

Charles and Camilla

I'm glad the holier-than-thou crowd in the general Synod did not get their wish to have a full scale debate about the forthcoming marriage of Prince Charles and Mrs Camilla Parker-Bowles. What's it got to do with them? As the law stands, divorced persons are allowed to marry again and that should be an end of it. Does anyone really warm to the idea of snivelling, narrow-minded evangelicals and born again freaks turning up their noses at the prospect of the Prince's future happiness? And isn't there something in the sayings of Jesus about only those who are without sin having the right to throw stones?

Evangelicals and puritans always put me in mind of Lord Macaulay's saying, "The puritans hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators". They apply a sordid selectivity when it comes to what we might be permitted to enjoy, and this list never extends far beyond fair trade coffee, soppy choruses and the twang of the churchy guitar.

But let me bend over backwards to be fair to the puritans. I can understand it if they want to assert the authority of scripture and declare that marriage is for life – till death do us part – and that therefore the remarriage of divorcees is not allowed. There is, however, another part of scripture – in fact there are several parts – where it says that sins can be forgiven along with the sinners who commit them. You would think that evangelicals, of all people, would understand very well that you can be born again and have a fresh start. So I can understand those churchpeople who say outright that of course Charles and Camilla should be allowed a church wedding.

What completely beggars the understanding is the present policy of the church authorities which says that some second marriages may not be solemnised in church but that, after a Register Office ceremony, the couple can come to church for a blessing. How can the parson say to any couple: "We don't approve of your marriage in church but go to the Registrar and then we'll bless it in church". How can anyone bless what they disapprove?

Prince Charles is a sinner. He has conducted an adulterous affair while he himself was married to Princess Diana. So what? If the synodical puritans want to claim that, because of his adultery and declared intention to remarry, Charles should not be allowed the title of Supreme Governor of the Church of England when he becomes king, they would have to invalidate the whole royal succession from Henry VIII onwards. Henry was, you may remember, not averse to the occasional divorce himself – or to the occasional execution when it suited his purposes.

Adultery is not the only sin, but it is the only one – with the possible exception of those sins associated with booze – that evangelicals and puritans bang on about. What about the other and worse sins listed by St Paul: backbiting, envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness? When did you last hear of anyone debarred from the Mothers' Union for backbiting? Or chucked out of the Synod for malice? And when it comes to the sin of uncharitableness, the evangelicals take all the prizes.

Prince Charles has declared his intention to marry Camilla Parker-Bowles. That is, he wishes to regularise a relationship which these same evangelicals now regard as irregular. You would think they would rejoice. Instead all this mean-spirited carping, carping, carping...