

The Servant is published six times a year  
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Please address all inquiries to:  
The Brotherhood of St. Gregory  
St. Bartholomew's Church ■ 82 Prospect Street  
White Plains NY 10606 ■ USA

*Founder's Forum*

## Think wisely

*Commit your work to  
the Lord, and your  
plans will be estab-  
lished.*

--Proverbs 16.3

No one dare dispute the fact that much of what we have come to know as the status quo is no longer to be found. Norms are no longer normally perceived. Change would seem to be the only constant. We are surrounded by change on every side: in our life at home; at the work place; in our social life; and -- just where we thought all was unchangeable --- in the church. Few institutions have in fact changed more than the church. From the Apostolic Age through the time of the Ecumenical Councils, through the "Dark" and "Middle" Ages, into the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the Age of Reason, right up to our own time, the church shifts constantly in its doctrines and disciplines. But it is because the church is a living, changing body that it can respond to the world, and the changes and chances of this life. The church is a logical place to begin thinking through our problems; through the problems of the day.

*God, make us  
trustworthy servants of  
integrity, servants of  
courage and wisdom  
who can be followed,  
servants of faith who  
will not falter; make us  
adequate to cope with  
our changing world and  
infuse our lives with a  
sense of responsibility  
for the shape of things  
to come. Amen.*

As Christians, we have a common code or canon with which to do that thinking -- namely, the New Testament. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr made clear the fact that applying the New Testament to contemporary problems is not easy. Nevertheless, if we allow ourselves to be guided by the Scriptures, we can find workable solutions that are wiser than our own errant feelings.

We cannot wait for issues to emerge if we are going to cope with change and conflict. It is those who think together who think wisely in times of crisis. If we learn to act and discuss in concert with those around us, we may in the end find that we have more common concerns and ideas than differences. By talking and sharing we might even find a common platform for action. And at least when we can come to no consensus, we will agree to leave the last word up to God.

The church needs collegiality; the church needs unity and the church needs servants who are part of God's team. Individuals may think clearly and succinctly on their own, but when "two or three are gathered together" God truly is in their midst. I believe when we truly learn to think together, and learn to communicate with each other, we will grow in capacity for wise leadership.

-- RTB

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## Faith and perjury

*Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior.*

*-- from the Collect for I Epiphany*

*Br. James Teets, who resides in the Bronx, New York, recently observed the tenth anniversary of his profession of vows in the Brotherhood; he is currently the community's coordinator of public relations and a member of the Council. He serves the national church as administrative assistant to the executive for World Mission at the Episcopal Church Center; is on the serving staff of the Church of St. Luke in the Fields, Manhattan; and is a member of the board of the Catholic Fellowship of the Episcopal Church.*

In a court of law, the testimony given by a person who claims to have first-hand information concerning the event in question is of paramount significance. This person is referred to as a witness, and the success or failure of a court case can depend on the story told by him or her. In fact, this person's testimony is usually so crucial that more time and expense can be spent on establishing the credibility of this would-be attestant than is expended on the rest of the trial.

By the fact of our baptism, yours and mine, *we* are such persons. How can this be? There is no one living today that was alive at the time of Christ and can claim to be a witness to the events described in the Scriptures. While this statement is true, it misses the point of the dramatic change which takes place at baptism. At our baptism our lives became incorporated into the life of Christ; we were changed forever in an instant, and each became an integral part of the one who is truly God *and* truly human. And this change is indelible. Rationally speaking, this does not mean that we claim to somehow have been transported back in time to the Palestine of the first century A.D.; such an experience would be insignificant. We know that God took on flesh and lived just as we live -- in and through that flesh -- for a brief period of time. Jesus experienced hunger, fear, doubt, rejection, love, and joy, just as each of us does. The quality of life was no different then, and there is no benefit gained or lost by being alive at any particular moment in history. What is important is what we do with our baptism, with our shared life in Christ, as witnesses.

Credibility is crucial in a witness. Are we in fact what we claim to be? and, if we are, what are we doing about it? In today's lessons we hear again the testi-

mony of Peter and John the Baptist as they give their personal witness concerning who Jesus is; but Isaiah goes even further: he tells us what we are to *do* with this wonderful gift of sharing in the life of Christ.

Isaiah first reminds us that we are God's creation, to whom we owe our every breath; he then goes on to inform us that God expects great things from us in our dealing with each other and with all of creation. Do we respond by lying, hating, cheating, stealing, and killing? Do we perjure ourselves in the face of this gift by misrepresenting ourselves as Christians, or do we strive to live in thankfulness as witnesses to that which God has done for us? The "greatness" of our everyday actions is not for us to judge, nor should we spend much time being concerned about it. Indeed, the "great" moments in our lives may well be found in responding to a street person; or to the secretary in our office whose husband died suddenly; or to the old man who accidentally dropped a five-dollar bill and didn't notice it. But one thing is certain: opportunities for us to witness abound. It would be well for us to remember that Jesus, too, was called to testify, and that his response was, "My task is to bear witness to the truth." (John 18.37)

What is important is what we do with our baptism, with our shared life in Christ, as witnesses.

## Commitment to Christ

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*That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of a physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has entered heaven and is at God's right hand, now that he has made the angels and dominations and powers his subjects.*

-- 1 Peter 3.21-22

*Br. William Bunting is a life professed brother, who has served at St. Andrew's, Bronx NY, for 37 years. He has been a lay reader, superintendent of the church school, chalice administrator, church school teacher, instructor for baptismal and confirmation classes, and as a spiritual advisor to clergy. He also conducts a writing ministry with the elderly, friends and relatives all over the country. In the Brotherhood, he has served as secretary to Chapter, member of Council, and recently retired as Provincial II. He continues to serve on the Brotherhood Education Committee.*

It is not too many months ago now, that I took my life vows of profession in the Brotherhood of St. Gregory. The passage from the First Epistle of Peter reminds me of that pledge -- the commitment that I have made to God. Each morning since that day I say to myself, "I, William, by the grace of God and none other, profess to follow Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior."

It is the same in our baptism. If we were infants at baptism, this pledge was made for us by our sponsors and parents. As we grow older and reach the age of understanding, we are brought to a bishop to pledge or commit, to confirm for ourselves the pledge that was made for us. This is what confirmation means -- to confirm for ourselves our baptismal pledge. We now take on a pledge to God: that we will follow Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Very often we fail in carrying through on that pledge. We have to fight continually against all sorts of evil in the world to keep up our pledge, our commitment to Christ. As a life professed brother in a contemporary community, I do not have it any easier than anyone else in the world. Even though I am a friar, under a rule, pledged to God, it is sometimes even more difficult.

We friars of the Brotherhood of St. Gregory, throughout our formation -- postulancy, novitiate, first vows, annual renewals, life profession, our whole life in the community -- are constantly aware of just how much we give up to keep that pledge. Even when we make the commitment, the pledge to God "for the remainder of our natural life," we still must continually reaffirm the pledge daily.

For me, one thing that helps to remind me of this pledge is a strong recollection I get when I administer the chalice and dip the bread in the wine for those who do not wish to drink from the common cup. The words, "The Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life," hold a deep meaning for me.

As I place the bread on the tongue of the person receiving, I see the ring I received at life profession on the ring finger of my right hand. Looking at it, I have a sense of awe. I can't describe it, but somehow it reminds me of how close I come to Christ and to God's people. It reminds me of my pledge to God through my baptism and my life vows. As I say those words of administration I feel drawn somehow to Christ and the persons receiving the sacrament. I hope and pray that their commitment, their pledge, at that particular moment will help cleanse them inwardly, and give them strength to carry their commitment, their pledge, that they might "live in Christ and Christ in them." It is a continual prayer. A part of the prayer is that I might, in my role as a friar, by example help them in their pledge to God.

I am not used to wearing a ring, so the weight of it is a constant reminder that in baptism and life vows I am committed to Christ for ever.

"I, William, by the  
grace of God and  
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## What is truth?

An earlier article, "The misuse of Scripture and how to avoid it," (The Servant #111) dealt with the first leg of Hooker's Anglican tripod. This article is an examination of the second part, Reason.

Pontius Pilate asked the question of the one person who might have given him the answer. John's Gospel does not record that Jesus made any reply. He didn't need to. Truth itself was standing there in the flesh, but Pilate didn't see it.

Theology is the continuing human search for that truth. There are other searches for truth, some more abstract, some more concrete. I would like to compare, for a moment, two of the more abstract quests for elusive truth: theology and mathematics. Those who think of mathematics as an exact science, and theology as a philosophical pursuit, may have a few surprises coming. Theology can be just as rigorous and systematic as mathematics is -- *and no more*.

Both theology and mathematics are based on sets of premises which are themselves unprovable, but which serve as the essential building blocks for all further thought. **In** mathematics these are called axioms or postulates; in theology, dogmas. These are the nouns and verbs with which doctrines about God and numbers can be articulated through the grammar of reason.

These sets of basic principles are only meaningful in discussion when they are clearly defined and all the parties to the discussion hold the same set of principles in common. Anyone involved in ecumenism knows that the process of working out these basic points of agreement must come first, before any other discussion. If these essential elements cannot be agreed upon, no further meaningful discussion can take place. If a school holds an axiom that two quantities each equal to a third may sometimes not equal each other, their mathematics will be very different from ours. Similarly, one that believes in Jesus as only a divinely inspired teacher will develop a theology very different from Christianity.

A particular case in point, one relevant to current Anglican/Roman Catholic

dialogue, is the dogma of infallibility. Part of the difficulty in dialogue is that even liberal Roman Catholics, who try to soften the blow as much as they can, are constrained by a dogmatic system that believes the church (acting in council) to be *at least* indefectible if not infallible, that the church, being a divine institution, is somehow protected from the possibility of error. Though some Anglican thinkers have bought into this notion, it is in fact contrary to the basic Anglican understanding of the role of the church as a whole, as expressed in Article XIX, and implied in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Anglicans in dialogue with Rome should stick to their dogmatic guns on this; otherwise they really aren't being Anglican!

As Anglicans, we try to keep our dogmas to a minimum. The statements of the Creeds, and the dogmatic decisions of councils and synods (when in accord with Scripture), form the basis of dogma from which all other theological inquiry must stem. Anglican thought finds itself near the center of a triangle whose points are the Protestant reliance on *Scripture alone*, the Orthodox notion of *consensus* (even when it goes *against* Scripture, as in the case of episcopal celibacy [see Trullan Canon XII]), or the Roman Catholic notion of a *supernatural infallibility* resident in the hierarchy.

Dogmas can't be proven: they are held as true on faith. Most people don't realize that the same is true in mathematics. Kurt Gödel's theorem -- developed in the 1930s -- showed that *any* sufficiently complex and useful mathematical system must contain unprovable axioms. The phenomenon arises due to self reference, when the system tries to describe itself in its own terms. This is, by the way, precisely what happens to the Roman Catholic ecclesiology with the dogma of infallibility. It can not be proven because it is the dogma about the proof of dogma! It is not exactly the same as circular reasoning -- that would be bad enough. What Gödel showed is that there are certain axioms

Canon XII of the Council  
in Trullo (A.D. 692)

"Moreover, this also has come to our knowledge, that in Africa and Libya and in other places the most God-beloved bishops in those parts do not refuse to live with their wives, even after consecration, thereby giving scandal and offense to the people. Since, therefore, it is our particular care that all things tend to the good of the flock placed in our hands and committed to us, -- it has seemed good that henceforth nothing of the kind shall in any way occur. And we say this, not to abolish and overthrow what things were established of by Apostolic authority, but as caring for the health of the people and their advance to better things, and lest the ecclesiastical state suffer any reproach...."

This canon violates the sense of 1 Tim 3.2-5, and Apostolic Canon V, which states "Let not a bishop, presbyter, or deacon, put away his wife under pretence of religion...." It is interesting to note that Trullan Canon XIII roundly condemns the "Roman Church" for requiring deacons and presbyters to "put away their wives" --even though Canon XII violates the same scriptural and apostolic custom!

in which the circle is unbreakable, and unavoidable.

So we Anglicans are lucky in preserving Scripture as our starting point, followed by a few doctrines for which the consensus is virtually universal, the Creeds. How do we proceed? Using logic, we test out new ideas against the existing set of dogmatic beliefs. Those that fit can be accepted; those that don't fit, however appealing they might be, must be rejected, or at best be treated like the Apocrypha: "for example... not doctrine." (BCP 868)

Logic is not infallible. Synods are not infallible. Popes are not infallible. It often happens that a doctrine is developed through a misapplication of a dogmatic or scriptural passage, often due to a faulty translation or a misunderstanding of the original text.

*So how do we know when to reject a statement or accept it? All acceptance, beyond the essential dogmas themselves, must be seen as provisional at best. We do not have truth; we do not possess truth; we still are peering darkly through that glass. However, it is far easier to tell when something is *not* true than to be sure that something is true.*

Here's a mathematical example:  $\pi$  is the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. Simple, right? But no one knows exactly what its value is. It appears to be incapable of representation in decimal form. It starts out at 3.141592 and keeps on going in a string of digits that never develop a pattern --or at least not yet. Scientists have calculated the value out to millions of decimal places, and still no end -- no pattern -- is in sight. But that doesn't mean there is no end. In the heart of mathematics there is an unknown: we don't know what the value of  $\pi$  is, and we don't even know if it is capable of ever *being* known. What we *do* know is this:  $\pi$  is *not* 3.7, or 4.7, or 3.00000001.

From time to time theologians introduce new dogmas and develop theologies based on them. I have discussed the problems which stem from holding as axiomatic the belief that "the divine image is incomplete without both man and woman." A bishop used that starting point as the basis for his pastoral condemnation of homosexuality. But since this statement contradicts the Scriptures and several accepted dogmas, such as the Incarnation, we are forced to question his conclusions. One must be very careful in making new dogmatic statements. In fact, one had best not make such statements at all. We really don't need more dogmas!

One thing we can be certain of: we can never have *certainly*, but we can trust the grace of God to give us *sufficiency*. Our knowledge is partial, and will continue to be so until that dark glass is broken once for all. As Christians we believe in a person who is "the way, the truth, and life." Constantly turning towards this person, Jesus Christ, may help to keep us free from unnecessary embroideries upon theology. There is a continued cry from some in the church for a "clear exposition of Christian morality." I fear that they don't want a clear exposition; they want condemnation of others and approval for themselves. The clear exposition has already been given, by the one who is truth, quoting the words God spoke through a prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit: "Love the Lord your God... and your neighbor as yourself." He also said, "Love one another, as I have loved you." This is the clearest exposition of Christian morality I know of; there is no need for any other.

-- TSH

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## Community Notes



*The Brotherhood announced its final grants from the BSG Tithe Grant Program for 1987: St. Monica's Home, Roxbury MA, operated by the Sisters of St. Margaret (\$475) and the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief (\$430). In the photo above, Br. Richard Thomas presents a check to Bobbie Bevill, interim director of the Presiding Bishop's Fund. They are flanked by David Crean and Nan Marvel, two of the Fund's senior officers.*

*Companion Fred Duncanson, M.D., (right) gave a talk at the Episcopal Church Center in New York on the epidemiology of AIDS. It was a welcome chance to hear the facts well explained.*

### New Hampshire

Br. Christian Williams, now assistant organist at St. Matthew's, Goffstown NH, and head of the Brotherhood Vestment Exchange, recently attended the convention for the redistricting of the diocese.

### Massachusetts

Brs. Laurence Andrew Keller (Provincial) and Donovan Aidan Bowley attended the dedication of the John and Ruth Coburn Hermitage of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, in Newbury MA. They also later attended a board meeting of Cornerstone, for which Br. Laurence Andrew worked last summer on the island of Iona. Br. Donovan Aidan attended the District 18 meeting as representative of his parish, Church of the Advent, Boston.

Brs. Laurence Andrew and Roy Tobin are active on the AIDS Action Committee / Pastoral Concerns. Br. Roy is working with the Rev. Susan Duffield in setting up an AIDS support network on the South Shore.

Brs. Bernard Fessenden and Matthew Staples attended the festival evensong marking the 75th anniversary of Boston's St. Paul Cathedral. Br. Bernard assists at the Sunday evening eucharist at Trinity Church, Copley Square, and has recently resumed work at the Addiction Treatment Center of New England. Br. Matthew is continuing his visitation ministry at St. Monica's Home, Roxbury.

### New York

Novice Br. Ciaran Anthony Della Fera visited New York and spent some time with Brs. James Teets and Tobias Stanislas Haller in the Bronx, and joined Br. Stephen Storen at an Integrity eucharist at which Br. Stephen preached.

Br. Richard Thomas Biernacki was organist for an Episcopal Church Center eucharist celebrated in solidarity with those who suffer and serve in the AIDS crisis. Br. James was subdeacon for the service.

### Orlando FL

Novice Br. Ciaran Anthony visited with the Very Rev. Robert Vanderau, former curate at Br. John Nidecker's parish in Rockville MD, now dean of the cathedral in Orlando.

### Lubbock TX

Br. Michael David Elvestrom sang with the choir at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Christ the King, at an AIDS memorial Evening Prayer service. He presented a slide / lecture on vestments and icons at St. Paul's on the Plains Episcopal Church; and officiated at Evening Prayer for the diocesan Integrity chapter. Several of his icons are part of an exhibit at Evansville Museum (Indiana), called "Precious Images."

