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#134

Founder's Forum

Objections sustained

When are we to object to an ordination, and when do we look the other way?

This forum is prompted by an editorial in *The Living Church* of July 15, 1990. I have been listening to all the sides of this "crisis"; the debate is intense. Where are the real questions?

*We raise objections concerning the sexuality of those about whom we know little else...*

If we are willing to tell our people that gay persons shouldn't be ordained if they are living in committed, life-long relationships, are we also willing—for the sake of consistency—to tell our bishops they may not re-marry after divorce (which, by the way, is forbidden in the Bible)? Are we willing to censure for more serious offen-

ses than ordaining a gay man or woman, a gay man or woman who may have a more genuine call than some others who breeze through the ordination process?

Can I be imagining the fact that some of the very people who objected to Bishop Barbara Harris' ordination because she has been divorced are divorced themselves? Can we really criticize Bishop John Spong for doing what has been done for centuries just because he did it in the light?

We Americans are so ready to be moralistic—we raise objections concerning the sexuality of those about whom we know little else. At the same time we stand silent when government officials engage in illegal acts, supply arms, and let our Presidents act above the law. Can we really maintain such double standards?

In past years Americans crucified Senator Gary Hart for spending a weekend with a model. At the same time we had no problems watching our President covertly arrange to support the Nicaraguan rebel forces after Congress has restricted such aid. Our elected officials may not deceive their wives but., at the same time, they can deceive Congress, lie to the people, and violate the Constitution!

It has been said that the General Convention and the Episcopal Church are very much like the U.S. Government. Our system of governance

is bicameral—two houses to legislate and concur. Read the above again and tell me I'm imagining that we, as a church, are behaving like the corrupt politicians we elected.

When *should* anyone object to an ordination? When the candidate does not love the Lord. And when anyone hears the Lord directly say "that person is not worthy" please make it known. I would like to hear what God has to say—in this day.

*When should anyone object to an ordination? When the candidate does not love the Lord...*

I suspect God might condemn a lot more of us than we imagine. And if God condemns, being ordained will not save us. Love and charity will.

RTB

For Proper 22 after Pentecost

## Heads I win, tails you lose

*Jesus said, "Show me the money for the tax." And they brought him a coin. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" —Matt 22:19-20*

It happens quite a lot in business. It happens every day in school. It even happens among so-called friends, and it's not very pleasant. Perhaps it has happened to you. Have you ever found yourself in the situation of listening—actually listening—to someone discredit you in front of your friends? Such a thing is even more painful than the hellish infection of destructive gossip, because you are right there to hear it. Someone is there, right in front of you, trying to seem like your friend on the surface, and underneath the surface they are trying to nail you to the wall.

That is what is happening to Jesus in today's Gospel reading. The Pharisees pretend to be Jesus' friends; they call him "Master." But then they try to nail him with a loaded question. "Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

If Jesus answers Yes, he undermines his credibility among his fellow Jews. Palestine, occupied by Rome, is home to a community praying for redemption from the oppressor and the oppression of a corrupt system of taxation.

*The one to whom most of what we render gets rendered is **ourselves**...*

If Jesus answers No, he is marked as a revolutionary, undermining the power of the government in power. The Pharisees weren't just trying to nail Jesus to the wall; they were trying to nail him to the cross.

Jesus' answer, "Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's," has become a sort of proverb, as well it should. It is a very important answer which avoids the political polarizations which the Pharisees were trying to draw

our Lord into. Avoiding the trap set for him, Jesus nevertheless leaves us with the decision of how we respond to Caesar's right to demand and our vocation to be stewards. What does, after all, belong to Caesar? And what does, after all, belong to God?

Americans, do you realize, are remarkably good tax payers. We do pay accountants and consultants millions of dollars to save us every penny we can save by April 15<sup>th</sup>, but most Americans do attempt to pay their taxes. We may seek out every conceivable deduction to reduce our taxes, but having taken the deductions permitted, we file and we pay. We moan, groan, and complain, but we fill the 1040 out and send it in. I recall reading an article several years ago that pointed out that many people in many countries don't do that. People either don't pay, or cheat on their taxes, in most parts of the world. Americans are generally very good at rendering money to Caesar.

The fact that Americans are not very good at rendering money to God, while that may be true, is not the point of this article. The fact that few of us honor or exceed the Biblical standard of the tithe is insignificant when one realizes that what is God's is nothing less than all we are or hope or dream, regardless of how much we earn. Our integrity in filling out the 1040 is as precious to God as our integrity in our tithe.

The problem most of us have with Jesus' question to the Pharisees is that while it includes Caesar and includes God, it doesn't include the one to whom most of what we render gets rendered: ourselves.

In the reading from Isaiah, Cyrus, King of Persia (which is now Iran) had conquered Babylon (which is now Iraq), where the Children of Israel had been deported as slaves. When Cyrus conquered Babylon he freed the captive Jews, and permitted

them to return to their homeland in Israel. The Children of Israel were delivered by the pagan King of Persia. God brought about the freedom of the chosen ones, their liberation, through the least likely and most unexpected way: the victory of another "chosen one," Cyrus, over Babylon.

Then, as now, God's people knew that, despite appearances, God's power is at work bringing about God's purposes for all who have faith, and that God is working his purpose out for all who render to God that which is God's.

*Since God has given us everything, tithing leaves us **ninety percent in God's debt**...*

The people of Israel saw God at work in Cyrus; no doubt he was. But there is a danger in assuming that decisions made by Caesar coincide at all times with the will of God. Whether in taxes or in politics, when Caesar makes all our decisions for us, and when we trust too much, we may in fact be rendering to Caesar things which are God's.

I am a coin collector. I specialize in the coins of the late Christian Easter Roman Empire, or the Byzantine Empire. One of the interesting things that the Byzantines did was to portray Christian icons on their coins. On Byzantine money, the "portrait and inscription" on the coin often was *Jesus*, not Caesar. History tells us that the Byzantines were probably more ruthless tax collectors than the Romans ever were. To the Byzantines, rendering to the Emperor *was* rendering to God, whether you wanted to or not.

Our situation is easier. We can see the difference be-

tween church and state, and we can appreciate that since God has given us everything, tithing leaves us ninety percent in God's debt. God lets us off easy; God does not exact the full cost to the last penny.

All God wants is our stewardship and our love, and there

### *Kerygma Korner*

## Forgive us... as we forgive...

I reflect on forgiveness in relation to Bishop of Newark John S Spong, and the furor over his ordination of Robert Williams, an openly gay man. Reaction has been out of 'al proportion to the significance or we event. As even a leader of the opposition, Bishop Wantland, has admitted, Spong has "broken no canon law." That being the case, the furor may cause more harm than Spong's initial action did. Some rational reflection is warranted in the face of the hysteria revealed in the church press. The most extreme response I have seen is a full-page advertisement in the February *Maryland Church News* which declares in 72-point banner type, "On Friday, December 15, 1989 at 3:00 p.m. E.S.T., a tragedy in the history of Orthodox Christianity occurred in the Episcopal Church." Really, now; one would think they were talking about the Great Schism!

***The irony is that Spong is not as liberal as some (including himself) claim...***

This event is not without its extraordinary aspects; it has produced a startling paradox: It is fascinating to see members of the Episcopal Synod of America and the Prayer Book Society suddenly becoming public champions of the authority of General Convention. On a more serious note, there is a move among some in the

is good reason to see even these requirements as gifts: for they allow us to be like God in giving abundantly with open hearts and hands. These are gifts, not taxes. Let us choose to give in the spirit of the gift. Because, heads or tails, we can't lose.

House of Bishops formally to "censure" Bishop Spong.

How are such strange and dramatic effects achieved? If Spong hasn't broken any canons, why the outrage and indignation? The answer lies partly in his attitude and delivery; he adopts the pose of a liberal Athanasius *contra mundum*. He has donned the mantle of Elijah, though it is several sizes too large for him. Given this style, he invites antagonism.

A report in the Newark diocesan paper, *The Voice* (38:2) portrays Spong as not having sought publicity regarding this ordination. This does not jibe with his appearance on the *Oprah* show some months ago, with then-deacon Robert Williams, in a debate with Wantland. Even if the ordination itself was not publicized, Spong's high-profile behavior invited continued scrutiny. Once in the spotlight it is difficult to escape it.

The irony is that Spong is not as liberal as some (including himself) claim—but he expresses his views from a grandstand. When he espouses rather old-fashioned 19th century historical or textual critical opinions, it sounds like an attack on the sanctity of Scripture. When he articulates—in response to fundamentalists within and without the Episcopal Church—a classic Anglican understanding of what it means to say "the Bible is the Word of God" he is accused of destroying the authority of the Bible.

In the case in question, he is merely one of forty-five bishops, including Presiding Bishop Browning (while he was diocesan of Hawaii), and one Episcopal Synod member bishop, who have publicly signed a

*Novice Br Christopher Thomas Connell is rector of Saint Raphael's Church, Brick Town, NJ.*

statement that they had no intention of complying with the recommendations of the 1979 General Convention Substitute Resolution A53.

Spong's grandstanding has attracted the ire of a large spectrum of the church, from extreme conservatives to moderate liberals. Realizing that he has done nothing uncanonical, some suggest that Spong be censured rather than tried in an ecclesiastical court (to avoid the cost and inconvenience of what Bishop Wantland foresees as "a long and divisive trial"). But should one be censured for indiscretion? Is it really true that poor taste is the greatest sin an Anglican can commit? If there is no canonical basis for trial, is there one for censure? What *is* censure, anyway?

***For the record, I am utterly opposed to the 1979 resolution and all that it stands for...***

The legal aspect of this case is instructive. What, in fact, hath Spong wrought? He is accused of violating a substitute resolution passed by the General Convention of 1979. I am a believer in General Convention's authority. But that does not mean I accept General Convention's rulings as in-fallible. General Convention (and the church itself, thank God) is a process rather than a fixed set of rules and regulations. The Rock upon which the church is built *moves*.

## *In government -church or state-there is a distinction between law and policy ...*

For the record, I am utterly opposed to the 1979 resolution and all that it stands for. It represents a shift from morality to moralism; an undue clericalism; a limited focus on sexuality as the sole touchstone and shibboleth for integrity; and fails to recognize that while faithful marriage is the *standard* for Christian sexual behavior, God has managed to do some wonderful things through some quite nonstandard people. A casual perusal of the genealogy in Matthew 1 reveals a number of folks who would have been left out had such a standard rendered them incapable of doing God's work.

However, rather than go off like a loose canon, or bishop, I choose to work for reform of this policy through the appropriate channels. I work for this change not simply because I disagree with the policy, but because I feel this policy is harmful to the spiritual well-being of the church. It has already resulted in people making some really quite extraordinary statements, some of which sound depressingly like, "I thank God that I am not like other men..."

In dealing with Spong, we must return to a primary question, *Wherein is the authority of the Episcopal Church?* As is often the case in determining authority, one must look to the negative side: what will get you in trouble if you go against it.

Title IV, Canon 1 lists the offenses for which clergy may be tried: crime or immorality; heresy (that is, "holding and teaching publicly

or privately, and advisedly, any doctrine contrary to that held by this church"); violation of Prayer Book rubrics; violation of the Constitution or Canons of General Convention, or of the diocese to which the cleric belongs; violation of ordination vows; habitual neglect or abandonment of ministry or worship; and "conduct unbecoming."

Where do General Convention resolutions fit in? In government—church or state—there is a distinction between law and *policy*. Our church law is contained in our Constitution, Canons, and Prayer Book. General Convention resolutions—unless they are amending these foundation documents—establish not law, but policy. No bishop, priest, or deacon is required, under pain of censure or prosecution, to follow the *policy* of the church, even on matters far weightier than the one in question.

Some, Wantland among them, have declared that Spong has gone "against the stated doctrine of this church." But since when is a resolution of General Convention an articulation of the church's doctrine?

As Roland Foster has pointed out, "The Episcopal Church has historically declined to declare doctrine by means of General Convention resolutions, going back to the Tractarian controversy of the 1850s. Asked at that time to pass a resolution about baptismal doctrine, the convention refused to do so, saying the Prayer Book was a sufficient doctrinal statement."<sup>2</sup> This declaration of sufficiency is ratified by the Preamble to the Constitution, which states that the historic faith and order of the church is "set forth in the Book of Common Prayer."

To raise policy to the level of law (or worse yet, doctrine) is difficult in any case, partly because there is such a quantity of it! The *Journal of General Convention* is an indigestible mass sure to raise a legion of Marley's

ghosts for anyone foolhardy enough to attempt its consumption. Because of this, it isn't always clear what the policy of the church is on a given subject, or even if there is one. There have been few efforts at compiling the *extravagan?* legislation passed by General Conventions down through the years. Who, in a polity with no standing judiciary, would be charged with keeping track of all of these? And to what end? The church finds it hard enough to keep track even of its canons, let alone its policy statements. For ex-ample, on the serious matter of abortion policy, two General Conventions "affirmed" a resolution which had never been passed!

## *"The Episcopal Church has historically declined to declare doctrine by means of General Convention resolutions..."*

So too in the case at hand. Has Bishop Spong violated even the 1979 Substitute Resolution A53 some charge him with violating?

Those who hold Spong in violation have misread the resolution by focusing their attention on the last paragraph, which states, "...we believe it is not appropriate for this church to ordain a practicing homosexual..." They fail to give due weight to the fact that the final resolve which introduces this section says, "That this General Convention recommend to Bishops, Pastors, Vestries, Commissions on Ministry and Standing Committees, the following considerations as they continue to exercise their proper canonical

1 It condemns homosexual behavior and sex outside of marriage, yet says nothing about divorce and remarriage, which has good scriptural basis as an impediment to ordination. (1 Tim 3:2,12)

2 *The Episcopalian* 155:2, page 8.

3 *Extravagant* in the original sense: going beyond, or outside, the normal—in this case outside the normal collection of codified canons. In the early renaissance efforts to codify miscellaneous church laws resulted in such collections as the *Extravagantes Johannis XXII*.

functions in the selection and approval of persons for ordination."

As the dissenters from this resolution pointed out when it passed, it is recommendatory, not binding. So, if he could be tried and were he to be tried, the charge would become, Has Bishop Spong failed follow the recommendation to consider, in the exercise of his canonical authority, the fact that the General Convention of 1979 believed it to be inappropriate to ordain practicing homosexuals? It is plain that he has considered the recommendation, and has, on his canonical authority, rejected it—as have others before him, without creating such a fuss! One could even argue that by making such a public show of his "consideration" he is being more faithful to the resolution than those who have quietly ignored it!

Why this resolution is recommendatory is revealed by the answer to the following question. Would a straight-forward canonical amendment rendering homosexual life-style or adultery *a diriment impediment* to ordination pass the General Convention? Bishops are loath to give up their authority to render decisions on the ordination process; they want the leeway of pastoral discernment, not the rigid limits of a menu of dos and don'ts.

If it truly were the mind of the church that these sexual mat-

*Bishops are loath to give up their authority in the ordination process; they want the leeway of pastoral discernment, not the rigid limits of a menu of dos and don'ts ...*

ters rendered one not simply unfit for ordination, but incapable of being ordained, then the church could state its mind clearly and unequivocally. But I doubt that this truly is the mind of the church. I pray that it is not. For if it were I would have to say that it has strayed very far from the mind of Christ, and from the Biblical authority which it claims as its basis.

Which brings me back to the theme of forgiveness, and the mandate to forgive as we have been forgiven. Some of the bishops and clergy of the Episcopal Synod of America, and other such bodies, *could* be brought to trial for "holding and teaching publicly or privately, and advisedly, any doctrine contrary to that held by this church."

It is the doctrine of the Episcopal Church, made clear in the Prayer Book rites for ordination, that women may be ordained to all three orders of ministry. There is a big difference between *conscientious opposition* to the ordination of women, including individual choices not to ordain, and public statements that women *cannot* be ordained, or *are not* ordained. Bishop Barbara Harris has been described by one of the partisans as no more than "a good, catholic deacon." Perhaps he, and others, have not been *advised* that this statement goes against church doctrine. Some others of them could be deposed for violations of the Constitution (Article X) and Canons (11.3.8) regarding use of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. These persons have experienced what some have called excessive tolerance and forgiveness. Are they not now prepared to do as much?

I pray that at the House of Bishops' meeting all will be considered with care, with charity, and with humility. Above all, may the bishops remember that however tolerant they may think they are, there is One who tolerates them, and all of us, even unto death on the cross.

TSH

*Here and there with the Brotherhood and Companion Sisterhood...*

## Community notes

### Province I

Br Roy Tobin

spent three days helping prepare summer cottages for use by people with HIV+ indication. This is a ministry of Fr Ellsworth at Drummer Cove in Wellfleet MA. For Roy, the Gospel was symbolized by Formula 409 cleaner, a vacuum, and Comet bowl cleaner. By the following weekend, all nine cottages were full of people enjoying the vacation spot. Roy also joined Br Bernard Fessenden at the opening fundraiser for the Wellness Center at Packard Manse, Stoughton MA. This is a day program for people who are HIV+, and serves as a drop-in center where people can feel a sense of

love and support. Roy's other AIDS-related ministries include helping with the workshop on Support Groups for the South Shore AIDS project in Brockton MA.

Br Christian

Williams served as organist for the annual New Hampshire Diocesan Altar Guild service. He was also epistoler and thurifer at the funeral of Fr Richard Wayne. With Roy and Br Donovan Aidan Bowley, he attended a memorial service for Br James Olley, SA, in Brockton. + + In early June, Christian was formally welcomed into the Diocese of New Hampshire at a eucharist at Saint Gregory's House, Manchester NH.

Bishop Douglas Theuner was celebrant, assisted by Frs Darryl Crosby and Bill Exner. Also in attendance were Brs Donovan Aidan, Bernard, Matthew Staples, and Dr Nate DeLisi, Judy Williams and Gara Filleul.

Br Laurence

Andrew Keller has been reelected Missions Chairman of the Massachusetts Diocesan Altar Guild.

Br Bernard gave a course at Brookline (MA) High School on HIV and IV drug use. He continues in the Deacon Training Program of the Diocese of Rhode Island. He also took part in the All Walks of Life fundraiser in Providence RI.



*George is a blur of newly deaconized joyful motion as he processes out, accompanied by Fr Pike.*

#### Br Ciarán

Anthony Della Fera has been in Japan on business connected with his work as a software engineer for Digital Equipment Corporation. + + + Br Donovan Aidan spent a quiet retreat in the guesthouse of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, Cambridge.

### Province II

#### The Brotherhood

Council met in early June, and the following day attended the 75th anniversary service of the "home base" Saint Bartholomew's Church.

#### Br George Keith

was ordained to the diaconate at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, by Bishop of New York Richard F Grein. This was a special moment for the Brotherhood, for while there are several ordained members in the community, George is the first to be ordained while part of the community. As an historical note, his sponsor was rector of Calvary / Saint George, the Rev Thomas F Pike, who received the first vows of our Founder at the first Brotherhood service in 1969!

#### Brs Richard

Thomas Biernacki, William Francis Jones, Christopher Thomas Connell, Richard John Lorino and Sr Clare Connell joined the Community of Saint John Baptist for the observance of their

Patronal Feast, at the convent in Mendham NJ. Br Richard Thomas was organist for the Solemn Even-song. + + + Postulant Maurice Grove at-tended a two day retreat at Saint Margaret's House, New Hartford NY. + + + Novice Br Richard John has begun part-time work as a chaplain at the Westchester County Medical Center, where he assists the Episcopal chaplains in visiting patients and flaking sure their spiritual needs / requests are met. The 600-bed facility

serves patients from eight counties in NY and many from outside the state.

#### Br Tobias Stanislas

Haller was on the faculty of this year's Finger Lakes Conference. He taught a course called "The Lost Coin," concerning the ways in which the church has historically overlooked or under-valued the contributions of women to salvation history, and how the rediscovery of these contributions can lead to a more complete realization of the church's mission. He hopes to see the material from the workshop published in the future.

### Province III

#### Br William Edward

Orce has been designated eucharistic minister for a spin-off mission from Christ Church, Rockville MD. This out-reach began with a few families about a year ago, and William Edward has been involved from early on. It has been a joyous evangelistic experience for him.

#### Br Edward Munro

took part in the Festival of Faith at Saint Paul's, Bailey's Crossroads VA, sponsored by Iglesias San Jose, Cristo Rey, San Pablo and San Marcos. The main speaker was the Rev Leopoldo Alard, director of Hispanic Ministries for Province VII of the Episcopal Church. Edward administered the chalice at the main eucharist on

### Province West

#### Three local

Natchitoches LA parishes benefitted from the artistic skill of Br Michael David Elvestrøm this Pentecost: Holy Cross (RC), Trinity (Episcopal), and First United Methodist churches all had mobiles of stylized bright paper flames hung from invisible fishing line surrounding their worship spaces and sanctuaries. At Trinity, the flames hung from a reinforcement bar, under which people pass as they go up to the altar. At Holy Cross, corner pieces of red fabric and flames on the altar frontal echoed the flames surrounding the crucifix suspended over the altar. At First UM, several elongated groupings of flames from ceiling to floor flanked a magnificent cross, with two other groups suspended over the pipes of the organ. Michael David noted that the flames would "dance when the organ is played."

#### Postulant Ronald

Fox is working with the Chicago Bishop's Advisory Commission on Alcohol and Drugs. At a retreat for this commission he lead Morning Prayer. He also served as thurifer for the visit of Bishop Griswold to his parish, Atonement.



*Br James with two of the founding members of St Bart's, and Companions of the Brotherhood — Cecil Berges and Marion Pierce.*