

The Problem of Heresy

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For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:3-5, all scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible)

“Christianity is not so much a system of propositional truths as it is a life lived in relationship to the living Christ.” I was asked to respond to this statement as a part of my canonical exams before being ordained to the priesthood. It is a very interesting statement because it suggests that propositional truth and relationship are somehow opposite ends of the same spectrum. This is not the case. In reality, propositional truth goes hand in hand with relationship, and relationship is built on propositional truth.

The oldest confession found in the history of the Church was simply “Jesus is Lord.” This confession is so old that it even predates many (if not all) of the Epistles. Paul’s Letter to the Romans tells us that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). In its most basic form, Christianity is nothing more (and nothing less) than a relationship with Jesus Christ.

If we were to leave Christian faith at this point we wouldn’t be wrong, but we would be left with a lot of questions. How do you come into a relationship with the living Christ? What does it take to maintain this relationship? If Jesus is Lord, what is he Lord over? Most of these questions can be answered by taking a look through the pages of the Bible. But when you answer questions with this book, more questions begin to pop up. Where did the Bible come from? Why does it have authority? How is it to be interpreted? Can we add more books to the Bible? So it seems that the simple confession of “Jesus is Lord” is not so simple after all.

Christianity is a life lived in relationship to the living Christ. The problem is that it is impossible to know how to live this life without the guidelines of the scriptures and Christian doctrine. Through the historic course of the Christian faith, the Church has developed a system of propositional truths to aid believers as they attempt to live out their lives in relationship to the living Christ.

As we look back on the history of the Church and of Israel, we can see many periods where God’s people began to waver from the truth of the Gospel. Sometimes it was individuals leading a group of believers astray, other times it seemed as though the whole Church had become corrupt. Whenever this has happened, God has called the faithful to rise up and proclaim the truth, banishing heresy from their midst. Remember Elijah in that dark period of his ministry when it seemed as though he was the only faithful one left. At this point of utter discouragement God spoke to Elijah in that still small voice saying, “Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). It was just after this that God gave him Elisha as his successor and together they began to work for the restoration of God’s people.

We now find ourselves in a time such as this. There are large portions of the Episcopal Church who no longer

proclaim the historic truth of the Gospel. And the faithful must now rise up and take a stand.

But how did we get to this point? How did the Church become so corrupt? We can compare the Episcopal Church to a house that has gradually fallen into disrepair. When small issues aren't fixed, they almost always turn into bigger ones. The roots of our present problems go as far back as 150 – 200 years. The situation didn't become acute, however, until the 1960's. It was at this time that Bishop James Pike published a book called "A Time for Christian Candor." In this work he openly denied such basic doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Virgin birth. Bishop Pike wasn't the only one who believed these things, he just happened to be the one who published them in a book.

Bishop Pike's book caused an uproar throughout the Church, but particularly in the House of Bishops. In 1966 he was formally presented to the House of Bishops on the charge of Heresy. An advisory committee, led by Bp. Stephen Bayne, was formed to deal with these issues. The report of this committee "called the concept of heresy "anachronistic" and called for the revision of canon law to make heresy trials almost impossible." ("An American Apostle: The Life of Stephen Fielding Bayne, Jr." p. 147) They stated that, "Any risks the Church might run by fostering a climate of genuine freedom are minor compared to the dangers it will surely encounter from any attempts at suppression, censorship, or thought control."

The House of Bishops then affirmed this report and adopted its recommendations concerning canon law. Thus instead of disciplining Bishop Pike, they supported him and made it nearly impossible for future bishops to be disciplined on the charge of heresy. At a time when the faithful could have taken a stand, they decided instead to accommodate and affirm. This was the beginning of the formal acceptance of heresy in our church. As the years march on more and more liberties are taken and the church becomes less Christian and more Pagan.

Do all Episcopalians believe these heresies? Certainly not. There are faithful Christians in every diocese. But the number of faithful Christians continues to diminish as the heresies become ever more popular. We have come to a place where the overwhelming majority of the Episcopal Church believes Bishop Pike's heresies. A place where the General Convention can no longer pass a simple resolution affirming that Jesus is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" and that "no-one comes to the Father except through [him]." As was the case at General Convention 2006.

Because we have come to this place, we now need to make a decision. Will we remain within a denomination that denies the basic doctrines of the Church; or will we choose to realign ourselves with another part of the Anglican Communion that conforms to the historic faith and order?

...choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

In Their Own Words

Below you will find a collection of heretical theological statements made by Episcopal Church leaders juxtaposed with quotes from the Word of God. My hope is that this document will be of use to those who are trying to discern their way through this time of realignment and reformation. Please take your time as you read these quotes. Some of them may not seem so bad when you first read them because they may use biblical language to disguise theological lies. Bear in mind that the most dangerous lies are often half-truths. Many thanks to Dr. Moheb Ghali, Peter Frank, and the AAC who have put together similar collections of quotes all of which were very useful to me in generating this collection.

Jesus is the Only Way

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

"In its narrow construction, it tends to eliminate other possibilities. In its broader construction, yes, human beings come to relationship with God largely through their experience of holiness in other human beings. Through seeing God at work in other people's lives. In that sense, yes, I will affirm that statement. But not in the narrow sense, that people can only come to relationship with God through consciously believing in Jesus" (Presiding Bishop, Arkansas Democrat Gazette, January 2007).

"For Christians, we say that our route to God is through Jesus. That doesn't mean that a Hindu doesn't experience God except through Jesus. It says that Hindus and people of other faith traditions approach God through their own cultural contexts; they relate to God, they experience God in human relationships, as well as ones that transcend human relationships; and Christians would say those are our experiences of Jesus, of God through the experience of Jesus." (Presiding Bishop, NPR interview: Here & Now, October 18, 2006).

"We who practice the Christian tradition understand him as our vehicle to the divine. But for us to assume that God could not act in other ways is, I think, to put God in an awfully small box." (Presiding Bishop, Time, July 10, 2006)

"The Incarnation God is one for us. But is Christ God's final act? We can't say that because we cannot see the future. We don't know what God will do next to redeem us. The Bible tells us that the Kingdom of God has not yet come." (Bishop of Pennsylvania, Virtue on Line, November 29, 2005)

"I don't think God cares if we are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and so forth. What matters is a deepening relationship with God." (Dr. Marcus Borg, St. Petersburg Times, February 9, 2005)

The Virgin Birth and the Trinity

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" (Luke 1:34-35)

"I put in black and white the fact that I would not affirm the literal Virgin Birth; I said that the concept of the Trinity did not speak to me; and I questioned whether salvation was possible through Jesus Christ alone."
(Bishop Pike, Time Magazine, Friday November 11, 1966)

"I have abandoned ship on the doctrine of the Trinity. I have jettisoned the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ" (Bishop Pike, Christian Beacon, Mar. 17. 1955).

"Am I suggesting that these stories of the virgin birth are not literally true? The answer is a simple and direct 'Yes.' Of course these narratives are not literally true. Stars do not wander, angels do not sing, virgins do not give birth, magi do not travel to a distant land to present gifts to a baby, and shepherds do not go in search of a newborn savior." (Bishop Spong, Rescuing the Bible from Fundamenalism)

"...I do not think that the virginal conception is historical, and I do not think there was a special star or wise men, or shepherds or birth in a stable in Bethlehem. Thus I do not see these stories as historical reports but as literary creations." (Dr. Marcus Borg, The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions, 179)

The Resurrection of Jesus

"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." (Luke 24:5-7)

If Christ has not been raised [from the dead], your faith is futile and you are still in your sins...If in this life only have we hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:17, 19)

"The story of Jesus' bodily resurrection is, at best, conjectural; that the resurrection accounts in the four Gospels are contradictory and confusing... the significance of Easter is not that Jesus returned to actual life but that even death itself could not end the power of his presence in the lives of the faithful." (Bishop of Diocese of Washington, D.C., Easter sermon in 2002)

"Asked about the literal story of Easter and the Resurrection, Jefferts Schori said, 'I think Easter is most profoundly about meaning, not mechanism.'" (Episcopal Life on line (official newspaper of TEC), April 8, 2008)

"I see the empty tomb and whatever happened to the corpse of Jesus to be ultimately irrelevant to the truth of Easter." (Dr. Marcus Borg, The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions, p. 130)

Jesus as the Son of God

And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." (Mark 3:11)

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." (John 11:27)

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (Hebrews 4:14)

“If you begin to explore the literary context of the first century and the couple of hundred years on either side, the way that someone told a story about a great figure was to say ‘this one was born of the gods.’ That is what we’re saying. This carpenter from Nazareth or Bethlehem – and there are different stories about where he came from – shows us what a godly human being looks like, shows us God coming among us” (Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori in Parabola Spring 2007).

The Bible

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16)

“But there is a tradition in the church in the United States of a kind of pluralism. There has never been one interpretation of scripture...And while I think we would all say as our ordination liturgy has us say – those of us who are ordained – that we believe that the Old and New Testament contain all things necessary to salvation, there is a broad interpretation of what precisely that means in actual terms as one looks at various issues and concerns in the life of the church. ... So when we think about church, I think many of us think first of all about that sacramental experience rather than the Book as the absolute determinant of our ecclesial life.” (Former Presiding Bishop, AAC Equipping the Saints 2007)

“Because we live in different cultural situations, not all biblical commandments or proscriptions apply simply or in the same way to any one person or situation.” (The Episcopal Church Center, To Set Our Hope on Christ, authored at the invitation of Presiding Bishop by a commission of six theology professors from four theological seminaries, and a bishop.)

“We wrote the Bible, we can rewrite the bible.” (Bishop of Pennsylvania, sermon at The Church of the Good Samaritan in Paoli, reported in: Virtue on Line, November 29, 2005)

“The Scriptures are internally contradictory on the surface. Their interpretation varies according to the needs of the hearer.” (Bishop of Pennsylvania, St. Luke’s Church, Newtown, PA July 8, 2004.)

“I believe the Bible is a book of poetry with a lot of history in it. I believe the Prayer Book has all that one needs for salvation. I believe that an all-loving God would never send anyone to hell for eternity. I believe he works it out in the end for everyone.” (Bishop of Lexington, at meeting with St John’s Parish, Versailles, KY, reported in Still On Patrol, March 14, 2008)

“There is no single biblical morality. Few biblical scholars would claim that a monochromatic approach to ethics and human behavior exists in the Holy Scriptures...The Holy Scriptures, written in antiquity, could not and did not foresee many of the ethical questions we face in our age.” (A Statement from the Episcopal Diocese of Utah, General Convention, March 13, 2007)

“Judgments about ethics by appeal to the Holy Scriptures alone are foreign to our Anglican traditions, which have always included other sources of authority in their deliberations...There is no single biblical morality...” (Episcopal Diocese of Utah- Deputies to General Convention 2006, Leadership, and Bishop (CCO1)).

Salvation

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)

“The question is always how can we get beyond our own narrow self-interest and see that our salvation lies in attending to the needs of other people.” (Presiding Bishop, Parabola, Spring 2007).

“I would choose to loathe rather than to worship a deity who required the sacrifice of his son” (Bishop John Shelby Spong, AAC Equipping the Saints 2007).

“God is not an external, supernatural entity, ruling the world from above the sky...Life has taught us that theism is dead. There is no supernatural God directing the affairs of history (Bishop John Shelby Spong, AAC Equipping the Saints 2007). The idea that Jesus is the only way to God or that only those who have been washed in the blood of Christ are ever to be listed among the saved, has become anathema and even dangerous in our shrinking world” (Bishop John Shelby Spong, AAC Equipping the Saints 2007).

Homosexuality

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:26-27)

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

“For almost forty years, members of the Episcopal Church have discerned holiness in same-sex relationships and, have come to support the blessing of such unions and the ordination or consecration of persons in those unions. Christian congregations have sought to celebrate and bless same-sex unions because these exclusive, life-long, unions of fidelity and care for each other have been experienced as holy. These unions have evidenced the fruit of the Holy Spirit: “joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (To Set Our Hope on Christ, authored at the invitation of Presiding Bishop by a commission of six theology professors from four theological seminaries, and a bishop.)

“...I don’t think the Scripture writers had any notion of homosexuality...So you’re dealing with a reality that isn’t reflected in Scripture. Is this possibly an instance where we’ve learned something that takes us beyond the world of the Bible and therefore the texts used don’t really apply?” (Former Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, 2004 Beliefnet.com interview).

“It [his homosexual lifestyle] is not something of which I should repent and I have no intention of doing so. I have been led to understand that I am loved by God just as I am. That is not to say I am

perfect but it is my belief that my orientation is value-neutral. It is what I do with my relationship that God really cares about...we worship a living God, not one locked up in the Scripture of 2,000 years ago...” (Bishop Gene Robinson to the Guardian)

Evangelism

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

“The Bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Los Angeles has issued an apology to Hindus worldwide for what he called “centuries-old acts of religious discrimination by Christians, including attempts to convert them. The apology was given in a statement read to over 100 Hindu spiritual leaders at a mass from Right Reverend J John Bruno. The ceremony started with a Hindu priestess blowing a conch shell three times and included sacred chants... Rev. Karen MacQueen, who was deeply influenced by Hindu Vedanta philosophy and opposes cultivating conversions (added) “There are enough Christians in the world,” (India Abroad, Posted: Feb 10, 2008.)

The Creeds

“Those creeds are not about checking off a bunch of propositions. They are about giving our heart to a sense that Jesus shows us what it looks like to be a divine human being” (Presiding Bishop, Parabola Spring 2007).

“You don’t all have to profess exactly the same understandings of the central tenets of the faith,” she added. “What’s important is to worship together.” (Presiding Bishop, San Diego, by Union-Tribune, April 5, 2008)

“Heresy implies orthodoxy, and we have no such thing in the Episcopal Church.” (The Very Rev. William Rankin, Former President and Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA, Witness, 1995).

The 12 Theses of Bishop John Shelby Spong

1. Theism, as a way of defining God, is dead. So most theological God-talk is today meaningless. A new way to speak of God must be found.
2. Since God can no longer be conceived in theistic terms, it becomes nonsensical to seek to understand Jesus as the incarnation of the theistic deity. So the Christology of the ages is bankrupt.
3. The biblical story of the perfect and finished creation from which human beings fell into sin is pre-Darwinian mythology and post-Darwinian nonsense.
4. The virgin birth, understood as literal biology, makes Christ’s divinity, as traditionally understood, impossible.

5. The miracle stories of the New Testament can no longer be interpreted in a post-Newtonian world as supernatural events performed by an incarnate deity.
6. The view of the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is a barbarian idea based on primitive concepts of God and must be dismissed.
7. Resurrection is an action of God. Jesus was raised into the meaning of God. It therefore cannot be a physical resuscitation occurring inside human history.
8. The story of the Ascension assumed a three-tiered universe and is therefore not capable of being translated into the concepts of a post-Copernican space age.
9. There is no external, objective, revealed standard writ in scripture or on tablets of stone that will govern our ethical behavior for all time.
10. Prayer cannot be a request made to a theistic deity to act in human history in a particular way.
11. The hope for life after death must be separated forever from the behavior control mentality of reward and punishment. The Church must abandon, therefore, its reliance on guilt as a motivator of behavior.
12. All human beings bear God's image and must be respected for what each person is. Therefore, no external description of one's being, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, can properly be used as the basis for either rejection or discrimination.