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SCANDAL IN ST ALBANS

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As is well known after failing to be appointed as Bishop of Reading last year Jeffrey John has now been appointed Dean of St. Albans Cathedral. The absurd secrecy that surrounds such appointments has contributed to the scandal but has also provided a smokescreen to some of those involved.

Many have said that opposition should not focus on Jeffrey John but his standing is the heart of the problem. From the opening chapters of Genesis it is clear that God's plan and purpose is that sexual intercourse belongs solely within the marriage relationship of a man and a woman. Homosexual practice contravenes God's will and we are told that those who engage in homosexual practice will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6.9). Homosexual practice is not singled out by God in this statement it is merely one in a list. The House of Bishops recent report *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* admits that despite many attempts the meaning of this passage seems to be what it seems to be. Moreover, the Christian church through nineteen and a half centuries, has understood this passage to mean what it says. Nevertheless, we are all sinners saved by grace and any who repent of their sin and put their faith in Christ will receive forgiveness of sins.

Jeffrey John admits that in the past he has engaged in homosexual sexual activity. As far as I am aware he is completely unrepentant for this. When, in 1987, the General Synod reiterated the Biblical and historic teaching that homosexual genital acts fall short of God's standards and should be met with a call to repentance and with compassion, he does not appear to have changed his lifestyle. However, he apparently maintains that since the production of the earlier House of Bishops report *Issues in Human Sexuality* he has been celibate. There is no suggestion that he repents and he clearly does not think his past action wrong because he teaches others that homosexual practice is acceptable. He even used the press conference when he was appointed to promote the idea of same-sex blessings. He has written and talked extensively on the subject and indeed appears to be one of those people who are put forward by homosexual activists to speak and write on this matter.

He is actively encouraging people to see homosexual practice as acceptable whilst himself apparently being prepared not to engage in it, at least for the time being. Since God has declared in His Word that those who do these things will not inherit the Kingdom then Dr John is deceiving people and leading them into sin (we do not single out the sin of homosexual practice, it is liberals who do that). Therefore, Jeffrey John is a false shepherd. It is a scandal that he is Canon Missioner of Southwark Cathedral and Church Society have written to the Archbishop of Canterbury calling on him to seek Jeffrey John's resignation as a minister in the Church of England.

Promoting immorality

What then do we make of the appointment? A comparison has been drawn by others. Suppose a clergyman was teaching that it is acceptable to kill Jews. What would our Bishops do? They would rightly be scandalised, surely no-one would suggest that he be appointed to a prominent position. So the underlying problem is that people think that homosexual practice is acceptable, even though the Bible teaches to the contrary. Church Society has argued that Jeffrey John should not be a minister in the Church of England. But others are colluding in this grave sin and thereby encouraging others in it. It is the teachers who will receive the stricter judgement (Jas. 3.1).

William Chapman is the Prime Minister's appointments advisor. It is his rôle to collect together a list of suitable people for jobs such as Archdeacon, Dean and Bishop. He receives suggestions from many sources and additional names for particular appointments. Many feel that Chapman is now actively promoting the homosexual agenda and that he has tried to push pro-homosexual candidates on other Dioceses. It is clear that a large portion of the Church has no confidence in him and his position is untenable.

The Archbishop of Canterbury sees all the names on this list and can comment freely on it. We are led to believe that George Carey always scrutinised the list and can only assume that Rowan Williams does the same. Dr Williams seems to have been happy with the idea of Jeffrey John being on the list. There is even a rumour (the secrecy leads to such things) that he thought it better for Dr John go to a safe seat like St. Albans rather than risk one of the maverick revisionists (Lincoln and Worcester come to mind) trying to appoint him as a Suffragan Bishop. Of course, Rowan Williams has also taught that homosexual practice is acceptable. It is no surprise that the revisionists in the US, Canada and the UK took his appointment as the cue to push their agenda hard.

The third player is the Bishop of St. Albans. He has defended his position, claimed responsibility and not tried to blame others. He knew that Jeffrey John was on the short-list as a result of the consultation process and agreed to this list. When Jeffrey John was chosen by Downing Street from the short-list he apparently took some time to consider it and eventually agreed. It would have been possible at either point to refuse. He agreed at both points despite the fact that he knew it would be controversial and, although he would not see it this way, despite the fact that it flies in the face of the historic teaching of the Church in which he is a Bishop. Sadly, the result is again that by commending someone who should not even be a minister in the Church of God he is promoting immorality and deceiving people.

I would not wish to doubt the claims that Jeffrey John is a charming and gifted man. But integrity and faithfulness to the Word of God requires that we say this appointment is wrong, Jeffrey John should not be a minister in the Church of God and those who have promoted his appointment are likewise unfit for office.

Response within the Diocese

One casualty in all this was the Suffragan Bishop of Bedford who had publicly opposed the appointment of Jeffrey John to Reading. The Diocesan Bishop clearly knew that the appointment would cause difficulty but did not consult him either when he agreed the short-list or the final appointment. According to the initial statements Bedford had been given assurances about Jeffrey John's lifestyle and teaching. When it came to it this was nothing different to those given last year. The Bishop of Bedford was in an unenviable position but one might have hoped that he would oppose the appointment, or at least be coy in how he greeted it even though he was only told a couple of days beforehand. In the event, his initial response, which was reported far and wide was that he welcomed the appointment.

There have been many more who have willingly and openly acclaimed the appointment and it is no doubt partly for this reason that St Albans was seen as a soft target by the revisionists.

Others however have stood up against the appointment and it has been encouraging to see how the situation has galvanised evangelicals in particular. This has been helped by the high-handed way in which the Diocesan Bishop responded to some of the early criticism.

There have been many who have called for the appointment not to go ahead and have prayed to this end. It appears that their pleas will go unheeded, but regardless, it is apparent that there is now significant division within the Diocese. This has been caused by the Bishop and reflects the deep division in the Communion as a whole because of the revisionist abandonment of Biblical truth and morality.

Action

I believe there are four reasons why action is necessary.

First, we must protect the flock. We cannot discuss error as it were an academic dispute, it must be confronted head on because people are being deceived.

Secondly, we must uphold the honour of God. To promote homosexual practice, when He has declared it wrong, and to do so in His name is to dishonour Him.

Thirdly, we must be faithful ourselves to our calling. This means that we must always be ready to speak the truth in love.

Fourthly, we must long that those who are in error would come to their senses, repent of their sins and turn to Christ.

Those who wish to uphold Biblical orthodoxy and safeguard the future of the Church of England as a Christian Church must act. But what can be done?

One option is to **use the existing structures**. One clear problem is that the present system of appointments is far from satisfactory and a member of St. Albans' Diocese, Anthony Archer, had already submitted a private members motion to General Synod seeking to revise the process. Other motions at the national level look increasingly likely as more and more evangelicals in particular realise just how far we are now down the revisionist road. These things are not easy to achieve not least because too many vacillate when it comes to the crunch and although many evangelical churches are flourishing they are often under-represented both in the clergy and in the bodies of the Church.

A further consideration is to **simply leave or opt out**. Already there are indications that some have left congregations in St. Albans' Diocese. Others are talking about resigning from posts and not attending meetings. The Bishop has caused division but to opt out is to hand the Church of England over to those who have forsaken it. The Church of England is a reformed protestant Church grounded in the Word of God, it is those who want to make it something else who should leave.

The most talked about thing is **financial action**. The Church of England as a whole is in financial crisis although this is not true yet of St. Albans.

For an individual Christian the matter is simple. We must give wisely; it is clearly immoral to use our giving to finance immorality. If the structures of the Church are promoting immorality it is time to stop supporting them. An individual can simply specify in giving to their local church that they do not want the money used to support the Diocese or central church. If a few people in a congregation do this then the PCC will have to decide how to respond, they could simply cut a proportion from the quota payment. If lots of people do it, the PCC will be unable to pay its share.

Quota capping generates much heat both because of the principle and dispute about how quota figures are arrived at.

No-one should be concerned about refusing to pay parish share. The historic assets of the Church of England belong to a reformed protestant Church by law established. Those assets are being used to support Bishops and Deans who deny that faith. Why should they not be used to support ministers who uphold it?

Quota (parish share) is an entirely voluntary contribution and there are no legal sanctions a Diocese can use against defaulters. It should also be remembered that the centralisation of clergy stipends was invented in the 1970s. Prior to that, for time out of mind, the Church had survived on a localised system of payments. The previous system had its problems but the experiment has failed, in fact it seems in many respects to have been a disaster. Moreover, many parishes handed over considerable assets in the 1970s to central funds much of which appears to have now been used up.

The final area of action is to seek **alternative Episcopal oversight**. The Bishop of the Diocese has made himself a focus of disunity. Many now find themselves unable to accept his spiritual oversight. It is perfectly possible to accept the legal office of the Ordinary in the Diocese, but not the spiritual oversight of the present occupant. Many are particularly worried about issues such as confirmation and subjecting congregations to false teaching. Therefore, as has already happened elsewhere in this country but more acutely in North America, the matter of alternative oversight is very definitely on the table.

Such is the consequence of the revisionist agenda. Their arrogance in rejecting the historic teaching of the Church and promoting their own agenda is breathtaking. They can disguise the enterprise by appealing to the breadth of the Church of England. Or they can justify it by saying that no-one can impose their own interpretation of the Bible on the whole Church, but then they simply impose their interpretation and its consequences on the whole Church. It is they who have departed from the faith and are ripping apart the Church as they go.

May God have mercy on us and raise up preachers and teachers to *turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*.