

[send this](#)[bookmark](#)[print](#)[close](#)

The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.33 No.21

The Third Sunday after Easter

04/21/02

Coercion and Freedom

Independence flows in my veins. I am, along with you, an American, and the idea of revolution and freedom is part of my identity. I am also a Southerner, and with that fact my sense of independence and liberty increases to the second power! It is no doubt an understatement to say that Parishioners of St. John's take pride in their American and Southern heritage.

In light of this double sense of Independence, it is easy to understand how any form of coercion might go against the grain of a churchman at St. John's. That is why we are very concerned when we hear of the kind of coercion that is now afoot in the National Church.

I refer to two recent events, one, the inhibition of a Priest in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, and the other, a delegation of investigators sent to bring orthodox dioceses on board with the ordination of women.

I will address the investigators first. In compliance with a provision passed by the last General Convention of the Episcopal Church, several teams of clergy and laymen recently engaged in interviews with the Bishops and Standing Committees of the three Dioceses that do not sanction the ordination of women. The intention of these investigators is to bring the Dioceses of Fort Worth, Quincy, and San Joaquin into conformity with the view of the General Convention and the recently revised Canons of the Church. Their view is that women should be admitted to Holy Orders. And this is the Law of the Church.

But what this intrusion into the life of these Dioceses really reveals is the mind of the General Convention. Their intention is ideological and not theological. They have failed to provide any compelling theological basis for their position; and because they do not persuade, they must coerce.

Moreover, it will not do for them to point to the Canons of the Church. The Canons historically were formed under the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the Sacramental Theology of the Church Catholic. The fact that the Canons have been revised over the past twenty-five years and now contradict both Scripture and the Sacramental Tradition only testifies to their inherent impotence.

What will the result of this coercion be? Heartache and dissension, and perhaps schism. You cannot force an ideology on what is essentially

free. St. Paul wrote, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." The Dioceses of Fort Worth, and Quincy, and San Joaquin have lived in Christian freedom, freedom derived from the Word of God Written, and the sacred Traditions of the Church. For the General Convention to trespass on these is gravely wrong. Do they really believe that the vote of clergy and laity, who seek nothing but their own special interests, means anything at all? It is chaff in the wind.

I do not for a moment doubt the sincerity of those who support this coercion. For them it is a matter of justice, and Canon Law. But even sincerity and the religious innovations of the past twenty-five years, (which is virtually nothing as a span of time) do not justify their use of ugly force.

The second event, which is equally as disturbing as the investigators intruding into the three orthodox dioceses, is the inhibition of the Rector of Good Shepherd, Rosemont, Pennsylvania. The Bishop has excluded him from his priestly duties for a period of six months after which he is expected to grant the Bishop a visitation to the Parish. The priest's name is the Rev. David Moyer. He and his parish have refused to have the Bishop make an annual visitation because he undermines the Faith of the Church. Bishop Bennison reportedly believes neither in the unique salvation of Jesus Christ, nor in the supreme authority of Holy Scripture in matters of faith and practice, nor in the Christian Church's traditional doctrine of marriage as the sacramental union of man and woman.

Now the Bishop has accused the priest of leaving the communion, and inhibited Fr. Moyer from his priestly duties until he acquiesces. Fr. Moyer believes that He is in fact keeping the true communion of the Church and remains faithful - come what may. The Bishop of Pennsylvania believes in coercion, just as do the investigators of the National Church. We will pray and shall see what happens. "The Lord is King, be the people never so impatient, He sitteth between the cherubim, be the earth never so unquiet."

These forces of coercion tend to elevate my blood pressure. But more than that, they make my twofold sense of Independence run more heatedly through my spiritual veins.

Someone no doubt shall say that my feelings of freedom are inappropriate here, because I have spoken only of the natural allegiances of being an American and a Southerner. To be a Christian, they will say, is to be a pilgrim, awaiting one's final home in heaven. The Kingdom of God must not and cannot finally be identified with natural devotions. And this is true. But still it misses the point.

It is precisely because the idea of freedom is so naturally and profoundly rooted in the psyche of the American Southerner that its archetype in the Kingdom of God is so much more potent. In this way one might say, along with St. Thomas Aquinas, that grace perfects nature. The idea of freedom given in the imperfections of natural allegiances find their true fulfillment in God's Kingdom. We are told in the Book of Revelation that with the final advent of the New Jerusalem, the nations of the earth shall bring their glory into it.

Freedom, both political and spiritual, is wedded to our hearts. We honor and love both, and we know the difference. But make no

mistake, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." The language of this freedom has been written on the hearts of myriads of saints and martyrs, and of countless common Christians. As we say in the Creed, ours is the freedom to believe in the Catholic Church. And believe we will.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

send this

bookmark

print

close

[Report Errors](#) | [Comments](#)

Copyright 2003 - 2004 St. John's Episcopal Church in Savannah, GA. All rights reserved.