

All the men in grey mitres

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1 Corinthians 12^{12-14,19-27} For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many... ..And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

John 15⁵⁻¹¹ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

It is remarkable that this sermon is being preached at all. In October 2008 I set off to come here in the elderly MG of my son in law. I encountered a storm of monsoon proportions about a dozen miles short of Cambridge and the car engine was swamped; as it eventually turned out, the alternator itself was damaged and everything stopped. Eventually the AA rescued me and I was returned to London with the car on a trailer about twelve hours later. Fraser very generously suggested I preach the sermon prepared for that occasion, which I shall, with a few adaptations to bring it up to date.

But, there is more. I went in to my computer database at home to find the sermon and could not do so. I went in to my office at the Cathedral, I located the sermon and my printer broke down. I decided to put it on to a memory stick and print it at home and the memory stick wouldnt work; even one of the IT wizards in the office couldnt make it work. So it is a sort of astonishing feat that this sermon has arrived at all, I had begun to wonder if there was a divine hand preventing me.

It is a real pleasure to be here this morning. I say that for several reasons, among them, I believe that I have never preached here, even though I was a curate of Great St Mary's for three very happy and stretching years, so there's a sort of 'notch in the butt' feeling; then, perhaps more worthily, this church was a safe haven for Frederick Dennison Maurice after he was ejected from King's College London and that gives it a special place in my heart.

That is pertinent. I was a student at King's at the time the F. D. Maurice chair in Christian Ethics was established. I returned to King's for six sublime years as their rowing coach—I mean the college chaplain. I now have the privilege of looking after Southwark Cathedral and just a few yards away at the entrance to Guy's Hospital there stands the house in which F. D. Maurice lived; he must, many times, have been in my present church although I can find no record of him holding any office there. Worshippers in this church will be familiar with the story that Frederick Dennison Maurice was expelled from King's for stating that 'Eternal Damnation is not necessarily for ever.'

Southwark has a long association with the rebellious and the maverick.

When Thomas a Becket was forced to flee from London he did so via the only dry route available, London Bridge, and he stopped at its southern end to preach in what is now the Cathedral, because it was beyond the jurisdiction of the City. After he had travelled on to Canterbury, to exile in France, and back to his death, the Augustine canons of Southwark founded a hospice, a hospital, in his memory; that didn't go down too well with the king. The hospital of St Thomas. That burned down in 1212 and they rebuilt it across the road, diplomatically renaming it St Thomas the Apostle and thereby pleasing the king. When the priory was dissolved by Thomas Cranmer's bailiffs it was bought by the Montague family as their London home; they had a servant, one Guy Fawkes, who ended up back in the neighbourhood on a pike on the end of London Bridge within clear view of his former place of employment. This year we mark the three hundredth anniversary of one Henry Sacheverell, chaplain to St Saviours, as the church was then known. He preached a sermon of such powerful denunciation of the government that he was prosecuted for treasonous sedition in the House of Lords. Crowds of supporting rioters gathered in Whitehall and so, when he was found guilty, their Lordships simply sentenced him not to preach for three years. At the end of the sentence he preached again, in the presence of Queen Anne, one of his admirers; the sermon caused the downfall of Parliament. There are some ambitions yet to be realised.

I have my own take on F. D. Maurice's view of eternal damnation. Eternity is a very long time indeed; however, it is exceeded in duration by the waiting for ecclesiastical lawyers and they, in turn, are not nearly as extended as test cricket.

Eternal Damnation is a good place to start this sermon. Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire addressed a very large audience at the end of the BBC's Hay Festival shortly before this sermon should have been preached. In his address he said to the attentive audience, 'I have no doubt whatsoever that Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria and I shall meet one day in heaven. (He paused as the audience quietly gasped) I say that, not only because I sincerely believe it to be true (pause), but also because I know just how maddening it will be for him.' Peter Akinola has now retired, but not, I am glad to say, Bishop Gene Robinson; not that retirement will silence Peter Akinola, just as it has failed signally to silence the former Archbishop of Canterbury.

Note that George Carey, Michael Nazir Ali and others have been bewailing the secularisation of British Society. They have called for a select panel of Christian judges to hear cases such as this week's appeal by a relate Councillor against his sacking for refusing to help a gay couple with sexual difficulties. The case was heard this week and in a very robust judgement Lord Justice Laws rejected the appeal.

There is a certain delicious irony in that Lord Carey immediately stated this is yet more evidence of the collapse of Christianity in the country and denounced the verdict is a slide towards anti-Christian sentiment. He would have done well to do his homework better. Lord Justice Laws is a very regular communicant at the Temple Church, indeed part of its governance. He is a stout defender of the use of the Book of Common Prayer and the Authorised Version, and perhaps

even better, he is married to the excellent New Testament scholar Sophie Laws, formerly of the Theology Faculty at King's London and chairman of the governors of that quintessentially Anglican Foundation, Grey-coat Hospital School on the nomination of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. Lord Carey got his Christian judge, but not the verdict he anticipated.

I believe Gene Robinson said something very important about meeting his antagonist in life eternal.

F. D. Maurice was ejected from King's and found refuge here. A century later the College founded a chair in Christian Ethics in his memory; from anathema to hero. Many people reading his works today wonder why there was any fuss at all, just as theological students are asked to read John Robinson's 'Honest to God' and cannot believe that there were petitions for him to be sacked, unfrocked, tried for heresy, anathematised and so on.

But there are people who still believe there is Eternal Damnation and that it will be forever. At least two of the candidates in the United States presidential election competition believed it, one on each side, one rather more definitely than the other, so it's really scary. Many of those who believe eternal damnation is for ever believe it is so because the bible says it is so, and the bible is true because the bible says the bible is true; many of them, are Anglicans; they advocate a very different sort of Anglican theology and ecclesiology from the tradition of this church, or any where I have served.

We saw them in Jerusalem prior to the Lambeth Conference at 'GafCon' the Global Anglicans Future Conference at the end of which they memorably set up the 'Fellowship Of Confessing Anglicans' (F-O-C-A—I leave the rest to your imaginations). There were many Bishops there, the organisers claimed about a third of Anglican Bishops, but it's hard to say really because not a few of them were retired bishops who aren't invited to Lambeth anyway and at least nineteen had been consecrated the previous month in Nigeria by Archbishop Akinola as a way of boosting the GafCon numbers and the apparent boycott of Lambeth. I suggest the boycott was grossly misrepresented in the media—many of the boycotters were toy-town Bishops. I suggest, further, that by refusing the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury to a Lambeth Conference, and deliberately holding a parallel conference, those who participated in both GafCon and the boycott have placed themselves outside Communion with the Archbishop and therefore with the Anglican Church as a whole.

However this poses important questions for people like you and me. If we hold to a high doctrine of the Church, as I hope that we do, then all people baptised in the name of the Trinity are equally entitled to recognition within its membership. I am not so much concerned about the toy-town Bishops whose actions may well have been based upon pressures, misinformation and even ignorance. I am enormously concerned about people like the former Bishop of Rochester. I find it impossible to accept that he, and one or two other Bishops in England, are any longer in full Communion. You will recognise immediately why I believe this to be so pertinent to this congregation. If F. D. Maurice found refuge here when the Establishment expelled him for his views, how do we respond to those whose views we find unacceptable? My doctrine of Baptism

prevents me from saying they are not Christians and my doctrine of Orders within the church makes it very hard for me to say they are not bishops, but I doubt that they are really in Communion.

In the first Epistle to the Church in Corinth we heard St Paul say, 'for in the one Spirit we were all baptised in to one body... ..If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body' that would not make it any less part of the body... and so on.

Paul spent his life in conflicts and debates. He tells us three times about his conversion experience on the Damascus road. It is too easily presented as a sudden change of mind and direction, from persecutor to Apostle. It is nothing of the kind; the story itself contains within it the clues to a much longer road, 'It is hard to kick against the pricks' suggests very strongly how Paul's inner conscience, how his intellectual skills, had been challenged for a long time. In the Book of the Acts Paul meets St Peter three times and each time they clearly have a major argument.

The disputes within the Anglican Church at the present time, revolving around scriptural interpretation, ecclesiology and doctrine, are not new. In fact they are par for the course. Whether we take a longer view and explore all Christian history, or we take the relatively short-term view of the existence of the Church of England, we can easily see the same issues. F. D. Maurice is but one. The Cambridge association with the Elizabethan Puritans, like John Harvard who was baptised in my Cathedral church, is another. These were the people who tried to drag the Church of England down exactly the same prescriptive narrow theological road of theocratic governance and moral compulsion that Archbishops Akinola and Jensen of Sydney seek at the present time. The Reformation itself, in which this city and university played such a central part, was a cataclysmic and brutal eruption of bigotry and intolerance. The nineteenth century expulsion of Methodists, the present debates around creationism and intelligent design, are contemporary examples.

I suggest to you that there is a thoroughly scriptural method for discerning the difference between those who choose to remain in Communion and those who do not. It revolves around the distinction between Sectarianism and Schismatism. Interestingly, and fundamentally important, the GafCon participants stepped back from creating a new church although there are clear moves to do so in the United States. There are lots of reasons for this; foremost amongst them are the unworthy reasons concerned with property, legal status, financial stability and social authority. In this country the Church of England is the best boat to fish from; anyone jumping ship has to ask themselves very severe questions indeed. Ironically, if they do so, and jump ship without the goods and chattels, they deserve our admiration. In the Anglican Church overseas it varies from place to place but since the Anglican Church is naturally strongest in countries where the British Empire once held sway it remains undeniable that much legally invested wealth and social authority is intrinsic to the Church. I have argued before, and continue to do so, that Schism is when the mother Church, the founding institution, kicks out some members who will not conform to some accepted norm of behaviour and belief; it is structural. Sectarianism occurs

more easily; it is when people throw their toys around the room and stomp off to play by themselves. ‘We piped for you and you would not dance, we wept and wailed but you would not mourn’ says Jesus of the Pharisees being like children in the market place. I believe that we saw real sectarianism at work in Jerusalem at GafCon. The foot said to the hand, ‘I do not need you’—critically the hand does not reply to the foot.

The scriptural method therefore probably lets people go, allows them to leave Communion, but always leaves the door ajar for repentance and return.

What we are witnessing, and I hope, what we participate in, is a debate within the Church about the way we treat scripture and the way we respond to God in our day. The present difficulties are not really about Gay and Lesbian people and ordination, especially to the episcopate, although in the Church of England’s debates about admitting women to the episcopate this summer it will seem so. They are about scripture, reason and tradition, about critical scholarship, psychological progress, the discernment and experience of good and evil in relationships. It is very interesting, but little remarked, that the ‘cassus belli’ when Jeffrey John was so disgracefully forced to stand down as the new Bishop of Reading in 2003, was that he was asked to do so because of his truthfulness about his stable, celibate, relationship, and his high doctrine of Episcopacy and Obedience. He was asked to stand down by the Archbishop and he did so. Those who opposed his appointment based their argument on untruth, alleged perpetual promiscuity amongst homosexual people, a refusal to believe in his celibacy (which incidentally they do not rank very highly anyway) and a low doctrine of Orders in that they were claiming large numbers of people would be offended—pure congregationalism. It was, at heart, about Jeffrey’s high doctrine of episcopacy and their elasticity with truth and the doctrines of the Church.

The General Synod debate this summer is the consequence of its decision two years ago when it passed a resolution towards making women Bishops, which was a watershed in the Church of England. By passing the motion that the House of Bishops had requested barely amended, (although to hear the reactions of several Bishops one would never believe it) the Synod effectively neutralised the Act of Synod which made special provision for those opposed to women’s ordination. The critically important point is however that the ‘cassus belli’ is the same, it is about episcopacy. And accepting the teaching of the Church.