

Jeffrey John to be next Dean of St Albans

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Downing Street announced this morning (Monday 19th April 2004) the appointment of Jeffrey John as the next Dean of St. Albans. The press had leaked the appointment over the weekend.

Dr John is a founder member of the group affirming catholicism. Last year his appointment was announced as the Bishop of Reading but he was then persuaded to step down because of opposition within the Diocese of Oxford and from the wider Anglican Communion. Dr John lives with his male partner although he has asserted that in recent years he has been celibate in order to live by the present policy of the House of Bishops. His partner is or has also been a parish minister in the Church of England. There is no indication that Dr John considers anything wrong with the present or past state of his relationship.

The Bishop of St. Albans, Christopher Herbert, is reported as saying: "I warmly welcome this appointment. Jeffrey John has a well-deserved reputation for being a good, caring pastor. He is an intelligent, courageous priest who will follow a long line of superb Deans of St Albans and will bring to the Abbey a wide range of gifts. He is a man of prayer, a preacher and teacher of real authority and grace."

The Bishop will have been actively involved in the appointment because the Dean is also Rector of the Abbey Church of which the Bishop is Patron. Previously the Bishop had appeared to sit on the fence on the issue that is tearing the Anglican Communion apart and last year called on people in the Diocese for a period of calm reflection after the appointment of Gene Robinson as 'Bishop' in New Hampshire, USA. The appointment of Jeffrey John appears to be a provocative act.

Why is this a problem?

The Church of England affirms the supreme authority of Holy Scripture in all matters of faith and conduct and expects its clergy to uphold the teaching of Scripture. The Church of England asserts that the Bible is the Word of God and in our Homilies, which serve to clarify and contextualise the doctrinal standard of the Church it very simply states that the Bible is God's infallible Word.

In matters of sexual conduct the Bible is very plain, there is only one proper place for sexual intercourse, namely the covenantal relationship between a man and woman. This is what marriage represents, it is part of God's creation plan, ordained from the beginning, and can be seen in some form in all human societies. This view was clearly endorsed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Anything outside of this, whether it be sex before marriage, homosexual sex, adultery, bestiality, or whatever, is wrong. Indeed, in various places in both the Old and New Testament God declares that such things are an abomination.

In his first letter to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul writes the following:

"Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God."

Because Christians have always believed the Scriptures to be God-breathed they have always taken this statement very seriously. God does not here say that sexual sins are worse than greed, habitual drunkenness or theft. Rather, all who practice these things, and remain unrepentant in them, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

There have been attempts by some to question whether the reference to sodomites in this verse really means homosexual practice. However, despite the efforts made the meaning will not change and honest interpreters and commentators have had to admit this fact. They may not agree with what is said in the verse, but they cannot deny what it says.

For those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and this ought to include all loyal members of the Church of England, this makes the matter very plain. To practice these things and to remain unrepentant in them is to be shut out of the kingdom of God. Therefore, this is an issue of salvation as has been clearly stated by some of the churches in Africa.

The heart of the Christian faith is that all people have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all under God's just condemnation and are deserving of death and eternal destruction. The glorious message of the Christian gospel is that through faith in Christ and because of His sacrifice on the cross, we sinners can be saved, our sins can be reckoned to Christ and therefore through Him we can inherit eternal life. These facts are borne witness to by the doctrinal standards of the Church of England. What this means is that all, from the greatest to the least, are called to repent of their sins and believe in Christ. To continue knowingly and willingly in doing what God declares to be wrong is to reject the message of salvation.

The issue in the Church of England and the Anglican Communion today is very simple. God declares in His word that certain behaviour will mean that people do not inherit His kingdom, but we have teachers and leaders who are saying that this behaviour is acceptable. Sometimes they even go so far as to say that such conduct is honouring to God. Those who teach these things and those who support and encourage them are setting themselves against God, they are deceiving people and leading them to destruction.

Underneath all this lies the issue of the nature and authority of the Bible. Christians through the ages have always declared the Bible to be the Word of God and have therefore accepted its authority. This has been the teaching of Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox alike. Today in the western world the dominant religion in many churches is liberalism. By and large liberalism has had the effect of strangling to death once vibrant churches. Liberals do not believe the Bible to be God-breathed and therefore although some may have an attachment to the norms of the institutional church, or to beliefs and practices of Christians in the past, at heart they believe that they have the authority to decide which parts of the Bible are relevant for today and which simply serve to show how people in the past understood God and their faith. Liberalism is in effect idolatry since the individual becomes the one who determines what God is like and what He expects of people today.

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