

Jeffrey John's Undertakings

A personal observation on the appointment in St. Albans.

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Following the announcement that Jeffrey John is to be the next Dean of St. Albans there have been some rather contradictory messages emanating from the Diocese.

Richard Inwood, Bishop of Bedford, was one of those who last year signed a letter calling on Jeffrey John not to take up the post as Bishop of Reading. The normal protocol for the appointment of Deans means that Richard was not consulted by the Diocesan Bishop but only learnt about the appointment a few days beforehand.

Bishop Richard was thus presented with a *fait accompli* and appears to have acquiesced to it. In his statement on the appointment he said:

"The appointment of Canon Jeffrey John as the Dean of St Albans means we shall have a gifted preacher and teacher in this key position. He also brings a commitment to mission, both within the Cathedral community and beyond, which I welcome warmly.

Jeffrey John has made certain undertakings to the Diocesan Bishop on the Bishops' statement 'Issues in Human Sexuality.' This assures me that none of the issues that caused concern last summer to so many people, including myself, will arise."

Regardless of what else is said it is the view of Bishop Richard that Jeffrey John had made undertakings to abide by the Issues in Human Sexuality report. But what were these undertakings and when were they made?

On the PM program last night this point was raised with Christopher Herbert, the Diocesan Bishop:

"Interviewer: 'The bishop of Bedford the Rt Rev Richard Inward is quoted as saying that Jeffrey John has made certain undertakings to the bishop on the bishop's statement Issues in Human Sexuality. What undertakings would they be?'

Herbert: 'As was made clear in the press conference today the undertakings were exactly those made by Jeffrey John before and so nothing has changed.' "

Christopher Herbert asserts that no new undertakings have been given. Instead the undertakings were simply those made by Jeffrey John before his non-appointment to Reading. 'Nothing has changed.'

The interviewer pressed the point regarding what undertakings had been given.

"Interviewer: 'Could you just spell them out?'

Herbert: 'Yes indeed, he is the first person to say yes he is homosexual and secondly he says and always says he has a celibate lifestyle and that for me stays within the

boundaries of what the House of Bishops Statement is about for clergy. So I don't have any difficulties with anyone saying 'Yes I am homosexual and yes I am celibate' I simply don't see what the problem is, it seems to be a perfectly honourable situation to be in and obviously achieved at some great thought and perhaps cost.' "

Therefore all that Jeffrey John has done is to say that he is celibate, which he said last year, and that he will abide by the statement Issues in Human Sexuality. This needs to be clearly understood.

Jeffrey John and his current partner, another Anglican clergyman, have, according to them, been homosexually active in the past. This is against the policy of the House of Bishops but no action was taken against either of them. There is no indication that either of them are repentant for their past actions and now this appointment effectively endorses their past behaviour and tears up the House of Bishops policy. In fact, one commentator noted that the House of Bishops has no longer has a policy and is entirely without direction.

Last year Jeffrey John claimed to be celibate though there appeared to be different stories circulating about how long his policy of celibacy had been pursued. In his statement yesterday and I believe previously he simply says that he is celibate at the moment. He has made it clear that he does not agree with the House of Bishops statement, he is certainly not going to teach in accordance with it and who knows how long he will continue to teach one thing and do another?

More importantly, the prime issue in this case has to do with teaching, not simply lifestyle. Prior to his non-appointment to Reading he taught consistently against the House of Bishops' statement, he has continued to do so since. Therefore for Jeffrey John to say that he abides by the House of Bishops statement is pure fiction.

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