

ANGLICAN SEMINARY OF VIRGINIA
COMMENTARIES FOR SEMINARIANS

A SERIES

BULLETIN TWO

FILE: ROLE OF A PRIEST BULL 2

BY THE RT. REV. LARRY WILSON JOHNSON

UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF A PRIEST

OR

TRADITIONAL WORSHIP VS. HERSEY AND WITCHCRAFT

EDITORIAL NOTE: THIS IS A RESPONSE TO A LETTER FROM A SEMINARIAN TO HIS BISHOP. THE SEMINARIAN PONDERES QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ANGLICAN FAITH. HERE IS THE INSIGHT OFFERED BY HIS BISHOP, RESPONDING QUESTION BY QUESTION.

DEAR BISHOP,

AS I HAVE MENTIONED IN OTHER EMBERTIDE LETTERS, I STRUGGLE WITH SOME AREAS OF OUR ANGLICAN "TRADITIONS" AND WORK DILIGENTLY TO STAY FOCUSED ON THE IMPORTANT THINGS IN MY WORSHIP OF OUR LORD.

I CONTINUE TO READ THE RECOMMENDED TEXTBOOKS ASSIGNED FOR MY SEMINARY STUDIES. I FIND MOST OF THE BOOKS DEALING WITH THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH TO LEAVE ME QUESTIONING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH TRADITIONS. I KNOW THAT MUCH OF OUR SERVICE (AND THAT OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS AS WELL) IS SYMBOLIC, BUT I STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF SYMBOLISM AND TRADITIONAL WORSHIP.

BISHOP: OUR FORM OF TRADITIONAL WORSHIP IS MORE IMPORTANT TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE. IT IS AN IMPORTANT PROTECTION AGAINST STRANGE AND HERETICAL "INNOVATION" WHICH WEAKENS THE POWER OF HOLY WORSHIP. THEREFORE IS CRITICAL THE ANGLICAN CHURCH NOT SUBMIT TO STRANGE INNOVATIONS THAT APPEAL TO THE CHANGING TIMES. THE ATTRACTION OF THE "ZEITGEIST" HAS DESTROYED MORE THAN IT HAS STRENGTHENED THE CHURCH. THOSE WHO WANT TO FEEL "MODERN" AND PRACTICE CURRENT SOCIAL MORES BASED ON CHANGING PSYCHOLOGICAL STANDARDS ARE MOST TIMES THE ADVOCATES OF CHANGE. THIS DISGUISES A DESIRE TO JUSTIFY A SINFUL AGENDA BY HAVING THE CHURCH PUT ITS STAMP OF APPROVAL ON AN INNOVATION THAT FITS ONE'S LIFE STYLE OR CARNAL OBJECTIVES. THIS IS ALWAYS A BIBLE TENET OR COMMANDMENT HOLDING THAT

THIS IS A SIN. THE SAME THING IS SEEN WHEN PRESSURE GROUPS SEEK LAWS BE CHANGED TO APPROVE OF A LUSTFUL ACT IN ORDER FOR IT TO BE SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE AND FREE OF SOCIETY'S CONDEMNATION. THE PROPONENTS ADVOCATE WHAT "FEELS GOOD" CANNOT BE SINFUL. THOSE WHO SUBMIT TO THE "FASHION OF THE TIMES" OR ADOPTING THIS APPROACH ARE DOING A DISSERVICE TO GOD'S BODY.

REPORTS TELL US THAT ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING "RELIGIONS" IS THE WICCAN. WHAT SOME MIGHT THINK IS BORING WORSHIP OF OUR GRANDFATHERS IS ACTUALLY THE BULWARK AGAINST THE DEVIL'S WORK. YES, THERE IS SYMBOLISM AND SAMENESS, BUT IT IS FRESH TOO, BECAUSE THE LIVING GOD IS PRESENCE THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST AND THE SHED BLOOD OF CHRIST. THERE IS MUCH SYMBOLISM DURING THE SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION. OUR WORSHIP IS AIDED THROUGH SYMBOLISM WHICH HELPS IMPART THE LOVE AND PRESENCE OF GOD. EACH SYMBOLIC ACT AND MOTION AT THE ALTAR, BY THE PRIEST ASSURES THE PEOPLE THAT CHRIST COMES INTO THEIR MIDST TO BRING SALVATION AND PEACE. THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK OF THE PRIEST IS TO BRING THE SACRAMENTS, AND THEREBY BRINGS GOD THE FATHER TO THE PEOPLE AS REVEALED BY THE COMFORTER, WHO FULFILLS SPIRITUAL, EARTHLY, AND BODILY NEEDS WITH HEAVENLY GIFTS.

IN A SOCIETY THAT IS ATTUNED TO A FAST-MOVING, "MADISON AVENUE AND HOLLYWOOD" APPROACH TO ENTERTAINMENT, THE MINISTER HAS A REAL BATTLE TO WAGE TO KEEP THE INTEREST AND ATTENTION OF THE PARISHIONERS, ESPECIALLY WHEN PEOPLE HAVE NOT BEEN PROPERLY TAUGHT THE MEANING OF THE LITURGIES AND ESPECIALLY HOLY COMMUNION.

THE ANGLICAN LITURGY COMPETES WITH THE NEW AGE ATTITUDE OF ENTERTAINING THE CONGREGATION AND BEING LESS FORMAL, AND IN MANY CASES THE CLERGY HAVE SUCCEDED TO ALLOWING FORMLESS UNHOLY TYPES OF PERFORMANCES IN THE CHURCH BUILDING AS A SUBSTITUTE. TRUE ANGLICANS DO NOT GIVE IN TO THIS TYPE OF BAWDY ENTERTAINMENT, BUT WORK TO EXPLAIN AND TEACH THE MEANING OF THOSE PARTS OF THE SERVICE THAT ARE SYMBOLIC SO THAT THE POWER IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST REVEALED THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS HAS MEANING FOR ALL, BECAUSE IS STRENGTHENS US FOR BATTLE WITH SATAN.

MANY DENOMINATIONS HAVE TAKEN TO TURNING WORSHIP SERVICES INTO LITTLE MORE THAN PARTICIPATORY THEATER-IN-THE-ROUND, SO TO SPEAK – VISUAL IMAGES AND SOUNDS OF ENTERTAINMENT CENTERS, LOUD INSTRUMENTS AND OTHER MODERN MEDIA TOOLS. MANY PEOPLE TODAY EXPECT THE CHURCH SERVICE TO GIVE SOMETHING TO THEM, WHEN IN FACT AS ANGLICANS WE

BELIEVE THAT THE REVERSE IS TRUE: WE SHOULD COME TO CHURCH TO GIVE SOMETHING TO GOD – OUR SELVES, OUR SOULS, AND OUR BODIES. IT IS IN THE SILENCE THAT WE CAN HEAR THE VOICE OF OUR SAVIOR. ANGLICAN TRADITIONAL ORTHODOX FORM OF WORSHIP ALLOWS THIS TO HAPPEN.

SEMINARIAN: AS A PARISHIONER IN THE PEW, I CERTAINLY DID NOT GIVE MUCH THOUGHT TO THE CREEDS, OTHER THAN THEY WERE UNISON PRAYERS IN THE PRAYER BOOK. I WONDERED, "WHY DO WE HAVE CREEDS?" I DID NOT KNOW WHAT CREATED THE CREEDS IN THE FIRST PLACE AND WOULD GUESS THAT 90% OF OUR CONGREGATION DOES NOT EITHER. NOW AS I STUDY UNDER YOU, I REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING AND BEING ABLE TO EXPLAIN THIS.

BISHOP: THE CREEDS ARE THE RESULT OF WORK OF THE APOSTLES AND THE CHURCH FATHERS TO ESTABLISH THE TRUE FAITH AND TO COUNTER HERESIES PREVALENT IN THEIR TIME. THE CREEDS DEFEND THE CHURCH AGAINST CULTIC PRACTICES THAT FROM TIME TO TIME THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES HAVE FOUND THEIR WAY INTO THE PRACTICE AND BELIEFS OF ANGLICANISM AND CHRISTIAN FAITH IN GENERAL. IN THE EARLIEST TIMES, IT WAS THINGS SUCH AS ARIANISM AND NESTORIANISM. TODAY IT IS WITCHCRAFT, HERETICAL RELIGIONS, HUMANISM AND THE RISE IN ATHEISM. BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF ALIENATING SOME OF THEIR CONGREGATIONS, SOME MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS NO LONGER EMPHASIZE THE CREEDS, WHICH LAY OUT PROPER BELIEF CLEARLY AND UNEQUIVOCALLY. THE FAITH AS HELD IN THE CREEDS IS MANIFESTED IN MAN BY OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMANDMENTS OF JESUS. THE BOTTOM LINE OF ANGLICANISM IS FAITH. WHILE SCRIPTURE BACKS UP THE WORDS OF THE CREEDS, IF ONE IS UNSURE OF HIS BELIEF IN THE INERRANT WORD OF GOD AS SET FORTH IN THE BIBLE, ONE WILL HAVE TROUBLE ACCEPTING THE TENETS OF THE CREEDS.

SEMINARIAN: IT APPEARS OR SO IT IS WRITTEN IN MANY OF THE BOOKS ON CHURCH HISTORY THAT MUCH OF WHAT WE DO TODAY IN OUR SERVICES WAS INITIATED BY SOMEONE IN POWER AT THE TIME, A KING OR POPE THAT DESIRED THIS IN THE SERVICE. IS THIS TO BE TAKEN AS SOMETHING INSPIRED, AS IS THE BIBLE? IN ADDITION, WHAT ABOUT VESTMENTS AND ORNAMENTS?

BISHOP: OUR CHIEF SERVICE IS THE HOLY COMMUNION WHICH COMES FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE VERBATIM. OUR ANGLICAN LITURGY IS BASED ON THE WORDS OF JESUS AT THE LAST SUPPER. ACTIONS BEFORE THE ALTAR WERE AND ARE INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND ALL FOUND IN THE BIBLE. THOMAS CRANMER, RIDLEY, LATIMER AND HUNDREDS OF SAINTS GAVE THEIR LIVES TO PRESERVE OUR FORM OF WORSHIP. OUR LITURGY IS WHAT WAS HANDED DOWN TO US IN 1549, AMENDED IN 1552 AND FINALLY ENACTED IN 1558 AND KNOWN AS THE SECOND PRAYER BOOK. OUR 1928 BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER IS

DESCENDED FROM THESE BOOKS AND I BELIEVE IT TO BE CORRECT AND TRUE. ADHERING TO THE LITURGY AND THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER PROTECTS US FROM FALLING INTO ERROR AND GIVING IN TO SKEPTICS AND DRAMATISTS WHO WOULD CHANGE WITH THE WIND TO SUIT THEIR FLIP-FLOPPING BELIEFS AND PRACTICES.

OUR FORM OF WORSHIP (1928 BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER) COMES FROM THE PRIMITIVE AND EARLY CHURCH, AND IS CONSIDERED VALID IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF VIRGINIA AND MANY ANGLICAN CHURCHS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD. OUR WORSHIP SERVICE RELIES UPON THE AUTHORIZED VERSION OF THE BIBLE IN ITS ENTIRETY AND THE MUSIC AND WORDS OF THE 1940 HYMNAL. THESE TWO COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER AND MEET THE BASIC REQUIREMENT OF TRUE CHRISTIAN FAITH WHICH DEMANDS THAT OUR ACTIONS, WORDS, AND DEEDS ARE BACKED UP BY HOLY SCRIPTURE. OUR MUSIC MUST BE ORTHODOX WITH MUSIC IS COMMANDED IN THE BIBLE AND WE WANT NO HERESY TO ENTER OUR WORSHIP THROUGH OUR MUSIC.

SOMETIMES THE USE OF VESTMENTS COMES INTO QUESTION. VESTMENTS ARE USED FOR IMPORTANT REASONS. THEY REMIND US THAT WE ARE DESCENDANTS OF THE SAINTS AND FATHERS OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH. WE USE THEM TO REMIND US THAT THE DEACONS, PRIESTS, AND BISHOPS ARE NOT THE CENTER OF WORSHIP, AND ARE ONLY ONE IN THE LONG LINE IN APOSTOLIC MINISTRY. THEREFORE, THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT REASON ANGLICAN CLERGYMEN WEAR VESTMENTS. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE HOUSE OF AARON WAS REQUIRED BY GOD TO USE SPECIAL GARMENTS.

ORNAMENTS AND PRACTICES IN THE SERVICE MAY BE CONSIDERED CONTROVERSIAL FROM TIME TO TIME, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE FOUND IN THE BIBLE. SMOKE, BELLS, AND HOLY OILS ARE EXAMPLES OF THESE AND ARE USUALLY RESERVED FOR WHAT IS KNOWN AS A HIGH-CHURCH SERVICE. SOME ANGLICAN PARISHES MAY NOT USE THESE BECAUSE AFTER THE REFORMATION, THEY FELL IN DISUSE AND TRADITION IS HARD TO AMEND. IN THE COLONY OF VIRGINIA, SERVICES WERE LOWER IN WORSHIP FORM. HISTORY RECORDS THAT FOR THE FIRST HOLY COMMUNION AT JAMESTOWN A SPLIT TREE MOUNTED ONTO CUT SAPLINGS SERVED AS AN ALTAR. IN THE MID NINETEENTH CENTURY THERE WAS A GREAT RENEWAL CALLED THE OXFORD MOVEMENT WHEN CANDLES, INCENSE, BELLS, CROSSES, AND RICHLY SEWN VESTMENTS CAME INTO GREATER USE. THUS, WE HAVE THE "HIGH" AND "LOW" FORMS OF WORSHIP WHICH ARE EQUALLY SPIRITUALLY BEAUTIFUL, NEITHER OF WHICH IS WRONG. SOME ANGLICANS PREFER SIMPLICITY AND SOME FIND THE ORNATE MORE SATISFYING.

AS MINISTERS, WE COME TO BRING CHRIST TO THE PEOPLE, NOT TO "UPSET" PARISHIONERS OVER THE FORMS OF TRADITIONAL AND

ORTHODOX WORSHIP. WHEN TEACHING IS REQUIRED, WE HAVE TO INTRODUCE NEW THINGS SLOWLY WITH CAREFUL AND PRECISE TEACHING, WHICH IS WHY IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT PRIESTS BE WELL VERSED IN SCRIPTURE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH AS WELL AS ANGLICAN LITURGY AND HISTORY. YOU MUST REMEMBER THAT CHRIST IS IN BOTH THE LOW AS WELL AS THE HIGH-CHURCH FORM OF WORSHIP. A PRIEST WHO DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THE REASONS FOR EVERYTHING HE IS DOING AT GOD'S ALTAR APPEARS WEAK TO HIS CONGREGATION AND IS MORE LIKELY TO BE LED ASTRAY BY WRONG THINKING.

SEMINARIAN: THROUGH THE AGES, THE BELIEFS OF THE CHURCH HAVE CHANGED DEPENDING ON WHO HAD THE STRONGER HAND OR IN POWER. THE EAST HAS BELIEFS, THE WEST HAS BELIEFS, SO WHO IS RIGHT AND WHO IS WRONG?

BISHOP: IT IS NOT THE POWER OF MAN BUT THE WORD OF GOD WHICH IS TRUTH ETERNAL. MAN OFTEN SEEKS TO INCORPORATE OR TO ELIMINATE PRACTICES AND BELIEFS IN HIS RELIGION. PERHAPS IT IS THE NATURE OF MAN TO BE INNOVATIVE THROUGH A LACK OF IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH AND ITS MEANING. HOWEVER, IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH INNOVATION MUST BE CHALLENGED AND NOT ACCEPTED IF IT IS NOT SUPPORTED BY SCRIPTURE, THE CREEDS, EARLY FATHERS, AND THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION.

THE CREEDS OF THE CHURCH ARE GOOD EXAMPLES OF THE CHURCH DEFENDING THE FAITH. A LEGITIMATE QUESTION IS "HOW DID THEY COME TO BE? ONCE WE READ AND BECOME INFORMED OF THE HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE COUNCILS WE MAY BETTER ACCEPT AND APPRECIATE THEIR VALIDITY AND ROLE IN PRESERVING THE TRUE FAITH AS SET FORTH IN THE SCRIPTURES

ANGLICANISM IS AN ANCIENT FAITH THAT HAS FOLLOWED RULES, ALL SCRIPTURAL, SINCE THE TIME OF CHRIST. EARLY APOSTLES WORKED DILIGENTLY AND GAVE THEIR LIVES TO MAINTAIN THAT FAITH UNCHANGED AND UNCHANGING. WE WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED BY GOD TO LEAD THIS CHURCH MUST BE WILLING TO DO NO LESS!

HERE ARE THE HERESIES THAT WERE DEALT WITH BY THE FIRST SEVEN COUNCILS:*

- 1. NICAEA 325 AD; CONDEMNED ARIANISM AND PROMULGATED THE ORIGINAL NICENE CREED**
- 2. CONSTANTINOPLE 381: CONDEMNED APOLLINARIANISM AND ISSUED AMENDED NICENE CREED.**
- 3. EPHESUS 431 AD: CONDEMNED NESTORIANISM.**
- 4. CHALCEDON 451 AD: CONDEMNED MONOPHYSITISM.**

5. **CONSTANTINOPLE 553 AD: CONDEMNED THE “THREE CHAPTERS” AND SUPPORTED DECISIONS OF CHALCEDON.**
6. **CONSTANTINOPLE 680 AD: CONDEMNED MONOTHELITISM AND REAFFIRMED DECISIONS OF PREVIOUS COUNCILS.**
7. **NICAEA 787 AD: DEALT WITH THE QUESTION OF IMAGES AND ICONS.**

*** WILSON, FRANK, D.D., S/T.D., LATE BISHOP OF EAU CLAIRE, THE DIVINE COMMISSION, MOREHOUSE-GORHAM CO., NEW YORK, 1940, PP. 45-46.**

DECISIONS OF THESE COUNCILS GAVE US THE NICENE CREED AND TEACHINGS, WHICH PROVIDES US GUIDANCE WE HAVE TODAY AS CORNERSTONES OF OUR FAITH. THEIR DECISIONS CONTAIN THE TENETS OF FAITH NECESSARY FOR OUR SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST AND TO PRESERVE THE TRUE FAITH. WE ARE REMINDED THAT DEACONS, BISHOPS, PRIESTS, AND MARTYRS STOOD STRONG SACRIFICING THEIR LIVES IN MANY INSTANCES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF OUR FAITH. THEIR WORK GUIDES US TODAY AS WE SEEK TO BE STRONG IN THE TRUTH AND WORD OF GOD. AFTER TWO-THOUSAND YEARS, ANGLICANS CAN REST WITH CONFIDENCE ON OUR PRECEPTS AND PRACTICES.

SEMINARIAN: I AM OVERWHELMED SOMETIMES WHEN I THINK OF THE ROLE OF A PRIEST AND WHAT HE MUST ACTUALLY BE AND DO. COULD YOU GIVE ME SOMETHING SHORT AND TO THE POINT ON THIS?

AS YOU PREPARE FOR ORDINATION, REMEMBER THAT A PRIEST IS A SACRIFICE BEFORE GOD. THE PATH YOU HAVE CHOSEN IS NOT AN EASY ONE. YOU MUST BE AS FULLY PREPARED EMOTIONALLY, SPIRITUALLY, PHYSICALLY, AND EDUCATIONALLY AS POSSIBLE. YOU CANNOT TEACH YOUR PARISHIONERS IF YOU ARE LACKING IN ANY OF THOSE FOUR THINGS.

THE FUNCTION OF A PRIEST IS TO SHOW THE WAY TO HEAVEN BY LEADING HIS FLOCK. YOU ARE TO OPEN THE WAY TO GOD. YES, YOU WILL BE A SHEPHERD, BUT THERE IS MORE! THE WORD “PRIEST” HAS A SPECIAL AND ANCIENT MEANING. “PONTIFEX” IS THE LATIN IN PRIEST. IT MEANS BRIDGE BUILDER. WHAT CHRIST DID YOU MUST SEEK TO DO AS WELL. YOU WILL BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN GOD AND MAN. THIS IS WHAT JESUS DID. HE OPENED THE WAY TO GOD AND MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR ALL MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN TO COME INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY AS YOU PREPARE FOR ORDINATION.

IN CHRIST’S LOVE,

THE RT. REV.+ LARRY W. JOHNSON

THE ANGLICAN SEMINARY OF VIRGINIA WAS FOUNDED BY BISHOP JOHNSON TO PREPARE MEN FOR THE PRIESTHOOD. FOR INFORMATION OR A CATALOGUE OF STUDIES, CONTACT THE BISHOP'S OFFICE. A SECOND PUBLICATION IS AVAILABLE TO ASSIST MEN WHO WANT TO PREPARE FOR ORDINATION OR CLERGY DESIRING TO COME INTO THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF VIRGINIA ENTITLED ORDINATION AND THE PROCESS OF INCARDINATION. VISIT WWW.THEANGLICANCHURCH.NET EMAIL LARRYWJOHNSON@EMBARQMAIL.COM