

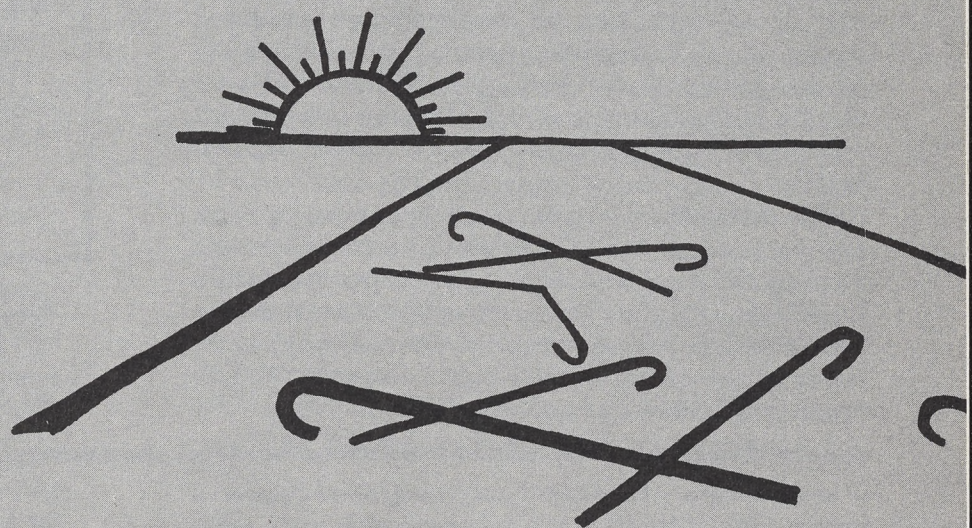
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# THE WITNESS

SPECIAL  
ISSUE

**Bishops Meet in Florida**

**Shepherds  
in  
Disarray**



**William R. Coats and others respond**



# From the Editor

Robert L. DeWitt

This special issue of THE WITNESS is prompted by what we feel is an urgent situation in the life of our church.

Many have wondered how seriously to evaluate the noisy confusion caused recently by continuing resistance to the revision of the Prayer Book, to the endorsement of the ordination of women to the "higher" orders of the ministry, to the beginnings of a more humane and informed understanding of homosexuality—all of which were guaranteed by last year's General Convention in Minneapolis. That "noisy confusion" took on added seriousness a few weeks ago at the interim meeting of the House of Bishops in Port St. Lucie, Florida. You will note that it was not in Miami. The meeting was held in a remote resort, with no easy access, which discouraged the usually full attendance by the press. Consequently, most Episcopalians are not too clear as to exactly what happened there. We feel they should be.

In this special issue we hope to provide a broad outline of what happened, a few corroborative details, and the beginning of an analysis. Why? Well, we hate to use the term "institutional crisis," but it does suggest something of the gravity of what we see in this situation. And the danger is not that people will not agree with our assessment, but that they will not even be aware of what we are attempting to assess. We will return to the analysis of these events in future issues, but felt we owed it to you to inform you as soon as possible as to what happened.

THE WITNESS is dedicated to the dogma that God once intervened savingly in human affairs in the Christ-event, and that therefore the church, His body, has a continuing vocation to intervene savingly in the current issues of human society. THE WITNESS feels that much of what happened at the recent meeting of the House of Bishops, beginning with the Presiding Bishop's address, confounded that effort. ■

A sense of urgency has dictated our getting to you this special issue of THE WITNESS. It was not an easy thing to do, and it precluded the customary graphics, color, lay-out and length. But we feel it is worth it.

We are grateful to the Rev. William Coats for major assist-

"We are dismayed by the failure of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church to address in any just or responsible way issues that affect all people within and without the church. We note the following acts of commission and omission by the House of Bishops at its most recent meeting in Florida:

1. The House of Bishops granted itself the "right" to discriminate against *women priests*, thereby attempting to undercut the mandate of the 1976 General Convention.
2. The House of Bishops mandated that bishops must discriminate against *homosexuals* seeking ordination, thereby undercutting the processes of study implemented by the 1976 General Convention.
3. The House of Bishops failed to make major commitment to the plight besetting the *cities* of this nation.
4. The House of Bishops failed to speak out against the incarceration of this church's *lay ministers* for their refusal, in conscience, to testify before a Grand Jury; moreover, the House of Bishops failed to call to account the church's national leaders for their insensitivity to issues raised by the movements for political independence and self-determination in *Puerto Rico* and elsewhere.
5. The House of Bishops condoned, indeed affirmed, the untenable and irresponsible behavior of its own Presiding Officer in his desire to both lead the church and maintain outright opposition to the church's canonical position on the ordination of women."

Statement adopted by the Mission and Social Action Committee, Episcopal Divinity School

WILLIAM COATS is a chaplain at the University of Wisconsin's Milwaukee campus and Editor of Plumbline magazine. He is currently doing special assignments for the Church & Society Network.

ance in assembling the material, to the typesetter and printer for a rush job, and to the many consultants who urged and advised in this effort.

As a courtesy, this special issue is also being sent to the Church & Society Newsletter mailing list.

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# THE WITNESS

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## Bishops Meet in Florida

William R. Coats

*(Editor's note: This article is a composite, a compilation of views and interpretations of a wide variety of witnesses and participants at, and analysts of, the recent meeting of the House of Bishops.)*

**Q. What were the highlights of the recent meeting of the House of Bishops in Florida?**

A. First, there was the Presiding Bishop's opening address in which he declared his opposition to the ordination of women and offered to resign. Second, the bishops voted for a "conscience clause" which supported those opposed to women's ordination. Third, the bishops re-affirmed their opposition to homosexuality and specifically condemned the ordination of persons advocating and/or practicing homosexuality. Fourth, the bishops dealt with Bishop Albert Chambers, who has been providing episcopal ministry to the St. Louis separatists. Finally, as part of the overall picture, the tone of the meeting, its structure and the attempt to gain a hearing for the urban mission of the Church were important.

**Q. Let's begin with the Presiding Bishop. What did he say?**

A. His address reflected his pre-occupation with the St. Louis separatists and those still within the Church who oppose the ordination of women. His remarks were designed to reach out to them in reconciliation. In the process he announced his belief that women could not be ordained and that as a matter of conscience he could not ordain them or consecrate them.

**Q. Then he did submit his resignation?**

A. No. What he really said was that if the bishops felt that his personal reservations were unacceptable then he would resign—an impossible challenge. What Bishop Allin did was take a serious issue—the pros and cons of women's ordination and his public responsibility in this matter—and ask

the House not to treat them as matters of public debate but rather to deal with him personally. This meant no one could speak to the issues involved without appearing to embarrass the Presiding Bishop. He effectively shut off debate on this matter by laying his own pastoral needs on the line. This created an impossible climate for serious and principled discussion, for who is going to attack the Presiding Bishop's conscience? Thus the resignation was hardly a serious matter.

**Q. But doesn't the Presiding Bishop have the right of conscience?**

A. What the Presiding Bishop (and others, as we shall see) should be saying is that they have *personal reservations* about a particular Church policy, just as we all have reservations about this or that law or some policy we must administer. But what the Presiding Bishop has done is take a personal reservation and turn it into behavior about policy. He has said he does not believe women can be ordained. This is his right, however regrettable or impolitic we may think his opinion to be. However, he has not left it there; instead he has asked that his conscience be implemented in action, i.e., in the form of an exemption from stated duties of his office. But as chief pastor he is rightly expected to uphold the Church's will and law regardless of his personal reservations. By elevating his personal reservations to the level, in effect, of lawless behavior, he has acted as if those reservations have the same standing in law as the law itself. This is a misunderstanding of conscience and of law.

### LEADERSHIP VACUUM

**Q. What has been the result of his address?**

A. It has created a sense of dismay, confusion and even betrayal throughout the Church. People expect leadership



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from the Church's Presiding Officer. Instead, because of his anxiety to reconcile extremists, it would appear as if he undermined the law of the Church, the authority of General Convention, the authority of other bishops trying faithfully to administer the policy of the Church under trying circumstances (like Bishop Rusack in Los Angeles where the extremists are strong), and the authority of his own office. This also comes at a time when the \$100 million program with which he is closely associated, Venture in Mission, is in deep trouble, and evident marks of his own leadership are not readily visible. It adds up to a crisis of leadership.

*Q. Can you say more about this problem of episcopal leadership?*

A. Ironically, ever since the bishops came up with the notion of collegiality, there has been a muting of debate and disagreement in the House of Bishops. Although intended to move the House towards unity, at a deeper level this has hampered them from taking principled stands on issues. For instead of taking such stands they have preferred to leave matters in the hands of individual bishops, and at the same time to reach *informal* agreements on united positions. This pastoral or collegial approach has failed not only because it has been impossible to make informal agreements stick but also because, without some firm public position on key issues, dioceses and individuals throughout the Church have simply gone their own way.

The collegial approach, while helpful as a pastoral device, has made concerted leadership virtually impossible. We now have a balkanized Church apparently incapable of principled

action and prone more than ever to erratic shifts of the political wind. The bishops remain solicitous of their relationships with each other, sensitive to ministry as it applies to the rigors of their office. But this too often comes at the expense of public leadership. It is for this reason, for example, that the bishops voted in favor of the "conscience clause" for those opposed to the ordination of women.

## THE CONSCIENCE CLAUSE

*Q. Let's take the conscience clause. Didn't General Convention pass a canon on women's ordination which refrained from forcing opposition bishops to ordain women?*

A. That is quite true. Moreover, when the bishops in Florida said that those opposed to women's ordination are not to be penalized and that this position is compatible with good standing in the Episcopal Church they believed they were saying no more than what had either been said or implied in Minnesota in 1976.

*Q. Then what is the fuss?*

A. There are three matters here. Consider first the feeling among women, especially those ordained. The bishops of the Church are heard to declare their support for the crudest form of sexism, namely the view that women by virtue of some ontological or other "defect" are so unlike and unequal to men that they must be excluded from the priesthood. This is almost like saying that belief in the inferiority of blacks is compatible with Christian teaching. Here a social evil is endorsed by the Church's bishops. And remember there was no resolution at the Florida meeting which affirmed women's ordination!

*Q. But surely not everyone believes this way?*

A. Perhaps not, but there is a second problem as well. That is the matter of the intent of General Convention. All laws are passed and upheld with a specific intent in mind; they do not include within themselves the notion that their negation is of equal weight. By suggesting this notion, the bishops are actually taking a step towards anarchy. For if their logic is followed then any reservation held in conscience can exempt the person from the effect of any law with which that person is in disagreement. Giving conscientious objection to law equal standing with the intent of a law itself is unheard of and manifestly dangerous.

*Q. Are you saying the dissidents in the Church don't have the right to resist laws with which they are in disagreement?*

A. Not at all, and here we come to the third point. You will notice that the word "reservation" has been used frequently. If the dispute were simply about mental reservation to law or specific doctrines, then the bishops' statement would not be so bad. But the context of the struggle over the ordination of women is not simply inside a person's mind; it involves overt behavior. We now have bishops refusing to ordain, Standing Committees refusing to pass favorably on otherwise completely qualified women, parishes declaring themselves "out of communion" with those who allow women to celebrate in other parishes, dioceses tinkering with local canons in order to keep women priests out. Now all of this is legal, a right. The question is, however, given that these actions are in the realm of public action and not simply mental reservations, what does it mean for bishops, whatever their intent, to legitimize and encourage such resistance?



Q. *Still, all these actions seem allowable under the traditional notion of the supremacy of conscience.*

A. Again there is confusion here. Classically, the supremacy of conscience is employed in two, often inseparable, ways. First, there is disobedience to law as part of the test of the law's moral or legal adequacy. In disobedience one witnesses to a higher law in the hope that the rightness of the cause will eventually cause the law to be changed. Second, there is the notion that one's personal convictions are inviolable and therefore one should be exempt from the effect of laws which violate one's convictions. Clearly our resisters are of the second type. They are not challenging the ordination canon with acts of disobedience; instead they are asking on the basis of personal conviction to be exempt from the full impact of the law itself. But in law no one can be granted such a blanket exemption; only partial ones can be granted. To grant full exemption would lead to anarchy. That is why pacifists end up serving in the armed forces, but as ambulance drivers. But there is another important distinction to be made. Usually in cases of exemption on the basis of conscience we are only talking about individuals. But in our case here more than individuals are involved. When a bishop's conscience is honored with an exemption it can mean that an entire diocese, like it or not, has to abide by his decision. But what of those in the diocese who believe in women's ordination? Apparently they end up with no rights at all. For here the model is not of isolated individuals whose consciences the law must somehow protect, but of structural entities—parishes, dioceses—whose collective future is bound up with the power and authority of the priest or bishop. Thus it should be said

that unless one is to limit the notion of conscience to that of personal reservation it would seem to have very little applicability in the present struggle.

## HOMOSEXUAL PRIESTS

Q. *We read in the papers that the bishops condemned homosexuals. Is that true?*

A. No. Specifically they affirmed Christian marriage, indicated the impropriety of homosexual marriages and opposed the ordination of those who advocate and/or practice homosexuality.

Q. *This would appear to be the traditional Christian position. What is so unusual here?*

A. It is a matter of context. At the moment the discussion on homosexuality is so fluid and so highly charged with emotion, so open to cruelty and vindictiveness, it would seem that a pastoral approach would have been more appropriate than the narrow legal and juridical one pursued by the bishops. Bishop Corrigan, in a pre-meeting letter to his colleagues, suggested this but to no avail. Responding to the heightened political climate of the Church, the bishops decided to make an explicit, legal presentation. By so doing they are, unfortunately, fanning the flames of hostility and vindictiveness throughout the Church.

Q. *Are you suggesting there is a witch-hunt brewing?*

A. Hopefully not, though the conditions are certainly there. For centuries there have been homosexual clergy. One estimate suggests that at least ten percent of the Episcopal clergy are gay. Up to now this situation, while known, was not publically acknowledged. Instead, a certain degree of informal tolerance and, above all the longstanding habit of bishops to treat this matter pastorally (sometimes, to

be sure, with less than beneficial results) prevailed. It is this set of arrangements which is being tested, if not undermined. Even the gradual "coming out" of gays has depended upon the strength of this informal, pastoral climate. This, too, is now in jeopardy. The bishops' position invites a more hostile climate, as well as the breaking apart of the previous pastoral arrangement. What was needed at Florida was the public recognition that time is needed to study and understand more fully the nature of human sexuality, as was mandated by action of the last General Convention. Instead, a manifestly legal and harsh response emerged.

Q. *The bishops distinguished between homosexual orientation, which they held to be acceptable, and homosexual practice, which they said was not. What does this mean?*

A. Since this distinction is a modern one and not part of the tradition of the Church, its addition is designed to bring moderation to a debate full of anxiety. Unfortunately, popular fear of homosexuality does not make any such distinction (indeed neither does the Supreme Court!), consequently even this hint of moderation is probably useless. Moreover the distinction is unworkable, if not spurious. What is a practicing homosexual? Is this a person who "does it?" But what if persons "doing it" declare themselves to be homosexual only in orientation and that the times they "did it" were mistakes. Are they to be accepted, while persons who "do it" and claim it was their intention, are not to be accepted? Can people get off the hook after "doing it" by claiming they don't believe in "doing it?" Imagine the dishonesty and hypocrisy we would be condoning in such a case, not to mention the agony we would be prolonging among homosexuals.



# Bishops ...

*Q. What does this add up to at the moment?*

A. It would seem that the ordination of avowed homosexuals is out for the time being while the pressure is on other homosexuals—clergy and lay. In addition, those who have not declared themselves homosexuals are discouraged from doing so. In other words, where a pastoral approach might have taken us a step closer to openness and honesty and to a less terror-filled existence for homosexuals, a stringent approach means the opposite. And all of this at a time when a national committee is preparing a report on human sexuality for the 1979 General Convention. The bishops' actions undermine this report since they have declared ahead of time what the "correct" answers are on this issue.

*Q. Isn't this a little bleak? After all, the bishops are not the official policy-making body of this Church; rather the Church as a whole in its various jurisdictions has this authority.*

A. That is correct. The hope is that a combination of factors—more education, popular pressure, a favorable national committee report—could help to reverse matters at the various jurisdictional levels. But, this hope has to work against the enormous influences of bishops—the fact that they are at the top of the Church's hierarchy, and that their views get more public exposure through the media.

## PASTORAL OR LEGAL?

*Q. Can you say a little more about the distinction between the pastoral and the legal? For example, the House appeared to go easy on Bishop Albert Chambers, who has acted for all in-*

*tents and purposes as the Bishop of the St. Louis separatists. Can we presume you favor this pastoral approach since you argue for one in regard to homosexuality?*

A. No one wants to be vindictive. However, it is rather amazing that the bishops could come down so hard on homosexuals who, after all, no one is accusing of heresy or disobedience or of opposition to the policy of this Church. To be sure, homosexuals do not conform to this point of traditional morality, but it is only at one point and doesn't involve dogma, doctrine or polity. Bishop Chambers, on the other hand, by word and deed, has declared the Episcopal Church to be schismatic and without catholic authority, has participated in a variety of separatist events and has encouraged their actions.

*Q. Then why do you think the bishops came down so hard on homosexuals and dealt so lightly with Bishop Chambers?*

A. Let's put it this way. The bishops' purpose was to speak pastorally to the Church and a surface reading of the Florida meeting might lead one to conclude that there was a consistent pastoral concern and approach throughout. But a closer look reveals a number of inconsistencies. The stern statement on homosexuality was a legal-style rebuke of gays and served also as an implicit chastisement of Bishops Moore and Myers, who have, respectively, ordained and licensed an avowed lesbian priest. Yet in terms of those opposed to women's ordination and those in support of Bishop Chambers the approach was clearly pastoral. Why this difference of approach? The answer would appear to be simple: politics.

*Q. What do you mean by politics?*

A. Politics refers to those forces at work demanding recognition for their views and the restraint of their opponents. At Florida it is easy to see that the initiative was with the forces of reaction. And perhaps this is reflective of the Church as a whole. At any rate at Florida the Right was perceived to be so powerful that only a pastoral approach would do. On the other hand, part of the demand of the Right was a stiff, firm proscription of certain matters dealing with human sexuality. This they got in the form of a legal handling of homosexuality.

*Q. But what about the liberal or moderate bishops? Didn't they play a role in this?*

A. Apparently they were on the defensive during the entire meeting. On the one hand they were helpless to address the real issues involved in Bishop Allin's address for fear that any attempt at a real debate would embarrass the Presiding Bishop and jeopardize their standing. In short they, too, succumbed to the notion that there was a pastoral tone to their deliberations which should not be upset. Moreover, they continued to act as if they were the majority, which they are not. On the whole, they were paralyzed and unable to provide firm, moderate leadership. The Right, both in the House and throughout the Church, succeeded in pulling the bishops over to their side. Without a comparable force on the Left, it was clear that the moderate and liberal bishops would eventually have to give in. It is predictable, therefore, that unless such a progressive, humane force appears now in the Church, we can expect more such meetings like the one in Florida.

*Q. Then you would conclude that such a force is imperative?*

A. Absolutely. For until we can settle the



# MORE RESPONSES FROM WITHIN THE CHURCH

## Bishops...

matters of women's ordination and homosexuality in a more humane way the Church will continue to flounder. It would be nice to believe that the new coalition of urban bishops and their keen sense of the urban crisis would allow the Church to rally around something positive and would provide a path away from disunity; however, this does not appear to be the case. Neither in Florida nor in the Church does it seem possible to substitute this for the pain and disunity of these other two issues. We must go back and deal with them more adequately. And for this a progressive force is needed. ■

"I see this act (the conscience clause), not so much as an affront to the sixty or so women already ordained to the priesthood, (although it certainly adds to the pain, the disillusionment and even the desperation they must surely feel at having their ministries used as a pawn in the political game), but as the most recent example of indifference to the place of all Christian women by our presumed Fathers in God. I do not feel I am exaggerating when I say that the adoption of this clause is an offense to the entire Church.

"The Presiding Bishop is now on record as saying that he will not himself ordain a woman to the priesthood, or consecrate a woman priest as a bishop, no matter how valid and regular her election may be, or receive Communion from the hands of a woman priest ordained by some other bishop whose conscience will allow him to exercise his episcopal function.

"The Church spoke in Minneapolis. We were given the hope of a new Prayer Book in 1979, and the reality of a whole priesthood beginning in January 1977. The latter gift has now been snatched back again and we are all degraded and diminished. I feel angry and despondent about that because I see my Church refusing to accept what it needs most—whole ministries, exercised by women and men together in the work of reconciliation enjoined upon all Christians at their baptism, by Christ himself."

Rev. David Ward  
St. Paul's Memorial Church  
Charlottesville, Va.

"We are shocked and dismayed that the Presiding Bishop has made a public stand against the decision of General Convention. What price unity when some dioceses will be allowed to decide for themselves the question of ordination of women?"

The Church & Society Network  
Rochester, New York

"My prayers would be that the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church—YOU, John Allin—would put the "Jesus way" so far ahead of women ordained YOU'd prayerfully conclude such overemphasis on this schism is both shameful and sinful. And a disgraceful waste of our so much needed spiritual strength in the world where the dear Lord bade us "go preach, teach, comfort to the world."

W. Hamilton Aulenbach  
Honolulu, Hawaii

"We, members of the House of Deputies, Diocese of Ohio, General Convention, 1976, are shocked and dismayed by the reports of your (the House of Bishops) action regarding the Presiding Bishop's offer to resign due to his personal position on the Ordination of Women.

"We believe that the Presiding Bishop's statement regarding refusal to ordain a woman priest or consecrate an elected woman bishop is contrary, by omission, to the Constitutions and Canons of the Episcopal Church which as Presiding Bishop he is responsible to uphold. This position is also in conflict with his role as chief consecrator."

Dalton Downs  
Carol Freund  
Ebert Hobbs  
Marion Huston

Clarence Mixon  
Pat Selwood  
Perry Williams

"It is possible that this Pastoral Letter (sent by the House of Bishops) was written under the threat and the shadow of St. Louis. If so, its draconian language will, it seems to me, be of no avail. Given the articles of agreement of the St. Louis Meeting, it appears that the Episcopal Church can overcome its 'apostasy' by nothing short of total submission to the terms proposed by the so-called North American Church."

John M. Gessell, The School of Theology  
The University of the South

"... the Vestry of Christ Church, Cambridge asks the Presiding Bishop to explain how he can have an opinion that does not accept women "in the role of priests," but can carry out faithfully all of the duties of his elected office, among which is the implementation of the official actions of General Convention."

Christ Church, Cambridge, Mass.

"The Presiding Bishop has done a lot of damage, especially spiritually. It won't help women priests seeking work if the Presiding Bishop refuses to push for a law that is on the books. After the Philadelphia ordination, the Bishops passed a resolution on collegiality; after Minneapolis, they pass a conscience clause. Sounds like whim to me."

Rev. Pat Park, Associate Rector  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Va.



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RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
Adopted Unanimously October 3, 1977

WHEREAS, the General Convention of 1976 determined that the provisions of the Canons for ordination to the three Orders of Bishops, Priests and Deacons should be equally applicable to men and women, and

WHEREAS, many women have been ordered deacons and priests, or had their previous ordinations to the priesthood regularized, or begun their preparation for such ordination in this and other institutions on the basis of the action of the General Convention of 1976, and

WHEREAS, it has been reported in the press that the Presiding Bishop, in a formal address to the House of Bishops assembled on September 30, 1977, at its annual meeting, stated that he is "unable to accept" women priests; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED by the Faculty of the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia that they express their continuing support of the many women who have been ordered deacons and priests in this Church and those who are preparing for such ordinations in this and other institutions; and be it further

RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be transmitted to members of the Student Body, all members of the Alumni Association, members of the Board of Trustees, and the deans of other accredited seminaries of the Episcopal Church.