

The Episcopal Crisis: Freedom In, With, and From the Bible

"Should conservative Episcopalians who disagree with U.S. church leaders about homosexuality, women's ordination, biblical literalism and other issues leave and form a separate denomination?"

1.....In light of the Scriptures (the Bible), Christianity has been and is a *movement* (with diversity and freedom) variously consolidating into *communities* (for unity and order). The movement and its communities have a personal center, Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

2.....Normal for Christianity are both centripetal-catholicizing and centrifugal-dividing pressures and tendencies. Christians come together to form churches, and divide to form new churches. The whole dynamic reality is properly called "the Church of Jesus Christ," his Body, of which he is the Head.

3.....Christian communities came to be called "churches" from the Greek word meaning belonging to the "Kyrios," the "Lord" Jesus. While their statements of faith (creeds, confessions, covenants) differ in details, there never has been any difference among us as to our central affirmation: "Jesus is Lord." Basic Christian unity is a divine gift; outward unity, within the limits of freedom in Christ, always has been a goal.

4.....Between the gift and the goal, the churches have used *guidelines* derived from the Bible, from representative councils of churches, and from the churches' experiences within their own cultures and across cultures. Both the Christian mind (theology, philosophy) and the Christian way of life (morality, ethics) were and are emergents as Christians - personally and corporately - lived and live in the Spirit under the lordship of the Risen Christ.

5....."Lived and live" brings us to the present "On Faith" question. While I believe in the authority of Scripture (and taught Hebrew and Greek, the Bible's languages, so that students for Christian leadership as clergy could have direct experience of the sounds and depths of Scripture), I cannot accept "biblical literalism," which both misses the metaphorical dimension and freezes the development of the Christian mind and morals at the biblical-historical level. And since this antiquarian mentality is the philosophical basis for "conservative Episcopalians" to "leave and form a separate denomination," I must answer NO to this "On Faith" question.

6.....Let's get specific about the two instances the "On Faith" question adduces. Read *literally*, the Bible sends homosexuals to hell and shuts women's mouths in church. But a nuanced reading of the biblical citations on both subjects raises questions which biblicistic minds are closed to. And subsequent advances in human knowledge of homosexuality and of women's abilities further qualifies the biblical negations as literally read.

7.....Almost a half century ago, I gave a National Council of Churches lecture on "Freedom In, With, and From the Bible." One may be free from the Bible by never giving it any honest attention: ignorance is an ironic freedom. But *intelligent* freedom from the Bible, from taking it literally (which is a secondary form of ignorance), is possible and is necessary to Christian life here and now under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the guidance to which the Bible calls us.

8.....Freedom FROM the Bible is third-stage. The first stage in the proper use of the Bible is freedom IN it - becoming free in it, knowing it to the extent one's life-situation permits. The second stage is freedom WITH it - to use it as a daily aid to devotion and as a guide to Christian thinking, and to "go public" with it in conversation and other forms of communication.

9.....As literature, the Bible is the world's supreme vehicle of the Word of God, which cannot flow freely through it if its literal wording is worshiped: bibliolatry is Bible-abuse, not Bible-honoring. Those "conservative Episcopalians" who hold to "biblical literalism" should *stay in the Church*, make their witness, and - like everybody else - take their lumps.

Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

TO FARNAZZ:

No one deserves abuse, and that Jew was abused. He got what he might have anticipated, not what he deserved.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 22, 2008 4:48 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Fitz! What a wind-bag! And all beside the point. Gay people are not sinful, wicked, evil, bad, yucky, gross, or disordered. And gay people are mostly invisible, and minimally intrusive. Being gay is not big deal. Yet, Mr. Fitz is hyper-aware of gay people and homosexuality.

That says alot about him, but does not move the argument much against gay people.

POSTED BY: DANIELINTHELIONS DEN | DECEMBER 22, 2008 10:16 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Mr. Elliott,

Meant to write you "were guilty of faulty reasoning." And in your defense to Paganplace, you most certainly are.

But, worse, Paganplace is correct: The implication in that essay is that the Jew got what he deserved. It has a disturbing religio-majoritarian state ethic that, quite frankly, is not doing this country any good.

POSTED BY: FARNAZZ | DECEMBER 22, 2008 1:39 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Mr. Elliott,

I didn't say you were antisemitic, but you are of faulty reasoning in the thread under discussion.

POSTED BY: FARNAZZ | DECEMBER 22, 2008 12:33 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Mr. Elliot,

Read the post to which I refer and your reply to Paganplace. Logic fallacies figure in my Eng. 101 course.

POSTED BY: FARNAZZ | DECEMBER 22, 2008 12:21 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I'm so PRO-Semitic (and an old teacher of Hebrew) that my rabbi friends would laugh at any torturing of anything I said as though it were ANTI-Semitic.

POSTED BY: ELLIOTTWL | DECEMBER 21, 2008 11:32 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Score, out of a perfect 10:

Paganplace: 12

Everybody else: -3

Paganplace is one tough Lady. I'd advise you not to f*** with her. I've done that, and came away bruised and wiser. And I also gained a friend.

POSTED BY: ARMINIUS | DECEMBER 21, 2008 8:57 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr. Elliot,

you made me so happy by you writing: "I cannot accept "biblibal literalism". I have been saying the same for decades: every passage and every word in the Bible, including the NT, are open to interpretation. This is my happiest Christmas! Wishing you the best.

POSTED BY: THISHOWISEEIT | DECEMBER 21, 2008 6:58 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"As literature, the Bible is the world's supreme vehicle of the Word of God, which cannot flow freely through it if its literal wording is worshiped: bibliolatry is Bible-abuse, not Bible-honoring. Those "conservative Episcopalians" who hold to "biblical literalism" should stay in the Church, make their witness, and - like everybody else - take their lumps."

I especially like this last point. Throughout his essay Mr. Elliot continues to use the term "literal" like a bludgeon. Apparently one is either a literal fundamentalist or a prophetic voice.

The truth of course (as always) is more sophisticated than Mr. Elliot's crude reductionism & political sloganeering.

The key to untangling his mess and the BOX he is (poorly) attempting to put "conservative" Episcopalians in...is nothing less than the breadth and depth of the scriptural and Christian sexual ethic

What are we to make of the incarnate nature of human sexuality? What are we to make of the ENTIRE community of the church including our ancestry and how do we do honor to the complete and thorough understanding of human sexuality given unto us by our Christian tradition.

What of fornication, divorce, marriage, polygamy, adultery, bigamy and what not. How do we reconcile the unitive and procreative nature of marriage & human sexuality?

I'm afraid Mr. Elliot has caught himself in his own web... there are "lumps" to be taken.... And all will be taken in God's good time...

One more immediate lump is the profound departure of the Episcopalian Church from the wider body of Anglicanism both actually and spiritually.

Beyond that is a Christian denomination here in the west that cannot theologically confront human sexuality with anything but a self-contradictory muddle.

POSTED BY: FITZ4 | DECEMBER 21, 2008 2:53 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Just on this:

" gamiller1

PaganPlace

You want us to feel sorry for you for throwing your "being born a queer" in people's faces? Not going to happen, so drop the martyr complex."

I heard that enough when I tried to speak out about certain thing happening around me when I was a kid.

If you really think it's that trivial, Christian, let my people go.

See how fast you're forgotten.

By the Gods, you let go of that old line, that somehow your bigotry is queer people's fault, ... we have very little in the way of further business.

I'm ok with that.

Very. Ok with that.

Actually, I'm very tired of you.

You seem to be the one with a problem about that. Me? My dear one?

Not so hard to please.

You?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 11:05 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Of course, if you think you know so much better what the legal gravity and reality of *my* marriage* is, while you call me a 'whiner,' well,

Humor me, Christian.

And if anyone needs to 'fight about it.'

Funny thing, yaknow, Christian. I'm probably about as sporting an opponent as you could expect to find with generally-crippling rheumatoid arthritis.

But, hey, if you think I'm 'whining,' let's go. Tough guy.

Maybe if you win it'll be OK to steal property from 'the objectively-disordered'

Yay!. Jesus is happy!

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 8:34 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

You know what sums this up?

Sweetie, who I am *going* to marry* comes home, says, 'How are you doing tonight,'

And I said, 'I'm trying to bring the true spirit of Yule to a****les.'

And... Yes, it's futile.

Blessed Solstice to all, and to all a good night.

Phhhhhbt.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 8:26 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

" gamiller1 Author Profile Page:

PaganPlace

You want us to feel sorry for you for throwing your "being born a queer" in peoples faces? Not going to happen, so drop the martyr complex."

Ok. In whose universe is it 'martyrdom' if anyone gets a tax hassle for not even being discreet about their homophobia, but it's somehow beyond the pale to register that when I talk about 'good Christian kids' actually curbstomping actual 'young ladies'that it's *not a metaphor? *

Not a metaphor. I'm talking about actual real, physical violence here.

If I'm the fragile creature described in the Bible, apparently someone did a piss-poor job of bloodletting.

If, as experience shows, Cristianity is the enemy of me being treated as an equal citizen, I assure you, the people who whine are those who expected to get away with pounding straghtness into girls.

And if you'd care to test your theory, there, ...

Well, guys need to 'defend their marriage' by doing anything but having a clue about their own families, right?

I have a little family here.

Can't guarantee I will meet any attacks on that in an abstract manner.

Is there something you think I'm taking away from you, Christian?

Cause the way I see it is, in *your* world, if you're wanting me to breed for you, you already failed heterosexuality and are trying to fake something.

By Earth, sky, and virgin Goddesses, if you need your God to snark at me, you have bigger proble ms.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 8:21 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I mean, you wanna talk about whiney victimhood, you're the one who keeps trying to 'prove' I got my theology from Goebbels while denying any kid of factual 'Ok, they fot that stuff from Blavatsky and here's why and how' I might demonstrate.

You are the one who keeps trying to insist I must be some kind of evil person if I can't 'roove' it according to your own disinformation.

Calling me a Nazi for being queer and Pagan, when the Nazis killed queers and Pagans by the *Millions.*

I am a human being right now, Farnazz.

What would you like to do now?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 8:10 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

PaganPlace

You want us to feel sorry for you for throwing your "being born a queer" in peoples faces? Not going to happen, so drop the martyr complex.

POSTED BY: GAMILLER1 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 8:07 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Yeah, Farnazz, you *get* to yawn. cause you're that damb *comfortable,* aren't you?

You wanna find out about *tense,* try being born queer in a time like this :)

The Wheel turns. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 8:02 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I mean, hey, Farnazz... Been here almost two years, the only thing I've learned about you book people is, there's those of you that aint even trying, and there's those of you hurting others to make excuses.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 7:49 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Whining at the moon isn't particularly attractive to Pagans, I hear.

POOOORRRRRR Victim Vous.

POSTED BY: FARNAZ2 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 7:39 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Paganplace:

Yawn. ZZZZzzzzzz

POSTED BY: FARNAZ2 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 7:38 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

" Farnaz2 Author Profile Page:

Look, Paganplace, I'm done. You bore me. You want to fight with people go ahead. Or shadow box. Less irritating to the rest of us.

Poor persecuted thing."

Oh, boo-hoo.

As they said, 'Wanna fight about it?'

Why is it those who are scared of not having big-capacity magazines are so terifies of a lil' ol 'lezbeen' like me?

You.

Whine.

Swear to the Gods, if my dear one and I could live as citizens, I wouldn't go out of my way to look at you.

We are American citizens. Period.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 7:36 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I second you, Farnazz.

POSTED BY: GAMILLER1 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 7:16 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Look, Paganplace, I'm done. You bore me. You want to fight with people go ahead. Or shadow box. Less irritating to the rest of us.

Poor persecuted thing.

POSTED BY: FARNAZZ | DECEMBER 20, 2008 7:04 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Doc Willis,

Nice verbal dance you set forth and much ado about nothing. Next time you post, please make a cogent point, for it is incongruous with the Bible (which is obviously not mandatory for your faith, just a good idea) to pick and choose which passages are and are not to be "honored" on to the same extent.

You may pick and choose, the Bible I read does not give me that liberty.

POSTED BY: GAMILLER1 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 6:57 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Am I missing a whole other conversation here, at this point?

In my tradition, Farnazz, this is the darkest night of the year, a time to actually do some kind of work turning

yourself from the depths to a waking light and resolve to keep yourself and your tribe living and breathing and thriving another year.

Denying what this dude said Jesus wanted last year is actually so irrelevant that after spending a couple turns of the Wheel here at On Faith, I'm back to thinking even less of you 'Book-people' and your mental capacities than I even did before.

You wanna get indignant, book person, scrol back.

Don't blame me if you aren't extolled as scions of the 'One, only and true God' if you can't manage a twelve month attention span.

Gods.

The rest of the world would be a lot more patient if you book people would just *get over yourselves.*

Blowing sh*t up does not impress us.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 6:56 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"Before you cite 'eternal tradition.'"

Here's the thing. I don't really need to read this dr*k and had assumed that Willie wouldn't reply. Christians victimizing Jews, blaming Jews for their victimization, forgiving themselves for their hatefulness, if necessary, is something I know a great deal about.

But then you got me pissed off, so I read his sh*t, and his response to you. Well, it is perfect for a lesson on logical fallacies, so I guess all is not lost.

Willis,

You wrote:

As for "the Jew who got put in his place," you imply I'm antisemitic. The truth is that I'm so prosemitic that I was chosen to preach in a NY synagogue on the occasion of the Munich Olympics slaughter of Jews by Palestinians; & I taught a course for rabbis (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform) involving the language of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)

POSTED BY: FARNAZ2 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 6:31 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Btw, since me calling him 'Evil Santa,' it does seem Rev. Elliott has started to learn a little bit. Doesn't mean what he said before went away. Not for those of us it hurt.

To him, I'd say, well, in the unlikely event any God *really* wanted to scare you into threatening, tormenting, and hurting queer people in the name of goodness, charity, and mercy, well.

You want everyone to swear on Bibles, but claim a soul's honor can't swear for itself.

If you're right, I was screwed from the day I was born.

If *I'm* right, well, it's hardly in your best interest to kneecap your rescue squad.

Unless maybe you got some weird sexual connection with death and ultimate doom.

Cause, I mean, I hear all these people thinking they're hard guys with all their weapons and some idea not spawning is against 'God,' but,

They call it 'Fatherhood' and 'traditional family.' While doing things that in actual reality tear families apart cause you can't cope with the reality not everyone in this species is a breeder.*

Forget about it. That's what they tell themselves till they work up a head of overpressure to hurt someone.

Only difference is, these guns you worship with?

I know exactly how they work.

And I live by an axiom that 'the bad guys always bring plenty of weapons.'

Now. 'Evil Santa.' It's the darkest night of the year.

Are you bringing light?

Or am I a 'party pooper?'

You tell a lot of people I need killing. Sooner or later one might get lucky.

If this was about this macho crap, I'd meet any of your best with whatever weapons you like.

But that's not what this is, is it?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 6:29 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Not so hard to find, Farnazz. Since you're quoting me. Look around this time last year, when he was defending the notion of a Jew being beaten down on the subway by a 'virtuous Christian' on the grounds the Jew was being a 'party pooper' for replying to someone saying 'Merry Christmas' as a challenge... then beating the crap out of the Jew.

Rev Elliot claimed the Jew who had the temerity to refer to his own holiday in well-wishing, as someone deserving the beating, for being a 'party pooper.'

Wow.

Just in case anyone's wondering how surreal life can get for the likes of me.

Just scroll back.

Before you cite 'eternal tradition.'

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 20, 2008 6:12 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Willis,

Just read this on another thread:

"This time last year, I was telling Rev. Elliot he was 'Evil Santa' (he *was* porting that beard in his thumbnails, after all) for blaming a Jew as a 'party pooper' for getting beaten for brazenly not pretending to be Christian on a subway."

Now, there isn't a whole lot that you people do and/or say that I find surprising; hence, I'm not surprised. Merely interested. To save me time, I wonder if (a) you would be so kind as to comment and (b) you would tell me the date of the post in which you gave us the Christian perspective on the matter referenced in the quotation.

POSTED BY: FARNAZ2 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 5:40 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

According to the US Biblical scholar, Morton Smith, of Columbia University, a fragment of manuscript he found at the Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem in 1958, showed that the full text of St. Mark chapter 10 (between verses 34 and 35 in the standard version of the Bible) includes the passage:

"And the youth, looking upon him (Jesus), loved him and beseeched that he might remain with him. And going out of the tomb, they went into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days, Jesus instructed him and, at evening, the youth came to him wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God".

POSTED BY: FARNAZ2 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 5:14 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Willis E. Elliott diagnosis seems all very clever. However, in the end - what are we then to make of the entire Christian sexual ethic?

What are we to make of the incarnate nature of human sexuality? What are we to make of the ENTIRE community of the church including our ancestry and do honor to an complete and thorough understanding given unto us.

What of fornication, divorce, marriage, polygamy, adultery, bigamy and what not.

Mr. Elliott formulations could be used in the service of revisions to all or none of these traditionally understood proscriptions.

POSTED BY: FITZ4 | DECEMBER 20, 2008 1:42 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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