

Peter's faux pas, blurted out here on the Mount, is just what we've come to expect. Like the "gee wiz, let me be your agent and we can avoid all that crucifixion stuff" earlier on the road when Jesus rebukes him with "get behind me Satan," it shows a complete misunderstanding of what Jesus is up to.

Peter is ready to set up a new religion, build three structures, and begin to venerate and by definition control access and belonging to the sacred moment revealed in this extraordinary vision. No doubt he envisions himself as its high priest, its protector. Imagine his embarrassment at having the heavenly voice interrupt him with something like, "Will you stop talking and listen for a change."

It's clear that what Jesus is up to is precisely not religion, at least not religion as it is normally understood. It is rather an unmediated access to the reality which religion is always hiding, always placing barriers before. This is the point of Paul's rather unflattering interpretation of Moses covering his face with a veil. We might even call it anti-Jewish, since he ascribes the same "veiled understanding" to all the children of Israel. His point, however, is that *every* religion by definition moderates or limits our "seeing the glory of the Lord."

Let me suggest this is why Jesus meets with Moses and Elijah. After all Moses delivered the children of Israel from the religion of the Egyptians whose gods became plagues on them. And Moses' meetings with God were an alternative insisted upon by the Israelites who saw the fire and smoke on Mount Sinai and heard the terrifying voice of God. "You meet with God and we'll do what ever he tells you," they told Moses. And Elijah called the people back from Baal whose worship had been introduced to the Temple by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, and had led to the return of child sacrifice in the Temple itself.

So these two "appeared in glory" with Jesus "and were speaking of his departure (the Greek word here is *exodus*) which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" because it would be the "religious" act that would undo religion. His departure of course is his sacrifice on the cross, a sacrifice of a different sort, since instead of being offered by human beings to god it would be God's sacrifice of himself offered to human beings. It is this event that will shed abroad the Glory of God, the light of Christ, that is here only glimpsed by Peter, John and James.

That light that Glory transforms us into Christ as we behold it and imitate him as in a mirror. This means that even the Church that comes from our experience of the transformative power of the death and resurrection of Jesus takes the form of a "religion," and has about it necessarily some of the obstacles of the sacrificial religion that Jesus overturned. This is because we have not been ready to receive the immediate glory of God; we continue to hang on to religious mediation, and religious leaders continue to lord it over the followers of Jesus. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom," says

Paul. Like the Israelites of old, we are apt to run from freedom and the responsibility it entails.

This is how I look at the crisis in the Anglican and Episcopal Church. I hope you had a chance to read Barry Beisner's article that appeared in the Chronicle last week. Barry, just consecrated Bishop of Northern California, made an important point: he said that all of us, whether believers or not, have a stake in the outcome of the struggles between and among the Bishops and Archbishops of the Anglican Communion. Our Church, our Communion worldwide is a model for international understanding and cooperation.

The Primates of the Communion met in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, this past weekend amid high pressure. The conservative Global South wanted clear and unequivocal discipline to be extended to the Episcopal Church for not repenting of consenting to the consecration of an openly gay bishop in New Hampshire. Expectations were particularly fraught with anxiety about seating of ++Katharine Jefferts-Schori, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the first woman primate of any Anglican Province. The majority of other Anglican provinces do not even ordain women priests.

Things appeared to go relatively well for the Episcopal Church. The Presiding Bishop was not snubbed. Everyone remained at the table to receive the report of a sub-group asked to evaluate the adequacy of the Episcopal Church's response the Windsor Report. Overall, and to the anger and dismay of the conservative Global South, the report affirmed that General Convention had adequately responded to the requirements of the Windsor Report. Seven Primates absented themselves intentionally from communion at the Eucharist because of the presence of the Episcopal Church USA, but that had also been done before at their meeting in Northern Ireland when Frank Griswold was PB. But the real question is can the Archbishop of Canterbury continue to hold the impaired Communion together? Or will the provinces of the global south spin off to form an alternative Anglican Communion.

I believe the problem, beyond sexual ethics, is that there are many in the Episcopal Church and in the Anglican Communion who believe that the Church has become too secular, too much like the secular culture in which it lives. Yet even the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams said in a recent lecture, "A certain kind of secularism has direct Christian and theological roots." Churches in Africa especially are in a fierce competition with Islam. When the Archbishop of Nigeria publicly supports a proposed new civil law to jail practicing homosexuals, it must be understood in light of the pressure the church there feels in its relations with its Muslim neighbors. For them to welcome the Episcopal Church's openness to gay and lesbian priests and bishops would be to hand over the RELIGIOUS playing field to radical Islam.

So what I have called, the jihadist interpretation again becomes applicable. An up and coming neo-conservative commentator Dinesh D'Souza, whose new book is called The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11, has written, "we should stop pushing secularism and feminism on Muslims who consider these liberal

values an assault on their religion and morality. Indeed, if ordinary Muslims could see more of traditional America ó the Americans who work hard and go to church and live by traditional values ó this would go a long way toward refuting bin Laden's accusation that we are an atheist, value-free society, which we are not.ö([www.dineshdsouza.com](http://www.dineshdsouza.com))

When Jesus came down from the mountain with his three arch-apostles, Peter, James and John, he walked into a religious dispute.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God. (Lk. 9:37-43a)

The disciples, left below where they are õbeggedö to mediate, are unable to stay faithful to the vision being revealed atop the mountain. Like Aaron and the golden calf they appear to have reverted to a sacrificial religion. Jesusõrebuke õYou faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you?ö is less directed at the disciples or the boy and his father than it seems to be at the generation, the convulsion, of religion itself.

As we enter the most ostensibly õreligiousö or õsacrificialö season of Lent, let us seek to remember the light shed abroad at this Epiphany seasons, the light of love and forgiveness that transforms us into the likeness of Christ so that it might condition our religious practices and makes them occasions not so much for self-abuse and repentance as rejection as for self-acceptance and new openness to others. AMEN.

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