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Heresy in the Cathedral

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The Rt. Rev. Peter Jensen, Australia's Archbishop of Sydney, is making headlines for denying a heretic access to the pulpits of the churches under his care. The heretic is the retired bishop of Newark, New Jersey, The Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong — a man who has denied virtually every major Christian doctrine.

Heretics are rarely excommunicated these days. Instead, they go on book tours. Bishop Spong is visiting Australia at the invitation of Australia's Anglican Primate Phillip Aspinall of Brisbane. When Archbishop Jensen denied Bishop Spong access to the pulpits of Sydney, Archbishop Aspinall extended an invitation for Spong to preach in Brisbane's St. John's Cathedral.

As the *The Australian* reports:

A row has erupted within the Anglican Church over a visit to Australia by an American cleric who has being accused of modernising Christ to the point of stripping him of all divinity.

Sydney Archbishop Peter Jensen has taken the extraordinary step of banning John Shelby Spong, a fellow member of the Anglican communion who arrives in Sydney this morning, from churches in his diocese.

By contrast, Anglican Primate Phillip Aspinall has invited Bishop Spong, a leader of the church's liberal wing, to deliver two sermons in Brisbane's St John's Cathedral.

John Shelby Spong has written a series of books attacking the central doctrines of the Christian faith. As a matter of fact, he has basically run out of doctrines to deny. He has repudiated the Christian faith as treasured by the faithful Church for two thousand years — the faith of biblical Christianity. This faith is the faith for which the martyrs died.

Mark Thompson, responding to Bishop Spong in the newspaper of the Sydney archdiocese, noted correctly that “one cannot imagine anyone willing to be martyred for Spong's Jesus.”

Even the secular press understands the depths of Bishop Spong's denial of Christian truth. *The Sydney Morning Herald* noted that Spong has denied that Jesus was born of a virgin, that Joseph ever existed, that Jesus performed miracles, that He died for our sins, and that He was raised from the dead. He also denies the deity of Christ and the nature of God as a personal being, much less the only true God. In other books Spong has suggested that the Apostle Paul was a repressed homosexual. More recently, he has joined the chorus of those suggesting that the death of Christ was necessary for the salvation of sinners amounts to “divine child abuse.”

So how would Archbishop Aspinall defend his decision to allow a heretic to preach two sermons in this cathedral? Here is his answer:

Dr Aspinall defended his decision to welcome the American bishop. “Bishop Spong speaking at St John's Cathedral is not particularly extraordinary,” he said.

“That Bishop Spong holds views which some Anglicans might find challenging is no reason to exclude him from speaking.

“Our church has thousands of members and widely diverse views on a wide variety of subjects. I am sure Anglicans will listen respectfully to the bishop’s views and make their own minds up.”

Not particularly extraordinary? Given Archbishop Aspinall’s own theological liberalism, that might be frighteningly accurate. What kind of pastor would invite his people to hear a denial of the Christian faith from his own pulpit and then encourage them to “make their own minds up?”

This controversy in Australia is indicative of the situation we now face in so much of Christianity worldwide. Archbishop Jensen defends the faith and protects his people and is treated as a divisive figure. Archbishop Aspinall invites a heretic into his pulpit, explains that this is “not particularly extraordinary,” and is seen as a portrait of magnanimous ecclesiastical leadership. Bishop Spong gets to sell more books, and the public gets to see a spectacle.

How profoundly sad . . . and how utterly predictable.

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