

## The Buck Stops Here

“The buck stops here.”

**Buck:** (1) a male deer, goat, etc; (2) a sawhorse or gymnastic “horse”; (3) a marker (probably a knife with a buckhorn handle) to identify the dealer in a poker game, and hence an indicator of final responsibility, (4) slang word for dollar, (5) a horse’s leaping and jumping, often in the effort to unseat its rider.<sup>1</sup>

“The buck stops here” was popularized by the sign President Harry Truman placed on his desk. The sign was a gift from a friend, a U.S. Marshal in Missouri, who saw a similar sign at the Federal prison at El Reno, Oklahoma.<sup>2</sup> It is a counter to “passing the buck”, which refers to failure to accept responsibility, and ascribing accountability, responsibility, and authority to someone else. In this sense, “buck” is a gambling term. It is a token that identifies who the dealer is at the moment, the one who distributes assets used by others to compete. It is also a phrase used in advertising sexual deviancy.

The recent impetus for these essays are scandals in corporate America, the government, and in the church. It is not hard to make a long list. It is a playground for the satirist. It is interesting that our politicians have developed a more acute sense of right and wrong than we have in the Episcopal Church. Lest the public become too self-righteous and reject both religion and politics, one should quickly observe that the serious misconduct problems that plague our schools and fill our courts arise from those who reject both God and civil responsibility. It is too easy to stand on the sidelines and shout “Hypocrite! Hypocrite!”, rather than to try to fix the problems. We are fond of identifying hypocrites as a way of excusing our own moral failings. Scripture tells us that we all sin. We need more hypocrites!?! We need more public acknowledgement of the difference between good and evil, even at the expense of being called “hypocrite” and “intolerant”. As important as knowing where the buck stops, it is important to know where responsibility starts.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth G. Wilson, “Buck”, *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English*, Columbia University Press. (1993). <http://www.bartleby.com/68/16/1016.html> 14 July 2002.

<sup>2</sup> “The Buck”, The Teacher’s Guide: Truman, Public Broadcasting System, [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/truman/tguide/tg\\_didyou.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/truman/tguide/tg_didyou.html) 15 July 2002

## Responsibility to Not Ignore

Scandal is not new in life. Institutions of business, politics, and religion bring us plenty of examples. Our knowledge of the existence of scandals come and go, while many escape notice. We focus on it easily when it is someone else's shame which will benefit us.

The antitheists (true atheists do not care) are fond of telling us, "Judge not, lest you be judged"<sup>3</sup>, and "Remove the beam from your own eye before criticizing the speck in someone else's eye."<sup>4</sup> Even Satan quotes scripture when it appears to be an advantage to do so.<sup>5</sup> We are like actors<sup>6</sup>, choosing our lines when it makes our appearance profitable. I do it, too.

So, what purpose does it serve for us to be critical? Perhaps, it is to warn, and hopefully bring correction. Was that not the work of our Lord?

*"If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day."<sup>7</sup>*

Jesus was the friend of tax collectors and prostitutes. He was gentle with common people.<sup>8</sup> He did not refrain from discriminating right from wrong, yet he forgave those who acknowledged error, and he instructed them to not continue in sin.<sup>9</sup> He was not as gentle with those charged with the responsibility of justice and teaching right from wrong. He called Herod "fox" when some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod intended to kill him. Jesus drove the merchants from the temple.<sup>10</sup> He chastised the scribes and Pharisees for hypocrisy.<sup>11</sup> He condemned those who cause little ones, children, who believe in Jesus, to sin.<sup>12</sup>

Some say that Jesus is permitted to do those things, but that does not mean we should judge. As the Son of God, he has authority to judge. Vengeance is God's prerogative.<sup>13</sup> "What Would Jesus Do?" (WWJD) does not apply to us because we are not divine. Only God can judge.

Jesus, himself, told us differently:

*"Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7:1

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:3

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 4:1-11

<sup>6</sup> ὁ ποκρῖτης, "who poke ree tays", actor, hypocrite

<sup>7</sup> John 12:47-48

<sup>8</sup> John 4:5-43

<sup>9</sup> John 8:2-11

<sup>10</sup> John 2:14-16

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 23:1-39

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 18:6, Mark 9:42, Luke 17:1-2

<sup>13</sup> Romans 12:19

<sup>14</sup> Luke 17:3-4

The theme of repeated forgiveness is directed to ordinary people. It is also the basis the church uses to excuse sexual sins and embezzlement on the part of clergy. However, even politicians (yes, politicians), teachers, and the military know that leaders are supposed to be held to a higher standard than the public. It was left to Paul to apply God's principles to selection and discipline of leaders for the new Jewish sect that eventually came to be called "Christians". Paul warned, "Do not be hasty in the laying-on of hands, nor participate in another man's sins; keep yourself pure."<sup>15</sup> Within the Episcopal Church, the warning is to beware of empty hands being laid on empty heads. Paul observed that the failings of some people are immediately obvious, but the sins of others will appear later in time. (Lord, have mercy.) The same is also true of good deeds.<sup>16</sup> He specified criteria for selecting leaders.<sup>17</sup> He realized that people who bear responsibility are habitually targeted with false and frivolous accusations and slander, and therefore accusations are not to be accepted for consideration unless there are at least two or three witnesses. Those who persist in sin are to be publicly rebuked to make others fear doing the same.<sup>18</sup>

When scandal erupts, these professions eventually take action to discipline their members. Cynical people can certainly find exceptions, but this is generally true. That is why scandals affecting these professions receive so much attention. The student of American history will find rich ore to mine about scandals and politics. A commendable quality of Americans is that we care. Many of our scandals are considered merely "business as usual" and status as a scandal baffles citizens of other nations.

#### **Discussion About Sodomy and the Episcopal Church**

The teaching of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason all counsel that sodomy is a sin. Lambeth has sent a clear message to the Episcopal Church that it is in error in ordaining people who have committed, intend to commit, or advocate acceptance of homosexual sex. Failure of many dioceses in the United States to honor the counsel of Lambeth has resulted in schismatic formation of Anglican Mission In America. The formation of AMiA probably has resulted in less membership loss to the Episcopal Church than the cumulative effect of individual families merely voting with their feet to a different established denomination, or to leave the church completely.

#### *The Buck Stopped Here*

The Roman Catholic Church is now dealing with the long term consequences of having a large percentage of clergy that are homosexual. The courts have gotten involved. Other organizations came under scrutiny. The Episcopal Church must consider its position.

All of the reviewed cases of sexual abuse of children and teenagers by Episcopal clergy was done by men. A significant number of cases of sexual abuse of men by Episcopal clergy was done by men. A similar observation has been made in the Roman Catholic church. Homosexual activists decry that pedophilia does not imply homosexual abuse. That is quibbling. An exhaustively documented rebuttal by Dr. Timothy J. Dailey has been published by the Family Research Council.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> I Timothy 5:22

<sup>16</sup> I Timothy 5:24-25

<sup>17</sup> I Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-16

<sup>18</sup> I Timothy 5:19-20

<sup>19</sup> Timothy J. Dailey, "Homosexuality and Child Abuse", <http://www.frc.org/expert.cfm?get=dailey> , 03 July 2002.

*Recommendations for the Episcopal Church*

We need to assert that violence against any person, including homosexuals, is sinful.

We need to restore penitential prayer in our routine worship services, so that we are all reminded that we are all sinners in need of redemption, and are sustained only by God's continuing grace.

We must comply with the counsel given at Lambeth. We need to distinguish between people who identify themselves as homosexual but have never engaged in homosexual sex, and people who have engaged in homosexual sex. People in the second category should not be ordained, and should be defrocked if they have been ordained. People in the first category should be permitted to continue in the clergy, provided they do not declare homosexual sex as permissible, and do not engage in advocacy of homosexual acts. Aspirants who identify themselves as, or are judged by a competent psychologist to be, homosexual should not be permitted to continue towards Postulancy, and should not be ordained.

Review of Anglican and Episcopal homosexual pedophile cases shows that abuse often occurs over an extended period of time before discovery and corrective action. The best approach is prevention. The Boy Scouts of America has an effective program for minimizing child abuse, both sexual and physical. A key element is a requirement that two adults, who have received certified training in child abuse prevention, are required to be present any time a meeting is held with a child present. If two such adults are not present, the meeting is canceled, with no exceptions allowed. The Boy Scouts accrued a windfall benefit that more adults received training in other areas, more adults were committed to being present for meetings, and program quality increased. It has provided real protection for the children, and it has reduced the risk of false accusation.

We need to embrace the Kuala Lumpur Statement.

*The Kuala Lumpur Statement*

Many people have not seen this statement, but may have heard the rhetoric surrounding this and the Statement of Koinonia authored by Bishop Spong. Therefore, the Kuala Lumpur Statement is reproduced below, that you may judge for yourself what was said.

Statement on Human Sexuality  
(2nd Anglican Encounter in the South, 10 to 15 February 1997)

1. God's glory and loving purposes have been revealed in the creation of humankind (Rom. 1:18; Gen. 1:36, 27). Among the multiplicity of his gifts we are blessed with our sexuality.
2. Since the Fall (Gen. 3), life has been impaired and God's purposes spoiled. Our fallen state has affected every sphere of our being, which includes our sexuality. Sexual deviation has existed in every time and in most cultures. Jesus' teaching about lust in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:27-30) makes it clear that sexual sin is a real danger and temptation to us all.
3. It is, therefore, with an awareness of our own vulnerability to sexual sin that we express our profound concern about recent developments relating to Church discipline and moral teaching in some provinces in the North - specifically, the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions.
4. While acknowledging the complexities of our sexual nature and the strong drives it places within us, we are quite clear about God's will in this area which is expressed in the Bible.

5. The Scripture bears witness to God's will regarding human sexuality which is to be expressed only within the life long union of a man and a woman in (holy) matrimony.
6. The Holy Scriptures are clear in teaching that all sexual promiscuity is sin. We are convinced that this includes homosexual practices between men or women, as well as heterosexual relationships outside marriage.
7. We believe that the clear and unambiguous teaching of the Holy Scriptures about human sexuality is of great help to Christians as it provides clear boundaries.
8. We find no conflict between clear biblical teaching and sensitive pastoral care. Repentance precedes forgiveness and is part of the healing process. To heal spiritual wounds in God's name we need his wisdom and truth. We see this in the ministry of Jesus, for example his response to the adulterous women, "...neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." (John 8:11)
9. We encourage the Church to care for all those who are trapped in their sexual brokenness and to become the channel of Christ's compassion and love towards them. We wish to stand alongside and welcome them into a process of being whole and restored within our communities of faith. We would also affirm and resource those who exercise a pastoral ministry in this area.
10. We are deeply concerned that the setting aside of biblical teaching in such actions as the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions calls into question the authority of the Holy Scriptures. This is totally unacceptable to us.
11. This leads us to express concern about mutual accountability and interdependence within our Anglican Communion. As provinces and dioceses, we need to learn how to seek each other's counsel and wisdom in a spirit of true unity, and to reach a common mind before embarking on radical changes to Church discipline and moral teaching.
12. We live in a global village and must be more aware that the way we act in one part of the world can radically affect the mission and witness of the Church in another.