

Spong battles prejudice

Episcopal bishop offers insight into church, diversity to Penn State students

By ADAM WOJCIECHOWICZ
Of the Lion's Eye staff

It is often said that college, above all else, exists as a place to experience new ideas, and not to just refine or complicate the old ones.

Cultural, aesthetic, and theological windows are opened for the first time to many individuals, even at a campus of Delco's modest proportions, thanks to speakers such as Bishop John Shelby Spong.

On March 23, the renowned liberal Episcopalian Bishop of Newark spoke to a packed audience in the Main building's lecture hall 101.

"We often pontificate on things we don't understand — that is often the case with the church," said Spong, a phrase that encapsulates his message as a holy man with deep concerns for the equality of all individuals under a religious leadership.

"I'm not proud to be a member of a Christian church that teaches us to love one another, when I was also taught to be anti-Semitic with Bible quotations underlining it, to be homophobic with bible quotations underlining it ...," Spong said.

The bishop continues a list of poignant social injustices he feels are propagated by the Christian Church.

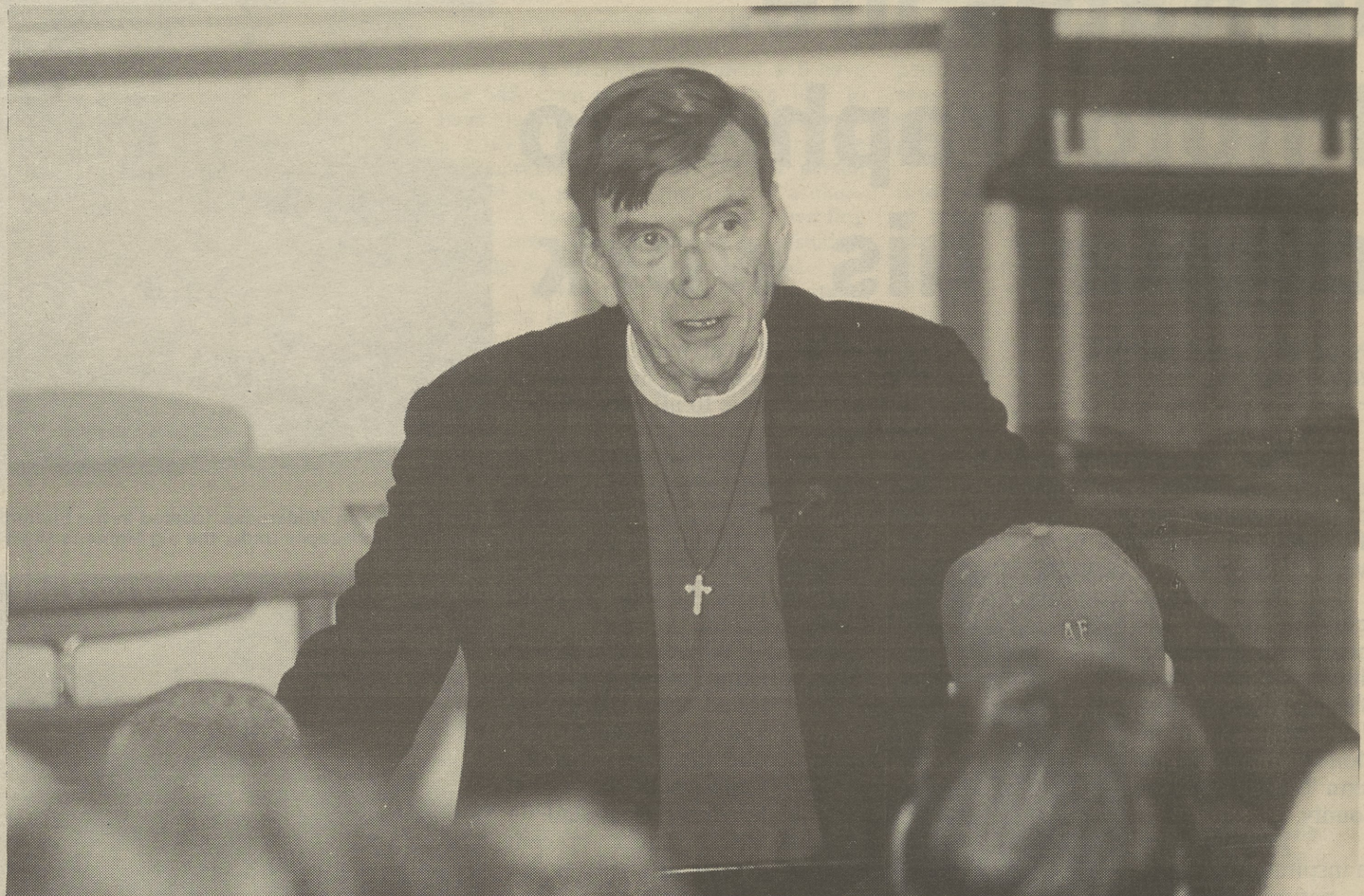
"Every now and then I get a letter from someone, asking, 'have you read Leviticus 20?' I usually ask them if they've also read the rest of Leviticus — I have," he said.

The point of this is that while verse 20 does explicitly condemn the "perpetrator" of a homosexual act to death, the Book of Leviticus also, in other parts, condemns any child who does not obey their parents to suffer the same fate.

"Now who would still be alive if that were taken seriously today," he asks. "You can lift quotations from the Bible here and there, and make them support any prejudice you like."

"We can't play the ancient games anymore," he said. "Antibiotics work just as well on sinners as on saints."

Equality for people with diverse sexual orientations is a prime concern for Spong in his life as a minister. In accordance with this, he has previously ordained both



Bishop Spong talks to a packed room of Penn State students, faculty and staff about his mission to bring an end to prejudice.

women and homosexuals as ministers to his church.

"Until I see a sign saying 'the Episcopal church welcomes you unless you're a homosexual, a woman,' or otherwise distinguished from tradition, then I think its my responsibility to help make that church what it claims to be," he said.

What it claims to be, Spong continued, is non-discriminative.

Essentially, "I want my institution to help people become more fully alive," he noted.

In support, Spong commonly refers to the gospel: "it's the call to people for them to be everything they can possibly be... There is nothing you can ever say or do that will place you outside the boundaries of love."

"Every barrier ought to be removed and people should be allowed to go wherever their ability can take them — we're all constantly battling the demons of our prejudice."

Spong has written a number of best selling books about his religious convictions,

including "Why Christianity Must Change or Die," a collection of essays entitled "The Bishop's Voice," and a recent autobiographical work, "Here I Stand."

These books exhibit some of his chief political concerns, which tie into his message about equality and phobias in a church institution.

"Homophobia exists primarily in two institutes [of America]: the Church, and the United States Military," he said.

Spong believes, because of the prevalence and influence in these institutes, that if their discrimination is weakened, then "the nation will be ready to move on," with real equality and democracy.

"I despair about what is called the 'faith-based programs,'" he said, in response to an inquiry about current political issues. "If anybody is trying to combat poverty and racism with that, then that's just 'whistling dixie,' to use a phrase from my youth."

The "politics" of the Church are also came into question.

"I'm really tired of Christian missionary imperialism: trying to convert others, saying 'we're the right way...'" I would never say that Jesus is the only doorway [to spirituality] for everyone," said Spong.

In regard to all of the social justice controversies that he has been involved in, Bishop Spong has confidence in the fact that "the battle is over — once you begin the debate, it's inevitable that it will happen."

Freedom is what he refers to, just as in the cases of movements for women's suffrage and Civil Rights.

In closing, a roused audience of many students and teachers alike cheered the bishop, before proceeding to the bookstore, where a prompt sellout of Spong's books took place.

At the close of his lecture, Spong cited as a mantra his favorite words in the Bible, those of Jesus:

"I have come that you might have life." Spong's efforts, in many ways, have done just that, giving better lives to individuals from all walks of life.

Photos offer glimpse of women's lives

By DANIELLE ROSSI
Of the Lion's Eye staff

The exhibit consisted of 25 photos.

Some displayed vibrant colors. Others stood in stark black and white.

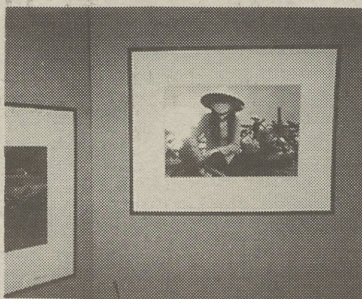
The photos offered a glimpse into the struggle Vietnamese women faced after the Vietnam, French and American wars.

These are but stills from these women's lives. Carrying heavy baskets. Caring for Children. Working in manual labor jobs.

On March 22, two Penn State professors displayed an array of photographs that captured the women and trauma in Vietnam.

Maureen Fielding, assistant professor of English and Women's Studies, and Gary Barnett, instructor of Geography spend last summer in Vietnam documenting the women's struggle.

The photos were based on the experiences of Le Ly Hayslip, a Vietnamese woman, who rose above the troubles affecting women since her country faced corruption and war.



Maureen Fielding and Gary Barnett, at right, took photos of the struggle for Vietnamese women.

Hayslip created a foundation called The Global Village Foundation. It is dedicated to helping women in her village, Ky La. Her development projects include an orphanage, a training center and housing projects.

Fielding learned of Hayslip's work during a research trip in Vietnam where Barnett later joined her. Together, they hope the photos will educate American women on the amazing similarities and differences women all over the world face.

"People need to be aware of



effects on Vietnam that the U.S. created," said Barnett.

Fielding and Barnett's photos reflect the recovering of Vietnam. With a common goal, together they hope to make people more aware of the life and conditions that still exist in cities such as Mekong Delta. Progress has been made, although the country is still facing problems.

"I wouldn't say [the country]

totally healed," said Fielding.

During the American war U.S. forces sprayed 72 million liters of the herbicides Agent Orange, White, and Blue on 16 percent of South Vietnam's land area. Forty million liters of Agent Orange contained a highly toxic chemical called dioxin.

Dioxin still remains in the food chain today as a result.

The war also left current eco-

nomics problems. Many women are left trapped in unsafe and painful situations because of unsuccessful marriages to war veterans who have abused alcohol and are unemployed. Women are the center of activity and are forced to work and run businesses with the help of their children.

Expanded capitalist intervention is also a result along with child prostitution and drug use. Thirty percent of all sex workers are under the age of 16. Between 1996 and 1998, the incidence of HIV infection doubled.

Fielding and Barnett's photography exhibit represents poverty, life, and the fact that women, in Vietnam, were left casualties after the wars.

However, women such as Ly La Hayslip have not become embittered. They mostly laugh and realize with the help of exhibits that depict their lives they can heal and move forward.

For more information about women's suffrage and the research that Fielding and Barnett have already completed, contact Maureen Fielding at mdf6@psu.edu.