

Honor to Whom Honor...

By Jamie Buckingham

My old friend Frank Gray, small-town Episcopal priest with whom I used to sit over a cup of coffee and crack jokes about pompous bishops, has just been elected to the establishment. He's just become the bishop of Northern Indiana.

I wrote him a condolence letter.

I know how he feels.

Earlier this year, without asking for it (or even buying it), I was awarded an honorary doctor's degree by Oral Roberts University. After all these years of making fun of people who are honorary doctors, I am now one.

When the letter came from the university I went into shock for three days. "I told you not to poke fun at people with honorary degrees," my wife, Jackie, said.

What if I get out to Tulsa for graduation and find that folks such as Kenneth Copeland, Robert Tilton or Lester Sumrall are getting degrees, too? The last time I attended an ORU graduation Jesse Jackson was the commencement speaker. What if they invited Pat Robertson this time? Surely a loving and merciful God would overlook the fact I had made fun of all these folks in the past. Surely He would not drop me in the midst of such company and have me "doctored" at the same time.

But...He did.

"It's not the degree," I told Jackie. "Secretly I've always wanted to be called Dr. Buckingham. I'm tired of being called 'Jamie.' Rodney Dangerfield ain't the only one who don't get no respect."

"Then what's the problem?"

"What if it's a DD? Nothing could be worse than having a Doctorate of Divinity."

"With or without walnuts?" Jackie quipped.

I didn't think that was funny. All I could think of was:

*There was a young preacher named Tweedle,
Who refused to accept his degree.
It's bad enough being Tweedle,
Without being Tweedle, DD.*

But God tempered justice with mercy: I'm not a DD, I'm a Doctor of Humane Letters.

"Now, that's not so bad," Jackie said after the ceremony. "You see, God just doesn't want you poking fun at all those people out there who have honorary degrees. He defused your bomb by honoring you."

"The next thing He'll probably do is require me to wear a toupee since I've made fun of all those folks also."

"Goodie, maybe He'll give you a Cadillac since you write sarcastic things about Cadillac Christians."

Sigh! Could it be sometimes even God don't give you no respect? I tried to picture myself pulling up in front of my stained-glass church in a Cadillac, wearing a three-piece suit, sporting a toupee and being introduced to all the folks in our padded-pew sanctuary as Dr. Buckingham. "Chickens," my



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wife reminds me, "have a way of coming home to roost."

I really don't like agitating people with my satire. It just happens.

For years I've written a column for our little church paper, *The Trumpet*. Each month, without ever wanting to, I make someone angry. One Sunday morning after church I saw a group of people out on the lawn, their faces red, teeth gnashing, shouting at my wife. She was equally angry, shouting back at them. Finally the group stormed off in all directions, and I asked Jackie what was going on. She said they were angry over last week's column in *The Trumpet*.

I thanked her for defending me.

"I wasn't defending you," she shot back. "I was agreeing with them."

I once wrote a column in a Christian magazine about preachers who smoked and the magazine lost almost 200 subscriptions. One preacher sent the editor an envelope full of cigar ashes (which the editor spilled all over his soup-stained tie when he opened it). Another time I used the word d--- in my column. A whole bunch of people canceled their subscriptions that time, and the publisher called me at midnight in Jerusalem. One lady was so angry she even canceled four gift subscriptions she had given to friends.

There are times when it just doesn't pay to poke fun at people. Especially angry people.

Recently I made a list of all the people I have offended over the years. They include bald people, fat people, loud-mouthed preachers, preachers who don't speak loud enough, women who wear goop on their face, men who wear wigs, people who don't work, people who don't do anything but work, hypocrites, Pharisees, Pentecostals, Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Arabs, charismatics, holy people, unholy people, my wife, my mother, my wife's relatives, my relatives....

So I wrote a note to my friend Frank Gray, who is now a bishop. Or is it Bishop, as in Doctor?

I reminded him of the fellow who received the annual humble button at the church banquet and then had it taken away because he wore it. Maybe the best way to wear the bishop's title—or a doctorate—is to let others honor you, but never honor yourself. In other words, take the office—but never yourself—seriously. ■

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