

Bishop Francis Eric Bloy

A Man of Deep Faith, Many Interests

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Francis Eric Bloy, AB '25, is a tall, angular, ascetic looking gentleman, the very epitome of the Anglican bishop, which he is—but his personality has more hidden sparkles than an uncut diamond.

What other prelate learned to swim because he was afraid of the water, learned to fly because a plane accident terrified him, has a scheme for stripping the cloud cover from the planet Venus and wants to write a book about the humor of Jesus?

Or, for that matter, what other bishop is known as “the top cat” in certain militant black circles because he dared to engage in person-to-person dialog alone in the heart of the ghetto after savage rioting?

He was born in England and came to the United States as a child. He was determined to break the clergyman tradition in the family and after graduation from the Columbia Campus he went to the Jesuit-sponsored University of Georgetown to study for a diplomatic career.

“Knowing that I was specializing in the Far East, I began to study the literature of those countries, teaching myself Sanskrit so I could read some originals,” he remarked in his offhand way, with no hint that learning Sanskrit by oneself is no mean intellectual exercise.

“Then one day—in the Library of Congress reading the Bhagavad Gita, the thought struck me that what the eastern religions lacked was the principle of the Cross, and I think that changed my whole life.”

Thus his decision to become a priest came about in a busy reading room in the Library of Congress.

Graduated from the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary at Alexandria, Va., Bishop Bloy was ordained to the diaconate in 1938 and became a priest the following year.

He was elected bishop of the Los Angeles diocese on Jan. 28, 1948, at 44 one of the youngest bishops in his church.

The succeeding 23 years have been “exciting, though difficult years, in some instances,” he recalls. During that time membership in the diocese has doubled, the budget risen four fold and the number of churches and missions increased from 144 to 186.

Being head of the largest diocese in the entire Episcopal Church is a full-time job, but the bishop has always found ways to relax.

A trout fisherman, he and Mrs. Bloy steal away once a year to Montana to enjoy that sport.

Ever since his boyhood he has resolutely tackled things he feared.

Thus he learned to swim at 12 or 13 because he feared the water.

“I took up flying after World War II because once I went up with one of these barnstormers,” he recalled. “Coming down we ground-looped. I came out of it without a scratch, although the pilot broke a rib or something.

“That scared the life out of me. I determined there was only one way to lick it, learn to fly.

“I haven’t flown now for seven or eight years. I grounded myself. The air traffic is too heavy, for one thing.”

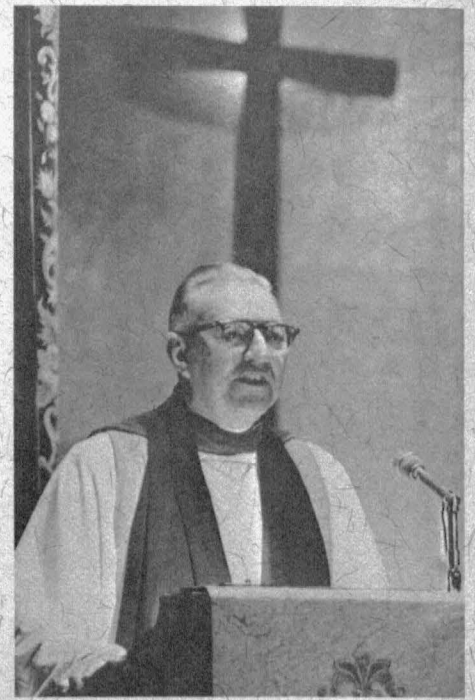
The bishop said he had always met his fears head on. “Physical fear is a weakness of character,” he said.

Following the South Los Angeles riot of 1965, the bishop went into the ghetto repeatedly to talk with the people there (the visits continue still), but he denies he was frightened at any time. “I went there because I was concerned for them as people. I think burning is senseless.”

Bishop Bloy always has actively combated racism. He called his diocese to a day of prayer and abstinence at the time of the Selma, Ala., troubles in 1965, and never interfered with any of his priests who desired to take part in demonstrations there, providing only it was a matter of conscience with the priest.

One of Bishop Bloy’s hobbies which never has received publicity is his learned passion for astronomy. He is the owner of a 10-inch telescope and also a portable one.

“Where I live, up in La Canada, we have about 45 or 50 good view-



The Rev. Francis Eric Bloy

ing nights a year,” he said. “That’s not very many, so I sometimes take my portable telescope farther up in the hills.

“Last year I went to South Carolina to photograph the total eclipse.”

He is an enthusiast about space exploration. Although acknowledging the sometimes heard argument that instead of flying Mariners to Mars, the money should be used to clean up the ghettos, Bishop Bloy rejects it.

“I think the two things can be done,” he said. “Man’s destiny is in space.”

He plans to retire in 1973 and do some writing.

“I’d like to write a book on the humor of Jesus,” said Bishop Bloy.

“For example, He told the parable of the servant who owed his master 10,000 talents. Now a little research would show that the whole Roman Army could have been kept for five or 10 years with 10,000 talents. Can you imagine a servant owing that much?

“How the people must have howled when He told that story.”

“I think God has a rich sense of humor. I think He must laugh as well as weep.”

Does Bishop Bloy consider himself an optimist about the future of man?

“Yes, indeed. If I were to die tonight, I’d die confident that the future rests not only with man, but is in God’s hands. If I didn’t believe that, I’d quit. I really would” □