

***REV. MS. EVELYN MORGAN JONES, I LOVE YOU***

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**AFTERWORD**

by Ann Lining Smith

Dear Ray:

I've just finished reading through your letters. You are right. You do sound a little confused. You do contradict yourself in places. You also sound like someone who is involved in a time of searching his life and experience, looking for a stand to take on an issue that didn't really exist when you were in seminary.

Did Evelyn Morgan Jones exist then? Perhaps she did. Perhaps as William Lyon Phelps suggested, she was alive -- growing and developing and preparing to step into your world. But she was no threat to you then. The most dangerous aspiration she might have had was to enter the mission field, where she might be your wife or your sister, but probably not your colleague.

Enter Ms. Evelyn M. Jones, desirous of becoming your colleague. Who is she? She's one of many seminarians -- men and women -- who have come to prepare themselves for the ministry to which they have been called. She is each of the first eleven women ordained in the Episcopal Church against canonical law. She is me, Ann Lining Smith, the first woman minister-in-training to serve with you at First Baptist Church. She is a woman who is not bound by the traditional roles acted out by her mother and grandmother. She is a woman called by the Spirit to serve the Lord, in his church, as an ordained minister. Is she an angel or a demon. Ray?

My impression is that you have painted the angel side much more vividly than the demon side. She is almost too close to ideal. The first person to read the letters, other than your wife Irene and me, had an interesting reaction. Knowing that I was a model for Evelyn Morgan Jones, Hal said that if he didn't already know me, he wouldn't want to meet Evelyn. She was too nice. She was too capable, too wise, and probably too responsible, as well.

On the other hand, you damn her childishness forthrightly. You discuss her bursts of anger as knowledgeably as if you had caused them yourself. Alongside her openness to people, you mention her closedness to ideas and advice. With her humanness, you include her inhumanness. It makes me glad to know that I'm not the only source for the characteristics of Evelyn Morgan.

I can't reply for all those people! I'm not sure I can reply for myself, not without writing an entire book. (What about a sequel? Maybe, "So What Are You Going to Do About It, Ray Jennings?") However, I feel an obligation to honor your request and supply the last word. So, I'll try to respond by telling you about who I, Ann Lining Smith, am and why I've been here in seminary, in your church, in the ministry.

You've spent most of a book talking about how you see me as a "representative of the emerging breed of women in ministry." That wasn't always part of my self-concept. I started out as a minister. Somewhere along the way, I've partially fallen been forced into the role of "Woman in Ministry."

I saw a performance of Leonard Bernstein's Mass recently. The Celebrant first appears dressed in jeans and a work shirt, singing quietly, musingly to himself:

Sing God a simple song  
Lauda, laude . . .  
Make it up as you go along  
Lauda, laude . . .  
Sing like you like to sing  
God loves all simple things  
For God is the simplest of all.  
For God is the simplest of all.

As he progresses in his role as a priest, he puts on a cotton robe and a satin robe and a stole and a cape and onward, until he is burdened by his weighty and complicated garb. His song becomes more and more complex, less and less simple. In him, I saw my sister and brother seminarians and myself. We now are singing our "simple" songs. However, like many of my sisters and brothers, I feel already my priesthood becoming more complex.

When I first came to First Baptist Church ten months ago, I was a very unsure, young minister. I did the easy things in the Sunday services, like reading the Scripture or giving the invocation and benediction. You asked me to do the children's sermons, and it was in those stories that I found myself singing my first simple song. Stories about bathtub rings, Russian dolls, and a balloon named Joy spoke to the adults as surely as they helped the children make the acquaintance of a man named Jesus. You allowed me to lead the "Pastoral Prayers." They, too, were relatively simple, speaking to the Father about the clouds and the blue sky, the hurts and joys of his children.

In January, four months after having joined the church staff, I took a week off from school and the church to attend a conference in Pennsylvania concerning women in the ministry. There, my singing of the simple song was reaffirmed. It was also there that my consciousness was raised and the first layer of robes was put on. Hearing the much quoted text from Galatians for the first significant time brought on the early tremors of my budding liberationism. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **THERE IS NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK, THERE IS NEITHER BOND NOR FREE, THERE IS NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE: FOR YE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS.** And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (emphasis added). True, they say Eve sinned first. But didn't the Christ die and live for her and for Mary Magdalene and for me as well as for Adam?

The next robe was presented to me from your hands, Ray. I began to feel that you were reacting more to Ann, the woman, than to Ms. Ann Lining Smith, the minister. I remember a luncheon meeting of the area's ministers. There was one other woman present besides myself. She introduced herself in her professional capacity. You introduced me as the minister-in-training at your church, but your manner and words were more appropriate for introducing a girl at a party or presenting the young daughter of a close male friend at her first grown-up dinner. The other ministers smiled or laughed appreciatively. Your comments hit me like a slap across the face, Ray, and you knew it the minute you had made them. Your defense began as soon as we walked out the door. When it came time for my first sermon, you suggested Church Vocations Sunday, when the national theme was women in ministry. For the second sermon, you thought of American Baptist Women's Sunday. For the Easter trilogy sermon that you and Paul, the other minister-in-training, and I preached, you assigned me "The Women at the Tomb." All of those were good sermon themes. However, Woman is only one of my roles. I'm also a minister, with other ideas and insights as well.

So, I became a Woman in Ministry. I was no longer able to sing that simple song as easily as before. I was forced to defend my presence in the pulpit. I almost wanted to defend my presence in the pulpit. Suddenly, the principal theme of my song was increasingly concentrated on Christ's love for women. There's more to the gospel than that, Ray!

When Paul was writing to the church in Galatia, he was talking to everyone there. He was telling of the marvelous capacity of God to love fully each person. He was proclaiming a birthright of freedom to all believers, to all the children of God. He was an advocate of People's Liberation.

You mentioned the "Do You Love Me?" story at the end of the Gospel of John. Jesus has appeared to the disciples on the beach. He eats and talks with them. Then, addressing Simon Peter, he asks, "Do you love me?" Peter answers, "You know I do." And Jesus gives him a charge: "Feed my lambs." Again, Jesus asks the same question and Peter reaffirms his response. A stronger challenge is presented: "Tend my sheep." A third time Jesus questions him. Peter is getting nasty, and bursts out with, "You know everything; you know that I love you!" Jesus' simple answer is: "Feed my sheep."

If I am a child of God, which I am, through faith in the Son, and if I can affirm and reaffirm that faith in the Son, which I can, do I not have the same charge to feed his sheep? Is that not true of any Christian? Do we not all have the privilege and the responsibility to proclaim the gospel and to care for each other?

Yes, we do. Yes, I and many of my sisters have that charge. We answer it by putting on the simple cotton robe that we are called to wear and by accepting gladly a present and future vocation of caring for and feeding his sheep in his church.

Therefore, today, as a minister, my song is one of thanksgiving and praise for the union that we have in Christ. Since it has not been realized on earth, I, as a woman, must also sing a song of petition that the Father open the hearts and minds of men (that's not generic) to the love that he holds for each child equally and infinitely. Third, I join the Celebrant in Mass, paraphrasing his new song.

I will sing the Lord a new song  
To praise Him, to bless Him, to bless the Lord.  
I will sing His praises while I live  
All of my days.  
Blessed is the one who loves the Lord,  
Blessed is the one who praises Him.  
Lauda, lauda, laude . . .  
And walks in His ways.

Peace, Ann