Interview with Ambassador C. Boyden Gray

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**Howard Smith:** Terrific. Good morning.

**Boyden Gray:** Good morning.

**Howard Smith:** It’s Howard Smith, and I’m here with Boyden Gray as part of the interviews that are going on with parishioners surrounding the 200th anniversary of Christ Church, Georgetown. Boyden, thank you very much for letting us take a couple minutes this morning.

I was looking a little bit into your history and you were born in the middle of World War II. One of four sons to an important business and political family in North Carolina in Winston-Salem. Early in your life, your father came to work for the Truman administration and had jobs, appointments, off and on, probably for the first 20 years of your life, in both the Truman and the Eisenhower administrations.

Did your family come to Washington, or did you stay in Winston-Salem? I know you went to boarding school and then Harvard, UNC, and all of that, but what was family life? Did you all move to Washington?

**Boyden Gray:** Sure. I was born in Winston-Salem in ’43, and he came up here in ’47, I think, or ’48, to be assistant secretary of the Army. He left in 1950, after having been secretary of the Army for about a year.

We moved back to North Carolina, but to Chapel Hill, where he was president of the university. That’s where I really grew up—Chapel Hill.

**Howard Smith:** During that period of time in Washington, did you all go to church? Did you have an affiliation with Christ Church?

**Boyden Gray:** We did. My father did, but I don’t recall going...

**Howard Smith:** To church.

**Boyden Gray:** To church.

**Howard Smith:** The rector then would’ve been...

**Boyden Gray:** Anschutz was the first one that I met. I don’t know whether he was there when we arrived, but he was there at one point. He’d come to the house frequently.
Howard Smith: No personal remembrances of him other than him just being around you?

Boyden Gray: He and my father were pretty close, but I was never included. I met him.

Howard Smith: Then off to St. Mark’s, off to Harvard, off to Chapel Hill for law school. A stint in the military. Then a clerkship on the Warren court for the Chief. I guess that would have been the time when you moved back to Washington permanently. Have you been in Washington since then?

Boyden Gray: Yes.

Howard Smith: Law career. What would you say is your first personal connection with Christ Church?

Boyden Gray: That’s a good question. I think that my brother Burton’s children were christened there. I would have gone to the christenings. What I remember is that soon as Eliza was old enough to appreciate the homily at church and the children’s school, I came regularly at nine o’clock.

Howard Smith: I remember quite well. You all sat in the middle in the back. It’s funny in how we all seem to take our same places every Sunday.

Boyden Gray: And you’re in the same place.

Howard Smith: We moved to the west side of the Church now. [laughs]

Boyden Gray: We were always there. We occupied a smaller pew. It occasionally became the refuge for Andrew Hamilton, who usually brought one or two of his children, but never on time.

Howard Smith: That’s for sure.

Boyden Gray: One time he came in so late that he just walked right straight up to the communion rail and partook, and walked right back and sat down next to Eliza for a total of about five minutes in Church. She turned to him and said, “Mr. Hamilton, has it ever occurred to you to try the 11 o’clock service?”

Howard Smith: [laughs] Does she have fond memories of those times?

Boyden Gray: She does.

Howard Smith: Sanford Garner was probably rector at the time. It was right at the close of his rectorship.

Boyden Gray: Then we had an interim.

Howard Smith: We had Dr. Kreider and then Stuart came. I’d like your thoughts here. His having children the same age as many of our children really led to the development of...
**Boyden Gray:** The ballooning of children coming to the Church.

**Howard Smith:** ...the whole youth education program.

**Boyden:** Yes. Lupton Abshire was one of the early directors. He was gifted at that. Eliza learned a lot of her values there. She’s got this innate sense of what’s right and what’s wrong. I don’t attribute that to me. She was always leading that aspect of the schools she went to. I have this really deep debt to Christ Church.

**Howard Smith:** Do you have other assistants other than Lupton that you recall that did anything in particular that shaped you, helped you, made you look forward to seeing them on a Sunday kind of thing?

**Boyden Gray:** There was a time when—I’ve forgotten what her name was. She was the director of—this was after, I think, Lupton left. She caught me—because the teacher had come in late or didn’t show up—caught me in a classroom with Eliza and a bunch of kids her age. I taught the class.

**Howard Smith:** Do you remember what you talked about?

**Boyden Gray:** No, I don’t.

**Howard Smith:** [laughs]

**Boyden Gray:** But she was quite taken with that. And so, there began a career of two or three years of teaching. I would take the lesson and turn it into a story. I was used to telling stories to Eliza. I turned it into a story. I used to have these kids in rapt attention. It was really great fun. It was wonderful. It was a wonderful experience. Parents would come and listen. Towards the end, they'd all gather around and listen to me finish my stories. Stories about that day’s lesson and what it meant for them.

**Howard Smith:** Connected with them. If you had parents in there, maybe what was going on in their lives, too.

**Boyden Gray:** [laughs]

**Howard Smith:** One of the things I’ve always loved about Christ Church since, as Washingtonians, we spend an inordinate amount of time talking about all forms of news, is that that doesn’t really come into Christ Church. You sit on the right side of church like I do and every other week Susan Davies, who was deputy White House counsel to President Obama, is the chalice bearer.

That’s quite something: a deputy Democratic White House counsel handing the chalice to a Republican White House counsel.

**Boyden Gray:** [Stuart Kenworthy] used to observe at the annual coffees, teas, drinks—he would always talk about the fact that nothing gave him more pleasure than to be...
Howard Smith: Serving all.

Boyden Gray: ...serving all. Seeing this Clinton appointee serving the communion.

Howard Smith: [laughs] Now we’ve called the man from Scotland. What are your early impressions of Tim? Do you think we’ll continue on as we were? Do you think there will be great changes?

Boyden Gray: I think he’s going to broaden—I won’t say intellectual life of the church—but he’s going to broaden the life of the church. He’s going to have more things like the adult forum. He likes the adult forum. He thinks it’s a very good institution.

I think he wants to broaden that opportunity for other people who don’t particularly want to listen to church history but want to have more knowledge about Lent, for example.

He knows the lifeblood of the church is children. He wants to bolster the children’s program I think, and he told me that he regretted not being able to buy—there’s a residence in-between the church and the rectory. It is a shame when you think about it. But maybe it will come on the market again.

Howard Smith: You mentioned adult forum. We’re both consistent attendees at adult forum and over the years have been blessed with phenomenal teachers. I’m going to call them teachers, because I think that’s what they were. Do you have a favorite or a fondness to any of them or any particular anecdotes?

Boyden Gray: Barry Seltser has always been to me the level of Ron Conner. He’s a brilliant lecturer. He’s funny. It’s unusual to have a converted Jew teach our class. It helps with a lot of perspective. I once told him. I said, “You know, you’re the high point of my week.” He laughed and said, “My God, what a dismal life you must have!”

[laughter]

Howard Smith: It’s so true.

Boyden Gray: It is.

Howard Smith: It’s so true. Last month, Frank Wade came and I think every one of us just left there with eyes bugged, heads shaking. It gives you something to think about for the rest of the week.

Boyden Gray: I don’t think there’s any other church that equals this. It’s given me an idea that the cathedral, given its convenient capacity, should be putting on events like this for broadcast to the country. They don’t seem to take my advice. They can get people we probably couldn’t get.

Howard Smith: For sure.

Boyden: It’s just a disappointment that they haven’t seen this little model. This little lesson plan.
Very disappointing. I live for those sessions there. They’re wonderful.

**Howard Smith:** I do as well. It’s nice that they are now recorded. If you miss one you can go back and pick it up.

**Boyden Gray:** You can pick it up, yeah.

**Howard Smith:** May I give you the last word? We’ve covered a lot of territory. Anything that we’ve not discussed that you would like to?

**Boyden Gray:** A lot of people get burned out going to the old-fashioned episcopal boarding school with three services a day. That can get to you after a while.

I didn’t pay much attention until Eliza came along. I still go to the nine o’clock service. I wouldn’t miss it. I like seeing all the kids go up. I like listening to the homily. It’s the only real peace I get for a couple of hours a week. It’s invaluable. Maybe that’s not the reason to go, but for me, it’s peace.

**Howard Smith:** Peace and thanks.

**Boyden Gray:** Peace and thanks. Gratefulness. Of course, I’ve made a lot of friends that I wouldn’t otherwise. I never would have met Ron Conner. I wouldn’t know Barry Seltser. I wouldn’t know some of the parishioners. I wouldn’t know Margaret Costan as well as I do.

Some of the people in high places like Tooey Leake—Nora Cameron—were college classmates, so that’s not new. But it’s just been a great part of my life, an indispensable part of my life. Sometimes I go out for the weekend to the country to one of the watering spots, and I find myself getting up at six or seven in the morning to rush back. Just to go to church. People think I’m crazy.

**Howard Smith:** It’s who we are.

**Boyden Gray:** That’s who we are.

**Howard Smith:** Thank you.