

**John Shelby Spong**  
**Doctor of Humane Letters**

Like many people who went on to become successful, John Shelby Spong, Class of 1952, delivered newspapers in his youth, but few can claim such a connection between their paper-tossing days and their professions. The last house on his *Charlotte Observer* route was Billy Graham's. Spong was raised in his young professional life on issues of civil rights as an Episcopal rector in churches in Durham, Tarboro, Lynchburg, and Richmond. In Durham he found himself preaching on the same Sunday one sermon to mill workers and another to Duke graduate students, gaining in the process a thorough grounding in the difference between saints and sinners. Spong's call to be a bishop came from far outside the South — the Diocese of Newark — which presented him with all the challenges of place and with very urban problems. He served that diocese for twenty-four years, but retirement has brought him no rest. Spong has been a central figure in the Episcopal voice worldwide on social, ecclesiastical, and moral issues for more than a quarter of a century, and he is a sought-after speaker all over the world. His first speech in the House of Bishops was in support of the ordination of women. That now is a non-issue in his denomination, but he is also a champion of the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the life and ministry of the church—an issue which continues to stir deep feelings on both sides. Through it all, Spong's driving concern is how to make Christianity relevant in the modern world. His fifteen books have sold more than one million copies in English, and have been translated into nine other languages. His current column on the Internet is opened 100,000 times each week. Spong credits the three years he took to graduate from Carolina for transforming his thinking as a Christian. He counts among those who influenced him most Maynard Adams and William Poteat of Philosophy, Preston Epps of Greek, and William Wells and Clifford Lyons of English. Among his academic appointments are Quatercentenary Scholar of Emmanuel College, Cambridge; Scholar-in-Residence at Christ Church College, Oxford; and William Beldon Noble Lecturer at Harvard.