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An Open Letter to the Bishop of Georgia

Dear Bishop Louttit,

In your address to the 182nd Diocesan Convention of the Diocese of Georgia, you put forth this notion as a guiding principle, "I know we will be more of a Catholic Church if we can contain and respect each other and lose no one, no matter what their opinion is about how we should minister to our homosexual members. It is exactly in that struggle of opinions in the context of reading the Bible that the community will ultimately come to know God's will."

Without comment on the epistemological assumption of your method, and as part of the community of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church in the Diocese of Georgia, I want to offer you what is my opinion to the various points you raised in your address. From what you stated in your address you seem to indicate that my opinion is also to be contained and respected, and even helpful to the struggle of the diocesan dialectic. I regret that I cannot offer you a more original opinion. In the final analysis, mine is no opinion at all, since it mainly reflects, in the words of St. Vincent of Lerins, what the Catholic Church has believed everywhere, always, and by all. Wherever I do, in fact, fall into error, I ask God's forgiveness and yours.

Your address covered a number of points, and I have tried, I hope fairly, to put them into headings. I trust that I note them all, or at least most of them. After introductory comments inviting us to visit the various local churches round about Valdosta, your address set out to discuss the following: 1) The reason for our gathering. 2) A statement about growth. 3) The influence of Satan in the life of the Diocese. 4) Pledges are down. 5) Life in the Diocese reflects two notes of the church, which are always in conflict: unity and holiness. 6) How the Episcopal Church uses the Bible, and how the Bible is authoritative. 7) Two biblical texts concerning homosexuality. 8) The Bible as the community's book. 9) How does God get through cultural biases? 10) The problem of repentance. 11) What in the Bible is authoritative? 12) How to understand the Bible. 13) The attempt of some to make the Episcopal Church a "confessional" church. 14) The oath we have taken "to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church." 15) Your own struggle. 16) Conclusion and vision.

If I were reading these headings for the first time, I might be inclined to hope that your address spoke to the reality of the present crisis in the Episcopal Church, but having heard your speech, and having read

it several times, I cannot help but conclude that it presents a defense for the status quo, an apology (in the old sense of an argument for the defense) for the institution of the Episcopal Church. I think I can discern why you voted "no" at the General Convention, but I wonder if that "no" has become "yes." (You did not take the opportunity at the Diocesan Convention to say why you voted the way you did at General Convention). You seem anxious to give the Episcopal Church the benefit of the doubt, and, certainly, you want to be sensitive to those who practice homosexuality and suffer pain and agony because of it.

But there is another element that seems to qualify and permeate the whole argument, and that is a distrust of the orthodox position and a demonizing of our intention. You seem to indicate that we who hold to the orthodox position are motivated by anger, driven by Satan, full of spiritual pride, ignorant of the proper way to read the Bible, hateful of sinners, not truly Anglican in theology, disobedient to the Church, enclosed in individualistic conscience, and without the humility with which you struggle over these "issues." In your condemnation of the orthodox as judgmental you seem to render a comprehensive judgment on us in every sphere of human conception - emotionally, spiritually, intel-lectually, and morally. Even so, as a member of the Church Catholic, I want to try again to offer my opinion, which you said you wanted, and I will do so in the context of reading the Bible.

The reason for our gathering. You began, "We are gathered here because God loves us even when we are selfish, turned in on ourselves, and unlovable. He has loved us, called us, and made us part of His family through whom He hopes His love will flow to others of His children in His world." There could be no better beginning. "We love him, because he first loved us," says St. John (I John 4:19). St. Paul writes, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). And St. John speaks of us becoming God's family, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12), and "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1). That God loved us first and made us his family is at the heart of the gospel.

The part about God "hoping" is, I think, not exactly accurate. The gospel record indicates from the beginning that the church, the family of God, is given the power, through the Holy Spirit, to participate in the will of God, which I hasten to add, includes the work of self-examination, confession, repentance, and mission.

Quoting St. John again (I will be doing a lot of that because, like you, I am very much a Johannine Christian), Jesus said to his apostles, after his resurrection, "Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this he breathed on them and saith unto them, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained'" (John 20:21-23). As for the power of the Christian family to spread the love of God, St. John writes, "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (I John 3:23, 24). God does much more than hope. He fills

us with himself.

Bishop, I realize that this is only a beginning in response to your address. And while I do not wish to draw out this discussion interminably, I thought this beginning particularly important, especially given how your address proceeds in such severe judgment of the orthodox.

to be continued

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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