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# The Parish Paper

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## **"PEACE, WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE"**

These are the words of the prophet Jeremiah. Uttered twice at the beginning of his prophecy foretelling the doom coming upon Judah and Jerusalem, Jeremiah laments that the religious leaders have come up short in calling the nation of Israel to repentance. "They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (6:14; 8:11).

This verse came to mind with our recent diocesan convention. The Bishop of Georgia did his best to call us to faith in the providence of God, saying that God is in charge of the future. And he acknowledged that the actions of our Church have had serious ramifications in other parts of the worldwide communion. Most importantly, he summoned us to love one another and to grow together as the body of Christ, and in this he did as he ought to have done. His words were true and good. But what he left unsaid was the troubling thing. We were left with an eerie sense of peace when there is, as far as the institution of the Church is concerned, little to none.

During the brief year that I was at Sewanee, after eight years of graduate school - under the tutelage of the finest minds in the Anglican Church - I took a course from a professor of Theology on the works of Jurgen Moltmann. A very fine mind, and I understand a good man, which is much more than can be said about most of us, especially me. Moltmann's works fall in the line of Process Theology, with a particularly pious slant toward God as a kind of benevolent, suffering, Marxist. A short digression on his theology is pertinent.

Moltmann makes his theology bear a Trinitarian structure. The Father is Creator, the Son is the suffering Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is the motion of all spirituality, both God's and ours, into the potentialities of the future. God is in some sense eternal, but not in the traditional sense, for God is not complete, or blessed, until he and his creation with him come into the future of a mutual, equal, spiritual life. What this kind of Theology means when it refers to the future seems to collapse into the vagaries of existential freedom and socio-economic egalitarianism. In other words, what will be will be, only it must be without class distinction, and have the qualitative finery of mutual love and respect. This was well expressed in a hymn we sang at Noon Prayers at the convention, "Not in the dark of buildings confining, not in some heaven, light years away - here in this place the new light is shining, now is the kingdom, and now is the day."

While this view of Moltmann, in various shades and tones, is the view of many in the current Episcopal Church, I do not think the Bishop of Georgia shares them. But at the same time I do not know, and cannot presume to say that he does not at all. Our Bishop wants to say that "All will be well." God is in charge, not us. And yet, in saying this, and by saying nothing else, we are probably witnessing the fact that, as an institution, the Episcopal Church is looking into the blinding light of an oncoming locomotive.

It was what the Bishop left out of his speech, and made no further comment about, that is of concern. He did not mention the present crisis of the Episcopal Church in relation to the rest of the Anglican Communion, nor did he mention the committee on which he sits, which is charged with crafting a response to the Windsor Report and which will be presented to the General Convention for changes or approval. His silence on these matters implies they are topics best left unaddressed, and therefore, of no good news and without comfortable words.

Instead the Bishop chose to emphasize the life and growth of the diocese. The theme of the convention was: "Together We Grow." And there were reports that many in the diocese are involved on various committees to see that action for growth takes place. A worthy theme and goal.

Still, the fact that a crisis exists and extends into our own diocese became evident when it was acknowledged that there is a parish in the diocese that pledged nothing to the diocesan budget. I was not aware of this. (I knew that our Vestry did what it has done before, taken ten percent of our net disposable income, removed twenty-five percent of that amount and sent it to various Anglican organizations throughout the world, and gave the other seventy-five percent to the diocese with the request that it be restricted to use in the Diocese of Georgia.) It was at that point that figures loomed toward the microphone, and one priest proceeded to make the judgment that the parish which pledged nothing to the diocesan budget amounted to a group of "spiritual freeloaders." Immediately thereafter, our friend from Christ Church, Dr. Robertson replied by commending the Bishop on his pastoral care for Christ Church and then went on to explain that the Bishop and Christ Church were seeking "creative ways" for that parish to make its contributions to the diocese without making a formal pledge to the diocese. Christ Church decided that, given the crisis in the Episcopal Church, they could not formally support the institutional apparatus of the General Convention, but instead would support local diocesan ministries.

Furthermore, Dr. Robertson said that our friends in the mother church of the diocese had "struggled" with the issues of the day, and he hoped that the rest of the diocese would have the patience of the Bishop to respect this. In doing so, Dr. Robertson presented himself a capable apologist for his parish, and pastorally patient in relation to others, and especially this declaring priest. His critic, on the other hand, presented himself as a pluperfect jackass. His was hardly an example of "Together We Grow." Everyone who knows the fine people of Christ Church, Savannah, know that they have prayerfully deliberated, discussed, and debated their course of action. They have

done what they have done with careful spiritual scrutiny, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Nothing more is required of any parish church.

The truth is that the Episcopal Church is in trouble. It is in crisis, and we must remember that the word crisis comes from the Greek word meaning judgment. It is a crisis that will have a purifying effect on all of us. The Bishop is correct. God is in charge of the future. And his purifying fire shall cleanse us all. And instead of our saying "peace" when there is no peace, he shall give us the peace that the world cannot give, that finally transforms us into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, there where he is, now, in the presence of the Father in heaven. It is there and not here, where we shall be clothed with his incorruptible glory, and heaven and earth shall share the vision of his face.

**The Rev'd. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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