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# The Parish Paper

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## **FIERCE INDIGNATION**

This past week I have been thinking about Jonathan Swift, Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, and his famous, self-composed epitaph: Ubi saeva indignatio cor lacerare nequit, 'where fierce indignation can no longer tear his heart'. Since his death Dean Swift has been much celebrated for his scathing satires of corruption in church, state, and society. Perhaps wisely, he saw to it all that of them were published anonymously during his lifetime.

I have been thinking about Dean Swift, because last week's Parish Paper essay ("Preaching a False Gospel") was a bit of ascorcher – a sometimes sarcastic expression of fierce indignation at the false teaching set forth by the Presiding Bishop in her opening address to General Convention in Anaheim in July. For some readers, I suspect, it was a strong and even unpleasant brew. Some of them, while agreeing with the substance of the criticism, may wish that I had spoken in more measured tones. I have no quarrel with these reactions, and I will not resent or refute what they say. Even I do not enjoy righteous indignation.

Some of my readers, however, may have been offended by my indignation. I would not be surprised if they were moved to rancour against my "rudeness" and "lack of respect" to the presiding bishop, - while they remained silent about her abuse of office for the public promotion of false teaching. Maybe they did not even notice the false teaching, which is bad enough. Maybe, however, they did notice, and just did not want to admit it – and that is much worse. Either way, their indignation at my outspokenness rings hollow. One thinks of the anger of Jerusalem against Jeremiah - because he told them a truth they did not want to hear, and told it to them in a form they could not avoid.

So to those critics I say: show me that I was wrong, or acknowledge that the Presiding Bishop taught false doctrine. Let them do so in a tone as measured and respectful as they like – and I will match them in it. GGD

## **ASSUMPTION OR DORMITION**

A week ago (August 15th) the Church observed the feast variously known as the Dormition ('Falling Asleep') of the Virgin Mary, or her Assumption. It is customary to commemorate the witness of the saints to Christ on the day that they left this world, and entered into glory;

on that ground there can be no controversy about that feast. What is controversial, however, is the special doctrine associated with that feast, and defined by the Roman church in 1950 as necessary for salvation. This doctrine is that Mary was "assumed" in body and soul into heaven.

In its favour, one may acknowledge (1) that the belief has long been held in the church, and recognized in its liturgy at least since the 4th century A. D.; and (2) that it is not inconsistent with scriptural teaching. For Scripture teaches (1) that the redemption of Man by Christ is a redemption of the entire human, body and soul, and (2) that other saints have been assumed bodily into heaven (Enoch, Genesis 5:24; Elijah, II Kings 2:1-18; and perhaps Moses). In this perspective Mary's assumption can be deduced from the scriptural testimony to Mary's faith, as the logical completion of her trajectory through grace to glory (Luke 1:46-49). In this view, her bodily Assumption anticipates the general Resurrection to glory of the whole Church, and is indeed a sign meant to encourage the people of God on their pilgrimage through the world.

Because of the large element of deductive reasoning required for such arguments, and the lack of any explicit or implicit scriptural warrant for the doctrine (the "woman clothed with the sun" in Revelation 12 is suggestive but hardly conclusive), Anglicans, in accord with Article XXI, have held that the Church cannot require it as a belief necessary for salvation. Among Anglicans therefore it is usually spoken of as a "pious opinion", which means, as Fr Crouse rather wickedly would say, that you can believe it if you are pious.

Why all the fuss about Mary? One may object to the sentimentality which often clothes Marian devotion. One may also question whether her veneration does not distract from the honour due to Christ alone. And certainly there can be no justification for Mary's veneration if it does not lead to a deeper faith in Christ and love in the Holy Ghost. Our justification can be only this: that in honouring her, we honour Christ. He assumed his manhood from her: and to call her the Mother of God is therefore to confess faith that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). When we honour her, we honour the faithful obedience which his grace has given her: "be it unto me according to thy will" (Luke 1:38). We honour the testimony which she bears to Christ: "whatsoever he saith, do it" (John 2:5). And we give thanks, for the glory to which God has exalted her: "behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; for he that is mighty hath magnified me, and Holy is his Name" (Luke 1:48).

Though not many worshippers seem to notice, we do honour her, in terms reminiscent of Luke 1 and John 1, whenever we sing the hymn, "Ye watchers and ye holy ones" (#599). For the second stanza is addressed to her:

"O higher than the cherubim,

More glorious than the seraphim,

Lead their praises, Alleluia!

Thou bearer of th' eternal Word,

Most gracious, magnify the Lord, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia,  
Alleluia”

GGD

#### FOR THE RECORD

In the Parish Paper for August 9th, I noted that was a matter of legitimate public interest how the clergy delegates to General Convention who have been nominated for election as Bishop—Fr. Frank Logue and Fr William Willoughby—had voted on Resolutions D025 and C056. I have since been informed by Fr Logue that he voted against both resolutions, and by Fr Willoughby that he voted against D025 and in favour of C056.

**The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar**



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