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OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS

FINDING UTOPIA

By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott

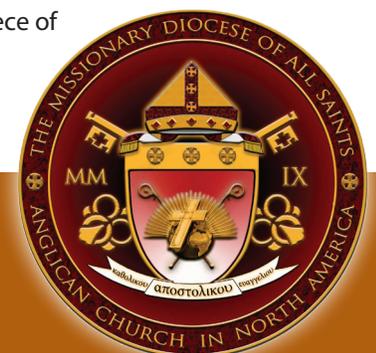
In the 19th Century and into the 20th, there were a large number of movements seeking Utopia. Many bore fruit, gathering people into separate communities or making an impact on politics and religion in various places. Some still are with us today, usually modified from their original vision. The various groups manifested a wide variety of ideologies, political ideas, religious beliefs and social experiments. Some examples are the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Adventists (including 7th Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses), Shakers, Zionists, Bishop's Hill Colony, Marxism, the German national racial movement which eventually morphed into the Nazis, Prohibitionists, and many more. As different as they were from each other, all sought to achieve utopia on earth.

Such visions, of course, were not confined to the 19th Century. The hippie commune phenomenon of the later 20th Century had similar aims, and even some medieval and Reformation-era groups could be included. Not to be forgotten are the more recent chilling cults like Jonestown and Heaven's Gate.

What is it that leads so many humans to seek utopia? Perhaps it is the subconscious collective memory of the Garden of Eden, the Paradise utopia closed to us by flaming swords, as a consequence of mankind's fall away from perfect love and perfect existence, as God's cherished creatures. Ever since the Fall, there has been an

urge to try to return to the idyllic existence of Paradise.

To date, Paradise remains lost. Most of the utopian efforts failed after a short time. Those that survived have evolved into structures that look very much like the rest of mankind's institutions, just as full of sin and failure. Sometimes, the utopias themselves became agents of horror, hells on earth. And mankind in general today seems mired in the same old rebellion, sin and self-destruction that led to the original eviction from the Garden. The war in Ukraine looks much like the wars of the last century and indeed every century. The genocide in Gaza resembles the genocides of Jews in Germany, of Armenians and Greeks in Turkey, of First Nations in the U.S., of Irish by the English, and of many other peoples, remembered and forgotten, back into the mists of bloody history. Lethal persecution of Christians today is under way in northern Nigeria, in Egypt, in North Korea, in Pakistan and elsewhere, just as it has been back through the centuries to the very New Testament accounts. Greed, and the consequent contempt for God's bountiful earth, given us for our nourishment and enjoyment, is destroying our own nest, the environment which is probably the largest remnant piece of the Garden which is still partially intact. Beyond this, human sin,



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

individual and collective, continues to corrode, corrupt, warp and distort our creation, desecrating the image of the loving and pure God.

It would appear, as Camus writes, there is no exit. We as a species seem destined to go down with the ship, which is sinking from our own scuttling of it. From the perspective of God, and the wisdom of my own Mother (and possibly, yours as well), the observation could justifiably be, "You have nobody to blame but yourselves for this." Adam, in the Genesis account, gives it a good try, managing to blame both God and Eve and not himself: "The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree [i.e. the tree they were forbidden to touch]" (Gen.3:12). But any experienced teacher would immediately see through such an attempt, and God certainly didn't buy it. Some theologians have ventured to blame Adam and Eve, as a way to exempt us, with the argument that it isn't our fault what happened back then. Were we beings known for great sanctification, they might have had a better case. But, like both Adam and Eve, we are fully involved in sin, quite aside from our origins. Thus, the situation stands. There is no exit.

Except that God remains, the same as always. We are indeed to blame, and he indeed blames us. But he does not stop there. With the disobedience and rebellion of mankind, comes the parallel plan of God for our salvation. "Sin is itself perceived as a falling away of man, and in him of all creation, from the sacramentality, from the 'paradise of delight,' and into 'this world,' which lives no longer according to God, but according to itself and in itself and is therefore corrupt and mortal. And if



this is so, then Christ accomplishes the salvation of the world by renewing the world and life itself as sacrament" (Alexander Schmemmann, "The Eucharist," p. 34).

The only explanation for this which makes sense is that it is motivated by love, for God's creation and creatures, including us. It is a love expressing itself in offering of self, as all genuine love does. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us," proclaims John (1 John 3:1). The incarnation in Jesus Christ, to become one of us, to proclaim and manifest God's love expressed in the plan of salvation, and to implement it through the Cross and Resurrection, is the accomplishment of "the salvation of the world by renewing the world and life itself."

In a nutshell that is the message of Good Friday and Easter. No wonder we celebrate for fifty days, rejoicing in this cosmic salvation which renews our world and we ourselves, overriding the blame we richly deserve, to restore us, in love, to the right path towards paradise once again. No wonder our chief celebration is denoted "Eucharist," the Greek word for "thanksgiving."

Amongst the many failures and downright evils which mankind continues to perpetrate on our world and its inhabitants, it is this clear message which can restore and comfort us. May it be a clear light showing that path of love which alone can show us the way to God's salvation offered to us.

Dystopia continues. It seems pretty well proven by the many failed tries, that utopia cannot be achieved through our own efforts. Into that despairing discovery comes the message from God. His plan is effective, intact and has already unfolded.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

REQUEST FOR A BISHOP COADJUTOR

The Standing Committee for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints have closed nominations for our next Bishop Coadjutor. Since one of these men will be leading our Diocese in conjunction with our Bishop Ordinary, our other Bishops, our Vicars General and the rest of our Standing Committee, we ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide us in selecting the right man. I would ask that all our parishes, clergy and laity, pray that God will insure the correct man be selected for this very important job in keeping us within the One, True, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. To this end, Fr. Christopher Parrish of St. Luke's Chapel in the Hills has drafted the following prayer, which I hope will help you:

A Prayer for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints' Selection of a New Bishop Coadjutor

Almighty God, giver of every good gift. Look graciously upon Thy Holy Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints that we may receive a faithful pastor who will preach the Gospel, care for Thy people, equip us for ministry, and lead us forth in fulfillment of the Great Commission: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God bless,
Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General

Teaching the **Power** and **Majesty** of the **Holy Spirit**



By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

Many of you may know the history behind the “first” nativity scene. In 1223 in Greccio, Italy, Saint Francis decided to present an intimate view of Christ’s birth. Saint Francis said, according to biographer Brother Thomas of Celano, that St. Francis wanted to “represent the birth of that Child in Bethlehem in such a way that with our bodily eyes we may see what he suffered for lack of the necessities of a newborn babe and how he lay in a manger between the ox and ass.” According to Butler’s “Lives of the Saints”, at this time, it was not unheard of to have an empty crib, or, in French, a creche in the churches. But in December of 1223, Saint Francis set his manger in a cave and surrounded it with live animals.

That night, it is said that the people came with torches and candle light to rocky crags illuminated by fires. Christmas Mass was celebrated there with Saint Francis, being a Deacon at this time, reading the Gospel lesson of the birth of Christ and giving the Homily. It is also reported by some that they saw a child in the empty crib. Giovanni Veleti asserted that he saw a real infant appear in the empty manger and that Saint Francis took the beautiful child into his arms, holding him to his chest in an embrace.

From this remarkable beginning, we have come to accept the Nativity scene in almost all Christian churches. Sometimes, the scene is set with great pomp and circumstance. Other times it just appears on Christmas Eve. But, no matter how it is done, the goal is always the same. The goal is to see with our eyes what happened over 2,000 years ago.

In fact, this goal makes up much of catholic churchmanship.

From Maundy Thursday and the washing of the feet to Good Friday’s Stations of the Cross to Easter morning with the celebration of the Empty tomb, the goal is almost always the same – to see “with our bodily eyes” the actual, historic events of our faith. And this is the one thing that people forget. These events were historical events, documented better than most events of the ancient world.

But there is one event of great historical significance that I have never seen presented in the same way as Christ’s birth. It is an event so significant that even atheistic historians will acknowledge that something significant happened on that night. That event was Pentecost:

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” [Acts 2:1-4]

And yet, I cannot claim Pentecost was never presented like the Nativity scene any more.

Last summer in 2023 when visiting Dijon, almost exactly 800 years after the first Nativity scene, in the Cathedral bookstore’s window I spied a scene that delighted me. For the first time I saw a depiction of the first Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Spirit. I had a friend take several pictures with my phone because, to be honest, I am not the greatest photographer. I usually capture a close up of one of my fingers.

So, here they are:



What a great idea! It is probably one of the hardest images to picture in our minds since there is no really good way to picture it. But here it is, as best we can.

The teaching profession will tell you that about 90% of what we learn comes from what we see. Thus, each time we try to picture the historical events in our church, we are helping ourselves to learn about these events.

But something else struck me about this scene – how far have we moved from our roots! Originally, the two most significant Holy Days in the early church's calendar were Easter and Pentecost. The Resurrection still holds significant sway, but what about Pentecost? The event that has become the most significant Holy Day now for most of us Christians is Christmas. Whereas Christmas was barely a bump in the calendar, now it takes up much of our Liturgical time and preparation. And the question must be, "Why?"

Christmas is not any more joyful than the Resurrection or any

more powerful than Pentecost. Its significance is true, but many Eastern Churches count the Feast of the Epiphany as the Baptism of Christ, where the Blessed Trinity is revealed clearly. Instead, we in the West complete the Nativity narrative with the arrival of the Magi bringing gifts for the newborn King.

I basically have two theories why Christmas has taken "center stage" as it were; the first is because of where we Anglicans have placed the emphasis in our theological writings.

I have written this before. Someone has said about the three great Catholic faiths that the Eastern Orthodox has placed their emphasis on the mystery of the Resurrection; the Roman Catholics on the mystery of the Atonement; but the Anglicans placed their emphasis on the mystery of the Incarnation. Now, let us make clear, all three religions hold that all three mysteries are important, but there is a relative emphasis which sometimes is perceived incorrectly.

I remember when I was a young man working at Lord and Taylors in the Fine Jewelry department a new Christian wanted to buy a cross. None were to her liking so I suggested a crucifix. Her reply was that "We don't believe that Christ is still on the Cross." Even as an atheist at that time I wanted to cross my eyes. How ridiculous. No Catholic believes Christ is still on the Cross; they are just in awe of the mystery of the Atonement and want to be constantly reminded that Christ went to His death on the Cross to save mankind. But, this is the type of misunderstanding that occurs from our relative emphasis, especially with new-born Christians.

No, it is not that we do not cherish Pentecost, but how and why God became Man has captured the Anglican imagination. Much thought and much writing has gone into this mystery. And, as a result, in the Anglican Faith, the Nativity often takes center stage in those cultures influenced by the English and Anglicanism.

But there is another reason for this emphasis on Christmas. It's just plain good business. Much "stuff" is sold at Christmas. We deck our houses with all sorts of Christmas decorations. And the celebration is well-deserved, even if timed inappropriately and sometimes over-the-top and way too secular.

However, where there is a will, there is a way. Stores and craft shops are selling all sorts of things for Easter now – not just eggs but Easter trees, Easter tablecloths, candles and decorations, mostly involving cute little bunnies and chicks, and not Christ coming out of His tomb. But still nothing for Pentecost – yet.

Maybe the French or Italians will start producing Pentecost Scenes like the one photographed, that we can put up in our houses. This is fine with me, especially if it is a good teaching moment with our children. Let us just make sure it doesn't devolve into emphasizing a cute little dove, instead of the power and majesty of the Holy Spirit.

God bless.