

Holy Wars

God's Love Gifts of Grace to All

The following is an E-mail exchange with a colleague in ministry about the ongoing "Holy War" within the United Methodist Church.

My opening comment to him was this "After all of our HOLY WARS all that are left over are dead bodies of those that God loves - - no winners, just dead bodies!"

(Colleague's response) "I think one of the most important lessons we have learned from the past is that religious violence is as you say a no win proposition. However I am not sure that having realized that, we should now say that what the people fought about is not worth debate and discussion today. It seems to me that is throwing the baby out with the bath."

(My response) "As I get older (will be 65 this year - - and enter geezerhood) and hopefully wiser - - I am even growing weary of that "good fight!"

Let me use that as a launching point for a discussion about our beloved United Methodist Church.

As I was preparing to go to Cleveland, Ohio, last year for the 2000 session of the General Conference it became more and more apparent to me that we indeed had a "holy war" going on within our church. It just seemed that everything was focused on one issue and that no matter whatever else was on our agenda that this one issue would dominate our presence there.

The battle lines were drawn and well defined. It was "circling the wagons" time! This was THE General Conference that this issue would be settled "once and for all."

All of the groups were in place and had their "war rooms" rented far ahead of time. They would have made that great military strategist - Napoleon - proud! The strategy breakfasts and lunches were all planned. Persons were stationed in every legislative committee to get the report back to the "war room." I even saw some of the new high-tech communication equipment in use (two ways, etc.). Cell phones were seen in use everywhere.

Somehow they had rooms in the closest hotels and motels. Some of us who were credentialed to be there had to scratch for rooms and walk several blocks.

They had their folks on the streets - - handing out flyers to everyone entering the meeting place. Demonstration signs were prepared and stored away for instant use. Folks were "bussed in" for the designated and planned demonstrations. They had pre-conference training sessions for the demonstrators.

As I began going from place to place - - from meeting to meeting, I kept hearing and reading about "possible demonstrations." I was helping track legislation that had come from the General Board of Discipleship (I had chaired their legislative committee). All of the conversations always centered on "what is the world is going to happen?"

As the days went on, I kept feeling this "dark cloud" hanging over me and the General Conference.

Behind God and spouse - - I love the United Methodist Church with a deep and abiding passion. I grieve when she grieves - - I laugh when she laughs. The United Methodist Church gave me my faith formation - - baptized me - - married me - - nourished me - - gave me a path for my spiritual

journey - - gave me a place to serve ö and continues to be my "sending station" to faithful discipleship. I am United Methodist from core to peeling!

My walks to and from the meeting hall and meeting rooms were growing more weary day-by-day. I was not having any joy at all about where I was and what I was doing. It was like there had been a death in the family.

On the middle Friday as I was walking back to the Hotel - - I began to have pains in my left arm and in my chest. I stopped and rested several times. I finally got back to the hotel and had to sit down and rest before I could get on the elevator and go up to the room.

On the way to eat that evening - - I finally told my wife what was going on with me. She was alarmed and wanted me to seek medical attention right away! Well you know how us guys are about something like that. I could tell that she was disappointed and very concerned. We returned to the hotel - - the next morning when I awoke the heaviness was still there. I just could not "shake it off."

I awoke my wife and told her that I thought that we needed to start back home - - and we were soon on our way. She - - wanting me to go to an emergency room - - and me wanting to get home to my own home and own doctors.

We arrived back home on Sunday afternoon after two days on the road.

Friends, I will not bore you with a litany of all of the tests that I underwent (just be thankful for good insurance). The bottom line was that there were no blocked arteries and no heart involvement at all! That was exceedingly good news!

After all of the tests were in, my doctor (who is an Internist and faithful United Methodist who knew what I had been through) told me that in his opinion that the primary cause of my symptoms was STRESS! He went on to say that stress will cause your body to initiate several defense strategies on its own to alarm you and get your attention!

After what happened the second week of General Conference - - I just thank God that I was at home and not in Cleveland (Wesley called it "prevenient grace"). The worst possible scenario happened!

- Demonstrations both outside and inside the auditorium at which dozens were arrested and taken off to jail.
- A woman threatening to jump out of the balcony onto the plenary floor.
- United Methodist Bishops taking public stands in opposition to the majority will of the General Conference and joining in the demonstrations and being arrested.
- A complete shutting down of a plenary session of the General Conference by demonstrators - - at which both Bishops and Delegates joined in and continued until they were arrested.
- Public Media (TV, Internet, etc.) instant coverage of all of this - - never covering the ministries that our church is engaged in around the world.
- Votes on the floor of the General Conference where there were lots of people who lost - - and lots of people who won in this "Holy War"

After Cleveland these good "God fearing" folks "un-circled the wagons" and headed back home. Back to their places of ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

As I observe the scene today, I see many camp fires ablaze out there where the cross and flame is lifted high. Places where people are being saved and healed - - places where somebody knows your name - - places where the Word of God is boldly proclaimed. "Saving Stations" for God's people.

But I also see the wagons beginning to circle again - - old "war room" maps are being studied again. Strategy sessions are being held and folks are being lined up - - "who will vote right" to be nominated for election as delegates to 2004 General Conference.

Friends, let me end this discussion where I began - -

"After all of our HOLY WARS all that are left over are dead bodies of those that God loves - - no winners, just dead bodies! "

A Jim Lane Commentary
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