



Has Armageddon Come to the Church?

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“Concerning the offense of the Gospel, nothing can do them good without disturbing them. And nothing will disturb them to any lasting effect unless it disturbs them deeply.” Paul Scherer

The late Bishop Ozro Thurston Jones, Bishop of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania of the Church of God in Christ was my primary theological mentor at age twenty two (22) during my first year as a student at Crozer Theological Seminary. He made sure that yours truly was nurtured in the fundamentals of our faith. *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard,, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life”* This is the same Word that keeps us from *“regarding iniquity in our hearts”* knowing that *“God will not hear us.”* It was from my mentor that I learned that the task of a theologian is to continually engage in the critical reflective clarification of the content of the Christian faith which would lead to sound doctrine that cannot be condemned. For decades my revered friend was our premier theologian and preacher. During the early eighties he preached a sermon about Armageddon (*arm ah GED un*)mountain of Megiddo. Scholars disagree about its exact location, but places it more likely between Mt Carmel and the city of Jezreel. This area is also known as the Valley of Esdraelon. Because of its military history, Megiddo became a symbol of the final conflict between God and the forces of evil. According to **Revelation 16:19**, *“the cup of the wine of the wrath of God”* will be poured out and the forces of evil will be defeated. All of this will take place at the end of history.

God also works on the edge of history. Bishop Jones argue that *“when conflict and things get so bad in the church, God will come down and fight Himself.”* During the COGIC 107th Convocation in St. Louis, Missouri a tough love message addressing homosexuality was delivered by Evangelist Earl Carter on Saturday evening. Ninety seven (97) percent of the sermon was tough, the three percent (3) consisted of what I deem as inappropriate language. The language was not only inappropriate, but was politically incorrect in the tradition of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Jesus Christ. John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees *“a generation of vipers”* (**Matthew 3: 7**); In (**Luke 24: 25**) Jesus called some people fools and yet forbids us to do so; hypocrites; blind guides, etc. Most of the prophets would have flunked the politically correct test imposed upon us by this godless age. The late Paul Scherer, professor of homiletics at Princeton and Union Seminaries talks about *“the offense of the Gospel”* in his classic book, **The Word God Sent** Here is the *“offense”* of the Gospel, says Scherer; *“not its wonder stories, which many would dismiss, and so have done with the whole fantastic business; but its persistent upsetting of our religious applectarts.”* The God with whom the Bible brings us face to face says Dr. Raymond Stamm, *“is not the source of rest, but the cause of unrest, not the simple purveyor of life’s goods.”* Instead, He is *“the One who often invades our lives by smashing life’s goods, not the kindly Father of our dreams who gently caresses our hands, but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whose only Son learned obedience through suffering.”*

The altar call that followed the message and the ensuing media blast has created a nightmare that has gone out of control. The statement issued by our presiding bishop appears to have disassociated him from what he terms as “*disrespectful and inappropriate statements*” by Evangelist Carter and apologized to the young man who claimed that he was delivered. All the social media and the public heard was the word “Apology.” The apology to Andrew Caldwell who claimed to have been delivered appears appropriate and does not represent a compromise of the Gospel in all fairness. The title of the video further complicates the problem. I have listened to the tape several times and did not hear an apology for homosexuality. The day our leadership apologizes for homosexuality, we would be compelled to apologize to the victims of pedophilia and a plethora of sexual assault cases which have been a continuing concern for the denomination. Let us be clear, the Church of God in Christ is not a gay affirming church similar to a core group of liberals in the Episcopal church. Homosexuality is classified as a sin of the flesh the same as fornication and adultery. Any form of censorship toward a tough love speaker would lead to regime politics, that leads by order to the exclusion of freedom which is the bedrock of Fascism. We are compelled by our Lord to love everyone and lead them to wholeness.

We should be mindful of an end time word from Paul in **2 Timothy 4:3v. ff.** “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears...And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*” In the Black prophetic tradition, we are starving for a prophetic word with substance that will challenge us to not only talk about justice in traditional symbolic ways and repeating what media pundits are saying, but how to navigate a complex world. Have we truly sought the Lord for a strategy of Justice that will be in place long after the media vultures have gone? As a trained independent researcher it was interesting after running media statistical data to note that the pro Carter response exceeded the pro administration response. The word of God insists that “*with loving kindness have I drawn thee.*”

Revelation 3:1 (LAB) “*To the leader of the church in Sardis write this letter...I know your reputation as a live and active church, but you are dead. Now wake up! Strengthen what little remains...for even what is left is at the point of death. Your deeds are far from right in the sight of God. Go back to what you heard and believed at first: Hold to it firmly and turn to me again. Unless you do I will come suddenly upon you, unexpectedly as a thief and punish you.*”

The Church at Sardis, similar to our situation today did not receive any commendation from our Lord. It was not a broken down building with members scattered and preacher ready to call it quits. It was busier than our Convocation, with committees galore, publicity events going full speed. It had a big name within ecumenical circles and at headquarters; a front, a façade; a form of godliness, but no power with God. He said, “*thou...art dead.*” We pray but God ignores our prayers; we inflate our numbers and step up church activities but not stirring ourselves to take hold of God. Bishop O.T. Jones Sr., says “when an organization boasts of a certain number of people, always cut the number in half.” Hopefully, there is time for repentance for appearing to be a market-driven religious empire. Having another traditional revival will not stave off Armageddon. A public relations campaign will not stave off Armageddon. But “*If my people which are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, I will forgive their sins and heal their land.*” (**2 Chronicles 7:14**)

1. I am calling for a prayer vigil for our entire leadership (tele-conference, personal, group, etc.)
2. Pray that our leadership will be sensitive to the Holy Spirit during this crisis.
3. Pray for a spiritual outpouring that will focus on our spiritual needs rather than our material wants.

Invitation to follow our blog at www.theagora.net. Pastor Charles Morgan who pastors a church in Florissant which is adjacent to Ferguson will provide a pastoral response to our crisis

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