

THE AGORA

A Radical Call to Authentic Unity

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Uniformity is not necessarily unity...please do not get them twisted. Wearing the same religious garb or uniform is merely uniformity. Unity evolves from within. Unity must be sought after and desired if it is to be realized within the Body of Christ and our nation. It is a totality of oneness derived from the human spirit. With such a totality there can even be unity in diversity. However, uniformity is like a forced march...one obeys because of rules, pressure and compulsion. Authentic unity takes place when we respect each other for who we are and provide an opportunity for respectful dialogue to hear what the Spirit is saying through each of us. As a denomination we are facing the end of an era. An era is a distinct period of history with a particular feature or characteristic. The new era appears to be pointing to the need for a shift in leadership. The leadership styles of the past will not fit the new emerging challenges of the present. Respectfully, no single leader will successfully lead our denomination apart from a radical shift in style. One does not pour new wine in old wineskins according to Jesus. The ferment of the new wine is too strong for old wineskins. New wineskins are needed. Radical new models of leadership are needed for our present situation.

Hopefully, the denomination will transition to term limits in response to a rallying cry from our COGIC base constituency for same. Several Traditional mainline Black denominations have successfully transitioned to term limits without major upheaval. When leaders are elected indefinitely they begin to substitute their limited authority for spiritual power. Lord Acton was correct – *“Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”* They argue that when leaders remain in office too long they often become selfish, self-serving and greedy. They confuse their term of office as a personal possession and not a great opportunity to serve God’s people through quality leadership. Our founding Chief Apostle Bishop CH Mason was never caught up in unnecessary power struggles, taking sides and being divisive. He was never accused of absolute power and a lustful greed for money. A prominent minister once told me a few years ago that *“whenever you place a price on your ministry you are getting ready to come down.”* Leadership should be focused on what can be done to unite us on a sinking ship. Prayer and radical action goes together. This is a challenge grounded in *“tough love.”*

Opponents of Jesus had manufactured a hostile accusation against him after casting out a demon from a man who could not speak. They claimed that Jesus received power from Satan, the king of demons. Jesus speared them with sharp rebuke and irony. Listen to his words: **Luke 11: 17ff** – *“He knew the thoughts of each of them, so he said, any kingdom filled with civil war is doomed; so is a home filled with argument and strife.”* (LBV) *“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth.”* (KJV) In the Account in Matthew and Mark the Pharisees were the opposition. In paraphrasing, *“Any Church filled with civil war is doomed.”* God cannot lie.

Poor leadership choices may thwart the Providence of God momentarily, but cannot defeat God’s will ultimately. Pray for leadership. Love and justice must go hand in hand. Leaders, beware! When the People of God, the Saints of God, the *Koinonia* Community begin to pray for leaders (including the Nation) and leadership by action and lifestyle goes against their prayers, you will be open to the judgment of God...God will remove you. With the chaos in our nation, may we as a Church lead the way toward an authentic unity that will evoke a smile from eternity. That Bishop Mason and our spiritual forbears will dance in glory.

May the Spirit use a verse from this hymn for our reflection as a Church and Nation in crisis -**Dear Lord and Father of Mankind**- *–Breathe through the heat(s) of our desires thy coolness and thy balm; Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire, speak through the earthquake, wind and fire, O still small voice of calm –* John Greenleaf Whittier, an American Quaker

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