

“Alea Jacta Est”

Julius Caesar reportedly uttered these words in 49 B.C., when he crossed the Rubicon, the river that divided Gaul from Italy, to wage war against General Pompey and the Senate of Rome. By proclaiming “the die is cast,” he coined a phrase that would forever mean that there is no turning back. The emperor’s words came to mind as I witnessed the unfolding of events at the 139th Convention of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. It is quite clear that, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, the Diocese is waging war against the Episcopal Church. Soldiers are in full battle gear, their chariots’ wheels are rolling and there will be no retreat. Whether the diocesan forces prove to be as successful in battle as were Caesar’s legions, however, remains to be seen.

The diocesan military strategy is well thought out. Its first act of war was to declare independence. This was done through the passage of a resolution which affirmed that the Diocese is no longer bound by the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church or the resolutions of its General Convention, if the Diocese deems that any such canon or resolution is “contrary to the historic Faith and Order of the one holy catholic and apostolic church.” I would suggest that a similar line of reasoning was one of the developments that led to the Civil War. Did not the Constitution of the Confederate States of America purport to establish a union in which each state acted “in its sovereign and independent power?”

Its second tactic has been to seek and identify new allies. This has been done through the Diocese’s affiliation with both the Network of Anglican Dioceses and Parishes and the bishops of the “Global South.” This latter group was represented at Convention in the personage of Henry Luke Orombi, Archbishop of Uganda, who has declared that the members of the Network are the only American Anglicans with whom he and his province are in communion. Another essential strategem in the Diocese’s bellicose activities is to hit the national church in its pocketbook. This was

accomplished by simply removing the “National Church” line item from the diocesan budget that was approved by Convention.

Next, the Convention succeeded in dissociating itself from policies, programs and people associated with the National Church. A resolution supporting the work of Episcopal Relief and Development (formerly the Presiding Bishop’s Fund for World Relief) was tabled indefinitely. This was not surprising since Bishop Duncan had launched the rival Anglican Relief and Development to provide an avenue for the Primate of Uganda and others to

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receive funding from sources outside of ECUSA’s structure. As one delegate described it: “When I give a dollar, I want the name of Jesus to travel with that dollar until it arrives at its destination. If you give to the National Church, the name of Jesus does not travel with that dollar.” A resolution supporting women priests met a similar fate, as delegates, including several women priests, argued that passage of the resolution would be offensive to those (e.g., many in the Network of Anglican Dioceses and Parishes) who oppose women’s ordination. In what Leslie Reimer described on the floor of Convention as the most poignant example of the Diocese’s break from the National Church, the delegates failed to elect the Very Reverend George Werner as a deputy to General Convention, in which he has represented the Diocese of Pittsburgh since 1979. This means that Dean Werner, president of the House of Deputies through the 2006 Convention, will be ineligible to run for re-election.

But no military campaign is complete without a surprise attack. That came in the last five minutes of the business session. After Bishop Duncan prayed that God would “give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions,” he announced that he may invoke a

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diocesan canon (XV, Section 6) which would have the effect of dissolving the relationship between Calvary Church and the Diocese and between St. Stephen's, Wilkinsburg and the Diocese. The reason we were singled out was that our parishes are plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the Bishop and other diocesan officers. Bishop Duncan has said that in filing suit against him we were being unfaithful to the Biblical injunctions contained in I Corinthians 6:1-8 and Matthew 5:25-26. It is not possible to delve into thorough exegeses of these passages here, but suffice it to say that in citing these passages out of context, the bishop succumbs to what Father Roger Ferlo, Biblical scholar and sometime rector of Redeemer, Squirrel Hill, describes as a "blinker Scripturalism." As the Windsor Report admonishes us: "We can no longer be content to drop random texts into arguments, imagining that the point is thereby proved." Moreover, the bishop's statement that "Scripture is the ultimate rule" is distinctly un-Anglican. While many Reformers, like Calvin, espoused a doctrine of *sola Scriptura* (only by Scripture) Anglicans since Richard Hooker have always understood Scripture to be one leg of the three-legged stool of Scripture, tradition and reason. Finally, I find it ironic that Bishop Duncan should challenge our right as Christians to participate in court proceedings. In 2001, Jane Dixon, bishop of Washington, sued the Reverend Samuel Edwards, rector of Christ Church, Accokeek, Maryland, demanding that he step down as rector because he had refused to recognize her as a bishop and because he would not give her a guarantee that he would keep the parish in the Episcopal Church. At that time, Bishop Duncan, although not named in the suit as a party to either plaintiff or defendant, filed a friend of the court brief on behalf of Father Edwards. (The court decided in favor of Bishop Dixon.)

The attack against Calvary and St. Stephen's is consistent with the anti-National Church theme of diocesan convention, because the sole basis of our lawsuit was and is to uphold the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church. Specifically, as has been widely reported, we objected to the decision on the part of the Diocese to defy those canons, giving to congregations who leave the Episcopal Church the right to take their property with them. It is this flagrant flaunting of church law that Bishop Duncan dismisses as "whatever the leadership's purported errors may be."

This development is fraught with questions. It is not entirely clear why the canon in question was created in

the first place. Although the bishop has stated that "the diocesan canons provide that the Convention may dissolve its connection to a parish in cases where there are egregious breaches of church faith or church order," these words are found nowhere in the canon itself*. What is the status of a parish thus dissolved? Of what larger entity, if any, would it become a part? Can two-thirds of the diocese vote us "off the island" simply because we are in disagreement? Is there any due process? As these matters are being sorted out, we have made an initial response in a press release, the text of which is found elsewhere in this issue.

No one relishes engaging in lawsuits. No one's idea of fun is fighting for our right to remain part of the Diocese. But on the other hand we cannot sit idly by while our Anglican birthright is sold for a mess of pottage of rather dubious nutritional value. As I write this, the church observes the feast of Leo the Great, bishop of Rome, a man who was no stranger to conflict, having had to defend Rome against Attila and his fellow Huns as well as the Vandals. In today's epistle, Paul admonishes Timothy: "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline" (II Tim. 1:6). For most of our lives, we have taken the church for granted. It has always been there for us, "a shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home." But that is a luxury we can ill afford at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The church is under siege, and there are those who would make it into little more than a sect, made up of people who believe that they and they alone can "profess and call themselves Christians." We must, as Paul further exhorts Timothy, relying on the power of God, be willing to bear testimony to the Lord while suffering, if necessary, for the sake of the Gospel. I believe that this is the mission to which Calvary Church is called at this time. What better way to mark our Sesquicentennial Year!

Faithfully, your rector and friend,



* *"The Convention may, by a two-thirds vote, dissolve its union with any Parish. Provided, however, that . . . notice of said proposed action shall have been given in the preceding Annual Convention."* – Canon XV, Sec. 6, *Canons of the Diocese of Pittsburgh*.