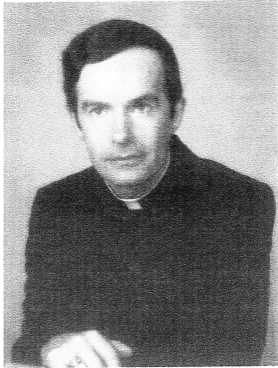




Chaplain's Corner, Hughes Camp Chaplain Richard W Rudd



This new year marks the fourth of a five-year commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the WBTS. Our reflections on this defining national event must include a reassessment of why the South lost the war. A review of the historical facts from a secular perspective tells us the South lost because it

was out-gunned and out-maneuvered. It is our review of the historical facts from a spiritual perspective that keeps this question alive on life support after 150 years. The moral character of leaders like Davis, Lee, and Jackson is incontrovertible. The effect of Christianity on southern culture continues to label the South as the Bible Belt, spiritual epicenter, conscience, and soul of America. So, if southerners placed their trust in God, why did God allow the Confederacy to collapse into the ashes of a bitter, humiliating defeat? In all wars, soldiers on both sides of a conflict are wounded, suffer, and die. But, why were civilians murdered, soldiers left to languish in Yankee prison camps, homes burned, possessions looted, and survivors castigated through the Occupation and beyond?

Most history books, especially textbooks published by liberal publishing houses, seek to propagandize the answer to this question for two reasons. First, the vanquished must be demonized as deserving of their plight. The exclusive focus only on the existence of slavery in the South provides a convenient catalyst for that purpose. Never mind that the issue of slavery was not motivating reason for the North's violent attack on southern states that only sought to depart in peace from the Union. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, benign in its effect on both the South and North, was the instrument used to formally inject the issue of slavery into the war two years after it started. Second, the North needed a justification for its actions, a thin veneer to make them appear reasonable and that all was in order at the conclusion of the war. The tragic result is that the South has been forced to suffer double victimization. It not only lost a war it did not provoke, but also bears the burden of blame for a war it did not want. The memories of

this have passed down through successive generations of southerners to linger in the catacombs of our minds; haunting specters that refuse to be exorcised and forgotten.

As God deals with nations (Ps. 66:7), so He deals with individuals (Prov. 5:21). Thus, the implications of an answer to the question of why a God-fearing Confederacy lost the war might also offer some semblance of rational explanation for the meaning of tragedies that, through no provocation on our part, present-day Christians continue to experience. This riddle, as old as Job, has been the plague of every generation. While there probably is no one definitive answer for every situation, each of us can and must search for and explore for ourselves the possibilities, one or a combination of which might give at least some solace for an itch that cannot seem to be scratched out of existence.

Our thoughts and ideas, although intangible and unseen, are no less real. Like the wind, their reality is seen in the effect they have on the visible world, on how we live and die. The facts associated with our experiences are neutral in value. It is our thoughts that characterize those facts and experiences as either tragedies or blessings. For example, the Cross, first viewed as a dreaded and reviled instrument of execution resulting in agonizing death, came to be venerated as an instrument of divine grace resulting in eternal life. For this reason, we should, like Solomon, ask God for "a wise and discerning mind." (I Kg. 3:9-12)

Where is God in the midst of our adversity? It is not for us to ask God to do what He has given us the capability to do for ourselves. It is by enduring adversity that we grow stronger through Christ. (II Cor. 12:10) Instead, we should seek courage and perseverance from God. "Our help is in the name of the Lord..." (Ps. 124:8) Whether we feel disgust or elation toward an experience is the result of God's inspiring ideas within us which provoke us to respond accordingly. That inspired response is God working in and through us. "We know that in all things God works for good..." (Rom. 8:28) Thus, the actions of an unseen God are made visible. The answer to where God is in the midst of tragedy I found not in an analytical dissection of

Continued on page 6...



Richard Rudd continued from page 5...

the facts about the events associated with a tragedy, but in our response to challenges, paradoxical situations, disappointment, the unexpected, pain, defeat, loss, even good fortune. If we focus on the tragedy and merely cope or acquiesce, we remain mired in the past. Neither we nor God can change the past. But, if we focus on the solution and take the initiative to develop an appropriate response, we can progress on to the future. God working through us can influence both the present and future. The present is where we are, not where we want to be. The future begins there, not where we were. A tragic experience can either demoralize and divide us, or energize, motivate, and unite us. It is our response to tragedy that determines its meaning. It is not what we react against, but what we live and work for that gives life meaning. Let us respond to life's tragedies in the spirit of St. Francis' prayer, "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace..." Then we will find peace of mind in our souls needed to face the inevitable tragedies of life.

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