

Peace on Earth in Redlands?

Bloodied bullets shattered the Peace in San Bernardino ironically just shy of December 7th, Pearl Harbor Day. We are shocked and saddened that this massacre was actually staged from Redlands, my home town. We are tempted to despair, like those reeling from the Civil War's brutal carnage. The poet Longfellow expressed national anguish in verse still sung as a carol in remembrance of Christ's Nativity. "There is no peace on earth ... For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Such pessimism contrasts with Redlands' nostalgia before the Korean War shattered post WWII optimism. Graduates parade into Redlands Bowl in cadence with strains of "Pomp and Circumstance" for diplomas. The Bowl Prosellis inscription looming above us declares: "WITHOUT VISION A PEOPLE PERISH." A trophy case outside Latin class reminds "Omnis veritas ad deum ducit" (Every truth leads to God). Each December, Redlands' churches, centered around "church corners," celebrate the Nativity with festive carols.

Sadly, the abbreviated Prosellis inscription easily reduces Proverbs 29:18 to an empty platitude. Solomon's full injunction reads "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Indeed, Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount exhorts his disciples to "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

Sepia-colored nostalgia further distorts 1950s reality in Redlands, San Bernardino, California and the USA. Celebrated Nativity scenes often obscure the fact that Joseph was an impoverished tax payer. We also gloss over King Herod's slaughter of Bethlehem's toddler boys in his futile effort to kill Jesus, "king of the Jews," whom Wise Men had come to worship. Their rich gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh were literally a life saver for Joseph's family. They funded escape into Egypt and helped Joseph set up shop until Herod died.

Like Bethlehem, Redlands and small towns across America suffer from state sanctioned killing of children. Families are further ravaged by ruinous taxation and inflation. Children and grandchildren are ever at risk of drugs and school violence. And, now families are perforce on terrorist alert in the Inland Empire.

Nevertheless, the angel's proclamation of Christ's Nativity still summons God's people to "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Let us join Longfellow in choral conclusion that

"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

We still have more than ample reasons to sing "Joy to the world! The Lord has come. Let earth receive her King! Let ev'ry heart prepare him room. And heaven and nature sing." May we all be blessed in 2016.

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