

The Christian Response to Fear.

St. Columbus P. Ch.

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John 20 vs 19-26; 1 John 4: 17-21.

For those of us who follow closely the events and developments in our society and in our country the past week or so has supplied us very graphically with two illustrations of the phenomenon of fear and the way in which people respond to it:

1. The first illustration is the foundation of the Afrikaner Volkswag (The People's Watch of the Afrikaner) and the shockwaves of fear which its launching in the Skilpadsaal, ^{the} (Tortoise Hall) sent through the white community of S.A. - especially through the ranks of the white Afrikaners.

2. The second illustration is much less dramatic - but I believe ^{in the long run} more profound, and is contained in an in-depth article which appeared in yesterday morning's

R.D. Mail on the effect a nuclear bomb would have on Gaby and surroundings if dropped on the Carlton Centre in Jhbq.

Why do I choose these two, seemingly unrelated illustrations? Because both these issues illustrate very clearly

to what extremes communities and nations are willing to go if driven by fear. In the case of the Afrikaner-volkswag it illustrates dramatically and forcibly the deeprooted fears and anxieties which the ultra-conservative section of Afrikanerdom harbours towards the Blacks in view of their belief of the threat which Black advancement poses to the heritage, the identity

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and the future existence of the African nations.

In the case of the nuclear bomb this article, ~~following~~ ^{in ser.} the showing of the film The Day After, is reflecting the growing fear of millions of people around the world of the terrible but realistic possibility of the ability of the heads of two nations to destroy the lives of millions of people (if not of mankind as a whole) by simply pushing a single button - and this means these two nations, the Americans & the Russian, fear each other's power more than anything else on earth.

In both cases the root cause, the basic ~~reason~~ ^{drive} ~~dis-~~ ting the actions of a group or a nation is fear. Don't you think the time is long overdue for us as Christians ^{in SA} to ask ourselves a few honest, down-to-earth questions ^{about the existence of plans or ~~inst~~} in the light of events and developments amongst us and around us? // Allow me to pose 4 basic questions which we as Christians ~~have~~ should ask ourselves if we wish to take our Christian faith seriously:

- (1) What is the nature of these fears? How do we ~~not expect~~ ^{recognise} them as such?
- (2) How widespread and how serious are such fears?
- (3) What effect do such fears have on our personal lives, our communal relations?
- (4) What is the Christian response to such fears? Can they be overcome by our Christian faith? If so how?

(1) The nature: It would be foolish to disregard the reality of fear ^{which exists} in the life of every human being especially the 3 basic fears: the fear of physical suffering, the fear of emotional pain & agony, the fear of the unknown.

(2) The extent: There is not a single aspect of human life where fear in some or other form does not exert some influence. For us as individuals there is the fear for the safety of our own lives and those of our dear ones, the fear of losing our livelihood, our health, our friends, our freedom, our basic rights. There is the fear which one cultural or racial group harbours towards the other in our country - do I really need to spell it out?

(3) The effect: Physically, as any medical doctor with his/her eyes will tell you, millions of people suffer the ^{physical} effects of many forms of fear; emotionally, as any psychiatrist or pastoral psychologist will point out to you, fear causes emotional havoc in creating and nurturing suspicion, mistrust, estrangement, hostility, enmity leading to conflict and ^{disunity} ~~disunity~~; politically and economically, ~~as~~ as any political or economic scientist knowledgeable about his subject will tell you, it creates tension, alienation, bitterness, warfare & death with all the resultant effects of poverty, hunger, unemployment and suffering.

A kind illustration of this process is to be found in the passage read: The disciples behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Fear ~~sets~~ ^{sets} down, erects barriers,

separates ~~excludes~~ people, increases mistrust. For in locking the door one does not only exclude the party one fears from entering but one also ~~prevents~~ ^{prevents} oneself from communicating with the person or party you fear.

(4) Christian response: Christ is in no way detained by this climate of fear. Truly he moves in and out. When he enters he does so with the key message which strikes a devastating blow against the fear prevailing amongst the disciples: "Peace be with you!" although this expression is the traditional way of Jews greeting each other it obtains a much deeper meaning & significance i.e. that through his love which he so unreservedly gave in life and death he established the true peace between all men & all nations: "Peace be with you!"

What does this imply? Christ is telling his disciples - all his disciples of all times - that through the power of his love he has destroyed the evil effects of fear. "Perfect love", John says, "banishes all fear" and where love has become the dominant motivating force in a human life, fear dis- appears and peace is established. Through this new motivation, meaningful communication is again being built, barriers of prejudice and enmity are demolished and reconciliation achieved.

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Therefore, the Christian response to racial fear
cannot be that of the Afrikanerboers;
nor can it be that of peace treaties with
surrounding countries unless we first face
the fears and injustices amongst ourselves in
our own country; neither can it be on
a global scale, the setting up and use of
nuclear missiles by the big powers

In the last instance the answer lies not
with others, but with ourselves: What do
I do to discover and to resolve my own
fears? And to assist others to resolve
theirs?