

a paper:

ON DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH

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PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to consider how to best deal with difficult people in The Church.

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SYNOPSIS

There are two extremes of dealing with disruptive, pathologically antagonistic people within The Church, neither of which are generally appropriate in most cases: total confrontation or total surrender. We shall consider two authors, one who advocates a more aggressive approach, while another advocates a more gentle approach. The first book is by Kenneth Haugk, “Antagonists in The Church.” The second book is by Marshall Shelley, “Well Intentioned Dragons.”

In truth, both authors offer sound Christian insight and advice in dealing with difficult people and conflicts within The Body of CHRIST. We may most happily see each on opposite ends of a spectrum and seek, under The LORD’s Spirit, to be flexible enough to seek the “Via Media” – the most appropriate “Middle Ground” – between the two extremes of total confrontation and total surrender. At times we may need to be more towards one end of the spectrum, and at other times more towards the other end.

EPIGRAPH

“Put on therefore, as the elect of GOD, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as CHRIST forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of GOD rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one Body; and be ye thankful.” COLOSSIANS 3:12-15 [KJV]

DEDICATION

To the early Churchman Pachomius, who said that, “To save souls, you must bring them together” within Christian community.¹

¹ 1, Shelley, Well Intentioned Dragons, p 148, paragraph 3.

I. INTRODUCTION

There are no perfect Christians in this life. We struggle towards the holiness, charity and perfection that The Lord would have us be. Nor are there any perfect Churches on earth. We as The Church Militant in this world struggle together towards the holiness, charity and perfection that our Lord calls us to. We run towards our Eternal crown together, in community, as The Body of CHRIST. And as we do, there are times when all of us will stumble and fall.

There are times when all of us will cause our brethren to stumble and fall. Strife and friction, even among the saints of GOD, reminds us that we are still human and effected by sin. As Saint Paul says in I CORINTHIANS 15:57, “But thanks be to GOD, Which giveth us the victory through our Lord JESUS CHRIST!”² We forgive one another, seek the forgiveness of The Lord and learn to live in communion with GOD and each another in Christian love. This is not always easy, but it is what GOD calls us to.

A problem arises however, when we encounter certain pathological personalities and their behaviors within The Church that seek by nature to engage in strife and argument constantly. These are they who have innate behavior patterns that bring dissention and disagreement, as the physical body breathes air with each breath, even within The Church. These difficult personalities we may term “dragons.” This raises some basic questions: What is an antagonistic “dragon” personality? The questions that follow are these: How can we identify dormant dragons? How should The Church handle dormant dragons in her midst? How can we identify active dragons? How should The Church handle active dragons in her midst? What conclusions should we draw?

To attempt an answer to these questions we will consider the advice of two authors, both Christians. Kenneth Haugk, a clinical psychologist,³ offers strong counsel, “Antagonistic individuals require a firm response” in The Church with a “tough love” in CHRIST of both “care and hope.”⁴ Marshall Shelley, a seminary graduate and a senior editor of a journal of leadership, offers a more gentle approach to dealing with antagonists, advising that such people are usually not intentionally destructive to The Church, but are rather “often zealous Christians, lifelong Church members [and] strong personalities.”⁵

II. WHAT IS AN ANTAGONISTIC “DRAGON” PERSONALITY?

Kenneth C. Haugk, in “Antagonists in The Church,” begins by defining an “antagonist” as one “...who wantonly, selfishly and destructively attack others.”⁶ We must distinguish antagonism from healthy criticism, conflict and disagreement within The Church. Healthy conflict is disagreement and debate carried on in an honorable Christian manner in appropriate times and places within The Church. Antagonism is

² 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 15:57.

³ 3, Haugk Antagonists in The Church, p 11, paragraph 3. “Preface.”

⁴ 3, Ibid, p 12, paragraph 1-2.

⁵ 1, Shelley, Well Intentioned Dragons, p 9, paragraph 2. “Forward.”

⁶ 3, Haugk, Antagonists in The Church, p 21, paragraph 2.

“unhealthy conflict” carried on in a distinctly dishonorable and un-Christian manner.⁷ Haugk offers this more exact definition:

“Antagonists are individuals who, on the basis of nonsubstantive evidence, go out of their way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in a leadership capacity.”⁸

Now if The Church is The Body of CHRIST, and The Lord her Head, then every part of The Body is necessary to function. When one part becomes nonfunctional or dies, the entire Body suffers. As it the human body, so also in The Body of CHRIST, as Paul says in I CORINTHIANS 12:26-27, “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are The Body of CHRIST, and members in particular.”⁹

Haugk sees the attacks of such people on others within The Body of CHRIST as like the attack of a bacterial disease upon one organ of the human body. The rest of the body is at peril if that one organ, as a result of the infection, becomes sick or dies. And the entire body is at risk of being likewise infected with the contagion. The entire body and its immune system must therefore respond to combat the attacking micro-organism, lest that one organ and the entire body is rendered sick or dies. Therefore Haugk holds the antagonist’s attack within The Body of CHRIST as “an attack by hostile forces on the very life of The Church. All must work together to repel the attack.”¹⁰

Shelley, in “Well Intentioned Dragons,” observes that people can criticize others, give strong opinions and disagree with each other and not be pathological or disruptive by nature. But those who may be called “dragons” commonly “have a spirit that enjoys being an adversary rather than an ally. They have a consistent pattern of focusing on a narrow special interest.” Therefore their focus is on one or a few “narrow special interest” issues, which is manifested in a highly unbalanced Church life.¹¹

Shelley sees the primary symptom of the presence of such people in The Church as divisiveness. Because antagonistic dragon personalities have “a spirit quick to vilify and slow to apologize,” they typically “cannot bring themselves to accept responsibility for something that has gone wrong, and hence, they resist asking anyone’s forgiveness.”¹² As Paul says in I TIMOTHY 5:24, “Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.”¹³

⁷ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 21, paragraph 4.

⁸ 3, *Ibid.*, p 21, paragraph 5 – p 22.

⁹ 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 12:26-27.

¹⁰ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 24, paragraph 1.

¹¹ 1, Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p 41, paragraph 3.

¹² 1, *Ibid.*, p 41, paragraph 4.

¹³ 2, KJV, I TIMOTHY 5:24.

Therefore we are to look, not only at people's words, but their deeds, interactions with others and their effect upon The Church congregation. When one is vexed with a spirit of constant strife and criticism of others, the fruits yielded are lingering hard feelings, division of people into camps over issues that are either intangible or non-foundational to The Faith, a tense air between brethren, low morale, even a sense of corporate depression and stifling of enthusiasm for The Church's mission.¹⁴

III. THE WORKS OF THE FLESH VERSUS THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Let us again turn to Saint Paul. Christians are suppose to be filled, and being ever in the process of rebirth unto holiness in The Lord, by The HOLY SPIRIT. Now we don't want to go about judging who is "truly saved" and who is not. That is GOD's province alone. And we must realize that some pathological personalities may, in extreme cases, be mentally ill. But we can see in GALATIANS 5:19-23 the life of he who is filled with the spirit of the world versus The Spirit of GOD:

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit The Kingdom of GOD. But the fruit of The Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."¹⁵

Haugk is less charitable towards antagonistic personalities, the more pathological, the less so. Such people he sees as serving evil spiritual forces – often willingly and happily – that desire the destruction of The Church and the vexation of GOD's people in every way. This may indeed be the case at times with antagonists, but is it the rule? Apart from CHRIST living in us and our submission to Him, Paul says in ROMANS 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."¹⁶ Shelley looks upon "dragon" personalities within The Church as themselves broken sheep that need firm guidance and earnest love to reclaim them. Haugk sees them as internal infections of the devil that must be contained and cut out of The Body with radical surgery.

As Haugk says, "deep within every daughter of Eve and son of Adam lurks the desire to be one's own god, intense and burning, like a hidden coal" – flaming up in the works of the flesh and suppressing the fruits of The Spirit. Pathological antagonists "tend this fire and nourish it regularly by brooding on past injuries, present suspicions and future insecurities." Such people, even within The Church, care nothing of Christian healing and forgiveness, but only of "getting the upper hand [and] getting even."¹⁷ Such people are "in the grip of evil forces [and] they enjoy it! What the suprahuman forces of

¹⁴ 1, Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p 41, paragraph 6.

¹⁵ 4, NKJV, GALATIANS 5:19-23.

¹⁶ 2, KJV, ROMANS 7:18.

¹⁷ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 42, paragraph 4 – p 43.

darkness plant, the antagonist's sinful human nature [in the flesh] incubates and brings to hideous birth."¹⁸

Yes, the flocks of GOD need protecting by the appointed Shepherds, who stand in The Person of CHRIST, from wolves from both without and within. But often the seeming wolves from within are in truth injured sheep, themselves in need of ministry, guidance, encouragement and Divine Mercy administered by The Church. As The Catechism of The Catholic Church says, "The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of The HOLY SPIRIT."¹⁹ Even the most hardcore "dragon," if he belongs to CHRIST, has working in him The Spirit of GOD to bring forth "wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of The Lord."²⁰ The Church is called to help even the antagonistic members of her Body to grow in holiness in CHRIST!

IV. HOW CAN WE IDENTIFY DORMANT DRAGONS?

Shelley gives some thought to the breeding grounds for potential antagonists in The Church that especially a new clergyman should be alert to and be wary of: one's strongest initial supporters, especially those who were influential in calling you to that particular congregation, as their expectations are greater;²¹ those who "work overhard initially at befriending you;" those who constantly compare you to a former Pastor;²² strong, dominant personalities in a Church where "formal authority and power structure don't match the informal power grid;"²³ parishioners who have become exceeding hostile to you as a result of formally counseling them; those who have "sensed a call to the ministry at one time," but are not serving in any way now.²⁴

Haugk classifies antagonist personalities into 3 classes – hard-core; major; moderate. But caution should be taking in labeling people into such boxes, as this might easily prejudice CHRIST's call to love them – even problem people – as He loves us.²⁵ Further, not all conflict is unhealthy or antagonistic. Further, everyone – even Christians – act "antagonistically" at one time or another. For "isolated antagonistic behaviors do not make an antagonist."²⁶ Further, activists are not necessarily antagonists. An activist is "issue-oriented," devoted to a particular cause because they genuinely care about changing society for the better. An antagonist is "person-oriented," focused on ongoing

¹⁸ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 43 paragraph 1.

¹⁹ 5, *Catechism of The Catholic Church*, # 1830, p 502. "The Gifts and Fruits of The HOLY SPIRIT."

²⁰ 5, *Ibid.*, # 1831, p 502.

²¹ 1, Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p 42, paragraph 2 & 5. "Habitation of Dragons."

²² 1, *Ibid.*, p 42, paragraph 2 & 5.

²³ 1, *Ibid.*, p 44, paragraph 6.

²⁴ 1, *Ibid.*, p 45, paragraph 2 & 6.

²⁵ 2, KJV, JOHN 13:34, "A new Commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

²⁶ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 30, paragraph 2.

problems with individuals, seemingly never able to or interested in bringing conflict to a peaceful resolution.²⁷

Class I are “hard-core antagonists,” who are “seriously disturbed” mentally ill people. They are “psychotic – out of touch with reality,” which “is almost always of the paranoid variety.” Such people can “appear normal some (or even most) of the time.” They present as having “incredible tenacity and an unbelievable desire to make trouble.”²⁸ And we may reasonably add, such people are potentially a physical danger to others.

Class II are “major antagonists,” who are generally “not as severely disturbed as hard-core antagonists,” but show similar behaviors at times.²⁹ These are people with a personality disorder” who often “carry a great deal of hostility, coupled with an overwhelming drive for power.” They are not psychotic, being fully in touch with reality. But their dysfunctions are “deep-seated,” coupled with little to no anxiety or guilt over their actions and the pain they cause others. They thus generally have no great desire to change.³⁰

Class III are “moderate antagonists.” They do not seek out opportunities for conflict, but may become antagonists if the opportunity is clear and close.³¹ They generally lack “the perseverance” of Class I and II antagonists for ongoing conflict. Their personality dysfunctions are generally of a much lower intensity. However, “they do make good followers of hard-core and major antagonists.”³²

Identifying the intensity of a possible antagonist’s personality dysfunctions may help clergy and Church leaders be on the alert for dragon-like behavior from such people. Haugk further identifies about 20 “red flags” that such people may wave at various times.³³ The more flags that are waved, the higher should be the state of alert, as the more likely such people have antagonistic tendencies. But while there is some validity to such

²⁷ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 30, paragraph 1.

²⁸ 3, *Ibid.*, p 27, paragraph 1-2. “Hard-Core Antagonists.”

²⁹ 3, *Ibid.*, p 28, paragraph 1. “Major Antagonists.”

³⁰ 3, *Ibid.*, p 29, paragraph 1.

³¹ 3, *Ibid.*, p 29, paragraph 1. “Moderate Antagonists.”

³² 3, *Ibid.*, p 29, paragraph 1 – p 30.

³³ 3, *Ibid.*, p 70 – 78, Chapter 8, “Red Flags of Antagonism.” Several of these “red flags” together in one person may indicate a potential antagonist: a previous track record of antagonistic conflicts; current parallel antagonistic conflicts in other areas of life; naming of anonymous, confidential supporters; denouncing of your predecessor; being immediately over-friendly; the giving of excessive praise to you; the constant catching of others in errors; disarming charm and liability; chronic Church hopping due to dissatisfaction; lying; use of inappropriately aggressive means in life to attain one’s ends; conspicuous giving of money or gifts to The Church; taking of notes at inappropriate times; the carrying about of files of alleged evidence to support one’s charges; the constant use of cruel and cutting language, jokes and putdowns against others; chronic refusal to work within established policies and under established authorities; constant and insatiable questioning or suggesting; excessive focus on a particular cause; ongoing bragging of accomplishments in “the school of hard knocks;” those on the losing side of prolonged and bitter disputes.

analysis, there is also the danger of straying into the position of judging the hearts and thoughts of fellow brethren in The Lord.

Haugk offers, after offering these categories of red flags, “Avoid making any snap judgments about individuals. But do remember that, for the sake of the congregation, individuals in it, and GOD’s mission and ministry, discernment is necessary.”³⁴ As David says in PSALM 7:8-11, “The LORD shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me. Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for The righteous GOD trieth the hearts and reins. My defence is of GOD, Which saveth the upright in heart. GOD judgeth the righteous, and GOD is angry with the wicked every day.”³⁵

V. HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH HANDLE DORMANT DRAGONS?

Shelley reminds us that The Church and every Christian “is an odd combination of self-sacrificing saint and self-serving sinner.” The Church does not choose her members. GOD does. We must remember that The Church “is an assembly of all who profess themselves believers in JESUS CHRIST as Lord and Savior. The Church, and those who minister in her Name, are called to care for all the members of her Body under JESUS The Head, “even those whose breath is tainted with dragon smoke!”³⁶ Remember the counsel of GOD which Paul gave to the elders of The Ephesian Church in ACTS 20:28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed The Church of GOD, which He hath purchased with His own Blood!”³⁷

The Minister of GOD must seek to understand all the sheep in The Lord’s fold, even ones who are snarling and billowing clouds of antagonism, in fear and trembling before CHRIST, with bold love and firm guidance. The clergyman must help such sheep to cut through clouded emotions to the logic of GOD’s will. And if the sheep cries out, “I’m not being fed!” then we must see if their hunger is perceived or real. Find out who they are, what their joys and burdens are, what they are struggling with. Offer them earnest Christian fellowship, open friendly discussion, Biblical solutions, sound theology and calm reason.³⁸ Lead them to the pastures which they both need and hunger for.

Assess if this parishioner and The Church would benefit from this person serving in some way in the congregation that is meaningful to them and uplifting to The Body of CHRIST. Find out where they may have served in The Church successfully before and guide them into a similar place of service. A loud, aggressive personality is not a qualification for ministry, but if the loud aggressiveness is due to feelings of frustration or isolation, this may be an opportunity to lead that sheep into a place of healing and

³⁴ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 78, paragraph 1. Conclusions, Chapter 8, “Red Flags of Antagonism.”

³⁵ 2, KJV, PSALM 7:8-11.

³⁶ 1, Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p 48, paragraph 5.

³⁷ 2, KJV, ACTS 20:28.

³⁸ 1, Shelly, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p 47, paragraph 4-5.

becoming a blessing to others. Shelley counsels, “If you can tap the cause of the frustration, help them recognize it, and love them in spite of their abrasiveness, they can be transformed from dragons to highly motivated allies” and faithful servants of The Cross!³⁹

Haugk calls a different approach to such dormant problem personalities in The Church - the putting up of barbed wire and the manning of the trenches: First, act professionally at all times, to be “consistent, responsible and self-controlled.”⁴⁰ Let the antagonist respect you and he may be less likely to attack you. Second, keep your distance.⁴¹ As The Lord says in MATTHEW 7:6, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”⁴² Third, be accurate and do not guess about anything, because “antagonists are delighted by opportunities to prove others wrong.” They thrive on searching out opportunities to catch others in errors.⁴³

Fourth, avoid excessive positive reinforcement. Care is called for to not raise an antagonist’s self view too high, as this “feeds the emotional power base from which he or she will launch an attack on you or another leader” and “make[s] it easier for them to build a strong following.”⁴⁴ Fifth, tighten your grips on the reins of power and authority. Work to keep such people from positions of leadership and power in the congregation, as such roles “can provide a springboard for the antagonists to create trouble more easily.” Such concerns should be clearly stated to Church boards about such people.⁴⁵

Sixth, hold onto your gauntlet. Don’t enter into open confrontation with such people, unless and until their disruptive behavior is truly significant, lest other Church leaders see you as belligerent and abusive of your power.⁴⁶ Seventh, hold your tongue and await the appropriate time and place to effectively respond. An antagonist receives satisfaction from his attack only when the person he attacks shows discomfort and “respond[s] in kind – with insults, fists or tears.”⁴⁷ Eighth, don’t recommend counseling to an antagonist. This kind of personality “very rarely follow[s] through on the referral” because they view everyone else as wrong and themselves as right. Such a recommendation also places such people on the defensive, “backing them into a corner,” which may “almost guaranteeing that they will lash out at you.”⁴⁸

³⁹ 1, Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p 46, paragraph 6.

⁴⁰ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 107, paragraph 1. “Act Professionally.”

⁴¹ 3, *Ibid.*, p 107, paragraph 1 – p 108. “Keep Your Distance.”

⁴² 2, KJV, MATTHEW 7:6.

⁴³ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 108, p 108, paragraph 1. “Be Accurate.”

⁴⁴ 3, *Ibid.*, p 109, paragraph 1. “Avoid Excessive Positive Reinforcement.”

⁴⁵ 3, *Ibid.*, p 109, paragraph 1-2. “Tighten The Reins.”

⁴⁶ 3, *Ibid.*, p 110, paragraph 2. “Hold Onto Your Gauntlet.”

⁴⁷ 3, *Ibid.*, p 110, paragraph 2. “Hold Your Tongue.”

⁴⁸ 3, *Ibid.*, p 112, paragraph 2. “Don’t Recommend Counseling.”

VI. HOW CAN WE IDENTIFY ACTIVE DRAGONS?

Returning to the disease model, Haugk identifies 6 early and 10 late symptoms or “warning signs” that an antagonist’s attack against your another Church leader is under way. The presence of these symptoms in those who have been waving several “red flags” of being an antagonism call for a high degree of suspicion. The more the “warning signs” and the deeper their intensity, combined with the greater number of such “red flags,” the more like likely the disease is in an active stage.

As to such early warning signs: a sudden chill in relations with a formerly cordial person; the sudden bringing of “concerns,” as anger coated with honey, to your attention; the constant asking of picky minor questions; the mobilizing of forces, gathering support and creating discord; meddling in areas that are not the concern of that person; growing resistance to and asserting of independence from your authority and leadership.⁴⁹

As to Haugk’s later warning sings: use of emotionally laden slogans; spying on your activities, schedule, conversations, etc; misquoting Scripture to support their case; giving of “the kiss of Judas” to the person being attacked by a “friend” who becomes antagonistic “for your own good;” inappropriate smirking in the presence of the person being attacked; constant pestering of Church leaders; ongoing letter writing to Church officials; making pretense of self portrayal as a champion or underdog; lobbying with small groups within a congregation.⁵⁰

But are the saints of GOD to be reduced to a disease state or infectious intruder when they become antagonistic, even the most difficult personality? Is not The Almighty in the business, not only of saving souls, but also in changing lives? People can change, even the most obstinate. Not by mere human hands, but only by the finger of GOD’s Spirit working to rebirth and renew us from within, cleaning the inside of the cup of our very being, that the outside might become more and more holy. We are saved when we are saved, but the fruits of The Spirit and the Christian virtues take time to bring forth. We are remolded into The Likeness of CHRIST over time. It is a prize that needs to be sought after diligently by men and cared for lovingly by The Church. As Saint Augustine says:

“Love is itself the fulfillment of all our [Christian] works. There is the goal; that is why we run; we run toward it, and once we reach it, in it we shall find [true] rest,” which can only be in The LORD!⁵¹

⁴⁹ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 80-83. Chapter 9, “Warning Signs and How to Recognize Them,” 6 early warning signs that an antagonist’s attack is under way.

⁵⁰ 3, *Ibid.*, p 83-85. Chapter 9, “Warning Signs and How to Recognize Them,” 10 late warning signs that an antagonist’s attack is under way.

⁵¹ 5, *Catechism of The Catholic Church*, # 1829, p 502. “Charity.”

VII. HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH HANDLE ACTIVE DRAGONS?

Both Haugk and Shelley would agree, that one argument or disagreement within a Church congregation, even a vehement one, does not a dragon make. It is rather the constant, ongoing, chronic destructiveness of dysfunctional antagonistic “dragon” personalities that the Shepherds of GOD’s people need to protect The Body of CHRIST from. Both Haugk and Shelley would counsel Church authorities in such cases, “Here is a wolf in the midst of the flock, from whom the flock needs to be protected!”

But Haugk would say further, “Do so with forthright warfare!” And then he would add, “And if necessary, cast out the wolf into utter darkness and let the devil take them!” But Shelley would say further, “Here is a wolf from which the flock needs to be protected from as gently as possible.” And then he would add, “And if possible, we will keep the wolf in the sheepfold of The Church, for he is a work in progress by GOD’s Spirit to remake him as a sheep.” So how do we handle antagonistic persons within The Church who are actively attacking The Body from within, creating ungodly distress, disease and posing potentially life threatening insult? Shall we beat them into submission in direct combat? Or shall we love them with gentle, but if needed, escalating firm correction? Or can we employ both as needed within a reasonable and flexible range?

Shelly offers this advice before all else, “When attacked by a dragon, do not become one” yourself! To paraphrase John Claypool, “if I become a beast in order to overcome a beast, all that reigns is beastliness.”⁵² The goal is often in business and politics to win at all costs and with whatever measures necessary. But this is certainly not the standard for the Christian response! The conceits of man’s vanity are the norm in the world of the lost, but should not be so within The Kingdom of GOD on earth, The Church! As Paul warns in ROMANS 12:17, “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”⁵³

Shelly reminds us, that the objective is not the destruction of an enemy as an army seeks to kill the soldiers of an opposing army, but rather to glorify CHRIST and be His instrument in evangelizing the lost and keeping the saints on The Way of The Cross. The Shepherds of GOD’s people and those in authority in The Church are called to protect the flock. We are also called to return the wayward wolf back to GOD’s pastures whenever possible. “The job of a CHRIST-one is to live His Way” and not the world’s way.⁵⁴

Let us be clear - this does not call for surrender to those who injure others and themselves with the works of the flesh in The Church! Paul says in ROMANS 12:21, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”⁵⁵ Being and doing “good” does not mean surrender to evil. But “our fears must be exchanged for Faith, which makes possible genuine love for enemies, love even for dragons.”⁵⁶ So as Christians and especially as Church leaders, “We are to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves,

⁵² 1, Shelley, Well Intentioned Dragons, p 61, paragraph 2-3.

⁵³ 2, KJV, ROMANS 12:17.

⁵⁴ 1, Shelley, Well Intentioned Dragons, p 61, paragraph 4.

⁵⁵ 2, KJV ROMANS 12:21.

⁵⁶ 1, Shelly, Well Intentioned Dragons, p 62.

steetwise peacemakers, compassionate confronters, and above all, patient disciples who understand that GOD can redeem even the worst situation for His Glory!”⁵⁷

Haugk’s prescription for handling antagonists differs: First, “take note of antagonists in the congregation,” those who cause strife continually, and watch them actively.⁵⁸ Second, deal wisely and prudently with such people.⁵⁹ Third, call such people clearly and openly what they are in the “white light of truth”⁶⁰ and cry “Wolf!” when necessary.⁶¹ Fourth, confront directly - first privately, then in the company of one or two witnesses, then before the congregation’s governing body.⁶² Fifth, shun, discipline and expel if necessary the offending person from The Church.⁶³ Sixth, be ever ready to forgive fully, readmitting the offending brother or sister back into full fellowship when there is confession and repentance. For GOD is ever ready to forgive all sinners!⁶⁴

Haugk advises using this Biblical prescription firmly, caringly and lovingly, always aiming “to reclaim one who continually chooses to reject GOD’s love, for the good of that person and...” The Church.⁶⁵ But he warns, “Forgiveness is not license for an antagonist to continue behavior injurious to the welfare of The Church, however, nor is it an escape from the clear principles of discipline laid out in MATTHEW 18:15-17.”⁶⁶ “That discipline is called into action when someone continues to sin, and it moves forward inexorably if the person does not cease.”⁶⁷

VIII. FORGIVING BUT NOT FORGETTING

After the battles have been fought and the dust has settled in The Church, what then? Let us first understand what Christian forgiveness is not. Shelley is helpful here: First, it is “not giving in and agreeing with them,” nor sacrificing the truth. Second, it is not “giving them our complete trust – they may not be trustworthy.” Third, it is not forgetting. We must remember antagonistic behaviors of the past in such people, forgive

⁵⁷ 1, Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p 62, paragraph 1.

⁵⁸ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 46, paragraph 1 – page 47. “Treatment for Antagonism.”

⁵⁹ 3, *Ibid.*, p 47, paragraph 1.

⁶⁰ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 46, paragraph 4.

⁶¹ 3, *Ibid.*, p 48.

⁶² 2, KJV, MATTHEW 18:15-17a.

⁶³ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 18:17b.

⁶⁴ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 49, paragraph 2.

⁶⁵ 3, *Ibid.*, p 48, paragraph 2.

⁶⁶ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 18:15-17, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto The Church: but if he neglect to hear The Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

⁶⁷ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 50, paragraph 1.

them in the present and thus be better able to love them and prevent repeat occurrences in the future.⁶⁸

Haugk holds the themes of forgiveness but not forgetting in much stronger tension in the aftermath of Church conflict. This he sees as necessary because “there is no such thing as a ‘former’ or ‘past’ antagonist. A more accurate term might be ‘antagonist in remission.’” He counsels to, by all means, forgive the antagonist. But he also counsels The Church to be watchful of these same individuals, because – as he sees it – “relapse is extremely common with antagonists.”⁶⁹ Therefore, Haugk’s final counsel is this:

“Be cautious. Don’t be surprised by relapses to antagonism and, of course, you and other [Church] leaders need to do all you can to prevent this from happening. You will want to combine your duty of being watchful with your responsibility to pray for the antagonist.”⁷⁰ For “you still need to forgive, but your forgiveness must not be blind. Offer your forgiveness with open eyes and a functioning memory!”⁷¹

What does our Lord call us to do? We pray in “The Our Father,” as in MATTHEW 6:12, Our Father in Heaven, “...forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors...”⁷² CHRIST then explains in MATTHEW 6:14-15, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”⁷³ We are called to forgive others as GOD forgives us in CHRIST, even when those who offend against us do not confess, repent or attempt to make restitution to us in any way! But this does not mean forgetting in a naïve way, for CHRIST also instructs us, in MATTHEW 10:16 that we are to be “...wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”⁷⁴

What then is Christian forgiveness? The Greek Word in The New Testament - ἀφίημι – aphiemī, is used 146 times. Of these, it means “to forgive” 47 times, while other uses mean “to send away, to let go or to give up a debt; to abandon claims against others; [to wipe away,] to leave behind and abandon” debts owed to you.⁷⁵ Webster’s Dictionary defines the verb “to forget” as “to loose remembrance; to neglect and to

⁶⁸ 1, Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p 145, paragraph 4-6.

⁶⁹ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 184, paragraph 4-5.

⁷⁰ 3, Haugk, *Antagonists in The Church*, p 184, paragraph 1.

⁷¹ 3, *Ibid.*, p 185, paragraph 1.

⁷² 2, KJV, MATTHEW 6:12.

⁷³ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 6:14-15.

⁷⁴ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 10:16.

⁷⁵ 6, Strong’s Data, 863 ἀφίημι – aphiemī, meaning: 1) to send away... 1b) to send forth, yield up, to expire 1c) to let go, let alone, let be 1c1) to disregard... 1d) to let go, give up a debt, forgive, to remit 1e) to give up, keep no longer 2) to permit, allow, not to hinder, to give up a thing to a person 3) to leave, go way from one... 3c) to depart from one and leave him to himself so that all mutual claims are abandoned 3d) to desert wrongfully 3e) to go away leaving something behind... 3h) to leave so that what is left may remain, leave remaining 3i) abandon... Usage: leave 52, forgive 47, suffer 14, let 8, forsake 6, let alone 6, misc. 13; 146.

disregard” a memory.⁷⁶ But the verb “to forgive,” means “to pardon; to cease to bear resentment against; to cancel a debt; to exercise clemency; to grant pardon.”⁷⁷

Certainly it is easier to offer forgiveness to others when that offending party has confessed, repented and offered restitution to us – when our forgiveness is humbly and earnestly asked for by those who have hurt us. But in MATTHEW 6 our Lord calls us to forgive, to let go of even just claims against those who have sinned against us, who thus owe us debts of restitution and apology. But is this not exactly what The Son of GOD offers us on The blessed Cross? Of this Christian forgiveness, which must be first lived out by the Clergy and Church leaders, Shelley says:

In CHRIST, we are called to “...let go of resentment, of anger, of all those feelings of revenge that are so tempting to hold close. Forgiveness is not leaving a dragon with something to live down, but offering to live through the situation together” in mutual Christian fellowship and love.⁷⁸

IX. IN CONCLUSION

What Scripture might sum up Haugk’s position in dealing with antagonistic “dragons” in The Church? Perhaps TITUS 3:9-11, “But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about The Law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.”⁷⁹

What Scripture might sum up Shelley’s position in the same matters? Perhaps COLOSSIANS 3:12-15, “Put on therefore, as the elect of GOD, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as CHRIST forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of GOD rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one Body; and be ye thankful.”⁸⁰

In truth, both authors offer sound Christian insight and advice in dealing with difficult people and conflicts within The Body of CHRIST. We may most happily see each on opposite ends of a spectrum and seek, under The LORD’s Spirit, to be flexible enough to find the “Via Media” – the most appropriate “Middle Ground” – between the two extremes of total confrontation and total surrender in each case. At times we may need to be more towards one end of the spectrum, and at other times more towards the other end.

⁷⁶ 7, Webster’s Dictionary, p 152, entry “forget,” verb.

⁷⁷ 7, Ibid., p 152, entry “forgive,” verb.

⁷⁸ 1, Shelley, Well Intentioned Dragons, p 145, paragraph 9.

⁷⁹ 2, KJV, TITUS 3:9-11.

⁸⁰ 2, KJV, COLOSSIANS 3:12-15.

We must remember, the object is not the annihilation of the antagonist, but the preservation and protection of The Church and all The Lord's sheep. The Christian antagonist is also part of The Church, and he also needs preservation and protection, as well as restoration when confession and repentance have been earnestly offered up to GOD. As The early Church's "Apostolic Constitutions" declare:

"O bishop..., let everyone join in prayers for this [penitent] man and restore him to his former place among the Flock [of CHRIST], through the imposition of hands. For he has been purified by repentance. And the imposition of hands shall be similar to baptism for him. For, by the laying on of hands, The HOLY SPIRIT was given to believers!"⁸¹

And such applications of Christian Biblical wisdom is not called for in a sterile vacuum containing only the antagonist and the clergyman, but within The living community of The Body of CHRIST on earth, The Church. As the early Churchman Pachomius says, "To save souls, you must bring them together."⁸² To learn and grow in Christian grace and love requires that we live in community with other Christians, even the most difficult of personalities – most especially ourselves, in The Divine Mercy and Love which GOD extends to us at The Cross of CHRIST! As Shelley sums up Pachomius:

"In community with flawed, sometimes disagreeable people, followers of Pachomius, learned to take hurt rather than give it. They discovered that disagreements and opposition provide the opportunity to redeem life situations and experience GOD's Grace."⁸³ For "...as attractive as solitary sanctification may seem, it is life [in The Church on earth] among the dragons that develops the qualities GOD requires" in us!⁸⁴

CHRIST is our Head and we are His Body within The Church. So we are members, not alone, but together one of another under Him. So we are called to bear one another's burdens in Christian charity as One in The Lord. As Saint Paul says in I CORINTHIANS 12:25-27, "That there should be no schism in The Body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are The Body of CHRIST, and members in particular."⁸⁵ So it seems fitting that we close with this Moravian hymn, "Join We All With One Accord:"

⁸¹ 8, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, "Absolution," p 5, 3rd entry. "Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.415."

⁸² 1, Shelley, Well Intentioned Dragons, p 148, paragraph 3.

⁸³ 1, Ibid., p 148, paragraph 7 – p 149.

⁸⁴ 1, Ibid., p 149, paragraph 2.

⁸⁵ 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 12:25-27.

“Join we all with one accord; Praise we all our common Lord;
For we all have heard His voice, All have made His will our choice.
Fellows with the saints of old, No more strangers in the fold,
One The Shepherd Who us sought, One The Flock His Blood hath bought!”⁸⁶

“One our Master one alone, None but CHRIST as Lord we own;
Brethren of His Law are we – “As I loved you, so love ye.”
Branches we in CHRIST, The Vine, Living by His life Divine;
As The Father with The Son, So, in CHRIST we all are one!”⁸⁷

“One The Name in which we pray, One our Savior day by day;
With one Cup and with one Bread, Thus one Covenant Way we tread.
One in spirit, one in life, One amid earth’s frequent strife,
One in faith and one in love, One in hope of Heaven above!”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ 9, Moravian Church Hymnal, # 258, “Join We All With One Accord.” “Matthew of Kunwald (1457), Gabriel Komarovaky (1467), Michael Weisse (1531) and John Horn (1544).” Stanza 1.

⁸⁷ 9, Ibid., Stanza 2.

⁸⁸ 9, Ibid., Stanza 3.

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