

“Blessed Are Those Who Mourn, for They Will Be Comforted”

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In 1923 a great earthquake hit the Tokyo area. When people were agitated and became unstable in their minds because of this sudden disaster, someone started a vicious rumor that the Korean residents in the Tokyo area were attacking Japanese people and poisoning drinking water. The public believed the lie and came out to the streets armed to “protect” themselves. What ensued was a massacre of innocent Korean residents in and about the Tokyo area. The official government report put the figure of the victims at 6,600, but in fact, the figure was much higher. There must have been a great lamentation and mourning among the Korean people that day.

This happened before I was born. But the story stamped the “Korean people” on my memory. Through Japanese intrigue and military force, Korea had been annexed to Japan in 1910. Until 1945, for 35 years, the Korean people suffered the exploitation and barbarism of Japanese colonialism.

In 1984 the Japanese emperor, Hirohito, on behalf of his people, read a prepared statement on the occasion of a state visit of the Korean President Chun Doo Hwan:

Our two countries were thus bound by deep neighborly relations over the ages. In spite of such relations, however, it is indeed regrettable that there was an unfortunate past between us for a period in this century, and I believe that it should not be repeated again.

The emperor of Japan spoke of Japan’s colonial rule as “an unfortunate past” and failed to express a “sincere apology” for the evil Japan had inflicted upon the Korean people. The emperor, “the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people” (Article 1. The Constitution of Japan, 1946) did not “mourn” over what Japan had done. The Japanese people did not “mourn” either.

A few years ago, I visited the Memorial Museum of Massacre in Nanjing, China. I discovered, incidentally, that a large and successful Japanese tour industry in the city will take you everywhere except this museum! In that city, 300,000 civilians were massacred by the Japanese army in December, 1937. I saw a roomful of skulls and of grisly photographs of Japanese atrocities against helpless civilians. Japanese secondary school textbooks approved by the Min-

istry of Education today tell of Japan's "entry" into China but carefully avoid the use of the word "invasion." Of the Rape of Nanjing the textbooks say only that "it has been reported that a massacre had taken place."

Japan did not "mourn" over the appalling cruelty committed by its army. In 1937 I was among hundreds of school children who paraded in the main street of our town celebrating "The Fall of Nanjing." We were completely ignorant of "The Massacre in Nanjing." News was controlled by the government then, as it was with the case of the recent Gulf War. When the new emperor, Akihito, visited China in October, 1992, representing the people of Japan, he said he was sad for the grave suffering his country inflicted upon the Chinese people, but he stopped short of offering an outright apology. The Japanese government speech writers, masters of obscure and ambiguous use of language, prepared his text with superb craftiness.

In Korea and in China there must have been a great mourning over those who were injured, crippled, and killed by the Japanese military. Their mourning is a mighty voice of protest against the injustice and brutality to which they were subjected by the barbarous power. "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground" (Gen 4:10). In the Korean culture it is the cry of "han," the cry of bitter accusation that comes from the unpacified souls of the people who were destroyed unjustly. In the Korean literature we read:

...han which has been absorbed into the bones and muscles of the people of the country for 5,000 years is still breathing in the roots of the grass which covers the graves of the dead.

In 1923, 6,600 han-ridden souls were added to the millions.

I am presenting "mourning" in two contexts: victims and victimizers. Victims will mourn. But the victimizers, the inflictors of brutality, must mourn also. Japan must mourn over what she has done to Korea and China. Reinhold Niebuhr, however, warns us that it is a romantic dream that nations would readily "repent" for what they have done. They are not open to repentance. The incident of the emperor Akihito confirms the judgment of Niebuhr. But, by the grace of God, a few in a nation might "mourn" and repent.

Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Kgs 19:18)

The tiny section of the Japanese population who "mourned" over their own nation's brutality were accused of being unpatriotic and betrayers of their own nation. The excitement and fascination of war paralyzes our power of observation and reasoning. Yet, the "mourning" minority in the aggressor nations is "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Mt 5:13f). Similarly a minority in this United States today is mourning over the fact that in this nation of great abundance 37 million people have no medical insurance. Globally there are minorities who are mourning over our civilization's destruction of the bio-sphere of our planet. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Steve Biko, and Martin Luther King Jr. "mourned" over political and racial tyranny. In 1946 the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America "mourned" over the use of the atomic bomb in Japan.

We would begin with an act of contrition. As American Christians, we are deeply penitent for the irresponsible use already made of the atomic bomb. We are agreed that whatever one's judgment of the ethics of war in principle,

the surprise bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are morally indefensible.

"Genocide" is the word I would mournfully use to describe the main characteristic of the 20th century. On the behalf of humanity, the church of Christ must mourn over this tragic fact.

It is difficult to believe that all mourners will be comforted. There must have been and must be millions of instances upon the earth in which the thought of being comforted is simply insulting nonsense or utter impossibility. In this sinful world (aeon), violence is ubiquitous.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" is a promise. It is the confession of a prophetic faith. Comfort will come from God who is with us yet beyond us. It is not of our making. It is a gift from God. The New Testament beatitudes point to the coming of the Reign of God. The beatitudes give a glimpse of an extraordinary way of experiencing human life in this world. We must hear the beatitudes in the context of the coming of the Reign of God. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." It points to the unexpected structure of the gospel.

Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for that is what their ancestors did to the
false prophets (Lk 6:26).

Divine beatitude begins with the knowledge of "what their ancestors did to the false prophets." Why then is it difficult for us to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets? It ought to be clear that when all speak well of you, you are a false prophet! What a direct and controversial speech! May I reverse the "woe" to the "blessed"? Then it will read,

Blessed are you when all do not speak
well of you, for that is what their ances-
tors did to the true prophets.

This is the new bold speech in the Reign of God. Such speech is embarrassing and confusing not only to middle class Christians but to the whole human system of moral and religious evaluation. Can any Search Committee work on this basis? The Christian proclamation is scandalous. The speech of the Reign of God is that of impending judgment and hope.

But woe to you who are rich, for you
have received your consolation. Woe to
you who are full now, for you will be
hungry. Woe to you who are laughing
now, for you will mourn and weep. (Lk
6:24f)

Are you "full"? In what way have you gotten that fullness? And what is the contents of that fullness? Are you "laughing"? Why are you laughing? What is it that makes you laugh? Are you sure that in all your "fullness" and "laughing," you are not living the life of false prophets?

Blessed are those who are marginal, peripheral, forsaken, forgotten, and victimized, because God, who is against false prophets of "good public reputation," will be with them, thus raising up the true prophets. The spirit of the true prophets urges Japan to apologize to Korea and China. By raising true prophets God is ever beginning a new history in which violence is rejected instead of apotheosized. "Behold I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). This is the biblical promise to the 5,000-year history of hidden souls in Korea.