

# THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West  
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS

## Analysis of the Seven Churches in Revelation: Pergamos (Pergamum)

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield



The ruins of the ancient city of Pergamum  
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This is our third article discussing the Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation. As you will recall, I am asking all the churches in the Convocation of the West to use this Lent, which ends this month, as a period of discernment, not just for our individual churches, but also for our Convocations and for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints.

We need to pray that God will let us know to whom we are to reach and how to reach them. And we need to pray to God to let us know what we are to do so we can continue to be a Diocese that is a beacon of faith and hope and a light to the world. And while we pray for discernment, we need to remember:

*Unless the Lord builds the house,\**

*Their labor is in vain who build it.*

*Unless the Lord keeps the city,\**

*The watchman keeps vigil in vain. [Psalm 127:1-2;*

BCP 2019 page 444]

So, we shall continue our analysis with the third of the Seven Churches – Pergamos, also known as Pergamum:

*“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges: “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”’ [Revelation 2:12-17]*

Smyrna, Ephesus, and Pergamos were three royal cities that vied with one another. Smyrna was a



### Our Core Value is:

*“The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us.”*

### The Vision of the Convocation is:

*“To STRENGTHEN existing churches;  
To PLANT new churches; and  
To RAISE UP missional leaders.”*

great commercial center. Ephesus was a great political center. But Pergamos was a great religious center. In Pergamos there were four important pagan cults that were centered there, as well as many minor ones.

Built high atop a thousand foothills, Pergamos had an impressive acropolis. One of the cults in Pergamos was devoted to the god, Asclepius, the god of healing. Another was devoted to the Egyptian god of the underworld, Serapes. This is interesting because Serapes was also a god of healing, specifically with the healing of blindness. Because of these two cults, in part, Pergamos developed an impressive library. In fact, one Biblical scholar wrote that most of the books in the library of Alexandria were stolen by Mark Antony and Cleopatra from this library. Additionally, when relations between Pergamos and Egypt soured, Pergamos could no longer get papyrus. As a result, these people invented parchment, which gets its name from this city.

In our last article, I explained how Smyrna was fiercely loyal to Rome and, because of this, the people supported emperor worship. Well, Pergamos is only forty-five miles northeast of Smyrna, and has the dubious distinction of being known as the earliest and most enthusiastic center of emperor worship in the region, surpassing even Smyrna.

Emperor worship started with Caesar Augustus who vacationed at Pergamos and culminated in an impressive temple to Emperor Trajan built in the second century A.D. It also resulted in the martyrdom of Antipas, referenced in this passage. This is important to understand in order to know why Christ called this city, "Satan's seat." With this information in mind, let us now look at our passage from Revelation:

*"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges:'*

Again, this is a reference to Christ. He is the one with the sharp "two-edged sword." This reference to this sword refers to the two-edged message of Christ. To those who believe, Christ's message is one of joy, hope, and love. To those who do not believe, His message is one of terror. And these two views of the same message boils down to Christ's final judgment.

Once again we are faced with the reality of our faith. Although we are never to judge others nor do we know who will or will not be saved, we are told emphatically by Christ that He and only He is the Way. As Christians we have no choice but to believe that no one is saved unless they believe in Christ. It is hard for many of us

modern people to get a hold of this message. We tend to believe that everyone will be saved and that it doesn't matter much what we believe, but that is not the message of Christ. Does that mean we will not be surprised who we will see in heaven? Probably not. But that is not for us to decide. God is the judge, not we. But if we are Christian, we must hold that Christ is the only way or else

much of what Christ Himself preached makes no sense.

*I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*

Remember, in these passages, it is Christ who is speaking. Saint John is acting merely as a scribe. So, these are Christ's words. In this passage Christ starts by commending the Christians in Pergamos for their steadfast faith. The reference to Satan's seat probably refers to the many pagan temples and beliefs

in that city. It also may refer to the emperor worship that was taking place. Being the center of false religions, it is no wonder Christ called this city "Satan's seat." Here also we have a reference to the martyr Antipas. The Eastern Orthodox tradition holds that Antipas was a bishop of Pergamos that was martyred in 92 A.D. He was burned to death in a heated bronze bull after he witnessed to the Roman governor that Jesus is Lord.

*But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

Balaam was a false prophet in the Old Testament. He knew that the God of Israel was the true God, but still was willing to go against God for money. Although each time he tried to curse the Israelites, he ended up blessing them, Balaam decided to work against God's chosen people. He told King Balak how the king could destroy the Israelites: have them eat things sacrificed to idols and teach the Moabite women to seduce the Israelites into sexual and idolatrous sin. This is a fascinating person. Balaam becomes the prototype of the corrupt teacher and religious compromiser. Through subtlety of argument and sophisticated devices, he encourages immorality, idolatry, and infidelity against the Lord. But, in the end, he died by the sword.

*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their*





pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. . . Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. [2 Peter 2:1-2, 13b-16]

This warning is made even more clear because, in Acts 15:29, we know that the Council of Jerusalem had prohibited the consumption of food sacrificed to idols and the practice of sexual immorality. Obviously Pergamos had members of their church that were not only going against what the Council had decided, they were preaching that no one else had to follow it, as well.

And the message to us is equally clear – eschew the false prophet. Resist the subtlety and the wiles of those who, even though they know our God is true, will try to get us not to follow Him. This is the ultimate in evil. We can forgive the ignorant who do not know. We can forgive those who honestly believe different than we. But the person who actively attempts to teach

a false doctrine is the hallmark of evil.

I remember reading that the Soviet Union, during the height of the Cold War, tried to plant people in seminaries for the sole purpose of destroying the faith. They saw religion as evil – the opium of the people, as Karl Marx put it. But, we are told that those who knowingly teach false doctrine are Balaam. And it is clear we still have our share of Balaams in the

world today. They have their own agenda and fear no one – not even God. And Jesus warns us here and elsewhere to be wise, cautious, and knowledgeable of our faith so that we can resist such men and women.

*So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

As we discussed in my first article on Ephesus, who the Nicolaitans actually were is not entirely clear. Some scholars, including some Roman Catholic scholars, believe that these were

people who followed a man by the name of Nicolaus of Antioch. Nicolaus was one of the seven deacons ordained in Acts 6:5, and is credited with apostatizing the Christian doctrine. He became a Gnostic and formed a cult that taught that, in order to understand sin, one must indulge in it. In this sense, the “Nicolaitans” are associated with a dangerous casual attitude toward idolatry and sexual immorality. Finally, there are those scholars that just look at the word “Nicolaitans” itself. The Greek word nikao means “to conquer,” and the word laos from which we get the word “laity” means “the people.” These scholars surmise that the Nicolaitans were people who tried to control the laity. In the case of Pergamos, the first theory makes the most sense. It is consistent with the reference to Balaam and how he encouraged idolatry and fornication.

*Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

This is crucial. “Repent!” is the order here. Clearly the church in Pergamos has already been compromised. It has taken in the false. It has accepted the wolf in sheep’s clothing as a sheep. And Christ is telling them that they must repent, change, and get rid of the false. If they do not, He Himself will come and destroy the false. But, for those who do repent and change, there is an important promise:

*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*

The “hidden manna” refers to Christ. He is the Bread of Heaven. Remember that Christ’s glory is currently hidden in Heaven, but was revealed in history through the Incarnation and in liturgy through the Eucharist. This gift of Christ as the ultimate Manna was foreshadowed in the gift of the manna given to the Israelites. It was also manna that was placed in the Ark of the Covenant, also revealing how Christ is our Manna.

Although this reference to manna may be clear to most of us, the reference to the white stone and the stone with a new name may not be so clear. A white stone was used in ancient times to cast a vote of acquittal. It was also like a “carte blanche” that carried a pass to gain entrance into an invitation-only assembly. The “new name” may be a reference to the fact that we all have a new identity in Christ. The result is the clear reference that, though those who follow false prophets will ultimately be destroyed if they do not repent, those who do repent or those who do not follow the false are acquitted of all wrong. They are given the ultimate pass which admits them into the heavenly presence of our Lord – the Lamb of God.

The message to Pergamos is a frightening one, especially given what we see happening in most modern, mainstream churches. But I must caution us all. It is easy for us to see the false in others. It is harder to see the false in what we believe. We clearly see the false preaching in other churches – churches that teach there is no such thing as sin or immorality; churches that teach everything is relative. But, we too need to be cautious. We are not immune from the false; and we can be swayed as easily as others by what we want to hear as opposed to what is true.



The angel gives John the letter to the churches of Asia, Beatus Escorial, c.950  
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You may find this surprising, but I tend to be conservative. As a result, I tend to see the bias that others miss when I view most network news or newspapers. Many of my friends tend to be liberal. They tend to see the bias endemic in more conservative stations that I may miss. That is why the model of the parish church is so important. Many churches have become places where everyone thinks alike and are in lock step religiously, socially, and politically. But the parish church is modeled on the village church where everyone belongs to the same church even though they may all be different religiously, socially, and politically. The model of the parish church actually is quite

healthy and helps protect the church from the false prophet. One group may be able to spot the wolf even though the others only see a sheep.

Although I do not want to promote paranoia, I do think using our God-given intelligence is what God wants us to do. We are not to suspend our ability to question, discern, and discriminate, no matter how charismatic our teachers may be. We must always pursue truth over the comfort of our own preconceived notions. And this can be done. All we need do is study our Bibles and use our minds, praying constantly for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



## Upcoming Synod & Clericus

### IT'S RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER!

This year's Regional Synod will be conducted in conjunction with our Annual Clericus. The Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding both in Mesilla, New Mexico, **April 18, 19, 20 and 21 (Bright Week).**

The plan at this stage is to have both our Regional Synod and our Clericus in person, but given the ins and outs of COVID, regulations and restrictions, we will be prepared to conduct both using our hybrid model that we used last year, if necessary.

**Please register on-line using the Convocation of the West's web page. Also, please let our Vicar General know if you are going to attend these meetings and whether it will be "in person" or "via Zoom" as soon as possible.**

**PLEASE ALSO NOTE: Each Parish has the right to at least TWO lay representatives for the Synod. Please have these people register on line, even if they will only be attending on Zoom.**

**If any one cannot attend because of financial reasons, the Convocation may be able to help.** Please contact your Vicar General, the Very Rev. Canon Michael A. Penfield, at [VicarGeneral@AnglicanCOW.org](mailto:VicarGeneral@AnglicanCOW.org) or at (408) 960-4915 so we may discuss what financial help we can offer.

This promises to be an excellent Clericus. We hope to see you all there!





**By Bishop Winfield Mott**

“Freedom” has become one of those words like “love,” which can be hijacked to mean whatever someone wants it to mean. It can be my freedom to say or write what I want, vote for any candidate in a free election (i.e. where anyone can run and votes are counted honestly), freedom to choose what I do with my body, whether or not to be vaccinated or have an abortion, or to strut naked down the street, to work any job I am offered, to live in any house I can afford, to own any gun I choose, to drive any vehicle on (or off) any road in any condition I happen to be in, to ingest any substance I crave, to travel wherever I want, freedom from taxes...the list could go on, as freedoms or imagined freedoms are extensive.

The word is a favorite of politicians. We are told we live in the “free world,” a term that used to mean the non-Communist world. Today, with the departure of Communism, it is used vaguely to differentiate “us” from “them,” whomever the latter happens to be in a current crisis, of which there seem to be many.

But is freedom simply what I want to make it? Most people seem to agree that, while I have the freedom to own a gun, I don’t have the freedom to randomly shoot anyone who irritates me. And while I am free to vote for any candidate in an election, I can only do it once. Perhaps without realizing it, most of us accept many restrictions on our freedoms as being reasonable.

Freedom of religion is important to many, and enshrined for us as a constitutional right. That may sound simple, but it isn’t. It is the right of any citizen to hold any religious belief he or she chooses. But the Constitution only says that the Federal Government shall not establish any religion. For some, that means no reference to

religion has any place in any public area, school, park or wherever. Such people want freedom from religion, to be able to live life without ever having to encounter any evidence or mention of any religion. Others, whose religion encompasses a belief in community participation, note that their religious belief includes the right to express themselves in public, together with others who share their belief, especially when that religious belief is held by a great majority of their local community. A conservative approach to the Constitution might point out that only the national establishment of a particular denomination as the approved church is forbidden. Conservatives remind us that several States in the original Republic had established churches without challenge for many decades after the Constitution was enacted, just that there was no national one. The result of all this discussion has been an endless tangle of conflicts over what freedom of religion actually means.

All this is tough in the time of the “me” generation, a populace dedicated to my right to do what I please, regardless not only of what you think, but of the impact of my actions on your life. The concept of living for others, be it in a marriage, a neighborhood, a nation, a world or even a church, is foreign to a lifestyle where I enrich and enjoy myself without caring about you. There was a time in the history of our country when there was a rough consensus on the principles of freedom and its restrictions, based on a generally accepted inherited Christian morality. It was never perfect nor unanimous, but even for those who refused to live by it, a shared moral standard was able to be defined. That is no longer the case, and the definition of what freedom is, also becomes unclear as a



result. It is questionable if a nation can continue as a united entity when it cannot agree on what freedom is.

A document that has nothing to do with America can be of assistance. St. Paul discusses freedom in the Letter to the Galatians, with a different perspective on freedom.

He observes that if you are enthralled by something or someone, you are not free, obviously. But being enslaved to one thing frees you from service to another. If you are enslaved to the Law, legalistic morality concerned with keeping a lot of rules, you are freed from dealing with the grace of God. If sin, of whatever configuration, holds your loyalty, you are free from service to Christ. Freedom is not a limitless exercise in doing whatever I want, but rather a choice of what or who I want to serve. In discussing the Galatians commitment to the Law (which is entered through circumcision), Paul says "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold, I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you" (Galatians 5:1-2).

Real freedom is found in serving Christ. If you sign up instead for the Law or for sin, Christ cannot help you, he is of no use to you, as long as you are enslaved to something or somebody else. But Christ can help you if you accept his grace, his freedom. Then you are no longer enslaved to any of the other masters who beckon to you. Unlike the "me" generation, freedom is not in serving self, doing as I wish, but in the free grace of God, which emancipates you to freely serve him.

That is done in the exercise of love, that other misunderstood

word. It releases you to give of yourself to others, as to your Lord, by the free choice of wanting to reflect God's love, as he has loved you. You are freed from the bondage of sin. Even though you may still sin, you are freed in God's grace from its chains. In the 1950's, I remember Bishop Ladasj Ordash of Hungary was jailed during the repressive regime in place under the Soviet boot. He commented afterwards that he had never felt so free as when he was in jail, because he had made the choice to follow the road of Christ, of grace and love. He was freed from the power of other humans to enslave him, even as he was locked up in a cell.

So often, people enslave themselves even voluntarily, drawn by some temptation or other. They imagine themselves free even while entrapped in a loyalty, an ideology, a patriotism, a material yearning for riches, power or fame. But true freedom can only come to you through baptism into the life and service of Christ. Then all else falls into place as the expression of your love to Christ and through Christ to others.

Lent is walking the Freedom Road. Its terminus is not in a perceived political freedom, not in an economic freedom from want, not in a freedom from conventional morality, not in a freedom from caring for others, as Ayn Rand imagines. The Lenten Road is a path away from all that, of divesting the false illusions of "freedom" so enticingly dangled in front of our eyes. It is a road to the freedom to love as Christ has loved us, without limit. The terminus is the endless resurrected freedom and love in the Body of Christ. This Lent is your opportunity to throw off the chains, and seek only to serve your Lord, who "for freedom...set us free."

