



# NEW BUSINESS

*by Nathan W. Harter*

The Reverend Bugher shielded his eyes from the slanting rays of evening as he stepped out onto the walk. With difficulty, he searched from behind his hand for a place to sit and breathe fresh air. He spotted another minister on a nearby bench, and so he strode deliberately toward him.

"Reverend Bugher," the younger man chirped, "What brings you out here? Has the convention recessed?"

The old pastor sat down next to his colleague and sighed.

"No such luck. The women's auxiliary is giving its report."

The other pastor grinned. "Then it's just as well that we are here."

Rev. Bugher stared out across the rolling campus, absorbing the green and tranquil scene. His massive brow and drooping jowls gave him an angry visage, an instrument of righteous indignation from the pulpit and a guard against nonsense in private. For now, as he basked in the last sunlight of the day, the old man simply emptied his mind of business.

"Tell me, sir," queried Dennis, his acquaintance, "What do you hear about Resolution G, the call to Peace?"

"Do you want the theological or political answer?" asked Rev. Bugher, wary of convention intrigue.

"Well, both, if you don't mind."

The veteran drew some thinning white hair over an ear before answering. He also began to frown.

"I would hate to criticize the thing, Dennis. After all, a lot of work went into its composition." He paused. "And I understand you had a hand in the first draft." The young pastor was visibly pleased. "Yes, Dennis, it is a masterful statement, fit for deliberation. It is tomorrow, is it not, that we debate Resolution G in New Business?"

"Yes. Yes, I believe so. I'm to speak in its behalf," he added with pride.

"As well you should! The topic suits you." He fell silent, letting his attention stray to a pair of playful squirrels. The session had been long, as always, and exceedingly tedious. Rev. Bugher doubted the ecumenical significance of these gatherings and promised himself to stay away next year. He had become too old to revel in his piety with these zealots. They also serve who stand and wait, he repeated to himself.

"But are you for it or against it?" insisted Dennis.

"Am I for peace? Yes! That is simple enough."

"Do I hear you saying that you will vote for the resolution?"

This is so important to you, the old man thought to himself. Just let me pack my things and drive home to the parish. This convention will pass nearly anything, adjourn, and dissolve into little groups of two's and three's. And all our dramatic posturing will be forgotten on the way home.

"Tell me again about the resolution. What is its point?"

"Gladly!" began Dennis. "We state that conflict is an obscenity against God and that peace is His will. Toward that end, peace, we prophesy to the world against division, war, and confrontation. When a state assumes that war can be justified, its institutions then prepare for war, leaving human needs untouched. Thus, we call for disarmament, international unity, and brotherly love."

"A considerable goal, my friend."

"With God's help, we can witness to friend and foe alike. Christians reaching out across the barriers of selfishness and greed. It is a revolutionary consequence of the Gospels."

"What is the consequence? I do not understand."

"Disarmament, international unity, and brotherly love."

"All of these as a result of Resolution G? If it were possible, you would already have my vote."

Such idealism, Rev. Bugher mused. The world is ugly, so they call for

beauty. It is a noble pursuit, in its way. Strange how the younger ones argue so. How is it their parishioners leave them alone for such crusades? Sam Blackstone went into intensive care last week. Little Sheri Walsler has become pregnant—by whom? The Wallaces have had their marital problems. Neddie Meyers has her gall bladder on the chopping block. And three wealthy physicians have been intimating my retirement.

And, yes, peasants are being killed by soldiers in Central America. And natives are starving in Africa. And there are rumors of war in the Middle East.

"Resolution G is today's Pentecost to a troubled age."

"You do have a way with phrases," the old man conceded as he watched the sun drop below the distant horizon. "Certainly Christ would commend your intent."

"If I might be so bold as to say, sir," interjected Dennis, "Christ would vote with us. This I sincerely believe."

Rev. Bugher turned at last to look at the earnest face of his colleague. There was hope, vigor, and there were no furrows around his eyes. His trim beard outlined a half-smile. Obviously, he did not wrestle with complexity—nor with failure.

"Would Jesus the Man have attended our convention?" It was an ironic thrust.

"I meant if He were here . . ."

"Oh, He is, in a spiritual sense. But the man Jesus, would he sit through seven hours of reports and then mingle with the witty and the well-groomed?"

"He communed with the Apostles."

"He taught; they listened. It was vastly different."

"Do you think He would vote against my resolution?" the young man snapped.

"Tell me, my good friend, why is it so important to you that he approve your agenda. Shouldn't it be the other way around?"

"I am doing His will."

"You know that for a fact."

"Do you disagree, Pastor?" the young man persisted.

"I just don't know, Dennis. And that's about the extent of my interest in your action tomorrow."

At first there was silence in the twilight. Then from the convention hall came applause and the first small cliques heading for dinner.

"The women have done their wagging," observed the Reverend Bugher. Amidst the laughter and the gossip which began to surround them, the older man stood up, cast a sullen gaze upon the dispersing assembly, then looked down at Dennis and said, "I shall pray for you and for the convention, but from my own parsonage. You had better go eat."

"I do not understand your reluctance. But I wish you Godspeed home."

"Thank you, son."

Then the aging minister made his way silently through the boisterous crowd to pack his things, go home, and tend to his flock.

The young man, joining a small clump of delegates already discussing Resolution G, entered the debate with uninhibited zeal.