

The Renewal of Anglican Catholic Mission

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Introduction

What follows is a summary of my thoughts on the topic of mission and evangelism, published under my blog title, "The Evangelical Ascetic." Some have suggested that this is too cryptic. I disagree. If you don't know what the words evangelical or ascetic mean, you should. Both are essential to the topics of mission and to personal formation. If a church is not interested in being an evangelically oriented outpost of spiritual formation through habitual ascetical practice, it is not serious about mission in an Anglican Catholic context.

The Anglican Catholic Church is theologically committed to the Affirmation of St. Louis. This theological commitment is shared by the larger "Continuing Church." Although that document would benefit greatly from some updated wording and a more pastoral tone, it nevertheless commits us to the ancient doctrinal consensus of the first millennium. Nothing I will say will depart from this commitment. Doctrine, however, has not been our main problem. Our main failures have been in the areas of love and charity and our inward orientation; we have tended to focus on obscure, intramural theological and liturgical debates rather than on proclaiming the faith once-delivered to a dying world. This needs to change if we want to fulfill our vocation. As my late friend and mentor Bishop John Cahoon once said, "We don't have time to waste answering questions that no one is asking."

My experience in the Continuing Church

I was baptized as an Episcopalian in 1960 and confirmed in that church in 1972. My teen years were spent outside of the church in various wayward activities. I went through a conversion during my college years and returned to church in 1980—to St. Peter's Church in Oakland, California, led by the Rt. Rev'd Robert Morse, one of the four bishops consecrated for the Continuing Church in Denver in 1978.

When I returned to the church in 1980, I had no idea what had happened to the Episcopal Church in the 1960s and 70s—and I couldn't have cared less. I wasn't angry at anybody. I was attracted to the faith. When I returned I felt at strangely at home in the liturgy and found the church's rule of life and prayer to be the perfect setting for a converted heart to grow in the faith. I always believed that my experience could apply to others.

I went to seminary, started a mission, was ordained a deacon and sent to Birmingham, Alabama in 1986. After a short stint there I came to St. Matthew's Church in Newport Beach in October of 1986. I was ordained a priest on Pearl Harbor Day that year. St. Matthew's Church consisted of around thirty members. The church met in a room it rented from a community church. We subsequently met in three other temporary spaces before we bought property and built a

church. We just finished a second phase of expansion. Our membership is now around four hundred.

Growing from around thirty people in 1986 to around four hundred in 2014 is hardly spectacular by the church growth standards of our culture, but it is significant in the Anglican Catholic Church and in the larger Continuing Church. Many Anglican Catholic and “traditional” Anglican churches are smaller today than they were twenty or thirty years ago. Slow, steady, healthy church growth has not been the norm. Thus, a setting where such growth has been experienced may provide lessons for the larger movement.

Missionary opportunities are different in each place. A church located in an area where the population is growing and new homes are being built has more opportunity for numerical growth than a church located in an area of declining population. A city church has different opportunities and challenges than a rural church. Nevertheless, there are common themes that ought to guide and govern mission in all places.

The nature of healthy church growth

Healthy church growth is organic. The proper analogies are trees and babies. When both are fed and nourished in a stable, healthy environment, they grow—and they grow up to reproduce themselves. Too many of our church growth models have come from the consumer and marketing culture, where excitement and immediately gratification are the guiding principles. This can produce what looks like growth but is really just momentary enthusiasm that wanes with time. Jesus was never excited about having crowds of people follow him just because they were jazzed about a “miracle.”

Traditionalists looked like dinosaurs in 1980. It seemed that traditional faith and liturgy had been overrun by new ways of being the church. The new ways were iconoclastic. They opposed traditional worship and symbols. However, the results of the experiment with “newness” look different after a generation. When people have experienced years of a subjectively oriented and emotionally charged Christianity but no progress toward maturity in the faith, they get disillusioned. We have a great missionary opportunity; people are wearied of the consumer and marketing approach to faith. We have something deeper, richer and life-changing to offer—if we will live it, articulate it, open our doors and invite others into it.

Our evangelism must be ascetical. Asceticism refers to the practice of spiritual disciplines. The word “ascetical” is rooted in the connection between physical and spiritual exercise. Just as the athlete must train in a disciplined way to grow stronger and compete well in his event, so the spiritual athlete must practice spiritual disciplines to grow stronger in the Holy Spirit and in virtues like faith, hope, and love. The main problem with Christian faith in our culture is that it has been preached and argued about but not sufficiently practiced. When the faith is not practiced with discipline, lives go unchanged. When a plant is not fed, watered and pruned, its fruit is unhealthy, minimal or absent.

Our movement has produced too many words and arguments, but not enough holiness. We need fewer liturgical arguments and more ascetical practice. People are tired of merely hearing about the faith. They want to see and experience it. If our churches are attractive and inviting communities where people's lives are changed, then people will be interested in knowing what we believe and how we practice our faith.

Why traditionalists haven't been good missionaries

The formative meeting of traditional Anglicans in St. Louis in 1977 has been described to me as "Pentecostal." As we distanced ourselves from heresy and met with common cause for future mission, there was great optimism about the future. It did not come to pass quite as expected. The culprit is often thought to be the various divisions that arose amongst us. Bishops fought and divided themselves. What could have been a powerful, unified mission became a number of separate splintered groups. So goes the narrative.

I believe this is an inadequate diagnosis of the problem. The real problem is that Episcopalians had never been characterized by evangelical zeal to convert souls to faith in Jesus Christ, and evangelism was not our primary founding purpose. The primary concern at our inception was to maintain the faith that had been abandoned by the Episcopal Church. There was great and necessary concern to define and guard the parameters of orthodoxy. Many of our founding clergy and lay people had fought the battle against compromise and heresy in the church for many years. They held on to the faith, but it was not their vocation and gift to shift gears and evangelize in the new world that was emerging.

We brought our old identity into the new setting. Anglican Catholics had been marginalized in the Episcopal Church. This created an identity as a marginal group, conscious of living in opposition. When new structures were created that eliminated the old opponents, we did what people who are used to fighting do. We found new opponents. Unfortunately, we tended to oppose ourselves—there wasn't any "them" to oppose anymore! We knew how to be the faithful remnant, standing firm against the opposition in an established church. However, we were completely untrained and unprepared to carry out a mission to the larger culture.

When you maintain tradition you maintain the good along with the bad. Our movement should always aim at the renewal of our commitment to the authentic Catholic and Apostolic faith, and the reform of those bad habits we have picked up along the way. We have not adequately distinguished between the two, and we have not been nearly self-critical enough.

We must learn how to be evangelists. Mission, rather than opposition, must become our primary focus. We begin the learning process by admitting that we don't know how to do it. This is a defect in our training, but it is an essential part of being truly catholic. As the Book of Common Prayer says, the church is:

Catholic; Because it is universal, holding earnestly the Faith for all time, in all countries, and for all people; and is *sent to preach the gospel to the whole world* (291—emphasis added).

The impact of the changing church culture

There was another factor that loomed even larger in our missionary failure. Denominational identity became less important. The denominationally-concerned World War II generation did not, by and large, pass on its convictions to its children. Traditional Anglican churches are not, for the most part, populated by the children of their founding members. This is due in large part to the influence of liberal or “higher” biblical criticism in the mainline churches in the mid-twentieth century. This produced the primary modern heresy, the denial of original sin, and the consequent loss of authentic faith in many churches—and especially in their seminaries. The gospel of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ was rejected—since leaders in the church no longer believed that people needed to be saved from sin. It was replaced with various versions of the “social gospel” and various “isms.” Increasingly in the mid-twentieth century, church people did not really know Christ.

Consequently, people left established churches and went either to exciting, iconoclastic, Bible-oriented evangelical churches—where the basic message of salvation through faith in Jesus could be heard—or they stayed home. Arguments against the liberals in the Episcopal Church did not provide a compelling reason for people to come to us. Most people could not make heads or tails of our intramural, high church/low church arguments, nor were they interested in them. Traditional church in general was rejected because people no longer understood the inner meaning of traditional worship. We have spent a generation reaching out only to those who already know what we are talking about. This is why our mission has been small.

The Continuing Church is now reconciling with itself. We are working together more and more; old animosity is being replaced by new charity. There is hope for a more unified church. We should regard cautiously, however, the missionary potential of this unity. Since division wasn't our main missional problem, simply coming back together won't turn us into a missional church. If you take three small non-missionary churches and put them together, you have one larger non-missionary church. It will create larger synods and clerical gatherings, but not necessarily an expanded mission. We still must change in order to fulfill our evangelical vocation.

What do we mean by mission?

We often use words like mission and evangelism to describe what we are doing, but we are not always clear about what we mean. If we are going to share a mission, we need a common understanding of what it is. So, what are we trying to do? Why do our churches exist? More importantly, does our church act consistently with our answer? When asked, most traditional churches will say they are present to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Often when we examine what is actually going on, though, we find other things at the center.

The actual behavior of many traditional churches reveals that they are more like preservation societies. Most of the central players in many parishes are something like docents at a museum. They are present to give tours and inform the few interested inquirers about the way things

always have been, but they are not prepared to make disciples or to explain to people how faith in Christ can change their lives.

Emphasis on preservation leads to inward focus, to strife, and to factions. Typically, the faction that stayed is constantly harping about the faction that left—or some variation on that theme. When a church is not present to give itself for others, it tends to feed on itself. But if you want your church to be a preservation society, at least be honest about it.

I believe the mission of the church is this: We want people to experience conversion of heart to faith in Jesus Christ through our ministries, and we want those who have been converted and baptized to continue to grow in their faith through the life of prayer they experience in the community of the church. Conversion and progress to maturity in the faith are the goals of our mission.

Anticipating an objection, I note here, parenthetically, that growth in faith will produce all manner of outreach directed towards all manner of needs, as the gifts present in each parish will dictate. Real faith produces “good works” born of a genuine concern for the well-being and salvation of others. But it should also be noted that good works are the fruit of genuine faith and not merely a “program.” Jesus did not intend the church to be merely a social service agency. Consequently, the evangelical mission cannot begin merely with assistance to the needy. It must aim first at a converted heart.

The emphasis on conversion and growth is consistent with the charge Jesus gave to the disciples:

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. (Mathew 28:18-19).

Jesus said, “Make disciples.” He did not say, “Set up a traditional church outpost where Mass is said just the right way, put an ad in the paper and wait for those who already understand the faith to come. When they don’t come, give sermons—jeremiads even—about how the culture is going to hell.” This is how we have typically done church. Most of our evangelism has been an attempt to double down on this approach—do all the same things, just be nicer to visitors, make better signs, keep the church cleaner, etc. This approach has not been and will not be fruitful.

Tradition is a means to the end of Christ—not the end itself

We are Anglican Catholics or “traditional” Anglicans. The words catholic and traditional refer to our commitment to be faithful to timeless things. There is something called “the faith.” The content of the faith is contained in the Bible and summarized in the Creeds. Authentic tradition is the ancient and universal consensus about doctrine and practice into which the Holy Spirit led

the church. Our liturgies express this timeless truth and enable us to experience union with God in Christ through the Spirit.

What St. Paul said about the Old Testament Torah or Law can be equally said about our tradition (St. Paul was talking about the Torah as observed through the Jewish “tradition”). “Christ is the end (telos) of the [tradition]” (Romans 10:4). We insist on being faithful to the tradition in order that we may truly know Christ and not be carried away by false doctrine and practice. The tradition is especially important in our time because so much heresy and false practice has appeared in the church. Tradition gives us the foundation of truth and is a safeguard against error.

But tradition can also become an end in and of itself. This was the chief complaint of Jesus against the Pharisees. They were the orthodox; the Church inherited and reworked their theological framework. The main re-working was done by the converted Pharisee St. Paul. But they mistook the means for the end. As a result, when Christ himself was present with them they held on to their tradition and rejected him. We can draw an analogy. Our Lord appears in glory at the end of time to complete the new creation—and the traditionalist would rather go to “missal Mass” or a “prayer book service.” This happens every time the demands of mission, love and charity are sacrificed in service to an obsession with obscure and non-essential parts of the tradition.

A church can ask some self-reflective questions. Is our tradition the means by which we know Christ and experience his redeeming presence and grace? Or is our tradition chiefly the means by which we differentiate ourselves from other Christians? Is the liturgy of the Eucharist something your church prays together so that it is the source and sustenance of your unity and the foundation for your mission? Or is it chiefly the thing you argue about—perhaps because you think your priest does it the “wrong way”; or because some are cranky that it is too high or low? How many people in your church characteristically ignore the invitation requirement that we be in “love and charity with our neighbors” by communing even while constantly sowing seeds of discord in these areas?

We need incarnation rather than arguments

Jesus opposed many of the Pharisees because they rejected him, but he did not reject the tradition they maintained. Jesus’ response to their hypocrisy was the Incarnation. He was the Torah or Law incarnate. He lived out the faith that they argued about. He was circumcised. He went to synagogue every Sabbath. He went to the temple for the required feasts. He tithed. He reached out to the poor and needy and drew them in to Israel’s true faith. Then He built His renewed Israel upon the new foundation of his chosen apostles. We are heirs of this ministry.

Renewal requires of us a similar incarnation. We must live out the inward truth of our faith and be far less fussy and legalistic about the outward form. For example, take the “Prayer of Humble Access.” In it we pray “that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body and our souls washed through his most precious blood.” We have wasted much energy arguing whether

just the priest should say it or whether it is a legitimate reform for the people to join in; and we have spent much too little effort in sincere and heartfelt prayer for actual cleansing and washing. The result of this focus on the outward rather than the inward is evident in many parishes—more Pharisees, fewer saints.

Excessive focus on the outward form creates a non-missional church. The mission of the church becomes the attempt to safeguard the pristine form. Outsiders and the uninitiated are seen as a threat against which the church must be protected—and growing up in a slightly different liturgical tradition makes one an outsider! The church door becomes a place of evaluation and judgment rather than a place of welcome. Very few outsiders and uninitiated will fit in without a purposeful effort to draw them in through social and educational events. Since this purposeful effort is lacking in many traditional parishes very few come and even fewer stay. This leads to an increasing sense of self-righteousness. We the righteous stand firm against the unbelieving post-Christian world.

Cultural shifts from the “Greatest Generation” to the present

Aren't we, as the remnant church, called to stand firm against the unbelieving world? There is a legitimate sense in which we oppose “the world” just as there is a legitimate sense in which we exist for the salvation of “the world.” The world to which we are preaching, however, has changed drastically in a generation. Unless we understand how it has changed—and many traditional churches are sadly ignorant of this—we will end up standing firm against those to whom we ought to be reaching out.

Many churches act like they did in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This was a time when denominational identity was more important. A church could attract people by differentiating itself theologically from other denominations or from others within its own church. The websites of many traditional churches are filled with excellent theological treatises that answer questions people might have asked back then when looking for a church. Or they answer questions that were (and are) important only to internal church combatants. The effectiveness of this approach has passed. Most of these treatises are now written by us and read only by us.

In the mid-twentieth century, mainline churches were the backbone of a more or less unified America, in which Christians felt connected to the political process. Consequently, fighting for righteous political causes (for example, pro-life) seemed closely connected to the ministry of the church. These battles or culture wars essentially were lost. The failure was not political. Rather, it was the function of the West becoming much less behaviorally Christian. The western world is okay now with sex outside of marriage, serial marriage and the laws reflect those values. I'm not saying that these are good things. I'm just saying that this is the way it is.

I am completely uninterested in the political discussion of these points other than to summarize the history and to emphasize, as strongly as possible, that there is no going back. We cannot, by political activism, “win” back the culture. Politics was always the wrong arena for the church. I

do not mean that Christians shouldn't vote, participate in politics and even run for office if so called. I mean that the mission of the church is not and cannot be political activism.

Mission is from the bottom up, not the top down

The current state of western society is a function of the failure of the church to make disciples. Because the church failed in its evangelistic and disciple-making work, we have an epidemic of fatherlessness and a host of moral and social ills that stem from that state of affairs—all in a culture in which upwards of 75% of people (in America at least) still identify themselves as Christian. No law will change this. It cannot be changed from the top down; it must be changed from the bottom up.

Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire; this led to what was historically called “Christendom” in the west. However, it began as Jesus called individual people to follow him. It began as the Spirit descended on Pentecost and the disciples Jesus called were led by the Spirit to go to various areas, preach and make more disciples. This “multi-level” mission campaign grew and eventually changed the world. The renewal of the church must follow the same pattern. Don't aim to create a “program” to reach a million people; aim to make some real flesh and blood disciples in your church. A small fire kindled over time can become a big one.

Our missionary environment is much closer to the world of the first century than it is to the world of the mid-twentieth century that formed our churches. Most people don't know what an Episcopalian or Anglican is. They know what a Roman Catholic is. That's the church they no longer go to. If your self-definition is full of references to past tradition, no one knows what you are talking about. If it is full of references to the Ecumenical Councils or the “Catholic” faith, it equally falls on deaf ears—it is Greek to them; you might as well print the statements of those councils on your websites in the original languages. It is not that these councils or theological definitions are unimportant. Rather, they are Christianity 501; most people are at the introductory 101 level—or lower!

Now, these comments all presume that a church wants to reach people and is not content to “compete” for the limited and decreasing population of traditional Anglicans and disgruntled others that might from time to time shift from one church to another. To attract the insiders you might lean on the old language. To reach the world you have to start with the assumption that no one knows who you are.

We are reaching out to victims more than perpetrators

Our culture is much less Christian in its assumptions than it was a generation ago. The current generation has been raised under a new set of post-Christian or pseudo-Christian assumptions and doctrines. For example, the culture used to restrain the sexual impulse; now it merely encourages it and treats its fulfillment like the ultimate thing in life. Serious Christians understand that this is not a good thing; unrestrained sexuality is very destructive. Our culture

is full of the carnage left behind by the new morality. The point is that this is what young people in our time have experienced; this is what they have learned. They are the laboratory experiment for the new morality. They are not doing very well because the experiment is failing—and the old message won't reach them. The old message was: "You have made a conscious decision to disobey—to digress from the Christian way. You need to admit that you have been bad and return to the right way." Then, they might return to the church—with a bit of stigma for their transgression. This message won't work because the point of reference is different now. Today's youth did not so much make a conscious decision of rebellion against an accepted norm as act the way they were taught to act; this is the only way they know. And they know they are bad; this generation is full of self-loathing. What they need to know is that they do, in fact, have worth and that their sins can, in fact, be forgiven.

Abortion is another issue where we need to be conscious of the victims as well as the perpetrators. We can rail again legalized abortion and *Roe vs. Wade*. But our mission field is full of the wounded. Based on the number of abortions in our country since it has been legal, we can assume that a significant group of women in every church has had a least one. They did what the culture told them to do. The guy contributed \$500, the doctor got paid, but she was left with the baggage. You don't need to tell her she was wrong. She knows it. Her question is, "Can I be forgiven?"

Now, I can hear the objection. You are saying there is no personal responsibility for sin. No I'm not. We all participate in the wrong we do. But what is our message? Did Jesus say to the Samaritan woman at the well, "You worthless slut, how could you?" (John 4:1-22). Or was she the first Samaritan convert? He did not skip over what she had done wrong, but he also loved her, valued her and brought her into the new people of God. Is your church a place where things like that can happen?

Will your church preach the gospel of forgiveness to sinners? Will you welcome the wounded of our culture? Will you be patient with them as they learn to embrace their new identity "in Christ"? Or would you rather continue to fight a losing battle in the "culture wars"?

People are looking for more

Once upon a time people went to church out of duty. If they "got something out of it" that was a bonus. Most people now go to church only if they want to. Many don't want to go because they see no purpose in it. If church is not a place where lives are changed and deep connections are made, why go? There are a lot of other things to do on a Sunday. Many aren't looking to "go to church." But many do want to know more about God; many do want to know how to pray; many do want to connect with other people in a community. Connection with others and God rather than duty or connection to outward form is what draws people to church now.

The evangelical movement has had great impact on our culture. Many identify themselves as Christians because they have had some experience of conversion mediated by evangelical influences. Broadly speaking, the problem with the movement has been that it fosters

conversion but not growth. It, generally, has not been connected to the sacraments and disciplines of the spiritual life that foster growth over time. There are many who have experienced a “conversion” but whose faith has not grown much past that. This is part of the reason people don’t go to church. If the church doesn’t help me to make progress—and if I am actually frustrated by my lack of progress—why would I go?

This why there is such a missionary opportunity for our tradition. We have tradition of prayer that will foster growth over time. We have the very thing that people in our culture want and need. But, again, people want the inward reality, not merely the outward form. Our life of prayer must change us first; only then will we have something to offer the world.

Towards an approach; begin with prayer

Diagnosis is the easy part. How do we begin to change things? Change is hard. Most of us put much more effort into complaining about things than we put into changing them. We are talking about changing our church culture. There is much inertia against change in church. There are entrenched interests; many people are committed to the way things have always been done. Consequently, changing a church culture takes vision, commitment, faith and perseverance. If the priest, leaders, and some significant core group in church does not have these things, you are probably stuck with the status quo.

All efforts at church renewal and mission must begin with prayer. Frequently, discussion about mission quickly transitions to the creation or adoption of some program—something we can “do.” We talk about justification by faith, but act like Pelagians. The truth is that we have no idea what to do; the only way to begin is to pray about it and ask God to show us. Prayer and fasting for mission should become habitual and regular in our churches.

To say that mission begins with prayer sounds trite. Many people hear the idea that we should “pray about it” as avoidance—again, we want something to “do.” Most Christians undervalue prayer, and prayer is frequently misdirected. Most prayer in church is for healing and amelioration of trying temporal circumstances; when people talk about how prayer “works” they usually point to some miracle of healing or deliverance from harm.

All prayer for healing will eventually fail because we are all going to die; the focus on deliverance from temporal danger does not adequately account for the faithful Christians who were not delivered—on the calendar we call these “martyrs.” What we should pray for is conversion of hearts and growth in faith. We should pray that the various circumstances of life will work to further these ends (cf. Philippians 1:12-14). We are not (or should not be) afraid of death. What we want is a “good” death; to die at peace with God and in the Communion of the Saints, with the hope of resurrection and life in the world to come—unless we don’t really believe what we say we believe.

Do you pray in your church for conversion of hearts to faith in Jesus Christ through your ministry? Do you pray that people will grow in faith through your ministry? Is this what you

want? Do you think about how your ministry will foster these goals? Or do you just want a few more people to come and help you pay the bills? Since we know it is God's will for the church to fulfill the Great Commission—that is the task he gave to it—we know that prayers for mission will be powerful (cf. 1 John 5:14-15).

Such prayers cannot be offered merely for a season to “help the church grow.” If this is what our mission is, then this is what we should always pray for. Prayer is powerful only when we persevere in it over long periods of time (Luke 11:5-13). When we do not persevere in our prayer, God's knows that we are not serious about it—that we are not really committed to mission and that no enduring work can be built around us.

Acts 1 and 2, a pattern for mission

The Acts of the Apostles provides us with a pattern for how to begin our mission. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come. The period of time between Ascension and Pentecost was a period of waiting and prayer—and we can safely assume that this period also included fasting (The traditional concept of a “novena” comes from this nine day period of prayer). After this period of prayer and fasting the Holy Spirit came and led the disciples into the mission God intended for his church.

This provides a pattern for mission. The pattern is that we must begin with a regular practice of prayer and fasting for mission. I recommend that a church set aside one day a week as a day of prayer and fasting for mission. As the church fasts and prays for mission, the remnant group in the church that is interested in mission should meet to discuss the task of mission. The discussion should begin with brainstorming. Since you have no idea what to do, many outrageous and even bad ideas will have to be worked through before a given church can discover how God wants it to do mission in its particular community.

A pattern will emerge as a church fasts, prays and discusses mission over time. The first thing that will happen is that mission will be given a priority in the life of the church. A church is finally praying for and talking about the thing it ought to focus on (If a church will not devote time to fast, pray and talk about mission, it is not serious about mission). As we pray for the Holy Spirit to come to our churches in a new way, the Spirit will, in fact, come (Luke 11:13). The coming of the Spirit to our churches may be more subtle than Pentecost, but it will be equally powerful. There will be new wisdom and inspiration. The Spirit will speak through the various members of the Body of Christ; the Spirit will begin to bring the dead bones of the new Israel back to life (Ezekiel 37).

Prayer for mission leads to self-reflection about the current state of the church

Prayer for and discussion of mission may initially lead to discouragement because it will require self-examination on the part of the church. This time in front of the mirror may be painful; this is why most churches avoid it and try instead to focus on problems “out there” in the world. For individuals and for churches, criticizing others deflects attention from our own faults and from

the essential task of self-examination. However, a church must engage in honest self-examination. If mission means inviting others to know Christ through the life of prayer we experience together in our churches, then mission must begin by considering just what that life of prayer is—or whether it is present at all.

We reproduce ourselves. What do your spiritual children look like? What is the life of prayer in your church? How does each member typically pray each day? What is the nature of your corporate life of prayer? Are people in your church serious about their faith? Are they working to conquer their particular sins through confession and the experience of forgiveness? Are they cultivating new virtues through fasting, silence, and service? Is there a genuine concern for others?

If the membership of a church is characteristically grumpy, if the typical Sunday conversation is griping about politics or complaining about the rector or some other thing in the church, then that church will typically attract grumpy discontented people. It will only attract a few of them, and they may not stay because they will soon be grumpy about that church too! But if a church is committed to the life of prayer, if there is an evident joy and cohesion to the community, if the members are typically growing in their faith and hopeful and excited about the things that God is doing, then the church will attract (and God will send) people who want to pray, connect with people, and participate in mission.

If a church is serious about mission, it must begin by asking, what are we bringing people into here? We can only give away what we have. Mission must begin with inward renewal.

What does church renewal look like?

The renewal of a church requires a shift in focus away from the details of liturgy and theological arguments and towards “the life of prayer.” A church should focus primarily on the salvation and progress of souls. Those who want to discuss mission should first ask themselves, what is my life of prayer? How am I making progress in the faith?

The Book of Common Prayer is, essentially, a “rule of life” or “rule of prayer” rooted in the Benedictine tradition of prayer. The English Reformation took the Benedictine monastic rule of prayer and reduced it to something that would be accessible to all Christian people. Its basic rule is participation in the Eucharist on Sundays and other holy days and praying the “Daily Offices” of Morning and Evening Prayer—with its daily Bible reading lectionary and cyclical praying of the Psalms. It sets forth guidelines for fasting and presumes a personal life of prayer beyond the liturgy. To be a Christian in the Anglican tradition is to be a Christian who lives by this rule; it is to have a rule of prayer that is rooted in a three-fold pattern: Eucharist or Mass, Daily Office and personal prayer.

Anglican Catholics and traditional Anglicans who are interested in mission should read Martin Thornton. He was a priest, monk and spiritual director in the Church of England. He died in 1986. He wrote two books about what it means to live by the Anglican rule. Thornton’s

book, *Christian Proficiency* is a distillation for lay people of the framework he describes in greater detail in a previous book entitled, *Pastoral Theology, a Reorientation*. In *Pastoral Theology*, Thornton makes a point that explains many of the problems of Anglican Catholicism after its renewal in the Oxford Movement of the 1840s. Thornton writes,

By a regrettable historical contingency, this doctrinal reform [of the Oxford Movement] led directly to revival of liturgical and ritualistic interests. This is, in some ways, tragic, not because ceremonial is unimportant—far from it—but because it came out of its true turn. The obvious child of this doctrinal reform is a rediscovery of ascetical practice in its fullness....Had ascetic been reborn at the end of the nineteenth century, the liturgical problem would have been solved without all the bitterness, and silliness, of the High Church—Low Church controversy that is still with us. Had the new found Remnants of zeal been directed rather than taught, the Anglo-Catholic liturgy would have evolved simply and naturally (112).

The essential point here is that we have focused on the outward details of liturgy when we ought to have focused on prayer and spiritual formation. Ascetical formation leads to deeper understanding of the Sacrament and to greater Eucharistic devotion. However, if we skip ascetical formation and go right to the liturgy, the tendency is (and has been) to focus on the outward form of liturgy and to miss its inner meaning and power. This is how the sacrament of unity becomes a source of division.

Those who enter the church by learning to live a life of prayer are more attentive to the meaning of actions and symbols. They grow to appreciate the fullness of liturgical worship as they grow in their life of prayer because they are focused on the essence of what is happening and what they are experiencing, not just the form. And they are able to worship in a range of liturgical settings. Those whose entry into the church is characterized by indoctrination into some theological perspective tend to see actions and symbols as party badges. They are always finding fault in liturgies because, in their view, something wasn't done "right."

Thornton argues that the essential work of priesthood is spiritual direction. We are called to teach people how to pray. Theology is important because it explains the life of prayer; theology is not merely something to argue about. The aerodynamic principles of lift and thrust are important because they insure that planes will actually fly. A very smart but not very helpful engineer might spend his whole life talking about how things fly, but never actually get a plane off the ground. A very smart but not very helpful or effective priest might talk about God and about worship, but never teach people how to know God through prayer.

Thornton's point with regard to the mission of the church is this. People are drawn to and converted by holiness. People are not drawn to the church and converted to faith by theological arguments. Since holiness is cultivated by the life of prayer, it follows that the renewal of a church begins with the renewal of its ascetical practice.

Your church's rule of prayer

Thornton talks about the “parochial remnant.” This is the core group in each parish that is committed to live by the church’s three-fold rule of prayer. Every member of your mission group *must* be a part of this remnant. Thus, the first task of mission is to determine who comprises the parochial remnant in your church. Who is committed to living the church’s life of prayer? Remember, the mission of your church is to foster conversion of the heart and spiritual growth through participation in your church’s life of prayer. How can someone who is not living your life of prayer help to bring another person into that life of prayer?

This gets back to the basic question of just what you want your disciples to do. When we ask people to “come to church,” we are presuming that they know what the church is doing. This is the old model of “evangelism.” In the old model, most people were “Christian”; they were going to go to church somewhere. The task of your church was to convince them that your church was a more attractive place to practice their faith. In the new model, people may think of themselves as Christian but that identity has no firm doctrinal or practical moorings—and they aren’t committed to coming to church. You will need to show them why church matters. You can only do this by teaching them to pray and by showing them how to experience Christ through the life of prayer in the community of your church.

I believe that cultivating communal participation in the “Daily Offices” of Morning and Evening prayer is central to developing a church’s life of prayer. Of our three-fold rule (Mass, Office, personal prayer) most people naturally participate in parts one and three; that is, most will be present in church for the Eucharist, and most will have some practice of personal and conversational prayer. The missing element for most people is the Daily Office. This provides the routine of habitual prayer that establish a daily pattern of prayer. Without the offices, time is governed by various temporal demands. The offices establish the new pattern; time begins and ends “in Christ.”

The genius of the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer is that it incorporates a cyclical reading of Scripture each year. This is how we read the Bible. This cycle of reading is tied to the church calendar so that we are conscious of being in Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost or Trinity. The Daily Offices give texture to the seasons. They provide for the daily praying of the Psalms. This is the central to our long term growth in the life of prayer. The offices provide a framework for balance (ACTS – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication), reminding us and leading us to pray in these ways each day.

Anglican Catholics have often maintained that the Daily Offices are for the clergy. This is nonsense. The goal of the Book of Common Prayer was to make the church’s rule accessible to all. The main way to encourage a corporate rule of prayer is teach people how to pray the Office. This does not detract from the important of daily Mass—where that can be provided. However, only a small minority of your church will be able to attend Mass every day. But all can pray the Daily Office.

The importance of relationships and connection—a shared life of prayer

Prayer is not practiced by individuals in isolation; prayer is practiced by members of a body. Even when we pray in solitude, we pray as members of the church. The communal nature of the church is especially important for mission. The “life of prayer” must be a communal life and involve a shared rule, a common practice of fasting and feasting, and close relationships in the church. The church must reflect the ideal of the “communion of the saints”; it must be a society in which people know others and are known by others. The reality of grace, of being loved as you are, must be experienced in the community—or else the message of grace that comes from the pulpit will not be received or experienced.

We live in alienated culture. The extended family gave way to the nuclear family, and now the nuclear family has broken down. Even when families are physically close there is often a spiritual and psychological distance between its members. The former shared understanding of human nature and destiny and the meaning and purpose of the family has given way to competing narratives that often place “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law...” (Matthew 10:35). People have a thousand friends on Facebook but really are not close to that many people.

The vocation of the church is to be the new family of God in which people experience genuine intimacy and closeness in relationships that are mutually beneficial; in which all give and all receive according to the various gifts of the members of the body (c.f. Matthew 12:48-50). To foster this environment the church must do two distinct things. First, it must listen to people and allow them to tell their stories; it must be a place where people can be heard without condemnation. Second, it must be able to articulate the new story of the people of God so as to provide the alienated a way to understand their story in a new and redemptive way through faith in Christ. In the new story, the narrative of how God works for good in the midst of our pain, of how God gives us meaning, purpose, and place in Christ replaces the current cultural narratives of hedonism, materialism, alienation and despair. This new narrative must be what the community actually lives and experiences, not just a script.

This need for meaningful community is one reason the missionary church must be different than the church of the mid-twentieth century. Back then church was more compartmentalized. It was one part of a network of connections. You went to church for an hour or so on Sunday before you went to do the rest of life—probably with a different group of people. The missionary church community will touch all of life. To reach people you will need to create social space at church for people to be with you in non-programmed ways. The mission discussion must focus on developing non-liturgical doors of entry into the church. You will need to invite people to social events at church. You will need to connect with people personally; have coffee and lunch with them and invite them into your homes. If you are going to listen to their stories, you will have to create space for them to tell them. And if you want them to hear your story, you must develop the relational trust to gain a hearing. This takes time. None of this will happen if church is merely an hour or so of Sunday worship plus a brief coffee hour.

This requires a change in traditional church culture. This change must be embraced by a critical mass of mission-minded people if a church is to re-orient itself towards mission. This does not mean that everyone in church has to undergo drastic change. For example, it doesn't mean you have to eliminate your early Mass attended by those who like to come early and get on with their day. That is not pastorally wise. Some people were formed by the old culture; they don't (and probably won't) understand the new world in which we live. That is okay. You should still minister to them. But you cannot build a mission-minded church around them. You need others to do new things.

The importance of the party

When we think of ascetical practices, we usually think of fasting and somber faces. But celebration is equally ascetical and it is particularly important for mission. If our experience of redemption in Christ is real, our communal life will be characterized by joy and celebration. The world has a party to kill its pain and drown its sorrows. The party of the church is the celebration of our life in Christ. Consequently, the fasts of Advent, Lent and other times must be complemented by feasts—just as the celebrations of those feasts must be preceded by a real fast.

We are most attractive as a community when we are having a celebration. However, many churches are skilled at hiding their joyful face. They gather for an hour of rather dry worship followed by a sharing of unattractive pastries chased down by subpar, lukewarm coffee. After this two hour liturgy, the people disburse to have their real fun somewhere else; perhaps it will be an attractive repast at their favorite local restaurant or a relaxing day with family and friends at home. Once they let their hair down, it turns out that these church people are actually fun to be around—you just have to get them out of church to discover it! A significant part of being a missionary church is changing this; bringing real communal joy and celebration back into the church.

Why is this important? Because people have decided not to go to church and they don't know what you are doing. Thus, inviting them to church to sit through a liturgy they won't understand followed by an awkward "social hour" will not, in general, be an effective method of evangelism. Nonetheless, we persist in thinking that evangelism is trying to get people to "come to church." We (and they) will be better served by first getting to know each other socially and personally. When people see us as an attractive community, they are more interested in knowing about the faith that makes us attractive.

This is also more consistent with historical methods of evangelism. In the early church those who were not fully initiated weren't even allowed to stay in the liturgy once the offertory began. Our setting is different. We are dealing with the poorly initiated, but the point is the same. There is a "pearls before the swine" feeling to the situation where those who don't understand the mysteries are encouraged to participate in them. They often end up being

critical of the things that are most important to us. This is often not their fault. We've drawn them into it out of order. We've made the end the beginning.

A ministry based on gifts

Another important mission theme is that there must be a movement towards ministry based on the spiritual gifts of the church members—and people must be encouraged to participate in the ministry based on their gifts. There should a survey of the spiritual gifts that are present in the church (Various “inventories” are available). Missionary ministry is gift-based; the ministry of any given church will be directed by the particular gifts that are present in that place. You know God is calling you to do something precisely because he has provided your church with the gifted people necessary to do it; and discovering what gifts are present will help you discover what God is calling you to do!

To foster gift-based ministry this there must be a conscious move away from clericalism. If “Fr. Jones” “does everything,” Fr. Jones is not cultivating the gifts of the members of his church. Fr. Jones is also limited by his own gifts. It is often assumed, for example, that the priest must be the primary teacher, pastor and administrator in each parish. However, if the priest does not have a gift in a certain area, his ministry in that area will not be fruitful. For example, if Fr. Jones does not have a gift for teaching, a gifted lay teacher (operating under Fr. Jones and with his approval and encouragement) will teach a better and more fruitful Bible study. This will require a certain maturity from Fr. Jones. He must be excited about, rather than threatened by, the gifts of the members of his church.

There must be a movement away from placing value on what we might call “the martyr worker.” This is the lay person in the church who “does everything.” This person does everything while everyone else applauds and does nothing; neither the martyr nor everyone else is edified by this pattern. The priest or lay person who does everything is doing other people's work and robbing them of their participation in the ministry of the church. It is a prideful, destructive and non-biblical pattern. In general, with some caveats and exceptions for special events and unusual circumstances, every member of the Body of Christ, clerical and lay, should participate in the ministry within their area of giftedness; each member of the Body of Christ should avoid getting deeply involved and entangled in areas of ministry for which he or she has no gift. If something needs to be done for which no gift is present, pray for God to send someone—and leave the work on the table until God does.

Leaders in the church should continually cultivate and train replacements. A good leader is one who is replaceable because he has trained many disciples. Such a leader will be highly valued for his gifts, but the church can endure beyond him because he had grown an organism that can endure. If the whole ministry is Fr. Jones and the whole ministry disappears when Fr. Jones leaves, Fr. Jones has not been an effective leader. This pattern and mindset should permeate every aspect of the church. We should aim to train disciples, not build little fiefdoms. The person who tries to control everything attracts dependent, dysfunctional people and hinders

their spiritual growth. This is huge barrier to mission—and many traditional parishes must confront it head on.

A new order for mission and evangelism

The old order for getting new church members was something like this. We would try to get people to come to church. If they liked the liturgy—usually because they already knew it—we would try to get them to come to social events and get to know people in the church; then, hopefully, we would get them involved in the ministry of the church. In a year or two they would be conscripted for vestry or altar guild or some other function. The new order is the older and ancient order. First invite people to get to know us in social and relationship contexts. If people find the community attractive, they will want to know more about the faith.

The second step is to invite them to an “inquirers’ class.” Churches should establish regular inquirers’ classes on Sunday mornings. When new people come they should be encouraged to attend that. This allows Sunday to be a combination of worship and instruction and makes outreach to new people a central part of Sunday. This class will systematically walk through the basics of the faith and teach them how to live a life of prayer in our tradition. After this they will be ready for the third step, which is Confirmation or full integration into the worship of the church.

There is also a necessary fourth step. Instruction in faith and prayer should help people to discern what their gifts are. The goal of initiation must be to make people fully functioning members of the church who contribute to its ministry according to their gifts and available time. People want to give. They want to be valuable and meaningful parts of the church. If a church is guilty of clericalism, or if one or two lay people “do everything” and leave no room for involvement by others, most competent and gifted people will eventually move on to a place where they can serve more effectively.

This order is not always neat and clean. People come at various stages of progress in the faith. Some new people can plug right into worship and have enough grounding to understand it. Liturgical worship is attractive to many seekers, especially if it is done well. The important thing is for each church to have all the components of effective mission in place: Social events, inquirers’ classes, excellent liturgy, and opportunities to serve. This will expose new people to the fullness of what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ.

The main point is to challenge the assumption that evangelism simply means inviting people to church—and to challenge the assumption that simply getting people to come to church is the goal of evangelism. Even those who know the worship well may not have as firm a grasp on the faith as we think. People may know how to participate in the Sunday liturgy, but may have no deep sense of faith in Christ and no concept of what it means to live a life of prayer. People may know the liturgy but may still be disconnected from meaningful relationships. This is why social and relational space in the church is as important as the formal prayer; getting people to

function socially in the body may be as evangelically significant as getting them to know the liturgy. Both are integral to what it means to be part of the Body of Christ.

Why mission requires faith

“Without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

A small church will be overwhelmed by task of taking to heart and implementing all that has been said above. There is a reasonable objection. “You say that we should have an inquirers’ class. What if we don’t have any inquirers?” This theme can cover much ground. “How can we have a nursery if we have no kids?” “We don’t have enough money. We can’t afford a good place to meet. We can’t afford a priest.” Following this logic, a church waits for inquirers’ before it starts a class; it waits for children before it provides a nursery; it waits for the money before it gets a building or hires a rector—and, surprise, most of the time the things the church is waiting for never come.

Mission always starts without the needed and desired thing—or else there would be no reason for the mission! People must be sent, there must be apostles, before you can have converts. Mission always moves forward expecting that God will provide the thing you are preparing for in faith. We can look at it from the other side. Why would God send you inquirers if you are not prepared to instruct them? Why would God send you children if you are not prepared to care for them? There are, indeed, financial challenges to mission. If a significant core of people are not willing to tithe—to commit financially to the kingdom—mission will be impossible: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). How can we ask God to be with us in our mission if we are not committed and willing to make significant sacrifices? As often as not, “We can’t afford a priest” or “We can’t afford property or a place to meet” is a stewardship issue more than a real objection. The rewards of expanding the kingdom of God are great, but great rewards can only come in response to great faith and sacrifice. God told the people to start walking toward the Red Sea *before* he began to part it (Exodus 14:14-15).

This raises the larger missionary questions. Why are you a church? What is your mission? If your mission is for people to experience conversion of heart to faith and spiritual growth through your ministry, how can you not be ready to teach someone how to be a disciple? How can your church not be ready to teach someone how to pray? How can you not be ready to welcome those God sends to you?

If we are honest we will have to admit that we are not fully ready. Our churches need work. That’s why we are talking about this. However, weakness is not a barrier to God’s work in us. It is a prerequisite (2 Corinthians 12:9). St Paul wrote, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The question is not whether God can do his work in us. The question is whether we are willing. Do you really want to change? As Jesus said to man by the pool of Bethesda, “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6). That man offered an excuse as to why he could not get well, just as we often make

excuses why we can't do the things God is calling us to do. Do you want to be a missionary and an evangelist? Or do you want to be a caretaker or a docent?

You don't have to be able to do everything, but you have to start by doing something. Start with a commitment to prayer and fasting. Start with a commitment to talk about mission. Then do something to move your mission forward. There is a snowball effect to mission. Each risk taken in faith, each step forward in the cause of mission establishes the new direction so that the next step becomes easier and more natural. If you keep taking small steps for a few years, you will discover that you have moved significantly in a new direction—and new and greater possibilities arise at that point.

There is also a snowball effect to remaining a comfortable and dying church. Avoid the risk and save the time and money; don't get involved in the messy work of reaching out to actual people; build the moat and pull up the drawbridge; play it safe and be content with self-righteousness. A few years of that approach and there is minor paralysis; a few more and rigor mortis begins to set in. But don't worry, you can hold a traditional requiem for the church—celebrated just the right way!

There are choices to be made by bishops, priests, deacons, rectors, vestries and churches. Who do you want to be? What do you want to do? I offer a closing exhortation from the words God spoke to the children of Israel just before he parted the Red Sea waters: "The LORD said to Moses, Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward" (Exodus 14:15).