

THE LINE

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



Three Views on Mission

By Fr. Michael Penfield

At our last Clericus, we were presented with ReVive, a program to help revitalize evangelical work within parishes. Canon Mark Eldredge, who is with the American Anglican Council, presented it. Many of us were impressed with the program, and I announced a missionary drive within the Anglican Convocation of the West to reach out to those who are lost in our troubled society. Unfortunately, soon after our Clericus, Covid-19 hit, and we were sheltered in place.

But an interesting thing happened. Some of our churches started to experience growth during this period of shuttered churches. People started tuning up at our church Zoom services. In our churches in Washington, outside services with drive-through communion started attracting non-parishioners who were hungry for the Blessed Sacrament. And I have been thinking about what is happening.

I am beginning to think that what we are experiencing during this crisis is that people have grown hungry and need to feed their faith. My hypothesis is that people who have said that they were "spiritual"

have started to see that they need more. Because of the virus, many of the distractions of this world have been shut down. And people are beginning to see that there is something missing in their lives. Others have started coming face to face with their own mortality. And this has brought people to our virtual churches. Therefore, we should be prepared when we are finally able to conduct services to welcome and feed a more aware and hungry society.

And with this in mind, I would like to look at three historical images of evangelism; one each month. I want us to see if we may employ their devices and methods to further our own evangelical mission. Remember, I will frame these three images of evangelism as archetypes. But, ultimately, we must ask the Holy Spirit to lead us, to give us a heart to feel and to give us ears to hear. From Him and through Him only will we be successful in reaching a doubting, troubled world. And God alone should be our ultimate inspiration.

The first person I would like to look at is Saint Benedict and his Benedictine Order. Through this



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."*

Order and the Benedictine monasteries, not only was Western Civilization preserved during the Dark Ages, but also was able to preserve and spread Christianity. The Benedictine form of evangelism was able to foster Christianity's growth in such a powerful way that the Middle Ages became the age of Christendom – where the average person lived his faith every day and in every way, making it a central part of his or her daily life.

But who was Saint Benedict? And what was so unique about his vision? Saint Benedict was born right around the fall of Rome, which many historians place at 476 A.D. He was born to a noble, Roman family, but as a young man decided to follow Saint Anthony the Great and become a hermit. However, Saint Benedict only was a hermit for about 3 years. But, during this time, his reputation for holiness made him a person that a local abbey thought could replace their old abbot after he died. Saint Benedict was reluctant, thinking his beliefs and disciplines would not be well-received. And he was right. Legend has it that the monks tried to poison him. After this, Saint Benedict left and eventually formed his own Abbey. As abbot, he wrote his Book of Order, which is still used today. And through this Book of Order, we begin to see how his form of evangelism worked.

The first thing that we have to acknowledge is that Saint Benedict was first and foremost a monk and hermit. He did not go out, into the world. Rather, he “built” holy places and holy lives in very specific areas, which attracted the outside world. In fact, Saint Benedict was highly critical of monks who either traveled about alone or in pairs. He did not think they were legitimate, and he was probably right. Charlatans, and especially religious charlatans, have been around as long as mankind.

But what Saint Benedict did was have his monks form a society of believers who would live holy lives of prayer, work and service. As I see it, Saint Benedict's first calling was for his monks to sanctify themselves. They were to live a Christian model of life, centered on prayer and work. He also was highly critical of what he called “murmuring”, which could destroy a community through rumor and innuendo.

The second calling was to serve others. This is not a hierarchy of priorities though. Although there are two callings, they are co-equal. One is to serve God; the other is to serve His children and their needs. Thus, although the monks lived behind the walls of the Abbey, they served the community around them. They would provide shelter for travellers, and

hospitalization for those who were sick. The monks would often have an herb garden where they would grow medicinal plants.

In time, other orders were formed based on the same way of life as contained in the Benedictine Order. However, these monks ventured out, establishing more monasteries and spreading Christianity and a Christian way of living throughout Europe. For the French, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux is the most famous. He reformed many of the Benedictine monasteries and the order of Cistercians.

The Benedictine Order became popular once more most recently through Rod Dreher's book, [The Benedictine Option](#). Although he sees the Benedictine monastery as a means of protecting Christianity in an ever increasingly hostile world, I see it as a way to view our own churches during this and maybe any future pandemics or crisis.

Those churches that are experiencing new people are doing so because they are, inadvertently, following the second Benedictine model.

These churches are serving a community in need. They are serving the “traveler”, which in our case are those surfing the web, looking for some sanctuary. They are taking care of those in need by providing the Sacrament, even if it is a “drive through” model of providing it. And hopefully, they will help heal those damaged by the virus, or the ill-effects of “shelter in place.”

But the Benedictine model of Christian growth can also be a trap. It fits neatly into

our image of an Anglican Church, where we don't venture out, but rather others come to us. We open our church doors and wonder why no one is coming. That is why this method of evangelization may not work except in crises. After all, it was born during a time of great turmoil after the fall of Rome, and grew through the darkest years of the Dark Ages and the bubonic plague.

However, for anyone who wants to follow the Benedictine Order, it is a wonderful means to gain an understanding of sanctification through prayer, of the morality and beauty of work, and the Christian, Godly love we can experience helping those in need. But, once shelter in place is lifted, we may find those who joined us on Sunday may return to their usual churches. And, once normality is re-established, including all the distractions of this world, we may see people returning to their old patterns. Therefore, we must look at two more archetypal models for Christian evangelism. Next month, we shall examine Saint Francis of Assisi.

God bless.



Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–543). Detail from a fresco by Fra Angelico (c. 1400–1455) in the Friary of San Marco Florence.



ONE LOVE

By Bishop Winfield Mott

Christianity is about oneness. The one God has put together a world where the unity of all creation is at the base of all design. This first hit me when I was dissecting a frog in college biology class and noticing how the essential structure of the frog was the same as mine. Years later, I see that oneness of design is far more extensive than I could have imagined. The opposite of the divine plan of consistent unity is chaos and division. When God creates, he creates oneness and eliminates chaos and void (see Genesis 1). The purpose and indeed being of the one God is love (as clearly and simply expressed in the New Testament; John 3:16, 1 John 4:7-13, Matt. 22:37-39, Ephesians 2:4-5, among many other examples). That which brings us and all creation into the divine unity of love is what God wills. That which pulls away from that unity into chaos and

division is sin and the enemy of God's plan.

Since we have just celebrated the festival of the Trinity, it might seem odd to stress unity, but that is actually the theological point. Along with Judaism and Islam, Christians profess that there is one God. The Trinity is the description of three beings who exist in such complete harmony and unity that it constitutes one being, existing in a perfect love bonding them flawlessly. The love relationship of the Trinity is in fact the role model for all relationships.

That was the intention with the creation of mankind. We were to dwell in a relationship with God in that perfect love. But for love to be offered in a free relationship, it is necessary to have the option of rejecting that love. Forced love is an oxymoron. Mankind chose division and chaos over love, with

the consequences that we see all around us. The central act of all history, the Cross and Resurrection, is God's solution to reunite us with him and restore unity to an otherwise lost creation, and lost human race, which was mandated to steward that creation in harmony with God and his love.

All humans everywhere are therefore invited to be baptized into that scene, to accept love and oneness over sin and chaos. In baptism, we are born again into that one love, as "very members incorporate in the mystical Body of thy Son which is the blessed company of all faithful people" (1928 Book of Common Prayer). We are not baptized simply to be "members of the Church." It is an analogy closer even than being brothers and sisters in one family. We are incorporated into the Body of Christ, an analogy of physical attachment, just as your leg or liver are "incorporated" in your body.

Humans, full of sin and rebellion, react against such closeness. The "blessed company of all faithful people," as administered by us, is fragmented and divided. Beyond that, humans have erected multiple barriers to the oneness of humanity, both inside and outside the Church. Those walls and inequalities separate us at every turn. They are aspects of economics, ethnicity, political divisions and national boundaries, gender inequalities, racial prejudice, religious intolerance, class distinctions, occupation and oppression; perhaps you can add more examples. The model of the Trinity's perfect love, the symbiotic harmonious functioning of the Body of Christ, is replaced with a seething ferment of division, dissent, violence, separation and destruction, inside and outside of the Church.

None of this is new. The initial rebellion and attempted coup in the Garden recorded in Genesis at the dawn of humanity has been replicated throughout time, as recorded in the history books, right down to tonight's evening news, and no doubt beyond. The seeds of love planted in the Garden to come to fruition in the Kingdom are in conflict with the weeds of Hell growing among them.

It is possible at this point to give up hope, and let the weeds take over. Indeed, that would be a realistic response, except for one thing. God has not abandoned us. He continues to apply the sacrifice made once for all, to bring the fruit of love to harvest every season. Unlike the results in my own struggling garden, the weeds do not prevail in God's garden. And despite our sinful divisiveness, we are still in the Body of Christ, we are still baptized indelibly forever, we are still in the Kingdom of love with the flawless oneness of the Trinity.

At this moment in history, what does that specifically mean for us as Christian community:

1) Many are confused by what is meant by "Christianity." The Body of Christ is not at all the same as the multiple versions imagined by various self-appointed "Christian" spokespersons

in America.

2) Sinful human chaos is pandemic within our churches. Sin within our churches needs to be honestly acknowledged and refuted, over and over.

3) The Body of Christ has nothing to do with capitalism, socialism, patriotism, or your comfort with the divisions in our society. There is a national religion in America which equates pretty directly with the old imperial religion of the Roman Empire. The main difference is that the Christians of those early centuries were clear that you cannot conflate Christianity with the national religion, the cross and the flag, the Founding Fathers with the Church Fathers, the national god who conquers the enemies and the loving God who loves the enemies.

4) In the Body of Christ, there is only one race; the human race. End of discussion (but don't take my word for it, take God's Word: Galatians 3:26-28, Colossians 3:11-15, for example). In the Body of Christ, there is no need for racial tolerance, because we are all the same race. In Christ, all human barriers are transcended, including the artificial and sinful barrier of racism. There is great beauty and variety in the divine design of creation, including pigment. But even biology is clear, along with the New Testament, that there is only one human species. The variety is for decoration, not for division.

5) The truth of points #3 and #4 is clear. The implementation of that truth among us is pathetic. Far too many in the Anglican Church in North America are trying to serve two masters, one their Lord and Savior, the other a way of life that fosters artificial inequalities of race, economics, gender and class. As Jesus points out, you can't serve those two masters, you must choose.

Moments of crisis, such as we are now in, have their uses. History is full of examples; the agonizing choice many had to make in 1861 between loyalty to the Union or to the Confederacy, the difficult decision between rebellion and loyalty to the Crown in 1776, the conflicting paths of the Vietnam years, the challenge of the Civil Rights movement, to mention a few just from our own history. Crisis forces you to face dysfunctions which it is more comfortable to avoid noticing. That confrontation in turn forces you to decide what is right and what you are going to do about it. "Large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality and humanity," said the Christian prophet Martin Luther King in 1967. If that observation describes you, you have some confronting of self to do.

The picture of heaven so gloriously portrayed in Revelation 7 shows everyone gathered from all tribes and nations, without differentiation. As theosis gradually absorbs us, the sooner on earth we arrive at that picture, the better. "One love" may be a Jamaican slogan, but it is also profound Christian truth.