

THE LINE

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



2020 MDAS Synod • Part Two

VERY IMPORTANT: On **17 October 2020** at 10:00 am EDT, 11:00 am MDT, 12:00 noon CDT and 1:00 pm EDT, the Missionary Diocese of All Saints will conduct their 2020 Virtual Synod via Zoom. All clergy, including non-parochial and retired clergy, and the representatives of all parishes are to attend. Please make sure that you and your two representatives are able to attend. If you or your representatives will not be able to attend, please notify your Vicar General at mapenfield@mailbox.org or 408-960-4915.

God bless.

The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield
Vicar General for the Convocation of the West



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."*

Three Views on Mission

By Vicar-General Fr. Michael Penfield

Today, I would like to look at the last of our three historical images of evangelism. Remember, I am framing 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 will we be successful in reaching this dysfunctional world. And Christ alone should be our ultimate inspiration, courage, and strength.

The first person we looked at was Saint Benedict and his Benedictine Order. The second person we looked at was Saint Francis of Assisi and his Order of the Friars Minor. The final “person” we will look at is no person; it is a group of people. I would like us to look at the clergy in England of the late 19th Century who were of the Oxford Movement. These clergy were assigned to the parishes that no one else wanted, in the slums of England, and turned them into beacons of evangelical conversions. And we will look at these clergy specifically to see if they can provide us with lessons that we may be able to use for our own missions.

The first thing that we need to note is that the conditions that existed during this Victorian Era were not all that different than today in that the Catholic branch of the Anglican Church was not well-favored. In fact, many in the church considered them aberrant. For this reason, many of these Oxford and Cambridge educated, upper class priests were assigned to some of the worst and failing churches in England. Many of these churches were quite lovely buildings that were established by the aristocrats, but the slums of a burgeoning working class started to grow around them.

In these slums were many immigrants from Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Those from Ireland were predominantly Roman Catholic; those from Scotland and Wales were predominantly Nonconformists. As you can guess, neither of these were good prospects for conversion. Others still were irreligious. And still others were quite hostile to religion. It seemed overwhelming. In fact, it is recorded that at least one Vicar who was so dismayed by his prospects when assigned to a parish in Liverpool shut himself into his Vicarage and “shut up shop.”

But this was not the solution that many Anglican priests took. Like all good Anglicans, many of these priests started by looking at their books. They were looking into how to operate in the slums of industrial Great Britain. They looked at their Church Handbooks; they looked at their lessons and subjects at University; and they asked advice from senior pastors and

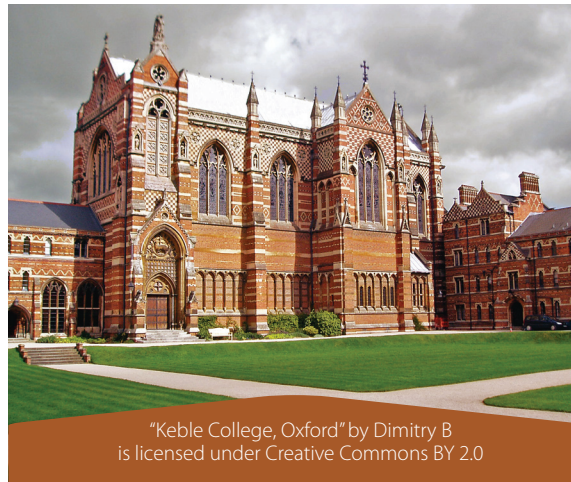
bishops, some of whom wanted them to fail because they objected to their catholicity. Yet, none of these helped. These clergy were facing conditions unfamiliar to their predecessors or advisors. They were facing a range of problems from a hostile public to crushing poverty. So, what did they do? They threw out their handbooks and started looking at the problem afresh.

In our recent presentation from the ACC’s ReVive! Program, Fr. Mark Eldredge told us about a situation he had in Florida. Similarly, the neighborhood he was in was quite poor and drug-filled. His parishioners commuted in and commuted out. The church was not growing. He started an outreach program to those in the area, started drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs and started reaching the people who actually lived near the church. There were problems, including parishioners who left because they did not like these new attendees and a drug counselor that they discovered was selling drugs in the parking lot. But, in the end, they grew and served their community. This is the closest present-day model that I have to the model used by the Oxford Movement clergy in the slums of England.

These 19th Century English clergy looked at their communities to see what they needed, both spiritually and physically. Many of these clergy became active in the Christian

Socialist movement; others did not. But, ultimately, they tried to serve the people around them. They used local community resources. They used their services to create “rites of passage” for their community, and the community used them. They set up clubs and societies for the locals to join and become a part of the church. They used philanthropic activities to bring in badly needed resources. And they became part of the community around them instead of set apart.

But there is another element that I think many academics missed. These Victorian clergy were also committed to bringing back the beauty and mystery of worship to their parish. They brought catholicity back into the form of worship predominantly because they fully embraced the idea that God should be worshipped in the beauty of holiness. They did not make the form of worship “pedestrian” because “God doesn’t care about all that stuff.” In fact, they believed God DOES care. So, they strived to make it truly beautiful, and like the Eastern Orthodox, they tried to engage all the senses in their worship from “bells to smells”. But, it is my theory this had an unintended side effect.



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In Victorian English society, the classes were quite rigid with little interaction, and the belief that the best was saved for the “best class”. When these Anglican clergy worshipped God in such beautiful and elaborate ways, it sent a subliminal message to their parishioners. It indicated that the clergy were not writing off the people as not worthy or not worth the bother; nor did the clergy decide that they would change their form of worship to “meet the needs” of their community. Rather, they saw that the worship of God demanded what catholicity could provide – beauty, mystery, and awe. And so, they tried to bring in all the beauty and reverence they could into their worship – and often they had the facilities to do so.

Now, oddly enough for us, this did not necessarily include Holy Communion each Sunday. Many in the Oxford Movement were quite comfortable with Morning Prayer most Sundays, though some moved to Eucharist each Sunday and Morning Prayer during the week. And this is the basis for an additional theory of mine – because many preserved Morning Prayer, they were able to reach those in the community who were Nonconformists. I also think that because of their rich Catholic-based services they were able to reach some of the Roman Catholics too.

The Oxbridge priests of Victorian England made great progress, reaching a very troubled community. The social ills, the philosophical hostility, and the secularism first established in France made Victorian society not unlike ours. However, we have additional issues with which to contend making us unlike our brethren in the slums of Liverpool.

As we look back at these three archetypes, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi and the Oxbridge priests of Victorian England, we can see that each were answering a need unique to their time in a unique way. Some of these same conditions exist today, in varying degrees. Some have advocated St. Benedict’s retreat into the monastery. Some have advocated St. Francis’s

radical poverty and service to the poor. Still others have advocated a less radical approach that serves the needs of the community similar to the English Oxford Movement priests of the 19th Century. And I would strongly recommend any of these approaches if you believe it would serve God, spread the Word, and reach people for Christ. But I would also ask you to remember what St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians so many centuries ago:

“I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake that I may be partaker of it with you.” [1 Cor. 9:22b-23]

This statement has always been a bit troubling to me. Taken out of context it almost condones being a hypocrite and liar. But this is not what St. Paul meant at all. It means reaching the unbeliever where they are and speaking to them on their level as equals and not as a superior. It is the opposite of being a hypocrite and the opposite of a liar. We are to speak as one sinner to another, and we are to be honest about our own failings in order to reach those who are letting their own failings stop themselves from seeking God and accepting Christ as their personal Savior. As Bishop Mott likes to quote, it is “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”

So, here is my advice and what I have learned from my research into these three archetypes. Throw out the handbooks and look honestly at your community, at your church, and at yourself. This is what these great men did. What does God need from you; what does your neighbor need from you; and how can we become more humble as we approach those who are in need? If you answer these questions, if you can proceed while constantly asking the Holy Spirit to guide you each step of the way, and if you can use the past examples as signposts rather than dogma written in stone, you WILL be able to reach a doubting world, with God’s help.

God bless.

Fighting Darkness And Chaos

By Bishop Winfield Mott

At the time of creation, our species was mandated to steward the earth. We Christians are the ones who (should) understand that mandate and therefore are burdened with leading others to the vision of a world managed by us on behalf of God and His will. This includes the political process, so pre-eminent right now, beginning with assessing the nature of a particular government, as it will either enable or thwart our earthly stewardship.

The New Testament points first to a transcending Kingdom. “My Kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus tells Pilate (John 18:36). “Our citizenship is in heaven,” Paul tells the Philippians (3:20). Some presume one set of standards for now, another when arriving into a future Kingdom. But that future begins in baptism, not at physical death. We have dual citizenship right

now in both heavenly and earthly kingdoms.

Jehovah’s Witnesses resolve this potentially conflicting situation by refusing to participate in earthly government, abstaining from expressions like the Pledge of Allegiance or voting. But our responsibility to manage the earth means Christians do not have this option.

Jesus had no interest in being a political leader, despite the expectations of the Jews that the Messiah would lead an uprising, restore the Kingdom of Israel and rule as king. Instead, Jesus is satisfied with the Roman government functioning to prevent chaos and darkness. When he was asked if Jews should pay taxes to Caesar, he answered “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17).

The Roman Empire was not a Christian nation, and did not become one for another four centuries. It frequently persecuted Christians. Nevertheless, early Christians supported that government. "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by him" (1Peter 2:13-14). If a government is performing its stewardship "for the Lord's sake," maintaining a peaceful well managed society and taking proper care of the earth, it is fulfilling its stewardship role whether it proclaims itself as Christian or not. Christians refused to worship the Emperor as a civic god, but otherwise were obedient to the Empire. The peace of the Empire (Pax Romana), the absence of borders, relative ease of travel and communications meant the removal of many obstacles to the spread of the Gospel. Martin Luther characterized this role of civil government as the "left hand of God."

The United States never has been a "Christian" or "Judeo-Christian" nation, despite the presence of many Christians among the populace and despite the frequent repetition of the lie that it is Christian. The foundational documents make reference to God, but not to Christianity. There is a body of law, with much that Christians find desirable or at least acceptable, along with elements that are not compatible. The same could be said for the Roman Empire as well.

There is, however, a major difference between Rome and America. In the Roman Empire, citizens did not choose their leaders (let alone the non-citizens who were the majority of the population). There were no popular elections, general referendums or votes. For most inhabitants, the only options were obedience or rebellion. Therefore, the New Testament has little comment on how to participate in government.

That vacuum has been filled in various ways. Many church synods debate a laundry list of resolutions ranging from support for Israel through abortion issues, legalization of drugs, liquor laws, child care, environmental issues to support for Palestine, and a whole host of other items. The Anglican Church in North America, thankfully, has generally refrained from this kind of exercise.

The question, then, is, who speaks for the Church? The answer is, you and I do. As inhabitants of the Body of Christ, we each carry the Church wherever we go. It is the vocation of each to participate in our political process, as part of our stewardship of the earth. Providing a peaceful, stable, nurturing setting is a crucial role of government. Beyond that, we share our Christian perspective to shape a government that cares for people and for the Lord's earth itself, so that both might have good health. To that end, a government which reduces poverty, promotes economic equality, provides health care,

fights climate change, values life in all its stages, among the myriad of tasks managing God's earth requires, is doing a good stewardship. Christians can move government in these good directions, even if the government, like ours, is not "religious."

Since we all are the spokespersons for Christianity, we must be wary of self-appointed ones, even when the media identify someone, such as Franklin Graham or Jerry Falwell to be one. You and I are the spokespersons, and the reality is that Christians speak with a variety of voices about issues of public stewardship.

A good example of how a Christians enters the political forum is John Kasich, an active Anglican and former Ohio governor. His Christian viewpoint is not expressed by loudly proclaiming his religiosity. He simply translates good theology into understandable public policy in a sensible way. I do not always agree with him, and you may not, either, because Christianity is not like Hitler or Mao, everyone in lockstep with

the party line. A Christian approach is that we each are given a brain to use, public policy is a dynamic dialog and we are working it out together in a democracy. Respect for others as children of God and a focus on solutions, rather than trashing one's opponents with scurrilous personal attacks is the Christian methodology.

In the present political atmosphere, we are experiencing a dangerous polarization. It benefits those on both the Right and the Left whose agenda is to prevent that dynamic dialog, and further divide us. Currently, some on the Right are trying to promote the idea that theirs is the only Christian viewpoint, even though at the top is

a leader who is absent of any Christian policy, and devoid of Christian morality. There is, in fact, no "Christian" party, despite the presence of Christians, like Kasich, in the ranks of both parties.

In the current swirl of disinformation, remember Jesus' advice to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Democracy only works when citizens have access to true information. Be sure to check your sources before believing some "fact" thrown at you! Checking it with the way Jesus sees things is ideal. Jesus cared for all, but in particular reached out to the marginalized and alienated, the poor, the ethnically disliked (such as the Samaritans), those in poor health, the "least of these."

Election decisions are a stewardship challenge, this year perhaps more than usual. Applying the love of God to the management of the earth and its creatures is the basic principle. It can't be achieved with a soundbyte or a tweet. It requires some thought, prayer and listening to the voice of Jesus in the Gospels.

This is the mission given to you and I, as the Body of Christ in action.

