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OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



What's Missing In Christian Belief?

By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott

“Let us love one another, that we may with one mind, confess the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” In the Eastern Christian Liturgy (of St. John Chrysostom), this is how the priest invites the congregation to proclaim the Nicene Creed. The anemic “Let us confess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed” pales by comparison. This is because St. John Chrysostom reflects an entirely different dimension into what it is to believe in Christ.

In seminary, I was taught dogmatics, the system of beliefs, as if each article of faith was a log. In the Creed, they were stacked together, piled like cordwood. Comparison among Christian denominations or schools was done by examining each log to see how various theologians interpreted it. For example, if 80% of the dogma-logs were the same among Roman Catholics as among Lutherans, it was noted that the two denominations had that extent of similarity in a quantified way.

St. Paul has quite a different take on this. “If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and

if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2). He notes this in a comprehensive message to the Corinthians on the Eucharist, and what constitutes a proper celebration of it. In 1 Cor. 11, he covers the theology, quoting Jesus’ Words of Institution which proclaim the bread is the Body of Christ and the cup seals the new Covenant, as we are united with Christ. But he doesn’t stop there. Even as they have correctly understood the Real Presence of Christ in the bread and the wine, he scolds them vigorously because many are indifferent or contemptuous towards their fellow communicants, not consequently discerning Christ in them also. Their failure to grasp the essence of the Presence is love makes their Eucharistic actions no more than “a noisy gong or clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1) despite their apparent orthodoxy.



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

It is important to realize the position of the Creed in the Liturgy:

First, it is an invariable component of our Eucharistic Liturgy, which witnesses to the importance of proclaiming what we believe as Christians. Our Faith is neither vague nor optional, and while there is room for variation in many things, the core is not negotiable, and it is this core we confess in the Creed. Placing the Creed in the middle of the Liturgy brings home its' centrality as the shared statement of Christian belief, in all places and through all times.

Second, the Creed stands as the bridge from the conclusion of the Service of the Word (Mass of the Catechumens) to the Eucharistic Service (Mass of the Faithful). The former stresses instruction, the intellect, trying to understand God's message to us. The latter brings us into the close personal presence of our Savior and Lord, the celebration of a love relationship. From earliest times, the Church designated it as the "agape" in Greek, the love feast. The Creed stands to connect intellectual affirmation with a loving relationship with our God, and equally, with each other.

Unfortunately, by the later Middle Ages in Western Europe, the flames of love were burning low and ignorance had replaced instruction. Most of the Reformers focused on the didactic and many errors were corrected. But they failed for the most part to grasp the central role of the Eucharist in restoring a loving Christianity along with an intellectually accurate one. In some Reformation liturgies, the Creed was even placed before the sermon, not after, as a recounting of the "logs" of Faith rather than the shared proclamation in loving unity.

The liturgical renewal of the past century restored the position of the Creed in the Liturgy as the "bridge." But its meaning as the expression of our shared love for the Triune God and each other is still largely missing among us. It is to be feared that the reason may be that we do not in fact have that shared love in our communities as the basic reason for our being. The rejection of the phrase, "let us love one another..." from St. John Chrysostom's

Liturgy by the ACNA Liturgical Commission in the 2019 BCP might well reflect the state of both love and community in our midst.

Current Anglican theological discussion is almost exclusively about sexual and gender issues, none of which are referenced in the Creed and few in the New Testament. Even abortion, a collateral damage of sexual behavior, falls in this category. The Christian core has become less and less familiar as the generations pass, instruction fades and more trendy issues fill the minds of the remaining Anglican adherents.

It would be interesting to speculate how the debates of the past few decades of ecclesiastical warfare might have gone if they had started with "let us love one another." Over the centuries, the question could be widened out to most of

the discussions (and wars, executions, incarcerations and other hostilities) if they began within a community united by beliefs forged in the heat of "let us love one another" instead of continuing in the old tradition founded by Cain.

Part of the problem is no doubt the use of the word "love" for many things which have nothing to do with "agape," the definition of which is a selfless giving to one who is loved, even if they do not return the love. Yet to simply surrender and decide to forget about a Christian community being centered in love of the best kind is so basic to Christianity and the Christian life that it isn't an option. In the many places in the Church where love is not the driving force nor regarded as the center of the Eucharist, the results have not been positive: declining numbers, a chasing of non-Creedal and non-Eucharistic rabbit trails,

a popular view of church people as judgmental, self-righteous, legalistic hypocrites determined to impose ugly restrictions on others and an orthodoxy focused on excluding others, not on loving them.

Simply restoring the phrase in the introduction to the Creed will not instantly change all this. But the discussion around it that would arise is as good a place to start as any. Except, of course, if the change needs to begin first in your own heart.



A Byzantine mosaic of St. John Chrysostom
Public Domain

New Year Ponderings II

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

"And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave." [1 Kings 19:12-13a]

I hope and pray that my last article stimulated thoughts and discussions in each of your parishes. I invite anyone who thinks they have a good idea to share it with me so I can pass it on to others. But, as promised, in the beginning of January I spoke with Canon Mark Eldredge regarding the findings the Anglican Council obtained from our recent survey. And I found our discussion quite enlightening. In this article, I will share these findings and his suggestions. I will also share with you how I interpret all of this. And I pray you all will find this helpful, as well.

The first point that Canon Eldredge shared was that his findings for the Convocation of the West was no different from the Missionary Diocese of All Saints (MDAS) as a whole and, surprisingly, no different from all of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). It did not matter if the church was Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical or Charismatic, their parishioners felt they were all Christ-centered churches that engaged in an authentic form of worship. But, as surprising as this may seem at first blush given the many and varied forms of worship that we represent in the ACNA, if you think about it, it makes perfect sense.

Many of our churches came out of the Episcopal Church because it either failed to put Christ first in its teachings or failed to worship the Lord in their services or both. Since this was our first priority, it became the cornerstone of our new churches. The point was that the parishioners in each of these churches felt that

these two goals were well achieved.

Likewise, the areas where we all felt we were good at were the same. These areas were classified as Spiritual Formation, Leadership Development, Lay Mobilization, Kingdom Generosity and Effective Systems. "Kingdom Generosity" is how well a church gives financially. All the other terms are self-explanatory. These areas did not score the highest but they did not score the lowest. They were in the middle ground area.

I would caution all, however, to still look at these areas for your church. For example, if you feel your church is NOT doing an adequate job in Spiritual Formation, do NOT let this poll dissuade you from improving your catechism for adults and for children. As one who was poorly catechized in the 60s, I have always felt that we can do a better job in this area. Catechesis is essential to all our churches, not only for withstanding the pressures of our society but also to help make it possible that our form of faith and worship will transcend past our current generation.

But the areas on which our parishioners felt that we do poorly are also the same three areas. These areas are classified as Vision Clarity, Covenant Community and Missional Impulse. "Covenant Community" is basically "fellowship". It is how a parish loves and cares for one another. The question is whether there is a genuine love for one another in your parish and whether you take care of each other's pastoral needs. Additionally, if it is a large parish, does it have small groups for fellowship? "Missional Impulse" is how well a church does in engaging in local evangelism. According to Canon Eldredge, Missional Impulse is almost always the lowest score in over 120 churches in the ACNA. Vision Clarity is self-

explanatory. Does the parish have a clear vision for itself and for its future?

This overview should give you a good feel for the Anglican Council's findings. Though these are the opinions of the parishioners and clergy, they are probably very accurate as to the overall reality of our Convocation.

The other important factor that Canon Eldredge and I discussed was the life cycle of a typical church. Now, I must admit, it was in 2019 that Canon Eldredge first presented this analysis during one of our Clericuses, and I forgot much of this. So, just in case you are like me or you were not able to attend the 2019 Clericus, let me refresh your memory.

When a church is first formed, when it is born its main thrust is conversions rather than programs. The people are excited and want to bring in as many new people as possible. Soon after its birth, most churches enter an "Incline" stage of growth. Most churches at this point are Vision driven. It's ramping up. It is also mostly future oriented as opposed to being concerned with the present (or obsessed with the past). Outreach is very big, and programs are ramping up at this point, but it is not yet a chief concern. Then comes the period of "Recline". This is when the church size is comfortable, the parish is comfortable, and they start to relax. Programs start to become increasingly important. Although Outreach is important, it is starting to lose its priority. The priority shifts from the future to the present – serving the needs of the present parishioners instead of trying to bring in more future parishioners. Here is where the turn begins.

The next stage is "Decline". The past becomes more important than the present or the future. Programs become more important than the vision or outreach. And the focus becomes preserving the Core than reaching others. Here is where things can start becoming dangerous.

The first problem is when the church is turned into a museum: the goal is to preserve everything as it once was. No additional services; nothing new; no changes to the building or the furnishings. This is not preserving a traditional form of worship – this is a type of rigamortis. The priest must conduct the service exactly the same way as before regardless as to how he theologically feels about this form of worship, and even if what was being done in the past was not correct. But this problem is really quite subtle. It is more about attitude than the actual forms it takes. The service may not change because it is what the parish and clergy want. But if the parish is open to possibilities, then the attitude may be a proper one. If the attitude truly is a kin to "nothing can change," then there may be a real problem.

Another problem that is not so subtle is when preserving the Core becomes so important that some parishioners may use their position as a tool for power to get what they want. "If you do this,

I will attend" or "If you don't do this, I will leave." I have had both of these things happen to me. There is only one solution: the answer must almost always be "no". And the reason is obvious. If one does not stand up against such blackmail, then one is always held hostage to this person or group. And this becomes crucial when the church is in decline.

What happens to many churches when they are shrinking and going into decline is that they start hunkering down. They go into "defense" mode. They do not chance; they do not dare. They become concerned and even scared. When this happens, it is quite easy to slip deeper into decline and despair. The enthusiasm that the parishioners had when the church was formed leaves and what is left is the surviving few. If this cycle is not broken, what may eventually happen is the death of the church, which is the last stage.

Now, some of you may think I am suggesting wild changes to the service to attract people, but I am not. That was a warped concept from the 60s and 70s. The notion that a traditional worship is one no young person can relate to is an inherently



The Rev. Canon Mark Eldredge

flawed concept. In fact, in our present society we now know that changes to the service itself is the WORST thing you can do. Additionally, according to our survey, worship is the one thing we do well – Christ centered, authentic worship. The ONLY suggestion I would make is the same suggestion made to me as a "young" priest – worship should be joyful. Is your worship full of the joy you feel when embraced in the love of God? If it is, you are doing well, no matter what your form of worship may be.

Our young people hunger for tradition. One recent study of those in their early adulthood called these people "the wolf children", meaning they were raised by wolves. What the authors wrote is that these are the children raised in day care. They have no sense of tradition or history and very little sense of family. They

are hungry for all these things.

One English man I met recently teaches the Roman Catholic catechism for those adults who want to become Roman Catholic (RCIA) in Great Britain. He said that these young men want to kneel during the consecration and want their girl friends to wear veils in church, which is very traditional. Meanwhile he said with chagrin that often this same couple is living together even though they are not married. Young people are hungry for traditions and authentic worship, even though they have not fully come to realize all the morality that their grandparents embraced. Education takes time.

However, this being said, we CAN do better. First, we need to let go of the fear. We must trust the Lord. Second, take this survey to heart. Dare to bring others in; dare to be open, accepting AND non-judgmental. We MUST have a vision AND we MUST all buy into it. We must be missionaries and evangelists, just like we were when the church first formed. We MUST dare to take chances, try new things, sing new songs (that we CAN sing). We must trust and not fear. Having a Vision and having a Mission are critical, but do not forget that we MUST

become a caring Community. All three of these are important. All three are where our churches are weak. And all three are needed in order to move out of “decline” and eventually into “incline.”

And just to add emphasis, the need for Community is huge. I have found visiting the different churches that are in the Convocation of the West that all the churches that are growing or at least maintaining have a good sense of community. They often share a meal after services. They visit each other when sick or in need. They call. They also do things together. There should be a sense of Community for those who are young to want to join and who want to stay. This may not have been true for us who grew up in the 60s and 70s. We wanted our own lives, we thought. We wanted to be “free.” But that was all a trap; it was not true. And each church can form a community. Just make sure it is something you CAN do. If you are older, making phone calls may

be better than visits. This is also true if you work a lot of hours. But little acts of sincere concern and caring will quickly develop into a true community.

Finally, Canon Eldredge has one more suggestion. He has a book that helps a parish go through this self-examination. The book is entitled ReVive and is written to be used by the entire church over a six-week period. It therefore lends itself quite easily for use during Lent. Each parishioner should get their own copy, reading one chapter a day for forty days. There are discussion questions

at the end of each section, which are designed for group discussions. The parish could use it where, if they get together for a Wednesday night soup dinner for Lent, the participants can discuss each section of the book. If the parish is large, they can break into smaller groups. If the parish is small, they can do the discussion after services on each Sunday of Lent. It is a good suggestion.

The easiest way to get the book is to go to www.churchrevive.org. Then find the picture of the book, and click on it. It is a link and will take you to Amazon where you can place your order or orders.

The final thought I would share is this: even if you are skeptical, I would ask you to get the book and read it. You may get a few ideas that can help you. But hunkering down is NOT a Christian concept. We need to be better evangelists. And, ultimately, we must trust the Lord to help us to be better than what we know we really are! God can work in very subtle ways; in fact, He often does. And He can turn your church around so it is no longer in decline, OR prevent it from going into decline.

Finally, as I wrote in the previous article, I would ask everyone, both clergy and lay, to pray and to listen for what the Lord is asking us to do in each of our individual churches. And then, we are to do it.

Amen.





Request for a Bishop Coadjutor

Bishop Lipka has notified his Standing Committee that the College of Bishops of the ACNA has given us permission to find a Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints. The Bishop, with his Standing Committee, has tried to be prepared for such a happy outcome. Consequently, we have a list of names of those candidates from each of the Convocations to be chosen for the Search Committee. The Search Committee will be selected at our next Standing Committee meeting.

This will be a very important period for our Diocese. Therefore, I am asking everyone to pray for Bishop Lipka, for the Standing Committee, and for the Search Committee. Please pray that they will be guided by the Holy Spirit to choose a Godly man, right for the job and inspired to follow our Lord, Jesus Christ so that MDAS will continue to strive to be part of the Lord's one, true, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

God bless,
Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General