

DIVINE COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE

OUR ANGLICAN HERITAGE : CONTINUITY & DISCONTINUITY

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INTRODUCTION

In order that we may be able to appreciate the true nature of our Anglican heritage, and thence be able to discern patterns of continuity and of discontinuity, it is essential that we are clear in our understanding of what that heritage is, and what it entails. We are concerned here not with mere matters of denominationalism, or what makes an Anglican different from a Roman Catholic or a member of ECWA, or any denomination for that matter. The heart of our faith and of the gospel supersedes all such divisions, as St. Paul made abundantly clear in his life and teaching:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:26-28)

Let us be clear that God will always bless and prosper his work done in his way, according to his will and for his glory. This assurance is not tied to any particular denomination. The heart of our Christian heritage is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This “good news” is for all people everywhere, and therefore the concept of mission is central to the gospel message and to our heritage. Any denomination which moves away from the mission of God is moving away from God’s blessings, but any denomination, Diocese, circuit, assembly or local church which surrenders totally and wholly to the mission of God and to the apostolic mission, ministry and teaching will surely see results such as the apostles saw.

Mission is central to God’s nature. John Stott put it this way:

“Mission is an activity arising out of the very nature of God. The living God of the Bible is a sending God, which is what ‘mission’ means. He sent the prophets to Israel. He sent his Son into the world. His Son sent out the apostles and the seventy, and the Church. He also sent the Spirit to the Church and sends Him into our hearts today. So the mission of the Church arises from the mission of God and is to be modelled on it.’¹

Mission is the mission of God, often referred to by its Latin term, *missio Dei*, the original concept of which was that of God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. This was then further extended to include the concept of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. The initiative and incentive comes from God: it is a movement of God to the world, in

¹ Douglas, J.D., ed. 1975. *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland. Official Reference Volume.* Minneapolis: World Wide, 66.

which the church is the instrument. The church exists because there is a mission to fulfil, and that mission is a mission of service, of representing God in and to the world, of pointing to God and of being a vehicle of God's endless love to the whole world. This is why, in the abstract given for this paper the mission of God was described as being "the drive of the Church, the inspiration of its theology, and the edification of its liturgical worship." Activities such as church planting, crusades and the building of church structures are results and expressions of this vision; they do not lead to it. This order of priority must be clear and must be maintained, because if it is not so, then mission activities become man's activities, and focus on man's ideas, plans, hopes and ambitions, rather than on those of God. We shall see examples of how discontinuity was brought about when such false priorities arose, but how at the same time, God's love never ceased and God himself brought solutions - providing only that man was prepared to listen and to follow.

The church therefore must live "in a creative tension of, at the same time, being called out of the world and sent into the world" having "the first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom.8:23) as a pledge of what is to come (2 Cor 1:22)². A true presentation of the gospel of salvation comes with practical implications and clear evidence of the message: it is a living out and a pouring forth of the love of God to all peoples, nations, tribes and communities of his world.

Today, as we look both backwards and forwards, we can see both continuity and discontinuity in the manner of the pursuit of this mission and therefore also in the nature of the results of the mission. What causes discontinuity? What brings continuity? How was the work of the gospel carried out by Jesus Christ himself, by the apostles, and by the church in later centuries? It is beyond the scope of this paper to do a thorough survey, but for the further consideration of our topic we shall look briefly at three areas, and consider relevant examples. Our areas of concentration will be: Training for Mission and Ministry; Apostolic Mission and Ministry; and Continuing the Mission.

1. TRAINING FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY Matthew 9:35 - 10:1

It is impossible to further any meaningful consideration of *missio dei* without taking our bearings from the very heart of mission, Jesus Christ, who alone provides the only perfect example of that which is pleasing unto the Lord. All other ways are examples which are flawed by human failure.

Jesus lived and demonstrated the mission of God; his whole life-style was the evidence of God at work in human form. He further made the mission of God possible for his followers to carry out and also pass on for continuity. The effectiveness of Jesus' teaching about the mission of God is in his ability to teach, to live out his teaching, and to train his followers through practical experience in the field. He never asked them to do what he himself would not do. A living church must be a Mission Church reaching out to others who are not related to you by blood, going to people in need of all that will restore their dignity and humanity through Jesus Christ. We who have received the benefits of mission must now go out to give out the mission of Jesus Christ in all its fullness.

² Bosch, D.J, 1991, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York, Orbis, 11

In Matthew 9:35-10:1 we see how, in this trip, the disciples were going to learn the lesson of a life time. Jesus is preparing for mission and therefore spends time personally in training his disciples for the task ahead. He spends time with them taking them through the mission fields, talking with them about what is God's priority, and showing them what the work looks like. Jesus is careful to introduce them to what it takes for them to make mission worth the effort and be fruitful.

The gospel, which the disciples and the church today are called to proclaim in mission is not an academic debate, or a purely mental exercise; it is a living power which must sink into the heart and mind of a person. Viewing the gospel as a purely intellectual discussion makes it abstract, whereas the gospel is a practical demonstration of God's power in action. The gospel must be believed to the point of motivating a believer to live out that belief on a daily basis, and thus to stand for truth, justice and righteousness at all times and in all places. In Romans 1: 16-17 St. Paul puts it this way:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'

In these two verses Paul encapsulates the central core of his theology and of his way of life. The power of the gospel is the power of God working towards the salvation of everyone who believes. It is more than just preaching, more than just talking: it is not merely an announcement of the fact that salvation will take place one day. The gospel is itself a divine power leading to salvation; it leads to faith and action, to the restoration of lives, of communities, of the environment. The gospel - if it truly is the gospel that is being proclaimed - will assuredly bring life, light and growth; because of the gospel, structures will be developed for the building of life together in communities and for the care of the environment; and at the same time, the power of the gospel will militate against all forms of dehumanization or degradation.

One of the main causes of discontinuity in the mission and ministry of the church is that many of those who teach in the training institutions which prepare ministers for mission are themselves not leaders in mission, and may not even have been converted, or they have no idea of mission in practice and cannot lead anybody joyfully in mission. These academically qualified few gain authority to propound theories and expectations which they themselves have not tested in any field of mission. Graduates of these institutions become leaders of churches and have authority over many lives and cities that are filled with unsaved and unreached peoples but they cannot see as Jesus sees nor are they concerned as Jesus was concerned, and this is because of the way they have been taught. The result is that it is only a matter of time before the idea of mission as Jesus taught it becomes vague, old fashioned and soon forgotten, and indeed only kept for debate on the agenda of council meetings to be discussed and debated over and over and over in the church.

Jesus, on the other hand, leads his team in mission, and each trip is a school of evangelism. Jesus does not just go about lecturing about it, he leads and shows how to do it! Jesus IS the gospel! We in our turn are called and sent to do as he did and to teach as he taught. Jesus introduces them to the heart of God and to what is needed

to do mission in God's way. In this trip, seven things stand out for missionary disciples to take to heart if they will bring forth fruit and bring glory to the Lord.

a. V35a Jesus on the Move (Movement)

“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages”

Jesus went about preaching the good news throughout cities and villages. This is a clear demonstration that the good news is for both towns and villages and that the gospel is not meant to be static but to be taken to everywhere. A church that is not on the move will soon become a maintenance workshop incapable of producing anything new except to maintain old worn out and dying commodities. Jesus shows the disciples that to be gospel bearer is to be on the move from everywhere to everywhere. There can be no sitting down in one location but they will always be looking out for areas where the saving message has not yet been preached. Their concern is to seek to find the lost in safe or unsafe areas of the world, remembering always that he who saves his life will lose it but he who lays down his life will save it.

b. V35b The Gospel of the Kingdom

“teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.”

Jesus demonstrates the purpose of ministry, that is, to bring the gospel of salvation to people. This gospel is effectively brought through teaching the Scriptures, through preaching to demand response, and through bringing healing to the sick in mind and body. This is the gospel of the Kingdom, bringing the rule and authority of God over every situation. Our ministry is incomplete unless it comes to people in the same way that Jesus demonstrated. His disciples were later going to practice what they had learnt from the master.

c. V36a Opportunity to serve

“But when He saw the multitudes”

Jesus saw the crowds in their true condition. What he saw was not what other people usually see. Others see the crowd as a liability, a political stepping stone, a bunch of ignorant people of whom one may take advantage and use to attain selfish ambitions. Jesus saw something different: he saw a harassed and helpless crowd like sheep without a shepherd. He saw an opportunity to serve in order to bring them freedom, self worth, direction in life and to restore their humanity in God. Do we see the crowd only for the offerings they will bring? Do we see a crowd and look down on them? Do we look down on a race? Do we look down on a tribe? Do we look down on the youth? What do we see in the areas of our primary calling? What we see will determine what we do and how we do it. Do we see with Jesus' eyes or through our own tinted spectacles?

d. V36b Compassion

“He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.”

This is the heart of the matter in Jesus' approach to salvation. In all Scripture, the one thing that moves God to action on behalf of the poor, oppressed and lost is his compassion. It is compassion that drives action! Without compassion there will no genuine salvation action. The good Samaritan had compassion on the man beaten by robbers and he gave up the comfort of being on his donkey in order to help the man; he gave his time to assist, he made money available for the health of the man and promised to settle all bills if this was necessary. Our call to mission is a call to self-sacrifice, to give our time, talents and resources, and to show practical care and concern until the mission work is finished and completed. A mission without compassion is not likely to be in line with the mind of God!

e. 37 Labourers

“Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few.”

Harvest time is the best time for the farmer; it is a joyful exercise; it is a time of singing and thanksgiving. Why ministry is not joyful is because it is not in line with this text. Why ministry is boring or even burnt out may well be because it is not harvesting!

Jesus showed the disciples the work ahead and made it clear that what was needed at this time for the Kingdom was willing laborers. The world then as now is looking for leaders, chiefs, professionals, and qualified top directors to fill vacancies for any job, even in the church. Qualifications and professions are not wrong in themselves, BUT the work of the Kingdom demands that we forget who we are and use all our qualifications and acquired skills for service in the harvest fields. We are not called to do the hard work of farming, we are simply invited to harvest, a task only for those who are willing to roll up their sleeves and make the sacrifices necessary so that they can joyfully engage in harvesting for the Kingdom. It is labourers who are needed!

f.v38a Pray

“Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest”

Here is one activity which the Lord himself assures us he will definitely honour. We are called to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers and we are promised that he will grant this request. This calls into question our recruitment processes for ministry. Are the people we put forward a result of answered prayers or are they brought in to achieve a certain objective for our personal goals? Are we interested in bringing in those who will labour for the harvest, or those who will labour for us and minister to our needs and to the needs of our families? If we ourselves are engaged in ministry because of the prayers of others, we cannot but trust the Lord to answer our prayers in sending out others to join us. Remember the harvest field is not ours and we MUST consider the interests of Him whose field it is. He it is who calls us willingly to join in the harvest, and we must seek his interests first and pray earnestly to him to send out laborers to join us in the harvest.

g. 38b Sending

“to send out labourers into His harvest.”

The mark of a missionary church is in its sending capacity, and whether it sends its best, most suitable, and most qualified to bring in a bountiful harvest. The one who is sent is not on his own but is sent to fulfill the task of carrying the message. A messenger is only as important as the message he is carrying: once the message is delivered and the task carried out the messenger returns to give a report of the task accomplished. The task of harvesting for the Kingdom is reserved only for those who are sent by the Lord, who are a direct result of answered prayers. The work in the harvest field is not those who send themselves or who are sent by man, no matter who the man may be.

In every part of the world where the gospel of Jesus Christ has borne fruit, there is evidence of following in the pattern of Jesus’ training for mission. The leader is the leader of the workers in mission, he demonstrates and becomes the visual aid for the disciples and is the teacher of how to carry out and accomplish the mission. His passion, conviction, commitment and consistency in the mission enterprise provide the motivation and encouragement for the disciples to continue the mission. This was true of Augustine of Canterbury who himself led his team to take the gospel to England; it was true of Samuel Ajayi Crowther consecrated “Bishop in the said countries of Western Africa beyond the limits of the Queen’s dominions”, and the leader of many missionary journeys, particularly up and down the Niger.

2. APOSTOLIC MISSION AND MINISTRY Acts 6:1-7

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

From its birth on the Day of Pentecost, the church, continuing the mission as commanded by Jesus, did not find it difficult to respond to mission. Having been with Jesus, learned from Jesus, and understood what the mind of God was and what God is about in the world today, Pentecost provided the apostles with what they had been waiting for - the promised Holy Spirit. Thereafter, the Acts of the Apostles provides us with snapshots of key moments in the life of the apostles and in the development of the mission. We hear of how they proceeded when they were faced with new situations, or with problems which could either thrust the gospel forward, or retard its growth, thus bringing continuity or discontinuity. One such account is in Acts 6:1-7.

The opening verse gives a good picture of what was happening in the early church. On the one hand the number of disciples was increasing and the church was growing; and on the other hand the excitement of church growth was tempered by a regrettable complaint expressed in murmuring. One of the deadliest diseases to be inflicted upon a young church is that kind of murmuring which kills all good virtues softly, steadily and surely. It would seem that like the early church we in this generation do not seem to notice the devastating and satanic effect of murmuring and segregation on the church; we do not realize the discontinuity which these bring. Jesus, by his death had abolished all divisions (Eph 2:11-22), and yet the church at the time of the apostles and the church today, tend to perpetuate such distinctions and to move away from the true pattern of mission as set forth by Jesus.

We believe very strongly that at any point in time the church needs leaders who have the gift of a DISCERNING spirit. The apostles in Acts 6 verse 2 were quick to see the hand of the devil; they discerned the situation and made a clear distinction of the issues involved; they could see what was going to bring discontinuity in the mission. The apostles knew what their most important task was, and they were not going to bargain about priorities which had been clearly set by Jesus. They would NOT be distracted from the mission of the church. In the presence of everyone they declared that they were not at liberty to neglect their primary task of preaching the gospel. This was non-negotiable, but they made a proposal that the people select seven men to take on the responsibility of administering tables. This would leave the apostles free to pray, to preach and teach, and to continue the mission with a clear mind and focus.

The quality of the people selected for any such new task can either solve or increase the problem (verse 3). The apostles therefore set down certain criteria. Those to be chosen must be full of the Holy Spirit; they must be full of wisdom; they must have a good reputation. We should note that it would have been impossible for the apostles to have laid down in clear terms God's principles of service without themselves being good examples. The known character of the apostles and the manner in which they now proceeded was most important and provided necessary teaching for the community at large, and in particular to those who were to be chosen. That they were discerning elders was one great example for the seven to follow. Moreover they were not distracted by the devil's tactics from their primary task of preaching the gospel. This was a great lesson that was later to be copied by Philip and Stephen. Notice that both the twelve and the seven were described as "servants". All of them served, whether as administrators, food attendants, teachers or preachers. All who serve must be full of the Holy Spirit, of wisdom and must be of good report. What the apostles did was full of significance: they prayed for the seven and laid their hands upon them (verse 7). Here is a sign of agreement, of continuity, and a sign that they were of one mind and one purpose. By acting in this way a principle of continuity and of passing on the

baton was ensured from the very outset. Indeed the baton was passed on with far greater effect than they may have imagined, as several of the seven “administrators” chosen to serve the food, became firebrand evangelists!

The verses from Acts 6 show us that if there is to be continuity in the ministry and mission of the church, there must be prayerful discernment, integrity and commitment in teaching and preaching, and a clear vision for the mission. Prayer, teaching / preaching and mission are the three legs on which continuity in the work of the gospel stands.

a. PRAYER

Jesus was a man of prayer and was recognized as such by his immediate community. The apostles were Jews and throughout their life they had been praying several times a day, and yet they saw something different in Jesus; Jesus achieved so much out of his prayer; he lived a life based on prayer, and so they begged, “*Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples*” (Luke 11:1). In reply, Jesus said, “*When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name . . .*” (Luke 11:2). It is not a matter of “if” we pray, but when or whenever we pray, because in praying we enter into a relationship with God who is our Father. Jesus’ praying was vital and effective because of the closeness of his relationship with God. This is emphasized again in Matthew 6:5-15). Jesus questions the motives of those who pray in order to impress others, or who babble on and on, as if length were a virtue in itself. Much of our praying should be in private because it is an expression of our relationship with God:

“But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
(Matthew 6:6)

Having seen the over-riding importance and the effectiveness of prayer in Jesus’ life, the apostles were not prepared to compromise this by wasting time on administrative matters which others could supervise. Therefore they insisted:

“we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word” (Acts 6:4)

Jesus promised that our prayer would be heard and that therefore we should not easily give up or lose heart (Luke 18:1). He promised that what is good and right will be given to those who pray (Luke 11:9-13): the problem is of course that we sometimes insist that we want what will not be best for us in the long run - and then we accuse God of not answering our prayers!

One of the great Christian women of prayer of the last century was Evelyn Underhill, who commented:

“The man whose life is coloured by prayer, whose loving communion with God comes first, will always win souls; because he shows them in his own life and person the attractiveness . . . the transforming power of the spiritual life. His intellectual powers and the rest will not, comparatively speaking, matter much. The point is that he stands as a witness to that which he proclaims. The most persuasive preacher, the most devoted and

untiring social worker, the most up-to-date theologian - unless loving devotion to God exceeds and enfolds these activities - will not win souls."³

Therefore prayer is:

(a) the pastor's primary obligation to the church

(b) the only condition under which the work of the Christian ministry can be properly done.

Therefore the priest **MUST** set aside time for prayer:

"A priest's life of prayer is, in a peculiar sense, part of the great mystery of the Incarnation. He is meant to be one of the channels by and through which the Eternal God, manifested in time, acts within the human world; reaches out, seeks, touches, and transforms human souls. His real position in the parish is that of a dedicated agent of the Divine Love. The Spirit of Christ, indwelling His Church, is to act through him."

If the priest does not put God first, no-one else will do so. God can never be adequately served or known except through sacrifice. The demands on the time and strength of the parish priest are great, and it might seem that he can give exclusive attention to God only at the expense of time and attention which are needed by his people. But history shows that this is not so. It is those whose prayer is strong and deep whose work for God and for others is also strong and deep.⁴

"Much is now being said about evangelism; but before we get effective evangelism, we have to get effective evangelists. Evangelism is useless, unless it is the work of one devoted to God, willing and glad to suffer all things for God, penetrated by the attractiveness of God."⁵

b. TEACHING AND PREACHING

Jesus' relationship with God was so close that when he taught the people about God they instinctively recognized that here was something different; here was a person who really did know what he was talking about; a person who knew God and who could teach others about God:

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Matthew 7:28-29)

Because of this the crowds flocked to listen to him. Young and old, rich and poor, educated and illiterate all came, and they all could understand and learn. Through his words, his actions, his miracles, his manner of life, Jesus was teaching about God; in him the presence of the Kingdom of God could be seen. The people were hungry for this teaching! They realized that here at last was the clue to the

³ Menzies, L. (ed.), *Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill*, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1946, 121-122

⁴ Menzies 123

⁵ Menzies 125

meaning of life, the living of life and the fulfilment of their hopes, longings and aspirations.

According to St. Matthew's gospel, Jesus' parting words to the disciples were:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

The people must be taught or else they will wander like sheep without a shepherd. They refused to give to any other work the priority which should be given to the word of God, and they therefore openly declared:

"It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables" (Acts 6:2)

The apostles realized the central importance of teaching and did not joke with it. They themselves taught the people in speech and in writing, and they urged others who had heard to pass on the message. Paul urged the young Timothy:

"what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well." (2 Timothy 2:2)

"But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. ²⁴ And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶ and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:23-26)

Similarly, he wrote to Titus:

"But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

As with Jesus, so with the apostles, the teaching affected and controlled their living: they lived out their teaching every moment of their lives. Therefore Paul could write:

"Therefore I urge you, imitate me. ¹⁷ For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:16-17).

For both Jesus and the apostles, such teaching and preaching grew out of a life of prayer and was therefore authentic and done with absolute integrity, being also rooted in the word of God and lived out daily by the teacher or preacher. If there is to be continuity in the ministry and mission of the church, then we today must follow the same pattern with the same emphasis on teaching and preaching, the same dedication, the same passion and conviction, refusing to be side-tracked onto issues of lesser importance. Teachers today must teach well, and must model and train others in ministry skills and in pastoral and evangelistic development. Those who preach and those who listen must be ready for missions locally, cross-culturally and internationally. Skills required for missions must be demonstrated by teachers and passed on to others. Wherever they serve, those who teach and those who learn should be a blessing to the people! Those who teach and preach must therefore

demonstrate strength, character and discipline in relationship to their call, their respect for authority, and (if ordained) their oath of office and Holy Orders. The models, attitudes and accountability that others see is what they will copy.

At present, however, some of the big heresies of the Church become evident when the churches gather in their respective places of worship on Sunday mornings. Sadly, on too many occasions, instead of the true gospel being proclaimed, and the people drawn out of themselves to turn to God and worship him, there is a fostering of self-centredness, racism and tribalism. We find tribal churches fostering tribal activities, with tribal traditions and status, and the pastor and people concerned exclusively with those of their own tribe. Ambition, activities and development therefore tend to be inward looking and concerned with physical and structural development, rather than with spiritual growth and mission. Little concern is shown in word, prayer, thought or action for the unreached areas of mission in the world, for widows, orphans, the poor and oppressed, for persecuted and forgotten nations and communities. Investment opportunities for the development and growth of the present generation, of young and future leaders and members are lost because of a lack of solid Bible teaching, and consistent discipleship training. The so-called “prosperity gospel” and the invitation to “climb to the next level” are further indications that churches are not facing in the right direction: attention is on personal success and acquisition of material goods, rather than on following Christ.

It is, of course, impossible to detect a fake article unless you know the genuine one. To combat these heresies we must proclaim the true gospel, teach the true gospel and live the true gospel with a total commitment to the Lord. This is the only way forward. To be sidetracked into debating the details of false teachings will inevitably waste time and will result in additional people being lost in the bush. Our focus, our concentration and our energy must be on Christ, and not on the devil’s distractions. This was how Jesus confronted his questioners; this was the method used by the apostles in Acts 6, and this should be our strategy.

c. MISSION

Mission is an exciting enterprise, an exciting adventure and a very contagious spiritual experience. It must be taught, lived out and demonstrated, not as a once only event, but as a way of life, and as a means of blessing for other people. We do not quite know whether the team of seven, selected by the people and presented to the apostles to serve at tables were part of the three thousand at Pentecost, but what we know is that they were not only faithful and successful in administering the widows’ food, but also they were responsible for the evangelization of new frontiers beyond Jerusalem. Philip was led by the Spirit to witness to the Ethiopian Eunuch and he baptized the eunuch. Philip was also responsible for the birth of the church in Samaria, and then made his base at Caesarea:

*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.
(Acts 8:4)*

And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.³⁹ Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.(Acts 8:38b-40)

On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. (Acts 21:8)

Stephen was to be found in the synagogue expounding Scripture with profound accuracy before the Sannhedrin, who later sentenced him to death:

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.⁹ Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.¹⁰ And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. (Acts 6:8-10)

We do not have much information about the credentials of the elected seven except that they were young men full of the Holy Spirit; they were people of good report within the community and they were people of wisdom. The young men were full of the fear of God, as it is written, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (Psalm 111:10). One thing that we can easily deduce, however, is that these young disciples had been well taught in the Scriptures, and they demonstrated passion, zeal, commitment and a total dedication to the mission of the gospel which they had copied from the apostles with whom they had lived. The young disciples and the apostles displayed similar qualities. The young deacons fulfilled the dreams and aspirations of the apostles. They did not add more to the problems of the church; they, rather, were a huge blessing and they brought solutions to the church. Furthermore they were instruments of expanding the mission - a ministry they carried out with joy.

Therefore when God calls us to mission, he calls as he called the apostles and as he called the first deacons, to bring healing, to be solutions and a source of blessing to unreached peoples of the world, to expand the frontiers of the church and to bring glory to the Lord. This call, together with the call to teach and preach, is inextricably bound up with the call to pray. The teaching, the preaching and the mission are fed by the prayers of the assembled church, and the worship of the assembled company of believers is fed by their life and work, ministry and witness. Neither makes sense without the other. When either one is missing there is a radical discontinuity.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.⁴⁶ So

continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,⁴⁷ praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

The Christians came together to break bread and to pray, but after they had gone out of “church” they continued joyfully and honestly to share with those in need, and to help others in whatever way possible. Such love always has the power to attract and to draw others into the community, so they were respected in their locality, their numbers grew rapidly, and they themselves grew in faith as they saw God at work transforming lives and situations. It is sad to notice today that in some churches the worship, or “liturgy”, has become an end in itself. All that matters is that the service is read correctly from the Prayer Book. When the written word takes precedence over the word lived, the church is in trouble! Jesus Christ is the Word of God, a Word lived in human form, a Word more supremely alive than any other living creature. Our liturgy must live in our lives so that our lives may live through our worship. This is, however, only possible when the worshippers (priests and people) are actively taking part in the teaching, preaching and witness of the church. A great many of the problems of our church today can be solved if only we take God’s solution and follow his principles as the early church did.

The problems of our Church in Africa are numerous and yet they are all similar: the clamour for leadership positions; the use of tribal cliques for selfish ends; glaring and outright insincerity; misappropriation of church funds; tribal sentiments and segregation. Worse still, sin is condoned under the cover of sympathy, and much church leadership is simply weak and empty. Therefore, of course, prayer cannot be said meaningfully with one accord, nor can the preaching of the gospel be done. Even if the gospel is preached it has little or no impact. The smaller, younger denominations easily sweep our membership into their churches as a result. The case was not so in the early church. They sought and found God’s solutions to their problems, followed God’s principles and the result was great and glorifying to God. The Word of God spread; the number of disciples increased and a large number of priests accepted the faith.

3. CONTINUING THE MISSION

The devil does not change his methods, and the church after the apostles struggled through persecution, dealing with heresies, with the formulation of the creeds, liturgies and expansion - world evangelism. In each generation the church was to confront the same struggles with the devil as the apostles had done. It is therefore the duty of the leadership in each generation to seek to confront the devil as the apostles did and to save the message and the church from discontinuity by applying Biblical methods for continuity. In Africa we have seen this many times in the past, and the same battle continues today. For example:

a. N. Africa

In the 4th century there was a viable church in North Africa. Why, it may be asked, did such a church die out? It has been suggested that the prominent reason

was the church's failure to evangelize and to indigenize. Even in Augustine's Carthage, the Bible was not translated into the language of the local people (Berber), and so an opportunity for evangelism was lost. Christianity often reached the cities through trade and commerce, but there was little or no attempt to convert the pagan countryside. This was a death knell as it was not in line with Jesus' practice!

In his book, "A Brief History of Islam"⁶, Harry Boer highlights various factors responsible for the demise of Christianity in North Africa at this time, noting particularly the problems Christians faced in Muslim dominated areas. He then concludes:

Consideration has been given to this particular aspect of the Muslim advance, because it is so rich in instruction for us at the present time. The Church in North Africa lost its position and even its life because (a) it was not a "*united Church*" and (b) it was not a *witnessing church*. Because of its disunity (especially in Egypt) it ended by having greater regard for people who did not believe in Christ (the Muslims) than for those who confessed him (their Orthodox brethren). Because of its lack of witnessing power, the mass of the native inhabitants were not truly interested in the gospel and when the Europeans left they went over to Islam. Today all of North Africa is Muslim. It might well have been Christian. That it is not Christian is in large measure the fault, not of the Muslims, but of the Christian Church itself.⁷

b. Mission on the Plateau

On the Jos Plateau mission work led by C.U.M.P. (Cambridge University Missionary Party) / C.M.S. (Church Missionary Society) began around 1906 and developed well. From the outset, the C.U.M.P. had been concerned to teach the people to read and write, to provide education and to train evangelists. In addition to the provision of medical care, they also helped with the digging of bore holes and the planting of fruit trees and various improved crops. Eventually, however, the acute shortage of European staff was such that an approach was made by C.U.M.P., through C.M.S. to the S.U.M. (Sudan United Mission - now Action Partners), concerning a possible take-over of the work at Panyam and Kabwir by the S.U.M.. This was eventually agreed upon and the transfer officially took place on 19th April 1930.

The Ngas people in particular did not like the handover to S.U.M.. Many of them walked over 400 kilometers to Zaria, the headquarters of the C.M.S. in Northern Nigeria, to register a protest before Bishop Alfred Smith. A considerable number moved from the Plateau to Zaria and Wusasa to live and work there where there was an Anglican mission and presence. The church on the Jos Plateau suffered dislocation. The reasons for this included negligence, language problems and tribal considerations.

Today in Nigeria we face many situations and challenges which have the potential to bring discontinuity and dislocation. Heretical teachings are peddled by a

⁶Harry Boer, *A Brief History of Islam*, Ibadan, Daystar Press, 1969, 64-65.

⁷Boer 66.

variety of so-called evangelists, who are more concerned with making money and gaining a name for themselves, than they are with proclaiming the truth of the gospel. This must be countered by authentic teaching and a living presentation of the true gospel in the lives of Christians, and especially Christian leaders. Let us remember that the pulpit is a place where one is called to serve others; it is a holy place, but it could be anywhere - in a boat, in the market, in the church, at home ... We must love the pulpit, revere it, respect it and use it to teach the truth, bring out facts, give guidance and direction for the life of the preacher and for the lives of the listeners. The pulpit must be used with wisdom and sensitivity, the tempo and understanding of the hearers must be gauged and they must never be in doubt about the preacher's love for God and dedication to his/her call. People are drawn to a sincere pulpit! The pulpit must never be a place of show, oratory or entertainment. It is a holy place of meeting between God and man!

As we look at the potential hearers, and at the whole community around us, one observation which is very clear and yet often ignored, concerns the age of the people. It is a surprising and highly significant fact that in Africa today 70% of the population are under 35 years of age. This age group is largely ignored and generally do not seem to have a place in the mission of the church today. This is a huge gap that may create a sense of discontinuity within a generation in our search for continuity of the work of the mission. This age group feel unwanted by governments in Africa; they are largely unemployed; a good proportion are unemployable. For similar reasons, they do not seem to have a place even in the church. In fact they have no offering to bring and are hardly educated and cultured for responsible church gatherings. The new generation congregations provide for them a place of identity and make no demands on them whatsoever: little is required in terms of morality or ethics; they just have to be present at entertainment "worship" services. We of the older traditional churches must first and foremost repent of past negligences and seek a sincere way, a sincere, transparent and credible way of bringing onboard methods of solving this problem. We have a huge task which needs the patience, prayers, dedication and seriousness of all of us in order to give the younger generation a future to hope, believe and work for. If this challenge is not met, this vast and growing throng of young people will be increasingly available for any activity of evil against their nation and its citizens.

We have in Nigeria a growing Anglican Church in a country whose population is growing even faster! The youth form the majority in our churches. We have a young church, young in its existence and young in its membership; a church which in parts of the country is persecuted, suffering and not free to build structures or buy land; a church which is facing the growth and incursion of Islam; a church which is struggling with poverty, societal corruption and political uncertainties; a church which is still struggling with inherited colonial mindsets concerning power, ability and trust; a church which draws its membership from very many different tribal and racial groups, many of which have fought each other in the past, and now have to learn to live and grow together.

The population growth rate is high. The crucial question is: at what rate does the church's work of mission and evangelism move? Simply to keep up with the population increase requires an ongoing determination; to overtake the rate of population growth - which must be our aim - is a considerable task! It is often said that the church in Africa is growing quickly, and the church in Nigeria is on the move. If, however, the population growth is taken into account, we are scarcely moving at

all, and there is most certainly no room for any kind of complacency. If there is to be a real continuity in the life and ministry, worship and mission of the gospel, the church must focus great effort on our youth.

CONCLUSION

The evidence around us today points to the unwelcome fact that the message of the gospel can degenerate in just a few generations. It seems almost impossible for the missionary zeal of any congregation to rise above that of its priest. If this is correct, then most congregations will be operating at 50% of the missionary zeal of their priest - and this is only when they are doing very well, and where there is good teaching, good fellowship and good prayer meetings. A few from that congregation, a very few indeed, may rise up to 70% or 80% in their zeal towards that of the priest. Suppose that from this congregation there is recruited someone who goes for training for the priesthood. If this man is operating at 50% when he goes to the seminary, and if the seminary is very orthodox and non-evangelical or liberal, then he is panel-beaten and sprayed down to 25%, and in that state he is ordained and sent to another congregation. Since he is now operating at 25%, his congregation will be at 11.5%. As time goes by, a member of that congregation may be selected and sent for training, operating at the same 11.5% and comes out from the seminary operating at 5.75%. It is only a matter of time, as the downward spiral takes its toll, that the work of mission and evangelism in his church will die. This is the end result of discontinuity!

The mission of the church, however, cannot, will not, and will never be discontinued. We may choose to neglect it and be careless about the whole mission of God, and indeed in a given generation with a particular group of people the baton could be dropped and the mission discontinued in that place and at that time. God's mission, however, will move elsewhere and continue.

There is so much to be done in the church and world today. In the same way in which Jesus spoke concerning the harvest in Israel, "*The harvest is plenty, but the labourers are few*" (Matthew 9:37), so is he speaking in our time and in our context. We must therefore determine and say to ourselves today, here and now, that the mission of God will continue to the third and fourth generation - and beyond - beginning from us. This means that we must firmly fix our eyes on Jesus Christ from whom, like the apostles, we will draw our example for the training and living out of mission and ministry. We ourselves must ensure that our own lives are rooted on prayer, on solid Biblical teaching and preaching, and on mission, so that we become such effective channels for Jesus Christ to use, that young, vibrant and committed men and women are attracted, trained and in turn become faithful servants in the mission and ministry of the church.

Our heritage comes from God, and we are made in the image of God (Gen.1:27). The mission of the church is God's mission, and like the gospel, the *missio dei* never ends. That mission is now ours to continue.

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