

Title: On *Parrhesia* and Gospel Witness

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When the crowds encircle Christ in Solomon's Porch during the Festival of Dedication, they charge him: "tell us boldly who you are!"¹ They do not draw-up to him to with excited anticipation as they did earlier in the Gospel,² instead they flank him like a gang of wolves. Already the crowd by the shore has begun its transformation into the mob of Good Friday.³ Though he has already told them in several places⁴ who he is, they charge him to do so at that moment with *parrhesia*—with a boldness about the truth being spoken. They are in a sense asking him "tell us again the truth we already know and yet cannot bear to receive; and say it with the boldness that will make us want to kill you." This is what *parrhesia* means: the kind of boldness about the truth that hazards death and rejection. The person who speaks with *parrhesia*, Michel Foucault once noted, "risk[s] death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken."⁵ Amidst the controversial social issues of the day, the Anglican Church in North America must be a province marked by this same *parrhesia*—this boldness about the Truth which hazards severe consequences-- or else it will cease to be what it is.

Such a charge, however bold it may seem, is not as simple as it first appears, for we live in strange times. Ostensibly, North America celebrates boldness — *parrhesia*— as a supreme virtue. Many voices, popular and academic, across the political spectrum enjoin us to "be bold" about our opinions and our persons.

¹ John 10:24.

² cf. John 6:1-15, 25-28.

³ John 19:7, 12.

⁴ viz. John 2:18-22, 5:17-47, 6:29-69, 7:16-24, 7:37-39, 8:12-59, 9:35-39, and 10:1-18.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*, Lecture Series at University of California at Berkeley (Oct.–Nov., 1983), transcribed by J. Pearson, <https://foucault.info/parrhesia/> p.4.

“Proud” is often the form this North American construal of boldness takes, forgetting that “the Lord resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”⁶ Being bold in this popular way, Christians across the continent have taken to social media, joined-in marches and rallies, and have left churches and friendships torched in their wake. This popular North American brand of boldness seems to offer an excuse from the costliness of loving one’s neighbor—especially if that neighbor disagrees about mask mandates, or put a particular candidate’s sign in their front yard.

The kind of boldness vended in popular culture is a pseudo-*parrhesia*; a loud confidence which leaves everyone more secretly anxious, angry, and ashamed; a boldness fueled, frequently enough, less by love for the Truth than by hatred for a scapegoat. It is a boldness that is often little more than a euphemism for a brutality that shows little regard for the worth of human persons. It is, in the final analysis, not actually bold.

It is essential therefore for the Church to distinguish Gospel *parrhesia*, true boldness, from the false and popular kind on offer in the wider culture. As the Anglican Church in North America seeks to be a community that speaks the truth boldly in a world of falsehood, a community of *parrhesiastes*, there are four essential marks which differentiate the boldness of Christ in John 10 from cheap and false substitutes.

First, Gospel *parrhesia* is anchored in Christ and finds its origin in the love of the Trinity. It is not anchored in a strictly interior and fleshly self-confidence, which we are called to reject.⁷ Instead, the Christian’s ability to bear witness to the truth comes through Christ Jesus “in whom we have *parrhesia* and access through

⁶ Proverbs 3:34, 16:5; James 4:6.

⁷ cf. Proverbs 26:12; Romans 12:3; Galatians 6:3; Philippians 2:3.

our faith in Him.”⁸ The love of Christ makes us bold, and in his love “we have *parrhesia* to draw near to the throne of Grace.”⁹ And this boldness before the Father is what sends us in the power of the Spirit to be bold in our proclamation of the truth, like the disciples who spoke the word of God in the face of persecutory powers with all *parrhesia*.¹⁰

Standing in this kind of confidence “in Christ in God”¹¹ enables a firmness of resolve in speaking the truth in the face of consequences. Neither the anger of those to whom the truth is spoken, nor the fact that the truth may not be heard or received with the desired effect, nor even the fact that the speakers themselves may be called to repent from the false ways in which they have spoken, can shake or unseat the Christian love of the truth. Far from deploying Christian faith as a means to proving oneself right in what one says, Gospel *parrhesia* begins and ends in the righteousness of the Jesus who comes less to “prove them right” than to “bear witness to the Truth.”¹²

Secondly, true *parrhesia* counts the cost of speaking the truth, as in the book of the Acts of the Apostles where the apostles are not merely undaunted in the face of persecution, but *un-surprised* by it.¹³ Easy ersatz boldness, after speaking boldly, leaves behind a fragile uneasiness. Christians “take a stand” on an issue of Gospel truth, and are subsequently dismayed and alarmed at the push-back. It is desired simultaneously to be bold and edgy and warmly tolerated. If, as Foucault has suggested, *parrhesia* means choosing “frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral

⁸ Ephesians 3:12; cf. Philemon 1:8.

⁹ Hebrews 4:16.

¹⁰ Acts 4:13, 4:29-31; cf. Acts 28:31.

¹¹ Colossians 3:3.

¹² John 18:37.

¹³ Acts 4:23-31.

apathy”¹⁴ then the Christian who lives thus boldly chooses to occupy costly position in her community. Peter Leithart is right: “Parrhesia is the virtue of martyrs.”¹⁵

To speak the truth with boldness in a community defined by *parrhesia* is to not balk in the face of the danger of bearing witness to the truth, as well as not being surprised by those dangers when they lay their cost. Suffering for the sake of the truth is real and ought to be lived before God by his people in lament and imprecation, admitted to and acknowledged, not merely borne without emotion. That pain can be spoken. But it is precisely this willing to suffer for the Truth that marks the church as a people who add the signature of their lives to the testimony of what is real.

Third among the markers of Christian *parrhesia* is a conformity of life to the message of the truth. St. Paul told the Philippian believers that “it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full *parrhesia* now as always Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death.”¹⁶ St. Paul bore in his manner of life a perpetual second witness to the truth-claims he made. The challenge of *parrhesia*, suggests Craig Hovey, is “deliberately living in such a way as to be freed and enabled to speak the truth.”¹⁷

The world has watched in horror over the past several decades as scandal upon scandal has broken upon Christianity. It is with no little irony that those very leaders who seemed the boldest in their convictions and preaching, became the very ones who hid and dissembled when called to account; their witness marred by

¹⁴ Foucault, *Discourse and Truth*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Peter Leithart, *Solemn Charge and Exhortation, Trinity 2021*, an address delivered to the 2022 class of the Theopolis Fellows Program.

¹⁶ Philippians 1:20.

¹⁷ Craig Hovey, “Free Christian Speech: Plundering Foucault,” *Political Theology*, 8.1, (2007), p. 71.

a lack of conformation with the truth they proclaim.¹⁸ Perhaps because the failures of celebrity ministry-leaders receive all the press, Christians may be tempted to ignore the way that such non-conformity occurs in smaller settings: on social media, around dinner tables, in arguments with family, at vestry meetings, through SMS messaging, etc. The Church must, at all levels, seek to “walk in the light as He is in the light,” conforming its life and the lives of its members to the Person of Jesus.

True Gospel *parrhesia* thus demands a truthfulness on two levels: (1) a conformation to the Person of Jesus, so that the truth spoken by the Church is also the truth lived by the Church; and (2) a culture of confession, in which each and every way that the Church fails in this regard is exposed, confessed, and healed. This is where Foucault made his great misunderstanding about truth and power: he “misunderstands how confession of sin is related to proclamation of the Gospel.”¹⁹ He failed to see the link between the *parrhesia* of the penitent, who makes bold with God about his or her sins and offenses, and the *parrhesia* of the evangelist, who makes bold to the World about God’s forgiveness of sins. Among the community of the penitent, therefore, Gospel *parrhesia* begins in the place of confession. Hovey notes that “[i]t should not be surprising that the same virtue as the Christian confrontation with unjust rulers gives expression to the same virtue as the Christian confrontation with the injustices of the self.”²⁰ One’s ability to demonstrate boldness, *parrhesia*, in the world cannot be dislocated from his or her willingness to confess with *parrhesia*. Unless this happens, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

¹⁸ Aware of ongoing investigations in the Province and their unfinalized nature, this statement is not intended to “weigh-in” on those proceedings or anticipate their outcomes in advance. It notes only the scandals of the past several decades, whose verdicts have been reached.

¹⁹ Hovey, “Free Christian Speech,” p. 76.

²⁰ Id., p. 77.

warned, “we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy,”²¹ and, as St. John wrote, “the truth is not in us.”²²

The boldness that results from confession is the mark of Christian witness. “Now our brother stands in Christ’s stead. Before him I need no longer dissemble. Before him alone in the whole world I dare to be the sinner that I am.”²³ In confession, moreover, one speaks with *parrhesia* and resolve about future conduct. As Brian Druppa counseled his readers, the Church is to come to confession not only bold in God’s mercy and bold to speak the truth to our brother about our sins, but bold also in our “[r]esolutions for the time to come never to offend in the same kinde [sic] again: for without this, Confession is but a mere Pageant.”²⁴ A Church that seeks to be a community that speaks the truth with *parrhesia* must be a community marked by this kind of repentance and forgiveness and a growing conformity to the Image of Christ.

Finally, Gospel boldness is marked by charity. Christ does not call his disciples to some easy naivete which mindlessly says “I have no enemies –there are none who intend my ill and no injustices against which I must speak.” But Christ does call his disciples to love their enemies, to serve them, to pray for them, to be good to them, and to win them.²⁵ False *parrhesia*, false boldness about the truth, excuses us from kindness and civility. One sees this across America and across the political spectrum: a boldness that finds strength in being gruesome in its disregard for those who disagree, and which exchanges loving argument for sour ridicule. There is a kind of boldness that lets one’s neighbors know where one

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, (trans.) John W. Doberstein, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), p. 110.

²² 1 John 1:8.

²³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 111.

²⁴ Brian Druppa, *A Guide for the Penitent*, (1660), pp.4-7; as quoted in Benjamin Guyer (ed.), *The Beauty of Holiness: The Caroline Divines and Their Works*, (London: Canterbury Press, 2012), p. 212.

²⁵ e.g. Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36.

stands on the issues of the day, but it is another kind of boldness altogether which invites the disagreeing neighbor into one's home for dinner and engages in costly conversations over desert and wine. It costs little to scorn those to whom the Church speaks the truth, but a deep costly *parrhesia* is needed to suffer with patience the scorn of our enemies and neighbors as we bear witness to the truth.

Such a posture lends force to the witness of the truth. To love one's enemies and those with whom one disagrees, in local and embodied ways, is to prove by example one's confidence in the truth. It is "the confidence that the truth *can* speak for itself."²⁶ For to speak evidence without charity is in fact not to speak the fullness of the truth. It is to concede that one does not actually believe in the power of the truth; it is to believe that the truth is a lifeless and blunt instrument only useful when deployed as a cudgel operated not by its own power to effect, but by one's own main force.

Christian *parrhesia* must be marked by a patient charity which, like the Lord Himself, is slow to anger.²⁷ This does not mean doing nothing, being idle, but resisting violent and uncharitable interventions in order to hasten the victory of the truth. For, as Hovey rightly discerns "[i]f victory could be brought about by the temerous intervention of the witness *qua* protester, it would not be the truth that wins."²⁸ For Christians, the truth is living and active, not a dead and unliving tool of coercion.²⁹ A boldness that this truth will be victorious is what inspired Thomas Cranmer to so easily forgive his enemies and those who had orchestrated his harm:

"What will ye have a man do to hym that ys not yet come to the knowledge of the trueth of the gospel? [...] if it be a true rule of our Saviour Christe to do good for evill, than lett suche as are not yet come to favour our religion

²⁶ Hovey, "Free Christian Speech," p. 79, (emphasis in the original).

²⁷ Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 78:38; Proverbs 14:29; cf. Romans 2:4; James 1:19.

²⁸ Hovey, "Free Christian Speech," p. 79.

²⁹ Hebrews 4:12.

lerne to folowe the doctrine of the gospel by our example in using them
friendlie and charitablie [sic].”³⁰

Christians in North America, Anglicans included, have proven themselves capable of being bold *about* their enemies. Have Christians in North America been as bold in *loving them*? The degree that this answer is “no”, is the degree that the Church has lacked true *parrhesia*. Anglicans in North America must love the truth with all the bright radiance of blessedness while also loving those from whom they suffer the cost of that love of the truth. As costly as such work is, extending charity while bearing witness to the truth is precisely the work of those who bear the Name of Jesus, for “those who have seen the risen Christ cannot longer be satisfied with easy consolation.”³¹ More simply, stated as an injunction: Speak the truth in love.³²

Rather than addressing itself to any of the particular contemporary issues to which our Province must give a Christian witness, this essay instead has considered the way in which such a witness is given. It is the risky and daring Gospel *parrhesia*, inspired by the Spirit of Truth,³³ which must mark the witness of the ACNA. Confident in the love of Christ, joyful in the face of the hazards resultant from speaking the truth, conformed to Christ’s image through confession and growth in holiness, and abounding in love and charity towards those to whom it speaks the truth, such a Church can speak by the Spirit into any of the issues which demand its witness. “A church characterized by *parrhesia* shakes the earth until only unshakeable things remain”³⁴ contends Leithart. That’s good news. In an

³⁰ J.G. Nichols (ed.), *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation, Chiefly from the manuscripts of John Foxe the Martyrologist; with Two Contemporary Biographies of Archbishop Cranmer*, CS, First (Old) Series, LXXVII ([London], 1859) National Portrait Gallery, London, pp. 246-7; as quoted in Ashley Null, “Thomas Cranmer’s Reputation Reconsidered,” in *Reformation Reputations: The Power of the Individual in English Reformation History*, (eds.) David J. Crankshaw and George W.C. Cross, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 194.

³¹ Hovey, “Free Christian Speech,” p. 80.

³² Ephesians 4:15.

³³ John 16:13.

³⁴ Leithart, *Solemn Charge*; cf. Acts 4:31, 16:26; and Hebrews 12:26-28.

age marked by the overwhelming sense of powerlessness and despair, the Church is called to demonstrate what it means to be truly bold.

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Strange New World in the Prayer Book: The Sovereign Self and the Psalter's Invitation

Introduction: This Present World

Does a woman have a right to an abortion, or does the unborn child have a right to life? Does a person have a right to marry a same-sex partner, or does the definition of marriage preclude this right? Does a man have a right to become a woman? Does he have a right to play women's sports and use a women's bathroom? What about the rights of a biological woman who competes with him and wants to use the same bathroom? These are some of the pressing questions of the present world in which individual rights clash and strong emotions flare.

How are traditional Anglicans, who oppose abortion, same-sex unions, and transgenderism, to respond? They can campaign to elect conservative representatives and judges; they can debate in favor of certain rights and against others; or they can take to the streets to protest loudly and demonstrate their passion for the cause. These responses may do good in the political sphere, but they will not convert many to Jesus Christ or convince them to change their moral views. In fact, they will most likely enflame conflict in this polarized society. These issues are all symptoms of a deeper disease: the contemporary view of humanity. Anglicans need to be reminded that they have a "timeless treasure" in their prayer book for responding to this crisis in anthropology.¹ Here is a proposal:

¹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Huntington Beach: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 268.

*Anglicans should pray the Psalter in the Daily Office and invite others to join them.*² Everyone can do this. It may seem like an odd or ineffectual response, but the rest of this essay will show why it is so crucial.

The Rise of the Sovereign Self

Carl Trueman's recent book *Strange New World* argues that the current sexual revolution is driven by "expressive individualism":³ the belief that each individual has a self—a unique core of feelings and intuitions—that must unfold to express that person's true humanity.⁴ He also characterizes this "strange new world" as a "cultural of authenticity" that celebrates the individual's quest for self-expression.⁵ His description helps to explain a number of things. First, it explains the rampant emotivism of the culture: the more strongly someone feels something, the more true it is believed to be. Also, it explains why people cannot agree to disagree with traditional Christian morality. By denying that people should act on their desires, Christianity is thought to deny the basic human rights of the individual. Seen through a cultural lens, that is not just mistaken; it is wicked.

According to Trueman, expressive individualism did not arise with the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Rather, it developed over a much longer period of

² It is possible to *recite* or *sing* the Psalms for aesthetic or traditional reasons but without faith. The language of *prayer* assumes a stance of faith in God that is open to change.

³ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022). This is a shorter and more accessible version of his previous book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

⁴ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 22. He takes this term from Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 333–334.

⁵ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 23. He takes this term from Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 475.

time, beginning hundreds of years ago.⁶ His historical narrative describes how the self is psychologized, politicized, and sexualized. First, the self is psychologized. By doubting all authorities and traditions, René Descartes (1596–1650) disconnects God from human nature. With his dictum “I think; therefore, I am,” he creates a mind-body dualism and gives the individual’s mind ultimate power over the body. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) sees the self, in its natural state, as fundamentally good and its emotions as central to human identity. Next, the self is politicized. Karl Marx (1818–1883) proposes that human alienation is caused by oppressive economic disparities in the social order. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) argues that “the superman” must show himself strong through self-creation, defying the weak who maintain power over society. Finally, the self is sexualized. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) believes that human identity is essentially determined by sexual desires and that happiness depends on the freedom to express such desires. All of these developments lead to an anthropology of the sovereign self. Human nature is neither given by God nor determined by society; rather, the self is thought to possess ultimate power.

Although most people have not read these philosophers, their understandings of humanity are common today. How is this possible? The concept of “the social imaginary” helps to explain.⁷ The social imaginary is the shared way that ordinary people imagine their social world and act within it. The ideas of these philosophers have deeply influenced education, books, movies, and Internet media that have influenced everyone—Christians and non-Christians alike. Everyone has a sovereign self now. Some still hold traditional moral views, but, unless the social

⁶ The summary of this paragraph comes from Trueman *Strange New World*, 33–34 (Descartes), 34–42 (Rousseau), 52–59 (Marx), 59–68 (Nietzsche), 72–78 (Freud).

⁷ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 27. He takes this term from Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171–172.

imaginary changes, it is only a matter of time until their morality changes as well. What can be done about this? Trueman suggests that the Psalms have a crucial role to play: “It is no coincidence that the Psalter is a book of corporate praise. Singing such poetry as a community shaped the social imaginary of the Jews. And the church needs to do the same today.”⁸ Rather than thinking of worship as a chance to perform for God, Christians should let the Psalms form their social imaginary.

In 1917, Karl Barth delivered a lecture entitled “The Strange New World within the Bible.”⁹ Although modern people believe the Bible’s world is old and their world is new, Barth reverses this polarity: the present world is actually the old one, and the biblical world is the new one. Opening the Bible is opening a door into the foreign world of God. Since expressive individualism has long influenced the social imaginary, Trueman’s strange new world is really just the same old world.¹⁰ A stranger newer world awaits in the Psalter, where the true God reveals what it means to be truly human.

The Rule of the Sovereign God

The Psalter provides an alternative to the sovereign self that dominates contemporary culture. But the anthropology of the Psalter is a *theological* anthropology. Therefore, before asking “What is a human?” it is necessary to ask “Who is God?”—and the short answer to that question is *God is the King*.¹¹ This is

⁸ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 181.

⁹ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 28–50. For a newer translation, see Karl Barth, *The Word of God and Theology*, trans. Amy Marga (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 15–29.

¹⁰ It is unclear if Trueman is aware of Barth’s lecture/essay. He does not cite it in *Strange New World*.

¹¹ On the image of God as King in the Psalms, see James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), esp. 12–22.

seen, first of all, in the most common term for God in the Psalter: the LORD.¹² The God of the Psalter is not a distant deity or an abstraction; he is a ruler with power, authority, and agency. In addition, the imagery of divine kingship appears at the beginning, middle, and end of the Psalter.

Near the beginning of the Psalter, Psalm 2 sets forth a hierarchical worldview as the backdrop for the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7). Enthroned in heaven, God has established his Anointed on Mount Zion above his people and all the kings and nations of the earth.¹³ The drama of the psalm plays out through three quoted speeches. First, the rebellious rulers of the earth express their plan to throw off the dominion of the LORD and his Anointed: “Let us break their bonds asunder and cast away their cords from us” (v. 3).¹⁴ Next, God laughs and assures them that their revolt will fail because he has firmly established his Anointed: “I myself have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion” (v. 6). Finally, the Anointed recounts his relationship with God and God’s promise to give him all kingdoms of the earth: “He said . . . ‘You are my Son. . . . Ask of me, and I shall give you the nations for your inheritance’ ” (vv. 7–8). The psalm ends with a warning to the rulers of the earth to serve the LORD and do homage to his Son (vv. 10–12). Those who oppose him will perish, but those who trust in him will be blessed.

¹² *The LORD* (with all capital letters) represents the divine name in Hebrew. It stems from the Jewish practice of protecting the sanctity of the divine name (*YHWH*) by substituting the title *my Lord* (*’adonai*). Greek and Latin translators followed this precedent by using their own equivalents for *Lord* (*kurios*, *dominus*), and Coverdale followed them in his English translation.

¹³ In the context of Christian worship in the Daily Office, the Anointed of Psalm 2 is rightly identified as the Lord Jesus Christ. New Testament authors also interpret Psalm 2 in this way (Acts 4:25; 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5; Rev 2:27; 19:15).

¹⁴ All quotations of the Psalms come from *The New Coverdale Psalter* (Huntington Beach: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019). Verse numbering differs, at points, from other English translations.

Near the middle of the Psalter, Psalms 93–100 repeat the affirmation “The LORD is King” (93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:7; 99:1).¹⁵ Here, God’s sovereign rule is depicted in three ways.¹⁶ First, God’s kingship is based on his creation of the world: “Ever since the world began, your throne has been established” (93:3). Second, God’s kingship is expressed in just judgment and lawgiving: “Arise, O Judge of the world, and reward the proud according to their deserving. . . . Blessed is the one whom you chasten, O LORD, and whom you teach your law” (94:2, 12). Third, God’s kingship should evoke praise from all his creatures: “O be joyful in the LORD, all you lands; serve the LORD with gladness, and come before his presence with a song” (100:1). All are invited to join the song of God’s kingdom.

Near the end of the Psalter, Psalm 145 returns to the image of divine kingship: “I will magnify you, O God my King” (v. 1). This psalm has a concentric structure. The center (vv. 11–13) exalts God’s eternal kingdom: “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all ages” (v. 13). The inner ring (vv. 8–10, 14–20) extols God’s gracious care for all his creatures: “The LORD is loving to everyone, and his mercy is over all his works” (v. 9). Finally, the outer ring (vv. 1–7, 21) encases the whole psalm in universal worship: “Let all flesh give thanks unto his holy Name for ever and ever” (v. 21). The ripples of praise continue through the last five psalms of the Psalter (146–150), which are all hymns of praise.

¹⁵ Biblical scholars often classify Psalms 47, 93, and 95–99 as “Divine Enthronement Psalms.” On the literary unity of these psalms, see David M. Howard, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997).

¹⁶ Psalm 96:10 encapsulates all three kingship themes in one verse: “Tell it out among the nations [praise], ‘The LORD is King; it is he who has made the world so firm that it cannot be moved [creation]; he shall judge the peoples righteously [judgment].’ ”

The Role of the Servant Soul

If *God is the King*, then what does that make humans? The Psalter's theology leads to its anthropology: *humans are servants of God*. Instead of a self, the individual has a soul, and the whole person—body and soul—is created to serve God:

“Comfort the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul” (86:4).¹⁷ All God's people are servants: “Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters . . . even so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God” (123:2–3). Indeed, all God's creatures are servants: “Surely your ordinances stand firm this day, for all things are your servants” (119:91).¹⁸ The nations do not yet serve God, but they are urged to bow before him in service: “Be wise now, O you kings; be warned, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD in fear, and rejoice with trembling” (2:10–11). The human soul receives its identity as a member of the kingdom of God, a great body of faithful servants.

What does it mean to serve the LORD in the Psalter? It means to honor him as the Creator in prayer and praise; it means to obey his will and keep his laws; and it means to represent him to those who do not yet serve him. These are the fitting roles of the human servant. But service also involves exercising dominion over creation. Like Psalm 2, Psalm 8 pictures God at the top of the cosmic hierarchy. God is enthroned on high (v.1) above the heavens and earth that he has made (vv. 3, 6). Unlike Psalm 2, Psalm 8 fills out this picture with the creation of humanity in the divine image (Gen 1:26–27).¹⁹ God made humans a little lower than the angels,

¹⁷ On the soul in the Old Testament and Psalter, see Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1974), 10–25.

¹⁸ In addition, various human leaders are called God's servants, such as Abraham (105:6), Moses (105:26), David (78:71), and the priests (134:1)—as well as the angels (103:21).

¹⁹ Some New Testament authors also find the rule of Christ in Psalm 8 (Heb 2:6–8; 1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22). This is fitting because Christ fulfills the royal vocation of humanity.

crowning them with glory and honor and giving them dominion over the animals (vv. 5–8). Humans occupy a special place in this world: they are servant-kings. They rule over the other creatures, but they must not rule in selfish and oppressive ways, for they, too, are servants of the LORD.

Conclusion: Invitation to Another World

This essay has shown that current debates over abortion, same-sex unions, and transgenderism are really symptoms of an underlying disease: the anthropology of the sovereign self. This is not a new way of thinking. What seems like a “strange new world” is really the same old world that Trueman shows developing over hundreds of years. After philosophers disconnected humanity from its transcendent source in God, they psychologized, politicized, and sexualized the self. The sovereign self is now deeply imbedded in the social imaginary of the culture. This is why it is so difficult to convince people to change their moral views with rational arguments. This is also why the sexual revolution sees traditional Christian morality as an enemy that stands in the way of human flourishing. Even Christians are natives of this conceptual world.

This essay is an invitation to all Anglicans to pray the Psalter in the Daily Office and to invite others—Christian or not—to join them. The Psalms do not directly address the controversial issues of the day, but they contain the worldview that is necessary for addressing them faithfully.²⁰ In that sense, the Psalms are the antidote to the disease that is ailing this culture and causing the symptoms. They

²⁰ The Psalms do touch on some contemporary issues implicitly. For example, Psalm 139 describes God knitting a baby together in his mother’s womb (vv. 12–16), and Psalm 45 assumes that marriage is between a man and a woman. Also, several psalms refer to God’s law (e.g., 1; 19; 119), which contains texts that relate to abortion (Exod 21:22–25), homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13), and transvestitism (Deut 22:5).

hold the power to reshape the social imaginary of those who pray them. In the words of Barth, there is a “strange new world” waiting in the prayer book. The Psalms are invitational.²¹ They invite people to see God as their sovereign King who lovingly rules his creation, judges justly, and welcomes all in worship. They also invite people to see themselves as God’s servant-rulers, who exercise dominion by honoring, obeying, and representing their Creator: “It is he that has made us, and not we ourselves” (100:2). Perhaps it is precisely because the Psalms do not directly confront the controversial issues of the day that they can extend an appealing invitation to the sovereign self: “O come, let us sing unto the LORD; let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and show ourselves glad in him with psalms” (95:1–2).

²¹ On invitation as a model of evangelism versus conversion and hospitality, see Richard R. Osmer, *The Invitation: A Theology of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

Rev. Logan Gates

Word Count: 2,475

Genesis and Rousseau: A Tale of Two Falls

Introduction

Behind the disparate challenges of transgenderism, critical race theory, and cancel culture, a particular story is being told. Like Genesis 1-3, it is the story of a Fall. It begins with a picture of innate goodness, interrupted by a series of events which cannot be undone. It sees these events as having brought about systems of oppression – patriarchal, racial, and neo-colonial – which are now embedded in institutions. The “middle” of the story is where humanity stands today, as protagonists with the moral duty of bringing about the happy ending, by dismantling those unjust systems and setting free the individual. How does this story compare with the Biblical one? What are the implications for the Church as it seeks to proclaim the *Gospel* story by its liturgy, witness, and charity? The aim of this essay is to compare these two stories, to draw out both commonalities and differences, and to offer by way of conclusion practical recommendations for the Church today.

To understand the Gospel story, the Church looks to Holy Scripture, but to understand the story of today’s culture, this essay will look to the eighteenth-century political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The reasons for choosing Rousseau are twofold. First, he is a pivot point in the history of philosophy, between the “early-moderns” like Hobbes and Locke and the “late-moderns” like Hegel and Marx. These later thinkers brought a new emphasis on how systems, institutions, and structures *shape* human beings, for better or for worse. By and large, Rousseau sees these systems as having shaped humans for the *worse*; he famously begins his *Social Contract* with the words, “Man is born free, and

everywhere he is in chains.”¹ Karl Marx builds on Rousseau to condemn what he sees as economic chains, embedded in the relationships of production, while Wilhelm Reich decries the chains of patriarchal, heteronormative institutions like marriage.² In short, today’s cultural story, with its focus on systems of oppression, finds one of its earliest tellers in Rousseau. The second reason this essay focuses on Rousseau is that, because he lived in a broadly Christian culture (born in post-Calvin Geneva of all places), he was forced to articulate his philosophy in explicit dialogue with the Christian faith. One of the clearest places he does this is in his *Second Discourse*, formally entitled the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (1766).³ This work is an account of humanity’s origins and can be read as a retelling of Genesis 1-3, with points of commonality and departure readily apparent. This essay will compare the narrative arcs of the *Second Discourse* with Genesis 1-3, before concluding with practical recommendations for the Church as it seeks to proclaim the Gospel with love to Rousseau’s philosophical descendants today. The thesis of this essay is that a comparison between Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* and Genesis 1-3 highlights three distinctives of the contemporary narrative: human autonomy, human innocence, and political apocalypticism.

Initial Goodness: Dependence vs. Autonomy

Both Rousseau and Genesis depict man in his original state as better off than today. In the Genesis account, the goodness of this original state stems from the presence of harmonious relationships, both between human beings and between

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Social Contract” in *Rousseau: The Social Contract and other later political writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), I:1

² See Carl Trueman, *Strange New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 80-88.

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men” in *Rousseau: The Discourses and other early political writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). All subsequent references to the *Second Discourse* will be from this edition and abbreviated as *SD*.

human beings and God. In the Bible, God makes human beings *social* from the beginning. He explicitly condemns the notion of man's independence, saying, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."⁴ The goodness of this arrangement is underscored by Adam's response to it, bursting into song at the creation of Eve.⁵ However, the primary relationship in Genesis 1-3 is the relationship between humanity and God. God "walks" with Adam and Eve in the garden, reflecting how they were "communing intimately" with Him.⁶ While Adam and Eve are created equally in God's image,⁷ Genesis describes the relationship between humans and God in terms of inequality. This inequality is evident through God's giving Adam and Eve commands, such as "be fruitful and multiply" and "have dominion" over the other creatures.⁸ God gives Adam and Eve a prohibitive command as well: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"⁹ The harmony between God and man before the Fall appears to stem from man's ongoing obedience to these commands.

In contrast, Rousseau primarily frames the original goodness of humanity in a "negative" sense, that is, not in terms of the presence of harmonious relationships, but in terms of the absence of unjust systems of oppression. Rousseau uses the image of a weathered, seaside statue to describe how man's nature has decayed over time, on account of society:

Like the statue of Glaucus which time, sea, and storms had so far disfigured that it less resembled a God than a ferocious Beast, the human soul altered in

⁴ Genesis 2:18 (ESV). All subsequent quotations will be from this translation.

⁵ Genesis 2:23.

⁶ Thomas Pangle, *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 98.

⁷ Genesis 1:27.

⁸ Genesis 1:28.

⁹ Genesis 2:16-7.

the lap of society by a thousand forever recurring causes, by the acquisition of a mass of knowledge and errors, by the changes that have taken place in the constitution of Bodies, and by the continual impact of the passions. (*SD* Preface:1)

Because Rousseau primarily understands man's original goodness in terms of the absence of later corruption, there is little positive content as to what that original goodness entailed. One key characteristic of this state, however, is autonomy; Rousseau writes that early man "had neither harm to fear nor good to hope for from anyone" (*SD* I:34). However, while autonomous in this sense, early man was not completely solitary; Rousseau argues that man was at his happiest when he moved into family life (*SD* II:12). Humans at this early stage enjoyed social relationships but did not *depend* on others, in contrast to the Genesis account, where Adam must depend on Eve as his "helper" and on God as his creator and sustainer. The Genesis account begins with dependency, which Rousseau exchanges for autonomy. In Rousseau's Garden of Eden, God is nowhere to be found. His very existence is too great a threat to the absolute autonomy Rousseau idealized.

Irrevocable Interruption: Original Sin vs. Innocence

Both Genesis and Rousseau point to specific events in human history that have irrevocably interrupted this superior state of early humanity, but they disagree sharply as to whether man should be held responsible. In Genesis, the circumstances that brought about the Fall were a test of obedience for Adam and Eve. The first humans exercise their faculty of freedom against the explicit command of God. They go on to blame their disobedience on others – including on

God.¹⁰ That God finds Adam and Eve morally culpable is confirmed by his retributive punishment of them and the irrevocable consequences that follow. Human nature becomes sinful, and the account of Cain's city in Genesis 4 shows how that sinfulness proved capable of taking root at a *systemic* level.

For Rousseau, humanity's Fall also consisted in certain irrevocable events early in its history. Rousseau argues that these events occurred when humans employed their reason to develop crafts like "metallurgy and agriculture" (*SD* II:20). Presumably because of the complexity of these technologies, man first "needed the help of another." This ushered in a new social dynamic, which Rousseau describes as "the first duties of civility." By *depending* on the help of another, man could now be said to "owe" something to that person. From this point onward, Rousseau writes, "any intentional wrong became an affront because, together with the harm resulting from the injury, the offended party saw in it contempt for his person, often more unbearable than the harm itself" (*SD* II:17). For Rousseau, these systemic "duties" left humans vulnerable to this deeper kind of hurt, at the "psychic" level, and have since snowballed into the oppressive institutions that have come to erode man's happy, primordial state.¹¹

A crucial difference between Rousseau and Genesis 1-3 is that, for Rousseau, man is emphatically *not* to blame for crossing this threshold. Were Rousseau to condemn the man who used his reason to invent agriculture, he would also need to condemn the man who used his reason to usher humanity into the happy stage of family life. Along these lines, it's not surprising that one of the Christian doctrines Rousseau liked least was that of original sin. In the *Letter to Beaumont*, Rousseau writes, "How I hate the discouraging doctrine of our hard

¹⁰ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis – Part I: From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 157; Pangle, 83.

¹¹ Arthur Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 114.

Theologians,” which depicts humanity as “this whole troop of rascals... for whom [the Christian priest] has inspired us with such horror.”¹² Rousseau’s account of the Fall finds a way to say of the world, “This is not what was meant to be,” without laying the blame on humanity as a whole. Marx builds on this very idea to divide the world into oppressors (owners of the means of production) and victims (the labouring classes). Without a doctrine of original sin applying to *everyone*, victims can be presumed to be wholly innocent, and oppressors wholly evil. A similar dynamic can be said to be at work in critical race theory, falling along racial lines, and is perhaps most clearly seen in cancel culture, where people’s membership in an oppressive hierarchy renders them irrevocably culpable in a way that non-members are not. It becomes a moral offense to “reward” oppressors with a platform. This idea finds roots in Rousseau’s exchange of original sin for original innocence.

The Fall-Out: Qualified Hope vs. Political Apocalypticism

For both Rousseau and Genesis, these irrevocable events have had lasting impact and inform what right behaviour looks like now. Whereas in Eden, Adam and Eve “walked” with God, with their expulsion came the loss of that kind of intimacy.¹³ The pains of childbirth, the toil of tilling the soil, and death itself¹⁴ now remind Adam and Eve – and their descendants – that they are experiencing the ongoing effects of God’s punishment because of their sin. Genesis 1-3 does not, however, end without hope. God speaks of a descendant of Eve who will “crush” the head of the serpent, foreshadowing Christ’s atoning death and resurrection. On the whole, Genesis 1-3 enjoins the Christian to avoid the sin of Adam and Eve by

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau citoyen de Genève à Christophe de Beaumont, archevêque de Paris* in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. IV, 940n. Quoted in Melzer, 18-9.

¹³ Pangle, 98.

¹⁴ Genesis 3:17-19.

submitting to God with humility and dependence, trusting in His provision of a Saviour, and, by the Spirit, being “conformed to the image of his Son,”¹⁵ joining in His work of undoing the effects of the Fall. Such work must include recognizing and responding to ways sin becomes embedded in systems and institutions. Genesis leaves Christians with a qualified hope; they have a task to do, but ultimately only God can bring us back to Eden – and in His second coming, He will do it.

Rousseau argues that humans have two options for responding to the corruption of society. The first is the hermit’s life. For those exceptional enough to bear it, Rousseau advises them to “leave behind in the Cities your fatal acquisitions, your restless minds, your corrupted hearts, and your unbridled desires” and to “go into the woods to lose the sight and memory of your contemporaries’ crimes”. (*SD* Note IX: 14). Nevertheless, because Rousseau realized living this way would be like learning to live again on “grass and acorns,” he offers another option. If man cannot totally abandon those relationships of dependence, he should *channel* them in a new direction, by reforging systems, institutions, and structures “to forestall, cure, and palliate the host of abuses and of evils that are forever ready to overwhelm us” and to thereby restore man to his original “psychic unity” (*SD* Note IX: 14).

Rousseau wasn’t sure that the right systems could be developed to undo fully the harm that had been done. Marx and Reich brought an optimism in this regard that Rousseau lacked, holding that society *could* be put to rights if only the old systems were completely torn down. Optimism is often good, but in this case, it rose the stakes of political action to an apocalyptic level. To not confront the old, oppressive systems – from meritocracy to gender binaries – is to perpetuate them

¹⁵ Romans 8:29.

and thereby to inflict a kind of hurt on others beyond physical wounds, at the psychic level. While Rousseau perhaps did not intend it, the narrative he inspired replaced the qualified hope of Biblical social engagement with a political apocalypticism that justifies a scorched-earth approach, destroying social institutions and whomever stands by them.

Conclusion: Recommendations for the Church today

In light of Rousseau's emphases on human autonomy (instead of dependence), human innocence (instead of original sin), and political apocalypticism (instead of qualified hope), this essay concludes with four practical recommendations for the Church:

1) *Tell a better story.* Rousseau found that the Gospel's starting point, the need to see oneself as a "rascal," rendered the Christian story irredeemably harsh. But even in God's punishment of Adam and Eve, He made "garments of skins and clothed them."¹⁶ This is the Gospel story that the Church proclaims: God's concern for the "rascals" stems not from *their* goodness, but from *His*. The cultural story says, in effect, "you are good" and "you are oppressed," whereas the Gospel says, "He is good," but "He was oppressed" for you. Through repentance and faith He offers true "psychic unity," but in restored relationship with Him, which no circumstance or even oppression can shake.

2) *Present a fuller vision of goodness.* Rousseau's account of man's original goodness is largely *negative* – marked by the absence of social ills. The Church can offer a fuller, *positive* vision of goodness. The Bible teaches a teleology – that humans were made *for* God, for relationship with Him and to be conformed to Christ's image. Today's culture speaks about meaning, but only of a kind that is

¹⁶ Genesis 3:21.

autonomously “created” for oneself, against the backdrop of ultimate meaninglessness. The Gospel presents meaning as something not created but “discovered.” For the Christian, the good is not autonomous but *personal*, grounded in the One who loves and has pursued humanity across heaven and earth, onto the cross, out of the grave, and up to the Father’s side to intercede for His children.

3) *Refuse to demonize*. The Church must not so condemn the culture as to forget her own sinfulness, lest Christians follow Rousseau and not Genesis in forgetting original sin. The Christian has no need for the ego-boost of feeling superior over others; Gospel humility tears down but also builds up.

4) *Pursue justice shrewdly, with hope*. The Christian ought not to underestimate the power of sin, reaching even the systemic level. Only Christianity offers Gospel-dignity for victims now, a promise of ultimate restoration through Him, and a Gospel motivation for the Church to go to where brokenness is, in response to Christ meeting the brokenness in us.

Title: The Eternal Crisis of the Gospel and Long-Term Spiritual Formation in a
Stopgap Society

Name: Joshua Heavin

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This essay argues that the recovery of historically Christian, and distinctively Anglican, practices of catechesis and spiritual formation is vital to cultivating a theological and ethical imagination capable of offering faithful worship and sustained witness amidst a wide range of contemporary social crises in our rapidly changing Western culture. Initially, this suggestion may seem naïve; “if the rule you followed led you to this of what use was the rule?”¹ Historic Anglican liturgy and practices of spiritual formation have been tried, it might be argued, and found wanting before the challenges of secularization and modern society; surely leaning even harder into these traditions and expecting different results will prove ineffective, if not maddening.

However, the disorienting complexity and volume of social crises that pervade contemporary life, both within and without the church, require not only courage and perseverance to resist an overwhelmed apathy or a helpless despair.

Furthermore, only a disciplined allocation of our finite time, energy, and attention will effectively relate to the challenges of our time that range from international wars, global pandemics, gender and sexuality ethics, sexual abuse, racism, poverty, deaths of despair, violence, climate change, abortion, the politics of identity, denominational decline, and much else. “Speaking the truth in love” not only involves the usual difficulties of exercising the courage of one’s convictions amidst peer-pressure, while simultaneously acting with humility and mercy, but proves exceptionally difficult if we are only acquaintances with and not intimate friends of the truth, and thus liable to being “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14–15). I contend that rediscovering practices of spiritual formation, which have withstood and the ebb and tide of history, offers a reliable path forward amidst the chaos and fragmentation of liquid modernity.

¹ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 175.

On one hand, Oliver O'Donovan is correct, that "there are many times – and surely a major Election is one of them – when the most pointed political criticism imaginable is to talk about something else."² Arguably, many within our churches are overly preoccupied with *du jour* controversies. The church of Jesus Christ offers a powerful counter-testimony against the lordless powers³ of our age when it refuses them the attention and idolatrous worship they so desperately crave, instead attending faithfully to the often small and quiet matters of eternal significance in hidden lives. Simultaneously, fixation on matters of ultimate significance is not to be confused with cool detachment or indifferent retreat, which are neither desirable nor possible before such challenges – undesirable, because the church's mission is to be ambassadors of the kingdom of God in word and deed; impossible, because a privileged position above the fray is forgone through union with Christ, which creates a solidarity with brothers and sisters in Christ, evident in the Apostle's Creed that we believe in "the communion of saints,"⁴ as we are bound together in a common baptism to act wisely and charitably amidst controversies roiling many of our churches and personal lives.

In Part I of this essay I situate contemporary ecclesial and ethical action within an ironic historiographical situation: though all ages are beset by presentism, absolutizing contemporary challenges as though they were unprecedented in scope or scale, the church in our own historical moment is especially prone to these errors due to a combination of poor catechesis, technological, and material factors.

² Matthew Lee Anderson, "Oliver O'Donovan on the American Political Environment," *Mere Orthodoxy* (2010): <<https://mereorthodoxy.com/oliver-odonovan-on-the-american-political-environment/>>.

³ Kevin Hargaden, "Locating the 'Lordless Powers' in Ireland: Karl Barth, Novels, and Theological Ethics in the Aftermath of the Celtic Tiger, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 84.3 (2019): 243–258.

⁴ See the Heidelberg Catechism, Q.&A. 55; The Anglican Church in North America, *To be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 101–103.

Rightly discerning how contemporary social and cultural challenges variously are, or are not, unprecedented in scope and scale is vital to effectively handling them. In Part II, I suggest three distinctive contributions of the Anglican tradition to the church catholic for redressing these problems; by imbibing the Scriptures, Catechesis, and Sacramental Liturgy deep into the lives of our churches, we will be better poised to commend the faith to future generations and to have a missionary encounter with our non- or anti-Christian context. Finally, in Part III of this essay I argue that our contemporary moment between a waning Christendom and significant challenges in the horizon, we must consolidate the integrity of our churches from within rather than being so preoccupied by challenges from without as to become hollowed out. While appropriate engagement with the issues of our time is necessary, over preoccupation with the crises of today can leave us disconnected from ancient wisdom and render us utterly unprepared for the unknown challenges of tomorrow. Yet, even the best of our traditions will not in and of themselves suffice to equip the church for action that is truly effective in relation to contemporary social crises; only the ongoing work of the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is our hope.

Part I

John Jewel's 1562 *Apology for the Church of England*, one of the foremost historical defenses and expositions of the Church of England, begins with an observation that what is popular is not necessarily true. Across the ages, the same problems afflict the people of God under various guises, from the sacred history of Israel to God's action in Jesus Christ, to this very day, as the truth continually seems strange:

It hath been an old complaint, even from the first time of the patriarchs and Prophets, and confirmed by the writings and

testimonies of every age, that the truth wandereth here and there as a stranger in the world, and doth readily find enemies and slanderers amongst those that know her not. Albeit perchance this may seem unto some a thing hard to be believed, I mean to such as have scant well and narrowly taken heed thereunto, specially seeing all mankind of nature's very motion without a teacher doth covet the truth of their own accord; and seeing our Saviour Christ Himself, when He was on earth, would be called the Truth, as by a name most fit to express all His Divine power; yet we, which have been exercised in the Holy Scriptures, and which have both read and seen what hath happened to all godly men commonly at all times; what to the Prophets, to the Apostles, to the holy martyrs, and what to Christ Himself; with what rebukes, revilings, and despites they were continually vexed whiles they here lived, and that only for the truth's sake: we, I say, do see that this is not only no new thing, or hard to be believed, but that it is a thing already received, and commonly used from age to age.⁵

The timeline within which the church of Jesus Christ exists is defined by the events of the gospel, namely, that “the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death [and resurrection] of the Son of God and re-created by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God.”⁶ The gospel announces not merely “an improvement in the human situation,” but “nothing less than the dawn of the new creation”⁷ in the crucified and risen Messiah and those who are united with him.

⁵ John Jewel, “The Apology of the Church of England,” Project Gutenberg (2006): <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/17678/17678-h/17678-h.htm>>.

⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, ed. by John Bolt, trans. by John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), vol. 1, p. 112.

⁷ J. Louis Martyn, “The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians,” *Interpretation* 54, no. 3 (2000), 250.

The Spirit presently manifests Christ's resurrection life and power in self-giving, cross-shaped lives in the reconciled community, whose faith, hope, and love are a sign which testifies against the powers of this age and testifies to God's coming reign that has already been secured in the risen Messiah and Lord. As such, the church lives at the overlap of the ages, where the kingdom of God is like leaven hidden in bread, like a discovered pearl left buried in the field, like a seed that grows imperceptibly apart from human striving, or like a field where crops and weeds intermingle before the harvest (Matthew 13). As Augustine concluded, "these two cities [the City of God and the City of Man] are interwoven and intermixed in this era," so the church can take heart that amongst the world there are people destined to belong to the City of Man who might not realize it yet, while the church also must remain watchful, as it cannot presume that everyone who associates with the church indeed is journeying towards the City of God.⁸

As such, the providential history within which the church lives is not reducible to human actions and scheming, but nor can the church's history be identified in an immediate way with God's being or acts. The God who lives in freedom has determined to be God with us and God for us in Jesus Christ, establishing a covenantal bond in the God-man for the healing and reconciliation of the broken creation, such that, as the Barmen Declaration rightly observed in opposition to German Christian capitulation to Nazi ideology, "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death," which precludes that "the church in human arrogance could place the word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans," as though the Word of God were

⁸ St. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (New York, NY: Penguin, 2003), 46.

an object we could exploitatively lord over others rather than ourselves be ruled by, or as though the church were a political voting bloc rather the Body and Bride of Christ, an outpost of an eternal kingdom.⁹

The opening chapter of Ecclesiastes provides an outlook on history which many of us would prefer to ignore, but one that can aid the church in resisting captivity to every idol that might capture our gaze. The Teacher in Ecclesiastes observes that “all things are full of weariness,” particularly because “what has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? It has been already in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.” (Eccl 1:8–11). Instead, if we falsely imagine ourselves as living within unprecedented times, a wholly novel epoch requiring emergency powers, exceptional ethics, and extreme measures for extenuating circumstances, it becomes far easier to justify arbitrary whims. Simultaneously, there is no small danger in dismissive presumption that we have nothing to learn about the challenges of our times, or in premature association of contemporary challenges with problems the church has faced in the past. But in every age, the church has been tempted to regard its situation as facing utterly unprecedented challenges in scope and scale, from the earliest generation of Christians, to those after the destruction of the temple in AD 70, to those who witnessed both the conversion of the Roman Empire and then its demise, to those in the 14th century who witness the Black Death and three popes each anathematizing one another.

⁹ Eberhard Busch, *The Barmen Theses Then and Now*, trans. by Darrell and Judith Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 19.

However, ours is an age particularly prone to presentism, “the view that only present things exist.”¹⁰ In no age has it been easy to cultivate a deep knowledge of the past and to diligently fashion mental furniture that lends itself to wise, collective memory. But now that the overwhelming majority of people spend hours every day looking at screens, we are swimming so deep in presentism that we can hardly recognize it any longer, particularly as we watch entertainment-news television with flashing, urgent notification messages, as we read 280-character tweets, watch short TikTok videos, and consume other content that by its very design is made to be ephemeral, arresting our attention for a short few seconds before leading us to the next momentary spectacle that will capture our hearts and minds. As Anglican political theologian Jon Askonas observes in *The New Atlantis*, the decline of social institutions that once fostered a shared picture of the world means that “consensus reality” is in decline today.¹¹ Thus, the church today occupies an ironic historiographic situation, namely, that while every age is vulnerable to the dangers of presentism and absolutizing its problems as unprecedented, ours is arguably the most presentist generation of them all. While in no age has attentiveness or the learned skill of just “being” been easy, ours is especially vulnerable to presentism since, as Hannah Arendt develops, effective propaganda need not concern itself with persuasion but only must confuse and exhaust – in sum, distract, and “totalitarian propaganda thrives on escape from reality.”¹² But in Christ, reality itself has encountered us, whether we like it or not.

Part II: Tools for Spiritual Formation

¹⁰ David Ingram and Jonathan Tallant, “Presentism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2022 Edition): <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/presentism/>>.

¹¹ Jon Askonas, “What Happened to Consensus Reality?” *The New Atlantis*, Sprint 2022: <<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/what-happened-to-consensus-reality>>.

¹² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1958), 352.

Given the overwhelming complexity of the challenges against speaking the truth in love well in our contemporary contexts, there is likely not only one solution that is required. By no means do I mean to suggest that only historic Anglican practices for spiritual formation can stem the tide, nor are they a panacea. Nonetheless, distinctively Anglican approaches to liturgy and daily Christian living contribute extraordinarily valuable resources for imagining an alternative Christian community and way of being in the world, and this tradition is worth understanding, enriching, strengthening, and commending to future generations, not only for the known challenges of today but the unknown challenges of tomorrow as well.

First, Anglican worship works the Word of God into the people of God, week in and week out, both in the public reading of Scripture, and in the Daily Office. The 1549 Preface to the Book of Common Prayer recalled the practice of the ancient church that all or almost all of the Bible was read over once each year, and “by daily hearing of Holy Scripture read in the Church should continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion.”¹³ William Tyndale’s dying wish, that the ploughboy would know as much Scripture in the vernacular as the Pope,¹⁴ could scarcely imagine our contemporary situation, where we have unprecedented access to the Scriptures and scriptural teaching but our hearts are taken captive by endless opportunities for novel distractions on our phones, such that biblical literacy is in stark decline, even amongst consistent churchgoers.¹⁵ The discipline of the lectionary compels us to

¹³ The Book of Common Prayer, The Anglican Church in North America (Huntington Beach, CA: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 794.

¹⁴ John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of These Latter and Perillous Dayes* (London: John Day, 1563), 570.

¹⁵ Brent A. Strawn, *The Old Testament is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

continue working through even those parts of Holy Scripture that we might otherwise avoid, and we have no hope of speaking the truth to our generation if we are unacquainted with – let alone if we have not meditated upon, imbibed, and re-read again and again – the Word of God. Not only on the Second Sunday in Advent, but routinely we Anglicans need to pray, “Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of your holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”¹⁶

Second, catechesis has been a hallmark characteristic of Anglican church life throughout all ages except perhaps for our own. While not every Christian is necessarily called to enter a classroom as a student or to learn multiple research languages and master an area of expertise as a scholar, nonetheless everyone who is in Christ is a theologian, for better or for worse, because eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3). The question is not if our churches are filled with theologians, but only what kind of theologians we functionally are, and which modes of theological inquiry will be used tomorrow in the practical lives of our clergy and laity for the complex challenges on our moral horizon. Do we have a functioning theological system in our churches and our lives, with proportionate doctrines interacting with one another? From St. Augustine’s *On Christian Teaching* to the great catechisms of the magisterial Protestant Reformation, Christians have long sought to instill the basic doctrines of the gospel into the lives of every Christian, particularly through expositions in questions and answers on the Apostle’s Creed,

¹⁶ BCP 2019, 598.

the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer as a summary of Christian living. The venerable literary history of the Book of Common Prayer has always included some form of catechism, and the ACNA's 2019 *To Be A Christian* well continues this hallowed tradition. Yet, catechesis remains something routinely overlooked not only by Christians in general but even by Anglicans today, perhaps regarding it only as an elementary course for children before confirmation that one graduates from, rather than an opportunity to continually re-discover the astonishing wonder of the gospel's profundity and simplicity. Under the tyranny of presentism, an endless stream of pressing controversies demand our attention now, urging us to "say something now" on matters which we might scarcely understand. There are an endless number of worthy causes the church can – and should – devote its time, reflection, and action towards. Yet, polling of American parishioners consistently demonstrates that the most basic of Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity or the person and work of Christ, are routinely misunderstood, let alone functioning as distributive doctrines that undergird the whole of salvation and the whole of the Christian life, which we then might use to navigate various anthropological, social, and political challenges that emerge. J.I. Packer is right: "the catechumenate – all-age pastoral instruction – has got to be revived. There are many ways of doing it right. The main thing that is not right is to not do it."¹⁷ Planting, watering, cultivating, and pruning deeply-formed Christian persons means setting down deep roots that can withstand storms and the change of seasons, and it requires a quiet faithfulness and resolved determination to continue putting the things that matter most deep into our churches and our individual hearts.

Finally, Anglican worship that follows the Book of Common Prayer, both in its unity and diversity, is an aid to conforming churches and lives to become more and

¹⁷ J.I. Packer, *The Heritage of Anglican Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 344.

more like Christ in this world. Through participation in Christ, as Richard Hooker wrote in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, “his body crucified and his blood shed for the life of the world, are the true elements of that heavenly being, which maketh us such as himself is of whom we come,” because as truly divine and truly human “Christ is... that true vine whereof we both spiritually and corporally are branches,” abiding in him in life, death, and hope of resurrection.¹⁸ In our own era where the population center of Anglicanism is in the Global South rather than England or North America, any discussion of Prayer Book liturgical traditions needs to be attuned to the reality that Anglican worship means neither uniformity nor arbitrariness, but discerning a unity amidst a variety of missional improvisations.¹⁹ But the basic pattern of Anglican liturgy, from the summary of the Law to our confession of sin, the assurance of pardon, and the canticles we read and sing, works the gospel into us as a people – whether we have an ecstatic experience of its power or are wavering in our faith and full of unrest. Anglican liturgical and sacramental tradition sets the gospel before us and before the world week by week, and year by year through the liturgical calendar, that we are the community of scoundrels and beggars, from every walk of life, who gather around a table where Jesus is both the Lord and the servant, where in faith we do this in remembrance of him, in love have participation in Christ presently, and in hope proclaim his death until he returns. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann observed that in the modern a world, made “frightening not just because of its hatred, division, and bloodshed” but also because “not God but man has become

¹⁸ W. Bradford Littlejohn, *Richard Hooker: A Companion to His Life and Work* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 173.

¹⁹ Gerald Bray, *Anglicanism: A Reformed Catholic Tradition* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 160–166.

the measure of all things,” even some churches and theologians in the West have replaced a Christian vision of truth, beauty, and goodness, the world at the service of God, for a reduction of everything to power struggles, economics, psychology, and politics – yet, nevertheless, the Eucharist “is the source of that renewal for which we hope.”²⁰ We are those who eat from one loaf; we have been washed in the waters of baptism, all alike sharing one common name of God into which we were baptized, the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In so doing the church can become an alternative community amidst a broader social and cultural context where people are arguably more isolated and lonelier than ever,²¹ and also ever-more increasingly less likely to spend time with other people who do not share their niche political preferences or algorithm-determined entertainment affinities.

Part III Our Only Comfort in Life and in Death

However, the only hope and the necessary focus of the church to effectively address the unique challenges of our age must be the God who lives in Freedom, who has determined to be God for us and God with us in Jesus Christ.

Decades ago, British missionary Lesslie Newbigin profiled how Christians in the West have not merely declined numerically or lost political influence that might have been held in past centuries of Christendom. Furthermore, the situation in which we presently find ourselves is one of missionary encounter, where we cannot assume that the basis of Christian and faith and practice will even be

²⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, trans. by Paul Kachur (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983), 9–10.

²¹ Myles Werntz, *From Isolation to Community: A Renewed Vision for Christian Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022).

intelligible to our rapidly secularizing and religiously multi-cultural society.²² That distinction is crucial: not merely has the Christian faith become one amongst other options in how late modern people might choose to live their lives, but it has become an almost unimaginable, almost unthinkable option to many of our neighbors, coworkers, and even our own children. The gospel of a crucified Messiah as risen Lord of the cosmos necessarily must contradict the claims of rival lords. But many of us in the late modern West are becoming less and less comfortable than we have been in past decades in our relationship to broader non-Christian society. Where once self-identifying as a Christian in some circumstances might have provided some social capital, today self-identifying with traditional forms of Christian doctrine and ethics can create more of a social liability than cachet.

In such environs, it is imperative that the church consolidate from within, and shore up the ruins, lest a frenetic preoccupation with an endless stream of urgent crises without weakens our integrity to the point of breaking. I am not suggesting that the church's public witness and the private work of Christians in any number of areas need to only be confined to internal activity; far from it. By no means is the gospel unconcerned with matters of racial injustice, climate change, gender and sexual ethics, poverty, care for the weak, the sanctity of human life, care for those with disabilities, the elderly, mass incarceration, hospitality for refugees, and much else. A gospel we might focus on, to the exclusion of or retreat from the world to which God has sent us to be his ambassadors, is not a gospel that has been sufficiently grounded in the doctrines of creation and new creation, and probably misunderstands the nature and extent of the fall, sin, the incarnation, and more.

²² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988).

Simultaneously, many of us are prone to so fixating on these challenges that they crowd out essential matters of Christian faith that are perennially to be the church's preoccupation, or we might so drastically re-define historic Christian doctrines to make them expedient for our concerns today as to become emptied of any connection to the communion of saints past or future. What is necessary is not some mediating course between our polarized, binary social and political options today; what is needed is a heavenly course that the world will find either compelling or confounding, a way that defies conventional categories like that taken by Oxford martyr Nicholas Ridley, who died a slow and painful death by burning at the stake for teaching the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation and was also "was noted for preaching on social justice" and whose advocacy for the poor established two hospitals.²³

If our current moment is indeed one of gathering and storing away provisions before a likely quite brutal winter on the horizon, then we can spend our remaining days of summer and Autumn on sanctimonious trivialities, or we can use what precious little time we have to prepare. If Christian theology is chiefly about God, and all else in relation to God,²⁴ then we need to audit our current priorities. Do we live in such a way as to keep our deaths ever before us, with a longing for the beatific vision? How well are we training ourselves and our churches for martyrdom? How susceptible are our churches to baseless conspiracy theories and propaganda, do we relate wisely or naively to the challenges of public discourse in era of fragmentation and social media? Are we cultivating an ethos in our churches that remembers our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and are we ourselves

²³ eds. Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams, *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 52.

²⁴ John Webster, 'What Makes Theology Theological?', in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*, 2 vols (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), vol. 1, p. 217.

honoring God with our functional sexual ethics, as we discern how to be Christians in an age where progressive sexual ideology is becoming increasingly dominant in the public square? Are the foremost determinative pressures on our personal and corporate outlook on matters of racial reconciliation and racial justice the pressures of the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture, or the latest talking-points and peer pressure of left- and right-wing commentators or our social media newsfeed? While God's kingdom endures forever, have we so misidentified certain political figures or parties with the cause of God's kingdom that we scarcely distinguish between them, thereby ensuring our churches will last no longer than their rise and inevitable falls? Is the suffering and injustice undergone by our brothers and sisters in Christ our own, or held at a remove? As we assess how to handle crises of abuse and trauma, do we avail ourselves of helpful tools from secular psychology to protect and care for hurting people, without allowing secular psychology to dictate the church's theological anthropology? Are we a God-intoxicated people, a people desperate to know and love Jesus Christ, a people so filled with the Holy Spirit as to forego peer-pressure and material comforts in order to be agents of truth and mercy in this world, burning with desire for the Holy Trinity, lost in wonder, love, and praise? Regardless of what we theoretically tell others and even ourselves, functionally are we ashamed of the gospel – or does our witness to the world by Word and Sacrament issue forth from a sincere faith that cannot stop speaking and singing about what God has done, is doing, and will do in Jesus Christ?

Th distinctively Anglican practices related to Scripture, catechesis, and sacramental liturgy are enormously useful resources towards forming our churches and individual hearts to better relate to the crises of our time and place. However, in and of themselves, if we are left only to ourselves, we are doomed inevitably to fail. As former archbishop Michael Ramsey wrote, “the credibility of the church of

God, and the credibility of Anglicanism, lies not in its own virtues or successes, but in the Lord of the church. And the Lord of the church is Jesus, crucified and risen, who through his church still converts sinners and creates saints.”²⁵ So may we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, have grace to take up our cross and follow him.

²⁵ Michael Ramsey, *The Anglian Spirit* (New York, NY: Seabury Classics, 2004), 134.

“At this moment there was a violent knock on the door.

‘Come in!’ said the bishop.”

~Les Misérables by Victor Hugo (Part I, Book 2, ch.2).

On a Simple Approach to Ministry During “These Uncertain Times”

By Todd Milton

The contemporary day and time in which the church finds herself in 2022 is, in many ways, not unlike other periods of history. It even bears many similarities to the first years as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles. However, in other ways, it has gone from bad to worse, from crudely simple to bewilderingly complex, and swiftly towards an even darker shade of gloom and doom. How is the church to respond with a faithful witness to truth and remain a positive influence for good during “these uncertain times”? The intent of this essay is to highlight the importance of the church’s basic understanding of the gospel and especially how that understanding is translated into the daily lives of the disciples through the simple, but powerful qualities of discipline, generosity, and hospitality. These qualities, more than any programs, will position the people of God to be influencers for good in the modern world, even with all its woes.

What are the most pressing issues in our modern world that the church must deal with? One hardly knows where to start when considering this question. Perhaps, beyond the headlines, some of the most concerning and rudimentary conditions might include: the breakdown of the traditional family strongly supported by enduring marriages, addictions of all sorts (including to noise, busyness and technologies), and an increasingly widespread crisis of mental health that is fueled by our stressful world, our anxiety-provoking technologies and entertainments, and our burden of being “in the know”.¹

The church attempts to reach out to this lost world in many loving and valiant ways. While many western churches seem to be largely program and event oriented, there are other methods (such as those described herein), simpler in their approach, which tend to be underemphasized, perhaps because they don’t yield as much applause and notoriety. It is the argument of this essay that these simpler ways are, in the long run, more effective.

The Church’s Basic Understanding of the Gospel

It will be helpful to briefly clarify which “version of the gospel” most strongly supports such an outlook. Like a goldfish trying to discern whether the water in its bowl has become cloudy, it is very difficult for the church to have clear insight into whether the gospel it preaches has veered off course. The slow drift of history is difficult to notice without assistance.

The late philosopher, Dallas Willard, explains that there are three common gospels heard today, and a fourth that Jesus preached.² Briefly, the first is the gospel of the theological right which is summarized as “your sins will be forgiven, and you will be in heaven in the afterlife”. A second, the gospel of the theological left, holds that “Jesus died to liberate the oppressed”. The third, familiar to both “sides”, is “take care of your church and it will take care of you.” Each of these contains elements of truth and they are not all bad through and through. But they fail to provide an adequate motivation for life and for mission.

What then is the “fourth gospel”, the correct version that Jesus himself preached? This, Willard claims, is an invitation to “put your confidence in Jesus for *everything* and live with him as his disciple *now* in the present Kingdom of God”. He further defines salvation as “participating *now* in the life which Jesus is *now* living on the earth.” This view of the gospel does not eliminate the focus of the “other gospels heard today”, but rather places them in a richer context which is exactly where Jesus himself placed them.

The three versions of the gospel most commonly preached tend to lead the church to be like Martha, “distracted with much serving”³, while the fourth gospel seats us along with Mary, “at the Lord’s feet and listening to his teaching.”⁴ This can seem an oversimplification of a complex historical reality of the slow transition of the church’s understanding of the gospel and its mission. But one has to seriously reflect on whether or not the gospel preached leads to guilt and burnout or to: “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”⁵

A church that is “distracted with much serving” seeks to burden it’s members with numerous events and programs while overlooking more fundamental and life-giving practices. This can perhaps be illustrated by looking at the interpretation and application of the Great Commission (Matthew 28.18-20):

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Is this a passage about world evangelization and missions? In many ways, yes. But what is to be the outcome? Clearly, disciples. Are these disciples to be immersed in water while a certain Trinitarian phrase is pronounced over them? Only if they are truly immersed in the reality of that Trinity and are introduced to that spiritual reality. Are these disciples plugged into church programs and told to read their bibles, give money, stay busy in attendance, and share their faith? Or is the command to “teach them to observe all that I have commanded you”? Are there seminars on how to love your enemies, bless those who persecute you, or love one another with the same love that I have loved you? Or does the church live with a low-lying black cloud of guilt for not doing more evangelism? Martha or Mary?

No quick fix is available for any of these longstanding and deeply entrenched misunderstandings. The solution, at least for a disciple of Jesus Christ, is the slow process of inner transformation into his life and character. Willard’s summary cuts to the point: “The church is for discipleship and discipleship is for the world.”⁶

Discipline

This will require the church to view its members as disciples (students) of Jesus and itself as a school for eternal living. It must teach transformation through the renovation of the heart. It will require a growing familiarity and appreciation of spiritual disciplines – not as a fad to boast about on social media – but as a time-tested way to enter personal transformation into Christlikeness. The church has at its disposal a treasure of almost two thousand years of the lives of men and women who have shown the way. Perhaps a good rule would be to set aside much contemporary writing and re-discover much of these writings from the past. One of the more recent of these guides wrote:

“Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered...Most of all, perhaps we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us....that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.”⁷

While it is, in many ways, a good thing that topics like “spirituality”, “spiritual formation”, “spiritual disciplines”, and “discipleship” are trending, as is typically the case, ideas that become “trends” can quickly stray from truth and helpfulness. The concept of discipline may have suffered along these lines.

A cornerstone of Willard’s teachings⁸ about spiritual disciplines is that they are activities within an individual’s power that help them become people who are capable of a quality of character that is not within their power to produce. They work by indirection. They take time and grace. They are not for “righteousness” but for the slow, lifelong process of *becoming*. A life changing moment for a student of Jesus comes when he or she realizes that the most important thing that they will get out of life (and even that God will get out of their life) is not that they have answered the test questions correctly about sin, atonement theories, justification, etc., but simply the person that they become. Jesus Christ is the best person to lead us in this way.⁹ Willard was known to say that if there was a better way, Jesus would be the first one to tell you to take it.¹⁰

Jesus’ students are *sent* into the world, as he was, and are also to be *sanctified* as he was.¹¹ They learn the manner of life that he showed us. This life of renovation is a “long obedience in the same direction”.¹² It is one characterized by developing habits of discipline: silence, solitude, prayer, fasting, memorization of passages of Scripture, secrecy, study, worship, fellowship, etc. There is no exhaustive list and these habits if practiced in the wrong way can be damaging. The attitude of the disciple is key and an expectation of being guided by the Spirit of Jesus is indispensable. This takes time and it takes teachers (living and dead). There is no microwave for these things.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it well: “The way to patience leads through discipline (2 Peter 1.6). The freer we are from ease and indolence and personal claims, the more ready we shall be for patience.”¹³ One must seriously reflect on Bonhoeffer’s own life of discipline and how that made him “ready” to endure

his trials. The church must teach true discipleship to Jesus Christ, the disciplines that he himself practiced, and the spirit in which he practiced them. *Then the church will be ready to engage a troubled world.*

Generosity

This transformation into living by the abundant resources of God's kingdom will naturally lead Jesus' students to be generous people. While generosity typically leads one to consider financial giving (and certainly does not preclude that), there are many ways to be generous.¹⁴

As a tremendous example, consider John Drage, a Missouri pastor who died in 2020 from glioblastoma brain cancer. His well-documented journey illustrates a disciple who overflowed with generosity and agreeableness despite his circumstances. He encourages followers of Jesus to be people who are givers and not takers – who give away the gifts of attention, affirmation, and awkwardness.¹⁵ Again, those who knew Drage for years prior to his illness, must consider how his practice of the spiritual disciplines prepared him for living (and even dying) generously.

An immediate critique of this outlook might be that the church cannot be generous too much in this way or the sinful culture will think that their way of life is acceptable. While this is an understandable conundrum, true disciples must seek to be disciplined and to become generous people and let God, by his Spirit, take care of what only He can do.¹⁶ Generosity is the way of the Father: “he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good”, and of the Son who “came....to give”, and of the Spirit who is “manifested” for “the common good.”¹⁷ One could even argue that the entire ministry of Saint Paul, and therefore half of the New Testament, hinged on an act of generosity.¹⁸

Hospitality

As these true disciples are learning to imitate Jesus, they discover a very simple, but powerfully effective practice that Jesus made much use of – hospitality.¹⁹

Hospitality takes the church away from the church building and programs. It welcomes other disciples and the world into our homes. Practiced on a regular basis over a long period of time it can have tremendous influence for good. The epigraph at the opening of this essay from Hugo's *Les Misérables* portrays the life changing power of the simple hospitality the bishop extends towards the convict, Jean Valjean.

But this is not only found in fiction. One family from the Church of the Good Shepherd in Lynchburg, Virginia has demonstrated this quality in a way that is instructive. For many years now, they have maintained the regular discipline of generously opening their home on Friday evenings for what they refer to as a “Sabbath Dinner”. The time consists of a brief ten-to-fifteen-minute liturgy that blesses the meal along with those present. The rest of the evening is spent eating, drinking, and in conversations.

What is most impressive is both the simplicity and the effectiveness of this habit of hospitality. It is not regimented – sometimes it may be canceled due to other obligations. It is not in a church building. The

guests are both regular and new – they come and go over the months and years. But in this familiar and comfortable setting, over the course of a long time, framed within the prayers that start each meal, God is at work. Relationships are built among believers and non-believers. Young people, often from broken homes, get to see and taste a real family supported by a strong Christian marriage. Only occasionally are any clergy present. This is an example of disciples who are both “sent” and “sanctified”. Perhaps these types of folks are those whom Jesus had in mind when he instructed his disciples to “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”²⁰

The way of life and discipleship described herein is summarized well by Lesslie Newbigin:

“A Christian congregation is thus a body of people with gratitude to spare, a gratitude that can spill over into care for the neighbor. And it is of the essence of the matter that this concern is the overflow of a great gift of grace and not, primarily, the expression of a commitment to a moral crusade. There is a big difference between these two.”²¹

The issues that the church must deal with and live in the midst of in our contemporary western world are decadent and disorienting to say the least. It has been the intent of this brief essay to suggest that although the world is increasingly complex, the church will find its way forward in the simplicity of true discipleship to Jesus and by learning his methods of ministry. As the church teaches a true understanding of the gospel, the response will be the making of these true disciples – who are progressively learning to do the things Jesus commanded – and through discipline are more and more overflowing with generosity and practicing hospitality. There has never been a better invitation undergirded by stronger promises. The controversial social issues of the day will be most sufficiently met by these simple acts of love. Truly, the fields “are white already to harvest”.²²

ENDNOTES:

¹ “Most of the luxuries and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hinderances to the elevation of mankind.” (*Walden*, Henry David Thoreau, p.14)

² See <https://conversatio.org/gospels-heard-today/?collection=2409> for a thorough explanation of “Gospels Heard Today”.

³ Luke 10.40 (ESV)

⁴ Luke 10.39 (ESV)

⁵ John 7.38 (ESV)

⁶ This quote is one that Dallas Willard is fond of saying in many places, one of which is the lengthy series found at <https://conversatio.org/collections/spirituality-and-ministry-2012/>.

⁷ Excerpt from the address titled, “Learning In War Time” found in *The Weight of Glory & Other Addresses* by C.S. Lewis.

⁸ See especially *The Spirit of the Disciplines* but, really, most of Willard’s writings will contain this key thought. Also most helpful is Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*.

⁹ See 2 Corinthians 5.21 for example.

¹⁰ See *Living in Christ’s Presence* and *The Allure of Gentleness*.

¹¹ John 17.17-19

¹² See *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* by Eugene H. Peterson.

¹³ August 9th reading in *A Year with Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Daily Meditations from His Letters, Writings, and Sermons*. This particular quote is from *A Testament to Freedom*.

¹⁴ Interestingly, the New Revised Standard Version translates the fruit of the Spirit “goodness” in Galatians 5:22 as “generosity”.

¹⁵ See <https://www.johndrage.com/blog/what-do-you-have-to-give>.

¹⁶ For example, John 16.8-11: “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” (ESV)

¹⁷ See Matthew 5.45, 20.28; and 1 Corinthians 12.7.

¹⁸ “So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,” Acts 11.25.

¹⁹ See pages 212 - 222, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* by Eugene H. Peterson.

²⁰ Matthew 9.38 (ESV)

²¹ From *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* by Lesslie Newbigin, p. 278.

²² John 4.35 (KJV).

The Kitchen Table as a Platform for Change:

Fasting in an Age of Division

Elizabeth Demmon

2450 words

Introduction

Today's many conflicts in political ideology, cultural values, and lifestyle choices make it difficult for Christians to know how to engage with our world in faith and charity. In this increasingly noisy and contentious marketplace of ideas, platforms abound: protests, voting booths, activist gatherings, political events, and an increasing array of social media. Let us now consider a quieter, humbler platform that nevertheless has power to shape and amplify the witness of today's church: the kitchen table.

Divisive arguments and cultural estrangement are as old as the Christian experience. Yet in the epistles of the New Testament there are explicit warnings against being caught up in controversies.¹ Addressing the deep societal divisions of our time must not be about winning arguments, policies, or culture wars. It is about trusting in God's transformative and incarnational love. That same love empowers and equips God's people to do something unexpected. In a culture that values the

¹ 2 Timothy 2:23-26; Titus 3:9-11.

right to pursue and celebrate any personal appetite, nothing is more unexpected than fasting.

The Book of Common Prayer (2019) contains this simple and oft overlooked statement: in addition to penitential seasons and special days of discipline, “every Friday of the year (outside the 12 Days of Christmas and the 50 days of Eastertide) are encouraged as days of fasting.” These days are to be marked by “reduced consumption...prayer, self-examination, and acts of mercy.”² The witness of the Anglican Church in North America can change dramatically if our kitchen tables are sparser one day a week. A fast will recommit our church to a posture of prayer, humility, repentance, and compassionate engagement with a world that is spiritually—and literally—hungry. The world will see a community of faith that is willing to make lasting lifestyle changes in response to what it cares about, and that will speak more powerfully than any post or placard.

Fasting and Prayer

Fasting is not simply a diet or physical discipline taken up to improve physical wellness. It may well lead to the same benefits, but Christian fasting is first and foremost an invitation to deeper prayer. This, more than anything our efforts themselves might procure in service to any cause, is our hope. God’s is the power to redeem and reconcile, to bring health, and change hearts.

This posture of prayer is facilitated through abstaining from food. Fasting appears throughout the Old and New Testaments in many forms, from a partial restriction in diet to complete abstinence from food and water. Biblical fasts are

² Anglican Church in North America, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 689.

undertaken both as individual disciplines and corporate acts.³ Our Lord addressed fasting as a practical fact with his disciples, as did the early teaching of *The Didache*.⁴ Though it is common throughout Scripture and generations of Christian practice, fasting fell out of favor and observance over the centuries.⁵ This negative connotation dates back, in part, to a reaction against the extreme asceticism and legalism in the Middle Ages.⁶ Nevertheless, there is support from the English Reformers for fasting. *The Second Book of Homilies* contains a two-part sermon on the discipline, which it describes as a “particular good work, whose commendation is both in the Law and the Gospel,” even emphasizing “that we ought to fast is a truth more manifest than that it should here need to be proved.”⁷

The logistics of fasting throughout the early church varied widely.⁸ Its value lies not in the exactitude of the prescribed fast so much as in the posture of prayer and self-denial in which it is undertaken. So what might it look like today to reacquaint the province to this intentional discipline? With the Prayer Book as guide, it need not be complicated: weekly observance, on Fridays, of eating less food. The discretion of church leadership may provide more details, such as abstaining from meat all day, or from any food until sundown. What matters is a “reduction of consumption”⁹ coupled with prayer, to “assist in breaking forceful habits that accrue within and harden the heart over years and even over generations...to render the faculties more subtle and sensitive to the outside world as well as to the ‘inner kingdom.’”¹⁰ Something as straightforward as eating less,

³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 49.

⁴ Matthew 6:16-17; Aaron Milavec, ed., *The Didache* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 21.

⁵ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery* (New York: Doubleday, 2008) 81.

⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 47-48.

⁷ John Griffiths, ed., *The Two Books of Homilies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), 280, 282.

⁸ Griffiths, *Homilies*, 284.

⁹ BCP, 689.

¹⁰ Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 81.

on purpose, with prayer, one day a week, is simple. Simplicity does not, however, translate to ease.

Self-Examination and Acts of Mercy

Even a single day of consciously eating less will inevitably bring aspects of spiritual health to light. Richard Foster, in his *Celebration of Discipline*, writes, “More than any Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us...Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear—if they are within us, they will surface during fasting.”¹¹ It is humbling to realize how powerful the physical desire for food is when not immediately satiated. The benefits of regularly confronting this challenge in prayer and humility is an increase in repentance, a weekly opportunity to observe one’s spiritual state, and a reminder to treat every meal with a heightened sense of gratitude. In prayerful practice, fasting directs its observers, over and over, to the truth that “Man is a hungry being. But he is hungry for God. Behind all the hunger of our life is God.”¹²

This posture of self-reflection and repentance prepares a person for acts of mercy. There are so many different ways to serve one’s neighbor, but let us consider again the current climate of contention. How might members of the church engage differently in some of our time’s most divisive conversations, once tempered and refined in the fire of fasting? Fasting lays bare how difficult it is to allow our faith to shape physical aspects of our lives. Many of today’s contentious

¹¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 55.

¹² Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 14.

social issues pertain to the physical body, including questions of sexual expression and gender identity, abortion rights, and healthcare access. A body of believers who can speak with compassion and experience about regularly denying the impulses of the flesh will sound different when addressing sexuality or addiction. They will be able to speak with humility and self-awareness about how being part of the church is incarnational, that the body is a gift and an integral part of worship. They may understand better the needs of a mother overwhelmed at the prospect of feeding a new child, or the desperation of an immigrant risking undocumented work. This is where the discipline of fasting meets the church's engagement with divisive topics. Its capacity to soften and strengthen the message and ministry of the church is not limited to a single issue.

Fasting will also necessarily result in a renovated relationship with the food we consume. Food is undeniably a vital part of the Christian narrative. From the very beginning, the garden was filled with edible provisions. The fall came through a bite of fruit. The sacrament of our redemption is a feast—not merely spiritual, but of actual food and drink. Indeed, we know Christ in the breaking of the bread. Our future hope is a banquet.¹³ Food is a sign of God's provision and proof of the value of our physical bodies. Yet in this present age, our relationship with food has become obscured. Unlike most humans throughout history, many of us in modern-day North America are disconnected from the production of the food we eat daily. Moreover, eating habits have led to a number of devastating challenges: obesity, food addiction, eating disorders, overly processed food devoid of nutrition, and food waste. These issues are rampant in our communities, but they generally garner less attention than more contentious topics. In our commitment to fast there

¹³ Genesis 1:29; Genesis 3:6; John 6:53-56; Luke 24:35; Matthew 22:2.

is a new opportunity to examine the role that food plays in our personal lives and communities and to prayerfully invite God's transformation into those spaces.

There are already movements responding to this need, but many of them originate outside the church. Meatless Mondays is an initiative with the same outward act of a weekly fast, meant to "promote sustainable behavior change by dedicating every Monday to health."¹⁴ Likewise, intermittent fasting uses set times of food abstinence to pursue weight management. Celebrated journalist Michael Pollan has been examining the environmental, cultural, and ethical ramifications of our food supply for decades.¹⁵ The church should be leading the way in these conversations. We still can.

This food-focused reflection leads to food-related acts of mercy. If the fasting church explores the question of how faith relates to food, answering that question has the potential to inspire direct changes in a wide range of current issues. For example, the church who rediscovers gratitude for God's provision in creation becomes a better environmental steward. They become ready to challenge the profit-driven corporate decisions behind overly processed and industrialized food. Envision the church promoting the care of creation through regenerative farming and community gardening to reduce the burden in our communities of rising food prices, food insecurity, and food waste. Again, these topics are less flashy in the headlines, but have the power to effect true change in the lives of our neighbors in need.

Of all food-related acts of mercy, the following is the most important: the church can and should lead the world in responding to the desperate situation of

¹⁴ <https://www.mondaycampaigns.org/meatless-monday>

¹⁵ See, for example, his works *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (London: Penguin, 2006) and *In Defense of Food* (London: Penguin, 2008).

the pending global food crisis. Fasting opens the eyes of the faithful to the plight of the hungry. It is “a critical alternative to our consumer lifestyle in Western society, which does not permit us to notice the impact and effect of our customs and actions.”¹⁶ The World Food Programme warned this summer that “Conflict, weather extremes, economic shocks, the lingering impacts of COVID-19, and the ripple effects from the war in Ukraine push millions of people in countries across the world into poverty and hunger.”¹⁷ While food insecurity exists in communities everywhere, including North America, the most vulnerable regions of the world are not beyond our capacity to help. Every meal skipped should turn into a meal given. Every dollar saved by fasting should go straight to hunger relief. This is where our resources belong, until the church has a worldwide reputation for feeding the hungry. More than any social cause the church engages with today, this has the power to save precious lives and show God’s love to a hurting world.

Some Objections

Some may object that our Lord warned his listeners against fasting in the public eye.¹⁸ English Reformer Thomas Becon addressed this concern by pointing out that Jesus’s warning was against seeking the praise of others. Our fasting does not need to be hidden. As a good work done in humility and prayer, it can shine as a witness to the glory of God.¹⁹

¹⁶ Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 83.

¹⁷ World Food Programme, “FAO and WFP warn of looming widespread food crisis as hunger threatens stability in dozens of countries” 06 June 2022. <https://www.wfp.org/news/fao-and-wfp-warn-looming-widespread-food-crisis-hunger-threatens-stability-dozens-countries>.

¹⁸ Matthew 6:16-18.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, Rowan Williams, eds., *Love’s Redeeming Work*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 42; Matthew 5:16

Similarly, it was important to the formers of our Anglican heritage to establish that fasts are not works that can be trusted “to purchase to ourselves and others remission of sin, and so consequently everlasting life.”²⁰ It is a mark of the Christian life to remember always that God’s grace quickens us to do his work, and that our salvation is a gift, not a wage. He then sends us out into the world to do the works he prepared for us to walk in.²¹

Some argue that fasting is “a private matter between the individual and God.”²² It is true that fasting is an effective spiritual discipline for the individual, as Scripture attests, but fasting in biblical times and the history of the church also exists as a corporate practice. In fact, even private fasts—done with prayer, self-reflection, and acts of mercy—are always done in light of the suffering world and to identify with the needy. “To fast then, is to fast with and for others...Fasting is a solemn reminder that everything we do relates to either the well-being or the wounding of others.”²³ It is true that there is no explicit command in the Bible requiring a weekly fast. The church is not bound to observe fasting in a particular form—but it can choose to do so. About fasts, the homilist says, “the Church hath full power and authority from God to change and alter [prescribed forms in religion] when need shall require.”²⁴

Why propose a sustained, weekly fast and not a special, limited one? Quite simply, because it is already encouraged in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Furthermore, a weekly fast can strengthen and prepare observers for those times when a special fast is called. Archbishop Foley Beach has made several invitations to members of the province to fast and pray: in response to the COVID-19

²⁰ Griffiths, *Homilies*, 279.

²¹ Ephesians 2:10; *BCP*, 598.

²² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 50-51.

²³ Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 84.

²⁴ Griffiths, *Homilies*, 293.

pandemic, the suffering of the people of Afghanistan, the civil discord and racial violence in America, and others.²⁵ In his leadership, he has not been afraid to call for fasting and prayer. Considering the countless desperate needs of this world, we are not in danger of fasting too much.

Conclusion

The Anglican Church in North America is uniquely positioned to adopt a discipline of regular fasting. Anglicanism mines from the deep riches of church tradition to address the special needs of its modern context. At this moment in history, many people have come to Anglicanism to reconnect with historic church practices and live out their faith incarnationally. A provincial-wide fast reconnects the faithful of the 21st Century to an ancient spiritual practice, one that embodies sacrifice and humility in a lasting lifestyle change.

Though it presents a challenge, this fast is feasible. The foundation is already laid in Scripture, early church practice, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and Archbishop Beach's prior call to special fasts. It is a practical and immediate, if unexpected, answer to those who wonder how to engage in this world and its climate of division. This fast is in line with the gospel of Christ, redirecting the faithful to pray and repent, trust God, and lay down one's own appetite and resources for the sake of others. It is an act of love to a world that is divided and cynical, needing a church that speaks a better word than the many other clamoring

²⁵ <https://anglicanchurch.net/?s=call+to+fast>

voices, a church that calls for real, lasting change to the kitchen tables of its followers in order to better minister to the needs of our hungry world.

Let us therefore, dearly beloved, seeing there are many more causes of fasting and mourning in these our days than hath been of many years heretofore in any one age, endeavor ourselves, both inwardly in our hearts and also outwardly with our bodies, diligently to exercise this godly exercise of fasting in such sort and manner as the holy Prophets, the Apostles, and divers [sic] other devout persons for their time used the same. God is now the same God that was then.²⁶

So Anglicans in the 16th Century were exhorted, and so are they exhorted now.

²⁶ Griffiths, *Homilies*, 296.