

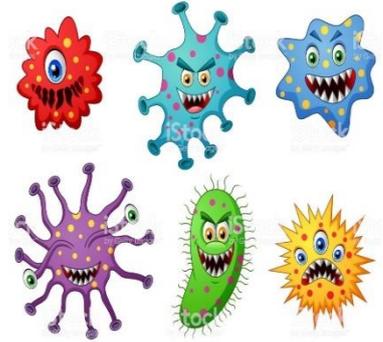


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The Corona Chronicles

Reviewing the Church through a time of crisis

Bishop Michael



Anglo-catholic renewal

Rowan Williams observed “catholic” and “evangelical” are words that belong together when they are properly understood. He went on to say that the wider Anglican Church have promoted as being a growing division, one that has devolved to the point where it has become almost a game where propogandists do battle for the title “True Anglican”. This is kept alive by those on the fringes, those who are simply not open to the importance of a broad-Church. They tend to press the profile for each group to the extremes. Evangelicals are pretty much fundamentalists and catholics do not believe in the truth of the Bible and are fussy about liturgical performances.

One of the things ignored in this parody is the way Scripture has undergone a major move to the centre of Christian thinking, spirituality and Church life. “Evangelical” is now found naturally on the lips of catholics, the same catholics for whom missionary activity in the world around them has come to be seen as a gospel mandate for all.

Is there a catholic spirituality and theology?

To use the thoughts of Rowan Williams again, “yes there is”. This does not mean these elements are not found among evangelicals. They are but they are of particular concern for those from a catholic heritage (or should be):

- Catholics are concerned about non-verbal as well as verbal expressions of faith.
 - This is very biblical. Here are many, many examples in the scriptures where God spoke through signs, wonders and parables – God spoke in Word and deed. There can be no separating these off in an attempt to separate the written Word and the Word through history (which was acknowledged well before there was any form of written Word).
- **They give** a central place to sacramental action as a necessary way of proclaiming the Word.

- Theology and worship for catholics is very much a part of its understanding of the meaning of the Incarnation – the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This is what is celebrated in catholic sacraments. The Incarnation means the fullness of the ministry of Jesus carries with it the grace and revelation of God and not just his words. In these God is revealed to the world, in the everyday life of the believer. It is in the sacrament we discover *God-at-work* in our midst.
- **They have** a strong sense of the need to see Christian life as something that takes time, that evolves over a period and is symbolized by the recurring journey of the Christian Year.
 - This too follows on from incarnational theology. The whole of humanity follows an inbuilt evolution of time as it moves through seasons and human activities that flow out of them (farming). The lectionary does the same thing on a spiritual-liturgical level, following the saving works of God through history. It means covering the fullness of revelation and not just the ones that suit the reader or preacher.
- **They insist** that faith is a community experience not only an individual one,
 - This is where catholics are truly counter-cultural in the contemporary western world. God calls people to community and wherever the Word is preached and the sacraments celebrated, there is the Church. This is not the same as saying *there is the Institution*, for that is but a means by which the Church self-organises, a necessity in any human community. *Christ* is never “my personal saviour”. *Christ* is always the saviour of all men and women. God calls *peoples* to faith and individuals are called in the context of the family of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ, with others who believe.

The principle underlying the Incarnation is that spirit is expressed through matter, the inward through the outward, the invisible through the visible. So God became man. So Christ entered into human life, and lived and loved as a man.

M.T Carpenter-Garnier

One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic

One of the most amazing realities of the early Church was the way it brought together peoples who were formerly in rigid and sometimes violent opposition with each other. We had Jews coming together with Gentiles, men with women, children and adults, slaves and those who were free. They do not have the same impact on people today as it did after that first Pentecost, but it was the beginning of a massive social upheaval on so many levels – gender, religion, culture, class and politics – all were torn

down , rebuilt and transcended by Christ. For Christians, the Kingdom of God was the overarching reality and the world was now viewed through the person and ministry of Jesus who reigns as the Christ of God.

Of course, that same observation could well be made of our own world today. We live in communities that are deeply divided. Sometimes, often, normally – these divisions reveal themselves in violence, persecution and oppression. It is difficult to come up with a full list of these divisions but some of them are all too obvious – male and female, gay and straight, Muslims and Christians and Jews; the rich and the poor, the powerful and those with no leverage. There are parts of the world people would never consider travelling because of the levels of violence and hatred.

Try as they might, politics, economics, military action and the actions of groups such as the United Nations remain unable to transcend these deep divisions and break down the mistrust and bigotry that underpins them.

Surely in these circumstances, the Church is perfectly placed to offer and facilitate the kind of lasting peace and harmony for which all peoples long. Every Sunday when we come together for the Eucharist, we are giving witness to what should be possible across the world. Men and women coming together to acknowledge their sins, listen to God speaking to them; to break bread, drink from the cup and go back out into the world bearing with them grace for the world. There is a unity in the great diversity of the pews, a unity that is made real through sharing a common oneness in Christ.

This is not going to be easy because of the reality of unhealed sins. When some peoples have not recovered from the crusades, for example, how is unity to be found without having some level of repentance and healing? All have sinned and all need to repent but few things open up opportunities than a confession, an acknowledgement of our failings and a commitment to healing and future collaborative love. This is true at all levels – parish, family, workplace and between the parish and the broader community.

Questions:

- Where might we as a parish need to explore these calls for repentance and reconciliation within our own faith community and visa vie the wider world? What are some of the things we might be able to do to begin this process?
- How might we introduce these two calls into our parish liturgical life?
- Christ the Healer brought new life to all who suffered. He cast out demons, healed those who were physically and mentally ill and raised the dead to life. In what ways might we as a parish imitate Christ and make the wider world aware

that these same healing gifts are available today as the same Christ works in and through the local church?

- Before seeking forgiveness and healing, we need to be confident that we know our sins and are willing to acknowledge them. Without overdoing it, how might we assist in helping people to understand the nature and reality of sin?

The Church is called to “be” *Holy*

The thing most misunderstood about holiness is that it is not the same as being like a saint, though they were, in their own way, “holy”. It speaks of the way disciples live in the world. The letter of **1 Peter** puts it this way...*as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.* The starting point needs to be in all your conduct. Biblical holiness is something permeating the whole of our lives. It means walking in the way of the Lord, according to the will of God as made known to us in Jesus his Son.

The challenge here is to walk in the way of holiness a lifestyle that means avoiding what Pope Francis calls “the world’s way of thinking” for that way does not lead to freedom and holiness requires freedom. Holiness frees us up to look forward in hope even though the road may be long and filled with difficulties. The Hebrew people in the wilderness are a good example. They struggled with the temptation to look back to Egypt. The road ahead was all wilderness and they wondered whether or not they were up to the task. It was by walking with Yahweh, following the cloud by day and finding comfort in the fire at night. The Tabernacle with the Ark of the Covenant was in their midst and that was all they needed, for it was the *God-with-us, Immanuel* that made them holy. They could look on the image of their God.

The great temptation was to “look back with nostalgia” to the less threatening days in Egypt. Slaves they might have been but there was at least food, there was shelter and opportunities to have a peaceful life. Of course, life had never been that good but in the wilderness just about everything else seemed to be good.

the central idea of the Anglo-Catholic Movement was this— Jesus Christ, our Lord, had in one sense accomplished at His Ascension in His single person the redemption of man. But in another sense, equally apparent in the New Testament, He had only provided in full measure the means for its accomplishment, leaving behind Him for the fulfilment of His purpose the church, which is the New Israel, now freed from all restriction of race—the church which is His body, indwelt by His Spirit, the home of 'the grace and truth' which 'came by Him,' and the visible organ through which He is to act upon the world.

Charles Gore

Brian McLaren writes of the significant role Celtic spirituality had on the Anglican traditions. One of his points was the way it was a resistance movement of a kind. They refused to assimilate into their traditions the Greco-Roman practices and beliefs. They celebrated the way the Spirit of God was working within Celtic culture, through their spiritual heritage. For him this was the model to be used in the way the Church tackles the threats from an assimilation into the postmodern godless world.

One thing we can learn from the Celts is its fierce resistance to reducing faith to a collection of dogmas, statements and creeds. It kept a focus on the importance of a connection with God, a close, intimate and life-changing *being-with* relationship.

Questions:

- Following the witness of the Celts, what are the kind of pressures to assimilate Christianity into the ways of postmodern thinking and acting? How does “being holy” assist in maintaining and growing our Christian identity?
- What are some of the dangers associated with “looking back” to the good old days with a kind of nostalgia that hinders our movement forward? What are some examples of that kind of thinking? How can we balance the “looking back” with the call to keep moving forward in hope?
- Respond to this sentence from McLaren...Celtic spirituality resists the constriction and reduction of faith into mere statements and doctrinal systems: it believes that God’s truth can never be separated from beauty, nor can God’s beauty be separated from truth and in that fusion of truth and beauty, there is the mysterious glow of holiness.

The Church is called to be “Catholic”

Our understanding of Church can be expressed along two broad lines of thinking:

- A Church where unity and universality are maintained by gathering believers together under a single dominant way of thinking, believing and acting.
- The alternative is a more humble and charitable, outreaching model. Here the unity is maintained through relationships that are based on charity, a generosity and openness to the Spirit that refuses all temptations to a sense of elitism.

These two broad lines come from an overview of the history of the Church. In its early years the Church was diverse and most students of history will have come across the quote from Tertullian...*What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?* These two churches were living very different forms of the Gospel. The first had more obviously grown

within a Gentile milieu and expressed its faith and beliefs in language familiar to that world. The second tended to reflect more its background in Judaism, the Hebrew world in which it had been born.

These broad differences reflect the reality facing all Christian communities. As it was with those first communities (first three hundred years or so) diversity was the reality. The Church thrived in this diversity. It grew and spread because it could be diverse. What was not acceptable in any way was a sense of one expression being superior to another. There was no room for religious elitism within the Christian tradition.

The Eucharist is the Sacrament of Love; It signifies Love, It produces love. The Eucharist is the consummation of the whole spiritual life.

Thomas Aquinas

Wherever we find the Word of God surely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there, it is not to be doubted, is a church of God.

John Calvin

Reading through some of the early heretical movements, it is clear they came to a bad ending mostly because of their elitist tendencies. They were right and everyone else was wrong; *our Church is more doctrinally correct than yours* and so we are separating ourselves off from you and your sinful thinking and acting. Schismatic churches became schismatic on the basis of this belief in their spiritual and biblical purity. While the Church was striving to be inclusive, they sought to exclude others, were intolerant.

In these things, one of the strengths claimed by Anglicans is how it has always preferred the so called “Middle way”. This is not about compromising fundamental truths. It is more about understanding the way Truth can manifest itself in a wide variety of expressions. Anglicans have been able to maintain the best of the Catholic tradition and at the same time, take into itself the Spirit-led movements coming out of the European Reformation. It was not about taking an either or approach. It was more an acknowledgement that the Spirit was at work in every manifestation of Church that was not elite and intolerant. It was closer to the way our earlier faith communities lived with each other in a blessed diversity.

Questions:

- How does our present Church absorb the lessons of the early communities? What does this perspective on “catholic” say about our sometimes fierce divisions between evangelical and catholic and the way? The divisions that are

so clearly exposed at the time of the Lambeth Conference and the alternative GAFCON gathering?

- Are there ways we can break down this sense of elitism that is so harmful to the Church's ministry in our world?
- Can there be a way for the development of a more traditional understanding of Anglicans being a middle-road? Being both catholic and evangelical?
- What can we do to ensure we take on a more Celtic response to the post-modern world, a world that fails to even understand faith? How can we ensure we are not assimilating harmful modern ways of thinking and acting that are not aligned to our scriptures and traditions?

The Eucharist is the heart of the Church. Where Eucharistic life flourishes, there the life of the church will blossom.

John Paul 11

The Church is called to be Apostolic

That word *apostolic* is a great example of the way the same concept can be used to support differing outcomes. *On the one hand*, for example, it can mean a legitimacy coming from being able to trace an office, practice, teaching, belief, liturgical actions and more back to the apostolic times. *On the other hand* there is also the

understanding that *apostolic* has the primary meaning of being “sent” by Christ to preach the Good News outside of oneself. The Greek is *stellein* (to send) and *apo* (out of, from, off from). It is about a move from the self out among the other.

The theology of the second understanding above is based on a belief in the *missio dei* – the mission of God already at work in the world in which we live. In the name of Christ, under the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are sent to move out of our own comfort zones into the world of an-other or others and become collaborators in this *missio dei*.

This is not about going out to others in order to change them through the preaching and teaching we bring with us. We are sent out primarily to *witness* to the Good News of the Kingdom that is among us. Apostolic has the same impulse as mission and both come from the direct unambiguous message of the Risen Christ himself...

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ So go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’

The connective word *so* is of such importance here. It follows on from the guarantee by Jesus that he sends them off into the world empowered by the *all authority* found in verse 18. They are not sent out without the grace and power they need to be successful. They minister under divine authority...I have all authority...and so you move out...

Move out to do what? Really simple, achievable and world changing actions – make communities of disciples, baptise and teach what Jesus himself had taught, remembering the primary commandment of Jesus is *love one another with the same love I have loved you*. The presumption behind this command is that God himself is already “out there” and if we are to collaborate with God in God’s saving activities in creation, we need to be “out there” as well. Not out there to fill our pews but to make disciples.

In the Fresh Expressions movement one of the images they use is that of the wineskins and new wine. The greatest treasure of the Kingdom is not the wineskin but the wine. Every wineskin we have will only function effectively for a period of time. It will become obvious that if we wish to preserve the new vintage wine, it is time for a new wineskin, for the old ones have become too hard, rigid and inflexible. We then have a choice between three options:

- We sit back and wait, hoping the old skin will survive long enough to at least get through the new vintage.
- Throw out the old wineskins while it is still functioning and successfully holding the wine in storage. If we throw out the old skins before we have new skins ready to contain the new wine, we lose both wine and skin.
- Prepare the new skins while the old skins are still working. Then, the wine will be ready to be transferred to the new skins before the old ones burst and lose everything.

The incarnation began with Jesus and it has never stopped . . . God takes on flesh so that every home becomes a church, every child becomes the Christ-child, and all food and drink become a sacrament. God's many faces are now everywhere, in flesh, tempered and turned down, so that our human eyes can see him.

Ronald Rolheiser

Apostolic then has a much wider connotation than just being traced back to the apostles. It does include what the Acts of the Apostles call the *teachings of the apostles* but not the literal imitation of what those apostles did and how they did it. *Apostolic* means living *in* the world in the way the apostles witnessed to Christ Jesus *in* the world. That requires contemporary *disciples of Christ* to be as Greeks when ministering among the

Greeks and Jews when ministering among the Jews. Same witness. Different manifestation of Jesus the Christ. All in the single *missio dei*.

Questions:

- Reflecting on what we feel are the primary gifts of our own parish, work out which is the wine and which is the wineskin? In the light of our understanding of an apostolic tradition, what are the essential parts of our identity in this particular part of the God's creation?
- Discuss what the three options with the wine and wineskins might say to our own parish? Where do we think we would locate ourselves? Where do we think we are heading?
- In our own local community, how and where can we be "Greeks" to the "Greeks" and "Jews" to the "Jews" without compromising our Gospel mandate?

The Eucharist and transforming the Church

Those in the catholic tradition of the Church should never feel the need to make an apology for regular celebrations of the sacraments. We should be in the forefront of witnessing to the way that sacraments are a part of the identity of all disciples. Christ is the sacrament of God and the Church is the way this divine sacrament is expressed in human cultures and communities – the sacrament of Christ. The Church then is a sacramental community.

One of the sacraments fitting so easily into the Fresh Expressions model is the Eucharist. Not just the Sunday Eucharist but the daily celebration Bishop Stephen Cottrell reminds us...*has always been part of our tradition*. The Sunday Eucharist is a key moment in parish life but it should not be the only opportunity people can come together to give thanks and praise. Indeed, for many it is the worst possible time given all of the other pressures on their time.

This is where there the daily Eucharist serves two purposes. **First** of all, it provides alternative opportunities for parishioners and others to take part in this vital act of worship. **Secondly**, the daily Eucharist can be a part of a parish mission outreach. It does not have to be at the normal "first thing in the morning" slot.

Having the Eucharist in a range of setting, at different times, means the parish is creating opportunities to say – welcome, to nurture the faith and spiritual lives of the faithful; to provide an experience of hospitality, teaching on top of the sacramental ministry itself. It could be celebrated at mid-morning, noon, in the afternoon or during the evening. These could be aimed at mothers and toddlers, families, retirees, Bible study groups, healing ministries – any ministry within which the parish is already engaged. They can be in a meal setting, part of a Bible study, before meetings; with young people, children and those with special needs – for those who have had a member of their family die over the last year; for those baptised, married or confirmed and for special themes – e.g. peace. As it was with the early Church and has been for the faithful through the ages, joining with the communion of Saints in this way offers a powerful witness to the world and as well brings Christ alive in in the fullness of parish experiences.

The Incarnation is the ultimate reason why the service of God cannot be divorced from the service of man.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

One further aspect to remember is the way participants engage in the real presence of Christ as it is Christ himself engaging with the Church in these sacraments. There is a powerful observation made by John Henry Newman along these lines:

Christ's priests have no priesthood but his. They are merely his shadows and organs, they are his outward signs; and what they do he does; when they baptise, he is baptizing; when they bless, he is blessing. He is in all acts of his Church and one of its acts is not more truly his than any other, for all are his...since historically speaking, time has gone on and the Holy One is away, certain outward forms are necessary, by way of bringing us again under his shadow; and we enjoy those blessing through a mystery or sacramentally.

Parochial and Plain Sermons

Questions:

- Explore ways in which the parish can be truly sacramental. What are the kinds of things we could be doing to be a true sacramental community?
- Ponder possibilities for a daily Eucharist. Are there opportunities for daily Eucharists in the parish? What form could they take – where? groups?
- Share on the quotation from Newman. How much of that makes sense? With what might we disagree?