The Idea of a Mission Community
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Introduction

We find ourselves in a new situation in the church with regard to mission. A new situation calls for a new approach. A new approach should focus on recovering and renewing essential principles and practices that have been lost, obscured, or neglected with the passage of time. This should not be seen as an attempt to return to some past golden age. Rather, renewal requires that we re-emphasize lost truths and practices in ways that apply uniquely to our time. This follows the principle of the Incarnation; that which was from the beginning takes on flesh at a given point in time in history (1 John 1:1-3). It also follows the principle of the Resurrection; the Spirit of God brings the dead bones of his people back to life (Ezek. 37).

This paper will develop the idea of a "Mission Community." This idea is rooted in the historical spirituality of the church, but also has flexibility in its form and application so that it can work in the twenty-first century. I will begin with a review of the current setting for mission in our culture. I will then develop the principles and practices of a Mission Community as a plausible way to pursue the timeless mission of the church now.

Mission Community and Missional Community

There is an existing movement among evangelicals to create "Missional Communities" for the purpose of mission in a given area. Mike Breen explains,

> A Missional Community is a group of approximately 20 to 40 people who are seeking to reach a particular neighborhood or network of relationships with the good news of Jesus. This group functions as a flexible, local expression of the church and has the expressed intention of seeing those they are in relationship with become followers of Jesus with them (Breen 2013, 6-7).

A Mission Community is different. Its spiritual life and mission are based on a monastic model. It is structured around a corporate Rule of life. It is aimed, initially, at the spiritual formation of its existing members. In the logic of a Mission Community, the focus on the interior lives of the community members connects directly with the outward oriented mission. A Mission Community can continue to exist for extended seasons of time by living its common life of prayer without a particular need to make new converts—though it will always be seeking to bear witness to Christ. Evangelism in a Mission Community is viewed as a process. There is not a hard and fast line between conversion and formation. A Mission Community will call people to spiritual maturity and holiness. For this reason, a Mission Community can have influence with people who are nominal members of other churches, calling them to a deeper life of prayer and experience of community. A Missional Community has a common corporate life, but its existence is mainly for the purpose of bringing other people to an initial conversion.

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The Mission Field Has Changed

"Many of us feel like we are suddenly in an unfamiliar land where our internal maps of how things should be no longer match what is going on around us" (Roxburgh 2010, x). Our approach to mission will always be rooted in our own experience and context. I am a traditional Anglican.[1] The traditional Anglican movement of which I am a part was founded in the 1970s by people who belonged to "The Greatest Generation." They lived and fought through World War II, helped to save the free world, and experienced peace and prosperity in an America that was profoundly religious. Now they feel like aliens on a strange planet. They have lost their world. This is an issue for clergy as well as for laity. Alan Roxburgh explains that in the old world, "The role of clergy was to provide religious services to those in the community who came to church. Nowadays, people drive out of their neighborhoods to a church of their choosing, rather than attending the one in which they might have been baptized as a baby. Most simply stay home on Sunday morning" (xii). Many churches and clergy have prepared for a mission that consists of providing religious services to customers who are no longer coming to the store. They are all dressed up with nowhere to go—and they have no idea what to do about it.

This can lead to nostalgia for the past, and the attempt to return to an idealized former age. This is a mistake, both because such a return is not possible and also because it fails to see the problems inherent in that age that contributed to its collapse. It is tempting for traditionalists to see the decline of the church in our culture as consisting only of the abandonment of the timeless faith (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-5). There is certainly plenty of that. However, a closer look reveals that our practice of the faith has been deeply intertwined with the assumptions of modernity. Its decline is at least partly due to the fact that these assumptions no longer rule the day. Roxburgh explains:

> Modernity is a cultural map that has profoundly shaped the west, dominating the cultural imagination of people in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Its roots reach back to the Enlightenment, when the French philosopher Rene' Descartes rejected the traditions of the medieval intellectual map, questioning the scholasticism of his day with the notions that physical actions could be explained in terms of God acting on things, and developing a method of approaching the world we now know as rationalism. (Roxburgh 2010, 9)

A detailed examination of the foundations of modernity is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I will touch on two aspects of modernity that are central to understanding the idea of a Mission Community. The first is the way modernity focused on the individual rather than God or the community:

> Compared to all previous maps across cultures, in which a divine being was the source of truth and knowledge, modernity places the autonomous individual at the center as the source of truth and knowledge. …With this shift in imagination came a method by which this rational subject could compel truth and knowledge from the objective world. This form of rationalism came to be known as the scientific method. (Roxburgh 2010, 9)

The scientific method led to an "atomistic" way of thinking, based on Newtonian physics. Isaac Newton believed that atoms were the smallest bits of matter. Peter Steinke writes, "To explain the principles of Newtonian physics, teachers often use the example of billiard balls. They bump into each other, suffer collision, but they cannot connect. …Individuals were

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[1] See Addendum 1 for a brief autobiography

considered to be the atoms of society, and immutable principles and institutions were the means to keep the separate parts in intact" (Steinke 2006, 21)[2]. From the modern perspective, each individual is seen as distinct from each other individual; each is an independent moral actor. This led to a uniquely western and modern moral outlook. What each individual does in private is understood to be no one else's business because it isn't seen as having any impact on the whole. There was a loss of a corporate moral vision (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26-27). Life itself is broken down into parts. The church going part of a person can be separated from the business part of a person. Faith can be reduced to Sunday church attendance and involvement in various church activities. After church, one might go to some other social venue in which one's identity and behavior could be distinctly different from what it was at church. I suspect that the general failure of the Greatest Generation to pass their specific form of faith on to their children was caused at least in part by this compartmentalization. If faith doesn't touch all of life and transform the family, why bother?

We have moved from an atomistic world to quantum world. "Quantum physics, in contrast to Newton's physics, contends that there is no world composed of solid, individual parts unaffected by and unrelated to one another." Scientists discovered parts smaller than atoms. "These particles became so small that there were not particles—only relationships. Subatomic particles only come into being because of the presence of other particles. Elementary particles are in essence a set of relationships" (Steinke 2006, 23).

This movement from atomistic thinking to relational thinking impacts mission. We can touch on two applications. First, the mission used to be to try to get people to come to our church to fill that compartmentalized, atomized part of their lives—come to our church on Sunday to fill your need for the church part of your life. Our mission field no longer consists of people who are trying to determine where they will "go to church." We will have to show how faith impacts all of life. If faith doesn't touch everything it isn't worthy of a full commitment, and it won't get the average person away from football, shopping, youth sports, or more sleep on Sunday.

Second, mission will now be centered on relationships rather than programs and doctrines. We used to advertise our programs to the church shopper. We will now have to display our community. If people connect with us and find us plausible, they will be willing to learn what we are doing and how they can participate. But if they do not connect with us relationally, most will not be interested in our doctrine or our programs (Everts 2008, 29-48).[3]

A clarification should be made. There are plenty of people who are still shopping for a church, but those people are not, strictly speaking, the mission field. It is possible for a church to have a ministry that consists of competing for the church-going customer. If a church attracts more customers, it is seen as having a successful mission. However, the real challenge of mission is to reach the people who are not looking to go to church. This group includes those who say they do not believe in God; those who count themselves as "spiritual but not religious"; those who have stopped going to church because they were hurt in some way by their past church involvement; and those whose lives are too busy for church. It includes the wounded of our

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[2] Steinke bases his pastoral method on "systems theory." Systems theory provides a corrective to the tendency of Freudian psychology to see the individual only in terms of his or her own internal characteristics. Systems theory holds that individuals can only be understood in terms of their relationships with others. Steinke gives an accessible explanation of how this relates to the shift from Newtonian physics to quantum physics.

[3] In their book *I Once Was Lost, What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus,* Don Everts and Doug Schaupp argue that the first step towards reaching Postmodern people is getting them to "trust a Christian." To develop trust, we must necessarily focus on developing meaningful relationships.

culture, who often do not view the church as a potential source for help. For various reasons, many people have come to see the church as irrelevant to their lives. Mission requires the development of compelling communities that present life in Christ in plausible, attractive, and life changing ways—ways that touch all of life, not just a few hours on Sunday morning.

The second aspect of modernity that is central to the idea of a Mission Community is its focus on rational ideas and argumentation. Here I will offer my own experience in thirty-four years of ministry. I began ministry with the idea that the goal was to proclaim the truth about Jesus and the gospel. If this cognitive truth was embraced by the hearer, this would lead to faith in Jesus and a change in one's manner of life. This approach was deeply rooted in the modern idea that faith is a set of "beliefs" or "doctrines." If one could convince the rational hearer of the veracity of the gospel, the rational hearer would be compelled to accept this truth. I discovered in practice that most people aren't looking to be convinced about the truth of an argument. Most people want to connect with God and others. They want to give and serve in meaningful ways. They want to be loved and to love. They want to be known and to know others. Thus, even when people are convinced by the argument the response might be, "So what?"

I discovered that intellectual assent does not necessarily lead to personal transformation. People will give intellectual assent to the faith. However, their newfound intellectual clarity about God can remain mixed with the same old manner of life. Many Christians hide behind the intellectual arguments because they would rather argue with others about doctrine than face the reality of their own disordered interior lives. Further, trauma and other background issues require more holistic approaches in order to effect change and healing. Simply knowing the truth about God and self does not lead to spiritual growth or holiness.

I learned that I had it backwards. The experience of faith comes first. The theology and doctrine of the church are the right explanation of that experience. The church began with the experience of Pentecost (Acts 2). The church spent the next 350 years explaining the experience, culminating in the Nicene Creed.[4] The error of beginning with the cognitive is the error of explaining an experience that the unbeliever has not yet had. The New Testament teaches that one cannot understand the deep things of God without the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:11-16). The apostles did not understand Jesus' teaching about the crucifixion until after the resurrection when he "opened their minds" (Luke 24:45). Their experience of the Risen Christ preceded their understanding of exactly who he was and what had happened to him. Thus, mission must begin with the experience of God's presence, not merely with teaching. The experience of God's presence will most often be mediated by a community of faith whose common life bears witness to the love, power, and presence of Christ. When people experience God's presence in a community, they are willing to learn the foundational truths that inform the experience.

This does not mean that right doctrine is unimportant. The wrong explanation of the experience, heresy, is harmful because it leads people into spiritually dangerous experiences.[5] The experience of flying may lead a person to ask how the plane flies. The explanation must be accurate if it is to be relied upon for subsequent flights. The point is simply that mission should not be aimed mainly at the mind. Mission should aim to bring the whole person into a new community in which the Risen Christ is known and experienced. The teaching is an explanation. "We worship and live this way because this is who God is and this is who we are as a result."

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[4] The Nicene Creed was the product of two "Ecumenical Councils" or gatherings of the whole church: The Council of Nicaea in AD 323 and the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.
[5] See Addendum 2 on "The Age of the Spirit."

Other Changes

I went into ministry as a traditionalist. Our traditional liturgy stood in contrast with the more emotive, audience centered worship of the various "non-denominational" churches. The sense was that we were dinosaurs, on the way out, ready to be replaced by this new and exciting wave of church that had more appeal in our culture. It hasn't come down quite like that. To be sure, contemporary forms of worship flourish and many traditional churches flounder. However, there is a profound movement back toward the timeless tradition of the church and away from the flavor of the month. Why? A personal recollection summarizes the problem. In the mid 1990s I subscribed to a series of evangelism tapes put out by Fuller Seminary.[6] On one tape, evangelist Leonard Sweet made comments to this effect: If a church wanted to be on the cutting edge of evangelism, it wouldn't have any music that was older than 1990.[7] I sensed a problem with this idea as it was projected forward into the future. When we came to the year 2005, for example, was everything from the 1990s supposed to be thrown away? If we continually cut ourselves off from the past, we lose our memory and forget who we are. New products are typically better than old ones. Seen as a consumer product, the new worship seems better than the old. However, spiritual formation works in a different way. Truth, beauty, depth, and timelessness are more important to formation than consumer appeal. Something is not better spiritually just because it is newer. Something is not truer just because it appears to be more exciting. As a result of this tendency to throw away the old in favor of anything that seemed newer and more exciting, the contemporary church was often shallow.

Something subtle but real happened in the evangelical movement as it evolved from its explosive impact on Baby Boomers in the 1970s to the more contemporary explosion of the mega-churches. The old style evangelists—ala Billy Graham—rooted their call to conversion in conviction of sin and an exhortation to personal faith in Jesus Christ. There was a "yes or no" moment. The newer evangelism of the mega-churches has been oriented toward meeting the religious needs of the attendees. The yes or no moment gave way to more therapeutic and marketing concerns. The focus came to be on attracting attendees—and not offending them. There was less focus on confrontation with the reality of Jesus, the Son of God.[8] The merits of this evangelistic method can be debated, but its net effect was to orient churches towards marketing and away from the proclamation of the gospel, come what may.

There are nuances here. Everyone involved in mission markets in some way. However, there was a subtle but undeniable conforming of the church to business models. The sole measure of ministry success came to be Sunday attendance and income. As David Fitch observes in his book *The Great Giveaway*, the problem with much contemporary evangelicalism is its "complicity with modernity": "It is our own modernism that has allowed us to individualize, commodify, and package Christianity so much that the evangelical church is often barely distinguishable from other goods and service providers, self-help groups, and social

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[6] This is a vivid memory, but I have lost this tape and do not have a reference for it.

[7] This is meant as a critical evaluation rather than an indictment of well-known evangelistic author and speaker Leonard Sweet. We took his advice in other areas. For example, he suggested that the church should not be the place that offered "the worst cup of coffee in town"—as it typically was. Our church made a concerted effort to improve in this area. We now offer better coffee than most coffee shops!

[8] An anecdotal illustration of this comes from a person I know who worked under a famous contemporary pastor at a well-known "mega-church." Reviewing the song selection for Sunday, the pastor removed every reference to the "blood" of Jesus and replaced it with a less offensive equivalent. Proclaiming salvation through the "blood of Jesus" was central to the message of the older evangelists.

organizations that make up the landscape of modern American life" (Fitch 2005, 13-14). This complicity was not only a problem for evangelical and "seeker" churches. Traditionalists were marketing their traditional approach to traditional religious consumers—and we were also assessing ourselves by our numbers. I can scarcely remember anyone who has asked me about our church who did not also ask, "How many people attend on a Sunday?" And, "Are you growing?"[9] To attract people you have to advertise; then you have to cater to the religious consumers once they arrive. This means you have to aim to make them happy and not offend them. The need to sustain the structure and income of the church comes to trump concerns about conversion, spiritual growth, proclamation of truth, and confrontation of sin.

There has been a pendulum swing in the movement from the tradition to the seeker-friendly and back to the tradition. The stagnant tradition of the mainline churches led to the evangelical movement and then to the seeker-church movement in an attempt to reach those outside the church. As the seeker-church movement has taken on aspects of the consumer culture, it has come to have a less transforming impact. Consequently, there is a movement back to the tradition. Can there be a form of mission that is both deeply concerned with reaching those outside the church, and also deeply committed to authentic faith and spiritual formation?

The Foundational Concepts of a Mission Community

A Mission Community is an idea that is rooted in two things that are essential to the health of the church in every age: personal spiritual formation and evangelism, the pursuit of holiness and the spreading of the gospel. Most Christians will agree that these things are essential. The debatable issues are the methods of pursuing each, and the manner in which the two are connected. A central assumption of a Mission Community is that the two cannot be separated without great harm to each component. To pursue personal spiritual holiness without any concern for those who do not know Christ results in a church that is ingrown—that is too attracted to the mirror at the expense of the window. However, to pursue mission without concern for personal holiness is to spread a cognitive message without any experiential reality behind it. If others cannot see Christ in us, we have nothing to bear witness to. I believe the second problem is the greater problem in our culture. Many have heard of Christ through the church. Fewer have seen him in the church. In their book *Constants in Context*, missionary historians Stephen Bevans and Roger Shroeder observe,

> Because of so much "malpractice" by the church's missionaries in the past, contemporary mission thinkers insist on holiness of life and authenticity of Christian practice as a *sine qua non* for proclaiming the gospel. As the CWME[10] conference in San Antonio pointed out, "no matter how eloquent our verbal testimony, people will always believe their eyes first." (Bevans 2006, 360)

The monastic movement has maintained an alternative witness throughout the history of the church: "In contrast to [the] sometimes forceful approach to Christianization, the men and women of the monasteries offered a gentle model, one that combines proclamation and witness" (128). The outstanding feature of monastic mission is that the monks remained primarily focused

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[9] This contrasts with an overarching concern for spiritual health and spiritual growth. These will be reflected in things like an increase in virtue in the members of the church, faithfulness to the church's mission, and lives that are being changed. An overarching concern for numbers and growth can sacrifice these spiritual concerns to the goal of achieving success in a business model.

[10] Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches

on their own interior lives and their pursuit of union with God. The mission of the Irish monks was "wandering for the sake of Christ." For them, "both pilgrimage and mission remained subordinate to the spiritual perfection of the monk" (121). Because the monk focused on his own spiritual perfection, to be pursued through ascetical practices in the life of prayer, he had something different to show the world.

The monastic ideal that combines the pursuit of holiness with missionary witness to the world provides a reference point for a Mission Community. A Mission Community is a community in which people commit to living by the Rule of the church, just as a monastic community is bound together by commitment to a common Rule. The monks took vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience.[11] While these vows will not be required of a Mission Community, the principles they embody apply to all Christians. Every Christian is called to practice tithing and generosity as a means of becoming free from the love of money, and to practice simplicity in one's manner of living. Every Christian is called to practice chastity; celibacy outside of marriage and faithfulness within it. Every Christian is called to obedience to God and to each other in the community of faith (cf. Eph. 5:21). It is a matter of degree rather than of commitment. The church's witness to Christ has been weak in large measure because its members have not committed themselves to the pursuit of holiness. Thus, the church looks very much like the world rather than being holy or set apart from the world.

The Pastoral Theology of Martin Thornton

Central to the idea of a Mission Community is the pastoral theology of Martin Thornton, which he articulates in his book *Pastoral Theology, A Reorientation.* In this section, I will summarize the central points as they apply to the idea of a Mission Community. Thornton argues that the Book of Common Prayer offered a form of spirituality that was a successor to the monasteries in England, which were dissolved during the Reformation by Henry VIII. The ideal of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP)[12] is the parish as a community that lives by a common Rule of prayer and spiritual discipline.

Thornton and the Vicarious Remnant

Thornton's model focuses on what he calls the "parochial remnant", the core group in every church that is committed to live by the Rule of the church (Thornton 1958, 2010, 22-25). This is not a concern for the few at the expense of the whole, or the cultivating of a spiritual elite. Rather, the spiritual energy of the remnant influences the whole. Their actions are "vicarious." Spiritual power flows from the center outward.

Beginners and nominal Christians are not ignored. There is instruction and training for the former and prayer for conversion to greater zeal for the latter. It is a matter of focus. This model instructs us to expend our greatest effort in the training and directing of the remnant rather than in catering to the nominal or in recruiting new members. In cultivating the prayer and growth of the remnant, the goal is to draw others into prayer and the pursuit of holiness. Holiness is attractive in the best sense. It draws people to it in a way that marketing campaigns trumpeting the latest exciting program cannot (24).

Jesus followed a remnant model. He spoke to the crowds, but focused his energy on training a particular group of mature leaders, the twelve, to carry on his work. Jesus' life had a

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[11] These have historically been called "The Evangelical Counsels of Perfection"

[12] I will not be concerned here with a particular edition of the Book of Common Prayer. My concern will be with the pastoral ideal that it contains.

vicarious impact. He lived and died for the sins of the whole world, yet he never traveled outside of Israel and only met a tiny fraction of the world's population. This vicarious principle extends to the lives of each member of Christ's body. Each member's work serves the good of the whole body, even when most of the body does not see it or know about it. The best thing a foot can do for the hand is to be a very good foot.

The Remnant Concept in History

The remnant concept developed in the monastic movement. St. Anthony of Egypt fled to the desert to be closer to God. However, his work served the church. The vicarious benefit can be seen in the enduring witness of his life. Some monastic practices overemphasized the separation of the monk from the world. St. Basil reformed this tendency. He emphasized a closer relationship between the cloister and the world. "The counsels [poverty, chastity and obedience] are no longer monastic but Christian. …Monastic and secular have the same fundamental ascetical basis; they vary according to vocation and possibly degree of progress towards the Vision, but they are the same in kind" (80).

St. Benedict is the heir of St. Basil. He moves monasticism closer to the world. The monks work in the same manner as others. "Monastic Rule is purged of all egocentricity; it is to serve the world through community…Prayer becomes idealized in corporate worship rather than individual Contemplation" (80). The Benedictine Rule of prayer is founded upon Mass and the Sevenfold Daily Office. Personal prayer is assumed, but it is no longer the focus of monastic life as it was in the desert fathers. This is "The Christian remnant rubbing shoulders with the world, engaged in similar work, indulging in similar pursuits, yet in the truest sense other-worldly and distinct because of ascetical discipline and common Rule" (81).

St. Bernard was an austere reformer of the Benedictine Rule, but his work and the work of the later Cistercians that followed him "carry the remnant to the very heart of the twentieth century" (86).[13] Benedictines worked in various crafts. The Cistercians shifted the emphasis on manual labor into agriculture. This moved the monastery closer to the world— "you cannot *farm* within abbey walls" (87). Benedictine monasteries relied on serf-labor. Cistercian labor was done by the monks, and by "conversi," who were lay brothers or peasant monks. The Cistercians focused on prayer. If some monks had to be in the field during communal times of prayer, then other monks remained in the cloister to pray the Office. The conversi were primarily workers. Their lives focused on their work, but as lay brothers they were brought into participation in the Rule. The conversi bridge the gap between the monastery and the world and illustrate how the remnant concept can be applied to modern Christians with secular vocations. Monks and conversi were organized into regional groups. A small number of monks work with a larger number of conversi. This is a pattern for how clergy, whose work is prayer, and laity, whose work is in the world, can live together in the church under a common Rule.

The Book of Common Prayer applied the Benedictine Rule to the local parish. The sevenfold Office, impracticable for a busy layman in the world, was reduced to two, Morning and Evening Prayer, to make the Office the work of the whole church. The church is now an ascetical community living by Rule. This is the ideal of a Mission Community.

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[13] There is nothing about this that cannot also apply to the twenty-first century

Mission in a Mission Community

The model for outreach in a Mission Community also comes from the monastic movement. Specifically, from the general approach to mission that characterized Celtic monasticism. In his book *Recovering the Past, Celtic and Roman Mission*, John Finney makes a comment that gets at the heart of the idea of a Mission Community: "The Celts did not church plant; they monastery planted." (Finney 1996, 28). Finney contrasts the Celtic model of mission with the Roman model of mission. "The Roman pattern was to set up a skeleton organization and then evangelize. The Celtic pattern was to gather the people and then set up an appropriate framework for them" (32).

Finney suggests that the Celtic pattern for mission may be more appropriate for "a non-Christian or semi Christian situation." "It has to be said that the Celts were the main evangelists of England. The monastic pattern seems to have been more successful at evangelizing the society in which they were set. The Roman pattern of parishes and dioceses…may be the most suitable for settled communities and a commonly accepted faith" (31-32). Finney identifies three aspects of postmodern evangelism that reflect a movement from a Roman to a Celtic model. The first is a shift from sudden, dramatic conversions towards conversions that occur more gradually over time (from Damascus Road to Road to Emmaus). The second is a shift from doctrine to spirituality. "Traditionally spiritual life flowed out of and was a consequence of doctrine. You believed certain things about God and as a result prayed and lived in a certain way" (42). Now, experience precedes belief. People come to believe something is true as a result of an experience. "This means that we can begin with prayer and the experience of the spiritual in ordinary life" (43). A Mission Community that lives a life of prayer can seek to draw people into prayer and into an experience of God's presence. Contemplative spiritual experiences that focus on creating space for silence may be particularly helpful in opening people's lives to God. This stands in contrast with the manufactured worship experiences that have characterized contemporary worship styles. The third movement is from missions to mission. This is a shift from the periodic crusade and the short term mission trip to the idea that the Christian life is a continual mission. "To have an occasional mission means that a special effort only had to be cranked up every so often. To be in a position of constant service and mission means being a welcoming, open community at all times" (46).

Conversion

There is a sense in which all of Finney's points are connected; gradual conversions rooted in the experience of God's presence over time in a community that sees its whole life as one of mission. Since mission ultimately aims at conversion of hearts to faith, a Mission Community should have some sense of how the process of conversion works. In his book *Conversion in the New Testament,* Richard Peace offers a model for conversion. He contrasts the "Damascus Road" style conversion that is rooted in the experience of St. Paul with the gradual conversion of the twelve that is presented in Mark's Gospel. "What was an event for Paul is described by Mark as a *process* for the twelve" (Peace 1999, 106). The same things happen in both the more sudden conversions and in the process conversions. They just happen over a longer period of time in the latter. Peace explains,

> *Conversion begins with insight*. When people are confronted with the reality of their situation before God, the option presented to them is to correct their errant ways. They now *see*, and in seeing it becomes possible for them to say no to the old while embracing

a new way. Without such insight into their true states before God, there would be no reason to embrace a new way. Without insight there can be no conversion. (49)

For Paul insight came on the road to Damascus:

> It was not that Paul had been unfamiliar with the tenets of the movement he was persecuting prior to this experience. But before his conversion he was blind to the significance and truth of the Christian way. He saw these ideas as heretical, a threat. They needed to be crushed. But in his conversion, his defenses were shattered and he saw Christianity in a whole new way. (52)

Peace describes the process by which insight is received:

> The pattern by which insight comes, then, is this. There is an entering set of assumptions—about God and about oneself. The encounter with Christ reveals these to be faulty, wrong and inadequate—out of touch with reality. As a result of that confrontation with reality, the old assumptions are shattered—they no longer can contain reality. One exits with a new set of assumptions—a new framework that better contains reality. (53)

"The new insight that overwhelmed Paul on the Damascus road came to pass in a moment." The insight that came to the twelve was more gradual. In any event, "Insight drives conversion. It does not matter if that insight is slow or sudden, or if that insight comes by means of careful sifting of the facts so as to reveal truth or by means of a flash or creative intuition" (54).

This insight is not merely intellectual or cognitive. Both Paul and the twelve were given insight through their encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. They came to understand in their minds who he was as the Son of God, but their knowledge of him was relational and experiential—it was not just facts. They came to "know" him. This is significant for a Mission Community. A Mission Community is the Body of Christ in a place. As such, it bears witness to the person of Jesus by its common life. This can only happen if the community itself is deeply connected to Christ by its prayer so that what it manifests to the world is an authentic witness, not merely a program designed to get someone to join a church organization, or to make an emotional response in a moment. If there is no commitment to the interior life, there can be no witness to Christ.

However, insight alone is not conversion. It is only the beginning. "Every therapist has seen patients confront a new insight about themselves, only to deny it or repress it the next week. …a second step is necessary in order for conversion to take place. A decision has to be made about the insight. Will the person turn from the old way to the new way? The term for the second step is repentance" (54).

There is a third step. "Insight gives direction and provides a mental picture of what should be. The turning launches a person in the right direction. But the turning is not complete until the new way is actively pursued" (89). Peace call this third step "transformation." Thus, conversion involves new insight about the nature of God and self that leads to repentance or a turning from an old way and results in a new, transforming pattern of life.

Conversion and Spiritual Formation

How does conversion relate to spiritual growth? Many people identify themselves as Christian, but the fruit of Christian faith is not always evident in their lives. This is a significant issue is mission. It is arguable that too much effort has historically been placed on the initial conversion at the expense of spiritual formation. It is possible, perhaps preferable, to see the

pattern of conversion as an ongoing process of growth. Through initial conversion and baptism, we adopt a new identity as children of God. But we are babies (1 Pet. 2:2). Spiritual growth requires that we continue to gain new insights, continue to turn from errors, and continue to be transformed. Sometimes people commit themselves to Jesus, but withhold parts. Sometimes, because of past trauma or wounds, the struggle to establish the new way of life is protracted. Initial conversion is a commitment of the will to follow Christ, but there remains an ongoing struggle with sin that will require an ongoing practice of confession and restoration. Growth happens precisely through this repeated struggle. A simplistic understanding of how conversion relates to growth can undermine faith. When the newly converted experience ongoing temptation, they may wonder, "Why doesn't faith in Jesus cause a more sudden and dramatic change?" If the way we understand the spiritual life does not adequately explain the ongoing reality of temptation, it will not provide a plausible spiritual model for those who struggle.

After the initial excitement of conversion dies down, the newly converted person experiences a Romans 7 struggle: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me" (Rom. 7:15-17, ESV). Before conversion, this is not necessarily true. Some people may try to be good and fail on a merely human level, but there are sinful things that non-believers want to do. A non-believer has not made a commitment to do the will of God. When one begins to follow Christ, one begins to put to death the "old self" (Eph. 4:22-24). It is only when we begin to fight against the disordered desires of our "old self" that we also begin to see how powerful they are. Growth requires perseverance. The old self may win a spiritual battle. If this failure is followed by confession and a renewed experience of grace, failure will lead to a gradual spiritual strengthening and an increased surrender of the will. We may begin by "wanting to want" to do the will of God.[14] Failure puts us back in touch with the reality of sin and the guilt, shame, and fear it causes. Confession and the renewed experience of grace then restores us to union with God. The contrast between the experience of guilt, shame, and fear, on the one hand, and God's grace, on the other, will result in a growing preference for the experience of grace, and a consequent increased willingness to let go of sin. Sin will increasingly be seen for what it is in the light of God's presence.

Romans 8 describes how life "in the Spirit" answers the Romans 7 struggle. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13). The grace of new life in the Spirit is the fruit of an ongoing practice of the life of prayer. As we persevere in the life of prayer, returning to confession when we fall so as to renew our experience of grace, and practicing spiritual disciplines that train us in new habits, we make progress over time. This ongoing progress is the greater focus of a Mission Community. This is the greater need in a culture where Christian identity is widespread, but Christian maturity and holiness are not.

How Spiritual Formation Takes Place

The topic of spiritual disciplines has surfaced among evangelicals in the last generation precisely because of this problem. In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy,* Dallas Willard discusses the problem of what he calls the gospel of "sin management." He recalls an old bumper sticker

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[14] I first heard this idea of a stage of growth involving "wanting to want" to do the will of God from Brother John Charles Vockler. He was an Anglican Franciscan and the onetime Anglican Bishop of Polynesia. He taught this concept in his School of Prayer.

that proclaimed, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven" (Willard 1998, 41). Salvation is understood as "forgiveness of sins because of transferred merit, with the resultant admission into heaven after death" (46). Thus, salvation is "a forensic or legal condition rather than a vital reality or character" (47). "What must be emphasized in all of this is the difference between trusting Christ, the real person Jesus, with all that that naturally involves, versus trusting some arrangement for sin-remission set up through him" (48-49). This raises the issue of how we establish a practice of the faith that helps believers to actually overcome sin, rather than to be merely assured of their forgiveness.

In his book, *You Are What You Love*, James K. A. Smith helps to direct us towards an answer. Smith explains the power of our habits, which we can think of as our daily liturgies. Smith identifies the problem this way: "What do you want? That…is the question. It is the first and fundamental question of discipleship because you are what you love. But buried within this insight is an uncomfortable realization: you might not love what you think" (Smith 2016, 27).

He elaborates:

> If I ask you, a Christian, to tell me what you *really* want, what you most deeply long for, what you ultimately love—well, of course, you know the right answer. You *know* what you ought to say. And what you state could be entirely genuine and authentic, a true expression of your intellectual conviction. But…are you confident that what you think you love aligns with your inmost longings? (29)

Smith quotes author Geoff Dyer, "Your deepest desire is the one manifested by your daily habits" (29). Then Smith observes,

> Christian worship faces this disturbing reality head-on, recognizing the gap between what we *think* we love and what we *really* love, what still propels us towards rival gods and rival visions of the good life. This is why the people of God are called regularly to confess their sins. A historic confession from the Book of Common Prayer names just this tension: "Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts." (29-30)

The problem Smith identifies is connected to a serious error in our understanding of spiritual formation. As modernists, we tend to think that what we believe (in our minds) leads us to behave in certain ways. Thus, if we come to an accurate cognitive understanding of the gospel, this will result in behavior consistent with our belief. In reality, a faith that is not embodied in what we actually do will not have the power to form our hearts and, thus, our behavior.

When we begin to follow Christ, we have already been formed by a life of devotion to other things. Our habitual behaviors are deeply embedded in strong emotional systems and attachments. This is why a merely cognitive change in our system of belief does not lead to behavioral transformation. A mere idea cannot change behavior that results from deeply embedded emotions. As family systems writer Edwin Friedman observes, "The emotional processes in a family always have the power to subvert or override its religious values." (Friedman 1985, 6). Change in behavior requires a change in our daily practices and habits. This change is also a process. As we have been formed over time by our existing liturgies of life, so faith will lead us into a process of re-formation through the establishment of new habits—new liturgies. As we persevere in our practice, our emotions will be reformed as they are redirected toward their proper end. By changing our patterns of behavior, our hearts will come to match up

with our beliefs. Faith will touch all of life, not just the mind. As Smith observes, "Our idolatries are more liturgical than theological" (Smith 2016, 23).

Smith illustrates his formative point by highlighting the worship we typically offer at the modern cathedral that is also known as the mall. While we do not typically think of our shopping as worship, it draws us into a liturgical pattern of behavior that forms us. We go shopping to acquire things that will make us look like the idealized forms shown in the advertisements (much like saints are the idealized images for the pursuit of holiness). We search through the racks looking for the object that will fulfill our desire and make us like them; then we go the counter and offer money to cashier (priest) who sends us away in a happy mood with a benediction— some nice departing words that make us feel good about our purchase (40-46). This does not mean that everyone who buys something at the store is an idolater. But we are foolish if we remain unaware of how the habits we practice in the consumer culture form us. We can observe similar liturgies in sports and other pursuits. If faith is merely an idea about how Jesus died for our sins, faith will have no power to counteract the formation we receive through these secular liturgies. We will experience the power of God to change us only as we replace our existing liturgies with new liturgies that train our bodies and our hearts to worship God. Smith insightfully observes how the church becomes complicit in our deformation when it uses consumer methods to attract people:

> In many cases we have ceded [the formation of our young people] to secular liturgies by importing those liturgies into the church under the banner of perceived relevance. …While we might have many young people who are eager participants in all the entertaining events we stage for them, such participation is not actually forming their hearts and their desires towards God and his kingdom as long as the default liturgies of such events are built on consumerist rituals and the rites of self-concern." (146)

Smith argues that pastors need to be "ethnographers of the everyday, helping parishioners to see their environment as one that is formative, and all too often *de*formative" (40). In a Mission Community, a pastoral leader needs to be a spiritual director, coaching people in how to establish new habits and new liturgies that will orient hearts toward God and toward holiness.

Rule of Life

The new habits that will comprise the new reformative liturgy of life go historically by the title, "Rule." Martin Thornton explains, "Rule, like pattern, model, or system, is an essentially *singular* word, in some ways directly opposite to a list of "rules" (Thornton 1988, 2005, 45). The concept of Rule developed historically in the monastic movement. Each monastic order is governed by its corporate Rule. What makes a Benedictine monk different from an Augustinian monk, for example, is that the life of prayer each practices is defined by the corporate Rule of the respective orders. Here we can identity a problem with contemporary discussions about Rule. They tend to focus too much on the construction of an individual Rule at the expense of a common Rule practiced by a whole community. M. S. Bickford provides a very helpful discussion of Rule in his book *Everyone Dies but Not Everyone Lives.* His subtitle reveals the focus on the individual: Developing A *Personal* Rule for Life. Some of the chapter subtitles highlight the focus: "Chapter 5…Defining *Your* Life." Chapter 6…Developing *Your* Disciplines." Chapter 7…Dreaming *Your* Goals (Bickford 2005, 7; emphasis added). These are necessary aspects of Rule. However, there is a tendency in contemporary discussions to present Rule as an individual consumer choice. Thus, a church may have fifty people living by a Rule of life, and the Rule of each person may be completely different from the Rule of each other person.

This misses a central point of the monastic ideal. Monastic Rule focused on the spiritual formation of the individual by his submission to the common Rule of the community.

A Rule will always have a personal component to it. There are different personality types, different spiritual struggles, and different states and stages of life that will lead each person to pray and practice disciplines in a unique way. However, it is possible for each person to pray in a unique way while still participating in a common Rule. For example, the Rule of the church calls Christians to fast during Lent.[15] All will fast. However, the specific content of the fast will necessarily differ from person to person. A healthy young person, of strong and committed faith, might embrace a challenging fast of food. An older person who is dealing with health issues might focus the fast in a different direction—away from food and towards entertainments or some other thing. The fast should be directed towards each person's area of struggle. For some, the physical appetites are not the focus of struggle as much as electronics and overuse of social media. Thus, the common fast of the community will be practiced in personal ways. However, part of the transforming power of the fast is precisely that it is practiced together in community. It requires submission to something that transcends the individual.

Submission to a common Rule will call us to forms of prayer and discipline that may not always suit *my* tastes and meet *my* needs. Continuing in uncomfortable but formative practices is essential to spiritual growth, just as submitting to uncomfortable forms of exercise is essential to getting in shape. I may not want to do the exercise that strengthens my back muscle. However, it may be that I find it particularly hard because my back muscle is weak and needs to be strengthened. The time tested disciplines of the church tell us to do things that are uncomfortable precisely because the saints have learned that this is what we need—although it may not be what we feel like doing. This is precisely where the concept of Rule challenges our modernism. Prayer is not just about me as a separate and isolated individual. Prayer is about me as a member of the Body of Christ. My personal growth in holiness is not just about my happiness; it is also my contribution to corporate health of the Body. My connection to the Body will require of me a submission to corporate observances and practices, even as I remain a unique individual.

The Biblical Origin of Rule

The concept of Rule is rooted in the Bible. God instructed Israel to observe certain feasts and fasts, and to pray in certain ways and at certain times in the temple. There were instructions for how to give money, and how and when to have celebrations (cf. Lev. 23). As Israel lived year in and year out according to the Rule of the Torah, the nation would be formed as God's holy people. The Old Testament chronicles Israel's failure to follow God's instructions. Rather than devoting their lives to the worship of the LORD, Israel allowed pagan worship and practices to creep in—and Israel was formed by these practices. Israel become an unfaithful woman rather than God's faithful bride (cf. Jer. 2:2-5). We should note the implications for spiritual formation. Israel did not make an intellectual commitment to idolatry. Rather, the people gradually mixed idolatrous practices with the worship of God. As they practiced these liturgies they became idolaters; they became what they chose to love in their daily actions. Jesus was a faithful Jew who observed and fulfilled the feasts of Israel. The church has historically practiced a Rule that is rooted in the Torah as it has been fulfilled in Christ and developed by the church. Because of

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[15] This is a historical practice in both east and west. Through some Protestant Christians have eschewed the practice of fasting and do not observe Lent, there is a movement back towards the Lenten fast by Protestants—mainly because experience has demonstrated the spiritually formative value of fasting.

the gift of the Spirit, we are able to rise above Israel's failure and become like Christ, albeit in gradual and progressive ways (cf. Rom. 8:4).

The Central Importance of Narrative and Story to Rule

Rule is the way we live in the right story, the story of our redemption through the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection of Jesus. Most people, even many Christian people, live in the wrong story. The wrong story is the narrative that is bounded by time. It begins at birth and ends at death. It may have any number of temporal things as its goal; money, status, achievement, pleasure—even things like family or philanthropy.[16] Prayer in this story is aimed mostly at improving the quality of life in between birth and death. Though "heaven" is sometimes invoked in this story, it often carries with it a sense of a consolation prize. It is not the thing a person was deeply longing for during their life. Rather, it is something that will be talked about now that we must let go of the temporal life that was the real focus.[17] Most people evaluate their prayer by how it makes life in time better. A practice of the faith that emphasizes only the practical aspects of life cannot transform us (cf. Mark 8:35).

The authentic narrative of faith begins with the new birth (conversion and baptism) and ends with "the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."[18] The New Testament is constantly pointing to these two events.[19] If we are consciously living in the story that aims at the appearance of Christ and the hope of being transformed fully and finally into his image, prayer will take on a different focus. We will learn to see temporal things in terms of how they impact eternity. We will begin to see temporal pain and disappointment as spiritually formative events that develop virtues like perseverance (James 1:2-3). The overarching concern will be our growth in virtue and holiness, not only the achievement of temporal happiness (cf. Matthew 6:33).

The Church Calendar

To be formed by the story that begins in baptism and ends with the resurrection, we must develop habits that root our behavior in this story. This is why Rule must be integrally connected to the church calendar. The calendar is the way the church experiences time in terms of the Christian story. We do not live merely through annual cycles of bloom and decay until our own flower fades and we die. Rather, we live through an annual cycle of the revelation of God in Christ that looks forward to our ultimate hope. It can be summarized as follows. We begin with the expectation of the coming of Christ in Advent. This leads to Christmas, "The Word was

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[16] Things that are good become idols when they are made to be the ultimate goals of life. In the Christian narrative, the desire for family or philanthropic good is part of one's larger service to God. If, say, being a good wife—or having a good wife—is seen as the ultimate goal of life, this will lead to idolatry. A good marriage isn't supposed to be the ultimate goal of life. It is supposed to point us to what is ultimate (cf. Eph. 5:21-22). Likewise, in the Christian story, the impulse to charity is the desire to manifest the kingdom of God in time. If the temporal good become the end goal, the goal becomes an idol. It will lead us to try to control rather than to trust.

[17] This is why the genuine Christian narrative aims at the Resurrection of the Body, not merely the Intermediate State so often referred to as heaven. Like the living, the departed are waiting for Christ to appear and raise the dead (1 Thess. 4:14-16). The Resurrection of the Body is the fulfillment of the longings we have as embodied people. Heaven, seen as a disembodied state, cannot be seen as a fulfillment in the same way.

[18] From the Nicene Creed

[19] Passages that emphasize the new birth: Rom. 6:3-4, 1 Cor. 6:11, Eph. 2:1-10. Passages that emphasize the goal of resurrection: 1 Cor. 15:51-52, Phil. 3:20-21, 1 John 3:2-3. The writings of the New Testament constantly remind us who we have become in Christ, and constantly exhort us to orient our lives toward the ultimate consummation and fulfilment of our baptismal identity in the Resurrection.

made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Then, we celebrate the various ways Christ is revealed in Epiphany. Lent shifts the focus to Easter. We prepare for the central Christian feast with disciplines of fasting and confession. This culminates in Good Friday and the commemoration of the death that accomplished our redemption. We enter into a renewed experience of forgiveness and new life in the celebration of the Resurrection— "He is risen" (Mark 16:6). Easter is a forty-day season that ends with the Ascension (Acts 1). During the ten-day season of Ascension, we pray for the Holy Spirit to come to us in a new way on Pentecost. The following Sunday is Trinity Sunday, on which we celebrate the Revelation of God as three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Then there is a long, general teaching season of Trinity.[20] As we experience time within this narrative, practicing disciplines that embody this narrative, we are formed by this story.

This is a "cyclically progressive" story. We live through annual cycles, but we do not merely repeat them. Each year we enter the seasons at a different place in our lives, having grown spiritually toward our ultimate goal. Each major feast points to the coming of Christ. In Advent we wait for Christ to come both at Christmas and at the end of time. Epiphany focuses on how Christ is revealed to us now and also how he will be fully revealed to us at the end. Easter celebrates Jesus' resurrection and also looks forward to our own resurrection on the Last Day. Each year moves us closer to the ultimate event (Romans 13:11). Because the calendar focuses both on how the eternal comes into time and also on how time will ultimately be fulfilled in Christ, living in the story defined by the calendar fills us with hope. This is the antidote for the despair that accompanies a life lived in an "imminent frame" (Taylor 2007, Ch. 15).[21]

The Story of the Week

The Old Covenant week consisted of six work days ending with the Sabbath Day. Jesus fulfilled this week. Holy Week exemplifies how. Jesus began his work on Palm Sunday, the first day of the week. He completed his labor on the sixth day, Good Friday with the words, "It is finished"[22] (John 19:30). He rested on the Sabbath Day (cf. Hebrews 4:10). He rose on Sunday, which is the eighth and final day, the completion of the Old Covenant. It is also the first day of the new week of the New Creation. On this day, the Risen Christ appeared to his disciples and proclaimed "peace" (John 20:19). Peace is shalom, a covenant word that indicates that the purpose of the Old Covenant, peace between God and man, has been established through the cross (Eph. 2:14-18). The church now lives in this fulfilled time of the New Covenant. The kingdom is present through the gift of Holy Spirit (John 20:22-23), but the church waits expectantly for the kingdom to arrive in its fullness (Eph. 1:13-14). The church begins its week by experiencing the resurrection again through the Eucharist (cf. Luke 24:13-35, Rev. 1:10)[23]

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[20] "Ordinary Time" in modern liturgical calendars

[21] In his book *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor describes how the modern world has lost the "higher time" perspective of the Middle Ages (essentially the perspective of the calendar as I have summarized it) and now lives in what he calls the "imminent frame" of the modern world. The goal in this imminent frame is "ordinary human flourishing." His book provides insight into what has happened to our sense of time, and how we have lost a transformative practice of the faith as a consequence.

[22] The word "finished" translates the Greek verb *teleo*, which means to bring to completion. He finished the work that completes the New Creation.

[23] The Road to Emmaus story is constructed to show how the church continually experiences the Resurrection through its Liturgy of Word and Sacrament on the Lord's Day. The teaching of Revelation is embedded in a liturgy that take place on the Lord's Day. John sees and experiences the heavenly reality that informs the Eucharist.

The church does not experience six work days leading up to a day of rest. The church has already entered into that rest through faith (cf. Matthew 11:28). The witness of the church is precisely that it carries the life of the Risen Christ with it from the altar into the world to bear witness to the New Creation (Schmemann 1963, 1973, ch 3).[24]

For faith to be formative, it must become imbedded in our experience of time. If faith is not embedded in our experience of time, faith will be reduced to an internal enthusiasm we attempt to maintain, even as we are being shaped by various secular liturgies. In his book *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dom Gregory Dix describes the discipline of living a life of prayer by a Rule that embodies the Christian narrative as "The Sanctification of Time" (Dix 1982, ch XI).[25] This is the aim of a Mission Community.

The Mission Community's Life of Prayer

The Rule of a Mission Community is how it lives out this weekly and seasonal story. A Mission Community gathers on Sunday for the Eucharist to renew its identity and experience of new life. The Bible readings for the Eucharist reflect the theme of each feast and season and provide the narrative for life. A Mission Community continues its life of prayer daily by offering to God the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. The BCP follows a daily Bible lectionary for Morning and Evening Prayer that appoints readings for each day; these are related to the themes of each season. Like the Eucharistic lessons, these narrate life in Christ according the story of the church year. Each member also practices a personal life of prayer that consists of conversations with God, meditation, contemplation and silence. Martin Thornton argues that this three-fold Rules establishes an ascetical balance: "All prayer, ideally, is to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit; but ascetically and analytically, the Office tend to emphasize the first objectively, the Mass [Eucharist] is the loving embrace of Christ, and prayer in private depends upon the Paraclete's indwelling" (Thornton 1958, 2010, 196).

The Daily Office

The Daily Office is of particular importance for a Mission Community. It is the way the community prays together each day. All the members of the community offer the Daily Office to God together, even when they are praying separately. Whenever possible, the members will gather during the week to pray the Office together.[26] The Daily Office is the missing element in the life of prayer for many people. Committed Christians will typically gather with the church on Sunday (Eucharist) and will typically practice some form of extemporaneous prayer during the week (personal prayer). Many try to set aside regular time for prayer. Pastoral experience has revealed that this undefined devotional time is hard to sustain because its form and the focus of Bible reading must be determined by each individual. For the approximately 313 non Sunday days of the year, the individual must create a personal devotion. During times of spiritual zeal or need, this may not be difficult. However, every Christian will eventually enter dry seasons during which prayer is difficult. In the Daily Office, the church gives us an order for praying the Psalms, reading the Bible, offering canticles of praise, and making intercession that can sustain

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[24] In chapter 3 of his book *For The Life of the World*, Alexander Schmemann discusses the "The Time of Mission." This is the best description I have found of the authentically Christian meaning of the week.

[25] Dix describes how this pattern of the sanctification of time was established by the monastic communities. They had a leavening influence on the whole church. "The church at large, just because she was in the world, could not renounce all secular life as the monk did, but she learned from him to sanctify it" (Dix 1982, 320).

[26] This should happen at least once or twice a week at a minimum.

us during the dry time. This operates in the same manner that a workout routine assists us in staying in shape when we do not feel like exercising. Most people who do not commit themselves to a workout *routine* do not continue to work out; most people who do not embrace some Rule for daily prayer do not continue to pray consistently.

The Daily Office is ancient. In his study of the history of the Daily Office, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, Robert Taft says that Christians observed fixed hours of daily prayer from the beginning. They did not always observe the same hours in every place, and the particular form of the Office varied; but fixed hours of prayer, to be observed by everyone in the community, was a universal practice. One of the earliest post-biblical texts is 1 Clement (written to the first century church in Rome). In this text, Taft observes, "The hours are not specified, but the phrase 'at set times' occurs…three times." (Taft 1993, 13). Taft says that, "like Tertullian [d. after 220], Cyprian [d. after 258] uses Daniel, the image of the Trinity, and the traditional texts of Acts to support the custom of praying at the third, sixth, and ninth hours." (21). The Christians were not always able to gather for these hours of prayer, but the standard was for each believer to observe it on his or her own, as a member of the body. This highlights the point made above about the corporate nature of Rule. Early Christians consciously observed the Rule of the church, not just their own personal Rules.

In harmony with Thornton's conclusion that the Book of Common Prayer brought monastic Rule into the parish, Taft observes, "Easily the most important of all sixteenth-century reformed offices is that of the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer*. To its great merit, the Anglican Communion alone of all Western Churches has preserved to some extent at least the daily services of morning praise and evensong as a living part of the church" (323). He quotes Louis Boyer, who observes that Morning and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer, "is a Divine Office which is not a devotion of specialists but a truly public Office of the whole Christian people" (323). The Daily Office is a form of prayer that people who are not members of a Mission Community can participate in. It is a way the community can draw people into its experience of prayer. Thus, it can be a means of evangelism.

Fasting

Fasting is a central discipline of a Mission Community.[27] Each member will be expected to fast during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. In addition, a Mission Community will establish a regular weekly day to fast and pray for the mission of the community. The Acts of the Apostles provides us with a pattern for how this relates to mission. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come (Acts 1:4). The time between Ascension and Pentecost was a period of waiting and prayer. We can safely assume that this period also included fasting (cf. Matt. 9:15). After this period of prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit came and led the disciples into the mission God intended for his church. Thus, a Mission Community will set aside a day a week as a day of prayer and fasting. The community will pray that God will send the Holy Spirit and lead the community into fruitful mission.

Feasting and Outreach

A Mission Community will have celebrations in observance of major feasts like Christmas and Easter. These will be occasions for community festivities. This will be a primary

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[27] There is not sufficient space here to give a full apologetic for the practice of fasting. Suffice to say that it is biblical and necessary. In the most overindulged culture in human history, the discipline of fasting, of learning to say no to things, is central to spiritual growth.

opportunity to invite others. In this way, mission flows from the very life of the church. We are not creating special events for evangelism that are unrelated to the ordinary life of the church. Rather, we are celebrating our principle feasts and inviting others to come into our joy. We are sharing our life "in Christ." A mission oriented event might consist of Evening Prayer followed by a festive dinner. This highlights the method of a Mission Community. It lives the Christian life together in community in a way that fosters the spiritual growth of its members. Its mission is simply the natural and organic sharing of that life; inviting others to join with us in the prayers of the Daily Office, to celebrate with us the joy of the major feasts, and to participate with us in Bible studies and others formative activities.

A Mission Community will focus its intercessions on the needs it sees in its community. The members can make particular needs they connect with the focus of their prayers. The mission of a Mission Community is not to pursue "volunteer" opportunities in the community. The mission is to be more fully Christian in our individual engagements with daily life. Our own spiritual growth and healing will lead us to share what we have experienced in Christ with the other people we are in contact with in the normal course of life. The goal is to develop deep relationships over time; to listen first, and to respond in Christ-like ways to what we see and hear. This is "Incarnational ministry." As Allan Briggs writes in *Staying in the New Going,* "The longer you are in active relationships with people who are far from God, they more they will believe you care about them, and the more they will open their lives to you. Your care can remind them that God is relational, drawing people into eternal relationship" (Briggs 2015, 7-8).

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction is an essential element in the ministry model of a Mission Community. This is another area where the traditional spirituality of the church challenges our modernism. Evangelical spirituality has often insisted that we do not need intermediaries to come between ourselves and God because we each have direct access to God through Jesus. This objection is based on the faulty idea that intermediaries separate people. In fact, the gifts of each member of the Body of Christ are meant to help draw others closer to God. Spiritual direction provides objectivity. The emotions and anxiety of our spiritual battles often make us unable to see what is really going on in our lives. Without help from the gifts that others possess, we can be overwhelmed by our tests and temptations. Spiritual direction provides objective remedies to common problems people get stuck in, and provides a personal, sacramental sign of Christ to the individual Christian, reminding the person being directed that he or she is a child of God, and that personal struggles are a normal part of growth in relationship with God. A Mission Community will operate under the oversight of someone who can provide spiritual direction to the members. This will be a function of how the Mission Community is organized. If it is organized under the oversight of an existing parish, the Rector of that parish will provide spiritual direction, or will assign that task to someone. If the Mission Community is organized under the diocese, the Bishop will provide direction, or will assign the directive task. There will often be a monastery or retreat center in accessible proximity to the community, and many monasteries are willing to provide spiritual direction to those who seek it.

The framework of direction is also a means of evangelism. It is the answer to what Martin Thornton calls, "the ambulance syndrome" (Thornton 1984, 2012, 9-15). This is the idea that priests and pastors are present primarily to respond when disaster strikes. Presence in crisis is an essential part of ministry. But that part of ministry won't be very effective or fulfilling if those ministered to in crisis are not living a life of prayer in normal times. Crisis is an opportunity to connect with those who do not know Christ, but the opportunity is precisely that

the relationship established in a crisis will draw a person into an ongoing relationship with Christ. Here the framework of direction provides a better platform for evangelism. It is better to reach out to people with the intent of having deeper conversations about their life's story and its meaning. This stands in contrast with an immediate goal of telling someone about Jesus. The latter approach tends to talk before it listens. The directive approach begins by listening. After the minister comes to know the other person and has established trust, he or she can suggest disciplines that will open a person's life to Christ.[28]

Apostolic Gifting

In their book *The Permanent Revolution,* Alan Hirsh and Tim Catchim argue that the gift of being an apostle is still present in the church (Eph. 4:10-12). Protestant Christianity tends to teach that this gift vanished with the end of the apostolic era and the establishing of the canon of Scripture. Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican practice has tended to fold the apostolic gift into the office of a bishop. Rather than being sent out to preach to the unconverted, the bishop as apostle is the custodian of the timeless faith in a given place.

Hirsh and Catchim observe that in the previous era of Christendom, the western church had a place of privilege. Most people had some relationship to it. Thus, renewal could be accomplished through evangelistic gifts. People were close and willing to listen to the message. In its current unprivileged place, the apostolic gifts are necessary for mission: "To help resolve the [mission] problem, we need to incorporate apostolic imagination and practice back into the church's self-concept and strategies, one that goes beyond the more evangelistic approach" (Hirsh 2012, 67). A Mission Community is intended to be apostolic in this way. It is present in a place for the benefit of others. The purpose of gathering in a home or other community location rather than a church is the greater ability to interact with those who are outside the church. To fulfill this missionary vocation, apostolic gifts will need to be present in the community. Without the gifts and calling to reach others, a Mission Community could digress into a prayer group that focuses mostly on itself. As Hirsh and Catchim note, "Until [the church] breaks out of the enclosed system and comes into direct encounter with new groups, it remains one-dimensional, church bound, captive to a people's collective fears and insecurities, and therefore unable to achieve what it was designed to achieve in the first place" (106).

Hirch and Catchim contrast two models of apostleship, the Pauline and the Petrine. Pauline gifts characterize those who are called to reach new groups; Petrine gifts characterize those who are called to minister to the existing people of God:

> Although the Pauline apostle is likely to extend Christianity and start new movements on new frontiers of the church, the Petrine apostle is likely to be the one to remissionalize the church as we now experience it. …The Pauline is called to extend and establish Christianity on new ground in the west, while the Petrine is called to reframe the nature of western Christianity itself." (121).

In the initial contexts envisioned for this work, a Mission Community will depend upon Petrine gifts. The initial focus is to renew the spiritual life of an existing group so that it can be the remnant in a place, whose spiritual presence will bear witness to the Risen Christ and have a missionary and vicarious influence in the community. However, this same model can also work in frontier areas. As mentioned above, the Celts "monastery planted" in their efforts to reach new

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[28] In this way, the ministry of the members of the community towards others takes on a spiritually directive form. Spiritual direction is a general framework for ministry.

groups. The principle is that the missionaries first establish a vibrancy in their own spiritual lives through prayer by Rule in a community. Mission is then the natural way that this life and witness is taken out into the surrounding world. If that surrounding world is largely the lapsed Christianity of our culture, the gifts will be Petrine. If that surrounding world is a frontier of faith, the gifts will be Pauline. But the initial work is Petrine: "Petrine catalysts accelerate the process of mobilization for mission by helping a community become inherently more creative and entrepreneurial." "Mission…is the mother of adaptive ecclesiology" (132). This is the essence of the idea of a Mission Community. It is a model for ministry that aims at reviving historical, ascetical practices in the church for the purpose of turning the church towards mission.

The Forms a Mission Community Can Take

A Mission Community is an adaptable form for mission. It could be a small manifestation of the church in a place. A few people who live at a distance from a church could establish a Mission Community as the center for their life of prayer. A Mission Community could be a subset of a larger church. Members who live in a given area could form a local Mission Community for the purpose of local mission. Unlike a Missional Community, which requires 20-40 people, a Mission Community could begin with two people (Matt.19:20).

There are few essentials without which a gathering will not be a genuine Mission Community. There must be a genuine commitment to the life of prayer and spiritual growth on the part of the members. There must be spiritual direction and oversight. There must be a genuine desire to share life in Christ with others. The community must remain connected to the Eucharistic life of the church. It is not a "free agent" community, but a community that is taking on a new form, in connection with the church, for the sake of mission.

Spiritual growth and its organic influence on others take time. The analogies that help us understand this are organic. We grow spiritually the way plants and babies grow. There must be patience and commitment to the process for the spiritual life and mission to bear fruit. Many people do not have the patience for it, especially in our consumer culture. We are trained to try to manipulate and expedite the process to gain quick results. If we fall prey to this tendency, the idea of a Mission Community will not come to fruition.

A Biblical Model for Mission

Historically, mission has been rooted in the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations…teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." We tend to hear the command "teaching them" to mean that the communication of the Christian faith is primarily a didactic enterprise. We fail to see that the main thing they were to teach was how to pray and how to live (cf. Luke 11:1). Because of this, it will help to place greater emphasis on the explanation of mission the Risen Christ gave to the apostles in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." These words of Jesus emphasize that the witness to Christ as Risen Lord was not just a message. The apostles received the Holy Spirit. Their very lives, the new way they lived "in the Spirit," was evidence that Jesus was alive and ruling in the world. The effective witness of the church, and of each member of the Body of Christ, is the outward manifestation of the inner presence of the Holy Spirit. We bear witness to something that has happened to us and is happening to us. A Mission Community is a community that prays and waits for the Holy Spirit to come into its corporate and individual lives. Then it is a community that goes out into the world to bear witness of its experience to others.

Addendum 1. A Brief Spiritual Autobiography

Every approach to mission is rooted in the experience of the person who develops it. This brief autobiography will give some context to my ideas. My family was Episcopalian. I was baptized in 1961 and confirmed in 1970. I received both Sacraments in the Episcopal Church. The most formative experience of my young life was the death of my brother in 1972 when I was twelve. I processed my grief through a long season of adolescent and teen rebellion that did not include any meaningful connection to church. Through the influence of a sister, and various others providential people and events, a process of conversion began in late high school and continued until I returned to faith and the church somewhere in the middle of my college years.

I graduated from college with a dual major in Real Estate and Finance and got a job in financial services. My plan was to be a successful, generous, and committed layman. I took some classes at a seminary, not because I wanted to be ordained, but because I loved learning about the faith. One thing led to another. I studied for a while and enjoyed it. I was asked to start a mission. As I did that work, I gradually felt called away from a career in financial services into ministry. I was ordained a deacon in February of 1986 and sent to Birmingham, Alabama to serve in a regional office that supported small churches around the south. I was there for nine months before being called to St. Matthew's Church in Newport Beach, California. I was ordained a priest in December of 1986 and have been Rector of St. Matthew's Church since then.

What I know about mission I have learned at St. Matthew's Church. I inherited a group of 20-30 people meeting in a rented space. We now have somewhere around 350 members, and we have built a church. Our growth pattern hardly compares to the meteoric size increases in some churches, but our tradition works with a different model. I have learned that worthwhile things in mission take time. If people are not willing to do the patient work of spiritual horticulture, it is best not to start a mission enterprise. Also, without spiritually mature missionaries it is easy to do more harm than good. We will give to others what we have. Mission requires that we have something within us to give. The spirituality of a Mission Community is rooted in a commitment to the church's Rule of prayer because that is what I have practiced for thirty-five years. My experience is that a commitment to Rule in community is deeply formative in a way that popular approaches to prayer are not. We cannot have effective mission in our current cultural context without missionaries who are deeply committed to their own spiritual growth.

My training and context have been exclusively suburban. I do not have experience or expertise in inner city ministry or in overseas missions. However, I believe that the principles of a Mission Community are transferable to a variety of contexts. The overall framework is essentially biblical and historical. The details can vary by culture and context.

My perspective is sacramental and liturgical. I am an Anglo-Catholic. Certain liturgical forms of the Anglo-Catholic tradition are preferences acquired by practice. However, I do not believe that either a sacramental perspective or an emphasis on liturgy should be seen as preferences rooted in a peculiar experience. The fullness of the faith is sacramental and liturgical—and the Bible is full of both. Mission and spiritual formation are impoverished and handicapped when either is avoided.

Though I am an Anglo-Catholic, my sympathies are ecumenical because I have been formed by multiple influences. My conversion was highly influenced by evangelical Christians. In my pre-conversion day, I did not encounter many Episcopalians who routinely confronted me with the reality of Jesus Christ! However, we are now in a time when the pressing need is for spiritual formation and spiritual maturity, I believe the Anglican tradition has unique resources to meet this need. This is the foundation for the idea of a Mission Community.

Addendum 2. On "The Age of the Spirit"

In the various writings about that nature of mission in our time, there is broad agreement that experience is replacing doctrine as the starting point for faith. However, some writers seem to believe that the emphasis on experience will lead to a decline in the importance of doctrine. In his book *The Future of Faith*, Harvey Cox suggests that we call our current period of time, "The Age of the Spirit." Cox proposes a division of Christian history into three time periods. (Cox 2009, 4-9). The first period is the "Age of Faith," which runs from the New Testament until roughly the late fourth century. The second is the "Age of Belief," which "lasted roughly fifteen hundred years" and came to an end somewhere in the twentieth century. Now we are in the "Age of the Spirit" (borrowing the title from Joachim of Fiore, ca 1132-1202). "In this new dispensation, Joachim declared, people would live in direct contact with God, so there would be little need for religious hierarchies" (8). Phillys Tickle adopts *The Age of the Spirit* as the title for one of her books. She concludes,

> The center of our new authority will not lie, as it did in earlier presentations, with the Church fathers and mothers or with Church councils, not with politico-ecclesiastical hierarchies, nor even with *sola scriptura* and inerrancy as it is popularly defined. Rather, it will lie within the realm of the Spirit and an awe filled, discerning discourse with it. (Tickle 2014, 153)

A similar tone is present in *Christianity After Religion*, by Diane Butler Bass. It is not always clear in these writings exactly what the authors believe the essential doctrinal foundation for experience to be. The general sense seems to be that the Age of the Spirit will replace the Age of Belief in such a way that the foundational and universal doctrines established by the church are no longer necessary. These authors have many good and insightful things to say about the nature of faith and mission in our time. However, it is not necessary to see the Age of the Spirit (experience) standing is opposition to everything in the Age of Belief (doctrine). If clericalism and the reduction of faith to "belief" were characteristic errors of Christendom, the great danger of the reaction against these things might be to so exalt experience in any form that it becomes untethered from truth. If the doctrinal understanding of faith that the Holy Spirit led the church into over the course of the centuries is false, how can we be confident that our current experiences are from the Holy Spirit? It is more consistent to see the movement toward experience as a correction against a previous overemphasis on doctrine, and to insist that orthodox theology is still the accurate explanation of our experience. Otherwise, we will have experiences without explanation. This will leave us with no ability to discern whether a given experience is good (cf. 1 John 4:1-3). We can move the center of Christian faith away from cognitive debate about God and back to the experience of the Father through the Son in the Spirit, while not abandoning the tradition that the right way to understand this experience is the Nicene Creed. The Age of the Spirit does not have to be the "Age of Heresy." As Phillip Jenkins observes, "Emerging world Christianity will be traditionalist, orthodox and supernatural" (Jenkins 2011, 278).

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