

MISSION NOT SCHISM: RECOVERING ANGLICANISM THROUGH LOYALTY



PREFACE

The real message of this booklet is a simple one, but it is one that many within American Anglicanism do not want to hear. If you are an American and think you can remain Anglican while you abandon the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, you are wrong. That's it. Despite what you have been told or what you have tried to convince yourself, it isn't more complicated than that. In order to be an Anglican, you must be a Churchman, and being a Churchman is at the heart of what Anglicanism is all about.

You might then ask, "What is a Churchman?" A Churchman or Churchwoman is an individual who is loyal to their Church, and this has ever been the mark of Anglicanism. There are those who maintain that the Anglican Church itself has its roots in schism, but this could not be further from the truth. Those who assert that the 16th century end of communion between the Anglican Church and the Roman Church represented a schism on the part of the Anglicans either do not understand or do not accept the orthodox views of the nature of the Church that were reasserted during the 16th century reformation. Since its beginning, Anglicanism has maintained and practiced an ideal of the National Church very like that which has always been the norm in Christendom outside of the West. The original Anglican reformers were very far from Anabaptist and Puritan radicals; they were not schismatics in any sense of the word. We have Anglicanism today because these men found themselves living in a land where the Church had greatly departed from the true faith; but rather than starting their own ecclesiastical bodies, they set themselves against all visible odds to win their Church back to the orthodox Christian faith. Priests like William Tyndale and bishops like Thomas Cranmer were models of fidelity and obedience, who lived and lost their lives to convert a fallen Church in a fallen world.

There are also those who assert that our Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States was born of schism. Though it may be true that our present circumstances grew out of a political division, the Protestant Episcopal Church in this country exists, and is part of the Anglican Church, because our fathers simply would not allow the natural bonds between the American people and our English parents to be

fully severed.

If you find yourself believing that Anglicanism is anything but wholly antithetical to schism, then you have swallowed a lie. Our heritage has its roots planted deep not in schism, but in its exact opposite, faithful loyalism. There are however many within American Anglicanism today who seem to be very strongly of the opinion that it is not possible for our Church to be reformed in the old way, that it cannot be rebuilt by loyal Churchmen, but must be abandoned and something new begun. If anyone leaves the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America because they believe it is fallen so far that it cannot be saved, then they are without faith. And what is not of faith is simply one thing, and that is sin. The disobeying of lawful bishops, the breaking of rightful oaths, the leaving off of communion with the Church, the forsaking of its members over to their own sin, the starting of new and alternative ecclesiastical bodies, and the general promoting of schism and rebellion, no matter how justified they seem, are in every way un-Christian acts and will harm rather than help the cause of Anglicanism.

You might now reasonably ask, “Are you saying that everyone who has left the Protestant Episcopal Church to join a continuing or realignment body was wrong to do so and should go back?” The answer is “Yes,” but it is a yes that needs to be qualified. While it is the purpose of this booklet to state unequivocally that schism is never the right answer, it does have another purpose, and that is to provide an alternative approach. The Protestant Episcopal Church was established by God in this nation of ours for a holy purpose. It was begun as a true Catholic and Apostolic Church, and it is our mission as Anglicans to faithfully endeavor to see that it lives out this purpose. This is the third option, neither remaining passive within our Church as it falls further into error and sin, nor leaving off this good work that God has begun, but instead actively pursuing the holy purpose of the Protestant Episcopal Church despite the resistance members of the Church might put up. The mission of the Church is to convert the world to the faith and discipline of our Lord Jesus Christ, but not in the first instance those outside of the Church, but rather firstly its own members. If we are to be true Churchmen and Churchwomen, we must embrace the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United

States not only as our Church but also as our natural mission field.

This booklet contains a number of ideas and strategies for living out the Christian mission in America while remaining loyal to the means God has ordained for that purpose, that is, to our Church. It is only by turning our backs towards schism and disobedience and opening our arms in a selfless love for our brothers and sisters in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America that we can in any way hope to retain our Anglican faith. A faith incapable of producing fruit of this kind is not even a Christian one.

There is a real, living faithful Anglicanism ready to be reclaimed, after the spirit of men like Tyndale and Cranmer. It may be a hard road, but at the end resurrection awaits. Our call today is no more than that of all ages, to have faith in the heart in those promises that seem impossible in our natural eyes.

EXPLANATION OF METHODOLOGY

The strategies that follow in this booklet all presume that the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America is The Church of the United States of America, and this by virtue of its relationship with The Church of England. These strategies further presume that the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America will remain The Church of the United States of America, and that through the efforts of its faithful sons and daughters it will itself be returned to orthodoxy. This is at the core of what makes these strategies so dramatically distinct from the options currently being presented to those Anglicans in America who desire to remain orthodox despite their Church's departure from sound doctrine and practice. We do not possess the authority to separate ourselves from our Church or to doubt that by the Word of God it can be brought to repentance.

The strategies that will be presented in the rest of this booklet are all based on Churchmen and Churchwomen acting independently of the Protestant Episcopal Church to do the mission of the Church, which it is itself failing to do, while at the same time not separating themselves from it. Each strategy is intended to be employed by those who will retain formal membership in the Protestant Episco-

pal Church, who will maintain communion and fellowship with its heterodox members, who will pray for, work towards, and faithfully expect their reconversion to orthodoxy, and who will accept fully the painful realities that we are living in an “impaired communion,” while letting every action be in accordance with a faith that this communion will at some point be rightly repaired. Throughout this booklet, the term independent is used to identify an organization, structure, or other enterprise that is not in any way under the authority or administration of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

These strategies that follow all support a unified mission, to allow Churchmen and Churchwomen to love the Protestant Episcopal Church selflessly and without failing. In all things the purpose of the strategies is that we might remain loyal to an unconditional love for the Church in all its error and sin and that we might look to God to give us the strength through that love to never cease to work for the reconversion of our Church’s members, no matter what they might do to try to divide themselves from us, to the ultimate end that we will be rejoined in the fullness of Christian fellowship with them.

From this perspective, any option that presumes to divide the body by leaving off its broken and diseased members must be wholly rejected. Those who have truly turned their backs on the Protestant Episcopal Church, who have ceased to pray for its members, and who rejoice in news of their failings are in need of real conversion themselves. Those who are still within the Protestant Episcopal Church need to do all in their power to remain such, and those who have been separated from it, need to begin now to reposition themselves to reenter it. And for those clergy ordained by bishops within succession from the Protestant Episcopal Church who are not themselves in communion with it, the words in this booklet pertain most to you, as it is within your power to raise up a generation to reconvert the Church from without.

INDEPENDENT CLERICAL SOCIETIES

Independent Clerical Societies have perhaps the greatest potential out of all the strategies described here to impact the future of An-

glicanism in America. There are two types of Independent Clerical Societies that will be covered in this section, those with bishops and those without bishops. A Clerical Society would be an organized group of validly ordained clergymen, most particularly priests, who would be providing the services that the Protestant Episcopal Church should provide to its members but is failing to provide. The Clerical Societies would provide these lacking services apart from the active oversight of the Protestant Episcopal Church. This presumes a body made up of priests that are not under the current and valid authority of a bishop of the Church, priests who have been deposed, released, or ordained outside of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

The main function of the Clerical Societies would be to provide those services that the Protestant Episcopal Church is not performing with adequacy or is performing in a way that harms the consciences of its members. This might include services such as the celebration of divine liturgy, reverent and right administration of the sacraments, orthodox preaching of the Word, and general orthodox religious instruction. Ideally, the duties of the Independent Clerical Societies would be carried out through the operation of Chapels. Chapels would be buildings that would be operated, and rented or owned, by the Clerical Societies and would be used in a manner similar to parish church buildings in the conducting of religious and pastoral duties. The Clerical Societies would not be an alternative Church, they would not term their organizational structure a church, but rather a Society, nor would they refer to the buildings they operate as churches, but as Chapels. In addition, the Clerical Societies might make their clergy available to provide services in Independent Chapels not owned by the Clerical Societies, as well as for other religious activities organized by lay persons of the Church to take place outside of a Chapel. Clerical Societies would have no lay members, would operate entirely under the authority of ordained clergy, and thus though they might possess staff, they would not possess lay offices, a vestry, or anything of that kind. Those who attend worship at a Chapel or avail themselves of any services of Clerical Society clergy should be encouraged to maintain membership in, fellowship with, and partake of the sacraments of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Ideally, the main worship services conducted by Clerical Societies would be set at such a time on Sunday that allowed for attendees to also participate in the worship services of the local parish Church. Likewise Clerical Society clergy should probably encourage their members not to forsake the sacrament of baptism as administered by the Protestant Episcopal Church, and perhaps themselves should refrain from performing the rite of confirmation.

The structure of an Independent Clerical Society could be as simple as a confederation of a handful of priests, operating only a couple of Chapels and a single monthly service at a rented public facility such as a hotel, or it could be as complicated as a large structure with multiple bishops and a developed episcopal hierarchy, operating a large number of Chapels, some as large a cathedrals, throughout the country. So also the nearness of relationship and cooperation between a given Clerical Society and the membership, leaders, and clergy of local parishes of the Protestant Episcopal Church that it might serve could vary a great deal. In some places, there could be hostility between them, but in some places there could be cooperation.

Clerical Societies that sought as their ends both to remain in communion with, and to aid in the recovery of, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America are a viable and wholly possible alternative to embracing separation. It's really only a matter of the spirit of the thing; orthodox Anglicans have the choice to pursue a path that is aimed at reconciliation or to be schismatic, divisive, and competitive.

INDEPENDENT CHAPELS

An Independent Chapel is a building for conducting religious meetings and for providing religious services in a manner much like that of the local parish Church. The concept of the Independent Chapel discussed in this section is essentially the same as what was termed a Chapel in the preceding section on Independent Clerical Societies, except that an Independent Chapel in this context would not be owned, rented, or operated by a Clerical Society, but would instead be a strictly local enterprise. An Independent Chapel might be owned and operated by either lay people or by a priest (or even by a bishop

or by a small group of clergy) who are not under the active operational authority of another clergy person or group of clergy.

A Chapel of this kind could be used to conduct divine services, administer sacraments, for Independent Public Meetings, for religious instruction, to hold Bible studies, and so forth. If the Independent Chapel is not operated by a priest, its owners or operators could arrange to have outside clergy perform religious and pastoral services at it. In many locations, there are certainly both active and retired priests still in good standing with the Protestant Episcopal Church who would be willing to provide some range of supplemental services to members outside of the context of the parish Church. As in the case of the Independent Clerical Society, the Independent Chapel would be intended as a supplement and aid to the Church, and not as an alternative to it. Its owners and operators should be members and communicants of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and likewise should encourage the attendees to be so as well, after the manner suggested for Independent Clerical Societies in the preceding section.

As lay persons in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America we swear no oath of obedience to bishops, and far from being prohibited from doing that which they might disapprove of, where our intention is their betterment, we are obligated to act in accordance with our duty to the Church and its mission. It is important to stress here, and should be remembered while reading what follows, that the principal divine offices of the Church, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, are suitable and appropriate for lay celebration both privately and publicly. Most of the services that can be provided to members of the Church by use of an established public building can also be provided without an established facility through an organized public religious meeting, as will be discussed in the next section.

INDEPENDENT PUBLIC MEETINGS

Independent Public Meetings are meetings independent from the operation and authority of clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church, which are regularly conducted for religious worship, fellowship, and

instruction, outside of a building generally maintained for these purposes. These meetings might be conducted by Independent Clerical Societies in locations where they do not possess a regular building to use for such purposes. Independent Public Meetings provide an opportunity for Independent Priests or lay persons to organize meetings for religious purposes that are supplemental to services provided by the Protestant Episcopal Church and are open to the public.

An Independent Public Meeting could be as simple as a number of members of a local parish Church setting up their own weekly Bible study at a local rented hall or as complex as arranging to have an outside priest, either in or out of communion with the Protestant Episcopal Church, come to a rented hotel conference room once a week to provide religious or pastoral services.

In addition to supplementing those services provided at the local parish, Independent Public Meetings might also be used to accommodate disaffected Church members who feel prevented by their consciences from partaking fully in the life of their local parish Church. Independent Public Meetings might further provide much needed opportunities for orthodox members of the Protestant Episcopal Church and for those who are no longer in communion with it to retain or redevelop fellowship with one another. It is possible for the lay people of a parish who have found themselves divided by the schisms of recent years to meet together regularly for an Independent Meeting in a neutral place and to worship God together through the reading of divine liturgy and the singing of praises, without any regard to divisions that might exist among their clergy. There is no reason to let clerical politics stand in the way of right Christian fellowship.

INDEPENDENT HOME GROUPS

Independent Home Groups are structured and organized family or home-based religious activities independent of the oversight of clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church that are intended to include persons from outside of the family group. Family worship, prayer, and religious instruction are of the utmost importance to Christian life. The liturgy and catechisms of the Church are not merely in-

tended for use by the clergy or within a church building on Sunday. It should be within the power of everyone to live the orthodox faith and discipline of Anglicanism within their own home. We also have the option of opening up the religious life of our home to those outside of our family through Independent Home Groups, bringing both our family nearer to the life of the Church and the life of the Church nearer to our family.

Though certainly such groups could be led by an Independent Priest in his own home, what is being suggested here is a formal lay-conducting of regular worship, hymn singing, fellowship, catechizing, Bible studying, or similar religious activities within the home to which other members of the Church would be invited.

This could be as simple as inviting a family from the local parish to your regular practice of Saturday breakfast and Morning Prayer or as complex as having a dozen folks come over to the Oratory you have set up in your home after a morning Communion Service at the parish on Sunday to spend the afternoon listening to a recorded sermon, fellowshiping, studying the catechism, or engaging in any number of activities that might supplement those provided within the local parish Church by its clergy.

If we neglect ourselves to maintain a Christian home, which is our domain, then we can hardly complain if the clergy of our local Church fail to do so in theirs. Christianity is a group effort, and the Church is not set up so its clergy do all of the heavy lifting.

INDEPENDENT RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

The religious society is one strategy that orthodox clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church have not failed to utilize, but the idea that will be presented here is something a little different. The Independent Religious Society suggested here is one that is neither organized by nor under the authority of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and because of the polity of our Church, that means a society in which the leaders are not themselves clergy. For a religious organization to be independent of the Church it must be run by lay people. The reality today is that the clergy of the Protestant Episcopal

Church in the United States of America are beholden to constraints of clerical politics that place serious limitations on their ability to effectively advocate for change within the Church. History has shown that the religious society, whether composed entirely of clergy, lay people, or a mixture of both clergy and laity, is an extremely effective tool in bringing about change within the life of a Church.

The particular type of Independent Religious Society envisioned here is a lay run organization composed of both laity and clergy whose purpose is to actively work within the life of local parishes to promote orthodoxy in both practice and doctrine.

Societies of this kind might operate just locally, in multiple parishes, or as broadly as nationally. Their activities might be limited to parish life or might overlap with the Chapel life described under the Independent Clerical Societies and Independent Chapels sections above. Though an Independent Religious Society might itself be used to organize and promote any of the strategies suggested in this booklet, the primary value of an Independent Religious Society would be to achieve that which the other strategies cannot, and that is to maintain resistance to heterodoxy and to militate for changes towards orthodoxy within the structure of the local parish Church (that is, among its local leadership, clergy, vestry, officers, and auxiliary organizations).

There are countless ways this can be accomplished, which do not need to be detailed here, but what often is lacking in the efforts of individual members, and can be provided by Independent Religious Organizations, is a structured purpose or agenda and a broader network to provide guidance and resources in support of localized efforts.

An Independent Religious Organization operating within a parish could be as subtle or as visible as the situation might demand. Living out our mission within regular parish life could be as simple as organizing a group of persons committed to practice prayer book discipline, to pray the offices daily, to fast on Fridays, and to regularly attend the Wednesday Morning Prayer service read by the parish rector. On the other hand, it could mean organizing that same group

of persons to campaign with the vestry and bishop to get that same rector removed from their parish and replaced with another.

THE CHURCHING OF ORTHODOX PERSONS

In this section we turn to a somewhat different subject. Unfortunately, many of those who profess to have the interests of Anglicanism in mind think the solution to the problem of the lack of orthodoxy in our Church is to abandon the Church. However, what the Protestant Episcopal Church actually needs is not fewer people who are orthodox as members, but more people who are orthodox as members. The best place to find large numbers of orthodox Christians in America is gathered together to worship on Sundays in places other than their local parish Churches. Therefore, we need to be actively and aggressively campaigning to bring these persons into the Protestant Episcopal Church.

There are legions of heterodox persons who have been encouraged by individuals within our Church to join it in order to change it, and it behooves those of us who want to retain the faith of our Church to make an equal effort to restore the numbers on our own side. The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America is a democratic institution; this has allowed it to be taken over by entry-ists, who never had any intentions of being true to their vows to uphold the Church's established doctrines. Though this is the case, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States is also very small (and growing more so by the day), and it is a demographic reality that the current leadership of the Church does not have the numbers, and certainly not the multi-generational continuity, to fend off the voting power of the orthodox indefinitely. It is simply a matter of reaching the point where there is enough interest among the orthodox in the institution of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America in order for our Church to be returned to the faith from which it has departed.

Therefore as orthodox Churchmen and Churchwomen, we should be making not only an effort to bring back our brothers and sisters who have departed from our communion by offering them realistic alternatives to maintain an orthodox Christian life apart from formal

schism, but we should also be making an effort to promote Anglicanism in any form we can and to as many people as we can. There is only one true, holy Catholic and Apostolic Church in the United States of America, and that is the Anglican Church, and we should be doing everything in our power to convert all individuals professing an orthodox Christian faith to that truth.

The numbers are entirely on the side of orthodoxy. Organized efforts like the ones described in this booklet, if implemented strategically, can hardly fail to overwhelm the heterodox power base within the Protestant Episcopal Church. The miracle we must look to God for is that there will be Churchmen and Churchwomen who retain such loyalty to the Church that He has established among us that they see its future reformation come to pass.

EPILOGUE

I hope that something of the thinking and suggestions in this booklet will have affected your perspective on the current situation within American Anglicanism and on the possibility of using faithful Christian ways to move towards a more orthodox future.

It is important to remember that there are many things we can do independent of the Church, that don't meet our needs, but rather meet the needs of others. On our own, we can organize and participate in any number of activities and events that fulfill the Church's calling to convert the world to the faith and discipline of Jesus Christ. This is not simply limited to services we generally associate with the clergy; we don't need the permission of our local priest to set up a local food drive, to collect ladies from the local parish to regularly visit a nursing home, or to become involved on behalf of Anglicans in an important social cause in our local community. The failure of the leadership of the Church to properly live out its calling does not make our duty lesser, but rather greater. The needs are there, and if the clergy of our Church are not going to meet them, who will take them up if not you and I?

We should not fool ourselves into thinking we can be truly loyal to our Church without being at the same time truly loyal to its calling.