

A Catechetical Model for Evangelism

*By the Rt. Rev. Ray R. Sutton, Ph.D.
Bishop Co-Adjutor, Diocese of Mid-America*

Evangelism has become a vital concern for the church in what has been called a *post-Christian era*. It has rightfully become a primary emphasis among Protestants and Roman Catholics as the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury both declared the 1990s the *Decade of Evangelism*. However, the decade has come and gone and Western Culture, what is left of it, still needs evangelism. Probably for the first time since Constantine the church finds itself in the midst of old paganism. Church attendance is down and shows no signs of turning around in the near future. Nevertheless, the church must still follow her Lord's commission to "disciple the world" (St. Matthew 28:19). The question is, "How do we do *it*?" And "how do *we* do *it*?" By "*it*" I mean how do we carry out our Lord's Great Commission and actually do real evangelism, not just proselyte evangelism. By "*we*" I mean those of us in the Anglican tradition and especially the Reformed Episcopal Church.

Many types of evangelism are available to the church. The most successful ones since World War II have been crusade evangelism (Billy Graham etc.), personal evangelism (Campus Crusade, Evangelism Explosion etc.), friendship evangelism (Young Life, the Alpha Program etc.), and so forth. Probably, however, the most basic type of evangelism for all traditions has been called *St. Andrew evangelism*. Modeled after the first disciple to bring someone to Christ, it could be argued that the other types of evangelism ultimately depend on this type of evangelism. St. Andrew's simple gesture of leading his brother, St. Peter, to Jesus, translates into an evangelism as basic as bringing someone to church for worship. It does not involve memorizing all kinds of programs and Bible verses or calling on people door to door. All one has to do is bring a person to church. Virtually every member can do this whereas only a very select few can do the more elaborate, direct types of evangelism. It is even debatable as to whether or not every person ought to be doing direct evangelism. There is not much question that all should and can follow the example of Andrew. The only obstacle is what the visitor meets when he/she comes to church. This is where the easiest, most elementary type of evangelism has become almost the most difficult for those of us in liturgical traditions.

Churches with little or no liturgy can provide an accessible service that involves minimal involvement that is not necessarily all bad. All a new person (unbeliever, believer from a non liturgical tradition etc.) initially has to do is come and listen. There are many examples of this in the Gospels, for this is where disciples of Jesus basically begin, even us. For decades, independent churches have offered an evangelistic style service on Sunday mornings that has been affectionately referred to by some of us in the liturgical tradition as a *hymn sandwich*, a sermon between some hymns and a couple of prayers. These churches have not surprisingly grown because they make it easy for the members to be *Andrews*. No doubt many of us in the liturgical tradition have been quite critical of what I have even derogatorily called a *dumbing down* of the service. Upon further reflection, I think this descriptive has not been entirely fair to some of my brethren who

want to do liturgical evangelism. Working within the liturgical tradition, they have not only seen the viability of the Andrew principle for growing a church, but they have sought to make their liturgical churches more accessible to the outsider so that the members would feel comfortable about bringing guests. To do this, they have turned to their free worship brethren, assessed what might be gleaned from their services, and produced more *user friendly* liturgical services to reach the unchurched and believers from non-liturgical traditions. Their churches for the most part have grown.

This brief document is an attempt to evaluate a certain type of outreach, what has been defined as liturgical evangelism. In no way am I implying that this is the only type, nor that the others should not nor cannot be used in addition to or in substitution of liturgical evangelism. That discussion is for another paper. Rather, I only want to interact with, critique, and improve upon methods of combining traditional and contemporary worship to facilitate St. Andrew evangelism. On the one hand it could and has been correctly argued that some forms of worship are not, strictly speaking, for the purpose of evangelism. On the other hand as we shall see, the early church understood access to worship as progressive, a series of stages. They made available different levels of services for people in the category of *catechumens*. It is this model that I will work toward and suggest as a refining template for liturgical churches who want to encourage St. Andrew evangelism. For now, however, let us evaluate first the various approaches to liturgical evangelism.

As far as I know, three basic liturgical models have been implemented to combine traditional and contemporary worship for the purpose of growth. First, there was the *liturgical renewal movement* that began in the post-Vatican II days of the 1960s and 1970s. Language and form were altered to reflect certain new, mid-twentieth-century insights about the older liturgies. The movement for the most part was concerned to move away from what had become traditional liturgies to an alleged more ancient model of the liturgy. I say “alleged” because it has not been proven entirely that the liturgical model appealed to by modern liturgists (Hippolytus’ model) was the universally accepted liturgy in the early church; there were other, even more popular liturgy families for a reason. The strength of the liturgical renewal movement lay in its ability to transcend significant liturgical differences among Protestant, Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The weakness became its change of the theology of liturgy through *lex orandi lex credendi*, “the law of praying is the law of believing.” Since the way people pray becomes their theology, the newer liturgies changed theology, which meant a newer, modern theology that has all too often fallen prey to heterodoxy. Also, this became a movement in reaction to traditional prayer book liturgy. The positive effect, on the other hand, was that this movement appealed to modern man and hence seemed to give more access to the older liturgical churches by altering what was perceived as the outdated liturgies. Nevertheless, minimal growth resulted because of the introduction of heterodox theology. Sadly, the liturgical renewal movement has become a catalyst to all types of aberrant theology to the point where even the liturgies of liturgical renewal have and will be totally abandoned. It seems the liturgical renewal movement, although it made some valid contributions, for the most part ended up with something just about to offend everyone. It repelled the traditional people because it took away the traditional liturgy,

and it didn't really appeal to non-liturgical conservatives because of its guilt by association with modernism.

Second, the charismatic movement has had an enormous effect on worship and outreach among evangelicals. Charismatics have built large churches by being long on experience, through praise and worship, and short on doctrine. Their more lively free worship, free experience has been adopted by a largely free worship evangelical movement. Their concern has been, to put the best face on it, a personal encounter with God through a dynamic experience of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the worship service. Although this is not intended to be a discussion of the Charismatic movement but of how parts of it evolved into part of a larger liturgical movement, suffice it to say that Charismatics at least to their credit emphasized the primacy of worship. As aspects of the Charismatic movement found the ancient liturgy, they brought the same zeal to the liturgy itself. Unfortunately, liturgical charismatics have most often used the modern liturgical renewal movement liturgies because they have seemed to be more accessible with their modern language. This has made for an amazing mix of mostly conservative, fundamentalist types, with catholic and modern liturgies and theology. The result has been church growth and evangelism through an amalgamation of contemporary worship, modern theology, Pentecostal practices, and a fundamentalist mindset. This accounts sadly for the often divisive nature of the Charismatic movement, as well as the tendency to drive away traditional people, most of whom are equally devoted to our Lord. Finally, the potential for gaining orthodox theology, conveyed in the traditional liturgical package, has many times been rejected, missed or discounted. This movement has consequently tended to drift theologically and only to appeal to certain segments of the church. While it has reached more people than the strictly speaking traditional churches, it has emphasized the charismatic and modern almost to the expense of the traditional. This has made for a *sui generis*, literally *in a class by itself*, meaning it lacks the continuity of a truly catholic and evangelical model. It seems that Scripture and the historic church call us not only to be evangelistic, which means to be sensitive to the contemporary, but at the same time to be consistent with what has been believed everywhere at all times by all the people of God. The Charismatic liturgical movement is to be commended for its great strides but encouraged not to create a *sui generis* liturgy and theology with some of its emphases.

Third, the blended worship movement has built on the first two. Also called the *convergence* worship movement, it was primarily master-minded by the now famous Dr. Robert Webber, Reformed Episcopal Seminary (M.Div.), Concordia Seminary (Th.D.) graduate, and former Wheaton College Professor, who is presently a professor at Northern Baptist Seminary. Dr. Webber has called for a mix of traditional and contemporary worship in a variety of contexts, mostly using the Eucharistic service as the main service for outreach. He has founded the Institute for Worship Studies and offers an M.Div. and a doctoral degree through the program. The strength of his appeal is that he has not totally rejected traditional worship and the contributions it brings to the contemporary. On the other hand, he has drawn from and even developed the contemporary aspects of modern worship, mainly music. In many respects he has helped contemporary worship music to move beyond the trite, Jesus mantra, campfire type of

music found in the earlier days of the praise and worship movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Certainly there is appropriate contemporary music that can and should be used in any of the traditional liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer, including the Eucharist. All too often this has not been the case in other approaches to mix traditional and contemporary, creating a horrible non sequitor: serious and penitent juxtaposed to trivial and carefree. The blended model in contrast has produced an attractive mix that keeps orthodoxy and the contemporary moderately balanced. Growth has resulted. Dr. Webber has become probably the most effective evangelist for liturgy, having developed a process by which free and contemporary worship people can discover the mysteries of the ancient liturgy with strong elements of the contemporary contained in the blended service. This is good and provides some direction for how traditional worship parishes might be able at least to include some of the more appropriate and dignified contemporary music. Moreover, Dr. Webber has cracked the door open back to a more ancient model of outreach. Nevertheless, while I have come to believe that we in the REC can benefit much from our good friend, Dr. Bob Webber, I offer a modest critique not so much of him but of aspects of the blended worship movement.

For one, I think it is spiritually unwise to use the Eucharist for an evangelistic outreach service. If the service is for other believers of different denominations, it can be a wonderful transition. However, if applied in a purely evangelistic context to the unchurched and unbeliever, a Eucharistic service seems to be against the wisdom of the Holy Scriptures and the ancient church.

For another critique along the same lines, Rite II of the Episcopal 1979 BCP, which lacks confession and absolution, has conveniently taken precedent for pragmatic reasons. Very simply it allows the Eucharistic service to be streamlined. However, the New Testament takes a less streamlined view toward sin (1 Corinthians 11), especially its need for confession (1 John 1:9) and absolution (St. Matthew 16), before the most serious act and rite of the church. This weak view of sin and penitence fits with the overall theological weaknesses of the 1979 version of the BCP. Although the 1979 BCP is not all bad and has many commendable aspects to it, this version of the prayer book has become the most widely used modern language liturgy in America. In part this is due to the failure of traditional liturgical movements to offer a viable, modern language BCP, at least not until the REC's prayer book revision using the 1662 BCP. Thus, blended worship can become subject to the theological and liturgical weaknesses of weak modern liturgies.

Finally, some of the blended worship parishes (though not all as I have recently witnessed) have produced a reaction to traditional worship that has driven traditional worshippers from churches. This is completely against the catholicity and pastoral nature of the church. Therefore, I suggest a modified version of the blended model based on what I believe is more consistent with the early church *mass of the catechuminate*, which was not a mass at all but another entry level of worship and instruction for the new convert or the unconverted. Remember, *mass* originally simply meant *service*, which could have been any type of service. It was only later in church history that the word *mass* came to mean almost exclusively the *Eucharist*.

An Ancient Liturgical Model for Modern Evangelism

First, the grammar, syntax, dialects and accents of the language of liturgy should be consistent as well as orthodox at all points. What do I mean? The grammar of the liturgy is the foundational Biblical principles of worship based on the commands and practices of worship in the Old and New Testament. The Biblical principles speak also of liturgical symbols, actions, and movements.

The syntax of liturgy is the theological significance of these Biblical principles as understood by the historic church, in our case the church as it has been reformed back to its truly catholic theology (The Reformed Anglican theology).

The dialects of the liturgy are the various liturgies and families of liturgies that emerged in various parts of the ancient church, reflecting different Biblical and theological emphases. For example, the Sarum Rite and the Eastern liturgies are two different families of liturgy, albeit with some commonality because of prior common roots, but also with very significant differences.

The accents of these liturgies are the variations within the liturgical families as they have been applied in history. For example, the Elizabethan, Cranmerian liturgies are accents of the Sarum Rite. Perhaps even translations of the Cranmerian liturgies into other languages are accents of a particular liturgical dialect. Here is where some kind of modern language version of the Cranmerian liturgy falls.

Therefore, the language of liturgy consists of these elements: grammar, syntax, dialect and accent. Grammar and syntax transcend all dialects and accents. However, dialects and accents interface the transcendent with the present situations into which Christianity continues to minister the Good News. Without dialect and accent, grammar and syntax are lost to the present generation. Without grammar and syntax, dialect and accent offer a foreign language for communion with the Living God. It is thus important that any liturgy should be Biblically and theologically sound, in other words have the correct grammar and syntax. Moreover, every liturgy is part of a family and history of liturgy. Any changes should be consistent within the family to which it belongs. For example, bringing in a liturgical practice from another family of liturgy can be a disaster. Finally, any accent of a liturgy should be consistent with the grammar, syntax, and dialect its liturgical family. If not, grave mistakes can be made with serious theological, liturgical and pastoral consequences. This is why the New King James approach to modernizing the Cranmerian liturgy would be the most consistent paradigm for modernization among Anglicans. It builds on the same grammatical, syntactical (Catholic and Reformed), dialectical model, to bring a modern accent to the ancient English liturgy.

Second, the *goal* of the catechumenate model is to lead the convert into the ancient liturgy of the Eucharist, not away from it. This represents a very different purpose from most of the blended models, even the best of them that are not strictly speaking attempting to abolish traditional worship. The catechumenate model holds before the

convert the need to rise above culture into the cultus (worship) of the ancient church, which is of necessity out of this world. The great danger in any kind of blended approach is the accommodation of culture, which seems to feed one of the most serious problems of modern Christianity, the tendency to be culture driven instead of vice versa.

Third, the best services to use for the mass of the catechumenate are Ante-Communion, Morning or Evening Prayer, and the baptismal service. Of course, the ante-communion has its roots in the pre-service at which the catechumens were present; they were dismissed before the Eucharist. However, Morning and Evening Prayer as well as the baptismal service all lend themselves to a mixed congregation of believers and unbelievers, Anglican and non-Anglican. These different services could range from almost purely evangelistic to a modernized version of Morning or Evening Prayer, appealing to almost any major Protestant background. The point is to create several points of entry for different levels and categories of new members and visitors. It is assumed that all of these services will include a Scriptural, Christ-centered sermon or homily.

Fourth, contemporary music consistent with the high quality of traditional liturgies can and should be used together with traditional hymnody and liturgical music. If the goal is to lead the catechumen into the *communio of saints* of all ages, then the music that they, the majority of the Church still sing in heaven should not be neglected nor slighted. On the other hand, appropriate contemporary music interfaces with the present from which the unchurched and non-liturgical Christians come. Also, a variety of musical instruments may be used depending on the type of service. Special music may be very effective as well. Probably the music should be put in a bulletin or provided by other means. The projection of music for outreach services can be effective, but for mid level types of blended services it can almost be distracting.

Fifth, times other than Sunday Morning primarily should be used for outreach and evangelism services. One exception might be for a larger parish where an evangelistic service might be offered at the same time as the traditional worship service, but in a separate building from the baptized and the confirmed.

Sixth, catechetical services (masses of the catechumenate) require all kinds of catechetical instruction in the form of Bible studies, classes, seminars and various training. The point is to help the catechumen to cross over from a basic entry level to the more traditional. Of course, no parish should be naïve to think that everyone will advance to the traditional service. Moreover, some from the traditional side might find the catechetical services more satisfying, reflecting their more basic spiritual commitments. A parish may want to offer a New King James version of the REC 1662 Eucharist at some time on Sunday for this reason. Many on the other hand will move to the more traditional as they mature, or simply grow older.

In conclusion, the model suggested here is not an either (traditional) or (contemporary) paradigm presented in the past by traditionalists who have averred the contemporary, or modern worship advocates who have decried the traditional. Instead, the wisdom of a

both/and approach based on the ancient catechetical model has been presented. This paper has attempted to suggest a more consistent paradigm for worship as well as outreach by recognizing the need for catechumen levels of services for those new to historic Christianity or who have never had the opportunity to be exposed to liturgical worship. This alters the purpose of a more simple, contemporary type of service from one of moving away from to one of progressing toward the traditional. It is believed that this ancient model of evangelism better suits the post Christian situation today, thereby encouraging modern believers to bring their friends to church just as the early disciple Andrew. May God make us all Andrews for His kingdom!

Almighty God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed Him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfill thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.