

It would be easy to align with the orthodox movement of the Episcopal church, and in fact have done so in the past. I no longer can uncritically endorse it, for the simple reason that I no longer see it as I once did.

For ten years we were at a reasonably sized Episcopal church that was one of the core churches of the charismatic renewal in the 70s and early 80s. For 5 of those ten years I was on the vestry, and during each of my vestry terms we called a new rector. The first call took two years; we did it thoroughly and well, and we made the best choice for that time. The second call was a charade of behind the scenes collusion with the former rector, the senior warden, and even the bishop to maneuver in the assistant priest as rector. I opposed the call, but I was alone in my dissent. The result was a disaster. I resigned from the vestry a year early, and left the church entirely 5 months later. Even that senior warden has now left the church, well sorry for the decision.

That is not at all to say that I disagree with the orthodox theological position on human sexuality. The problem is different than merely sexuality; until the church is willing to live by the entire list of sins that Paul names in I Corinthians 5, as well as the need to expel the sexually immoral, we has best be very careful about being so confident that our emphasis on rightness in matters of sexuality is also God's central focus. When is the last time the Episcopal church divided so sharply over drunkenness? Or greed? Jesus was far harder on the religious power brokers than he was on those whose sin was sexual.

My question is simple: where are the poor, the addicts and prostitutes? It isn't that no one helps them when they do rarely come in; rather, why are the churches not directly involved in the lives of the poor? To wait until they come to us is not what Jesus was about. Discussing this once with the then Bishop Suffragan (now a Bishop) of this diocese, I was peremptorily dismissed with the comment that the poor were being cared for. In other words, it was not necessary that they should need to come to the parishes. How very convenient...

While we will admit to personal faults and sin, too often we still live in the myth of our own goodness. What we miss is that in the Incarnation God began a radical realignment of the order of things that will culminate in the full recovery of the governance of the planet.

I had occasion several years ago to read the parish profile of a well to do, established orthodox Episcopal parish; the parish profile had been published as a normal part of a rector search process they had done. In it they proudly described a group of older women that wanted to organize themselves and spend some time together, under the name of Les Grandes Dames. They didn't want it to be entirely self focused, so they found a service project: they gave receiving blankets to indigent mothers at the county hospital. That the women were involved in the community was a source of some pride to the parish.

Here I must caution the eventual reader to read carefully what I write; it could easily be misunderstood or misconstrued.

I was stunned at the self-congratulatory pride evident in the parish profile when describing this group of women. My questions were then, and remain now, something like these. How many of the indigent mothers were ever brought to the parish even once, not as a point of maternalistic pride but of a desire that they might find a place in the community? How many of les Dames ever

went to the home of one of the indigents to help with the care of the child, or a ride to the doctor, or to care for the child if the mother were ill? These things were never said in the profile; I can only assume that nothing like that ever happened.

This is the same parish that decided to tell me about itself with a discreet plaque in the narthex: the organ is an Aeolian Skinner. It is a magnificent instrument, to be sure; that this is what they choose to advertise about themselves is evidence of a shallow, affluent pride. Yet this is a parish that is solidly in the orthodox camp, and the Word is preached there (to quote a parishioner, an old friend, from a recent encounter.)

I no longer accept this sort of widespread status quo in the orthodox wings of the Episcopal church, *that I know*, for this simple reason: doctrine and praxis do not align. (There may well be parishes that do live that balance, and I wish to be ever ready to acknowledge that.)

How would that alignment look? I can only dimly glimpse it in concept, but a central principle would be the equality of the Gospel. This is not a doctrine that I have ever heard expounded, but it is clearly a driving principle in St. Paul's thought. It is laid out in II Corinthians 8 in the context of a relief effort for those suffering from famine in Jerusalem. Paul sums it up in these words: "There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality. At the moment your surplus meets their need, but one day your need may be met by their surplus. The aim is equality; as scripture has it, "Those who gathered more did not have too much, and those who gathered less did not have too little."

Equality. It is no surprise that this is never taught, at least in my hearing; it radically threatens contemporary ecclesiastical social orders and power structures. Equality means that I must live in the awareness of, and responsibility to, the larger community with every resource of my life, whether time, money or presence. I need to choose to live below what I can, in order to have something for others in their need. Though none hold me accountable to that now, per Matthew 25 I will answer for it to God.

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