

What Can Orthodox Anglicanism Contribute To The Church?

--Fr. John Spencer, FCC meeting, St. Louis, August 23, 2006

Anglicanism has always been a mess; it's more of a mess at present. We have come to expect it.

But "Orthodox Anglican" is like "true believer": we shouldn't need the adjective. If we are Anglican, we should unquestionably be orthodox in our belief.

What we can contribute: Holiness, holiness in the biblical sense: to be "Holy" : to be set apart:

- Specifically, to be set apart for worship, and for service of God.

I agree with Fr. Gardner: a not-to-subtle shift has taken place theologically, not just in Anglicanism in recent times: an infection of modern psychotherapy and American individualism focused of "self-realization," the "me" of all our commercials, and of the "Me generation."

How can the church as a whole, and traditional Anglicanism specifically be holy in this culture, in this time?

- First, by being willing to be set apart, to stand apart, to be separated as need be to be seen in both the prophetic role of the Church but also in the servant role.

Perhaps Anglicanism is dying as an aged servant who has served a household faithfully through 2-3 generations, and eventually goes the way of all flesh...

But maybe, just maybe, there is yet a little life there...

For we are called to be holy in another way: to step apart, to stand apart, from the "majority" of "democratically" ruled Episcopalism, to be ruled by our Lord, a majority of One.

The Continuum churches have been doing this for decades. And they have paid the heavy price. At the present moment some ECUSA dioceses and parishes are learning what those costs look like. We are being forced to move out, and move on...to go outside the camp.

We read in Hebrews 13:

12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. 13 Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. 14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come.

To stand apart, to be holy, is to allow God to crucify and kill us as he may choose, as a witness to his Own holiness. “Be ye holy, for I am holy...”

We find two problems, however, as we think about “standing apart”:

1. *Nobody* wants to be left out, sent out, or “left behind” (witness the popularity of the neo-Gnostic pop-lit series by that name!)
 - Everyone wants to “belong.”
 - Especially they want to belong to what is familiar, to the church they grew up in, if possible.
 - To be called out, set apart as holy, as “a testimony against them” is not now, nor has ever been, a popular or exciting vocation for Christians.
 - Folks would rather suffer insufferably long bondage, apparently, to a dying institutional structure than face the music of realizing that the structure has become a coffin.

2. We are also dealing here with what is known as “battered-spouse” Syndrome.
 - On the day I returned from Columbus, I shared with my wife (a Christian therapist) that the Lord had finally helped me see why so many are having trouble breaking the old ties to Episco-paganism: they are suffering from battered-spouse syndrome.
 - The very next day, Fr. Lou Payne made the same point to our diocesan clericus as we de-briefed and decompressed from Columbus.

The controlling, power-hungry leaders of ECUSA (now “TEC”) have gotten nearly complete emotional control of the battered traditionalists who have “hung in there” for so long that they can’t now leave. We hear all the typical words of the abuser to the abused: “But I still love you, I won’t hit you anymore, please stay, I love you, I need you, I promise I’ll change (a rich one!)...”

And so, the battered traditionalists can't bear to take the plunge, to "split the sheets," perhaps loose some of the kids.

As we cling to what is rightfully Anglican, we should recall that it's not sufficient to be righteous, it's not sufficient to be pure, to be orthodox, to be catholic, even to be Anglican. First, we have to be Christian, and like Peter, Andrew, and others, willing to have our arms stretched onto a cross.

There is where the perfect *Holiness* of Jesus was revealed to us: there his divinity showed cleared, in his willingness *to be cut off* from his people, and -- for a few moments apparently -- seemingly cut off from his Father's love...

Be holy. "You shall be holy, for I AM holy, says the Lord."

While we are all standing around in our various ecclesial fortresses, I suggest we can do a much better job of passing notes to one another during class, of standing by one another when the law suits fly, of lifting up holy hands to our holy God for the newcomers to sacrifice, and persecution.

And it's good to remember, as we man the fortresses, that although we repel out enemies, when our friends and allies show up, we ought to let them in! Especially if they bring fresh supplies to replenish us. Bishop Robert Duncan puts it well: If we don't hang together, we WILL hang separately. We need always to remember who our friends are, and hold together with them.

Although we stand apart from those who would tear the holy, catholic Church down, we must *together* with those who will help us to build it up.