

**The Presiding Bishop's Exhortation**  
**The 57<sup>th</sup> General Council**  
**June 7, 2023**

**The Complete Gospel for the Age of Exclusive Secularism**

Archbishop Beach, Primus Fenwick, other REC Bishops, Clergy, Delegates, and distinguished guests, greetings in the Blessed Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever! We gather here in Charleston, South Carolina for the 57th General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church with joy and excitement. On behalf of all of us, I thank Bishop Willie Hill and the Diocese of the Southeast for hosting this historic council. Today marks our entrance into the celebration of 150 years of God's faithfulness to this part of His Church. The actual day of our beginning is December 2, 1873. Our founding Bishop, George David Cummins, began his opening sermon entitled *The Old Paths* with the following words: "In God alone we trust. In a consciousness of loyalty to Christ is our confidence. In our entire dependence upon the Holy Spirit is our only hope. If the work we inaugurate to-day be of men, may it come to naught. If it be of God, may He grant us more abundantly 'the Holy Ghost and wisdom' to make us 'valiant for truth,' strong to labor and faithful in every duty, and 'rejoicing to be counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.'"

Now after 150 years of our existence, we know that what began was not of men. We give God all the glory for preserving by His Sovereign power through the Holy Spirit true faith in Jesus Christ, adherence to the inerrant and infallible Word of God, unwavering fidelity to the catholic creeds and ancient councils, and a firm commitment to the "old paths" of the early church up through the English Reformation. Furthermore, in keeping the REC spiritually alive and faithful to Him, God continues to send His Spirit to proclaim the Gospel through mission and church planting not only here in the U.S. but around the world. The Lord's Hand indeed remains on the REC. We give praise and thanksgiving to our God!

Since our last General Council only two years ago, which was re-scheduled to a 2021 zoom meeting due to the pandemic, there have been many other important developments. We'll learn about them in our reports. We want to see the Gospel spread more through our witness in the very challenging times to come. But we now live in a culture quite different from the one that was accommodating and even friendly to the Western Church for nearly 1700 years. To meet the daunting task of reaching our 21st century culture that has become more like the days of early Christianity in the Roman Empire, I therefore call us in my exhortation to proclaim *The Complete Gospel for the Age of Exclusive Secularism*.

**The Exhortation: The Complete Gospel for the Age of Exclusive Secularism**

The great 16th century German monk and reformer, Martin Luther, once stated the following:

"If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest expression every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefields besides is mere flight and disgrace, if he flinches at the point.

Luther stood on the Word of God to fight the spiritual wars of his day. Yet in his statement, he speaks forcefully about the need for the Church always to fight "where the battle rages." Our Biblical, theological, and moral struggles in the culture of the 21st century is quite different from the ones of the 16th century, and even the late 19th century when the REC began.

Aaron M. Renn's article, "The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism" (*First Things*, February 2022), offers a penetrating three-fold overview of some of the enormous differences. He calls the early centuries of America up to 1994 the Positive World, in which, "Society at large [in this period] retains a mostly positive view of Christianity . . . Christian moral norms are the basic moral norms of society and violating them can bring negative consequences." The next period 1994-2014 Renn chronicles as the Neutral World, where "Society takes a neutral stance toward Christianity. Christianity no longer has privileged status but is not disfavored . . . Christian moral norms retain some residual effect." The last period from 2014 to the present, Renn classifies as the Negative World. He cites the Supreme Court Obergefell decision that redefined marriage as not exclusively between a man and a woman. This decision Renn identifies as marking a transition into a "Society [that] has come to have a negative view of Christianity . . . Christian is a social negative . . . Christian morality is expressly repudiated and seen as a threat to the public good and the new public moral order."

The spiritual battlelines of Luther's day have been redrawn. Scholars like Renn recognize that we're now living in post-Christendom. For 1700 years the Church in the West through all of its ups and downs has been surrounded by a culture mostly favorable to Christianity. This long era has come to an end. Coming full circle, we've returned to a kind of secular world that resembles the cultures around the early church.

The good news, however, is that the Church has been here before, successfully reaching mostly hostile cultures with the Gospel. Our own 16th century English Reformers show us how to learn from that period to proclaim Christ to our similar world. They adopted the motto *ad fontes*, meaning "back to the sources." To address the problems of the late Medieval Church the sources for the reformers were the Scriptures and the church fathers. Though the issues are different, their model was right. It's still relevant for the challenges of postmodernity. By going back to the Scriptures and early Christianity, we can learn how the ancient Church took the Gospel into and defended it in antagonistic cultures much like ours. For example, the early Church in the 5th century faced a similar situation where the secularists of the Roman Empire blamed Christianity for its demise. The secularists called for a return to the old pagan religions and ways, and the removal of Christianity. The famous Bishop and scholar, St. Augustine, stepped forward to write his classic, *The City of God*. He said, "From this world's city there arise enemies, against whom the City of God has to be defended." In his massive work, he attributed the collapse of the empire to its own corruption. He also offered a stunning comparison of how Christian saints did more for the empire than any of their super-heroes like Hercules. These holy Christians conquered with Christ's love without violence. St. Augustine said, "What does [their] love look like? It has hands to help others; it has feet to hasten to the poor and needy; it has eyes to see misery and want; it has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men; that is what love looks like." Such unconditional love is only taught in the Holy Scriptures (1 Corinthians 13).

With St. Augustine and many other early church fathers, we can learn how they relied upon and drew from the Word of God by standing on the shoulders of those who had gone before. The Apostle Paul became the primary Biblical source in his three missionary journeys. On his second one in A.D. 50, he preached the Gospel at a place called Mars Hill in Athens, Greece. This world was like our culture in its exclusive secularism. Before considering St. Paul's Biblical and apostolic model of the Gospel, let's understand clearly what exclusive secularism is.

### **A Word About Exclusive Secularism**

To date, the most extensive analyses of the secularism of our cultural environment are the writings of the Roman Catholic Charles Taylor in his book, *A Secular Age*, and the Protestant scholar James K. A. Smith

in his work entitled, *How Not to be Secular*. They both conclude that our culture has become one of exclusive secularism. This is a different kind of “secular” from the Middle Ages when the word referred to Christian work outside the Church like a baker or candlestick maker. The understanding of “secular” changed significantly in the 18th century Enlightenment. The natural world and morality were understood as having no inherent definition in themselves. Many philosophers began to assume that the world did not even have God’s created revealed meaning of it. Instead, the natural and the moral were considered neutral in design until human reason provided their value. The famous philosopher Rene Descartes crafted the popular phrase on which this new meaning of secular was based. He said, “I think, therefore I am.” Culture and all aspects of it are reduced to what human reason dictates. The Christian worldview became one option among others.

Taylor and Smith speak of a third type of secularism prevalent in our day. James K. A. Smith says about this new version of secularism, “Religious belief or belief in God . . . [that has been] understood to be one option among others,” has become “contested” (pp. 21-23). By “contested” he means “belief in God” is no longer even to be considered a possibility but culturally opposed. Taylor therefore concludes that we are now in a secular age of “exclusive humanism” (Smith, p. 22). To understand the exclusiveness of the present secularism, Taylor and Smith define it with the phrase “closed world structure.”

These scholars also use the image of a two-story house to explain this exclusive, secular “closed world.” In this two-story structure the lower story representing our present culture closes itself from the upper floor. They refer to the two floors of this house with the words, transcendence, and immanence. The upper story is the transcendent supernatural realm of God beyond the physical lower floor. It is the transcendent realm of God, and His meaning of humanity, morality, and so forth, according to the Scriptures. The lower story is immanent and the natural, this present world. Taylor and Smith point out that until recently in history, the upper story gave meaning and life to the lower story of this immanent world. However, they explain that exclusive secularism now attempts to shut out the upper story. That is, it will not allow the transcendent world of God and the supernatural into the lower story. The immanent, secular, ground floor relegates the upper floor of the Biblical worldview to an attic where no one is allowed to go and still be taken seriously by media, the arts, and the institutions of our society.

The immanent floor has become so hostile to the upper transcendent story that it even erects what Taylor and Smith call a *brass ceiling* above it. In other words, there is no connection allowed between the two stories. It is a way of excluding “a vision of life in which anything beyond the immanent is eclipsed” (Smith, pp. 22-23). By “eclipsed” these authors mean blotted out, like an eclipse of the sun by the moon. The immanent floor eclipses the transcendent historic Christian perspective by making it socially unacceptable through the arts, the media, and popular leaders. Those considered authoritative in the lower story close off the transcendent by not allowing the Biblical view to be represented in the institutions of society. For example, a Christian professor and head of a chemistry department at a major state university in Texas recently told me, “If I talk about the God of the Bible to my students it’s cause for my losing tenure.” Yet other religious viewpoints and worldviews are allowed on campuses.

All the while our culture is told the immanent closed world structure with its brass ceiling contesting and eclipsing the transcendent makes way for a new progressive society. But in fact, it is regressive. C.S. Lewis wrote a book about this false notion of progress almost a hundred years ago called, *Pilgrim’s Regress*. The underlying theme of Lewis’ insightful book is that early Christians were the ones who brought the real progressive new world of God’s Kingdom. The 6th century early church father, St. Maximus the Confessor, explained how the unchanging Jesus Christ introduces true progress. He found the basis for this Biblical understanding in the Lord’s statement, “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me,” and in Jesus’ application of the same kind of relational union to His disciples (John 14:11, 20). Beginning with

the relationship between the Father and Christ, Maximus described this dynamic union of one in the other with a Greek theological term *ekstasis*. It's a compound of "being" (stasis) and "out of or from" (ek) meaning to pour out. For Jesus to be in the Father and the Father in Him, and yet each remain His own Person, Maximus explained it as a pouring out of one into the other. Mystically the Persons of the Godhead are in each other without being dissolved. It's like the diagram sometimes used to depict the Holy Trinity with three overlapping circles all connecting but remaining distinct. For St. Maximus, this pouring out of one Divine Person into the other is ecstasy without any sexual or carnal meaning.

Moving from His relationship with the Father, Jesus applies the same description of ecstatic union with His disciples. The Lord adds, "In that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me and I in you" (John 14:20). Maximus observed that Christ uses the identical language of His ecstatic outpouring out, He in His Father and the Father in Him, to describe His union with the disciples. He is in *them*, and *they* are in Him. Based on the same Scripture, Archbishop Cranmer crafts an identical kind of phrase found in our Book of Common Prayer service of Holy Communion, "He in us and we in Him."

For St. Maximus, however, Christ's ecstatic outpouring of relationship in His disciples leads to a Christian understanding of true progress. The Son of God is eternal. If He is in His disciples and they are in Him, His relationship ecstatically pours the eternal into them and their world. And with it the everlasting future is interjected into the present. It's called the "life of the world to come." Eternal life in Jesus Christ is the true future for the present world. It is real progress! Therefore, Christians with the correct Biblical understanding of progress should not let exclusive secularism trick them into thinking that they are not progressive. Secularism may offer some kind of future, but it is not progress. It is regress, to use C.S. Lewis' brilliant description. It's old, not new. The false view of progress plunges the world into regression every single time that it repeats itself in history. Rather, St. Paul says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). When Christ comes, the true future follows with His new creation of progress. Yet He and His Word never change. In the words of a hymn in the new REC hymnal, "Not by the wisdom of this world" (#531), the last line is, "As then, as now, as evermore."

Sadly, there are many Christians in the West who have been deceived into thinking that they are not the true progressives. The secular worldview seemingly offers progress with its unbiblical inclusivist ideas, models of social justice, and postmodern redefinitions of morality. Some Christians have been tempted with and taken in bits and pieces of the secular by doing its "laundry," as the late 20th century Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer used that image. By trying to clean secular laundry so that Christians may wear a synergized or mixed worldview, they believe they can better win over the secularist. Yet, not realizing that the new secularism is the old, exclusivist version that doesn't allow the Christian worldview, they are overcome by it rather than vice versa. This is nothing new. Tertullian in the 2nd century said, "What indeed does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" Early Christian defenders of the Faith like him concluded that the Biblical worldview is unraveled with attempts to weave truth with the secular. These early church fathers noted how the prophets of Israel in the Old Testament brought covenant lawsuit from God against His people because they comingled beliefs of the gods and cultures around them with the teachings of the Scriptures. In doing so they became like the pagan culture rather than the other way around. Israel ceased being the light to lighten the Gentiles. The opposite happened. Their synergistic worship and secular worldview dimmed the true Light of Scripture.

No doubt many early Christian theologians used secular paradigms for apologetic purposes. They were able to recognize where the secular had true insights by General Revelation. And their revelations pointed to the veracity of God and His Word, where they could be found in purest form. God's Scriptural and creedal theology even resolved what the secular could not. This approach can still be effective. Yet we

must remember that some early theologians and others through Church history leaned too far into the secular. We see repeatedly that the uniqueness of the Trinitarian worldview expressed in Scripture and the catholic creeds and councils is eventually excluded by the unholy. The secular is not after all inclusive. With a synergism leading to a false inclusivity, whole churches and denominations have collapsed into secularism in our lifetimes. You'll notice that once this happens, those churches striving to be contemporary with post modernity and allegedly inclusive begin to exclude those who hold to Biblical and traditional theology and morality - they end up becoming post-modern, truly. Reform by going back to the sources becomes necessary as St. Augustine explained: "God's Son assuming Humanity without destroying Divinity established and founded this faith, that there might be a way for man to man's God by God's man."

Charles Taylor says in his analysis of the postmodern secular exclusivist age that it is "unique." In one regard he's correct. In the last two centuries atheistic movements such as Fascism and Communism have arisen that attempted to blot out completely any reference to the transcendent God and His followers. In seeming contrast, the Greeks on Mars Hill to whom St. Paul preached had their gods and belief in "universal ideals." They alleged both to be transcendent. In some sense they were, but as the apostle reveals, these "universal ideals" and their gods were in fact only false versions of real transcendence. Where the early cultures of the first three centuries and ours do meet and are similar, however, is in their exclusive rejection of the transcendence of Jesus Christ and His Word. Those on Mars Hill for the most part rejected the apostle's message, as our contemporary culture does today. To borrow Taylor's and Smith's description of our exclusivist secularism —the Athenian Greeks eclipsed St. Paul. But the message of St. the apostle did finally penetrate their secular culture over time. He and other Christians following him did it with what I am calling, *The Complete Gospel for the Age of Exclusive Secularism*.

### **The Exhortations**

By way of introduction to St. Paul's sermon, note that the context of Mars Hill was a closed but strategic world. The hill itself represented the best of thinking and culture of the whole Greco-Roman world. The place itself rose 377 feet above sea level overlooking the terrain around. It was situated near the Acropolis and Agora (the marketplace). It was named after a Greek god named Ares, or Mars. He was the god of war. This location according to Greek mythology was allegedly where Mars had been put on trial by the other gods for murdering the son of Poseidon, the god of the sea. Mars Hill was also where the Areopagus Court was held. It was considered the highest tribunal for civil, criminal, and religious proceedings. Philosophy, law, and religion merged in this court. But in the final analysis, this was an exclusivist secular culture that remained extremely resistant to the Gospel for three centuries.

St. Paul had to present the Gospel with a greater, more fulsome approach, since the culture of Mars Hill lacked any knowledge of Christ and His teachings. Unlike the reduced versions of the Gospel in previous times of our own culture, the apostle offers a more complete presentation based on who God and humanity are, Judgement Day, repentant faith, the uniqueness of Christ's resurrection, and a holy remnant approach to church growth. That's more than a kind of decisionism walking aisles, raising hands, or signing decision cards. In other words, St. Paul's presentation cannot be reduced to little tracts the way the Church in a more Christian culture was able to proclaim the Gospel. I am not entirely critical of such efforts. They were effective at a different time. But as I've attempted to explain, these simplified versions of the Gospel were able to assume basic understandings of God and humanity in a more sympathetic culture that no longer exists in our secular world. Most people in the West before the late 20th century were baptized and held views of the Lord and mankind that allowed for shorter versions of the Gospel. One could start with sin and proceed to Christ as the answer for a presentation of the Gospel. Christ is surely the answer to humanity's greatest needs. But in our current culture much more Biblical truth must

be provided before the deeply held false assumptions blocking a true understanding of God and His salvation can be overcome. Most churches, even the ones known for successful evangelism, only grow by Christians moving from one congregation to another. No one is having much real success at making actual converts of total unbelievers. Though there are exceptions, not many immediate conversions take place with the quick decision approaches. It takes time, patience, and catechesis for true conversions nowadays. To reach lost unbaptized people or those without a background in the church at some point in their life, and some basic knowledge of anything in the Scriptures, it requires the complete Gospel. We should not be discouraged. It was that way once upon a time in the early days of the Church. The good news is that St. Paul in his sermon on Mars Hill shows us the way with his approach to the exclusivist secular culture of his day.

### **“The God Who Is Always Greater”**

St. Paul introduces his sermon by calling his audience to observe the statues to all their gods. He then draws their attention to the one entitled, “To the unknown god” (ESV) (Acts 17:23). The one God they didn’t know was the one God who is the true God. Moreover, he was not saying that his God was in that statue. Rather, all their gods were unknowable. Something about their entire religion and system of belief was impersonal. St. Paul’s God is completely different and unique. To use a line from the great Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, “God is always greater.” In Latin his statement is *Deus non est in genere*. It literally means “God is not generated from creation.” The apostle develops how the Christian God is always greater. Each of his points are my exhortations for us to proclaim the complete Gospel.

#### **1. God Is Always Greater in His Transcendence Above All Other Gods and Religions.**

First, God is transcendent above all other gods and their religions. The basis for the apostle’s argument is the Biblical doctrine of creation. His God is Uncreated having, “made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24-25). The apostle’s assertion is that if God created the world He existed before it. Though He created everything, He is distinct from it. There is a Creator/creature distinction between his God and creation. The God he presents is transcendent and not of the creation. With such a statement, St. Paul directly contradicted the Greeks’ view of matter and their gods. They believed in the eternality of matter. Consequently, their gods were part of and ultimately came from creation. They were proto evolutionists. As matter evolved, so did their gods; they were always changing. St. Paul’s God was totally different. In the words of that powerful 1929 Gospel blues song by Willie Johnson, “God don’t never change.” He is transcendent, above, and distinct from the creation. He is always greater.

Furthermore, God is so great as the Uncreated Creator that He cannot be contained by “temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands. He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” St. Paul’s point is expressed in the service for the *Consecration of a Church* in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The opening prayer says, “O Eternal God, mighty in power, and of majesty incomprehensible, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, much less the walls of the temples made with hands; and who yet hast been graciously pleased to promise thy especial presence, wherever two or three of thy faithful servants shall assemble in thy Name.” The prayer like the Prophets of the Old Testament reminded God’s people that He was so vast only His feet touched the altar. However, He was and can be present in the Biblical houses of worship. It’s that He is bigger than any container whether a temple or a statue. He is not like the Greek gods nor their statues.

The apostle adds, “We ought not to think that the divine being is like gold, or silver, or stone” (v. 29). In other words, God’s Being is not attached to the inanimate apart from His Person. Here is a fundamental

difference between all ancient Greco Roman mystical religions and Christianity. In Holy Scripture, God's Being can only be known through His Person. In mysticism God is believed to be accessed through His Being apart from His Person. The mystical and pagan religions for that matter had no concept of person. Only the teachings of Christianity gave the world an understanding of a human as a person. In the Greco Roman world, a person was merely property. The early church father Tertullian began to use the word *persona* to mean more than an attribute to describe a human. He laid the groundwork for understanding Scriptural teaching of a human as a person and not property. Eventually, this Biblical teaching on person was expressed in the creeds to describe the Three Persons of the Godhead as distinct but not separate from God's Essence. This truth changed the world introducing a concept of "human rights." Therefore, St. Paul's comment about God's Being that is not like "gold, silver, or stone," turns to another way in which God is always greater in His Person as well as in His Being.

## **2. God is Always Greater by His Immanent Person Nearer than all others.**

Secondly, God is greater not only in the way that He is transcendent before and above all things, but also by how He can be immanent, present, and closer than all other gods. St. Paul says, "Yet he [God] is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'" (Acts 17:27-28). The apostle brilliantly reverses the notion that God came from the creation, by quoting one of their own poets. An "offspring" is a human child. The offspring comes from the parent. God is like the parent from whom creation comes. However, if humans are God's offspring, then the apostle's point is that God is a Person to be able to make persons. He is not simply an Uncreated transcendent Being. He is also a Person and able to be near, "not far from each one of us." And if God is a person, then He can be personal. As C.S. Lewis says, "God has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had created." Only the Christian God can be so great in His closeness.

Furthermore, if God is a Person, then He could become human in a way unlike the Greeks believed their emperors or their statues could be gods. The apostle indicates that the Second Person of God became Man. He says, "God will judge the world by a righteous Man whom he has appointed" (v. 31). How could God judge the world by a "Righteous Man" unless He had become Humanity in the Incarnation? Indeed, God and that "Righteous Man" are one in Jesus Christ. Divine Essence is not apart from the Person of Jesus Christ. The Greeks did believe their emperors were divine. But this was not the same as the Incarnation. Their emperors were not sinless. Only the Divine could be united with the sinless Humanity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, only He is God. That is why early Christians refused to call the emperors, "Lord." Also, the Greeks maintained that divine essence could be moved into a statue. However, if divinity could be in an impersonal statue, it was not a person. It remained impersonal. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ is completely different. He is the only One who is infinitely personal because He is the eternal Second Person of God.

Therefore, in our exclusivist secular culture so much like St. Paul's world, we should no longer begin our Gospel presentations with only the atonement of Christ. We need to move from God's transcendence in creation to the Incarnation to explain Christ's death. This is St. John's approach in his Gospel written to Greeks. He starts with, "In the beginning was the Word; the Word was with God because the Word was God" (1:1). Fourteen verses later he says, "The Word became flesh" (1:14). St. John's account of the Incarnation became a model for the early church fathers. St. Athanasius wrote a classic work *On the Incarnation*. He began the first chapter of the book, however, with the doctrine of creation. He moved from creation to Incarnation to explain the Gospel to a resistant culture. St. Athanasius wrote, "The Self-revealing [Uncreated] Word is in every dimension: above creation; below in the Incarnation; in depth in Hades; in breadth throughout all the world." We must do the same.

Anglicanism is a model of the Gospel as Incarnation. Horton Davies, who wrote on the history of the liturgy, stated that there are only two ways of doing theology: by the Incarnation and by the Atonement. Anglicanism does both but via the Incarnation. The *Litany of the Book of Common Prayer* is an example. It presents an Incarnational view of salvation that includes the death of Christ. However, the death of Christ is understood within the fullness of the Incarnation. The *Litany* says, “By the Mystery of the Incarnation.” It then proceeds to specify the major events in the Life of Christ from His nativity, circumcision, baptism, fasting and so forth to His death, resurrection, and ascension. After each line the refrain is, “Good Lord deliver us.” The theology of this prayer is that all of the particular events in Christ’s Incarnation are part of our salvation. Each reveals the cross and the cross includes Christ’s whole life. It is this incarnational approach to presenting the Gospel that is critically necessary for an exclusivist secular culture to understand the great, vast, transcendent God who is also Person “not far from us.”

We live in an impersonal world in need of the personal God, the Lord Jesus Christ. It must have the entire story of the Incarnation to understand God as personal. Our culture has become impersonal by closing out God. It has also dehumanized humanity through the slaughter of the unborn and willingness to have any end justify the means for eliminating humans young and old. It is increasingly becoming a culture of cyber-space where in-person presence is decreasing. We’re told Artificial Intelligence could threaten the very existence of humans. God will not allow such an end, but our culture needs the hope of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Only by explaining and teaching the Incarnation will people be able to grasp the reason for Christ’s death. This is what the early Christian Evangelists did in their Gospels. What a novel idea, we should present the Gospel of the Incarnation of Christ the way they did.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, “Lying at your feet is your dog. Imagine, for the moment, that your dog and every dog is in deep distress. Some of us love dogs very much. If it would help all the dogs in the world to become like men, would you be willing to become a dog? Would you put down your human nature, leave your loved ones, your job, hobbies, your art and literature and music, and choose instead of the intimate communion with your beloved, the poor substitute of looking into the beloved’s face and wagging your tail, unable to smile or speak? Christ by becoming man limited the thing which to Him was the most precious thing in the world; his unhampered, unhindered communion with the Father.” Every event in Christ’s life tells of His sacrifice. His whole Incarnation “exegetes the Father,” as St. John says, and becomes a commentary for Christ’s own death (John 1:18). In a world that is no longer baptized and raised in the Church, people need the whole story to understand the singular purpose for it. However, St. Paul’s Gospel message from creation to the Incarnation brings him to the third aspect of his complete Gospel, humanity, to develop further how God is always greater.

### **3. God is always greater in creating Humanity One Blood by which Christ Reunites it**

Thirdly, God is always greater by making humans one blood by which He can reunite them through Christ. St. Paul now turns to the subject of humanity from the issue of who God is. This topic is equally critical to the complete Gospel. Christ became human to save humanity. The apostle therefore must prove that Christ was fully human. He says, “And he [God] made from one man [blood] every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps search for him and find him” (Acts 17:26-27). Whether the word translated “man” means one “blood” as other translations render it, the point is still the same. The meaning is that all humans are descended from Adam, the first human. Whatever blood ran through his veins continues in every nation or race of the earth. No matter what race everyone has the same blood. Regardless of the color of our skin, human blood is red. That’s the apostle’s argument.

To prove his one-blood point the apostle reaches back to the Tower of Babel without mentioning it. He refers to how God formed the “periods and boundaries of their dwelling place,” that is the nations. This event took place at the Tower of Babel. Genesis tells us that all people regardless of race joined together to overthrow God’s kingdom with an evil tower into heaven. As a result, God brought it down and confused their languages. His purpose was salvific. By this means God inhibited the peoples of the world from creating a false unity of a one-world government to exclude God. The Lord, however, had His own non-political plan for how the races of the world would be reunited through His only Begotten Son. St. Paul explains God’s purpose for partitioning humanity into nations, “that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him” (17:24). The Lord’s plan was salvific. He not only wanted to prevent the nations from ever attempting to unite against God, but the Lord desired for them to learn from this judgement to seek Him. Furthermore, in the chapters of Genesis following the Tower of Babel, God calls Abraham to the Land of Canaan and promises a seed to save the nations (Genesis 12-15). The promise to the patriarch was fulfilled in Christ.

St. Paul speaks of the “righteous Man whom God has appointed” (17:31). The apostle wants his hearers to see the connection between the “one blood” of all people and this “righteous Man.” He is Jesus Christ. He has the same “blood” as every human, but His blood is different. It is “righteous,” sinless. It cleanses all humans for their salvation regardless of race. His sinless blood is also the only way to reunite the races. The apostle says in his letter to the Church in Ephesus, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the *blood of Christ*. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility . . . that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Ephesians 2:13-17; Italics mine).

This message of the unity of humanity in one blood and reunification through Christ’s blood is integral to the Gospel. Only Jesus Christ, not another religion or secular worldview, has ever been able to overcome racism. Successful Christian efforts have been exemplified by valiant leaders like William Wilberforce in 19th century England and Martin Luther King Jr. in 20th century America. Both men were dynamic Christians. One was a white layman and the other was a black minister. Their message was the same. By a non-violent and Biblical model of peace through the Gospel, they were instrumental in their day in making slavery illegal in one case and in bringing greater peace between the races in the other. No doubt much remains to be done for the races to love one another and better work together. But the successful work of Christians who have gone before to bring racial peace and harmony can only be completed in the Gospel and not with secular approaches. Capitulating to the current culture’s un-Christian, anti-Biblical, evolutionary views cannot move the hearts of humans to love one another or overcome racial or any other differences. We’re seeing the failure of these approaches without the Gospel that are stirring up even greater racial turmoil in our culture. Only Jesus Christ is the “way, the truth, and the life” who can unite the races! The Reformed Episcopal Church is a testimony to this as I look out onto a sea of multi-ethnic faces united in Christ’s Word and Sacrament. With God’s help we must never lose this witness nor the message of Christ who alone can draw all races into union in His Church and to much needed peace among peoples throughout the world.

The apostle’s definition of humanity as one blood, however, reveals that humans are who God says they are, “one blood.” The Greeks did not believe all humans were the same in essence. They saw all other races as barbarians. In other words, the Greeks believed that they were a pure race and blood different from all the other races. Essentially, they were racists, believing they were superior to all other humans. St. Paul’s statement therefore ran contrary to their view of humanity. He was calling them to the Righteous Man. Just as the Gospel declares who God is, it also defines humanity. St. Paul had to explain who humanity is,

for the Greeks to understand who humanity is and ultimately to understand Jesus Christ in His Humanity. The same need is particularly true in our culture.

The apostle in this third part of his sermon addressed what in theology is called anthropology, the doctrine of humanity. Anthropology has become the primary Biblical and theological issue of our day. It is critical to the correct view of the Gospel. If humanity is not who God says it is, then neither is sin. God's righteous standard ceases to be absolute and humans define sin according to their own standard. Furthermore, if humanity is not according to God's definition, Christ in His Humanity is not the one "righteous Man" necessary for the rescue of humans from their sin. Therefore, St. Paul for the sake of the Gospel had to define humanity according to God's interpretation of it.

God's original created design of humans is defined in the early chapters of Genesis. We read, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . . male and female made he them in his image' (1:26-27). Humans in two and only two genders are uniquely imago Dei, the image of the Triune God. There are no other genders according to Scripture or the biological DNA that God put in man. There is no "it," only male or female gender given by God from the moment of conception. Gender cannot be altered into another gender. Humanity can only be what God made it, nothing more and nothing less. Carl Trueman from Grove City College writes regarding transgenderism in his book, *The Rise and Triumph of Modern Self*, "[Here is] a view of personhood that has completely dispensed with the idea of any authority beyond that of personal, psychological conviction, an oddly Cartesian notion: 'I think [or feel] I'm a woman, therefore I am a woman.'" Trueman correctly observes that humans cannot remake themselves contrary to God's image simply because they think or feel it. I would add that not even ghastly cruel surgical procedures can change a person's gender. What is altered on the exterior of a human body cannot change the interior DNA God made at conception.

Furthermore, to attempt to be another sex different from what God made a person is sin. Scripture says that men should not seek to be nor dress like women and vice versa. The Word of God concludes that "whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord" (Deuteronomy 22:5). Humans lost in their dysphoria need Jesus Christ.

What should be the Church's response? While acknowledging that Scripture prohibits such behavior, we must nevertheless "love the sinner while not condoning the sin." The Word of God says, "there is no condemnation in Christ." No matter what the wrong, we are commanded by Christ to love every sinner with His transforming love. Christ died for them and the whole world of sinners like you and me. Based on His love, we are called to be Good Samaritans reaching out with God's love to broken and disordered people. Many that have been misled into an attempt to alter their gender are in need of spiritual and psychological healing and restoration. We must be willing to bandage their wounds with Christ's true charity so much at the heart of the Gospel. Even more, like the Good Samaritan we should be prepared to carry the disordered after giving them the healing balm of Christ, to places of help and provide for pastoral and psychological care.

Furthermore, while meeting those in gender dysphoria with Christ's compassion, we must lovingly help them also to see that much more is at stake with this issue than a personal preference. C.S. Lewis, the great Anglican scholar and apologist, wrote in his classic, *The Abolition of Man*, "For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, . . . the power of some men to make other men what they please." Lewis insightfully observes that if such transgendered social views are embraced by an entire culture, those in seats of power can begin to believe they may do what they please with any human. It happened in Europe in the 20th century during the tyrannical reign of the Third Reich in Germany. Now, in the Post WWII West this horrid path has been further pursued with the immoral legalization of killing the unborn

child. The trail to greater evil will be even more possible with powerful new Artificial Intelligence technology in the wrong, wicked hands. How will those who write the software for A.I. define a human? If the question is answered according to an exclusivist secularism's definition, the world will see the slaughter of the innocents the likes of which it has never encountered before. It will not only be unborn children, but both young and old whom powerful men make "what they please" will be disfigured and destroyed. And Christians will become a primary target for evil men to "make what they please."

The issue of who and what a human is, has always been critical to explain the Gospel. Sin consistently manifests itself in human history in gender and sexuality related issues. Ancient societies have struggled with them. Gender dysphoria is nothing new. Yet, for humans to be saved, they must come to see their need for a Savior. The need is sin, but it is often deeply rooted in the distortion and disordering of the human person, the doctrine of anthropology. The Good News is that God's salvation can overcome any sinful human condition. However, as Biblical and Church history illumines, He can and has irrupted into history to judge nations when their sinfulness threatens the existence of all humanity and especially His people. He did with all the ancient Greco Roman Empire. He did no less in WWI and II in countries like Germany and Japan. Furthermore, Christ will someday return at the end of all history to judge the "quick and the dead" as we confess in the Catholic Creeds. This too is another way in which we see that God is always greater.

#### **4. God is Always Greater by His Ultimate Judgement of Humanity**

Fourthly, I exhort us to include in the Gospel, as St. Paul did, the judgement of God to explain how He is always greater. He is the only One who can, does, and will bring ultimate and final accountability for all humanity. The apostle says, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17: 30-31). The "Righteous Man," as St. Paul says, will judge the world at the last day. The apostle weaves judgement into the Gospel. There will be a judgement day for all. Jesus says of this day,

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . . Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" . . . And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Matthew 25:31-46).

Like our culture, the Greeks knew little of this kind of judgement. They realized that the gods could become angry and issue a temporary or local judgement but not a universal day of reckoning. St. Paul's Greek audience surely ruled out the possibility of their closed world coming to an end. The Roman Empire was so great at the time of St. Paul's ministry that they couldn't conceive of it collapsing; but it did. The Greeks did not want to hear of the kind of righteousness he presented. Greek philosophers did teach about the need for a partial righteousness called the "philosophical virtues" of wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage. Basic virtue was actually what most of these philosophies attempted to restore. But St. Paul talked about the righteousness of the Man Jesus Christ that required so much more. The righteousness of Christ not only reveals the philosophical virtues, but the Biblical and theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The Greeks knew nothing of these greater virtues. They were trapped in fear of awful gods with their limited virtues without faith in the One, True, God who is always greater. St. Paul

offered them the righteousness of Christ that saves from sin, death, and judgement unto an eternal life of faith, hope, and love.

Our secular exclusivist world has adopted a completely different view. Where there is a belief in judgement, it is not the righteousness or virtues of the Scriptures. Current views of ethics do not even include the ancient Greeks' understanding of the four great virtues. The postmodern re-defines virtue in terms of an evolutionary view of social justice, political views of socialism and communism, and climate control. While it is important to be a good steward of the environment, this is not what leads to heaven. Nor is climate the ultimate judgement of the world. God said that He would never again allow a flood to cover the earth. On the Great day of Judgement, God is not going to ask, "Did you purchase an electric car to help the climate?" He's not even going to ask what political party we joined. Rather, God's penetrating queries will be according to the ethical standard of the Righteous Man, Jesus Christ. Without an understanding of true righteousness required by God and ultimate accountability to Him, exclusive secularism has no sense of a final Judgement Day or having to face God on it. We live in the midst of a lost culture without true hope. This hope can be found, however, in Jesus Christ and His righteousness alone.

Biblically, the message of hope in the Gospel involves rescue from sin, death, and judgment. Not surprisingly, all the great, historic revivals and reformations in Church history have included preaching on the judgment of God. For example, In the first Great Awakening of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jonathan Edwards delivered a famous sermon entitled *Sinners in the Hands of Angry God*. In it he used a powerful image to communicate the fragility of human life before the judgement of God. He stated that a human hangs over the pit of hell like a spider suspended from a thin thread of its web. The postmodern Church rejects such emphases on the judgement of God. It typically does not include the judgement of God in the message of the Gospel. Unfortunately, it does not mention God's judgement because the postmodern approach to the Gospel most often builds its message on some kind of market analysis of what humans prefer to hear. The result is concentration on making "me" feel better. It's the Gospel of "Meism." Such a focus on the present benefits for "me" neglects the more important eternal one, salvation from the judgement of God. The marketing approaches correctly perceive, however, that those in need of conversion don't want to hear of a final judgement day. Are we surprised? Has it ever been any different in the history of humanity? Of course humans in sin don't want to hear about their eternal end and accountability. That doesn't mean they shouldn't or do not need to have preaching and teaching about their end without Christ. Anthony Esolen in his important book *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* says that the faithful ministers of God must be "tellers of the truth again – and people must be willing to hear truths, even when it hurts to hear them." Unfortunately, since the postmodern church will not allow the Gospel truth of God's judgement into the message, universalism, the heresy that all will be saved out of hell at the end of the world, is having a resurgence. Such an insidious evil teaching not only removes any sense of ultimate consequence, but it also destroys the need to evangelize. This has always been the fate of the false teaching of universalism. Why would the church preach the Gospel of eternal salvation if everyone in the end will be saved?

In addition, the absence of teaching on the judgement of God in the postmodern church combined with a faulty once-saved- always-saved approach removes ultimately any motivation to live virtuously in this life. Current discipleship approaches hardly if ever teach the need for true virtue so essential to real faith required by God on Judgement Day. Today there is typically no reference to the classic teaching of the church fathers and the Middle Ages on the seven deadly sins or vices, or even the seven virtues. According to a 19th-century Danish Christian philosopher, the basis for a life transformed into virtue in Christ begins with belief in the judgement of God. Søren Kierkegaard once said of his secularist culture, "The beyond, and with it the judgement [of God], has become a joke, something so uncertain that one is amused

to think that there was a time in which this idea transformed the whole of human existence.” The judgement of God is not a joke, nor is it only an idea, as we confess in the catholic creeds. It is an event as certain as night follows day that will surely come in history. The New Testament says that in our preaching we should prepare people for Christ’s Second Coming on Judgement Day. It’s always near and possible at any moment. At the same time, the judgement of God is never separated from the accompanying Good News of the resurrected Christ in St. Paul’s complete Gospel model that transforms lives.

### **5. God is Always Greater by His Resurrection in Jesus Christ**

Fifthly, I exhort us furthermore to proclaim the Good News of God is always greater by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostle says, “[God] has given assurance to all by raising him [Jesus Christ] from the dead” (Acts 17:31). In this proclamation is also the preaching of the cross. If Christ was raised, He surely also died. However, it’s important to understand that the idea of coming back from the dead, revivification, would have not been entirely new to them. Other religions of the ancient world spoke of resurrection in one form or another. What was new for the Greeks was that the man preaching to them had seen the resurrected Christ. The Christ He saw on Damascus Road was also unique. He was glorified resurrected flesh and blood.

Christ’s physical resurrection was different from the other miraculous ones in Scripture. God had raised people from the dead in the Old Testament. Jesus had raised others such as the widow’s son at Nain and Lazarus. Christ’s resurrection was unique in that He would never die again. He was glorified in His resurrection. He became a transfigured body without losing physicality. St. Paul calls Christ’s resurrected body a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:38). The word spiritual in the New Testament, however, is not detached from the physical. The Greeks and our Enlightenment modern/postmodern world understand “spiritual” as ghostly, ethereal, vaporous and without flesh and bones. The apostle’s Greek listeners couldn’t conceive of a resurrected body like he was describing that was a “spiritual physical body.” They conceived of such a phenomenon as spiritual without the physical. To the contrary, Jesus’ glorified resurrected body could move mysteriously through walls while remaining fully Human, without eliminating the matter of the barriers or His body. He could also eat food proving that His Humanity did not cease to exist. The early church father Irenaeus makes that profound statement against the Gnostics, “Jesus was a Jew.” He meant that Jesus in His Humanity was bodily a Jew before and after He was raised, while also being changed into a glorified Humanity. Christ’s incarnate resurrection completed the new creation in His body that began at His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit in the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The resurrected body of the Lord was physical, but His Humanity became more glorified than ever before. In every miracle (sign) Jesus performed, and especially in his transfiguration on the mountain when His body radiated the Light of His glory, the veil between heaven and earth had been lifted and the disciples had been given a glimpse of the Light of His glory. These events were only previews of what was to come. When Jesus was raised from the dead, however, His glory was released like never before. His glorified flesh the apostle describes as a “spiritual body” in his first Letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:44). He had similarly used the same Greek word earlier in the tenth chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians. He says referring to Israel in the wilderness, “For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (vv. 3-5). This reference was the only way the apostle could describe the mysterious relationship of Christ with the physical. He does the same with reference to the Lord’s resurrection body and His union with other humans believing in Him. This relationship with the glorified Humanity of Christ explained their change through His resurrection.

Jesus Christ's resurrection was the beginning of what changed the world. St. John revealed God becoming Man as the Uncreated New Creation. The Incarnation was therefore a new creation. But the mission of the Incarnation was not completed until Christ's resurrection declared victory over sin, judgement, and death. His resurrection brings about the new creation of the world and of all those who are in Christ. The glorified change of His resurrection changes people who believe in Him to become like Him. St. Paul's argument in his great chapter on the resurrection leads to his conclusion that all those trusting in Him will also receive resurrected bodies like His (1 Corinthians 15:52-56). As St. Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). God is always greater as the resurrected Christ truly changes lives.

The changing of the world started with the apostles including St. Paul. From fearful, doubting and even betraying disbelievers, they were transformed into new creations of bold witness willing to die for Christ. This good news of a changed life into a new creation by the power of the transfigured, glorified Christ continued in history to be part of the powerful Gospel claim. In the 5th century St. Augustine writes in his classic, *Confessions*:

I was weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when I heard the voice of children from a neighboring house chanting, "take up and read; take up and read" . . . I arose, interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open [the Bible] and read the first chapter I should find . . . I seized, opened, and in silence read . . . : "Not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." No further would I read, nor did I need to. For instantly at the end of this sentence, it seemed as if a light of serenity infused into my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

St. Paul's message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals the way of changed lives. It is still the great message of hope we can bring to our exclusivist secular culture even though it resists. Such rejection happened to St. Paul. At Mars Hill, we learn, "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead some mocked" while others said, "we will hear you again about this" (Acts 17:32). The Holy Spirit cannot be "cancelled" by human rejection. God was on the move as He always is with the proclamation of the complete Gospel. He can penetrate any closed world of exclusive secularism. It can happen again today in our resistant culture. Yet in the face of a challenging culture, it will not take place by dumbing down Christianity. We can only see true converts with what the apostle calls *repentant faith*.

## **6. God is Always Greater by His Call to Repentant Faith**

Sixthly, I exhort us to call all people to a repentant faith by the God who is always greater. St. Paul says, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). We're also told at the end of his sermon, "But some men joined him and believed" (Acts 17:34). Faith was not disconnected from repentance. The Gospels and the New Testament connect the two. John the Baptist and Jesus Christ both said, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." On many occasions they also said, "Believe." The words "repent and believe" are interchangeable as one includes the other. True Biblical faith consists of repentance. It is more than changing the mind. Repentance is a "decision of the whole man to turn around" (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol 1, p. 358). Patrick Morley says in his book, *I Surrender*, that to "add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin . . . is [the false notion of] a change in belief without a change in behavior." St. Paul's letters to the churches in the New Testament bears out the connection between faith and virtue. In nearly, every epistle the first half is about issues of faith. The second half always turns to moral behavior. His message is that there is no true confession of faith without change in character. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor and

scholar martyred for his faith in World War II, said, “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, [and] absolution without personal confession.” Cheap grace without repentance explains why the statistics of behavior inside the Church are not measurably different from those in society today. Jesus expressed the path of repentant faith: “Small is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life.” He adds, “Few enter by it” (Matthew 7:14). We deceive ourselves if we think that God grants exceeding grace while demanding little obedience. Jesus preceded His statement with, “wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter by it” (v. 13). Only a “few” with true repentant faith responded to St. Paul’s sermon. They became part of a holy remnant.

## **7. God Is Always Greater by Reaching the World Through a Holy Remnant**

Finally, St. Paul’s Gospel message of God is always greater exhorts us to adopt his holy remnant approach to growing the Church. We read in our text that, “some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (Acts 17:34). Note that our passage says, “some” followed St. Paul. The apostle’s model in building God’s Kingdom was not based on crowds, the so called “big church.” Yet, that doesn’t necessarily mean big is bad. The Book of Acts tells us there were over three thousand in the Church in Jerusalem, but even this three thousand was a remnant. The remnant response was much smaller when the Gospel spread into the exclusive secularist, more hostile environment of the Roman Empire. Whether big or small, the Biblical principle is to reach the masses through a holy remnant. It’s not vice versa. Even when the Gospel is preached to the masses, it still only comes about by finding the holy remnant, and then discipling them to reach the world. This is what St. Paul did.

The important 20th century Anglican monk and writer on spirituality, Martin Thornton, develops how church growth begins by finding and building up the holy remnant within each congregation. He contrasts the holy remnant model with what he called, “multitudinarianism.” He observed, “The trouble with the multitudinist congregation is that it consists of one fairly strong man struggling with hundreds of paralytics. The strongest priest can do nothing without the Remnant. You cannot carry a stretcher by yourself.” So, we too should have the same strategy for cultivating a holy remnant in our parishes. Some call it discipleship. Thornton also speaks of St. Benedict’s ancient model of establishing the *regula*, the rule, as the foundation for cultivating a holy remnant. The rule of faith consists of the Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer, private Bible study and devotion, and weekly communion. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer embedded this model of spirituality in the Book of Common Prayer. These offices begin the prayer book. Peter Adam in his concise but insightful book, *Living the Trinity*, explains how all three offices form a balanced Trinitarian life. The Daily Offices emphasize the transcendence of God the Father. Holy Communion offers the Son, Jesus Christ. Private devotion renews us daily with the Holy Spirit. It is by entering the full life of the Blessed Trinity that the Holy Remnant is shaped into a vital witness for the Gospel from less to more. The masses are reached through a holy remnant properly formed in the parish church. As the early church fathers and the reformers said, “If you will not have the Church as your mother, you cannot have God as your Father.”

## **Conclusion**

My brothers and sisters, I have offered us good news following the wisdom of Luther’s words, “fight where the world and the devil are at that moment attacking.” Remember that the Church has been at a “moment” of exclusive secularism before. St. Paul preached the complete Gospel to his secular world. His model was followed in the first three centuries of Christianity. Church fathers returned to the Scriptures as they stood on the shoulders of earlier saints. Over a millennium later our English Reformers adopted the motto

ad fontes, “back to the sources,” to address 16th century problems. They returned to the Scriptures and the early church fathers. The same sources are equally relevant for our day on our different battlefields.

Other good news is that there remains a holy remnant of God’s people to stand together to contest the closed world culture with the complete Gospel. The REC is still part of this holy remnant thanks be to God. But we are not the only ones. There are other baptized believers who in that wonderful expression of Bishop Cummins’ catholicity, “love our Divine Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” We allow them to commune with us and we with them at the Lord’s Table. Yet, for the first time in our history, we have been able since 2009 to extend even more deeply this catholicity into our own Anglican family of the Anglican Church in North America and the Global South; catholicity begins at home. Now more than ever since the Church tragically split East and West in A.D. 1054, all true believers must stand together to the greatest extent Biblically possible. We must strive to be one as the Undivided Church once was. Christ’s prayer for unity is not yet fulfilled. Nevertheless, the holy remnant spread across its divisions must bear witness together in Christ. No one denomination by itself can penetrate an exclusivist culture like ours with the Gospel. It will take the whole Catholic Church. As Jesus prays for His people to be “one,” He adds, “that the world might believe” (John 17:21).

The REC has by God’s grace remained devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, the unchangeable Holy Scriptures, and the Great Tradition of the ancient Church in the Anglican Way. We must always with God’s help keep these loyalties. But we can only continue down this old path by going out into the world of exclusive secularism to preach Christ crucified by evangelizing with the complete Gospel. We must recover the missional charism of Anglicanism. Great evangelistic movements for two thousand years have come out of the Anglican Way from the early Celts in Briton to the missionary movements of the last 200 years. We must rediscover this missional DNA by heeding the Gospel compulsion deep within us. This will include planting churches and raising up new converts more than ever before. Restoring this mission vision obligates us to catechize new converts young and old in the Word and Sacrament of the Faith Once Delivered. We will need to train up our children in the way that they should go by building new Christian schools and even colleges to equip youth with a thorough Christian worldview. We will have to expand our theological institutions to equip the next generations of faithful clergy. Early Christians in this country did it before by building all levels of learning committed to the Lord and His Word. It can happen again. But it will only take place when generations in Christ are determined and fully equipped to take every thought captive in and by Him.

The ultimate good news is, as the Medieval theologian said, our “God is always greater.” In the words of that echoing line from Handel’s Messiah, “And He shall reign forever and ever; forever, and ever and ever and ever. Hallelujah!” Amen!

The Most Rev. Ray R. Sutton  
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