



I'm *very* glad we do not get political at St Paul's.

We *are* political at St Paul's. And where we're not, we should be. The question, however, is *how* we are political. It is a matter of "strategy" versus "tactics." Strategy refers to broad overall goals; tactics refers to the specific means by which we achieve those goals.

It is very much within the Christian Church's competence and responsibility to speak to overall societal goals: for example, equal justice and peace for all people, protection for the innocent and powerless, the opportunity to fulfill the potential which God has placed within each person. All these things are no less than a part of the Baptismal Covenant. The tactics for achieving these goals, on the other hand, are not the corporate competence of the Church. Those tactics almost always involve highly technical and very complex issues that are the area of competence of the best non-partisan, professionally objective, and highly trained sociologists, psychologists, economists, and political scientists.

The competence and responsibility of the Church are (1) to work to keep before the people of the world these strategic goals as commanded by Jesus Christ, (2) to equip each of its members to make carefully intentional and theologically informed judgments and choices, and (3) to continually remind its members of the responsibility that all Christians have as individuals to be conscientiously informed and active members – most especially in a democracy – of the body politic.

When, however, the Church and its leadership involve themselves corporately in tactics – the specific means of achieving societal goals – they can not only show themselves very publicly to be incompetent, appearing foolishly naive thus destroying their credibility, but can also do serious permanent damage to a society. An example that comes immediately to mind is the Prohibition movement which began in earnest soon after the Civil War and was spearheaded and maniacally driven by the "mainline" WASP church leadership until 1919 when the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted and the Volstead Act passed which implemented it. Balanced and healthy living is a strategic goal that the Church quite rightly promotes; the abuse of anything is directly contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, when the American WASP church hegemony began "hard ball" involvement in secular politics, the documentable results, the historians tell us, were (1) actually greatly *increasing* the U.S. consumption and abuse of alcohol; (2) creating the economic structure and means for organized crime to become a very successful major U.S. industry, which continues to the present; and (3) creating a general (including most police and many government officials) disregard for the rule of law, a dangerous attitude begun in the 1920's which has also survived widely in U.S. culture to the present.

I have a friend who goes to an "independent" church in [another state]. My friend says that it is Anglican because they use a service booklet they put together using parts of the Book of Common Prayer as a source of some of their services. However this doesn't seem to me to make them authentically Anglican.

As a life-long Episcopalian your intuitive sense is absolutely correct. First, the fundamental *sine qua non* of being Anglican is being in Full Communion with the See of Canterbury and being recognized as Anglican by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Your friend's "independent" church, of course, is not.

Second, like the Early Christian – the original – Church, for both Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of prayer [is] the law of belief). That is, the Church's official Catholic liturgy is the Church's official

statement of doctrine (theological belief and teaching).^{*} All of the “independent” and breakaway groups are “confessional,” that is, have free-standing “confessions of faith,” most often their own Calvinist Protestant interpretations of the Articles of Religion (“The Thirty-nine Articles”) which is a 16th Century English legal document written to determine legal compliance in England-only with the secular “Elizabethan Settlement,” and which was never intended to be an ecclesiastical theological definition at all. Therefore the theology of these “independent” churches is not Anglican.

Third, the Book of Common Prayer is not merely a collection of liturgies bound together in one codex. It is the official Anglican *Regula* or “rule of life” that comes directly from *The Rule of St Benedict* (c. 540). This is the foundational formative influence which created the spirituality and culture of Anglicanism that was the result of almost a thousand years (597-1536) of the overwhelming influence of Benedictine and Cistercian monasticism in English secular cathedral and parish church life. This is a monastic spirituality and culture that is rooted and centered in the Mass; the Divine Office (since 1549 required-for-clerics Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer with optional Noonday Office and Compline); and Devotions (that is, individual prayer: *responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words*, BCP page 856). This, and this alone, is authentic Anglicanism. It is quite different spirituality and culture from – and produces an extremely different life than – an “independent” church that “uses [merely if and as they choose] a service booklet they put together using parts of the Book of Common Prayer as a source of some of their services.”

You have said on a number of occasions that our mission and ministry as Christians is that of the first Christian, the Blessed Virgin Mary: loving and caring presence, intercession, and mediating God’s Grace. What exactly do you mean by that?

Recently I was talking with Barbara Bower Schuessler, a life-long parishioner who has served a number of terms as a Vestryman and a Churchwarden and who is a Director of St Paul’s Foundation. Barbara expressed her conviction that St Paul’s Social Ministry must always be a direct personal ministry to God’s people, never “just throwing money at a need.” It was no surprise to me that Barbara’s perceptive theological sense was right on target, that she fully understood the difference between ministry in the Name of the Triune God and secular social action, even that done by Christians through the Church. In the future this distinction will be even more important at St Paul’s inasmuch as the Foundation will be the recipient of a substantial (seven figures) endowment for assisting the poorest of the poor through Anglican agencies throughout the world with first consideration to go for the greatest needs in the Third World.

The theological foundation of this crucial distinction between social ministry and secular-social-action/charity is the ministry of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the (both maternal and prototype) Mother of the Church: the first Christian and now the first among the Saints. Mary’s ministry is individual and three-fold. It has three inseparable facets: (1) loving and caring presence; (2) continual intercession; and (3) mediating God’s Grace ... as the Archangel Gabriel declared, She is full of Grace, and She gives to all of God’s children as She Herself has been given.

As the first Christian, Mary’s ministry is the prototype of the ministry each of us was called to by God at our Baptism. Like Mary, we are called by God, not to do things *to* people, but to do things *with* people as we do things for them. Our ministry to others is to be, like Mary’s, a loving and genuinely caring presence to them personally. Without continual intercession for them – prayer to the Father, through the Son, by means of the power of the Holy Spirit, just as Mary prays continually for each of us individually – what we do, no matter how beneficial, cannot be true ministry. And, like Mary, we are to mediate to others the Grace of God that we ourselves have been given. As historic Catholic theology teaches, genuine Christian life and ministry is “mutual mediation.”

^{*}The statements of dogma (the official and binding explanation of doctrine) are the decrees of the “Ecumenical” or “General” Councils of all the Bishops world-wide validly ordained in the Apostolic Succession of the undivided Universal Church. In addition to the original Apostolic Council of Jerusalem, there were seven, the last in A.D. 787.