

Renewal Past and Present

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Why renewal? Because the Christian church has been around for over 2,000 years, renewal becomes necessary as each generation must once again claim the faith for itself, but also must address the changes and challenges of a surrounding culture that may or may not be sympathetic to the Christian gospel. As the upcoming generation encounters the challenges of its own culture, it has to be faithful not only to what has come before, but also to address new challenges in new ways.

A renewal movement took place in the Episcopal Church in the 1970's that had its roots in the charismatic movement that began in the 1960's, characterized by the experience in mainline Protestant denominations of charismatic gifts that earlier had been characteristic of Pentecostalism. The renewal emphasized an experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in worship that had been lacking in mainline denominations.

This renewal movement has continued to have an influence on the contemporary church. Many later church leaders got their starts or came to faith then. Charismatic renewal had a significant effect on styles of (contemporary) worship music. Within Anglican and Episcopal circles, charismatics are regularly included as one of the "three streams" of conservative Anglicanism identified as not only Evangelical

and Catholic, but now also Charismatic.

While this renewal movement of the 1970s played a significant role in bringing revitalization within the mainline churches, it was only one of several renewal movements of the previous century. In what follows, I will mention three other renewal movements, and how they led me to become an Anglican.

Contemporaneous with charismatic renewal was the rise of "Evangelicalism" (as distinct from Fundamentalism) in denominations that were predominantly baptistic or revivalist, – "born again" Christianity. Evangelicalism likely reached its cultural high point when Newsweek recognized the election of Jimmy Carter as President by designating 1975 as the "Year of the Evangelicals."

During my high school and college undergraduate years, my family were members of an Evangelical megachurch with a large youth group that became the center of my social circle. While other teenagers went to prom or played high school sports, I spent my time with my church friends. It was through this youth group that I became convinced that I had a vocation to some kind of Christian ministry, and I ended up doing my undergraduate studies at a local Evangelical liberal arts college. My Evangelical upbringing gave me a spirituality that focused on a "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ, a knowledge of and love for the Bible, and a way of responding to certain types of worship. Hymns like "Amazing Grace" still move me in ways that are hardly rational.

A second renewal movement took place during the twentieth century in the area of academic theology. The Reformed theologian Karl Barth introduced a Trinitarian and Christocentric focus into systematic theology. In biblical studies, the "biblical theology" movement corrected a one-sided emphasis on historical-critical readings with demands for a theological reading of Scripture. Historical theology brought fresh readings of significant theological figures such

as the church fathers, Medievals like Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, and the Protestant Reformers. A liturgical renewal movement studied the history of worship, produced liturgical theologies influenced by the new developments in biblical, historical, and systematic theology, and created new worship texts in mainline denominations. In the area of Christian ethics, there was a focus on the distinctively biblical foundations of ethics, as well as a rediscovery of virtue ethics.

Some excellent faculty at the college I attended introduced me to what were then new areas of study for Evangelicals, particularly in biblical theology, historical, and systematic theology. When I graduated, I was certain that my vocation to Christian ministry was a vocation to study and teach Systematic Theology, and to share what I learned as my own teachers had shared their knowledge with me.

I came across the third area of renewal while studying for my Master's degree, when I read a series of essays discussing "The Chicago Call" in a book entitled *The Orthodox Evangelicals*, edited by Donald Bloesch and Robert Webber. The "Call" was primarily for Evangelicals to recover their "full Christian heritage," not only in Scripture and the Reformers, but also in the pre-Reformation church. Through my studies, I came to realize that I needed to belong to a church that was not only rooted in Scripture and the Protestant Reformation, but that understood itself in continuity with the pre-Reformation church, was creedal, worshiped liturgically, and celebrated the Eucharist weekly. Shortly after, a friend of mine invited me to attend an evening Eucharist at the local Episcopal cathedral. The bishop, William Frey, described himself as "evangelical," "catholic," and "charismatic." He celebrated that evening in corduroys and a turtle neck sweater, wearing a stole as his only liturgical garment. The handful of us present gathered in a circle in the choir area of the cathedral, shared the host, and handed the chalice from

one to another. (It was not a typical service.) A year later, Bishop Frey confirmed me, and I had become what Robert Webber would describe later as an “Evangelical on the Canterbury Trail.” A few months after my confirmation, Bishop Frey moved to Ambridge, PA, where he became the Dean of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. I moved to South Bend, Indiana, to study for my doctorate at the University of Notre Dame.

It has been four decades since the charismatic and Evangelical renewal movements of the 1970’s. I now teach Systematic Theology at Trinity School for Ministry, and I regularly walk by Bishop Frey’s portrait in a line of photographs of past Dean Presidents on a wall across from the library. My identity as a teacher has largely been formed by those three theological renewal movements that I encountered in my young adulthood: the Evangelical movement, the academic theology movement, and the “Canterbury trail” movement that led so many Evangelicals to find themselves in liturgical churches.

There is a focus on spiritual formation and worship at Trinity now that echoes the spiritual seriousness of the earlier charismatic and Evangelical renewal movements, although the approach is perhaps more distinctly Anglican. Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and weekly Eucharist are at the center of the school’s worship life. Trinity’s faculty find themselves among successors to that earlier movement in academic theology: Biblical studies center on biblical theology; systematic theology and church history focus on the creedal core of trinitarian theology, christology, and the church as not only regenerated individuals, but the corporate community of the body of Christ gathered to worship the Triune God in Word and sacrament. TSM carries on the “Chicago Call” by hosting “The Robert E. Webber Center for an Ancient Evangelical Future.”

The current crop of students were not yet born at the height of the charismatic and Evangelical renewal movements of the 1970’s, and many of them were raised in Evangelical homes where what once was renewal is now “just the way things have

always been done.” While the renewal movements of the 1970’s were in some ways responses to the cultural uncertainties of the 1960’s, the counter-cultural youth movement, and too placid mainline churches, the generation that attends seminary now faces a very different culture characterized by post-modern pluralism, the prevalence of social media, and a dominant secularism in which skepticism about religious faith is a given assumption.

What form renewal will take for the current generation is not evident. While today’s students are not dismissive of the charismatic and Evangelical renewal movements of their parents’ generation, many come to seminary with what is perhaps more of a concern for spiritual and theological depth. Some of our students come to us after doing undergraduate work at such Evangelical strongholds as Moody Bible Institute or Wheaton College, and they are looking for a liturgical church more rooted in the church’s tradition. Students express keen interest in biblical languages and theological exegesis. They write theses on the church fathers. They enthusiastically participate in the seminary’s liturgical life, and they pray for one another on campus and in each other’s homes. They willingly join in the worship and community of local churches, and take courses in church planting. Trinity’s students form deep friendships with fellow students and faculty that continue after they graduate. I have every reason to believe that this current generation of students will be the leaders of a new renewal movement in the church that may look somewhat different from the renewal movements of my own generation, but I pray will be the needed missional response in the presence of a now increasingly secular and post-Christian culture.