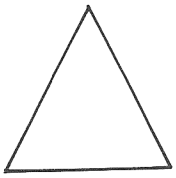
The Christian Life

WORSHIP *"...Continue...in the breaking of bread and the prayers." (BCP p. 304)*



DOCTRINE
"...Continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship." (BCP p. 304)

ACTION
"...To represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be." (BCP p. 855)

Christian Life is life lived in Christ: "Christ in us and we in him." Christ comes to us and we seek Christ in worship, doctrine and action. Each is a passageway into a transformation of life, directed toward our union with the heart, mind and work of Christ.

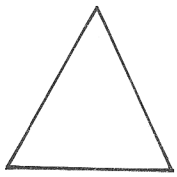
Worship, doctrine and action are the means by which we participate in the life of Christ's Body, the Church; in her unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. They are the means by which we participate in the Church's mission, "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." We are restored to unity as we are drawn into the prayer of Christ, the mind of Christ, and the work of Christ. In prayer, study, and work we become instruments of his holy mission. Through his baptized people he shares his life and draws all people to himself.

The Christian Life can be compared to a piece of fabric with three primary threads; all the threads must be strong and in a proper relationship if the whole piece is to have its full strength and beauty. Worship, doctrine and action are the essential and central elements of Christian living. They are interdependent. Weakness or distortion in one element eventually presses toward weakness or distortion in the others. Faithfulness in each presses toward faithfulness in the others. We grow in the Christian life as we open ourselves to a proper expression of each element, the strengthening of each, and the mutual exchange among them.

The Anglican bishops spoke of this pattern of life at Lambeth in 1978: "...This inextricable fusion of worship, of doctrine, and of action constitutes the distinctive contribution the churches of the Anglican Communion desire to make to the Universal Church of God in Jesus Christ..." Martin Thornton points to it in The Rock and the River: "...Moral action only flows from doctrinal truth by grace and faith, that is through prayer..."

Worship

HOLY EUCHARIST *"The Gifts of God for the people of God." (BCP p. 364)*



DAILY OFFICE
"Day by day we bless you; We praise your Name forever." (BCP p. 98)

PERSONAL DEVOTION
"That in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight." (BCP p. 100)

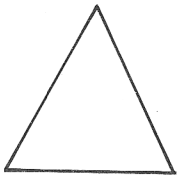
Our worship tradition as Episcopalians is based on a three-part structure. Martin Thornton calls it the Catholic Threefold Rule, and provides a detailed presentation of the Rule in his books. Michael Ramsey, the one-hundreth Archbishop of Canterbury, refers to it as the Benedictine triangle. The three elements, Eucharist, Daily Office, and Personal Devotions, comprise the fundamentals of a disciplined Christian spirituality in the Anglican tradition.

The use of the Rule can help us move away from the attempt to base our prayer life on a self-made, unintegrated list of "rules" toward an integrated Rule grounded in the Book of Common Prayer.

Doctrine

"...Continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship." (BCP p. 304)

SCRIPTURE *"To hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them..." (BCP p. 236)*



CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC TRADITION
"...Upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." (BCP p. 230)

REASON
"...Blessed...with memory, reason and skill..." (BCP p. 370)

We are called to the transformation of our minds; to have in us the mind of Christ; to see our lives and our world through the eyes of Christ. Concrete ways for this transformation to occur are offered by Our Lord, within and through his Church, in the Scriptures, in the Catholic and Apostolic Tradition, and in the Holy Reason of his people. As Anglicans we give authority to those teachings that we can recognize in the Scripture, have come to be generally accepted in the Church through

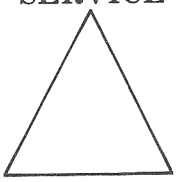
many centuries, and can withstand the test of human reason in each age.

Our concern is to be formed in Christ. The issue is: what will we allow to influence and shape us on a regular and frequent basis? Formation includes the development of habits of prayer and behavior that flow from who and whose we are in Baptism. Formation also includes the way we think and decide. We are called to live a pattern of life in which the Church's sources of authority are engaged on a regular and frequent basis. Our task is to allow Scripture, Holy Tradition, the wisdom and knowledge of the larger human experience, and our own reason to speak to our experience, so we might discern and respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Action

"...To represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be..." *(BCP p. 855)*

SERVICE *"...Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself." (BCP p. 305)*



EVANGELIZATION
"...Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ." (BCP p. 305)

STEWARDSHIP
"...Giving the whole world into our care, so that we might rule and serve all creatures." (BCP p. 373)

Christian action is participation by the People of God in the work of God as he draws men and women into deeper relationship with himself, into service to others, and into responsible participation in the care and ordering of his creation. To be a Christian is to be a servant, evangelist and steward. This is most properly understood as a way of being rather than as a list of things to do. Those shaped over the years by participation in the life and ministry of Christ's Body, nurtured by Word and Sacrament, grasped again and again by Mercy and Glory, become his light and salt and leaven. Martin Thornton touches on this in Spiritual Direction: "...Aquinas got it right: prayer is 'loving God in act so that the divine life can communicate itself to us and through us to the world.' Christian action is not action of which Jesus approves but action that he performs through his incorporated, and therefore prayerful, disciples."

The context within which we are servants, evangelists and stewards is our daily life and work. Because of who we are in Christ, we are ...in our work, community and family... instruments of his compassion, his inviting, and his order. We may be more or less faithful and effective at this; we may have a great deal of growing to do. But however we are, we are his... his people, his instruments. He will use us in and for his love.

The particular way in which we are servants, evangelists and stewards will depend on the needs and opportunities present in our work, family and neighborhood. It will also take on a particular shape due to our order (laity, bishop, priest, deacon), our particular vocation(s) in the Church and world, and our gifts.

An Integrated, Responsive and Stable Christian Life

Three helps in living an integrated, responsive and stable Christian life of worship, doctrine and action are:

Openness to spiritual dependence and guidance - Openness to our own experience, a willingness to reflect on it, to seek the movement of the Holy Spirit in it; openness to the notion that for all eternity I am called to growth in his love and service; and openness to having some setting for exploration of and guidance in the spiritual life. This involves an acceptance that we are dependent on God and that this dependence is mediated in and through other people, e.g., priest, spouse, friend, parent, spiritual director, support group, etc.

Establishing a rule of life - We can give ourselves to an intentional pattern of Christian discipline which expresses the faith and practice of the whole Church in our own lives. A rule is a description of how each of us will participate, at this time in our life, in the Church's mission through worship, doctrine and action. This involves accepting responsibility for the ordering of our own spiritual discipline.

Life in Christian community - We need to give ourselves to a specific expression of the body of Christ. We need to be part of a parish church, a particular community of the People of God who worship, learn and act in Christ. With these other people — all too real and limited — we participate in the holy exchanges of the Body - forgiveness received and given, intercession for and with the living and the dead, and burdens and joy shared. In those exchanges we may recall and know that we must lose life to find it. This involves accepting our interdependence with others.

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by Robert A. Gallagher, OA
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