

# Evangelism – Part one

## A glimpse into its history from an Anglican perspective

**DARCEY LAZERTE**

There has been a lot of talk, in recent years, of Anglicans being more missional.

Some embrace this idea, many struggle with it and it is in recognizing this that I would like to share a conversation I have several times a year. After the person found out I did my doctorate in evangelism and that I teach it at Trinity they say something like “Evangelism, at Trinity? Shouldn’t that be taught across the street?” (referring to Wycliffe College).

This exchange is reflective of the fact that, as Anglicans, not all of us are comfortable with evangelism.

So, with the understanding that not all mission is evangelism but that the principles of mission apply to evangelism, I am going to share with you three articles that look at the history, modern day realities and some approaches going forward to help us understand a little more about evangelism as it relates to mission.

The history of evangelism for Anglicans can be found in the phrase “Gain and Gospel”, turned by Stephen Neil in his



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seminal book Anglicanism. It is the understanding that as the British Empire spread, the English church spread and took hold across the Empire.

With a uniformity of thought, heritage and the *Book of Common Prayer* there was a consistency of religious practice across these churches. Added to this were the role of the Missionary Societies, most notably for Anglicans

governing, self-supporting and self-propagating”. The result of this is that in the 20th century, Christians in Africa grew from 10 million to 360 million. Additionally, in the last century, it has gone from 80% of Christians living in North America and Europe, to today, where 60% live in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific.

The center of Christianity is moving! Where does this leave us then? Quite frankly, the fact that evangelism and colonialism are so intertwined means that we

The final piece historically which needs to be mentioned is “The Christian Missionary Enterprise” which crossed denominational lines, was born of the 19th century renewal movements and which became the great cause of the Protestant church.

The climax of the Missionary Enterprise was The Edinburgh Conference of 1910, of which Anglicans and our missionary societies were full participants. Here it was declared that the final onslaught against the heathendom beyond the frontiers of Western Christendom was the church’s next step.

As the twentieth century unfolded, the acceptance of the Christian Missionary Enterprise faded and there came a call for these newer churches to be “self-

governing, self-supporting and self-propagating”.

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Where does this leave us then? Quite frankly, the fact that evangelism and colonialism are so intertwined means that we

do not have the historic skills for this ministry. Paradoxically, much of the growth of the Anglican church today is found amongst those who were colonized.

*The Reverend Canon Darcey Lazerte is Rector of St. Simon’s Oakville. [darcey@stsimon.ca](mailto:darcey@stsimon.ca)*

*(Next month in the second of his three-part series on Evangelism, Darcey will examine practices today in evangelism.)*

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