



Presiding Bishop

Michael Curry

Comments from a recent interview at the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in Vancouver

*The bishop sat down for an interview with the Anglican Journal during the meeting of General Synod in Vancouver to speak about the health of the church, cross-border church relationships and his post-royal wedding fame.*

**Speaking of the 21st century—there's such a concern right now about the decline of people coming to church, the decline of finances. What are your thoughts on that?**

I can tell you what I've started to realize for us in the States, which I think parallels. The church has always—Christians, I'm not using 'church' as an institution, necessarily—the church has always been strongest the closer it has been to Jesus of Nazareth and his actual teachings and his spirit. It has tended to be weakest, frankly, the more aligned it is with the status quo in the actual society.

We are coming out of a period of too much alignment, or comfort, with the cultural world around, and the establishment, the status quo. I'm not putting that down, I'm just saying we have been very comfortable.

I grew up in that church, and the church of that world helped me to be a Christian, so I'm not putting that down. But what helped me to be a Christian was not that alignment; what helped me to be a Christian was, they taught me about Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings, how to live out of his spirit, his way, his risen life. Live into him. That's what did it. And we are strongest the closer we get to that.

I like to refer to that as the Jesus movement, which is the origin of Christianity, which has taken various forms over the centuries. And that movement has been an underground minority movement. When it started with Jesus and the earliest days of the church, it was composed of poor people, women, slaves and then a few rich people—I'll tell you, it was a strange mix of people. It was an underground kind of movement, and it was incredibly strong.

And then over time it became the religion of the empire. It became the religion of civilization, at least in the West, and to some extent in the East. And it crowned emperors. It became the establishment.

**And is that what you mean when you say ‘aligned with the status quo’?**

Yeah, that's what I'm getting at. It has become state religion, state church. My point is, we've been this way before. What's going on in Canada and in the United States, in the Western world—the Jesus movement has been this way before, and the cultural changes and the structural reality and the size of our numbers has not stopped the movement.

The movement can't be stopped, because it's following the risen Christ, and he's alive. Pilate couldn't stop him. The Roman army couldn't stop him. And the secularization of the Western world won't, either. So, we may be smaller, we may have less money. That doesn't matter. Jesus wasn't wealthy.

If we are about preserving ourselves as an institution, and our institutional structures, then we are at the mercy of the cultural forces around us. If we are about following the risen Christ, this Jesus of Nazareth, and making our witness in the world, then we will figure out how to navigate with maybe less money or fewer people. We will figure out how to navigate if we have more money and more people. That won't matter. What will matter is the closer we are to this Jesus of Nazareth, and following his actual teachings—not just the idea of it, but his real teachings.

I think that movement, that closeness, people gathering around this Jesus, is what he's talking about in Matthew 16, when he says, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build

my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” That’s the movement—not being an institution. He wasn’t talking about institution, he was talking about people gathering around him and following his way.

There are some institutional realities that are important, and there are some things that we do that take institutional embodiment, so this isn’t anti-institutional. But when our consciousness of being Christian is dependent on our institutional forms, then we’ve missed the point. We’ve substituted the outward form for the inward reality—and it’s the inward reality that endured.

There’s a collect that prays that we “hold fast to things eternal, even as we pass through things temporary.” That is what we must do.

Hold fast to that which is eternal, and we can handle whatever is temporary.

**-Episcopal News Service**