



Global Episcopal Mission Network

2014 Global Mission Conference – Seattle, WA

The Rt. Rev. Mark MacDonald

Notes taken by The Rev. Dr. James Boston

Bishop Mark MacDonald is the Bishop for Indigenous Peoples for the Anglican Church of Canada. He is a former bishop of the Diocese of Alaska, a scholar of indigenous Christianity around the world, and is currently one of the vice-presidents of the World Council of Churches.

NOTES ON BISHOP MACDONALD'S PLENARY ADDRESS, Friday, May 30, 2013

"Welcoming a New Era of Mission in North America: The Challenges and Opportunity"

Description: "Though this era is described by many as one of the great moments in God's mission in history in creation, most Euro-American Christians experience this as a time of steep decline. What are the elements of receiving of this new era among the churches of a Western cultural framework?"

Bishop MacDonald described four major undercurrents moving in the Christian world today. They are not obvious to Western Christians. Traditional elders teach us that holy things are only seen with our peripheral vision, something like the burning hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Historians will call this a time of dramatic growth and expansion for Christianity; except in the West.

1. Moving from a missiology premised on absence to a missiology premised on presence.

The great 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference had only a sprinkling of non-Westerners. The follow-up centennial conference in 2010 had a substantial majority from Africa, Asia and Latin America. At the latter conference the Koreans said they were uniquely prepared for Christianity by Confucianism and Shamanism, contrary to the old idea that Western heritage was necessary for Christianity to be present. Pentecostal theologians note that the non-Western world is open to "Spirit". God is chasing everyone and the Spirit is present in all creation. Western Christians tend to be theists who see God as from elsewhere, the Creator and Visitor. We also have feared syncretism in indigenous and non-western contexts. Bishop MacDonald points out that syncretism by the broader western culture is much more dangerous than "lighting a few sticks of sweetgrass" in an indigenous religious ceremony. We are starting to realize that in reality, God is present in all creation. Early missionaries impressed on people that their traditional societies had little value. Local culture and traditional practices were to be abandoned as they were submerged into the Western Church. Non-western Christians now know better, and *indigenous peoples understand that there is no life apart from the presence of God.*



2. Moving from a missiology focused on the issue of belief to a missiology focused on the issue of idolatry.

Idolatry is putting anything that is less than the Creator in a position that is higher than the Creator. Secularism provides deep cover for idolatry. *We are the most idolatrous society in history.* Idolatry has led to systemic evils such as imprisoning native kids and invading countries while expecting to be welcomed as liberators. The opposite of true love is false love, the love of that which is unworthy. We need to address the systemic evil of idolatry, which Bishop Mark equated with the “principalities and powers” of Ephesians 6:12. We are colonized in the mind and heart by things that are less than God. The Church has played an animating role against people on the margins through systemic evil based on idolatry.

3. Moving from a missiology focused on institutionalization to a missiology focused on reconciliation.

We need to learn to understand both systemic evil and systemic good. We don't understand systemic good; we tend to have a very individualized conception of repentance and redemption. Bureaucracy allowed the Inquisition, and many other evils, to endure, and led to systematized evil. The Church is a fallen institution that, unless it understands itself, cannot protect itself from becoming evil. We are riddled with habitual ways of thinking. Our habitual cultural way of thinking when injury occurs leads us to apologize, and then to adopt new policies, trying anew to assimilate people into institutions rather than do the healing work of reconciliation. We need to tap into our wellspring of reconciliation, applying our ability to reconcile individually in learning to repent corporately. The new Archbishop of Canterbury has made reconciliation a central focus of his ministry. We need to seek to practice corporate repentance, *and learn to be a people that embodies reconciliation.*

4. Moving from a missiology focused on church growth to a missiology focused on a new Pentecost.

Our largest indigenous communities are in Los Angeles and then Toronto. Indigenous people want church. They seek it out, but may not return when they find churches operating under a different set of premises. Bishop MacDonald noted that traditional people tend to have a fear of travel, and will only undertake it for a good reason, such as prayer in a sacred place. In Luke 10 Jesus sent out the seventy to make every home, every heart, a temple. The glory of God is not only in the Jerusalem temple. The rabbis taught that the glory of God hovers over the bed of the sick. Matthew 25 is about how to find the glory of God. Jesus says that “if you want to see me, go to the poor, the hungry, the prisoners...” Moses' experience with the burning bush was not an encounter with the miraculous so much as an opening of his eyes to see the bush as it truly is. The Pentecost brought the capacity to see the true reality of life – life that needs to be unveiled.

The global communion of the Anglican Church has been uniquely placed by accidents of history to be an agent of reconciliation – to be a meeting place and a place of reconciliation. *Thus, Anglican Christians have a unique vocation as agents of reconciliation.* The first Bishop of Alaska, Robert MacDonald, was surprised in 1862 to find when he arrived 4,000 native people saying Morning and Evening Prayer each day. They had been reached family by family by



unknown catechists bringing them truth, bringing them Jesus. Anglicanism preceded most missionaries, and didn't institutionalize them but made their lives better. For this traditional people, the center of religious experience is the home: in the morning for private prayer, and corporate prayer in the evening, such as hymn singing. Attempts to overlay institutionalized Sunday morning corporate worship fail, while evening corporate hymn singing, and a shared meal, thrive among both urban and reservation communities.

NOTES ON WORKSHOP, Saturday, May 31, 2014

"God's Mission among Indigenous Peoples: The Surprising News and Its Important Implications"

Description: "Among religious practitioners and the broader public, there are many widespread assumptions regarding mission among Indigenous Peoples. Most of those assumptions are wrong or misguided. Though the record of Church institutional behavior in relationship to Indigenous Peoples is painful at best, the Gospel has a different history and horizon in Indigenous life. This important story is yet to be heard or even told on a wide basis. Its implications are critical to the future of the larger Church movement in North America."

For centuries the indigenous peoples of Canada and United States were the objects of white missionaries, working to bring the Indians into western Christendom. The Churches' plan did not work out. God's did.

A little known, and tragic, illustration of that was the Ghost Dance movement among the Lakota in the late 19th century. The expectation of the movement was that Jesus would return with their ancestors to renew the buffalo herds and drive the white people out. The idea emerged that "ghost shirts" would protect their wearers from bullets. That was sadly disproven at the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. Mark noted that one could say that the prophecies are coming true, only later. The buffalo are coming back, the whites are leaving South Dakota, and Kevlar shirts can stop bullets.

The Church found a "family" of spiritualities among the "First Nations" (a Canadian term) and American Indians. Broadly speaking, these spiritualities spoke the language of religious experience: what we might call "pentecostal" spirituality. They saw God acting among and for them. We need "peripheral vision" to notice the movement of the Spirit in this new Pentecost, an openness to feeling the "tingly" movement of the Spirit. In the New Testament we see that energy on the first Pentecost, in the leaping of the formerly lame man, in the Spirit falling on the home of Cornelius, and in the immediate response of the Ethiopian eunuch.

When relationships are transformed in unexpected ways, we move from individual experience of the holy to shared faith and life in the Spirit. In one tribe, Anglican missionaries lamented their lack of Sunday worshipers, but discovered that, unknown to them, a thousand families, in their homes, were reading morning and evening prayer daily from the Book of Common Prayer. The Good News passed naturally from family to family. The institutional church was resisted.

We need the capacity to be surprised in order to be able to see God's work.



Urban Indian ministries start readily when they involve an afternoon of hymn singing and food. Move them to Sunday morning services and they die as quickly.

Indigenous leadership development that works is incremental, progressive and modular. A person moves over time from being a lector to a lay reader, then becoming a catechist/pastor, to long service as a deacon and finally as a priest. Our present system is counterproductive. It starts with a personal call, continues with training outside one's community and only then does the newly ordained young person go to work. In the indigenous world, leaders need a sophisticated understanding of prayer, of how to consecrate life. Hymn singing is an important part of that. Hymns are channels for meditation and songs for healing.

So, Bishop MacDonald does not focus on making priests. For thirty years the church made the mistake of choosing candidates for priesthood who simply wanted to leave home, who did not fit in their own communities. "The glue of the church is the living dynamics of the Gospel that spreads from person to person." It is not administration. When chiefs tell him that they want a church, Bishop Mark responds, "Send me two of your best elders and I will make them catechists." They will be the embryo of the church.

Catechists are trained in the catechism, "*The Seven Grandfather Teachings*", the Book of Common Prayer, and discipleship. They are then set free to serve. Contemporary Native American communities, both urban and reservation, are chaotic. People suffer from poverty, substance abuse, family trouble, discrimination and loss. Bishop Mark called it a war zone and said, "Our churches grow by shared suffering."

Note: The "Seven Grandfather Teachings" are: wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. They have been drawn from traditional sources and applied to modern life. More on Wikipedia.