

# “Other sheep not of this fold”: The Christian family tree

The fourth Sunday of Lent – March 27, 2022

Holy Trinity Church - Tom Mount

## Scripture Reading: John 10:14-16

### Introduction

- John 10:14-16: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”
- **Mark 9:38-40.** How do we discern who is another bro/sis in Christ and who is not? Suggest three principles:
  1. **Christian unity is predicated on our shared oneness in Jesus, effected by Christ through the Holy Spirit.** Christ has made you one with himself; made me one with himself. That makes us one with each other. Cf. Eph 4:3-6; Col 3:10; In 1 Cor 12:3.
  2. **Christian unity does not require uniformity of culture, tradition, personality, language or any other human artifact.** There is immense diversity among genuine Christ followers, and our Lord seems to relish that diversity. Cf. Gal 3:27-28; Rev 7:9.
  3. **Christian unity presumes two points of agreement: what we believe and how we act based on the kind of spirit in us.** Christians have a shared set of doctrinal beliefs derived from the teachings of the bible. Christians have a shared set of virtues characterizing our lifestyles as a result of the Holy Spirit living inside of us.
    - **Doctrinal beliefs.** We must believe in “first order truths” that are embodied in the Nicene Creed. There are second and third order doctrinal issues that are not as important to agree on. Peter Meiderlin: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity”.
    - **Lifestyle.** We can’t be a Christian and live a life of immorality or selfishness or untruthfulness or cruelty. Why? Because those things are diametrically opposite the kind of fruit the Holy Spirit produces in a person’s life. They are indicative of another kind of spirit (cf. Gal 5:19-23; Lk 6:44).

## A Look at the Four Main Limbs of the family tree

- The tree is large. There are approximately 2.5 B Xns worldwide. To give some basis for comparison, there are about 1.7B Muslims, 1.2B Hindus, 500 M Buddhists, and 15 million Jews around the world.
- The tree is complex. There are a total of around 41,000 Christian denominations.

### 1. Oriental limb

- 80 million adherents
- They split from the orthodox church in AD 431 and 451 over arguments regarding how Christ's humanity and deity are joined. There are two main branches.

#### **The Assyrian branch** (or Church of the East or Nestorian)

- This is the most Semitic of the ancient churches, speaking Syriac.
- They practice the oldest documented liturgy in the world.
- They have been historically concentrated in east Syria, Persia (Iran), and Mesopotamia (Iraq).
- They were some of the most zealous missionaries in church history, taking the Gospel to Arabia, India, and along the Silk Road to central Asia, Mongolia, and China.
- Sadly, their numbers were decimated over time and they are very small today: 500,000 adherents.

#### **The Oriental Orthodox branch** (or Miaphysite branch)

- They are primarily located in Syria, India, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt and Armenia.
- There is a great variety of traditions reflected in their architecture.
- The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church that carved these churches is one of the most colorful and interesting.

### 2. The Orthodox limb

- For 1000 years the heart of Orthodoxy was this Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.
- The "Eastern Orthodox" communion has around 250 million adherents worldwide, mostly in Greece, the Balkans, and Russia.
- There is no single pope. Instead, there are 15 "autocephalous" churches including Russian, Greek, Romanian, Serbian, Georgian, Bulgarian, and Latvian, each of which is headed by its own Patriarch.
- Although speaking different languages, the Orthodox family of churches are united by the same general liturgy and practices

- There is a growing Orthodox movement in the U.S. (OCA) among disaffected Evangelicals looking for “more.” Local example: Sts. Cyril and Methodius OCA

### 3. The Roman Catholic limb

- With 1.2 billion adherents this is the fastest growing limb in the world. Most Catholics living in Latin America and Europe.
- This limb developed when the “One, holy, catholic and apostolic church” split in the Great Schism of 1054
- Rome was always an important See since both Peter and Paul ministered and died there. And Rome played a decisive role in resolving important theological debates in the early centuries.
- Local examples: Newman Center, St. John’s, Our Divine Savior

### 4. The Protestant Limb

- With 800 million adherents, this limb is huge with many branches. It is arguably the most diverse of four limbs ranging from Anglo-Catholics to the simple Amish.
- It has tens of thousands of branches. Ten of the more well-known ones are:
  - Four historical movements:
    - **Lutheran** (1517). 90 million. Germany, Scandinavia.
    - **Reformed** (1523). 30 million. Dutch Reformed; Reformed Church of America. Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands
    - **Anabaptist** (1525). 5 million. Amish, Plymouth Brethren, Mennonite. E.g., Holdeman Mennonites in Glenn County.
    - **Anglican** (1534). Church of England or “Episcopal” in U.S.: 90 million. They are not protestant, per se, but a middle ground between Catholic and Protestant.
  - Six later movements:
    - **Presbyterian** (1580s). 40 million. Scotland, U.S., Korea.
    - **Baptist** (John Smyth 1609). 100 million. England, U.S.
    - **Methodist** (1740s). 75 million. England, U.S., Korea.
    - **Pentecostal** (1905). 130 million.
    - **Non-denominational Evangelical** (1950s). 80 million.
    - **Independent**. Around 350 million. This is the newest phenomenon (mostly 20<sup>th</sup> century).

## **A Rich Tapestry**

- The Church is a rich, variegated tapestry, woven together by God to make something of exquisite beauty and enduring glory.
- Where does Holy Trinity fit in? We want to hold onto our distinctives, yet be open for God to teach us new ways of being intimate with Him.