

A PERSONAL JOURNEY – THE THREEFOLD CORD

Introduction –

Beginning in the mid 1980's a fresh concept of Christian renewal began to emerge on the spiritual scene that held out promise for taking the Christian Church back to its roots and foundations in a manner that has begun to prove prophetic in pointing to and illuminating the wider purposes of God in history. Many movements of renewal in Christian history have helped to shape the heritage and current life of the Church of Jesus Christ – some bringing change at the personal level of spiritual commitment and devotion in the day to day experience of Christ's followers, others affecting more the corporate life, structure and practice of the Church, the ecclesial community of the faithful. The movement referred to in this attempt to share a portion of my own personal journey of discipleship has to do with what is being described by many across the life of the one Body of Jesus Christ as "The Convergence Movement", or "the convergence of the streams".

The concept is captured in two passages of Scripture that have epitomized this "ecclesiological renewal". The first is found in Psalm 46:4 & 5: *"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in her midst, and He will help her at the break of dawn."* The second reference is found in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: *"...though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."*

One final passage of Scripture that has been pivotal and instructive in this perspective is found in Matthew's gospel, 13:52: *"Therefore, every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures and well as old."*

"This Scripture summarizes the insight and discovery which has led to a fresh stream of thought and renewal throughout the wider Body of Christ. Described as the "Convergence Movement", or "Convergence of the Streams", this emerging movement appears to many, both observers and participants, to be another contemporary evidence of God's continuing activity in history to renew, replenish and unify His people in one heart and purpose in Christ. Arising out of a common desire and hunger to experience the fullness of Christian worship and spirituality, the Convergence Movement seeks to blend or merge the essential elements in the Christian faith represented historically in three major streams of thought and practice: the Charismatic, Evangelical/Reformed and Liturgical/Sacramental. An increasing number of local congregations and leaders from many backgrounds are finding "treasures old and new" in the spiritual heritage of the Church universal." (quoted from "What is the Convergence Movement?" from *"Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship"*, volume two of *"The Complete Library of Christian Worship"*, Robert Webber, Ed.).

Invitation –

In the pages that follow I am attempting to share from my own personal journey in the Lord Jesus Christ the unfolding spiritual influences that have shaped my own

discipleship as a follower of Christ and that have given rise to my vision and experience of the worship of Almighty God. It is a story, or a chapter, within the Great Story that God is authoring in every life which bears His image. It is also an invitation to you who read and ponder my own journey to open yourselves to the One Who is Great Beyond Expression, or as the early Church described Him, “The Mysterium Tremendum” – the Great Mystery of Love whom we encounter in Jesus of Nazareth as God Incarnate; an invitation to explore, discover and connect with new depths and heights in knowing Jesus Christ and His ways that you may possibly to this point have never considered, but which may hold new spiritual riches that can take you beyond the boundaries of your own story and experience thus far. The influences and experiences that have shaped my journey with Christ have been diverse from the beginning, resembling Joseph’s “coat of many colors”. May the Divine Artist Himself paint new colors and dimensions into your own heart and relationship with Him as you read and share in the story of my personal path of discovery. Welcome to the Journey!

-Chapter I-

GENESIS – In the Beginning

The genesis of my journey into “convergence” began with my personal conversion to a living faith in Jesus Christ at the ripe and formative age of seventeen. My spiritual upbringing had included roots in the Pentecostal Holiness tradition up until the age of eight. At that point, upon the passing of my father, my family moved from Colorado to Texas to be near grandparents for emotional and familial support. My grandparents worshiped in an Assemblies of God context, and my sisters, my mother and I became a part of their local congregation. Neither of these initial settings was responsible for my conversion or baptism into Christian faith, and neither seemed to have left any marked impression on my spiritual consciousness, save for the impact of the biblical stories themselves.

The other early influence in my own journey was my grandmother’s background in the fundamentalist and evangelical Church of Christ tradition. Again, the importance and centrality of the Bible as Holy Scripture – God’s inspired and infallible Word to man – was impressed upon me out of this context. However, I found that my thinking concerning Christian truth and claims was not narrowly formed with any specific bias or particularity as regards denominational loyalties or differences.

Upon my mother’s remarriage when I was eleven, my family began to attend more mainline denominational churches, primarily Methodist and Presbyterian. Our attendance of these churches, however, was more typical of nominal lip-service than spiritual aspiration. Consequently, at the tender age of 14 I personally departed from regular church attendance until my personal conversion at the age of 17. During this period of almost four years, spiritual influence was almost nil, although roots had been formed through my early exposures that would prove to be significant factors in my emerging understanding of the Church.

My conversion came about as a result of Divine Providence weaving two lives together at just the right time – a “kairos” moment and encounter. The summer of 1965 I met a young lady at a local school softball game and found that the only way she would agree to see me further was if I accompanied her to her local church. The congregation happened to be Methodist (not yet “United Methodist” at this point in history), and she and her family were vitally involved, exhibiting a very sincere evangelical approach to their personal faith as Methodist Christians. With Balaam the Lord God used an ass to point the way; with me, it was a delightful young lady – different bait for different fish!

The process of attending the local congregation had nothing whatsoever to do with bias or formation, but everything to do with the attraction of the moment. And yet, God was mysteriously at work drawing me toward a Greater Delight. After attending some five or six weeks and becoming involved in the youth group (although I definitely felt like a fish out of water at this point), a Sunday evening youth meeting took place that proved the hinge upon which my life would turn and which would begin the journey of the blending of the streams of Christian faith and worship in my experience.

This particular evening a sermon was read by a minister named Peter Marshall who had been onetime chaplain of the U.S. Senate and a Presbyterian pastor in the 1940’s. There was, some time after his passing, a Hollywood movie produced about his life titled, “A Man Called Peter”. He spoke in this particular sermon, called “Mr. Jones, Meet the Master”, of the person of Jesus Christ in a way I had never heard Him spoken of before. He described his relationship with Christ as personal, alive and consciously interactive. His whole description was very intriguing and stirring to me. From that night, I began a personal search to see if God could, indeed, be experienced personally, as Peter Marshall had described. That entailed for me spending time each evening, after school work and before retiring, reading a chapter in the bible and attempting prayer, though my prayers were basically limited to the “Our Father”, “Lord, forgive me for all my sins”, and a yearning, questing, reaching out from the inside – groping after a personal connection with God, if you will.

My encounter with the risen Presence of Jesus Christ came about approximately four weeks after beginning this regimen. The Lord of Glory came to me in my bedroom three consecutive nights and woke me from a sound sleep by calling my name in the dark...“Wayne!”. The third night it happened twice during the course of my attempts to sleep, and at the second calling of my name, I responded to this voice, believing I had been dreaming the previous two evenings. As I made a personal answer to the Voice, “Lord, what do You want; here I am?”, the Son of God gloriously revealed Himself that third night and came rushing with divine Love into my heart and life as I opened myself to His vivid and intensely immanent Presence. I invited Him to “take control of my life and see what You can do with it”, an invitation the God of life never refuses. The Journey had begun.

EARLY FORMATION – The Weaving of a Threefold Cord

Immediately upon experiencing this vivid conversion, I sent away to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association for some of their Bible Studies for new Christians I had seen offered on one of his television crusades. Thus began an “evangelical” stream of influence in my newfound faith and relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ which served

as a catechumenate in the teaching of the Holy Scriptures that was foundational in my spiritual formation and discipleship. Daily devouring the Scriptures, reading them through in various translations, and thrilling at the living, pulsating Life I was experiencing at their center became a joyous adventure in spiritual exploration, never quite slaking an avid spiritual hunger to know all I could about this One who had invaded my life with Love from beyond.

At the same time, I found myself being drawn to the transcendent and the mystical in the new spiritual life and relationship I had embarked upon. Early on, in the first year of my spiritual pilgrimage, I ran across the spiritual autobiography of the great twentieth century Roman Catholic mystic and monk, Thomas Merton – “*The Seven Storey Mountain*”. Somewhat because of the intensely mystical nature of my conversion and acute personal awareness of the Presence and Love of God in Christ in my daily life, I discovered a great and deep delight in the type of devotion, prayer, and worship being described by Merton. There was an inner resonance, a corresponding “yes” in my deepest heart to this man’s experience of God. In this manner, an additional stream of Christian spirituality was introduced into my formation – that of the liturgical/sacramental – that would woo my heart to more deeply abide in the fellowship of Christ found in the experience of wonder, mystery and awe. This experience, in turn, began to lead me into a period of visiting other types of churches in my local area of Dallas, Texas, to see what I could further know, learn and discover of this wondrous Person of God Almighty whose love and disclosure to me had so radically altered my life, my perceptions and my direction.

A wide array of Christian denominations were included in my exploration: Southern Baptist, Assembly of God, Bible Church, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, etc. In each setting I found the same Lord, heard the same glorious Good News, sang songs of worship and adoration about the same redeeming work of the Savior. A deep appreciation for the whole Church began almost unselfconsciously to form within me at an early stage. I had begun to fall in love with the Bride, as well as the Bride-groom! In my visits I happened upon a United Methodist congregation that was involved in charismatic renewal in the early springtime of that movement among the historic mainline churches. Sometime in the spring or summer of 1967 I experienced a deep and profound release of the Holy Spirit’s power, Presence and gifts in my life while attending an evening service of this church’s life. Again, yet another dimension of spiritual growth, formation and worship were added to me in this experience. This led to an even deeper love for the Word of God in Scripture and to a more intensive training in personal witness and evangelism, as well as more formative Bible study through the Campus Crusade for Christ study series. The man who would become a lifetime mentoring figure in my personal spiritual formation was the youth director at this particular Methodist congregation at that time. The Rev. Bob Stamps, a young Methodist minister just finishing up seminary, not only led me and others into Bible study, Scripture memory, and witnessing outreaches, but also introduced many of us young zealots to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer as part of our personal prayer and devotional life. This young minister and his influence and example were to become key factors in my discovery of the vision of the “convergence of streams” in the Church’s life. In 1969 he became the Chaplain of Oral Roberts University, which I later attended.

One further significant experience that was formative for my vision of Christian worship and the “three-fold cord” nature of the Church was a midnight Christmas Eve Mass I attended December of 1967 at a large Dallas Episcopal Church. As a young disciple

and ardent worshiper, with no previous denominational bias and a hunger to experience and know all of God that I could, I felt as though I had been caught up into heaven's worship itself that evening. The incense, the glorious choir, the processional with the bishop, clergy and attendants, the vivid colors and symbols, the intense sense of the Holy, and yet the immanence of the Presence of Christ in the sacraments, the liturgical responses, all of this deeply impacted me and caused an even deeper yearning for the fullness of God in the midst of His Church, coming from the full flow of this one river that would be years in being worked out.

ORU – Ecumenical Charismatic Renewal

In the fall of 1969 I transferred from the University of Texas at Arlington (between Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas) to Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. This was to prove my introduction into an even broader understanding and experience of the three streams meeting and converging with one another. In those years the ecumenical Charismatic renewal was picking up steam, having been magnified in its public impact by the beginnings of charismatic renewal among Roman Catholic university students, professors and clergy in the Ann Arbor, Michigan area. As a consequence of this movement of historic spiritual renewal, Rev. Stamps, who was by now the Oral Roberts University Chaplain, regularly invited men and women from various denominational backgrounds to the campus to share their stories in our chapel services. We experienced a stream of figures from Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian and other traditions of the Church who were all being empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit with the release of spiritual gifts. As an individual still being formed in my basic faith and discipleship, I was deeply moved by this evidence across the whole spectrum of the Christian Church of God's renewing and unifying work.

I began attending a local Episcopal Church, St. John's in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1971-72, deeply imbibing the rich theological and devotional heritage of the Anglican tradition of worship, while yet encountering the Presence of God in the midst of this type of worship through an ongoing charismatic and mystical immediacy that had deep roots in a strong biblically nurtured faith context. Chaplain Stamps further stoked the fires of love for the whole Church and the blending of its rich elements of worship, faith and devotion by the approach he took to modeling this on campus in Sunday evening worship gatherings patterned after Catholic Charismatic prayer communities. The blend of the three streams was very evident in all he did to make the liturgy, sacraments, Scripture and faith of the Church come alive for us in a setting of contemporary Holy Spirit ecumenism. He taught me and others how to incorporate Holy Communion, Roman Catholic practice of the Breviary Prayer of the Hours, and charismatic/evangelical approaches to Bible study and discipling of new converts into our spiritual grids. A deep love affair for Church history began to grow in me, as I both studied it and lived out its contemporary integration on the ORU campus. People from many denominations from around the Tulsa area would attend these heavenly Sunday evening Vespers gatherings that always included the Table of the Lord in Holy Communion as the climax of our time together. Glorious singing of Catholic charismatic and other renewal songs flowed seamlessly into charismatic singing in the Spirit, with strong evangelical teaching, sharing of testimonies of God's work in different people's lives and prophecy that drew us nearer to Christ's heart in our midst. Our hearts, individually and collectively, were

poured out to Him, as we all sat together in the round in concentric circles centered on the Table of the Lord. Throughout the week, noontime charismatic Eucharist celebrations were held in the Prayer Tower on the campus as, again, professors, students, staff and others from around the city would come and encounter the glorious manifest Presence of Christ among us around His Table. On at least three different occasions while I was involved in these Sunday evening worship gatherings, our Lord Jesus was seen openly by various ones as He stood at His Table during the prayer of thanksgiving over the elements. It was what I call a charismatic liturgical revival that deeply impacted all aspects of the life of the campus for five or six years.

The spiritual landscape we were viewing through the ORU experience of the early 70's was filled with irony and paradox. At the same time that there was an intense sense of recovery of spiritual vitality that enhanced commitment to and appreciation of different denominational traditions, there arose simultaneously a "new" distinct group of churches known as "charismatic" (to distinguish them from classical "Pentecostal" congregations), "independent" or "interdenominational" churches. The ORU campus was increasingly enjoying what was being called a "liturgical" revival that clearly recognized and embraced the "threefold" nature of the Lord's one Church. On the one hand, historic Pentecostals were teaching Roman Catholics the ecumenical and universal ministry of the Holy Spirit and His gifts, while the Roman Catholics were using the descriptor, "Catholic Pentecostal", to describe their newfound experience. Methodists and Baptists were beginning to gain an appreciation for the deeply spiritual nature of liturgical and sacramental worship, while liturgical Christians were learning to share their "personal witness and testimony" and learning to lead others to personal faith in Jesus Christ with a strong adherence to the inspired Scriptures as the Word of God written. The historic impact of the Second Vatican Council of the early and mid sixties contributed greatly to this new openness of Roman Catholic followers of Jesus to Scripture and spiritual renewal. While a striking sense of unity pervaded my own participation in these events, it was also clear that other nascent influences were on the horizon - that of the "independent" charismatic churches being birthed as a result of reaction, "restoration" and conflict with historic branches of the Church.

In assessing the character of the 1970's spiritual renewal atmosphere, I would have to say that it appeared one of intense pneumatic ecumenism, unity and what one might call "pan-convergence" – all streams of the Church learning from one another as they flowed together in the great gift of "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". The elements of the later "convergence movement" were obviously at work, mixing with one another, interacting creatively with one another, and infusing new life into old and separated wineskins. My own personal development was decisively shaped by the dynamics at work during this landmark work of the Holy Spirit in contemporary Church history. My own vision of the Church, its nature, purpose and outworking, mystically and existentially, was profoundly broadened and stamped deep within my soul and spiritual consciousness. It would prove to be the segment of my own journey in which seeds of vision and understanding earlier planted were plentifully watered and began to sprout and were to form a touchstone for the future development of language and concept by which the convergence of the streams was articulated.

-Chapter 2-

THE 1980's – New Emphases and Divergence

Toward the end of the 1970's a distinct shift in the spiritual atmosphere of this renewal began to take place that would introduce new elements into the picture, as well as create a growing sense of withdrawal and divergence contrary to the sense of innocent and open convergence of the 70's. From the 1977 Kansas City Holy Spirit conference that drew over 50,000 participants from numerous denominational backgrounds on into the 80's, a sense of withdrawal into denominational identities and "camps" seemed to surface. The overarching awareness of a sense of unity and mutuality that had led to a shared experience of the grace and power of God and an openness to learn from one another's traditions began to evaporate into the ether of older suspicions and prejudices. The Neo-Pentecostal or "Faith Movement" began to arise on the scene with its valuable contributions and polarizing tendencies. These churches and leaders appeared to me and others who had tasted the goodness of the Lord in the 70's renewal, and the deepened and enriched vision of the whole Church this had resulted in, to be speaking of themselves and others of like thought with them in referring to "the Body of Christ", rather than the more all-embracing, universal understanding of the Church. It appeared as though in this perspective those who were really heirs to the Holy Spirit's work were churches such as themselves with understanding of Scripture and doctrine such as theirs. For all of its positive contributions to the understanding and practice of the Christian life and faith this movement offered, there was, at the same time, a subtle but growing sense of judgment on other theological understanding and teaching that often had much more venerable and tested roots in the universal Church's journey through history. As a result of these factors and the withdrawal and suspicion from the earlier unity and pneumatic ecumenism of renewal participants, convergence seemed greatly stifled, and divergence, rather than "diversity", seemed to fill the vacuum.

Around the same time that the Kansas City Conference was taking place and the Neo-Pentecostal Faith Movement was beginning to emerge as a dominant influence on the spiritual renewal front, a quiet but deeply significant fresh "stream" was being formed that would call back the spirit of the earlier renewal and lead to even further awakenings in my journey and call to the "convergence of the streams." This work of the Holy Spirit was what was later to be known as the Vineyard or "Third Wave" movement under the leadership of Rev. John Wimber from Anaheim, California, and a number of others from Southern Baptist, Presbyterian and other denominations.

I had been personally drawn into many of the aspects of the Faith Movement and had planted a local church that reflected many of its values and teachings in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the early 80's. However, my earlier formation under Chaplain Bob Stamps and the loving embrace of God's work in the whole of the Church those experiences had fostered continued to exert its influence on my thinking and practice in many key areas of Christian teaching and worship. I continued to teach the spiritual vibrancy of the grace of God available at the Table of the Lord in Holy Communion and that this was a healing and saving sacrament for those who approached in faith. The music we used in worship services reflected a broad eclecticism that included Pentecostal and

“independent charismatic” songs, great hymns of the historic Church, 70’s Catholic Charismatic renewal songs, Maranatha and Scripture songs.

My own reading and study continued to be flavored with a sincere love affair with great spiritual movements and leaders of the Church’s long history, rather than just those of the last 50 or 100 years. Dr. Robert Webber, a professor of theology and Bible at Wheaton College, a bastion of evangelical Christianity in Wheaton, Illinois, published a book in 1978 that Chaplain Stamps had introduced me to that continued to shape my thinking and cause an ongoing hunger and openness to exploring the spiritual heritage of the Church through history. The book was titled *“Common Roots – A Call to Evangelical Maturity”*. This work would prove to be pivotal for the long-range development of my own spiritual vision of convergence. Donald Bloesch, then Professor of Theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, summarized the premise of the book when he stated, *“In this valuable study the author locates the key to church renewal in a rediscovery and re-appropriation of the catholic heritage of the evangelical faith.”* Webber returned to models of Church life, worship, mission, spirituality, discipleship and education that were prevalent and practiced in the second century. In the process of developing his premise in the pages of the book, he cites the efforts and vision of “Rev. Robert Stamps, campus Chaplain of Oral Roberts University”. The language and description of Rev. Stamps’ approach to worship renewal on the ORU campus began to form ideas in my own reflection that would later lead to similar conceptualization as “the convergence of the charismatic, evangelical, and liturgical/sacramental streams of the Church into one river”.

Quoting from page 102 of *“Common Roots”*, Webber states:

“An example of worship renewal which has succeeded in maintaining the historic shape of Christian worship with spontaneity may be found at Oral Roberts University....Although Stamps does not use a prayer book, his spontaneous prayers follow the ancient customs of the Church and contain the content of historic Christianity....This is worship from life – oral, spontaneous – yet finding roots in the Tradition of the Church.”

Needless to say, this treatment of the nature of Christian faith and worship was much more in line with my earlier formation than the divergent and polarizing tendencies of the 1980’s, as I perceived them. However, in 1985 the providence of a loving God brought my path into contact with Rev. John Wimber and the “third wave” or Vineyard Christian Fellowship movement of renewal. Wimber had made headlines in many Christian periodicals for his innovative approach to teaching a class on Church growth through ‘signs and wonders’ at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, in the early 80’s. I became aware of his ministry as a result of his participation in a local Tulsa conference sponsored by Faith movement, independent charismatic churches. Wimber’s style of ministry in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit through healings, signs and wonders was fresh, potent and theologically related more to an ecumenical evangelicalism than a Pentecostal approach.

LATE 80's – Reawakening

On a personal level I was deeply affected by Wimber's ministry because of his model and approach. It was much more reminiscent of the Catholic Charismatic renewal approach to ministry in healing and gifts of the Spirit, but with a decidedly evangelical theological underpinning. As we entered into involvement with Wimber and the Vineyard "signs and wonders" movement, I became aware of currents of thought in his teaching and modeling that drew much more from modes of thought and practice that were ecumenical – or "eclectic" – rather than narrow or sectarian. In its practice and teaching the Vineyard renewal reached out in a broad way that recognized, honored and encompassed the theological and spiritual elements of the Church universal. Wimber's ministry of renewal crossed all lines – Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical, Anglican, charismatic, Pentecostal, etc.

As we grew in our involvement in and growth through this association, I began to notice elements of sacramental thought coming out in certain areas of Wimber's teaching and ministry practice. There was a period of close and intimate association between Wimber and the Vineyard renewal and the historic Anglican tradition, especially in the Church of England. I began to read and study more in the areas of Anglican, Catholic and evangelical circles of renewal as a result. One of the key books that was instrumental in the development of my perspective at this time was Howard Snyder's "*The Radical Wesley*". In this work Snyder characterized Wesley's own spiritual journey and development as one of comprehensive synthesis of diverse elements of spirituality and thought from the broad and substantial theological history of the western and eastern branches of the Church. In addition, the influences of the Moravians, Puritans, Eastern Orthodox and Patristic writings from the first five centuries of the Church were fundamental in Wesley's ministry and practice. What began to appear was John Wesley as an historical model for convergence in ministry, worship and spirituality that shaped the expression of his mission of the Gospel.

This discovery began to lead me to other sources of thought that strongly fed and nurtured a growing hunger in my own life and ministry to see a greater wholeness or fullness of the universal Church's experience at work in my efforts. Other texts began to appear at key times between 1985 and 1989 that formed the foundation from which the eventual vision of the "convergence of the streams" would grow. Some of the key titles were by Dr. Robert Webber, whose earlier work had exerted such a potent effect in shaping my vision of the Church and the practice of Christian discipleship. His work, "*Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail – Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church*", provoked me to a whole new level of consideration of the comprehensiveness of the true nature of the Body of Christ. In the conclusion to this work, Webber quotes Dr. Robert Schuler as saying

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"You know, I think in another hundred years or so people are going to look back on the period between the Reformation and the Twentieth century as the second Dark Ages of the Church....I believe...that the divisions which have haunted the Church over the last four centuries have begun in our time to be healed. The walls that have separated us are being broken down. A great new Convergence of the traditions is occurring which will change the face of the Church in the next hundred years."

Webber goes on to say,

“I hope he is right. I think he is right. And I think the confluence between the evangelical and liturgical tradition is a sign of spiritual health, a sign of renewal in our times.” (page 171.)

Other key authors and titles, such as *“Becoming Orthodox – A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith”*, by Peter Gilquist; *“Foresight”*, by Howard Snyder, *“The Early Christians”*, by Eberhard Arnold; and many of the writings of the early Church Fathers continued to come across my path. In the process, my family and I had moved to Kansas City, Missouri in 1987 in order to plant a new church in the area in close association with the Vineyard movement. As the church grew and developed, I began sharing some of these thoughts, insights, and perspectives with our local pastoral leadership in the new congregation. Some of them had come from Roman Catholic and other mainline and Episcopal backgrounds and were immediately open to pursuing this direction in study. Along the way, I was providentially brought into contact with other pastors and leaders who were on this same “journey of discovery”, as we began to describe it. Mike Owen, a fellow Vineyard pastor from a Southern Baptist background, Randy Sly, a pastor from the Wesleyan Methodist tradition involved in charismatic renewal in his congregation (who had also grown up Episcopalian), and Robert Wise, who had begun his ministry as a United Methodist pastor involved in mainline charismatic renewal and later served for five years as the head of the Reformed Church of America, were three of the key companions on this journey of discovery. A close friendship formed between the four of us as we shared our experiences, perceptions, and questions together.

Numerous other leaders began to find one another, discovering they were on a common journey or pilgrimage of spiritual and theological shift into a commonly shared vision of the “convergence of streams”. Without fail, the others leaders who stumbled across each other’s paths providentially had all read the same authors and come to the same conclusions. It was beginning to appear that some mysterious work of the Holy Spirit was weaving lives together at a grassroots level that was forming a fresh look at the Church’s nature and identity that cut across all boundaries. I began to use the term “convergence of streams” to describe what we were all beginning to perceive and experience in many of our leadership training classes and personal conversations with other pastors. As leaders met one another in various conferences and ministry contexts, I used this term to describe what we were experiencing and the term began to be used widely by those touched by the Lord in this light.

Working this out in our Kansas City congregation led us to explore possibilities of relationship with the mainline Episcopal Church of the USA and other similar liturgical bodies. Meanwhile, the leadership of the Kansas City church began to implement certain elements of worship and practice locally that proceeded to move us toward a major paradigm shift in the way we viewed worship, the Church, and ourselves as a local expression of the Church universal. Elements of liturgical and sacramental emphasis from the Anglican/Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* were introduced into our Sunday celebration and home church meeting contexts that began to unfold a new model for us. Much teaching from the leadership accompanied these changes, as well as some quite remarkable miraculous healings at the celebration of the Table of the Lord, which continued to create a hunger and openness to explore even further. Changes were made in respect to celebrating the seasons of the Christian Year, the use of some

liturgical vestments and their spiritual symbolism, and regular use of the sacrament of anointing with oil and laying on of hands for healing. In addition the weekly celebration of the Holy Communion, as well as continued practice of ministry through the spiritual gifts and the preaching/teaching of the written Word of God in Holy Scripture all began to be woven into the fabric of our life together in Christ as His people.

As this remarkable journey continued to unfold, and more study and practice were engaged, my associate pastor, Randy Sly, and myself were asked to write an article for Dr. Robert Webber's upcoming landmark series on the history and practices of Christian worship. The series was eventually titled *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* and included an eight volume compendium contributed to by over 500 Christian scholars from over 70 different denominational groups, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, mainline Protestant, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic and ethnic expressions of Christianity. Randy and I were asked to contribute an article on the history and development of what was now beginning to be called "The Convergence Movement" by many practitioners and observers alike. At the same time, however, this work of God was still being experienced and discovered at a very grassroots level among leaders and congregations, rather than being hailed as "the latest, greatest" fad in a more public marketing approach so characteristic of many aspects of developments in the Church in America.

The article chronicled the history and development of the thought of the movement, including many of the key figures across the Church who had been influential in shaping the concept. The second half of the article concluded with identifying and describing the specific elements of value and practice that "convergence" congregations were beginning to recognize and implement. The year of publication was 1992, and the article appeared in volume two of the series, *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*. This event began to give additional impetus to the growing grassroots interest in this understanding among a wide cross-section of Christian leaders.

-Chapter 3-

THE CANTERBURY CONNECTION – Anglican Context

A key event happened in the fall of 1992 that was to lead to the formation of the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches as a context within which congregations could work out the implications of the convergence vision in a cohesive fellowship identified with a recognized historic tradition. Pastor Mike Owen of the Oklahoma City Vineyard invited me to join him in OKC during a weekend visit from a charismatic Episcopal bishop from California whom he had contacted about our journey. As we met together with Bishop Robert Hawn from the United Episcopal Church, we began to sense that the Lord Jesus might be calling us to come under his oversight for training, confirmation into the Anglican spiritual tradition and, eventually, ordination. He seemed keen to support and affirm what was happening with us on our journey and to offer himself to help nurture that vision within the context of the Anglican tradition of the historic Church. After prayer, discussion and fellowship, Mike and I both felt as though

this was the connection the Lord was leading us to for the working out of the convergence vision. Many other congregations engaged in practicing convergence concepts of blended worship and ministry were from various backgrounds; but Mike Owen and myself, along with many others, were being drawn toward finding a more historic context in which to learn to live it out. So, in February of 1993 my family and I moved to Oklahoma City to join Mike Owen and his wife under Bishop Hawn within the United Episcopal Church, a more biblical and conservative branch off of the mainline Episcopal Church. The Kansas City congregation was released to my associate, Randy Sly, to take them on in their own journey of convergence after our five year time with them as the founding leaders.

We began studying immediately under Bishop Hawn's tutelage for ordination as Episcopal clergy through this particular branch of the historic Anglican spiritual tradition. In the process of that taking place, we sponsored a summer conference for other pastors from various backgrounds who were also "on the journey", as we regularly described it. The conference was held on the premises of now "Fr." Mike Owen's parish church building, Church of the Holy Spirit. The conference was titled "*Treasures Old and New – Convergence Renewal in the Contemporary and Ancient Churches.*" Bout 75 pastors and inquirers showed up from different points of the compass, geographically and ecclesiologicaly. Five speakers joined us for the event who had all been mentors to many of us on the journey through their writings. Thomas Howard – brother to Elisabeth Elliot and professor of English Literature at St. John's Seminary; Dr. Robert J. Stamps – Methodist pastor and former Oral Roberts University chaplain; Fr. Peter Gilquist – former Campus Crusade for Christ leader, now Eastern Orthodox priest; Dr. Thomas Oden – professor of theology and patristics at Drew University; and Dr. Robert Webber – professor of theology and Bible at Wheaton College. All of these men had been used as instruments in God's hands to make a profound impression upon the thinking of many on the journey about the nature of what was happening in this grassroots movement of renewal. The whole event was a watershed moment in the convergence movement's unfolding. Men were gathered at the event who later were foundational figures in establishing two of the current communions of churches practicing and professing the convergence vision worldwide. It has proven to be an historic and pivotal experience for all who attended, including the speakers themselves.

BEGINNING STEPS – Articulating and Defining the Vision

As we made our way forward in the outworking and practice of this profound sense of vision and calling, we experimented with various approaches to developing a model for worship that would clearly articulate the interweaving of all three elements. Charismatic praise and worship music was interwoven with fresh arrangements of historic hymns and the inclusion of ancient chant melodies to parts of the service, such as the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Liturgical worship dancers offered creative arts expressions of worship to contemporary and ancient songs of the faith. Healing prayer and ministry in the gifts of the Holy Spirit were regularly encouraged and engaged in with a continuing flow of miraculous healings reported. Liturgical worship vestments, signs and symbols were taught on and implemented to enhance and enrich the worship experience of those in the congregations. Ongoing teaching and preaching of the Holy Scriptures from an evangelical perspective was offered in all types of settings and service formats. The

teaching, of course, also wove together understanding of all three aspects of the convergence to give spiritual insight into practices, meanings and origins. We were seeking to develop together a model, not only for our own relationship with the risen Lord, but also for others to draw from for their own journeys.

In September of 1993 I had been ordained to the presbytery in historic Apostolic Succession under Bishop Hawn and began to serve as an assistant pastor under Mike Owen in the Oklahoma City congregation. As we moved through 1994 and into 1995, it was beginning to become obvious that there were some missing elements in the context we found ourselves in for the full expression and outworking of the convergence of streams. The United Episcopal Church was at heart much too conservative and traditionalist as a whole to understand or accommodate this new wine in such a rigid wineskin.

In the fall of 1995 Fr. Mike Owen, myself, and another former Vineyard pastor, Dan Gincig – who had himself come the way of the convergence through joining an Old Catholic jurisdiction – met together to begin to explore alternative means and contexts for providing an outlet for this practice. We had continually encountered many pastors and church members alike who were on the convergence journey, but did not necessarily relate to practicing it outside of their own immediate denominational boundaries.

However, there was another contingent of leaders and lay people who felt called to enter this arena through the doors of a historic Church expression that employed full use of the liturgical and sacramental tradition and spirituality, in addition to the inclusion of the charismatic and evangelical elements. Many questioned us as to why we couldn't join one of the already established Churches, such as the mainline Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic or canonical Orthodox Churches or other established conservative branches of the Anglican tradition. The answers were various, but boiling down to the main issue that our understanding of the Church of Jesus Christ, at its very heart, was that it was at the same time charismatic, evangelical/reformed and liturgical and sacramental. These convictions about the nature of the Church and the Christian life were born of our study of Scripture, the early Church Fathers describing the experiences and life of the early Church of the first 5 centuries and our sense of what God was saying in a very direct and sovereign way that gave shape to this perception. Many of the established historic expressions of the Church contained members who were involved in charismatic renewal or evangelical study and teaching, but who did not necessarily see the foundational nature of the Church universal as being identified in this way.

Consequently, the three of us, with the collaboration and encouragement of a number of other leaders, both within the United Episcopal Church and without, began to work prayerfully on developing ideas for a communion of Churches in which this might be more fully and expeditiously worked out. As a result, the Ecumenical Communion of Catholic and Apostolic Churches was founded in 1995 as another important leg of the journey that God was leading us into. We found ourselves feeling a very close sense of kinship and identification with the Psalmist who penned the poignant words of Psalm 84:3 & 4, *“Happy are they who dwell in Your house! They will always be praising You. Happy are the people whose strength is in You! Whose hearts are set on the pilgrim’s way (or, ‘whose hearts on set on pilgrimage)’*”. We felt we were definitely on a journey of pilgrimage with the Lord, continually discovering new insights, vistas and spiritual

treasures that we never knew belonged to all members of Christ's Body. The founding documents of this new communion were developed and written by myself, Mike Owen, and Dan Gincig in order to provide a practical framework of values, structure and practice that would allow the convergence of streams to be lived out within parameters that retained historic, liturgical/sacramental shape.

At the same time, we were very conscious of the Lord's prodding us to embrace the values and foundational perspectives of convergence that we saw embodied in particular movements of the Spirit in the history of the Church. One of these was the Celtic Christian movement of the 5th to 9th centuries in the British Isles that made such a huge impact on the advance of the Gospel, not only in the British Isles, but also throughout various parts of western and eastern Europe. We were constantly aware of the Holy Spirit prompting our hearts to reach for the essence, the heart, the spirit of understanding and practice, rather than just being caught up in the outward forms of things. To this end, another key historical example of the practice of the convergence of these streams was highlighted for us in the Wesleyan revival and awakening under John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield, who were all three Anglican priests until their deaths. We were learning, experimenting and being formed in a way that would not allow us to become locked into one way of doing things, but to regularly progress and evolve in our understanding and experience in such a way that we were constantly "on pilgrimage" with the Lord. What we didn't want was mere "formalism", where there were outward "forms of godliness" but no "power thereof", as Paul warned Timothy about.

There were key illustrations the Lord began to give us as we continued to search, seek and encounter Him in the midst of the journey. One was the relationship of "form" to "life", being concerned that practicing liturgical worship expressions and devotional approaches did not stifle the work and free moving of the Holy Spirit in power and demonstration to confirm the Gospel and build up the faith of followers of Jesus. Examples included "the river and its banks". A river that flows with life through its banks can irrigate and enrich a whole valley; whereas, a river that overflows its banks can destroy and flood a whole valley. So, form (the riverbanks) and freedom (the flow of the river) were complementary and produced powerful and life-giving results.

Another example was "fire" and "the fireplace". A fire started in the middle of the floor of a home without proper "forms" for safeguarding and directing its properties can destroy a home; whereas, a fire put into a fireplace can heat a home, provide ongoing light and comfort and even be used to cook food for those in the home. However, a fireplace without any fire is just a cold, useless form, maybe attractive in the way it is designed or decorated outwardly, but devoid of true usefulness and "life". In the same way, riverbanks without the life-giving flow and power of a river is just a dead gully or dry riverbed. In both instances it takes both working together in complementary ways to receive the most benefit from the function of both aspects.

So, we discovered that while Paul admonished Timothy, and all disciples of Jesus after him, to watch out for those who hold to a "form of godliness" but "deny the power thereof", it was also clear that he did not tell Timothy under the Holy Spirit's inspiration that "forms of godliness" in and of themselves were useless or to be avoided; but only those which did not connect people to "the power" they pointed to or spoke of. Paul himself continued in his relationship with the risen Christ in the power of the Spirit to honor and practice certain forms of Jewish devotion and worship, such as taking vows in the Temple, celebrating the feast of Pentecost and synagogue worship elements. But

he did so with the connection to the “power” thereof in his relationship with a living Lord and the anointing and gifts of His Spirit.

As others began to hear of this effort and joined us, Mike Owen was consecrated as a bishop in historic Apostolic Succession, as was Dan Gincig, and a federation of like-minded churches and jurisdictions began to coalesce. However, it soon began to become apparent that the resulting wineskin was attracting other leaders who were not necessarily engaged in the same pursuit of this vision of the Church. The ECCAC was a step in the right direction for us. We had sought to make clear in the founding documents the nature of the role of the Holy Spirit and His empowering work and gifts, as well as the evangelical nature of our proclamation of the Gospel, but it was being read through more historically and traditionally “formalistic Catholic” eyes than what we were bringing to it.

-Chapter 4-

A Move Toward Home

As we moved through the spring and summer of 1995, Bishop Owen and I continued to sense a deep stirring of the Holy Spirit to reach out to God for more grace and guidance to fulfill more fully the original vision of convergence. In midsummer we were contacted by a group of fellow pilgrims on a similar journey from Virginia. The way in which they discovered us was clearly for us a direct working God’s providence, proving indeed to be a “divine appointment”. The leaders of this group had come from mainline Episcopal churches which were involved in charismatic and evangelical renewal and were answering a perceived mandate from the Lord of the Church to form a fellowship of churches that would provide the framework whereby churches and leaders from various backgrounds could come together in a “convergence paradigm” of worship and ministry. Some of those who were drawn to them along the way, as they developed foundational vision and values, were former United Methodist ministers and church planters, Assembly of God ministers, and independent Charismatic pastors, all of whom had been drawn in this same direction by attraction of the Holy Spirit.

The initial call was an invitation for us to come to Virginia to help them publicly inaugurate this new Church, initially called the Evangelical Episcopal Church. They were requesting that Bishop Owen be involved in consecrating their first two bishops and in ordaining into the historic Apostolic Succession twenty-plus pastors who were affiliating with them in the inaugural stages. We received some of their foundational documents by which to ascertain the content of their vision and sense of mission. Over a period of two weeks of prayer, further conversation and reading through their materials, we felt strongly that this group contained the essence of the vision of convergence that had been given to us and many that we had met on this journey.

Consequently, on the first weekend of October, 1995, myself, Bishop Owen and his wife and two other bishops who had become friends on this journey flew to Fredericksburg,

Virginia to participate in the public establishment of the EEC. The Ecumenical Communion of Catholic and Apostolic Churches was still an ongoing reality and developing its own constituency. Bishop Owen and I continued as members, together with Bishop Owen's independent Anglican diocese at that time. The service in Virginia was a glorious experience of celebrating the sovereign purposes and power of Almighty God in bringing this communion about, in line with the growing grassroots interest in the convergence vision across all boundaries. Three hundred followers of Christ from different streams of the Church attended the celebration. Within a week after the event, Bishop Owen was invited to affiliate with the EEC and bring his jurisdiction of clergy and churches with him. That was accomplished in October, and in December Bishop Owen was elected as the first Presiding Bishop for the Evangelical Episcopal Church International, as it was now called.

The EEC began with five congregations actually affiliated, and 25 pastors and 7 deacons, with three bishops initially overseeing the new communion. As 1996 approached, the EEC began the effort of a new communion or network of churches to work out its initial vision and test the waters of original values. Many of the fast growing members of the EEC were from non-liturgical backgrounds. Consequently, a study program for ministers previously ordained in another denomination was developed to give everyone the same basic grasp of vision, values and practices for ministry within the broad and inclusive vision of the communion out of a convergence center. Eager and consistent inquiry proceeded as a result of a small ad in *Christianity Today* magazine. We began to be fascinated by the breadth and scope of the interest that was being expressed. Leaders from Africa, the Philippines and India soon contacted us for affiliation. There was clearly a sovereign element of confluence at work around the world on many fronts. Interest grew so fast that the leadership of the mother network in the USA found itself hard-pressed to facilitate communication with all who were calling. Within a year over 700 calls, letters, faxes and emails had been received inquiring about the EEC and the convergence of streams vision it represented, most from ordained ministers in other Christian bodies.

By the fall of 1996 it began to become evident that some kind of changes needed to be implemented in the current structure and configuration of the EEC that would more effectively accommodate the worldwide interest that was happening. It was discussed that the need for provinces being established in national settings and consecrating bishops for those areas would more strategically enable the communion to grow and expand worldwide, rather than having everyone and everything depending on the USA, which was still in its own infancy, to provide the impetus. As discussions continued and new missionary bishops were consecrated, including myself earlier in February of 1996, more substantial interest began to arise from India, Africa and the Philippines with a number of congregations potentially represented. The original documents that formed the foundational direction for the EEC were being slowly revised and expanded to meet these growing needs for structure, support and definition.

THE CEEC – Shaping the Wineskin

By the late fall of 1996, it was becoming evident that a completely unexpected diversity of backgrounds, nations and motivations were involved in the rapidly expanding nature of the EEC. Leaders from mainline, Anglican/Episcopal, Africa Inland Mission, the

Church of South India, independent evangelical and charismatic churches all began to coalesce around the vision of the EEC. As presbyters and new bishops were ordained or received for the international nature of the expansion, a cry for further definition, articulation and clarity began to emerge among all those involved. Exactly how were we seeing “convergence renewal” and the historic Church heritage interacting in practice? How were the three streams of Christianity supposed to be worked out in worship, evangelism, church planting, and the training and equipping of new clergy in the different nations? How was authority to be exercised by the bishops of the EEC? Was it to be along the lines of the Anglican model of contemporary Anglicanism; the Roman Catholic hierarchical model; the Orthodox model, the early Church “Ignatian” model of the first three centuries or the Celtic Christian model? How were new dioceses to be formed and lines of jurisdictional authority to be understood? How was all of this different or essential as a particular outworking of Christian worship and discipleship and ecclesiology from joining one of the historic expressions of catholic Christianity within which to attempt convergence practice?

In January of 1997 the House of Bishops of the EEC came together to discuss the perceived need for a reconstitution of the EEC along more international lines, not just as a denominational expression centered in America, but as a truly international “communion of Churches”, identifying with the historic Celtic and Anglican spiritual traditions, but firmly committed to the vision of the Church as a convergence of many streams. In the course of this gathering, the House voted by a majority to reconstitute and reorganize the Evangelical Episcopal Church as the “Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches”.

I was particularly concerned that we remain “prophetic” in our approach to this new step, keeping a clear hold on the spirit and essence of the convergence vision and looking at a relational and organic way of living it out, rather than an institutional approach. This was the reason that the Celtic Christian emphases of the 5th to 9th centuries of Christianity were so important for me; their values, worldview and practice of the faith were far closer in attitude and heart to the early Christians of the first three centuries than the Church after Constantine. I was wanting to enter more and more deeply into a Way of Life in Jesus that flowed out of living relationship with Him as the center and His Spirit among us as the guide and constant inspiration for convergence as a spiritual reality.

My personal concern, having studied historical spiritual renewal movements in every branch of the Church, was that we didn’t end up becoming a “monument” instead of a “movement”; in other words, that we would not become trapped in wanting to settle into building an institutional organization that began to be self-serving and concerned with “political”, “hierarchical” and “turf” concerns, but with the advancement of the kingdom of God through convergence of the streams. The analogy the Lord inspired in my heart for this was the picture of the difference between a stagnate pool of water and that of a rushing, flowing, life-giving river. I definitely prefer to be in the center of the river, wherever that takes us, (white-water and all) rather than on the “safe” shores or standing around a stagnate pool looking at my reflection in the murky waters.

As we were taking this new step and seeking to navigate the fresh waters, other “convergence” networks of churches were being established along similar lines of vision. One such group was the International Communion of Christian Churches, founded by Archbishop Daniel Williams, with whom the CEEC came into a close relationship.

Archbishop Williams had come out of a Southern Baptist, charismatic and world missions background and found us in the midst of his own journey into the vision of convergence in 1997. We connected in a growing fellowship and dialog with him for a period of two years, at the end of which our College of Archbishops consecrated him into Apostolic Succession and appointed him founding archbishop for the new ICCC. The Charismatic Episcopal Church was another significant communion of churches birthed out of the convergence vision with founding leaders from a variety of backgrounds. Another was the “Communion of Orthodox Charismatic Churches”, with an emphasis relating more to the Eastern Orthodox branch of the Lord’s people. We were constantly amazed at the ongoing emergence of more and more leaders and congregations and networks that were moving in this direction, for the most part unaware that others were seeing the same picture.

Our original founding documents began to appear woefully inadequate to accommodate a constantly growing and expanding communion worldwide. As an infant network of churches identifying with the historic Church, but on the basis of what was considered a prophetic vision of renewal and essential nature of the Church, we were realizing that our experience and resources were far outstripped by our vision and enthusiasm. We had received much help and encouragement from historical and theological studies, as well as from dialog with mainline Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic leaders and institutions. The seminal influence and ongoing development of thought and practice, however, was represented for us in Dr. Robert Webber’s writing and seminars, which were invaluable in confirming a spiritual vision which had apprehended so many of us on this journey of discovery. However, in light of the international rapid growth and expansion and the influx of so many new leaders from so many diverse backgrounds, it was obvious that we needed to come before the Lord Jesus and rethink together the outworking of the vision of convergence in our life as a developing communion of churches.

The CEEC continued its journey in Christ through 1997. In December of 1997 I was elected as the second Presiding Bishop for the worldwide communion upon the resignation of my close friend and brother on the Journey, Archbishop Michael Owen. He chose to step down from his role because of health issues. My commitment to the communion was to see a set of official “canons” or church guidelines for function and operation developed and adopted for use throughout the CEEC. It was clear to me that the current need was to define the relationship of vision and journey to infrastructure for the ongoing perpetuation of the mission and calling of the CEEC. We were beginning to see ourselves as a part of a much greater plan and action of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to recall the Church universal to its inherent spiritual unity and complementarity, drawing upon its diversity not as contradictory, but as enriching and leading to a greater fullness. This was an internal emphasis to strengthen our inner life as a fellowship in the Lord’s universal Church.

We concentrated on our practices of convergence worship, devotional and discipleship life, structuring the various families or dioceses of churches, as well as the provinces, or families of dioceses, around the world. We continued to sense the Lord calling us to an ongoing journey of relationship, discovery and evolvment of our sense of identity as a communion, rather than becoming fixed, rigid and static. Many of the essential values and emphases began to more clearly emerge over the next four years, as an authentic “relational” and “familial” sense of connectedness began to define the heart of the way we walked together as an expression of God’s covenant people. The term that began to

be used to describe this particular value was “a band of brothers” sense of commitment to one another, rather than one based on strict conformity to doctrinal sameness in all areas.

Another related value that began to shape our journey as a household of God was that which was first articulated by the great 5th century Church Father, Augustine of Hippo, bishop of North Africa, and one of the greatest theologians and teachers of the faith in eastern or western Christianity. His dictum was stated as: “in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; in all things, charity!” As we saw this principle in the life of the early church of the first five centuries, and, again, particularly in Celtic Christianity of the 5th to 9th centuries in the British Isles, we began to realize that our relationship to and faith in the Truth of the faith was to a Person who revealed Himself to us as The Truth, rather than as a set of dogmas or doctrines. Of course, the teaching of the Scriptures and Apostolic Tradition as contained in the early Rule of Faith and Creeds were important markers on the journey of God’s people through history, and the foundational teachings of Christ and the apostles must be believed from the heart and with the whole being if we would walk in the Light as it has been revealed in our Lord Jesus. However, the distinction between ecclesiastical traditions and Apostolic Tradition is one that is important to recognize so that biblical diversity in matters of devotion and faith not essential to salvation can exist and thrive among God’s people who are heirs of His multi-faceted grace and the fullness of Truth found in Christ.

We began to realize that diversity was not the enemy or the opposite of “unity” in Christ. In light of this value, the communion began to see leaders and disciples of Jesus from many diverse backgrounds and theological/doctrinal persuasions being gathered together as one within the “convergence of streams” vision of the Church. We began to see how vast and rich were the spiritual deposits of prayer, worship, devotion, spiritual disciplines and culturally contextual ways of applying these that had been birthed in the life of the Church through its history. Many in the developing life of the CEEC, for example, did not hold to the same views of eschatology and the second coming of Christ; there were variations in the way different ones would celebrate Holy Communion or baptize; some believed in women being ordained as both presbyters and deacons in the life of the Body of Christ, and others believed only in ordination to the diaconate for women. Some were much more oriented toward a particular way of being convergence that was identified with an Anglican or High Church expression; others were more what I would describe as a Eucharistic Vineyard or charismatic congregation, with much less use of formal liturgy, but with deep reverence for the Presence of Jesus in the meal of the Lord’s Supper as central to Christian worship.

What held us all together as one was the central vision of the Church as a threefold cord of charismatic, evangelical and sacramental – and the value of being family, a band of brothers and sisters in the Household of God. On various occasions, as in most families, there were misunderstandings or momentary sincere disagreements; but our commitment to the call to love one another as He has loved us superseded these moments, and beautiful experiences of godly forgiveness, restoration and healing were the result. Those who came toward us with particular agendas – be they doctrinal hobby-horses or “proper churchmanship” or being “valid/legitimate Anglicans”, etc., usually did not remain among us for very long because our center was so clear and prominent in the way we related to one another and, together, to Christ.

Out of these kinds of experiences there began to rise to the surface additional practices and values, not only of diversity, but also of flexibility in worship practices within the broad blending of the streams, as well as more of a functional/relational approach to our bishop's roles among the people – one which sought to reflect a more spiritual “father and family” tone than that of a hierarchical authoritarian approach. We saw in the church of the first three centuries what we came to call an “Ignatian” model of the role of bishops; that is, one that was a more organic and apostolic fathering function – one of servanthood and spiritual mentors or facilitators, rather than “princes of the Church”, which developed in the later Middle Ages. Another application of these values was the cross-cultural approach to proclaiming the Gospel among diverse people groups and sub-cultures – for example: among American Indian peoples and such groups as “The Rainbow People” or “punk culture”.

-Chapter 6-

A NEW EMPHASIS – Mission and New Friends on the Journey

In the fall of 2001, after I had begun a second term serving as our international Presiding Bishop, I began to be drawn by the Lord into a season of deep and fervent intercession for the communion and God's purpose for us in this way of Holy Spirit renewal. I sensed very strongly in one of the prayer sessions in my office in Tulsa, Oklahoma at this time that the Lord was challenging me to ask Him to give to the CEEC three independent charismatic congregations of between 400 and 800 members or more, whose leaders were apostolic men with a vision for church planting, and who were on the convergence journey at some level. This impression was dropped into my heart with an accompanying gift of faith for this to transpire so that these congregations would be able to have a regional exposure or impact, because of their size and background, to the sovereign nature of the convergence movement and to give momentum in growth and further church planting to the communion. The Lord Jesus seemed to be saying to me that after coming through some testing seasons in the development of our inner life that we were now being poised to “become the communion I have always intended you to be”.

This fresh conviction and sense of the Lord directing the life of the communion as its Head in a very sovereign manner gave me a new expectation in prayer and began to birth in my heart a recognition that the Lord was calling the CEEC to even more of an emphasis on its apostolic calling as a people sent by God into the world to bring Christ and His redeeming love and power to people where they were, rather than expecting them to come to us. I began to communicate this as a vision and calling to become a “Go Church”, rather than a “Come Church”; to be the Church everywhere we went, 24-7, rather than only when we gathered on Sundays. It was beginning to unfold for me, as I studied the Book of Acts and spiritual renewal/revival movements through history, as a return to the living out of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as a Way of life, rather than as a series of events or religious meetings.

As I began to communicate this sense of calling from the Lord to us around the communion, others began to “catch” the emphasis like a “virus” of the kingdom spreading to more and more. It was a call to become a “missional” or apostolic *people*, rather than relying only on “missionaries” or bishops, or pastors to engage in mission as a lifestyle. One of the key phrases that captured this for me in messages I shared was: “When I came to a living faith in Jesus Christ, I was delivered from ‘going to Church’; I found out that I was the Church – ‘going’ into all the world – or into every man’s world.”

As I began to share these words from the Lord with our other bishops and archbishops, we began to sense that the Spirit of Christ was calling us to a new era in our history and journey as a communion of His one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church – one that related now rather to our outward mission of the Gospel in church planting, discipling others and new leadership development, than to the inward focus of the first 9 years of our life. In the midst of this development new leaders began to be drawn by the Holy Spirit into the life of the communion in fulfillment of Christ’s challenge to me regarding the three charismatic congregations of size and regional influence. The first to appear was founded and led by Rev. Quintin Moore, now one of our USA bishops. He had pioneered a Pentecostal Holiness congregation in Hutchinson, Kansas, in the mid 1980’s that later became affiliated with the charismatic Word of Faith movement and had grown to close to 900 in the mother congregation, with three others related to it. Out of a formation in both the Pentecostal Holiness and Lutheran traditions of the faith, Pastor Moore had been on a personal “convergence” journey of blending the streams in discreet ways in his hub congregation for over five years.

As we met and connected through one of our other bishops who knew him, Pastor Moore quickly began to respond to the language of convergence, or blending the streams, that made sense of his own personal journey and spiritual longings. Others along the way had connected to our journey from various spiritual backgrounds, including now Archbishop Daniel Williams mentioned earlier. Archbishop Williams came from a Southern Baptist and independent charismatic background and had been instrumental in pioneering a world missions and church planting movement that had planted over 2,000 congregations and 145 Bible Training Institutes in a variety of nations over a 15 year period.

During part of his journey with Christ, Archbishop Williams had served on the staff of a charismatic mainline Episcopal congregation working with youth for three years. In this context he had developed a deep appreciation for the Book of Common Prayer and aspects of the sacramental tradition of the Church that were planted deep within his heart. His own cathedral congregation he and his wife had planted beginning in 1993 was convergence from the beginning and has grown to over 1,000 in attendance in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

Over a period of time, Archbishop Williams and I experienced a growing sense of clear guidance in our hearts to seek closer ties and the possibility of a full communion of affiliation. Archbishop Williams had begun to share his journey with other key charismatic leaders he knew, both in the US and other parts of the world, and had consecrated three of these men with networks of churches into his own communion. In the fall of 2004 he, myself and a select number of his and our bishops and leaders met in retreat in Mississippi to seek the Lord Jesus for a way forward in full communion. Coming out of the retreat, and in subsequent meetings in January of 2005, it was clear

to all our bishops in the Province USA I oversaw in the CEEC, and to Daniel's key leaders, that the Holy Spirit was indeed leading us into a merger.

Archbishop Williams' cathedral congregation of 1,000, and another one of the key congregations led by one of those consecrated by him of 2,500, fulfilled the three congregations of 400-800 or more whose leaders were apostolic men with a vision for church planting who were on the convergence journey. At that point, the Lord in prayer spoke into my heart a deep conviction to ask and believe Him for a total of seven congregations of this makeup, including the first three. At the time of the writing of this chapter, others of our USA-based archbishops are in close dialog and processing with two other groups of churches on this convergence journey, both of which could bring in at least two or more congregations that fit these parameters given by the Lord in prayer.

For me, the amazing element about these kinds of developments is that they continue to be what I would describe as "sovereign, grassroots" actions of God's Spirit at work without the typical American "marketing" approach to publicizing and promoting something. The CEEC as a whole has always been very low key and has not pushed or publicized what has happened among us, except through the divine connections of relationships that were brought together by His providential working at just the right moments in our history. This continues to amaze me and humble me as I recognize the glory and transcendent power and plan of God at work emerging and blossoming all around us – almost as if we were watching Him at work as spectators of His glory – and trying our best to keep up with Him as His steps become a pathway for us to follow.

Other key leaders and networks from a more Reformed background, American Indian spiritual leaders, African American leaders and networks of churches and those involved in the "emerging church" conversation and development among GenX leaders and churches have all begun to be drawn into the life and fellowship we are sharing as a Journey with Jesus Christ in this communion of His Church. The Joseph's Coat experience is certainly alive and well among us in the adventure we call "convergence".

"...AND THE ROAD GOES EVER ON AND ON..."

It may seem a bit melodramatic to end this chapter of my own personal journey to convergence with a quote from the great trilogy, *"The Lord of the Rings"*; but the analogy is strikingly appropriate for how I view what God has done these first ten years of our journey as a communion. I see it as a journey of discipleship and continuous spiritual growth and transformation in Christ for those who are committed to being life-long "learners sitting at His feet", ever growing in the fullness of the knowledge of God revealed in Him. It is a journey that seems to go "ever on and on", with a depth of riches and graces and discoveries in Christ that seems to loom vast and plentiful without the narrow restrictions of false sectarian boundaries we so often draw around ourselves in the brokenness of "denominational" thinking.

We have found a deep and growing affinity for the term "communion" to describe our relationship together as members of Christ's living Body within our particular expression of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We see ourselves not as the "true Church", drawing a tight and narrow circle around ourselves to exclude and differentiate all those "not like us", but as a *part* of the one true Church of Jesus" - His holy, pilgrim

and covenant people on a journey of Life in Him who is the Way, proceeding toward the fullness of Truth found only in Him. In seeing ourselves this way, we are seeking to live out our faith, calling and vision of His kingdom and His Church by drawing an ever enlarging circle that includes all those called by His Name – His truly “catholic” and “apostolic” people. Whenever someone tends toward excluding us or shutting us outside their “circle of validity”, we seek to draw a larger circle that includes and accepts them as “one in Christ”.

Truly, the “threefold cord” of Scripture, the converging of the three major streams of the evangelical/reformed (Scripture), the charismatic (Spirit) and the liturgical/sacramental (Sacrament) cannot be easily broken! While there are many other genuine works of God’s grace and Spirit at work in the larger Church around the world, and many other movements of renewal of various aspects of the faith and life of God’s people - all of which have value as aspects of God’s plan to unite all things in Christ - we sense that the “convergence of the streams” that we have been deeply touched and formed by somehow relates to and connects with all of them and is mysteriously moving us all to that place of “unity with a purpose” that Jesus so fervently prayed for in John 17 before His death for us all. We sense that the convergence vision of what it means to be God’s covenant people, the Body of Christ, is meant to lead us all to a larger purpose – that of the harvest of the nations in apostolic kingdom evangelism out of a heart and way of life that proceeds from divine unity, love and fullness that will compel the world to finally recognize and believe that the Creator of all has sent Jesus as the Savior of the world.

It seems as though we are all living in deeply significant times in world and salvation history. There seems to be all around us the sense of things changing rapidly at a dizzying pace, altering the face of global relations and politics, as well as releasing upon the universal Church of Jesus Christ a “new reformation” that many from all sectors of the Body of Christ are recognizing. How all of this will play out and take shape in the near and long-term future, no one can with confident clarity quite grasp, although many are increasingly aware of the historic nature of the transitions we are moving through. All human beings seem, more clearly than ever, to be engaged and caught up in a Story greater than our own ability to fathom or predict. The people of God in Jesus Christ are finding themselves on many levels being realigned with one another in this “new reformation”, discovering friendships across ancient divides that promise much hope for the future of world evangelization and the unity of the Church.

At the same time, however, it seems as though there is a compelling Voice that continues to call us all to a journey of discipleship, discovery, pilgrimage and openness to the Lord of History as He orchestrates all things for the consummation of His divine plan of love and redemption, rescue and reconciliation, restoration and renewal of all things. As with Frodo and his companions, we find ourselves in a time fraught with danger and increasing anxieties and uncertainties, but one that beckons all of us to play his or her part, as insignificant as it may seem, in the unfolding drama and desperate necessities of our times. I believe that the “convergence movement” has a resonant parallel with the story of Frodo and his “Fellowship of the Ring”, as people from widely divergent and sometimes divided and mutually suspicious backgrounds find themselves being “chosen” by a loving and beneficent Providence to come together and draw strength from their diverse gifts in a moment of great need for a greater good. It is as though none of this has been of our choosing or our planning, but the times in which we live seem to have chosen us for such a venture for the sake, not only of the whole of the

Church, but for the sake of the world for which Christ has died and for which His heart beats in mercy and compassion.

Sovereignly, in our day, our mighty God seems to be weaving together these three historic threads or streams to again give to the Church, and through the Church to the world, the full beauty and power of the tapestry which reveals the fullness, beauty, and glory of the Church's Lord and the world's Savior. Whether it be in the formation of new communions of historic, apostolic, and catholic faith and worship that combine these three streams, or in the implementation of the influences and heritage of all three in already existing communions and congregations, this "convergence of streams" is contributing a growing impact towards reshaping the face and expression of Christianity in our time. There are hopeful signs of a new impetus towards unity and reunion, albeit, at a very grassroots level, as a new sense of Holy Spirit-inspired ecumenism seems to be spreading as one of the fruits of this fresh movement of renewal. Separate traditions of the Lord's Church, which in isolation represent one or the other of these three threads, seem to be finding one another on a journey of enriching spiritual discovery of one another's worship traditions, thus providing a more complete picture and experience of what God has given to His people in Christ through history.

Who knows, but in our day – today – the Church universal may be poised on the brink of rediscovery of its' ancient roots, a rediscovery of the treasure of the fullness of its' heritage that may lead us again to a deepening experience of the biblical axiom:

"Though one alone may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Ecc. 4:12.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit
MAY THE TAPESTRY BE RESTORED WHOLE AGAIN, TO THE GLORY OF
GOD!