

MAINTENANCE TO MISSION

VISION FORMATION GATHERINGS



SESSION 1: OUR NEW APOSTOLIC MOMENT

Msgr. James Shea, President, University of Mary



"Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a 'Christian society' which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone."

-- Pope St John Paul II

Essential Takeaways -

1. Fruitful engagement in the Church's mission depends upon accurately assessing the cultural moment.
2. Every culture sees the world through a particular lens, what Shea calls a 'Ruling Imaginative Vision' (RIV).
3. When the Church exists in a culture with a broadly accepted Christian RIV, we call that a 'Christendom Moment'. The primary task in such a moment is the maintenance of the flock.
4. When the Church exists in a culture with a different RIV we call that an 'Apostolic Moment'. The primary task in such a moment is the mission of evangelization.
5. When the Church operates in a Christendom Mode in an Apostolic Moment the results are disastrous.
6. We have the peculiar problem of having inherited all of the institutions and expectations of a late-Christendom culture. So we have the unique challenge of maintaining the aspects of Christendom that still make sense, while also making the vital turn toward Apostolic activity.

Assessing the Cultural Moment -

The principal here: Fruitful engagement with mission demands accurate assessment of culture.

Monsignor Shea says it is critical for us, as leaders in the Church, to “take thought for the times in which they live and to devise pastoral and evangelistic strategies suited to those times.”

MAJOR PRINCIPLE

"Fruitful engagement with mission demands accurate assessment of culture."

Ruling Imaginative Vision -

Every culture sees the world through a particular lens, what Shea calls a ‘Ruling Imaginative Vision’ (RIV). He defines this as ‘the way in which a group sees the world’. It so deeply pervades a group that it becomes ‘the atmosphere that the members breathe and the soil in which the institutions of that culture take root. It provides the answers to the deepest human questions.’

Shea says a Ruling Imaginative Vision is not just a moral code, but rather:

- the accepted ideal of a good person
- clear categories of success and failure
- economic and political values and practices
- legal codes and public policy
- manners and modes of entertainment...

Shea notes, the word ‘imaginative’ “doesn’t mean make-believe. It refers to the ability that we have in our minds to draw to mind things that are not immediately in our experience; to take stock of the past and the future and to put it all together into a meaningful narrative.”



Christendom versus Apostolic Moments

When a Christian Imaginative Vision predominates; we call that a Christendom Moment. In a Christendom society, the Gospel and the Christian RIV thoroughly permeated all aspects of culture. We saw this from the 4th century until recent times in the West.

Conversely, when Christianity is present in a society with a different prevailing Ruling Imaginative Vision, the Church then exists in an Apostolic Moment. Examples of this are:

The early Church, which was surrounded by the ancient Greco-Roman culture.

Areas that are only first hearing the Gospel today or where there are other predominating worldviews and religions.

Pivotaly, this is also true for us again now, surrounded by and immersed in a modern secularist culture. Thus, we live in a new Apostolic Moment in the West. Shea says that, "The Church necessarily has to operate differently in Apostolic and Christendom times." Accordingly, it is critical that we come to terms with this reality.

"We don't choose the times in which we live. There's no room for nostalgia or hand-wringing or unnecessary anxiety in Christian life. We receive from Christ the times in which we live and we receive from him as well the corresponding grace to rise to the challenges of the times in which we live!"

So, what has to change?

In Christendom the main focus is healthy maintenance: continuing on with what is already established, purifying it, not giving in to the besetting temptation of Christendom which is hypocrisy. In Christendom, Christianity can often become increasingly lukewarm, watered-down and conventional.

In an Apostolic Moment the main focuses are evangelization and the building up of a counter-culture. Living a settled, ordinary life can be difficult for sincere Christians in an Apostolic Moment -- so the besetting temptation is cowardice. In the book Shea notes that in our Apostolic Moment, we have the peculiar problem of having inherited all of the institutions and expectations of a late-Christendom culture. So we have the unique challenge of maintaining the aspects of Christendom mode that still make sense, while also making the vital turn toward the Apostolic focuses mentioned above.

"We are at the end of Christendom. Not of Christianity, not of the Church, but of Christendom. Now what is meant by Christendom? Christendom is economic, political, social life as inspired by Christian principles. That is ending -- We've seen it die... These are great and wonderful days in which to be alive. ... It is not a gloomy picture -- it is a picture of the Church in the midst of increasing opposition from the world. And therefore live your lives in the full consciousness of this hour of testing, and rally close to the heart of Christ."

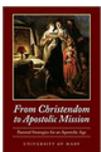
-- Ven. Fulton Sheen

What is at stake?

For all leaders in the Church, this massive cultural shift hits very close to home. Shea says, "Anyone who has been a priest for five minutes has had this experience of someone coming up and saying, 'Father, I don't know what to do, I'm so hopeless. We raised our children in the faith, we did everything our parents did, we sent them to Catholic school, we taught them their catechism and their prayers and took them to church. We did everything we could and exactly what our parents did and they left and our grandchildren aren't even being baptized!' I reassure people that the circumstances have changed very radically in the course of that time."

Shea says, "The greatest danger that we face is not getting this shift clear. If we continue to operate in a Christendom Mode when we're really in an Apostolic Age, then all of the strategies that used to be effective... all of those strategies are going to fall flat. The catastrophe of that method can be seen in places that only a few generations ago were the most Catholic places in the world -- think about Quebec, Spain, Belgium, Ireland -- they were solidly Catholic places. Because the Church was going along 'business as usual' even though the culture was changing rapidly, that strategy, that way of conducting the Church's life, caused the collapse to be almost complete. Such that now those places that once were thickly, thickly Catholic are now profoundly secular."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



**From Christendom to
Apostolic Mission**
Monsignor James Shea



Rescued
Fr. John Riccardo

Illustrated Explanatory Videos:

- [Christendom and Apostolic Modes of Engagement](#)
- [Catholic Imaginative Vision](#)

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