

DIVINE RENOVATION

SUMMARIZING CHAPTER ONE

“House of Prayer: Remembering Our Identity and Purpose”

LEARNING FROM THE TITANIC. “April 14, 2012, was the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. ... *many of the lifeboats launched from the stricken vessel that night were no more than half filled.* In fact, in the eighteen lifeboats that launched from the ship, there were a total of 472 unused spaces. After the ship disappeared below the water, around 1,500 people floundered in the icy waters while the lifeboats sat at a safe distance and watched. *Only two of the eighteen lifeboats went to rescue survivors.* They transferred passengers to maximize free space, and it is a recorded fact that some of the first-class passengers complained about terrible inconvenience. By the time those in the lifeboats had recalled their purpose and had gone among the victims, only nine people were found alive, and three of these eventually succumbed to hypothermia. As I watched the movie, it struck me that this was a metaphor for the Church. *We exist for mission.* Like Jesus, we have been sent to ‘seek and save’ those who are perishing, and there are plenty of seats available in the lifeboats. Yet, so often as a Church, we sit at a safe distance, more concerned with our own needs and comfort. Perhaps if a few people swam over to us, we would help them, but going to them? This is not just a question of our comfort zones being challenged—it is totally outside of our frame of reference, because we have so thoroughly forgotten our identity. Lifeboats exist to rescue people. So does the Church. We maintain our lifeboats, we paint them, we serve the people in them and keep them in good order and hold card socials, but we do not use them for the purpose for which they were created. Any crew member who would dare to disrupt life on the lifeboat will quickly hear a chorus of complaints from the passengers who are adverse to being inconvenienced in any way. We lament the tragedy of the loss of faith, secularization, church closures and so on, but it does not occur to us to pick up the oars and row.”

A CHURCH WITH A MISSION OR A MISSION WITH A CHURCH? “The identity crisis in our Church today is not unlike the one that existed at the time of Jesus. It is said that it’s not so much that the Church of Christ has a mission, as that the mission of Jesus Christ has a Church. We, however, have so forgotten our essential missionary calling that we have contented ourselves with maintenance and serving ourselves. That the Church exists for the sake of mission has been asserted by popes and theologians continuously for the last 50 years, but most Catholics perceive mission as something that a select few carry out in far-off places, and most parishes, crippled by a culture of maintenance, focus at best on meeting the needs of parishioners. Like Israel at the time of Jesus, we have become robbers of the people God has appointed us to reach, that his ‘salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’ (Isaiah 49:6)”

WHAT’S THE MISSION? “So, if we exist for mission, what is the mission of the Church? To answer this question, we turn to the last verses of Matthew’s Gospel, to the passage known as the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:19-20) Here, the wavering disciples are told to ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.’”

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE? “To be a disciple is to be a learner. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be engaged in a lifelong process of learning from and about Jesus the master, Jesus the teacher. The English term ‘disciple’ comes from the Latin *discipulus*, and provides the connotation that this learning process is not haphazard, but intentional and disciplined. To become a disciple is to commit to such a process of growth.”