

CHAPTER FIVE

It's Liberalism, Eh!

He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?"

Luke 6:39

The last chapter explored the nature of liberalism, demonstrating that it is different from and opposed to the traditional/orthodox Christianity upon which the ACC was founded. The resulting confusion and confrontation lies at the heart of the malaise which afflicts the denomination. Indeed, it has led to a kind of stalemate as the two religions pull in opposite directions. This is bad enough, of course, but the problem is much deeper than a mere standoff between competing factions in the Church.

This chapter will revisit the various symptoms of the crisis that were examined in Chapter Two in order to show that liberalism in and of itself has had a generally negative effect on the life and witness of the Church. *The truth is that many of the aspects of the present crisis in the Church either find their origin in liberalism or have been made worse by its influence.*

It must be emphasized from the start, however, that I do not mean to imply that liberalism is the sole cause of our Anglican troubles - just the main one! Of course, we share in the general marginalization of the wider church experienced by all denominations. Of course, some of our decline, for example, must be laid at the feet of our unwillingness to engage our culture with serious evangelism and mission, our stubborn refusal to adapt our worship to contemporary realities and our preoccupation with the proper form of liturgy while at the same time neglecting the need for our worship to come from our hearts, not just from our words.

While these matters, and others, are serious indeed, they must remain secondary considerations when placed in the shadow of liberalism. In fact, we are being so shaken by the enormity of the present crisis that we will no longer be able to hold on so tenaciously to these all too typically Anglican attitudes. In this sense there is a silver lining in the clouds that surround us. But now it is necessary to fly into the eye of the storm itself.

Symptom 1: The Membership Blues (Reprise)

In Chapter Two I presented the bare fact that the ACC has experienced a precipitous drop in membership over the Sixty years or so. The loss of so many members has not been a pleasant or healthy experience for the Church. It has been a real and painful loss and, it is now important to realize, it has a real connection with liberalism. In order to understand this connection, it is necessary to probe deeper into the various ways in which Anglicans have slipped away.

Like every human organization, denominations experience a loss of fringe members as a part of its natural life. One of the saddest realities of parish life in the ACC, however, has been the steady exodus of some of our most involved and committed lay people. It parallels the infamous “brain drain” of our best and brightest Canadians down to the United States. Why are they leaving?

In the unfortunate absence of a more scientific investigation it is necessary to fall back on what is the common experience of many parish priests. When someone is leaving the Church, they will often seek to explain their actions to their pastor. This is a valuable if painful source of information. Another is conversations with the seemingly endless supply of former Anglicans who now belong to other denominations. All too many begin with “Oh, I grew up in the Anglican Church...” or “We used to go to St. John’s...”.

Many of these people make it clear that they are not leaving because they want to but because they feel they must. Call them the “reluctant orthodox”. They claim to have discerned trends in

our Church, especially at the national level, which they consider to be contrary to the Word of God. They have been disappointed with the inability or unwillingness of the leadership to proclaim clearly the Gospel in its traditional/orthodox shape.

They have also come to the critical conclusion that there really is no hope for change, no possibility that recent trends can be halted, let alone reversed. With much anguish of soul for themselves and great stress to their parishes they have quietly departed taking their energy, talents and money with them.

One of the greatest frustrations for those in local leadership is to see this happening and not be able to do anything about it. We agree with them that there are serious problems in our Church and we too feel powerless to effect change. However, for various reasons we have not come to the conclusion that leaving is the best solution. For us, the frustration at seeing them leave is much worse because our hopes for renewal and reformation diminish as fewer and fewer sympathetic people are left behind to carry on the struggle from within.

Former Anglicans continue to help populate the pews of those denominations that have remained unequivocally committed to the essentials of traditional/orthodox Christianity. Many of them express deep regret, missing especially the beauty of the liturgy and the life of the sacraments. Such sentiments, however, are not enough to make them change their minds. The slow march continues.

Of course, it continues as well into the new denomination known as the Anglican Network in Canada. There is no question at all that its *raison d'être* was the dominant theological liberalism of the ACC. Most started out as Anglicans and many were part of Anglican congregations that left the ACC reluctantly and with much anguish. Most had to give up their buildings and start from scratch. To say the Anglican establishment did and does not treat them with the love one would expect from their close brothers and sisters in Christ is perhaps an understatement. At the very least they are seen as deserters and schismatics. When the histories of this sad episode are

eventually written they may well show that the ACC was more concerned to keep its physical assets than to keep its parishioners or to ensure that the witness to the Gospel continues in the churches built by previous generations of Anglicans.

Jesus said that the sheep know the voice of the shepherd. The sheep "...follow him because they know his voice. But they will not follow a stranger: in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." (John 10:4-5) Is this the spiritual reality that lies behind the exodus of thousands of once-faithful Anglicans? Is the voice of liberalism a "stranger's" voice? Is this why so many have "run away"? This is the essence of the challenge presented to the Church by this type of leaver.

It needs to be said at this point that there is yet another class of departures. These are people who have become so discouraged about the state of the ACC at all levels that they have simply become inactive while not actually leaving for another denomination.

A number of these persons were traumatized at the end of the last century by the way in which the BAS was introduced into many parishes. Rightly or wrongly they feel that they were robbed of their way of worship, which, for many Anglicans, is a mortal wound. They have no comprehension of the reasons why the BAS was so eagerly received and the BCP so effectively sidelined.

Some of them even felt obligated to leave their home parishes and become wandering gypsies camping in another parish for a while until the BAS takes over there, necessitating yet another move. It is a trail of tears. Others, less determined or more discouraged, have kept up their membership in their local parish but almost never attend. To the extent that liberalism was behind not only the BAS but the way in which it was so eagerly introduced (even imposed), it must shoulder a major share of responsibility for these less visible departures.

While we are considering these questions, it might be worthwhile to ask ourselves “Where have all the young men gone?” In a church that is greying one expects a predominance of females because of basic demographics. But something else seems to be at work as well. For not only are older men absent but also there are relatively few younger men. In this area the ACC shares in the overall failure of the Christian church in our culture to attract males. But the suspicion remains that they are *especially* absent from our Church. This seems odd in an institution which has supposedly been molded by an exclusively male hierarchy. On the surface one would expect such an institution to attract men with ease. This is not the case.

One reason for the relative absence of younger men may be what might be called the feminization of the Church, a process that took place long before women were accepted into the ranks of the ordained. It is common knowledge that women have, in recent years at least, formed the backbone of the workers within the ACC.

For whatever reasons they are the ones who have rolled up their sleeves and done a great deal of the necessary work. Sometimes this was done through the Anglican Church Women (the saviour of many a parish budget) or through the official and unofficial offices open to them as lay persons. They have taught in the Sunday School, visited the sick, run the bazaars, served on vestries, become layreaders, chaired and staffed committees, gone to synods, done stints as wardens, etc. Without the enormous contribution of these women, the ACC would have had to fold up its tents long ago. But you won't find much reference to them in the history books.

Why has this happened? If you listen to the women themselves one often hears the lament that they had to do this work because their men-folk refused to get involved. It is possible to argue that it is hardly any wonder such a female-dominated church (at least in the actual activities of lay people) would not be very appealing to most men. They don't tend to show up at Tupperware parties either! But surely this begs the question. At some point, perhaps even within living memory, it is clear that the ACC became relatively unattractive to males in our culture.

Naturally this is a troubling development for an institution which is in such need of revitalization. It is a well-known fact among professional observers that if a father goes to church it is likely that his wife and family will too. Not only is this true, but there is a much greater probability that his children will also continue to be part of the church when they grow up. If it is only mother who goes to church, the reverse is true. Therefore, any church which appeals so predominately to the female gender will probably continue to decline. It will also find itself suffering further from fragmentation as modern families struggle for wholeness.

What has been the role of liberalism in this area? Without denying that there is a variety of reasons for the feminization of the church in general, the ACC has been particularly hard hit because of its current style of pastoral ministry. Even though the male gender was in control of the hierarchy, the denomination came to see the Christian faith in largely feminine categories. The fact that this development arose simultaneously with liberalism is, I would argue, no coincidence. In fact, with the loss of any need, desire or ability to evangelize (see especially "Of Decayed Evangelism", p. 13ff, above.), much more of the work of the Church became focussed upon its own membership. Today the clergy are largely chaplains to those who attend.

Almost the entire emphasis in such ministry is put on pastoral care, the looking after one's own instead of winning the world for Christ. We became an exclusively nurturing, caring, empathetic, accepting, loving, listening, non-judgmental, and affirming community. While there is much to be said in favour of most of these things, other more male-oriented aspects of the faith were downplayed. Any suggestion of aggression, even protective or progressive aggression (as in the use of military metaphors or in evangelism) became *verboden*. Anything that reeked of strength or dominance or victory was shunned. In this context, the introduction of female priests was a perfectly logical development. That God is being addressed in feminine similes and metaphors, with some even calling for goddess worship also comes as no surprise.

In the light of all this it seems reasonable to suggest that men became more and more alienated from an increasingly feminized church. Where could their maleness find expression and

acceptance? Where was there room for decisive bold leadership or for an all-out commitment to a great cause? Instead of being enrolled as soldiers in a very real battle against “the world, the flesh and the devil” (BCP) at baptism, now prayers are made that new Christians be given “an inquiring and discerning heart, a courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and love [the Lord] and the gift of joy and wonder in all [his] works” (BAS). This change may be symbolic of the problem.

While the liturgy was in the process of being “softened”, even feminists like the satirist Nancy White were discovering that “Daughters of Feminists” still wanted to play with Barbies. In spite of all the propaganda that would suggest otherwise, boys will be boys and girls will be girls. When a church fails to provide adequate psychic space for half of the human race, it can expect to be only half full.

Liberalism also effectively serves to cut off the Church from those movements which are proving effective in encouraging men to be active. Canadian Anglicanism seemed almost untouched, for example, by the Promise Keepers. Although this organization peaked in the mid-nineties and its function has been replaced largely by more local men-friendly approaches, it had considerable success in recruiting and encouraging men in the Christian faith.

Many liberals naturally (but questionably) saw Promise Keepers’ clear call for men to take their rightful and biblical role as leaders in the home and in the church as a call for a return to male domination. Jumping to this conclusion caused them to miss an opportunity to offer men a place to stand. Promise Keepers also, like most of these organizations, has a Statement of Faith which commits it to the traditional/orthodox Christian faith. This, too, makes it anathema to liberals. Thus, it seems that the ACC can only stand and watch as other churches see more of their men return to the pews.

While the categories of “leavers” already discussed can no doubt account for much of the membership decline in the ACC, there remains one more that may be more numerous than all

the others put together. These are those for whom the Church has simply become irrelevant. Again, it must be acknowledged that this fate is not unique to the Anglican Church. For a variety of reasons Canadian society has turned its back on institutional religion as a whole.

What needs not to be overlooked however, is the fact that those denominations which have continued to affirm clearly their commitment to the essentials of traditional/orthodox Christianity have in large part not been plagued by massive defections. Like the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada mentioned earlier, they have held their own or even grown some. There are, no doubt, many reasons why this is true. I would like to suggest a few which, in the context of this book, seem to me to be the most important.

First of all, by its very nature, liberalism cannot present a unified or easily understood message to those uninitiated into its mysteries. It constantly is morphing into different shapes as new theories take hold in scholarly circles. Traditional language and symbols are retained while at the same time their meaning is in constant flux. Trying to decipher what is really being said is like trying to guess where the pea is in a kind of theological shell game. And then the pea turns out to be a lot like other societal messages.

As a result, liberalism is much better at telling us what it rejects than what it affirms. It is caught in a web of confusion due to its tendency to be in constant change and its inability to use straightforward language in explaining itself. For these reasons at least, it is extremely difficult to win or retain the allegiance of many ordinary people. Presumably it would attract some people who considered themselves spiritual in one way or another and who were already committed to a left-liberal political agenda. But this is a relatively shallow pool in which to fish.

However, there is a deeper problem. As we saw in the previous chapter, at the heart of liberalism are its basic principles of the ultimate authority of experience, of universalism and of inclusivism. For most people this boils down to one simple “truth”: in the long run it does not matter what one believes. Whether you are a Christian or a Muslim or an atheist we are headed for the same

destination. The God who is love will embrace us all. Where here is the incentive to go to a meeting every week and give up a good percentage of one's income to boot? Where here is a great cause worth sacrifice and effort? With so many other demands upon a person's time and energy and without the encouragement of a society in which going to church is the thing to do, it is little wonder that so many have walked away from the Church. Who can blame them?

This brings us to a final irony. Liberalism began as an attempt to adjust the teaching and practice of the church to fit in with modern thinking. This was done in order to save the church from itself, from continuing to present a hopelessly outdated message to a culture committed to the new ideas of science and technology. As a number of observers have noted, however, as the faith was reshaped in order to be acceptable to current thinking, it began to look more and more like that thinking itself, dressed up in spiritual language.

This is hardly surprising because in adopting secularist assumptions liberalism had already committed itself to a secularized version of Christianity. Many people began to notice that the message of the liberal church was largely a baptized echo of certain strains within secular society coming exclusively from the cultural and academic elite to begin with. Even if one agreed with this message, it was easily seen that church membership might be redundant. Why go to church when basically the same message was being proclaimed from many different sources? On the other hand, to the extent that they were opposed to the musings of the cultural and academic elite, they would find church irritating at best and offensive at worst. Why go to church under these conditions? Why indeed?

And so we come face to face with what is perhaps the only really hard statistical fact that we have in this whole discussion: *whenever liberalism has become dominant in a denomination (i.e. the so-called "mainline" denominations) there is always serious numerical decline*. This is a universal truth across cultures, languages and nationalities. It is an observable fact, chronicled by many. One of the recent authors to do so in detail is Thomas C. Reeves in his 1996 book *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity*.

The opposite also holds true: *whenever liberalism has not gained a serious foothold in a denomination (i.e. the evangelical denominations and in Eastern Orthodoxy) such numerical decline has not taken place.* Canadian Anglicans need to be aware that the Anglican Church in the Two-Thirds World, such as Africa and South America, is experiencing significant growth. It is no coincidence that these Anglicans are largely untouched by liberalism. The conclusion, then, is as obvious as it is irrefutable:

Liberalism is a major cause of membership loss. It goes hand in hand with decline. It is that simple. We might debate why this is so, but there is no debating that it is so.

And so they have left. They have left with many others and for many reasons. It must be appreciated that all these leavings have not left unaffected those parishioners who do remain active. Most of our parishes are quite small and when key people leave or drop out the burden falls on fewer and fewer shoulders. Besides, those who have left are people they know and love. They are friends and often even family. When one suffers, all suffer. Naturally this has had a profound negative effect on general morale. Much more serious in some parts of the Church than in others, it is impossible to gauge the way in which this might impact upon any movement towards reform.

There is thus what might be called a "culture of leaving" within the Anglican Church. This is different from what some have called the "circulation of the saints" which some other denominations experience. The latter have people coming and going all the time and some of their growth is attributable to the patterns of this movement among the already converted. Unfortunately, Anglicans generally live on a one-way street. People leave by the back door all right, but they are failing to come in the front door at anywhere near the same pace.

But if anyone is still looking for the major reason why all of this has happened to their beloved Church, the short answer is: "It's liberalism, eh!".

Symptom 2: Of Decayed Evangelism (Reprise)

The discussion of this topic in Chapter Two noted that the Anglican Church of Canada, just when it needed to evangelize in order even to survive, seemed unwilling or unable to move much beyond talking about this aspect of the faith.¹ What follows will demonstrate that the major reason for this dilemma is the heavy influence of liberalism within the denomination. This can be seen most clearly through a discussion of evangelism in the context of the mission of the church.

Since its inception and until very recently, the church has seen its overall mission in terms of extending the kingdom of God to the whole of creation (at least in principle). This was to be done, in part, in and through obedience to Christ's great commission to "go 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 I have commanded you." (Matt.28:19-20)

This is an unambiguous command to bring all persons to Christ out of all the peoples, races, cultures and religions of the world. It, in turn, is based on the clear biblical teaching that any person who is not a believer in Jesus Christ is "condemned already" (John 3:18) and needs to be converted in order to enter the kingdom of God. Eternal life will be granted only to those who repent and put their trust in Jesus Christ alone. Jesus himself made this astonishing claim: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

According to the witness of the Bible, we find the early church busily engaged in this project from the very beginning, first among the Jews and then among the pagans of the day. It recognized that to come to Christ meant to reject any other way of salvation. Ever since, the church has taken this as a given even if, for various reasons, it did not always act as if it did and made serious mistakes along the way.

¹ See above, p.13ff.

England was one of the pagan countries evangelized and eventually converted to Christianity. This is an essential part of our history, sharing as we do in the developments since that time within the Church of England. Indeed, the history of Canada itself was shaped by this impulse as first French Catholic missionaries accompanied the earliest European explorers and then the English arrived along with their missionaries from the Church of England. This became part of the great missionary movement of the nineteenth century. While it is true that there was much left to be desired in the ways in which this enterprise was carried out, it was all done in response to Christ's unambiguous command.

While all of this was taking place on the ground, by the end of the 19th C. liberalism was gaining adherents among the leadership of the church and this has led to radical change on the mission front. The problem is that the basic principles of liberalism are in serious conflict with the evangelistic emphasis of traditional mission activity. These principles arise out of a new approach to Scripture which has led to a multiplicity of views as to who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. From this perspective the Church does not have a single Christ to present to the non-Christian. To whom are they to convert? This core of uncertainty at the heart of liberalism made a significant contribution to its early loss of interest in the older forms of missionary work.

This is more clearly seen when we remember that universalism and inclusivity are two of the central principles of liberalism. These principles stand fundamentally opposed to evangelism. The inner logic of the latter is clear enough: unless a person comes to explicit faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour she cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, out of love for humanity and in obedience to its Lord, the Church must be engaged in the business of trying to bring as many as possible to the faith. How could it do anything less?

But when you believe that no one is ultimately outside the kingdom and that all will be saved then what is the point of engaging in evangelism? Indeed, you may be opposed to evangelism on the grounds that it is arrogant and imperialistic.

The bottom line is that liberalism and evangelism are, along with the two religions they represent, mutually exclusive in principle and in practice.

Ingham's characterization of the evangelization of those who belong to other religions as bigotry shows just how true this conclusion really is. He is only being consistent.

When we turn to the history of missions in the last hundred years we can see how this incompatibility has actually worked itself out in the life of the Church as the new religion entered its bloodstream. Liberals did not abandon mission as one might expect. However, as they often did with traditional concepts, they redefined it. In this case it is, perhaps, more true to say they refined and narrowed it.

In the nineteenth century many of those most concerned with evangelization were at the same time developing a strong social conscience, seeing the need for the reform of societal structures in order to alleviate suffering and injustice. Liberals found themselves attracted to this aspect of mission partly because it did not seem to require a supernaturalist view of reality. It was focussed on the here and now instead of the possibilities of heaven and hell. Heaven and hell were made irrelevant, in effect, by the acceptance, in practice if not in theory, of universalism.

In fact, while all this was taking place around the turn of the century, liberals also were proclaiming the dogma of "The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man". While this slogan may look like a commonly accepted truth to most Christians, it is now clear that its proponents at the time meant it as an expression of universalism. Rather than meaning only that every human being was the special creation of the Almighty in his image and thus a respected and equal part of the human family (a Biblical concept), it also embodied the idea that this fact automatically qualified them as being in a proper relationship with him. This fit hand in glove with the new way of defining mission as what became known as the "social gospel".

This development marked a shift towards seeing Christian mission predominately in terms of social justice. The incoming of the Kingdom of God was to be accomplished through changing social structures. To this enterprise liberals have brought a profound and admirable commitment. It helped that liberals of all stripes, and even conservatives, here find common ground. For one thing a common view of Jesus is not a necessary part of the agenda. There is no real need to talk about him very much at all except perhaps as a great teacher and example of how we are all to live. The message was not really about him. Instead it was about bricks and mortar, about politics and economics, about social sin rather than personal sin. This message found particular resonance, not so much with the teaching of Jesus, but with certain clear strains in the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

There is no doubt that the whole church owes a great debt to liberalism due to the way it has raised our consciousness in reference to social justice. The consistency and persistence exhibited in pursuing this goal have been remarkable if not inspirational. However, it also needs to be said that wherever this approach to mission came to dominate, as it eventually did in the leadership of the ACC and much of mainstream Christianity in North America, the missionary zeal which had characterized the previous period of church history was quickly extinguished.

Odd as it may seem today it was this zeal that lay behind the very formation of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in 1893. It was partly a concern to facilitate the support of the missionary work in the North that originally motivated the Canadian dioceses to come together. The Church also had its own very active Missionary Society for years, but this is no longer the case. The Society was upheld by the laudable efforts of its Women's Auxiliary, the old W.A. The latter has been replaced by the Anglican Church Women. In spite of this less focussed title many ACW groups continue to be missionary minded. It is also significant that the Special Service for Missions, with its explicit prayers for the "evangelizing of the world" and the conversion of "the heathen", was removed from the Prayer Book in the revision of 1959.

Today a search of the programs of the ACC on its website fails to reveal any remnant of its Department of World Mission. No doubt some of its former functions have been farmed out to other departments or programs. Suffice it to say that missionaries, in the sense of those sent out to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have had little or no opportunity to hear it before, are simply not part of the Church's official program any longer. This is not to say that there is nothing good being accomplished in terms of our work with our overseas partners through the National Church, but the focus has shifted to short-term mission largely to do with the social gospel rather than winning the lost for Christ.

Of course, there still happen to be many thousands of Anglicans who vigorously disagree with and are deeply offended by the marginalization of evangelism. To them the conversion of non-Christians is at the very heart of the Gospel and cannot be excluded without the denial of that Gospel and the love of God that is behind it. It is impossible to overstate their dismay when they realize that world evangelization, which they believe is the only real hope for humanity and a main reason for the existence of the church, is simply not a priority within the official structures of their own denomination.

They are understandably alienated from the narrowly focused mission of the National Church and find themselves supporting other outside mission agencies, such as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, who still make evangelism a priority. This pattern, however lamentable, is inevitable when two incompatible faiths share the same institution. If National Church bureaucrats as well as bishops are frustrated by the reluctance of many Anglicans to support mission through the official channels they can find a good part of the reason right here: the two religions have two differing concepts of mission. This is how deep our division runs.

This is why I speak "of decayed evangelism" in the Anglican Church of Canada. It is not that no evangelism, as traditionally defined, is being done in the Anglican Church of Canada, but it is only being done by those of traditional/orthodox faith. Some parishes have enjoyed at least modest success in this area, especially those with a ministry to university students.

There certainly remains much to be learned and applied in this area among those who identify themselves as evangelical Anglicans. While they have the theology needed for evangelism they have not been doing a very good job, mostly because they have been preoccupied with secondary matters. If some have hoped that evangelical Anglicans would act as a kind of recruiting agency for the rest of the Church, they have been generally disappointed. The whole Church needs to be mobilized for this task.

Clearly this will not be done as long as liberalism dominates the power structures of the denomination. Not surprisingly, the call of Lambeth to be engaged in "the primary task" of the Church in the Decade of Evangelism fell on deaf ears here in Canada. Instead, the official Church shows every sign of regarding evangelism, the only remaining way for it to increase its membership, as something embarrassing or even abhorrent. Not a good sign.

Symptom 3: The Falling Dollar (Reprise)

There are a number of ways in which the present and impending financial crisis in the Anglican Church of Canada can be linked to liberalism.

We have already seen that the membership decline in the denomination can be attributed in significant measure to liberalism. Fewer people means less money. Beyond this rather simple but all too accurate equation, some of the specific reasons for the membership decline help to explain the financial situation. The same reasons that have led persons to leave the Church also have dulled the motivation to give among many of those who are left.

Those who are traditional/orthodox Anglicans will have a general unease about the direction the Church has been going. Liberalism's universalistic message lacks a note of urgency and even causes many to question its relevance. They can easily find other outside agencies who share their "old-fashioned" understanding of the Gospel. To these explanations one must add the fact

that the aging membership (attributable in part to liberalism) contains many who are on fixed incomes and simply cannot increase their support.

Another major way in which liberalism has contributed to the financial woes of the Church is the fact that its general attitude to the authority of Scripture has effectively cut it off from an idea that arises out of the Bible: tithing. Because liberals have sent the clear message that the Bible is not a reliable guide after all, when attempts are made to promote the biblical tithe of 10% of income (or the "modern" tithe of 5%) one can be excused for wondering why this particular teaching of the Bible is so enthusiastically endorsed by those in Church leadership. One might even be tempted to ascribe the real motive, not to a desire to promote a biblical lifestyle, but to the fact that Church officials know that if Anglicans did begin to tithe, their budget troubles would be over and none of their programs would be threatened. It should be noted, as a simple observable fact, that Christians who live in a denominational atmosphere that upholds the traditional/orthodox view of the Scriptures as the Word of God have a much greater tendency to give more than those who do not.

Finally, reference must be made to what may be the most compelling reason to link liberalism to the falling dollar. In a day when there is increasing competition for the charitable dollar people must be highly motivated to give to a particular cause. Earlier, in Chapter Two, I explored the ways in which a serious division has developed between laity and the clergy elite of the Anglican Church of Canada.² This has resulted at the very least in a serious communications problem and at most a sense of alienation from the leadership. Certainly, there is widespread disinterest. In such a context it would only be natural to expect lukewarm financial support for programs perceived as coming down from on high. As the editor of the Anglican Journal put it:

Cynicism and a distrust of authority are blamed for much of the reluctance at the grassroots level to contribute to the national church's coffers. And this reluctance is taking place at a time when the national church is being asked to do more with less. (Feb. 1996)

² See above, p.34ff.

To some extent this "cynicism and distrust of authority" is just the product of our time. Look at modern politics, for example. However, I would suggest that the elitism evident in the Anglican Church makes this problem even worse in our pews. This elitism, as I will shortly argue, is, to a significant degree a direct product of liberalism and it must itself bear a large part of the responsibility for our current financial crisis.³ The people are just not buying what liberalism is selling.

Symptom 4: Indecent Disorder (Reprise)

We must now return to those indications of considerable confusion in the life of the Anglican Church of Canada in order to show that much of this "indecent disorder" can be linked to the new religion of liberalism.

As we saw under this title in Chapter Two, the Anglican Church of Canada has, since the arrival of the liturgical renewal movement, moved into a time of relative liturgical flux.⁴ This has resulted in a radically altered ecclesiastical landscape, a territory unfamiliar to most Anglicans and even unnerving to some. It is now our task to see how much all of this is due to liberalism.

It must be said at the outset that the call for liturgical revision itself cannot be blamed directly on liberalism. Although many Anglicans appear to have forgotten this fact, the Prayer Book itself arose out of a deep conviction of the English reformers that worship was to be conducted "...in such a tongue as the people understandeth." (Article XXIV) While at the time this was directed at the Latin mass, the principle remains that for Anglicans worship must be in the language of the worshipper. This leads inevitably to a second principle: because language changes over time and place it is necessary for liturgy to be revised in order to reflect this reality. As the Preface to the revision of 1662 puts it:

³ See below, p.123

⁴ See above, p.20 ff.

...it is reasonable, that upon weighty and important considerations, according to the various exigency of times and occasions, such changes and alterations should be made therein, as to those that are in place of authority should from time to time seem either necessary or expedient. (BCP, p. 719)

If you have difficulty understanding this passage that is because it was written in the English of that time and reflects a vocabulary, phrasing and structure that is much different than ours. The liturgy produced in that era, the Book of Common Prayer, was a "contemporary" liturgy. It simply speaks the language of the day. It is certain that the Reformers would have been surprised to discover that their spiritual descendants were still worshipping in this language three hundred years later, given that English itself had changed considerably over that time. So it is a good and Anglican thing to revise liturgy, especially with a view to ensuring that worship is conducted in a language that is fully understood by the people.

In this sense, therefore, the desire for contemporary rites is part of our heritage, even if it had been seriously neglected for a time. While this authenticates part of what has happened over the last thirty years, it fails to explain why the Canadian Church has moved away from the tradition of "common prayer". It is one thing to insist on worshipping in contemporary language; it is quite another to endorse or at least permit an endless multiplying of liturgies for various communities within the Church. This moves us beyond mere language and into the realm of theology and here we find, not surprisingly, that liberalism is at the centre of this development.

The problem is that liberalism cannot be contained in any one liturgy. Just as it is by nature forever changing and without boundaries so also is its liturgical expression. Liberalism's tendency towards fragmentation was explored in Chapter Three.⁵ It was pointed out there as well that the 1985 Book of Alternative Services (BAS), although in form dramatically different than the Book of Common Prayer, was, in reality, a moderately liberal revision from the theological point of view.

⁵ See above, p.61 ff.

However, it was soon in need of supplementing as liberalism continued to spin off in various directions and its newer variations experimented with liturgies which more fully reflected these trends. In this context the ideal of common prayer, in the sense of a shared liturgy throughout the Church, became obsolete.

To be specific, the liberal elite soon began to reflect the cultural relativism (inclusivity), radical feminism, and pro-gay agenda of its secular counterpart. As it did, many within it found the BAS, not to mention the largely bypassed BCP, hopelessly out of date. Given an atmosphere which encouraged liturgical innovation, it wasn't long before experimentation was in progress on each of these fronts, and more.

At a clergy conference in central Canada the participants confessed themselves believers in "...God, Mother-Father spirit". This same "creed", in what was supposed to be a Christian service, does not mention any belief in Jesus Christ, let alone the Trinity. A liturgy used at a private school in eastern Canada simply omitted the Creed and the Gloria and refused to pray in the name of Jesus Christ at all. In fact, the only reference to Jesus was in the Eucharistic prayer itself where he apparently is still unavoidable. From this perspective the BAS is obviously much too traditional and increasingly inappropriate.

Those communities within the Church that have arrived at these new understandings of the faith are naturally demanding, and in some cases exercising, the right to worship as they see fit. Liberalism, as part of its commitment to cultural diversity, cannot but agree to these demands. It seeks to promote the idea that each distinctive group within society should be able to set its own agenda free of the imposition of the values of the larger society. So liberalism, largely because of its inability to set boundaries, creates both a multiplicity of liturgies and the atmosphere that actively welcomes these developments. It therefore comes as no surprise that General Synod agreed to the production of supplementary eucharistic rites for feminists, evangelicals, indigenous Canadians and other groups. This is just cultural diversity. It can never lead to common prayer.

Those evangelicals who, in resisting the BAS, insisted on composing contemporary liturgies for their own parochial use have also contributed to the demise of common prayer. However, they did not start out in this direction. If the compilers of the BAS had been willing to make a few key changes and include in the book at least one eucharistic prayer (out of six) that clearly reflected a Prayer Book theology, things would probably have been different. In spite of much petitioning from the evangelical side of the Church, this was not done and some, at least, resorted to doing their own thing. They felt, not for the first time, excluded by the liberal church. Not having another option, it was every man for himself. Ironically, if they had been included from the start they undoubtedly would have been content with the BAS and would now be its staunchest defenders! Certainly, in the light of what liberals were soon doing, the changes evangelicals (and others) requested regarding the BAS were moderate indeed. But not deemed in the right direction.

Liberalism, then, is the real driving force behind the current proliferation of experimental liturgies. Because liberalism is forever fragmenting in a process that knows no boundaries, so also is the liturgical innovation it has spawned. Liberalism brings division, always and everywhere. It has bequeathed to us the era of uncommon prayer.

One of the signs of the lack of unity in the Anglican Church of Canada is the increasingly wide diversity of worship music that congregations are using. Again, it must be stressed at the outset that this cannot seriously be blamed solely on liberalism. Rather it is largely a function of liturgical renewal on the one hand and an explosion of contemporary worship music on the other, combined with a sense that variety was to be encouraged.

This is not to imply that all those of traditional/orthodox faith have enthusiastically embraced renewal music. Far from it. The new music comes attached to a more informal and personalized style of worship which is not attractive to many Anglicans. In addition, some find that much of the new music does not reflect the theological depth of more traditional hymns. Indeed, many

congregations who do use the newer music also continue to employ the older hymns for just this reason. Both sides in this debate have something valid to say to each other.

Thus, although there is some division within the traditional/orthodox camp over this aspect of worship, it is not a matter of first importance. There is an underlying commitment to the biblical theology underlying both styles which bridges the gap effectively. It explicitly proclaims the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and well as such doctrines as the deity and bodily resurrection of Jesus. As a result, there is a substantial unity underlying all this diversity that is rooted in the core doctrines of catholic Christianity. The differences between parishes who use such music are more matters of style and taste than of substance. In fact, much of this music comes out of a similar musical style.

It is important to observe that, with the National Church's publication of the "Common Praise" hymn book, the Church entered an era in which a small but significant proportion of its members will actually be unable to bring themselves to sing "the hymns of the church" for doctrinal reasons. Other more liberal-minded Anglicans will find that, even with their pronouns adjusted, the older hymns are just too full of an understanding of the faith that they find archaic, if not repugnant. A large body of Anglicans will just shrug their shoulders and wonder what all the fuss is about.

The fact is that it is only liberals who desire to introduce inclusive language in reference to God, even in some cases to the point of suggesting goddess worship. It is only liberals who want to replace "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" with "Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer" and who avoid as much as possible referring to the fact that God is our Father or that Jesus is a man. It is only liberals who shy away from patriarchal and hierarchical terms for God, especially "Lord" and "King". It is only liberals who are shy about Satan and squeamish about sin. It is only liberals who are embarrassed over the triumph of Christ and his church.

In other words, our divisions over worship music are, because of liberalism, divisions that are much deeper than style. It is now about substance as well. And that is much more serious.

What is the relationship of liberalism to the evident disarray in Christian education within the Anglican Church of Canada? It will be recalled that this area shares in the general disunity that one finds at almost every level of Church life.

As I have been arguing, liberalism is by nature a fragmentizing agent. It knows no boundaries and is in constant flux. Even its emphasis upon experience takes it in the same direction, into expressions that are as varied as the experience of persons is varied. While it is tempting to draw a direct line from the nature of liberalism to the fragmentation of the Church's educative efforts, in reality things are not quite so simple.

For one thing such an explanation fails to account for the wide variety of approaches to this subject even among those Anglicans who are traditional/orthodox Christians. It could be maintained that this phenomenon is at least indirectly the result of the liberalism that led to both the introduction of the "New Curriculum" and its rejection by the grassroots in the mid-sixties.

Indeed, when the histories are written it may be that the New Curriculum will be identified as the first official endorsement of the new way of thinking. As the intended replacement for the aging but thoroughly orthodox General Board of Religious Education (G.B.R.E.) curriculum it failed to attract the same wide usage, thus creating a vacuum. Many parishes were not happy with the revised denominational curriculum and felt it necessary to look elsewhere. As they were basically on their own they naturally ended up in going in a number of different directions. More liberal parishes were also left in a vacuum when the New Curriculum was withdrawn with no replacement. They too had to scramble.

If the old G.B.R.E. curriculum had been brought up to date while retaining its traditional/orthodox perspective, it would perhaps have continued to provide a denominational Sunday School

curriculum that was more widely acceptable and therefore more viable. At the same time, it could have provided the foundation for a stronger sense of unity within the Church. But this would have naturally left liberals still dissatisfied, looking for other curricula to meet their needs. Again, we have a for instance of the incompatibility of the two religions now in the Church.

As far as the issues of baptismal and confirmation preparation are concerned, it must be admitted that the smorgasbord of programs (or lack thereof) is endemic to liberal and traditional/orthodox alike. There are good and sufficient reasons for the present turmoil swirling around the general issue of Christian initiation which have nothing to do with liberalism. Until the ACC is able to address these issues from a common perspective no order will arise out of this chaos. At that time the whole question of adult Christian education can also be addressed. For now, we can expect only diversity to rule.

As for marriage preparation, given the current divisions even over the very definition of marriage, there is little prospect for progress on this front. Our denomination has a desperate need to establish a common understanding of sexuality in general and marriage in particular that will address the needs of contemporary society, but in the current context this frankly seems impossible. The Lone Ranger rides again.

Symptom 5: A Complex Superiority (Reprise)

As was noted when this subject was first addressed, clericalism, the dominance of the clergy, has been a feature of church life almost from the beginning. This is due in large measure to the very nature of the church and is to some extent inescapable and even good to a degree. The historic division between the clergy and the laity has, however, reached dangerous proportions in the Anglican Church of Canada. Much of this can also be traced to the presence of the liberal religion in the denomination.

Perhaps the best way to try to understand this is to follow an imaginary seminarian as she proceeds through the refined educative process on the way to ordination. As we do so we will discover a basic reason why the clergy have become distanced from many of the laity. I must stress at the outset that while the following description reflects a typical experience it does not represent the situation in all our schools or the positions and methodologies of all their faculty members.

Having said that, let us call our student "Gloria" and assume that she is a "cradle" Anglican from a city parish who has felt a call to ministry. Perhaps this is a response to a conversion experience as a teenager after which she augmented her Sunday School knowledge by enthusiastically reading and studying her Bible. After four years of higher education at university she arrives on the doorstep of an Anglican theological college eager to acquire a sure foundation for ministry by means of a thorough exploration of the faith of the Church.

What Gloria gets instead is a baptism of fire. Almost every assumption she has brought with her will be brought into serious question. Of course, the world view bequeathed to her by her Bible and her Church has already been severely challenged by the dominant secularism and politically correct assumptions at her university. Now, oddly, that challenge is deepened at theological college, which is itself immersed in these same influences.

By the end of three years she will, unless she shows great determination and courage, emerge with a radically altered understanding of the faith. The College, typically, is deeply committed to the kind of liberalism outlined in the previous chapter and is in fact the major point at which this new religion is introduced directly into the bloodstream of the Church.

Gloria's Sunday School faith and her "uncritical" straightforward reading of the Scriptures will be under constant and direct attack. She will be informed that no truly modern person could take

the Bible at face value, as she has always done. Assured that all mainstream scholars concur, Gloria is then initiated into the mysteries of modern biblical criticism.⁶

She will quickly realize that from this point of view her simple understanding of the faith cannot be sustained and as a result she is plunged into a traumatic and painful crisis of faith. This might come to a head, for example, when she is exposed to the scholarly opinion that the accounts of Jesus's resurrection appearances in the four Gospels are hopelessly contradictory and certainly cannot provide serious support to the idea of a bodily resurrection (which modern people cannot accept in any event). What really happened, she is informed, is that the early church somehow came to have an experience of the "risen Lord" in their midst and these stories of the empty tomb and appearances were written later in order to try to express this spiritual reality in concrete terms understandable to the people of the day.

Ill-prepared for this assault on what she had always believed, Gloria is faced with either following what she had so faithfully been taught in Sunday School or what she was now learning through the authorized and sophisticated teachers of the Church. She might well identify with this quotation from a newspaper interview with an Anglican seminary student:

If you want spirituality, don't go to a seminary. They turn you upside down and inside out and some of us survive and some of us don't. Seminary is not what I expected and not what a lot of others perceive it to be... If you go even not half sure of your faith, you won't make it through. (Saint John Times-Globe, August 2, 1996)

The seminary experience almost seems designed to destroy the simple faith of those students still holding to such an outmoded and intellectually unacceptable religion.

Just as Gloria is feeling the foundation of her old faith begin to crumble she is then introduced to the new faith, liberalism, in whatever form or forms are in vogue on campus. The culture of

⁶ See above, p.60 ff.

seminary life (and the general academic world) brings powerful pressure on her to conform to one of these. The current models available to her would include radical feminism, liberation theology (leftist political agenda) and eco-justice (environmentalism). To the extent that it is taught at all, traditional/orthodox Christianity is relegated to historical studies.

In the face of all this Gloria may well decide that she has had enough and just drop out. If she continues she will have three options. First of all she may quietly resist the new teaching. I say quietly because vocal, active opposition to the reigning versions is not tolerated well and can lead to much unseemly confrontation. After all, one's whole view of life is at stake. Secondly, she can go with the flow and convert to the new religion altogether. Lastly, she will remain unsure of her beliefs but continue on in her studies in the hope that it will all get sorted out eventually.

Whichever option she selects it is unlikely that it will form any barrier to her being ordained. She will have to commit herself to "conform to the doctrine...of the Anglican Church of Canada" but this is carefully left undefined in any substantial way and it is commonly understood to include any of the liberal varieties as well as traditional/orthodox Christianity. The only belief she will have to affirm in a specific way is the ordination of women, which for her should not be a problem! Any doubts she might have will be soothed by her knowledge that the doctrine of the Church is always open to various interpretations.

Let us presume that Gloria chooses the middle option and buys into the liberal religion. Imagine the task she will face in the parish. Here she is likely to be faced with a congregation in which many have the same Sunday School faith she has left behind. Every Sunday large portions of raw Scripture are read to them and then she has to get up in the pulpit and try to expound a message that does not easily arise directly out of the text. She has been ill-equipped by seminary to provide her listeners with a way to move them from where they are to where she is.

Fortunately, they are predisposed to defer to her now greater understanding of the faith. She is a clergyperson, after all. Who are they to argue? But she finds herself distanced from them by

her training and her faith-journey. They hear her words but are baffled by her theological terminology. It sounds vaguely familiar, but it lacks clear meaning. In this context any changes she feels are necessary are sometimes perceived as imposed, arising out of her agenda, not theirs. She and they are in somewhat separate worlds, even if they are an educationally sophisticated congregation. Her socialist politics and radical feminism may be tolerated as the typical product of the ivory tower not of the real world. What is she to do as the pastor in such a situation?

One thing is almost certain. Gloria will not embark on a program to encourage the uninstructed reading or study of the Bible. She will not do this because she knows, consciously or unconsciously, that the reading of the Scriptures in an "uncritical" fashion, in the pre-modern belief that takes its words in their everyday sense, will lead only to an affirmation of the Sunday School faith she has rejected as obsolete for contemporary Christians. She is certainly not opposed to the reading of the Bible but is acutely aware that, in order for it to be properly understood, it must be interpreted by someone who comes from the perspective of modern critical scholarship. For most parishes that leaves only one person who is qualified. Guess who!

What Gloria may not fully appreciate, however, is that her old Sunday School faith bears an uncanny resemblance to catholic orthodox Christianity. As I have argued in Chapter Three the catholic faith arises out of the understanding of the Bible as God's Word written.⁷ It is the final authority. If it says that Jesus rose bodily from the grave and lives forevermore at the right hand of the Father, then that is what Christians are to believe. End of argument. This is taking it at face value following the normal rules of grammar. Once this way of approaching Scripture is abandoned, so also will catholic Christianity be abandoned. It is as inevitable as gravity.

Ironically, the Anglican Church began with an attempt to go in exactly the opposite direction. The English Reformers deliberately set about to put the Bible back into the hands of the average

⁷ See above, p. 50f.

believer. It was to be loosed from the fetters imposed by those who had distorted its teachings and had forbidden its use. Let it be read and believed by one and all!

For them the reading of the Bible in its plain ordinary sense was the greatest source of spiritual life that God has provided to his people. It is his Word written, after all. It was to be translated into the common tongue and placed in every parish church. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the composer of much of the Prayer Book, had this to say:

Unto a Christian man, there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable, than the knowledge of Holy Scripture; forasmuch as in it is contained God's true word, setting forth his glory, and also man's duty. And there is no truth nor doctrine, necessary for our justification and everlasting salvation, but that is, or may be, drawn from that fountain and well of truth. Therefore, as many as be desirous to enter into the right and perfect way unto God, must apply their minds to know Holy Scripture; And as drink is pleasant to them that be dry, and meat to them that be hungry; so is the reading, hearing, searching, and studying of Holy Scripture...

And, on the other side, nothing more darkeneth Christ and the glory of God, nor bringeth in more blindness and all kinds of vices, that doth the ignorance of God's word. (The Homilies, Book 1:1)

So we have come full circle. At one time our Church recognized and exploited the connection between the straightforward reading of the Bible by ordinary people and spiritual vitality. *Modern critical scholarship has taken the Bible away from the Church just as effectively as the Roman Church had done by the late middle ages.* This time around no one is actually forbidden to read the Bible. But in a number of different ways parishioners are told that its true meaning lies behind what it says on the surface and that it takes a special knowledge to be able to access that meaning.⁸ They are told this by many within the clergy-elite, the ones to whom they look for

⁸ See again my comments in reference to Bishop Ingham's position, above, p. 94 ff.

spiritual guidance. In Anglican homes the Bible has typically become a closed book, literally as well as figuratively. The result is a biblically illiterate laity and a confused, moribund Church. It is no accident.

There is a great sadness in this. Those like Gloria who have chosen to follow the liberal religion have not only distanced themselves from many of their parishioners, they have sealed themselves off from their past, a past which points the way, the only way, to another reformation and the possibility of a revitalized future.⁹

Conclusion

No doubt I have made my point. But let me make it again in case you missed it! Liberalism by its very nature has been and continues to be a fundamental reason for the troubles that afflict the Anglican Church of Canada. Its attempt to present a new message in traditional language has resulted in misunderstanding and confusion among the rank and file. It creates disorder because it is fundamentally disorderly. Membership decline and financial woes are its constant companions. Incompatible with the very idea of evangelism, it has proven itself incapable of attracting significant numbers of new adherents. This is what liberalism is and this is what it does.

Do I sound like an alarmist? Is my vision narrow and false, distorted by anger, prejudice, ignorance and fear? I am content to let my readers be the judge of that. But I have come to the conviction that liberalism is not just another option within the spectrum of Christian truth. It is not merely the subject of polite conversation over a glass of sherry. It is a deadly enemy of Christ and his Church. Surely someone has to sound the alarm. Who else but an alarmist?

⁹ At this point it needs to be said that there are many good reasons to reject the liberal reading of the Bible and return to the conservative one. There is a world of literature available, from C.S. Lewis to J.I. Packer to John Stott to Alister McGrath to N.T. Wright, just to mention a few world-class Anglican scholars.

...if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.'

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me..." (Ezekiel 33:6-7)