

CHAPTER THREE

How We Got Here from There

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.

1 Corinthians 3:10-13

We will now explore how certain ideas and events which have made significant contributions to the current crisis in the Anglican Church of Canada. While this book makes no claim to be scholarly, it nevertheless represents a serious effort to grapple with the reality of our past by one who knows at least something whereof he speaks. Although I must take responsibility for what I have written, it is important to stress that many in the Church share at least the general point of view here expressed. There are many voices crying out in the wilderness.

If the following explanation needs correction it is urgent that it be done quickly in order to spare us from unnecessary conflict and division. We can only be brought closer together by the truth and it is in the give and take of discussion (or argument!) that illusions will dissolve and truth will emerge. However, none of this should be taken as implying a lack of confidence in the fundamental correctness of what I have to say.

I shall argue that, in reality, our major problems are primarily caused or made worse by the introduction of what is generally known as "liberalism" into the life of our denomination. Until this situation is dealt with, the other problems, and there are many, cannot be effectively

addressed or resolved. I shall demonstrate that liberalism is not the classical Christianity of our mothers and fathers of the last two thousand years. It is in fact another religion altogether and actually stands opposed to classical Christianity on almost every important theological issue.

Our crisis exists largely, but not exclusively, because these two incompatible and opposed religions, each with its own vision and purpose, co-exist in our church. This is our fundamental problem. It has led to a terrible kind of institutional paralysis. No organization can long continue healthy in such a state of division.

It is also important to note that in the heat of argument I may sound like I am laying the entire blame for all our problems on “liberalism” and “liberals” and I want to nip this impression in the bud. I am indeed convinced that liberalism is our major problem and that is what I am trying to convey. But it is not our only problem and the blame must fall on all our shoulders. We have all been in this together and we all need to repent of things we have done or have left undone. But the urgency of the current situation forces me to focus on the most important thing.

In order to do so, I need to make certain judgments and abstractions that simplify a complex reality for the sake of argument. I need to address one of these at the outset in order to avoid as much misunderstanding as possible. None of what I say below is meant to imply that the ACC is neatly divided into conservative and liberal Christians as if each of us was a perfect embodiment of our pre-suppositions. Life and people are much more complicated than that and most of us are mixed up to one degree or another! No, this is a call for each of us to examine our basic principles and see how they have been leading us to this point in our history and beyond. If you are one of the many Anglicans who are kind of in the middle, more or less, I hope you see this partly as a call for all of us to be more honest about, and consistent with, those principles. Whatever they may be.

In order to better judge the validity of my above-stated thesis, it is necessary to see things in historical perspective. In this manner it is easier to see that what has happened in the Church is

not merely the natural development of Anglicanism's famous comprehensiveness. Rather something fundamental has changed, bringing us into a situation entirely without precedent. As such, old solutions will simply not do. Something more will be needed.

From its very origins in the sixteenth century, the Church of England (and its daughter churches in other countries) has been relatively tolerant of a variety of theological perspectives. It is beyond the scope of this treatise to outline the reasons for this tolerance but there is no dispute about its reality.

However, something does need to be said about the general nature of this tolerance. Until recently it has been a tolerance within certain well-understood limits and which presumed a core of basic Christian truth shared within the one holy catholic church ("catholic" in the sense of "universal", containing all the branches of Christ's scattered flock).

This attitude was perhaps best expressed by the seventeenth century cleric Richard Baxter to whom is often credited the famous dictum: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty, and in all things, charity"¹. By following this in a kind of informal fashion over the years, the Anglican community has been able to hold an amazing diversity of views within its bosom while retaining a significant degree of cohesion. The latter, strained almost to the breaking point at several moments in its history, has nevertheless managed to hold. At least until now.

What has held it together has been a more or less universal acceptance of what constitutes those "essentials", the common ground upon which we stand. Historically this was the specific function of the famous "Thirty-Nine Articles" that appear at the end of the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 698-714).

¹ See "Anglican Essentials", p. 11: <http://www.anglicancommunionalliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Montreal-Declaration-for-ACA-Website-PDF-FINAL.pdf>

Here we find what used to be the basic doctrines of the Anglican faith. Generations of clergy had to agree to them as part of the ordination process "...for the avoiding of diversities of opinions and for the establishing of consent touching true religion." This quotation is from the Title Page that used to precede the Articles (prior to 1962) along with King Charles the First's "Royal Declaration" of 1628. In the latter the king recognized that there was indeed some leeway of interpretation of the Articles but he took care to guard their centrality, insisting that all clergymen

...agree in the true, usual, literal meaning of the said Articles, and that even in those curious points, in which the present differences lie, men of all sorts take the Articles of the Church of England to be for them: which is an argument...that none of them intend any desertion of the Articles established.

...no man hereafter shall either print, or preach, to draw the Article aside in any way, but shall submit to it in the plain and full meaning thereof: and shall not put his own sense or comment to be the meaning of the Article, but shall take it in the literal and grammatical sense.

...if any publick Reader in either of Our Universities, or any Head or Master of a College, or any other person respectively in either of them, shall affix any new sense to any Article, or shall publickly read, determine, or hold any publick Disputation or suffer any such to be held ..,he, or they the Offenders, shall be liable to Our displeasure, and the Church's censure...(BCP [1918 ed.], p. 658)

So much for authentic Anglican tolerance! In practice this seemed to result in a significant variety of opinion within these parameters. Even at the height of his fierce battle with anglo-catholicism, the controversial nineteenth century evangelical Bishop of Liverpool, J. C. Ryle was able to say:

I have always allowed, and do allow, that our Church is largely comprehensive, and that there is room for honest High, honest Low, and honest Broad Churchmen within her

pale...But I firmly maintain that the comprehensiveness of the Church has limits, and that those limits are the Thirty-nine Articles and the Prayer-book. (Principles for Churchmen, p. 71)

Historically, then, the Anglican Church has always known both that it had borders and where those borders were, more or less. It is now necessary to ask what enabled it to mark out such clear boundaries in the first place. When we have discovered these foundations and what has happened to them, then we will understand why there is such confusion in the contemporary Church and perhaps even find a way forward through all the noise.

An important historical event can serve to shed some light on the true roots of our commonality as Anglicans. At the same time that Ryle was concerning himself with what now seem to be quaint and insignificant divisions within the Church of England, there was a gathering sense of optimism regarding the possibility of Christian reunification. In reflecting on these matters during the Lambeth Conference of 1888 the bishops of the Church carefully outlined another, more minimal, list of Christian "essentials" upon which any hope for a reunified Christendom must rest. This became known as the "Lambeth Quadrilateral" and it is worth quoting in full at this point.

- A. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
- B. The Apostle's Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol, and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
- C. The two Sacraments,- Baptism and the Supper of the Lord, - ministered with the unfailing use of Christ's words of institution and of the elements ordained by Him.
- D. The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the various needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church. (Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, p. 877-8)

There are a number of things that should be noted about in considering this important document. First of all, in the first clause, there is an inherent expression of the final authority of the Bible over the Church. Many Anglicans have been taught that authority in Anglican theology is seen as “a three-legged stool” of Scripture, reason and tradition. To the extent that this metaphor implies the equivalence of these three sources, it is simply wrong.

It is better to say that Anglicans recognize the importance of reason and tradition in seeking to understand what it is that Scripture is saying. Even more important, we are never to put reason or tradition over Scripture. It is the ultimate authority and this is what we see all the bishops of the Church affirming when they insisted on this clause.

The second thing to meditate upon is that it was the bishops who issued this affirmation of the authority and place of Scripture in Anglicanism. They took the initiative and provided significant leadership not only to those within the Anglican fold but also to the whole of the Christian church. Today they are, at least in Canada, largely silent on the point of the centrality of the place of Scripture.

Not only are they silent, they give every appearance of urging silence on the rest of the Church as well. When others, out of a sense of frustration and urgency, gathered themselves together outside the official structures of the Church at “Essentials 94” in Montreal in an attempt to offer a contemporary list of essentials for consideration they received a very cool reception from many in official positions of leadership. It seems that the very idea of insisting on a number of essentials, whatever those are conceived to be, is just not on. Needless to say, this represents a radical change from the situation that existed up to the turn of the twentieth century.

The third thing is to observe that J.C. Ryle's insistence on the Thirty-nine Articles and the Prayer Book does not contradict what the bishops say about the position of the Bible in the Church. After all, these two standards maintain the same attitude toward Scriptural authority expressed by the Quadrilateral. Indeed, until recently, our Church has spoken with one voice on this subject. The

position of the Bible was the central theological issue underlying the English Reformation (as it was in other parts of Europe).

And it is not just Anglicans who have always seen the Bible as the ultimate standard of faith. It is but the natural outgrowth of catholic Christianity's conviction about the nature of the Holy Scriptures. All Christendom held that the Scriptures are the very Word of God written and are without error in all that they affirm. This was the view of Our Lord, the Apostles and early church, the Fathers, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Thomas Cramner and all the English Reformers, Richard Hooker (the quintessential Anglican theologian) and all the Anglican "divines". While it is true that this doctrine has never been officially adopted by the Anglican Church it is the unspoken but necessary assumption that runs through the whole foundation of its theological structure.

Until quite recently, there was simply no serious debate or division on this issue in the whole history of the Christian faith. The only question was not about the nature of the Bible but about whether or not its authority was superseded in some way by that of the Church. On this question, as we have seen, Anglicanism has always said that the Church is under the Scriptures and not vice versa. This was re-affirmed as recently as the Lambeth Conference of 1958.

So far, I have sought to argue that Anglicanism has historically seen its famous tolerance limited by the acceptance of common set of core doctrines. These have always included an explicit affirmation of the final authority of the Scriptures as well as an implicit affirmation of the universal Christian conviction that these Scriptures were the Word of God written and thus absolutely reliable.

It is absolutely critical to recognize that all the central doctrines of the Christian church, all of the basic elements of its message, its very conception of God and what he has done in Christ for the salvation of humanity were developed out of and depend upon this attitude to the Bible.

Wherever it has held sway these same central doctrines have been held by every variation within what we have come to call the Church catholic (i.e., universal). This is not to say that the myriad and unfortunate divisions within the church have always been over relatively peripheral issues. However, when the divisions have been over core doctrine it is because one side or the other (or both!) have placed some other authority over Scripture. While I believe that what I have said is simply a matter of reason and historical fact there will be many who will dispute it on the grounds of its being overly simplistic (and probably on other grounds too!).

Let me be clear. I am not claiming that holding the classical understanding of the nature and authority of Holy Scripture automatically or easily results in the emergence of the central doctrines of the orthodox Christian faith. This is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit who both inspired the Scriptures in the first place and continues to witness to their truth and meaning in each generation. But when the guiding principle of theological reasoning is rooted in the classical view of Scripture, at the end of the day it will result in affirming the fundamental beliefs shared by all catholic Christians.

In order to both illustrate and buttress my argument I would direct my reader's attention to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada as a kind of living proof. Here we have a contemporary Christian organization which joins together what at first appears to be a bewildering variety of denominations, congregations and individuals, all of whom are committed to just the kind of Biblical authority under discussion.

While it is true that the denominations in the Fellowship remain mutually exclusive and differ considerably from one another on a number of doctrinal matters they all at the same time share a deep commitment to the *central* doctrines of classical orthodox Christianity. They are all Trinitarians, they all accept the pre-incarnate divinity of Our Lord, they all preach the atoning sacrifice of Jesus' death on the Cross and they all proclaim his bodily resurrection from the dead. All of them. Indeed, all subscribe to the Fellowship's "Statement of Faith" which corresponds remarkably to the core of essentials which were once considered necessary for Anglicans and all

catholic Christians. It may be important to note that, while the ACC has “observer” status, it is not a member of this body.

This organization shows how a commitment to the classical concept of Biblical authority is inevitably linked to a similar commitment to the core doctrines of classical orthodoxy. This can be observed both in history and in contemporary Christian life. Those who believe that such a commitment to Biblical authority is inadequate to produce anything but utter doctrinal confusion are simply in error. It has, in actual fact, produced remarkable doctrinal unity.

Admittedly, this unity does not extend itself over the whole range of doctrine and is not (yet) expressed in organizational unity. Denominations and movements continue to exhibit a distressing tendency to fragment even while admitting that they continue to share the basic faith with those from whom they are distancing themselves. Many still seem unwilling to make a proper distinction between what is of primary importance and what is secondary.

Perhaps it is not too arrogant suggest that a good dose of authentic Anglican tolerance (a la Richard Baxter) might help provide the perspective necessary to keep us all more fully in the family. This could be part of the witness of a reformed and renewed Anglicanism to the whole body of Christ, bringing us closer to the fulfillment of the famous Anglican plea that "... all they that do confess thy holy Name may agree in the truth of thy holy Word, and live in unity and godly love" (BCP, p. 75).

This intercession, by the way, is a wonderfully compact expression of the authentic Anglican understanding that Christian unity is based upon agreement about the teaching of Holy Scripture as the truth. The BCP Collect for Saint Simon and Saint Jude, reflecting the same attitude, forms an appropriate end to this section:

O Almighty God, who has built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant us so to be *joined*

together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (My italics)

Not only is this prayer an appropriate end to the above discussion but it also leads us into a consideration of another aspect of the classical Anglican attitude to the Scriptures. If one is convinced that the Bible, as the Word of God written, is both absolutely trustworthy and the final authority in matters of Christian belief, one is also necessarily committed to what might be called the "conservative principle": that is, whatever the Bible teaches is not subject to revision. It is a deposit of truth which is to be guarded and passed on from one generation of believers to the next. We are to remain loyal to its message because it is the message of authentic Christianity.

This implication is rooted in the actual teaching of the Scriptures themselves. Again, and again, they exhort the church not to depart from what it has already been taught. At one point, St. Paul says that "even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned." (Gal. 1:8). There is also a dire warning at the end of the book of Revelation which could justly be taken to apply to the whole of the Bible:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city... (Rev. 22:18,19)

Just as Anglicanism has historically affirmed its commitment to the classical view of Scripture, so also has it expressed its desire to follow the conservative principle. For example, in the Supplementary Instruction (for Confirmation) from the Book of Common Prayer the candidate is asked, "Why is the Church called Apostolic?" and the answer is "Because it received its divine mission from Christ through his Apostles, and continues in their doctrine and fellowship" (p. 553). In that same Instruction we are told that the Church teaches that "The Bible records the Word of

God ...and nothing may be taught in the Church as necessary to salvation unless it be concluded or proved therefrom." (p. 554-5)

At one time in the Canadian church our Bishops explicitly committed themselves to this same view of the Bible and accepted the responsibility to "...be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's Word; and both privately and openly to call upon others to do the same." (BCP, p. 663) While this latter commitment is omitted by the Book of Alternative Services the new Bishop does declare "the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation;" and promises to "...be faithful in prayer, and in the study of holy scripture..." in order to "...have the mind of Christ...". He also accepts the responsibility to "...guard the faith..." of the Church (pp. 635-7) which suggests that the faith is a given.

Perhaps the most spectacular commitment to this position was made by the Bishops, clergy and laity of the very first General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in 1893. It is contained in the famous "Solemn Declaration" now included at the front of the Book of Common Prayer (p. vii). As the founding document of the denomination it bears careful consideration. This is especially true because those who brought the ACC into being clearly saw themselves as committing the denomination to this view for all posterity. It is worth quoting at this point:

We declare this Church to be, and desire that it shall continue, in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world, as an integral portion of the One Body of Christ composed of Churches which...hold the One Faith revealed in Holy Writ, and defined in the Creeds..., receive the same Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as containing all things necessary to salvation; teach the same Word of God...

And we are determined by the help of God to hold and maintain the Doctrine, Sacraments and Discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded in his Holy Word, and as the Church

of England hath received and set forth the same in The Book of Common Prayer..., and in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and to transmit the same unimpaired to our posterity.

This commitment has never been revoked. In fact, the Declaration is given prominent place in the last revision of the Book of Common Prayer in 1959. It is preceded in that Book only by "The Preface to the Canadian Revision of 1918 Altered in 1959" which contains the following forceful statements which clearly reveal the mind of the revisers:

In the years of preparation and study, the principles which governed those who first gave the Church its Book of Common Prayer have been constantly borne in mind. The aim throughout has been to set forth an order which ...is agreeable with Holy Scripture and with the usage of the primitive Church. And always there has been the understanding that no alterations should be made which would involve or imply any change of doctrine of the Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer...

When the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Church in Canada assembled for the first General Synod in 1893, they made a Solemn Declaration of the faith in which they met together. It is in that faith that this Book of Common Prayer is offered to the Church... (p.vii)

It is therefore fair to conclude that up until 1960 or so the Anglican Church of Canada officially continued to conform to the pattern established from the beginning. It saw itself committed to the supreme authority of Holy Scripture and to the "conservative principle" wherein the apostolic faith was to be retained, proclaimed and guarded by the Church. For generations the revision of the liturgy had been conducted within this framework and understanding. This was the Anglican way.

Based on what has been said so far one might be excused for assuming that when the ACC next faced calls for liturgical revision in the late seventies, a mere twenty years later, a similar set of principles would guide the process. However, one glance at the resulting Book of Alternative

Services, produced in 1985, is enough to convince anyone that, in many ways, it is radically discontinuous with any previous revision.

While most of its differences may have more to do with the form of worship rather than any substantive change in belief, such change is certainly not absent. Indeed, for the first time in Anglican history the authors of a new liturgy stated a desire to distance themselves from central aspects of the basic eucharistic theology expressed in the Book of Common Prayer (BAS pp. 178-9). Amazingly this doctrinal change was introduced without any debate or even justification, as if it was just a little adjustment with which any reasonable and informed person would naturally agree.

Instead of committing themselves to "...hold and maintain the Doctrine...as the Church of England hath received and set forth the same in the Book of Common Prayer..." they attempted to return to the use of the more "fluid images" which they perceived in "the biblical material", certain ancient liturgies and patristic theologies. At first glance this attempt to "go back" beyond the Reformation seems odd because, in the "Introduction", they stress the vast changes in the world since the sixteenth century which necessitate this new approach. With all this emphasis on "difference" perhaps it comes as no surprise that the BAS makes no effort to remind Anglicans of the Solemn Declaration or of the Preface which grace the front of the Book of Common Prayer.

Whatever the merits of these changes, for our purposes it is important only to note that they represent a significant new departure for the Anglican Church of Canada. For over four centuries the Church had been following one pattern of liturgical revision and then suddenly, seemingly out of the blue, it turned its back on its past and veered off in a completely new direction. As we have already seen, a mere thirty-three years after adopting these new principles the pace and magnitude of liturgical change continues to grow and are now seriously threatening our sense of unity and even of what it means to be an Anglican Christian. For good or bad, the face of the Church has been deeply altered.

While it must be acknowledged that the life of the Church consists in much more than its liturgy, there can also be no doubt that they are closely connected. Therefore, the pattern of change we have observed represents even more profound changes beneath the surface. Clearly something very dramatic has happened within the wider life of the Church to bring about the changes in the liturgy. How could an institution, after 450 years of steady development in one direction suddenly find itself going in another one altogether? How could a Church which was the very embodiment of what was often seen as stuffy uniformity become a laboratory for constant change within less than a generation? Understanding the answer to these questions may help point the way forward out of our present crisis.

In many ways what has happened to the Anglican Church of Canada can be compared to the so-called "Quiet Revolution" which has taken place in the Province of Quebec. For generations Quebec appeared to be a solidly monolithic society. The Roman Catholic Church was firmly in control of the culture. Religion permeated every aspect of the civilization, dominating almost every institution, including education and politics. But, behind the scenes and unnoticed by many, a "quiet revolution" was taking place.

Many Quebecers, especially among the intellectual elite, were abandoning the faith of their fathers and most of what it represented in favour of a secular nationalism. Even as recently as fifty years ago a casual observer could be excused for thinking that it was all as it had always been. Quebec gave every appearance of still being an old-world Catholic society. But behind the facade almost everything had changed. The new faith had largely supplanted the old and could not be contained within the confines of the old institutions which had unwittingly nourished it. The revolution, when it finally erupted in the early seventies, left a shriveled, shattered and dispirited Roman Catholic community in its wake. It seemed that it had lost Quebec almost overnight.

So it was in the Anglican Church of Canada. Although it presented an official traditional/orthodox face to the world, momentous changes were taking place behind the scenes. For over a hundred

years increasing numbers within its ruling elite had been educated in an approach to religion that was rooted in a rejection of the basic assumptions that had lain underneath the Christian theological framework for almost two millennia. Inevitably many came to accept this new way of thinking and as a result distanced themselves from the traditional understanding of the Faith.

For a variety of reasons, instead of simply leaving the Church as one might expect (now that they no longer accepted its official teaching), they saw themselves as merely reinterpreting the Faith in ways "acceptable to modern man". At the same time this approach to theology was itself subject to all kinds of schools of interpretation and thus its adherents were themselves divided about which new interpretation was correct.

What held them together at all was a common rejection of orthodoxy and its methodology plus an agreement that, in essence, Christian mission boiled down to pursuing one biblical theme: social justice. All of these developments were beneath the radar of most church members because the new theologies continued to use the traditional language of Faith but actually meant something entirely different by the old familiar words.

Given also the enormous self-confidence of official Anglicanism in the late nineteenth century (shared by the whole church of that age), and its tradition of tolerating differing theological views, it hardly seems surprising that little was done to confront these developments. More and more priests and bishops were educated by those of the newer persuasion. Certainly, by the late 1970's (and arguably much earlier than that) this new understanding had reached a kind of "critical mass" within the leadership, allowing its agenda to go increasingly mainstream. What might seem like a huge gap between the affirmation of traditional Anglicanism in 1959 and a self-conscious departure from that tradition in 1985 was really the logical outworking out of a process that had been going on for several generations. The "quiet revolution" was over.

What I have just described is a kind of "inner history" of the Anglican Church over the last hundred years and is necessarily full of generalities and sweeping statements. Nevertheless, I am

convinced that the picture painted is broadly true and can be verified by anyone who cares to investigate. In fact, I hope that this task will be taken up by professional church historians in order to provide us with a fuller picture. As far as I know there has been no scholarly attempt to write this kind of history of the Anglican Church of Canada. In order to understand these developments more fully it is necessary to explore the nature of this "new way of thinking" that has been introduced into the life of the Church.

The assumptions underlying the message and mission of the catholic church had to do with the nature and authority of the Bible as God's word written. Simply put, the church had always accepted the truth and accuracy of the Bible. If it claimed something had happened in a certain way, then that was in fact the way it happened. If it claimed something to be true, then it was true. For example, the Gospels clearly state that Our Lord was born of a virgin mother and therefore this fact was never seriously disputed within the church. Obviously, this acceptance of the truth of Scripture took place within a worldview that was open to the possibility of the miraculous. The entire theological structure of the catholic church was erected upon this foundation.

With the arrival of the so-called "Enlightenment" or "Age of Reason" in the 17th century this worldview came into serious question. Man had become the measure of all things. Human reason became the new authority and the rise of science with its many spectacular successes lent a great air of optimism to this new approach. The suffocating shrouds of "authority" and "tradition" were cast aside and man stood to his full height and surveyed his own domain.

One of the dominating philosophies that developed in this atmosphere was "empiricism", which held that knowledge could only be derived from sense experience. One of its implications was that, because we do not experience miracles in our day-to-day lives, they cannot, in fact, happen at all. This view corresponded to the newly emerging theory that nature functions according to certain unbreakable "laws". Since a miracle (like a virgin giving birth) would involve the breaking

of one of these laws it was automatically excluded from the realm of possibility. It just couldn't happen.

While this brief account is hardly adequate to the task, it can serve to highlight the basic pattern of our intellectual history. All that remains to be pointed out is that the new views came quickly to dominate the intellectual establishment of the Western world. In fact, it is only in the very recent past that such assumptions and theories have come under serious question, especially with the rise of the "new" physics and a rejection of the sterility of a worldview devoid of the mysterious. But for generations it was the faith that guided the dominant thinkers in our culture.

It is impossible to exaggerate the dimensions of the threat that these developments posed to the traditional/orthodox version of the Christian faith. If these new views were true, then the church had been misreading the Bible for over 1500 years. It would mean that its understanding of who Jesus actually was would have to be radically altered, if not abandoned altogether. No longer could he be born of a virgin, heal the sick, control natural elements, know the future, rise bodily from the dead nor rise up into heaven on a cloud as the Scriptures plainly taught. This in turn destroyed the idea of the Bible as the utterly reliable Word of God. And, as I have stressed, this assumption had underpinned the whole Christian theological enterprise, producing the common understanding expressed in The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed that are affirmed in each Anglican service.

While the vast majority within the church simply continued, with varying degrees of tension, to hold to the old view of the Scriptures for a number of generations, there was an increasing number within her ranks who more or less came to accept what I am here calling "liberalism". Fundamentally, it involves the rejection of the traditional/orthodox assumptions regarding the nature and authority of Scripture. Desiring the right to be free to go wherever Reason and Conscience should lead, it seeks to encourage the church to change its positions in a "progressive" direction in order to meet the changed conditions in which it finds itself.

Once severed from those assumptions that underlay the traditional shape of the faith, liberalism has produced a bewildering variety of alternative versions of Christianity. This is more than a little curious given the promise inherent in adopting what was seen as a "scientific" methodology. One would think that having left behind the wrong methodology for the right one there would have been assured results. The opposite seems to be true. In fact, it is a commonplace observation that each generation of liberals has tended to advocate versions of the faith that on examination prove to be little more than Christianized expressions of a secular philosophy of their day. No longer tethered to Scripture, such theories float along on the prevailing breezes.

In line with this new approach, many sought to apply the principles of the new "historical criticism" to the Biblical record in an attempt to uncover the "Jesus of history". It was assumed that the latter would emerge from the layers of legend and misunderstanding evident in the Bible. Behind this assumption was another: the "real" Jesus, the Jesus of history, would be a man to whom we would be drawn and who would command our allegiance. If we could just get back to him and the "pure" Christianity that he taught, we would be in touch with the unadulterated essence of the Faith. In a way this was a version of the "conservative principle", the difference being that the church had always taught that the Jesus of history was the Jesus of the Bible and thus the aim was to get back to the Bible, the aim of the Reformation. Now the aim was, and still is, to get back to the Jesus who lay behind the Bible, a Jesus, that is, who would not offend modern sensibilities.

The 18th and 19th centuries produced what came to be known as the "Quest of the Historical Jesus". A number of "lives" of Jesus were written from the new perspective, each of them differing considerably from the other. This whole effort collapsed around the beginning of the last century after Albert Schweitzer astutely pointed out that each of these "real" Jesuses was made in the image of the author who tried to reconstruct him.

For a time this realization seemed to encourage a return to "biblical theology" but this did not endure. Instead there arose a very influential stream of thought that went the other way entirely

and insisted that the unknowable "Jesus of history" was irrelevant to authentic faith after all. Although this was a logical conclusion, given the inability of scholars actually to produce the historical Jesus, this theory was quickly judged to be in conflict with the stubbornly historical nature of Christianity. Therefore, in the early 1950's scholarship once again set off in another "Quest of the Historical Jesus". He has continued to prove extremely elusive.

This fact came clearly to the surface in the 1990's with the television programs, newspaper articles and magazine covers focused on the "Jesus Seminar".² This is one of the few times that mainstream scholarship has surfaced in the popular media and it attracted a fair amount of attention. It brought together a large number of liberal New Testament scholars in an attempt to decide whether or not Jesus actually said the things the Bible reports him as saying. Each scholar voted on each "saying" by dropping a coloured bead into a box. If he thought that Jesus probably did say it or something like it, he would use a red bead, while if he thought the Lord probably never said it or anything like it, he would use a black one. Other colours stood for shades of probability in between. The result of the vote indicated that this particular group of scholars thought that only 18 percent of what the Bible attributes to Jesus was actually said by him.

While such a conclusion may seem shocking to the average lay person, at least that 18 per cent gives us a solid basis for our understanding of the real Jesus of history. Or does it? On closer inspection it is easy to see that it does no such thing. First of all, it is important to realize that not all of the scholars agreed on the authenticity of this 18 percent. Those were only the sayings which at least a simple majority of the scholars thought deserved a red bead. In other words, those sayings that made the grade might only be accepted as authentic by just over half of those voting. Those scholars who disagreed with the majority did not change their minds because they were in the minority! In spite of the impression that the Jesus Seminar manages to convey, its participants remain divided about even the tiny percentage judged to be really from Jesus himself.

² c.f. "Can the New Jesus Save Us?" by C. Stephen Evans, *Books and Culture*, November/December 1995, pp. 3-8.

To add further to the uncertainty of these results we also need to recognize that if a different group of scholars with a different set of assumptions at a different moment in history had participated in the Jesus Seminar the results would have been different as well. A modern Albert Schweitzer might also observe that the Jesus which emerges from this endeavour manages to sound remarkably like what many of those scholars would like him to sound.

My point here is that the democratic procedure of the Jesus Seminar does not and indeed cannot render any truly reliable or consistent results. The same is true of all the basic methodologies of liberalism. Once liberated from having to accept all of Jesus' sayings as authentic (the traditional/orthodox view, the view of the "church"), scholars are free to pick and choose according to whatever criteria they deem helpful. They are obviously guided in their judgments by their own philosophical and ideological presumptions.

Furthermore, when one actually reads the efforts of these scholars one discovers that they are constantly building hypothesis upon hypothesis upon hypothesis. And, like building a house of cards, whatever they construct is regularly collapsing and being rebuilt. The result is something near chaos. The world of modern biblical scholarship is riddled by a bewildering variety of ideas, trends, schools of thought, nationalities, cultures, languages, Churches, philosophies, gurus, jealousies and rivalries. Just like any other human endeavour.

What we therefore discover is that no one picture of the teachings or person of Jesus emerges from the efforts of modern scholarship. There are only pictures. Using the same general methodology, scholars have come to opposite conclusions. For example, some suggest that Jesus was a kind of wandering Greek philosopher who challenged the prevailing social and cultural assumptions of his day while others highlight the more or less conventional Jewishness of who he was. Some see Jesus preaching that the end of the world is still in the near future, while others have him stressing the present reality of God's kingdom. Some hold that only the actions of Jesus can be known. Others claim the opposite, that only his sayings can be known. Some see him as

uninterested in the politics of the day while to others he was advocating a revolution against Roman oppression. The only sure conclusion we can draw is that this methodology produces no sure conclusions!

Not long ago many liberal scholars, having turned aside from supernaturalism, reinterpreted the Christian language of spirituality in terms of modern secular psychology. A few years ago, in a startling departure, but again following the secular culture, many embraced New Age spirituality. This can be described as a kind of generic supernaturalism in which angels, spirits, shamans, goddesses and witches are taken seriously and eagerly incorporated into "Christian" spirituality and worship. This approach seems to have been especially attractive to those inclined towards feminism. At the turn of the 20th century liberals were loudly proclaiming "The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man". Now, at the turn of the 21st, in a strange kind of echo, one hears calls for "The Motherhood of God and the Sisterhood of Women"!

Here we note that the radical feminist agenda which has made itself felt in the "politically correct" movement which has swept across many of our secular university campuses has arrived at many of our seminaries. The efforts of this kind of feminist theology to remake the Church in its own image are nothing short of breathtaking. It is also increasingly straightforward about it. Because it is still very influential it is important that we gain some understanding of what direction it is going. The best way to do this is to examine the conference called "Re-Imagining" which took place in 1993. While this cannot be done in any detail here, it is important to realize that it took place under the auspices of the World Council of Churches initiative called "The Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women, 1988-98" and received funding from a number of mainline denominations.

For our purposes we need only pay heed to the comments of Kwok Pui-Lan, a professor of theology at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. For some time liberals have been denying the superiority of Christianity over other faiths but Ms. Kwok proclaimed the superiority of Confucianism and Buddhism over Christianity! She also did away with the ideas of

sin and guilt. "O Jesus," she said, "who are you that reconciles us to God? Who is this funny God? Who needs to be reconciled with him?" She argued instead for multiple incarnations and reincarnations with Jesus being reincarnated in the endangered environment, specifically as a fig tree. All this from someone who is teaching "Christian" theology to Episcopal seminarians!

We are clearly in theological free-fall.

In spite of the lack of common results, mainstream scholars, many of whom teach at our seminaries, remain solidly committed to their basic worldview. Those who were part of the Jesus Seminar, for example, shared the conviction that the Gospels are "...narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church's faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the gospel story for first century listeners who knew about divine men and miracle workers firsthand."³

These assumptions, or ones much like them, are commonplace in modern biblical scholarship. They are the rules by which the game is played. Even conservative and evangelical scholars (and, contrary to popular belief, there are many of them) who start from the traditional/orthodox understanding of Scripture have to couch their work in terms compatible with these rules. Otherwise they would gain no hearing at all. While there is no doubt that modern scholarship has contributed a great deal to our understanding of Biblical times and customs, its overall impact on the church has been nothing short of devastating.

Basically, what has happened is that several generations of prospective Anglican clergy have been plunged into the world of modern scholarship upon their arrival at our theological schools. At most of them many of their teachers have strongly advocated one or other of the above-described methodologies. (How these teachers ever got into and remained in these positions is a complex story beyond the scope of this book.) It is little wonder that many students emerge

³ Evans, "New Jesus", p. 3

from theological college not only with less confidence in the classic tenets of the faith than they had before, but also, for some, with a completely different understanding of the faith itself.

They are especially vulnerable to the pressure they encounter in seminary because their faith had already been under assault in the secular educational system. Now they discover that their teachers of theology share a similar set of assumptions to their counterparts in the university. For many this is no doubt a very liberating experience as they discover they can fully accept a “modern” worldview and at the same time remain in the church.

Their teachers of theology might tell them, for example, that of course one cannot accept the idea that a man could bodily rise from the dead. But that does not mean that you can no longer affirm a belief in the resurrection of Jesus. You can still do this by changing the meaning of the word "resurrection" to refer to the "rise of faith" which the early disciples experienced after the discouragement brought about by the death of Jesus. And so you do. After all, these respected, knowledgeable and authorized teachers of the church have encouraged you to go the way they have gone.

In fact, in many cases, theological educators have taken great efforts to attack and destroy the "Sunday School" faith of their students in order to replace it with something more sophisticated and congenial to the modern approach. They see this as a critical part of an agenda to make the church more relevant to modern people. It has reached the stage in most of our seminaries that it is fair to say that students who continue to hold to the traditional/orthodox positions of the Church do so despite their theological education. And for many of these, the experience has actually strengthened their convictions.

The bottom line is that we now have a Church in which even the common slogan that proclaims “Christ” as our unity cannot remain unqualified. The reality that we have many “Christs” as the objects of our faith. If your Christ is a political revolutionary and my Christ is a confused Messiah, or a feminist crusader, or the pre-existing Son of God who offered himself as an atoning sacrifice

for the sins of the world, what can we really have in common? To say that we all believe in “Christ”, without defining what we mean, is surely to beg the question. In our Church such statements simply must assume we have a shared understanding of who “Christ” is or that the fact that we mean quite different things by “Christ” doesn’t matter.

It was of first importance to Jesus. People need to have a correct understanding of who he is. At Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples who people thought he was.

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:29-29)

Then Jesus went on to explain that he was to be rejected by the Jewish authorities, suffer, be killed, and then be raised in three days. Peter rebuked Jesus because his understanding of “Christ” did not include suffering, rejection and death. But to Jesus these were essential to who he was and what he came to do, and so he rebuked Peter in turn:

“Get behind me Satan!”, he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” (Mark 8:33)

Peter was right in calling Jesus “Christ”, but he had a false understanding of what that title meant and Jesus was not at all happy with his “interpretation”. Indeed, he saw Satan himself behind it! Perhaps I can be forgiven for my concern about the multiple contradictory understandings of “Christ” in the Church today and that the Church doesn’t appear to care.

This not to say than none of our theological educators, scholars or institutions uphold the faith of the Church. Some do. In fact, Wycliffe College, in Toronto, has made quite a little cottage industry out of being the exception to the rule, attracting many students beyond its natural evangelical Anglican constituency and, as a result, is thriving, at least in relative terms. These students come from all over Canada and from various shades of churchmanship in order to get a solid grounding in the Bible. There can be no doubt that its commitment to the centrality of the

Scriptures (the school's motto is "Verbum Domini Manet" or "The Word of the Lord Endures") has kept it also as a centre for traditional/orthodox faith in the Canadian Church.

However, the overall picture drawn in this section remains the normal experience for the majority of our theological students. The irony is that many of these students go on to be ordained and promise to uphold the doctrine of the Church, the same doctrine they have found under sustained attack in theological college. Those who have been converted by their professors find their new views to be no barrier to ordination as far as their bishops are concerned. The old requirement to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles has been quietly dropped. Ordination vows are now taken with the shared understanding that the Church is not going to hold candidates to the ordinary and commonly understood meaning of its basic doctrine. A kind of game is being played in which only a few of the spectators know that the rules have all been changed.

This attitude has made a significant contribution to the overall atmosphere within the Church. It has become entirely acceptable, for example, to lead worship with a thoroughly orthodox liturgy while at the same time being in active mental opposition to what it plainly proclaims. Naturally this has been done at substantial psychological cost and a number of rationalizations have been developed to help deal with the obvious tension. Some justify themselves by saying that they sing rather than say the Creed, on the grounds that this removes it to the realm of poetry and symbol. From this point of view its normal and literal sense can be transcended, allowing one to make it mean whatever they want it to mean. Others resort to the theory that there is a proper distinction to be made between what one stands for in public, as a representative of the Church, and what one privately believes as an individual.

There is little to recommend such justifications. If all the clergy bought into them it would, in theory at least, be possible to have a situation in which none of the Church's leaders believed in what the Church officially stood for! It is difficult not to see all these justifications as mental gymnastics designed to avoid the obvious charge of hypocrisy. Could such a thing be tolerated outside the walls of the Church? Imagine, for example, a Boy Scout leader admitting that he really

thought that outdoor camping was harmful to young people or held that children should not receive badges to acknowledge their accomplishments. The obvious question would be, "Why, then, are you in the Boy Scouts?" Indeed.

Given these circumstances, it is little wonder that tremendous pressure was building behind the scenes to do away with the old orthodox liturgy and move toward one that is more in line with modern beliefs. This is one of the main reasons why the BAS was so eagerly received by many bishops and clergy and why it seems so radically different than the BCP. Although the BAS represents a fairly modest shift toward modern theology, more by what it omits than by what it says, it really is the first time that such theology has broken surface in the denomination (unless, that is, one counts the "New Curriculum" for Sunday Schools in the 1960's). And, of course, it is also only a way-station on the road to much more radical change as various groups in the church press for liturgies that conform to what they already believe or do not believe anymore.

If anyone finds this account difficult to believe I simply invite him to have some frank conversations with persons who have been ordained in the ACC in the last forty years. Most of those who are close to the system are fully aware that many of our clergy, including bishops, no longer fully accept the traditional/orthodox Christian faith which the Church still officially proclaims. No wonder there is but silence when what used to be heresy is openly proclaimed. After all, who is able to cast the first stone?

Much of this came into dramatic focus for me when a colleague told me of an experience he had as a theological student when doing parish visits as part of his training. The rector had asked him to visit a retired Canadian bishop who had taken up residence in the parish. When my friend arrived, he found the elderly gentleman reading his Bible. As he did so, he was using his pen to cross out those portions with which he did not agree. While few knowledgeable people would be shocked by such a story nowadays, it is revealing to note that this episode took place in the 1950's! If we make the reasonable assumption that the bishop had come to his convictions during his theological education some forty years before we can see that the kind of behind-the-scenes

changes to which I have been referring were already well underway back in the early years of the last century. No wonder that by the 1970's the bubble was about to burst.

Liberalism, then, is by its very nature is forever changeable and it has been introduced into an institution which has stood for the same truths for almost two thousand years. This would be destabilizing all by itself, but the fact is that many within the Church have continued to espouse the traditional/orthodox position and have no intention of moving away from that commitment. They have tested modernity and found it wanting on many levels while the traditional understanding of the nature of the Bible has much to commend it. As long as the official facade of traditional/orthodox Christianity remained and as long as liberals were unwilling or unable to make any changes in official doctrine it was possible to retain some (increasingly false) sense of unity.

Liberalism, having already abandoned adherence to the Bible in matters of doctrine, is now pushing to do the same in matters of morals and practice and this, by the very nature of things, requires a more public face. After all, it is possible to doubt or reinterpret doctrine, like our retired bishop above, without anyone else necessarily knowing, or, worse, caring. It is only a matter of what one thinks. But changes in morality are much more visible, affecting behaviour or lifestyle.

For years liberalism has been content to share the Christian moral consensus which underlaid Western culture. Now, just as the culture has moved away from that consensus so theological liberalism, its child, desires to follow. Deriving its belief systems, not primarily from the Bible, but from some version of secular philosophy, so also has it turned from the morality of the Bible to the "situation ethics" which dominate the thought of the cultural elite.

Underlying both these shifts has been the conviction that there is no absolute truth. Liberals are well aware that they themselves hold a bewildering variety of theologies which are all open to change as the culture develops. In this context it is not proper to raise the question of which of these varieties might be the truth. Such a question betrays a lack of understanding of the

fundamental rules of the game. According to the latter, "All truth, is relative". Except, of course, for the truth of that last statement!

It must be said at this point that non-liberals most definitely do not share this conviction about truth. They continue to hold to the now out of fashion idea that when something is said to be true then its opposite must be said to be false. To them, along with vast majority of humanity both past and present, this is self-evident.

The idea of the relativity of all truth has only arisen among the cultural elite of European-based cultures. These cultures, now in the process of abandoning the Christian faith upon which they were founded, have been unable to agree on any viable alternative. This, along with a whole complex of other factors, has resulted in giving up on the whole idea of absolute truth. Although this view is beginning to show real signs of disintegration in the culture at large, liberals in the church continue to embrace it. To the liberal mind it is mere arrogance to assert that one has the truth, This sentiment is heard again and again in the Church, especially from those in leadership.

A recent example comes from Primate Michael Peers' address to the 1995 General Synod, when, in reference to Essentials 94, he said that he wanted "...to discourage a tendency to suggest that one group is right and another not, a tendency that moves into issues of power and talk about winners and losers rather than about brothers and sisters."⁴

Those who continue to hold to traditional/orthodox Christianity often find such statements nonsensical, intimidating and even self-serving. To them it just doesn't make any sense, for example, to affirm Jesus Christ to be the only Saviour without implying that other views are self-evidently wrong and even possibly un-Christian. Part of their goal is to point this out to their brothers and sisters whom they see as in serious error and in spiritual danger themselves not to mention a threat to the faith of the Church as a whole.

⁴ General Synod 1995 Report, p. 2

It is not so much a question of power as it is a question of truth. It makes perfect sense, if one is operating from the position that all “truths” are equal, to imagine that only by the exercise of some kind of power can one “truth” be said to be correct. However, if truth is something that can be arrived at through argument and evidence, as has been the assumption throughout human history (think courts of law), then it is not established through power but through the normal human means of so doing.

At the same time, conservatives may hear such statements by those enjoying high positions of authority as direct attempts to silence and disenfranchise them and deprive them of any voice within the denomination. The rules of the game seem to be framed in such a way as to try to keep them off the playing field altogether.⁵ Furthermore, the Primate speaks of power as if it is something none of us should seek while he and those who share his views occupy many of the seats of power in the denomination. One can be forgiven, perhaps, if, from this point of view, his comments might be heard as a little bit ironic.

This is not to imply that the Primate intended his remarks to have these effects. It is much more likely that he was simply unaware that anyone could react in this way. He wants to be open and inclusive, but he apparently cannot see that those within the Church who do not share his liberal assumptions actually end up being excluded by them. It is part of the burden of this book to show how this is so and that the inability to recognize this reality lies at the heart of the present crisis in which the Church finds itself. Gone are the days when we fought over such trivialities as whether or not to wear stoles or use candles on the altar. Our division is infinitely deeper, going to the very foundation of what we believe.

We now have within our ranks two different languages, two different ways of thinking and, in fact, two different and incompatible religions. Although this is a drastic conclusion to reach, it is,

⁵ For an example of how this works out in practice, please see my analysis of the *National Homosexual* [here](#).

I believe, the only one which accords with reality. I recognize that some will accuse me of causing division and even schism by saying this. But, in fact, the division is already painfully present.

Until both liberals and those in the traditional/orthodox camp recognize this fact they will continue to try to mix oil and water with increasingly frustrating results. Indeed, part of the sense of crisis is the fact that many on both sides are subconsciously aware of this truth but cannot bring themselves to admit it, let alone name it. It is just too monstrous an idea for good Anglicans to consider. It calls into question our history, our identity, our unity and, perhaps most importantly, our future. But that does not make it any less true. We must face the truth and deal with it. There is no other way out of the mess we are in. The truth will set us free.