

The Canterbury Connection

Betrayals lie at the heart of the Christian religion. Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday, presents the pageant of our betrayals of Christ and one another. It does so to call us to repentance and to the transforming power of the forgiveness of sins. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" is not only the first word from the Cross but is the most gentle, most poignant and most compassionate rebuke of our arrogance and ignorance imaginable. You see, it allows for the possibility, our willfulness notwithstanding, that perhaps we don't fully understand the consequences of our actions.

There can be no greater mercy and no more powerful incentive to repentance and renewal. How disturbing, then, that a church to which such a proclamation has been entrusted should be so cavalier and so dismissive of its own need to repent and be renewed. The Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada has said that the Canadian Anglican Church, which has been called to account by the Anglican Communion for its unilateral actions in authorizing the blessing of same-sex couples, "*may choose to walk apart*". In so saying, he has betrayed his office and his church. He should repent and he should resign, along with the other bishops who are complicit in the same actions.

The autonomy of the Anglican Churches in the Communion does not and cannot extend to matters of doctrine. What the Primate is saying is pure and unadulterated *sectarianism* which clearly violates the *catholicity* of the Anglican Church of Canada. For its historical and theological claim is that it is "*an integral portion of the One Body of Christ*", an integral part of the Church Universal, but only by being "*in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world*". Andrew Hutchinson has openly and flagrantly denied that principle so straightforwardly and unambiguously expressed in *The Solemn Declaration of 1893*, one of the foundational principles of Canadian Anglicanism and one which limits precisely the scope of episcopal and synodical authority.

The betrayals are everywhere, of course, but perhaps never so blatantly expressed. Regardless of one's opinion about so-called "*homosexuality*", it would have to be admitted, at the very least, that the Anglican Church of Canada, through the actions of Bishop Michael Ingham and the New Westminster Synod and then through the floundering motions of the 2004 General Synod, has violated "*the process of reception*" that has been the *modus operandi* of the Communion for the last several decades, leaving aside the greater matters of principle that inform and shape the authentic life of the Anglican Churches in their catholic claim to be full members of the Church Universal. The Primate's words make it clear that the Anglican Church of Canada is nothing more than an episcopal sect, a morally and intellectually impoverished one at that.

It has willfully broken its *Canterbury Connection*. But there remains another break, a breach within the Anglican Church of Canada, because there are faithful priests, parishes and peoples who uphold what Andrew Hutchinson has denied, namely, a commitment to catholicity. He has broken communion with us.

The sad tragedy of Anglicanism lies in its embrace of process thinking at the expense of theological principle, not to mention the further betrayal of its own commitment to process. There are and there must be controversies in the Church but the folly of the Anglican Church of Canada lies in its arrogance about its much-vaunted autonomy. It has assumed that its Bishops and Synods have a magisterial authority – a teaching authority – which they do not have. They have betrayed the very foundations of their own authority. Perhaps, in the charity of Christ, we may say, that “*they know not what they do*”, but we all live with the consequences of their decisions, namely, the breach of *the Canterbury Connection* without which we are not “*an integral portion of the One Body of Christ*”.

The wonder of Holy Week lies in the spectacle of our betrayals overcome in the greater spectacle of God’s love. For Canadian Anglicans especially, we can face the political betrayals of our church by its episcopal and synodical leadership through the knowledge that “*councils may and sometimes have erred*”(Art. XXI); by recognizing that Anglicanism means a commitment to a fallible and not an infallible church which has erred “*not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith*”(Art.XIX); by repudiating the follies of an issue-oriented institution that has betrayed basic orthodoxy in matters of liturgy, orders and morals; by renewing our own souls and those entrusted to us in the high things of God, notwithstanding the official statements of the Anglican Church of Canada.

The Anglican Church of Canada is a church in betrayal. We can only pray for its repentance and renewal but we can only do so by standing up to the follies and the foibles of its leadership.

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