

The Whole Truth
June 29, 2021

Many of us have come to the Anglican Church from smaller evangelical denominations where the call to simple and holy living sounded, inspiring lives of dedicated and faithful Christian service, a compelling call regardless of the denominational size.

And yet depth and catholicity matters, and the constant danger of the denominations is to lose sight of all that God has accomplished in Jesus Christ, the whole counsel of scripture and its distillation in the received teaching of the church. As it is put magnificently in Colossians:

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

In other words, for many the step toward the Anglican Church of Canada was a step away from sectarianism and its dangers and temptations and a step toward the catholic faith and life of the church, into a church in Canada that was comprehensive and robust.

In the apology of June 25, the vision of a much narrower church came into view.

(<https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/from-our-bishops/read-bishop-asbils-apology-to-the-lgbtq2s-community/>)

Three things were glaring.

First, on the defining controversy of our time, an apology was made to all those on the liberal side who have left. There is more than one reason for the catastrophic decline of the Anglican Church of Canada, and anyone with a single explanation is being simplistic. But it is undeniable that thousands have left due to the very principles at work in the apology. And to those who remain loyal to the received and defining doctrines of the church, this division in the church has been heart-breaking. The loss of brave and principled bishops, clergy and laity has meant the loss of dear colleagues and the diminishment of the Anglican Church of Canada. For them to be left unmentioned and unnamed ignores, in fact, an open offense that this generation of bishops could actually do something about.

Secondly, at the very time when all Canadian bishops have acknowledged the unsettled nature of the debate on Christian marriage and chastity, this apology not only implied that it has been settled, but cast the darkest of aspersions on those who, without animus toward anyone, simply seek to do, to teach and to uphold what they promised in a solemn oath before God.

“We apologize for the teachings . . . we were wrong.”

The real situation is much harder and more demanding. A debate continues in the church, with no easy or quick solution in sight. These are circumstances when the whole church is called to tell the truth, to struggle, to sacrifice and to endure - for the sake of Christ and his church. In such

circumstances, a great many people feel marginalized - like those bearing faithful witness to the vision of life and married life arising from Scripture and confirmed by the Church, scorned in society, and belittled by clergy and bishops in their own church. In this apology, only the marginalization of some merited mention.

And thirdly, not only does this apology assume the outcome - an outcome which contradicts the doctrine, discipline, canons and liturgy of the Anglican Church of Canada - it also declared its own partisan goals - 'Our Diocese will seek to partner with other affirming churches and organizations who have walked this path in their communities.'

This, as some have thought, may be the only way to blunt the rapid decline of an aging, self-styled progressive sect. Join up with the couple of other similarly declining denominations, and put off the inevitable. That may well be the decision before the Anglican Church of Canada at the next General Synod if proposals toward a provincial and congregational vision of the church move forward.

But it will be a path toward sectarianism and it will make inevitable the loss of those whose life and loyalty is to the holy catholic church of Christ.

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