

What The Reformed Faith Must Mean For Canada

Canada has its own identity and unique history. But to be your own, while having a giant as neighbor, is not easy. It is a constant struggle. We are a nation of many cultures. Our Canadian mosaic includes Eskimos, Indians, Ukrainians, those whose ancestry is British, immigrant from the Mediterranean, the Far East, and many other parts of the world. There are also six million French in Quebec who aggressively seek to maintain their own language and culture.

We do not have as many denominations as the U.S. Though Canada is an immigrant-receiving nation, the traditional Protestant churches are predominantly Anglo-Saxon. The church historian John Grant remarks that "comparatively few congregations went out of their way to make them feel at home."

A post-Christian generation - From the beginning, Canada was officially considered a Christian nation; parliaments and courts owed allegiance to Christ as sovereign Lord. The vision of Christ having "dominion from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Ps. 72:5) had for many Christians the dimension of a crusade.

Religion played a dominant role in the private and public sectors of life. This is no longer true. After World War II, Canada rapidly secularized. New literary, artistic, political, and educational impulses were no longer introduced and sponsored by the church, but came from sources hostile to her." We don't even have a Christian consensus anymore. The present generation is the first post-Christian generation. One Christian principle after another is being removed from law, court, and culture.

Secularism has become a dogmatic and often intolerant ideology. The secular humanists don't allow a hearing for the views of the Christian minority. For example, CBC, our national radio, is controlled by the secularists. In Ontario, the Roman Catholic and independent Christian schools are sailing on rough waters. Mark R. MacGuigan declares in an essay "Unity in the Secular City," "The public school educates for democracy and brotherhood, in a way that no denominational school can do, precisely by mingling children of different religious faiths as well as of different social and cultural backgrounds and by engaging them in common tasks.

"Thus, as symbol and reality, the public school performs the work of democracy. From the viewpoint of the State, therefore, it would seem highly desirable that all citizens should be educated in the public system."

Canada is facing a moral, social, and economic crisis. Adultery, homosexuality, rape, abortion. You name it. We've got it. We also have the dishonorable distinction of having the second highest strike record in the Western world. Our nation is divided, but not over religion. The division is caused by a quest for a greater share of the economic pie.

Response of Church to Crisis

How does the Canadian church respond to the challenge facing her? Theological liberalism believes that the answer is in ecumenicity and in social and political activism. Joint worship services no longer rate headlines. Many subscribe to the ideas of Father Jean Martucci, who said about the Christian Pavilion for the 1967 World Exposition in Montreal, in which Roman Catholic and Protestant churches participated, "Sharing the same faith, the same hope and the same charity, they (the churches) want to hear the same witness to Christ and his Gospel."

Dr. Douglas Wilson remarks that "the separate denominations and churches in Canada will have to dwindle in importance, while concerted efforts through the Canadian Council of Churches or other national bodies will have to increase."

Evangelicalism, in the broadest sense of the term, fights for doctrinal purity, but has narrowed down the gospel to individual salvation and eschatology. Canadian youth is in a shopping mood for answers, but many Christians are answering questions nobody is asking. So much preaching has little if any content. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is still too strictly confined to the experience of the Christian individual. The wider implications are ignored. Ethics is limited to the individual, especially to the problems of smoking and drinking. The social questions have been largely neglected. The historian Theodore Roszak describes modern Christianity as "socially irrelevant if privately engaging."

The observations I have made are general. There are signs of a social awakening among evangelicals. I could mention other developments in Canada, but this would take a few articles.

Message of Calvinism

What must the Reformed faith mean for Canada? Calvinism has had some strong advocates in the past, but their image has not left such a favorable impression. A. Lower says orthodox succeeded in driving the liberals (self-styled "Moderates") out of most of the offices of the denomination. Up to the present, however, the president, Dr. Jacob Preus, has failed to execute the convention decisions that district officials who defy the denomination's position on such matters as biblical authority are to be disciplined. Although many have deplored the bitter controversy that has arisen in this denomination, all who are concerned about church faithfulness in maintaining the truth of the gospel ought to rejoice and take heart at such a revival of orthodox Christian conviction in this age of confusion and indifference.

Similarly encouraging has been the very rapid growth of the new Presbyterian Church in America, made up largely of churches that have left the Southern Presbyterian denomination because of the liberalism that had come to dominate it, but including also congregations coming in from the United Presbyterians. Its third General Assembly represented 386 congregations. While the new denomination inevitably encounters some problems in feeling its way out of the decades of conflict with liberalism back to a biblical faith and life, all orthodox Christians ought to be heartened by this work of the Holy Spirit leading men back to the gospel and building a church that seeks to be

faithful to it. Drawing interest in Calvinistic biblical doctrine is shown in the large and increasing enrollments of students at Westminster and Jackson's Reformed Theological Seminaries.

Dr. J. I. Packer in his little 1958 book entitled "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God (pp. 45ff.) pointed out that, in the weakness and "ecumenical" confusion prevailing in the religious world in our time, we need to observe that "there are three distinct authorities to which final appeal might be made Holy Scripture, Church tradition, and Christian reason; that is to say, Scripture as interpreted by itself; Scripture as interpreted (and in some measure amplified) by official ecclesiastical sources; and Scripture as evaluated in terms of extra-biblical principles by individual Christian men."

These three views he saw held by (1) evangelical Protestant Christians, by (2) Roman Catholics and by (3) religious Liberals, respectively. He observed that we are being urged to forget this difference of starting point and to form a common front on the assumption that the difference is "small and trifling-unsightly little cracks on the surface of an otherwise solid wall. But this assumption is false." "The wall is cracked because it is not all built on the same foundation. The more one probes the differences between Roman and Protestant, Liberal and Evangelical, the deeper they prove to be; beneath the cracks on the surface lie fissures which run down to the very foundations, broadening as they go. Nothing is gained just by trying to cement up the cracks; that only encourages the collapse of the entire wall. Sham unity is not worth working for and real unity, that fellowship of love in the truth which Christ prayed that His disciples might enjoy, will come only as those sections of the wall which rest on unsound foundations are dismantled and rebuilt. Till this happens, the question of authority must remain central in discussion between the dissident groups; and the best service one can do to the divided Church of Christ is to keep it there."

Packer was right. Our authority must be God's inspired Word. Our evaluation of what is happening in the churches and in the world around us must be based on that and our own course must be directed by it. That is bound to create a difference from and a break with the majority and with public opinion.

The Lord was never more popular than when he fed the 5,000 without it costing them anything and they in their enthusiasm wanted to make Him king. As soon as He refused to adopt a socialistic policy of continuing free lunches for all and insisted that men must receive Him as the Food of eternal life, went on to intricate "doctrinal" explanations which increased their irritation, and, worst of all, preached Predestination (negative as well as positive!) the crowds vanished as quickly as they had gathered. When His disciples were asked, "Will ye also go away?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Note that the Lord's inspired words were the authority and therefore Christian conviction and experience followed: "And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6).

The history of our times continues on the course which the Lord has predicted. The movement of apostasy within the churches as well as in the world of which He

forewarned us, emerges more and more clearly. At the same time He continues to gather, by His Spirit and Word, His chosen Church from every people and nation and language until the time of His triumphant return. May we, by His grace, pray and strive to be faithful members of that Church and sharers in that triumph.

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