

THAW

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IN THIS ISSUE

We have an essay by Ty Ragan to enjoy. There is a review of Tom Harpur's book "The Pagan Christ" and an editorial. Nothing has come from the north. Melting snow may have impeded Fr. Shivering's dog team.

Editorial

When I was in civic politics I came across a saying, whose obscenity was outweighed by its wisdom. In reference to a marginal person who was troublesome to the caucus one would hear: "Better to have him inside the tent peeing out than outside the tent peeing in".

Now I offer heartfelt remorse to any who are offended, but you have to admit, the saying has a point. And it applies to the Church, today. There are many who are standing outside the tent and you know what they're doing. There are not so many

inside the tent, aiming their contributions to the outside, not as many as there should be.

In this November issue of "Thaw" I find myself inside the tent, to my surprise. And I examine one prominent writer who is outside the tent, doing you know what.

S. Francis was a prominent Inside-The-Tent-er. In all things he was obedient to the Holy Father. He was super critical, of course. But he was loyal. Other reformers, his contemporaries, with a similar love of poverty stepped outside the tent and, in a short time, disappeared from history. Their message by its direction as much as by its content, turned into an attack on the Body of Christ and not a loyal act of reformation.

That may tell us something about staying in the Anglican community during the intensifying struggle over same sex relationships. We have endured difficult circumstances in the past.

Belonging does not mean, of course, conforming. In the Anglican tradition, it has meant common worship and ardent communication but not necessarily agreement. *Lex orari, lex credendi*. "As I pray, so will I believe". The problem becomes more difficult if contestants refuse to come to the altar with their opponents, due to something they call "impaired communion". Such affrontery tends to terminate the Anglican way.

The primacy of liturgy, our touchstone for obedience, is delightfully stated in this quotation from Stanley Hauerwas:

"One reason why we Christians argue so much about which hymn to sing, which liturgy to follow, which way to worship, is that the commandments teach us to believe that bad liturgy eventually leads to bad ethics. You begin by singing some sappy, sentimental hymn, then you pray some pointless prayer, and the next thing you know you have murdered your best friend".

Two writers outside the tent are examined in the next two issues. One is Tom Harpur, popular religious deviant, whose book "The Pagan Christ" promises to be as sensational as it is short-lived. The other author is one of our own: a member of the Franciscan third order and bishop of Alaska. He has written an article, "The Gospel Comes to North America" published in the fall edition of "Ministry Matters" found at the Anglican Church of Canada website. You can download it and study. Bishop Mark Macdonald is an "Insider" of course. But he writes as if he were outside the tent, aiming in. His article will be analyzed as well. Harpur and Macdonald (Mark) – an unlikely pair of outside-the-tenters.

TOM HARPUR – THE PAGAN CHRIST

Tom Harpur is to the Christian Church what a comet is to the solar system. Like the Church, he is fascinated by Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sun whom we all orbit.

But Tom has his own plane of rotation. He is an individual performer, with a tail which brightens the religious sky momentarily. The rest of us rotate in our different orbits on the same plane, some hotter than others, arguing who is closest to the sun but we are all of the same family.

So the first thing to say about Tom Harpur, or rather about the Gospel and Harpur, is that Jesus draws all and sundry. In a plethora of ways, Jesus is the centre of people who so differ in their apprehension of Him that they often fall upon one another with swords. Harpur, bearing many cuts and scars, is no mean swords man, himself. Large is his following.

On the other hand, there is the question of his deviant plane and orbit, the Harpur who wishes to stand outside the tent and is wetting our shoes.

The first word that applies to him is the word "myth". For Harpur a myth is a truth-bearing story which doesn't have to be rooted in history. A myth can be an alternative to history. Thus if Jesus is a myth, then it's not necessary to say that Jesus ever existed in the flesh. It means that Jesus is the "Christ myth" which you will find played out under different names in all religions and which actually states explicitly what is deep in the unconscious of the human soul. Myths, he says, express the deepest truths about being human. The crucifixion, for instance expresses the pain, the agony and death in each of us. The resurrection expresses the opposite. But, as events in history, Harpur has discovered that Jesus Christ is not one of them.

Indeed the Christian story is really a cleverly crafted but bogus biography devised by early Biblical writers, incorporating many, if not all, the truths in myths from pre-existing Egyptian mystery religions. He implies there existed scholars in the first 100 years or so with sufficient literary skill and religious information to put together a biography, a creation of the infant Church, which compelled people to look not at the myths of self understanding but at the fabricated, (and false) life of an historical Jesus.

Harpur does not use the term "myth" in another more common way – a story which gives meaning to the events of history without replacing them. But Harpur, himself, is a player in another myth which help explain the plane of his true orbit.

To put it simply, Harpur is a romantic. The romantic myth says that the good dwindled in the course of history. It existed supremely long ago in the natural state of creation, (Eden). But humankind has been going downhill ever since.

Note that Cain, the first murderer, was also the builder of cities. Never mind that the story of salvation starts in a garden, (Genesis) and ends in a city, (Revelation). Think only of nature being the vestige of Eden and the summer traffic jams of people heading out to the lake. To be refreshed by nature. "One impulse from the vernal wood..." wrote Wordsworth, one of the romantic poets of the late 19th century.

Tom Harpur thinks that we got it right in the early centuries of Christian history but then created the Jesus story, defended it with murders and repression with the result that, for centuries, the Christian Churches sat in darkness.

Until... when? Well, until he, Tom Harpur, found the light and began a movement of reform to recover that lost light.

He's not the only one to make use of the myth of history as a story of human decline. The Mormons used it. The Church was in darkness after the apostolic age, they said, until the Book of Mormon fell from the sky. Dan Brown in the Da Vinci Code uses the same mythic device. The true story of Jesus was suppressed by Opus Dei and other extremist Roman Catholic prelates. Until?

Well, now! Dan was the one, (like Tom) to get it right. Every romantic reformer has to say that civilization became increasingly corrupt so that the same reformer can proclaim the better way, the truth, and start the revolution. Jean Jacques Rousseau was the father of history as decline.

Harpur's weakness is two-fold. He asks us to believe, first that everyone was wrong for thousands of years, without intelligence, courage and faith. That's a bit hard to swallow. Then he asks us to believe that he, or his principal source, has got it right. After all these centuries! Even harder to swallow.

I would be more impressed with The Pagan Christ if, in the end history had no place. But the book fritters away its argument. In the end, so long as we don't think of Christ as the human-divine Jesus, but as a cosmic and pagan myth, then we can have it all. Almost. The bible, the sacraments, the life of prayer, meditation, transformation.

Almost. Something's lost. It was an original insight for the Church fathers to have seen that God became incarnate in a human person. There was scandal of particularity it was called. Personally, I am happy to have a God who is the man Jesus Christ, rather than a God who is an archetype defined by Karl Jung or a myth floating in the mind of meaning. It was a courageous and bold thing to proclaim that our little lives were and are the scene of divine coming or that the beautiful Bethlehem story points to a real historical event, a real coming, a real union of God and humankind.

The Inerrancy of Scripture in the Anglican Communion: A Personal Reflection

By Ty Ragan

How we know we are following God's will? For some it is with the aid of a spiritual director, in some faith traditions it is upholding scripture as the final judge of what is right and wrong. Does that mean that scripture speaks to every decision that needs to be made in life? Every moral choice along the journey? Does it clearly spell out solutions to divorce, abortion, marriage, leadership in the church? The litany of issues for discussion currently in all faith traditions can go on and on and on where each party can bring their own interpretation of the text to the table.

It is this crossroads the Anglican Communion has come to on the debate of Same-Sex Marriage or blessings. Each side of the argument has held up scripture to defend its stance. Some will ignore passages that disagree with their theology; while others will remove a verse or two from the context (historical, social, biblical) to make their point more valid. This may be a new issue, but the idea of a church in flux and debate is not new.

A reading of John Newman's *The Via Media* illustrates the challenge the Anglican Church as a whole faces in walking the middle ground between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. In his dialogue between Clericus (clergy) and Laicus (laity) he illustrates how the core of what the Reformation had been about had been lost, and that there needs to be another renewal of the Reformation to get the church back on track a renewal of beliefs rooted firmly in the church that Christ commissioned.

For the Church of England International, otherwise known as the Anglican Church (or in countries where being seen in co-operation with Britain is not a good thing, "the Episcopal Church") it has a strong history of holding both Reformists and Catholics together under one cross (hence two versions of the Lord's Prayer in our prayer books). This is done by our decision-making process, known colloquially as the "Three Legged Stool": Scripture, Reason and Tradition.

Scripture of course being the Word of God, the Canonical books, but also in the more Catholic school of thought (which I am a part of) within the Communion, the Deutero-Canonical works as well. Reason being our ability to think things out logically, it is one of the greatest gifts God gave humanity that the animals do not have. Finally, Tradition or *Traditio*. This is the tradition in the church that dates back to Apostolic times, and led to such writings as the Apostle's Creed. It is not like the tradition most default to, for example a church has always used overheads for worship music, then they move to hymnals for a period. The small "t" tradition is the one we

create and after a while it becomes a localized tradition and is not what is meant when Anglicans speak of Tradition in their decision-making process, and faith.

This brings us to the view of Anglicanism and the Scriptures, because as in any church dispute one side will hold up the Bible as the inerrant Word of God and this style of fundamentalism has led to many nasty instances historically. On the other side is fundamentalism as seen in those that badly interpret or ignore pieces of scripture that disagree with their concept of God. Either of these two stances does a disservice to God's words, but also tends to place God in a box by trapping God in the way that only our human vocabulary can describe the way that God is.

As Reginald Fuller phrased it in his article in *The Study of Anglicanism* - God's word is the incarnate word as seen in the life of Jesus Christ (p. 88). Fuller goes on to write about the inspiration of Scripture as covering both Old and New Testaments as an outline to the faith (p. 88-89) for a believer to be able to see the journey with God and pointing to the saving grace we find in the Life of Jesus, the word of God incarnate (as bluntly phrased in the first chapter of the Gospel of John).

Scripture is held in Primacy, which means that it is the norm by which faith, and traditions are judged as to whether or not they are from God and part of God's teaching (Fuller, p. 91). Fuller also adds besides being a norm for faith, the Bible is the starting point of understanding God's character, so it becomes a norm for our ethical/moral behaviour as well (p. 92). To add to this understanding, Article VI in the Thirty-Nine Articles (an Anglican Catechism) states that scripture contains all things necessary for salvation (Fuller p. 90 and the Book of Common Prayer).

What does this mean for a believer who is part of an Anglican Faith tradition? I cannot speak for the masses, but I can reflect on my understanding and what it means for my reading of the Biblical Text. I am on the published record (The March 2005 issue of the Presbyterian Record for my article *Love God, Love His Story*) that I do not necessarily read the Bible as edicts or law, but rather the Story of God with his people. It is a continuing story that has new chapters written each and every day, yet here is the beginning and end of the story presented to us in a library of stories, poetry, dramas, histories, biographies, pretty much every kind of genre writing available.

It leads to a broad perspective of the whole text God has given us, that points us specifically namely to the Word Incarnate Jesus Christ and what that means for us as his people. To live our lives in the heart of God, with the Word of God both written and incarnate as our norm to figure things out.

This leads into a beginning to unpack the liturgical worship and the mysteries of our faith. The New Church Teaching Series is designed to help equip laity to lead in the church. Two volumes that help to explore the Liturgy, is *A Theology of Worship* by Louis Wiel and *Mysteries of Faith* by Mark McIntosh. It may seem unique to

explore liturgy with the inerrancy of scripture, yet it fits together. As discussed earlier the incarnate word of God is Jesus. The Liturgy is the *Traditio* that aids in the community experience of the word of God.

Scripture is used to develop the framework for an Anglican's faith, from the prayers of confession, praise, thanksgiving and intercession to music to the sacraments, they all come from the story of God's people living in the heart of God. Celebrated together with one another to draw us closer together God as a community. The liturgy service on Sunday is designed that within a three-year cycle the entire Bible will be read to the People and taught. But we are not a service of the written word of God with that being the focal point, rather we are centred on the Eucharist and this is what bonds the Anglican Communion together as one, coming humbly to the altar to renew ourselves with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Not just a remembrance as within the Protestant church, yet not transubstantiated as within the Roman Catholic Church. One of the mysteries is the Eucharist and what exactly happens during it, but it is one cup, one bread of promise and hope for a people to experience the Incarnate Word so that we are equipped and readied for Monday to Saturday as Christ's ministers in the world.

To say Anglicans are people of the Word is accurate in my opinion, because our ability to figure out norms living in the Heart of God comes from the written word and the incarnate Word. It is experienced in life. It is experienced in the water of Baptism that God uses to wash us clean; it is within the laying on of hands for Confirmation, and Ordination or the anointing with oil and praying over the sick and/or dying. It is found in the blessing of a marriage of two people made one, or in the Eucharist.

One people under Christ bonded by the Eucharist. We are a people of God that discover God's will for our lives by using Reason, Scripture and Tradition. This "Three Legged Stool" helps equip us for action in the world. It is in the action of the six days we are called to minister to the world and be renewed on the seventh in community of God's People. It is this we as a people need to remember when we hit crossroads and disagreements on points of doctrine, we have been at crossroads before and instead of asking what is right and wrong, what about asking "What is God doing within his People with this?"

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¹ John Newman would convert later in life to Roman Catholicism and become Cardinal Newman.