

Advent 2011

Dear Friend,

Have you ever reflected on the state of things in the Church and thought to yourself, “Things cannot get any worse?” Then things immediately got worse.

Are you trying to make sense of what is happening around you? Are you wondering what has happened to the Church in which we grew up or in which we were converted?

John Chryssavgis, a Greek Orthodox Deacon, wrote a little book called *The Way of the Fathers: Exploring the Patristic Mind*<sup>1</sup>. The opening chapter begins a discussion of “Making Sense of History” with these words:

In the opening passage of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens describes the world as it was prior to the French Revolution:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

Today, no less than yesterday, the history of the Church and of Christian thought might be summarized as peaks and valleys continually succeeding one another through the centuries. There was never a time when it was all one or the other. Saints lived in the most difficult of times, and sinners in periods of growth; intellectual pillars lived in the darkest of ages, and dull writers of repetition in the golden ages. Yet in order to understand the whole story, one must unravel the treasures of the whole span of history, beginning at the very beginning and appreciating each phase of Church history and Patristic thought as a realization of the day and event of Pentecost.<sup>2</sup>

This is a reminder that we need to hear from time to time. It does not take too much reading of the Bible to show us that there were some really evil times and there were some great times. If we look at the New Testament—the Corinthian letters, for example, we can very quickly appreciate that even in bible times soon after Pentecost, things were somewhat less than perfect in the Church. If we read any amount of Church history, we quickly come to a realization

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<sup>1</sup> Chryssavgis, John *The Way<sup>1</sup> of the Fathers: Exploring the Patristic Mind*; ©1998 Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies; Light & Life Publishing Company pp 206

<sup>2</sup> p.1, *ibid*

that the Church has almost died out a number of times. Why should we expect things to be any different today?

I am sure that you are familiar with the hymn verse:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him all creatures here below;  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>3</sup>

In our home we often sing this verse as a table blessing before meals on special occasions like Christmas and Thanksgiving.

It is the closing verse for two hymns in our “old blue hymn book” written by Bishop Thomas Ken. In his personal will, Bishop Ken wrote these words:

“As for my religion, I dye in the holy catholic and apostolic faith professed by the whole Church before the disunion of East and West, more particularly in the communion of the Church of England, as it stands distinguished from all Papal and Puritan innovations, and as it adheres to the doctrine of the Cross.”

Bishop Ken’s times were not easy years. His school years were the period of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell when the use of the Prayer Book was forbidden. King Charles and Archbishop William Laud were executed and for more than a decade the Church and the Book of Common Prayer were forbidden. Thomas Ken later became the Bishop of Bath & Wells. He was deprived of his bishopric as one of the non-juror bishops in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century

I have a tremendous admiration for Bishop Ken in his determination to remain Anglican even when it was not convenient—to focus on the Church of the Scriptures and the Fathers—and especially on the doctrine the Cross.

I am reminded of Lyte’s hymn, *Abide with me*<sup>4</sup> written almost 150 years after Bishop Ken’s passing:

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;  
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;  
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;

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<sup>3</sup> Book of Common Praise 1938- Hymn #2 part 2 & Hymn #20

<sup>4</sup> *ibid* Hymn #16

O thou who changest not, abide with me.

I need thy presence every passing hour;  
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?  
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless;  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.

Hold thou thy Cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Every verse of that hymn is relevant to Bishop Ken's circumstance and equally to our own today and there is not one wasted word.

One hundred and sixty-six years ago John Henry Newman converted to Rome. Today there are various fellowships and societies named for John Henry Newman—some are way stations for those *en route* to Rome.

Canon Arthur Middleton, a “retired” English priest, seminary professor, writer, and speaker, draws attention in his *Towards a Renewed Priesthood* to the English situation at the time of Newman's secession:

In 1845, in the wake of Newman's secession to Rome, Dr. Pusey wrote to Samuel Wilberforce the Bishop-elect of Oxford summarizing the position in these words: ‘As far as I can see, what is chiefly at work is not attraction towards Rome, but despondency about ourselves.’ To the task of reassurance, the new bishop was called.<sup>5</sup>

Canon Middleton, having made the point about the state of things at the time of Newman's secession, continues and notes that “Despondency about ourselves, but for quite different reasons, describes what many priests have experienced in recent years.”<sup>6</sup>

Canon Middleton's chapter title is “From Despondency to Conversion.” I find this to be significant. It points out an assessment of the situation and simultaneously points out the solution.

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<sup>5</sup> p.1 Middleton, Arthur, *Towards a Renewed Priesthood*© 1995Arthur Middleton, Gracewing, pp139

<sup>6</sup> p.1 *ibid*

Personally, I suspect that it is this despondency that has contributed to the problems plaguing our lives recently. I am convinced that many Anglican Catholics “lost faith” in being Anglican—perhaps because they panicked when the Mother Church gave in on significant issues—notably the ordination of women to the priesthood in 1993. That date is interesting because that it was just after that notable Synod vote in England that the fairly newly formed Traditional Anglican Communion sent representatives to Rome. When the Church of England no longer seemed to be rock solid, there was a tendency to look to the Rock which is Peter. Perhaps we should have been more focused on the Rock of Ages.

In the early days of the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada, Fr. William deWitt Clinton wrote a little tract<sup>7</sup> expressing some thoughts on the question of the “identity of the Anglican Catholic Church” which he put down under three headings or terms: “Continuing”, “Loyalist”, and “Relief”.

Fr. Clinton wrote:

Loyalist refers to a principle. We are – or claim to be – Anglican Loyalists because we insist that we intend to adhere to the Solemn Declaration of 1893 (page viii, Prayer Book) and to transmit that heritage undiminished to our posterity.

This is in contrast to “Patriotism” which accepts the proposition “my country (church) right or wrong.”

The distinction between us is that we claim to be “Loyalists” while those who stayed in the Anglican Church of Canada, whether they agree with its changes or not, are the “Patriots”.

After a lengthy paragraph on “Continuity”, he summarizes: “All of this is due to the fact that we have this social and institutional continuity in a historical social identity as Anglican.”

Particularly germane to my purpose here are Fr. Clinton’s comments about “Relief”; he wrote:

Relief We are not a new church – we are a “relief” jurisdiction of the Church. Relief refers to two things: (a) Relief from the imposition of the majority which has altered the “organisation” – the Church. (b) Relief to be the Church according to its principles as summarized in the Solemn Declaration. And there is a third sense in which we are as it were, a Relief “location” – a “City of Refuge” for those fleeing from false persecution.

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<sup>7</sup> Circulated in photocopy form. Bishop Alfred Woolcock noted on a reprinted copy of the handout, “We are indebted to Fr. Clinton for this brief and clear statement of our position, as members of the Continuing Anglican Church.”


There is something in this statement. As Traditional Anglicans we have a freedom in Christ. We are free to be the Church

The 1959 Preface to the Canadian Prayer Book (1962) tells us—referring to the faith described in the Solemn Declaration of 1893:

It is in that faith that this Book of Common Prayer is offered to the Church, with the hope that those who use it may become more truly what they already are: the People of God, that New Creation in Christ which finds its joy in adoration of the Creator and Redeemer of all.<sup>8</sup>

As Traditional Anglicans, we are a community of people who want to do just that.

Sincerely,



Fr. Robert S.H. Mansfield, SSC

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<sup>8</sup> p.vii, Book of Common Prayer (Canada) 1962