

Short Changing the Father

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Bill Cosby tells us that there is a difference between Mother's Day and Father's Day. Mothers, he says are much better organized. They give their children a list of the things they would like. They then ask their children to go and ask their father for the money needed. With money in hand she then instructs: "Go buy me something nice from this list and come home and surprise me."

Fathers on the other hand do not have it so good. Cosby says that before Father's Day he gives each of his five kids \$20. They then pool the money and spend \$10 on two, three-pair packages of underwear. They each wrap a pair separately and give the sixth pair to the Salvation Army. After Father's Day, Cosby's kids have done their duty and are then walking around with \$90 of his money in their pocket. Mother's get the most out of the gift they receive. Fathers on the other hand are short changed.

If earthly fathers are short changed by their kids, so too with our heavenly Father. I want to show you in this essay how we have shortchanged the Father by the way we have reduced the Gospel and its message. He has given us his resources and we have often used them for our self-serving ends.

I will do three things in this essay:

1. Give a historical context that will show us how we have over the past 110 we have been short-changing the Father;
2. Illustrate how the teaching of Bishop Michael Ingham exemplifies this;
3. Show how we within Essentials are called to recognize this and return to the Father what is rightfully his due.

The Historical Context

1. *Thirty Years' War:*

Between 1618 and 1648 Europe was wracked by a series of wars that together was known as the Thirty Years' War. Overall, the struggle was between the Holy Roman Empire, which was Roman Catholic and Habsburg, and a network of Protestant towns and principalities that relied on the chief anti-Catholic powers of Sweden and the United Netherlands, which had at last thrown off the yoke of Spain after a struggle lasting 80 years.

Its destructive campaigns and battles occurred over most of Europe, and, when it ended with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the map of Europe had been irrevocably changed.¹

¹ In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved June 15, 2007, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9072150>

According to Philip Schaff this was the context in which the motto for Essentials had its genesis. In 1628 a Lutheran pastor named Rupertus Meldenius wrote a treatise commenting on the war that was ravaging Europe. It was in this context that it was first written:

“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”²

I find it to be an encouragement to know that when there was such turmoil in the church and society that the originator of the Essentials motto articulated words that have outlasted their generation and have a new significance for those of us faced with the challenges and conflicts of this present time.

2. Parliament of World Religions

In 1893, in Chicago, 400 clerics gathered for the first Parliament of World Religions. Many of the speakers at the 1893 gathering focused on how the world’s religions fit into a global, evolutionary move toward Christianity, broadly defined. One of the delegates was Swami Vivekananda of Calcutta. He said:

“Truth takes many forms and believers must learn to share each other’s truths—even if they clash”

The essence of his thought is articulated in this quotation:

*“Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas or sects or churches or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality. All religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, are so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, as determined by the condition of birth and association... Every religion is only an evolving of God out of material man.”*³

Now contrast this with the comment of Edward White Benson, who in 1893 was the Archbishop of Canterbury. In responding to why he did not attend this Parliament his response included these words:

“I do not understand how that one religion can be regarded as a member of a Parliament of Religions, without assuming the equality of other intended members and the parity of their position and claims.”

Four years later at Lambeth 1897 Benson’s words were echoed by the Bishop’s gathered:

² Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 7, pp. 650-653 (repr. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1965)

³ Touchstone Journal: “Just a Few Other Gospels”.

<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=12-04-096-b>

“The tendency of many English-speaking Christians to entertain an exaggerated opinion of the excellence of Hinduism and Buddhism, and to ignore the fact that Jesus Christ alone has been constituted Saviour and King of mankind, should be vigorously corrected.”⁴

At the turn of the twentieth century it was stated by the Anglican episcopacy that there was still a clear understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus and his universal claim on human lives. However by the time we get to 1986 the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury was represented by Robert Runcie. Runcie expressed a very different understanding of the Gospel’s relationship to other religions from that of Benson White:

“Dialogue can help us recognize that other faiths than our own are genuine mansions of the Spirit with many rooms to be discovered, rather than solitary fortresses to be attacked. From the perspective of faith, different world religions can be seen as different gifts to the Spirit of humanity.”

I find it interesting that the exclusivism marked by Archbishop Benson White’s words is replaced with a statement celebrating religious pluralism in Archbishop Runcie. In expressing his position Runcie caricatures those of an early generation as being aggressive in their approach to other religions. While it is true that at times this may have happened, I would suggest his words are exaggerated because religious pluralism is seen as a highest good. But lost in this is the centrality of Jesus Christ and the clear understanding of his person Benson White articulated with such clarity.

So why is it that there could be such a change in perspective? To answer this I turn to the year 1966. In that year, Bishop James Pike said: *“the Church’s classical way of stating what is represented by the doctrine of the Trinity is... not essential to the Christian faith.”⁵*

The Episcopal Church queried about the best way to respond to him. Should there be a heresy trial? It was decided that no, this would create an oppressive image for the Church and present a tone and manner unbecoming of Episcopalians. Pike’s utterances were, they said, “irresponsible” for one holding Episcopal office. Bishop Pike’s fault was a certain degree of irresponsibility and a lack of tact rather than false doctrine.

This was the report of the majority. There was a minority report that forty years later has become the common mind of many North American Anglicans:

4 Touchstone Journal: “Just a Few Other Gospels”.

<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=12-04-096-b>

5 The Episcopalian Preference by Philip Turner Copyright (c) 2003 First Things (November 2003). http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=547&var_recherche=James+Pike

“We believe it is more important to be a sympathetic and self-conscious part of God’s action in the secular world than it is to defend the positions of the past, which is a past that is altered by each new discovery of truth.”⁶

From these disputes of forty years ago, the Anglican Church has answered the question What Kind of Church are we to be by saying: “We want to be an enlightened denominational option on the North American religious scene. A “prophetic” lever to pry people loose from the incrustated positions of the past.

The teaching of Bishop Michael Ingham

In the historical overview I have attempted to show contextually what has happened in the Anglican Church. Increasingly it articulates an ideology more in keeping with that expressed by Swami Vivekananda.

In Canada no one epitomizes this better than Bishop Michael Ingham. In his book *Mansions of the Spirit* he maintains: The early Church’s dogmatic “exclusivism,” which warped the loving, prophetic teachings of Jesus, is giving way to a new age of religious pluralism. His main thesis is developed in the opening chapters of the book where he writes:

“Claiming the authority of the Holy Spirit, the early church chose to proclaim Christ as liberator from the Jewish law. A new covenant was proclaimed in place of the old. The church announced salvation through Christ alone.”⁷

In reading the book, it is clear that Ingham sees this as a tragic mistake. The early Church was wrong. Today, after centuries of rigid orthodoxy, Ingham is convinced that more enlightened bishops, theologians, and mystics are outvoting the church fathers.

He then uses Scripture to support his thesis. But in so doing he takes the text and distorts its meaning. This is his comment on what is at question when Paul visits Athens, as recorded in Acts 17:

“What was being debated at the Areopagus was not the issue of the salvation of non-Christians, but the merits of polytheism over monotheism, which was the Greek belief at the time.”⁸

I question how such a deduction can be reached from a clear reading of the text: At 17:30ff this is how Luke records Paul:

6 Ibid.

7 Michael Ingham: *Mansions of the Spirit*; 1997 Page 16

8 Ibid page 68

“³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

There is nothing in this passage that supports Michael Ingham’s interpretation. And yet, his is a voice that speaks in some circles of the Anglican Church of Canada with much authority.

But he does not keep this interpretive method only to his views on pluralism. It is also used when he argues in favour of same sex relationships.

While his theology is formed by religious pluralism, his sexual ethic is informed by a late 19th century philosophical ideology called naturalism.

Here is a definition of naturalism:

Individual characters were seen as helpless products of heredity and environment, motivated by strong instinctual drives from within and harassed by social and economic pressures from without. As such, they had little will or responsibility for their fates, and the prognosis for their “cases” was pessimistic at the outset.⁹

Now with this definition in hand read what Michael Ingham said in March 2007 while in Ottawa:

‘Today we have a better understanding of homosexuality as a basic and natural orientation experienced by some members of the human community, just as we find the same thing among some animal species, and in Christian terms we must come to think of this as not only natural but also God-given and good

But these developments in the social sciences and therefore in popular understanding are still relatively new--since about the 19th century. They have not yet penetrated the Church’s thinking except at the edges of its consciousness and greatly against its will.”¹⁰

Notice the language he is using: Homosexuality as a basic and natural orientation; We must not only think of this as natural but God given.

As you read Bishop Ingham did you notice the parallel between his words and the Encyclopedia’s definition of Philosophical Naturalism? Here we see the same kind of development that I was presenting earlier. Just as the Anglican Church’s

9 Naturalism. (2007). In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved May 18, 2007, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: www.britannica.com/eb/article-9055047

10 Anglican Planet March 2007 www.anglicanplanet.net/TAPCanada0704b.html

theology has come to represent something that is more akin to what the 1893 Parliament of Religions endorsed, so in our sexual ethics. This is 19th century naturalism and not biblical ethics.

To further illustrate this let me quote what Bishop Ingham says about Romans 1:

The Greeks “tolerated sex between adult males and young boys—which is almost certainly the context in which the New Testament condemns homosexuality,” said Ingham. “St. Paul understood same-sex relationships only in terms of the older-man and younger-boy relationship of the Greeks, which we call pederasty, or in other words child abuse.... But no difference was perceived [by the Church] between child abuse and adult same-sex love.”

Here is the Bishop doing the same thing with Romans as he did with Acts. He had a preconceived agenda that he brings to the text and makes it say something that is not there at all.

Bishop Ingham’s theological premise is faulty. On what contextual evidence does he base his claim that what Paul was writing against was pederasty? If you read the plain meaning of the text on homosexual relationships (Romans 1: 24ff.) we discover that Paul does not only address homosexuality but lesbianism.

If he was only addressing pederasty why does he use the Hebraic literary device called parallelism? Parallelism is a type of literary discourse that provides a means for a writer to reiterate what they are saying by the use of repetition. This is the structural tool that we find used in the Psalms and Proverbs.

In Romans chapter one Paul has been describing how the worship of God has been exchanged for idolatry. When we worship the created order rather than the creator there is a disordering of life that ensues. One of the manifestations of this disordering is sexual immorality, particularly says Paul, lesbianism and homosexuality.

“For this reason God gave them up to passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.”¹¹

Paul’s argument here is laid out in the context of the larger issue of worship. When we distort the image of God, by idolatry, we end up becoming distorted ourselves as verse 26 and 27 articulate. There is nothing in the Greek that would support Bishop Ingham’s claim that the objects of the shameless acts referred to in verse 27 were boys.

¹¹ Romans 1:26-27

Therefore, if the theological premise supporting homosexual relationships is this faulty, one can conclude, so too is the ethical deduction that results from such an argument.

Given Bishop Ingham's methodology, it is understandable that he comes to this ethical conclusion. However to construct an ethic based on this reasoning is to reject the witness of scripture and to exchange it for the Spirit of the Age. He resorts to eisegesis, that is, reading into the text a personal agenda, or issue, rather than the more arduous and difficult path of exegesis, that is, taking out of the text what the author intended in the context in which he writes.

It is here that the likes of Bishop Ingham and others are short changing the Father. Their theology and ethic diminishes the teaching of Scripture as they have replaced a biblical world view with that of pluralism and naturalism.

So while those of us within Essentials are often seen as divisive and responsible for the current fractures that currently exist, I have tried to show by the historical context and by the example of Michael Ingham why Essentials needs to speak up and persuade people to reconsider a course of action that could sever our ties with the larger communion.

Essentials is called to return to the Father what is rightfully His due

Within the Essentials Movement we maintain that the kind of problems we are facing are of such significance that they get to the heart of what is most important. In First John 3:23-24 the Apostle writes:

“And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. Those who obey God's commandments live in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Holy Spirit lives in us.”

Here is the correction needed to allow us to give back to the Father what is rightfully his due. We are to believe in the name of his son and love one another. This brings together the responsibility and calling we have to hold together a Christian theology, believing in His name, and a Christian ethic, to love one another.

These are clearly expressed in the Montreal Declaration where we read:

The Only Saviour

Human sin is prideful rebellion against God's authority, expressing itself in our refusing to love both the Creator and his creatures. Sin corrupts our nature and its fruit is injustice, oppression, personal and social disintegration, alienation, and guilt before God; it destroys hope and leads to a future devoid of any enjoyment if either God or good. From the guilt,

shame, power and path of sin, Jesus Christ is the only Saviour; penitent faith in him is the only way of salvation.

By his atoning sacrifice on the cross for our sins, Jesus overcame the powers of darkness and secured our redemption and justification. By his bodily rising he guaranteed the future resurrection and eternal inheritance of all believers. By his regenerating gift of the Spirit, he restores our fallen nature and renews us in his own image. Thus in every generation he is the way, the truth and the life for sinful individuals, and the architect of restored human community.¹²

The Standards of Sexual Conduct

God designed human sexuality not only for procreation but also for the joyful expression of love, honour and fidelity between wife and husband. These are the only sexual relations that biblical theology deems good and holy. Adultery, fornication, and homosexual unions are intimacies contrary to God's design. The church must seek to minister healing and wholeness to those who are sexually scarred, or who struggle with ongoing sexual temptations, as most people do. Homophobia and all forms of sexual hypocrisy and abuse are evils against which Christians must ever be on their guard. The church may not lower God's standards of sexual morality for any of its members, but must honour God by upholding these standards tenaciously in face of society's departures from them. Congregations must seek to meet the particular needs for friendship and community that single persons have.¹³

With these two statements Essentials is articulating what the Scriptures clearly teach. What we do at this Synod will either provide an opportunity for us to reclaim our biblical heritage or go further down the road laid out over the past hundred or more years by the like of the Bishop of New Westminster.

The stakes are very high and we within Essentials will work gracefully and truthfully to call the Church away from secular pluralism and philosophical naturalism to a theology and ethic deeply grounded in the Biblical Revelation.

For it is our prayerful intention to give back to the Father that which is his so that we can believe in His name and love one another in ways that honour the biblical ethic.

¹² Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials: Statement #4

¹³ Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials: Statement 14