The Canadianization of the Church of England

by

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When the Canadian Journal of Theology was launched in 1955, Gerald R. Cragg ventured that some people would deny that such a phenomenon as Canadian theology exists. When he surveyed the field, he was cheered by the recognition that in recent years Canadians had been participants rather than spectators. He could only point, however, not to the achievements of the past, but with guarded optimism towards the mature theology which might develop in the future. When churchmen speak of Canadianization, they often use the future tense. (1)

An anonymous editorial in that initial volume both hedged and affirmed the possibilities for an indigenous theology: "although Christianity is not Canadian but universal, and although there cannot be a Canadian theology in the sense of a Canadian system of doctrine, the eternal quality of truth is to be reached, not by seeking to abstract ourselves from our existence, but by relating ourselves to it." (2) A quarter century later, the CJT had been dead some years, and its disciples were still debating whether or not it had experienced a resurrection in Studies in Religion. The United Church Committee on Theology and Faith produced an anthology of Viewpoints towards a Theology of Nation, and one of the contributors echoed that earlier editorial. He avoided "the adjectival phrase 'Canadian Christian,' because there is no Canadian Christianity." But he too wrote that Christianity must be concretely embodied by people in the groups (like nations) in which they find themselves. (3)

Labels like the 'American heresy' or 'continental theology' have been as misleading as they have been helpful: they point to particular aspects of a church's thought, but the very act of pointing makes a charicature out of a characteristic. Canadian Anglicans have lacked the charicature--indeed both as Canadians and Anglicans they suffer the double identity crisis of their larger bodies. When they do attempt to define themselves, both tend to do so in terms of compromise. They both travel the via media, or, as has been suggested of at least one, the via mediocris. (4) It is the intention of this paper, not to try of suggest a peculiar ethos for Canadian Anglicans, but to trace their growing self-consciousness as an independent member of the body of Christ, insofar as a member can be independent.

Among the few memorials to Canadians in St Paul's cathedral in London is a bust of Sir John A. Macdonald which records his boast, "A British subject I was born; a British subject I will die." For the prime minister who did so much to forge the Canadian nation, as for the majority of his anglophone contemporaries, Canadian identity emphasized rather than denied the imperial connection. Political autonomy could be achieved without repudiating the British heritage. In a similar way, the Anglican church in the colonies could attain self-government, while stressing its British roots.

Though this paper will concentrate on the growth of ecclesiastical independence of Canadian Anglicans, that only represents a technical coming of age. Institutions, moreover, do not mature; only individuals do. Even in individuals the adolescent vacillation between rebellion and dependence takes on more subdued forms, so that the 'passages' continue throughout life. If Canadians and Anglicans have identity crises, it is only because they are human.

Another of the St Paul's memorials, to Lord Thomson of Fleet, describes him as coming "from nowhere." It seems an unconscious example of Northrop Frye's description of the geographic disorientation which affects our psychology: "To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent." (5) The Canadian question, he suggests, is not just "Who am I?" but "Where am I?" English Canada has been part of the wilderness, then of North America and the British Empire, then of the world--but never for long enough for its traditions to be founded on them.

The Church of England on this side of the Atlantic had long been an episcopal church remote from bishops. The question had often been raised. Archbishop Laud may have intended to send over a bishop, as part of his plan to bring New England into conformity with the established church. Towards the end of the 17th century, lieutenant-governor Francis Nicholson of Virginia (who would become governor of Nova Scotia in 1712) wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, "Unless bishops can be had, the church will surely decline." (6) Almost as soon as it was founded, the SPG proposed appointing suffragans, who could more easily be removed if the experiment failed. A later initiative won the support of Queen Anne, and a bill was prepared for parliament. Her death ended the plan, but the same year a legacy of £1,000 from Archbishop Tenison was designated towards the support of a colonial bishop when one should be appointed. At mid-century, Bishop Sherlock of London urged the government to relieve him of the burden of colonial jurisdiction. Petitions from the colonies from the start of the 18th century onwards, and especially from clerical conventions after mid-century, reiterated the desire for colonial bishops. (7)

In 1783 a group of Loyalist clergy, many of whom would settle in the remaining British colonies, presented to Sir Guy Carleton their plan for a bishopric in Nova Scotia, which would serve as a rallying point for refugees. (8) The first desire of the British government, however, was to appease American sympathies. Not only was Seabury consecrated in Scotland (1784), but White and Prevoost were consecrated by Canterbury (1787) before arrangements were finally made for the establishment of a colonial episcopate, and Charles Inglis consecrated as the first colonial bishop (1787).

Much of the pre-revolutionary agitation had presumed the possibility of the episcopate functioning as a spiritual office--to confirm, ordain and supervise church order--without requiring state support or assuming coercive powers over the

laity. The southern colonies had grown so used to running their own affairs that the church there disavowed itself from New England's promotion of the episcopal cause. Though North Americans might regard episcopal authority as a good thing, they were wary of being given too much of a good thing. So although the erection of an episcopal see in Nova Scotia was intended to complete the transfer of the establishment to the colonies, it was a modified establishment. Inglis would be supported by the government, and work in close connection with the governor and legislature; but he was not given a seat on the Legislative Council (yet Mountain would be given a seat in Quebec six years later), nor was he styled 'Lord' Bishop.

The church in the American colonies had long survived without resident bishops. Now that one had been appointed to Nova Scotia, others would follow, as dioceses were divided and new areas were opened. Though the number of sees tended to proliferate, on the American rather than the British model, (9) the vastness of the country meant that bishops were still geographically distant. 19th century church history was once regarded as the story of epic episcopal visitations, with records of the bishops "finding" churches in the settlements along their way. The colonial clergy usually served two distant masters--their bishops, and the societies which supported them (the SPG, the CMS, the Colonial Church and School Society)--as well as their congregations. And they often displayed a disregard for any master: Duncan of Metlakatlah would resist the efforts of the CMS and of Bishop Ridley to control him. When Lord Dalhousie referred to Stewart as "the head of the church," an Irish clergyman replied, "Some of the ecclesiastical subalterns scarcely consider him the little toes." (10) Strachan felt the wave of immigration from the "Sister Isle" accounted much for the lack of respect towards authority. His present-day successor, Lewis Garnsworthy, has noted the continuing dichotomy between his people's "very high doctrine of episcopacy" and their "very low practice of it," though in his view the office requires him to make decisions, and not become "just a clothes-hanger for a few episcopal clothes." (11)

Conflicts over authority have always brewed within the church: Ignatius of Antioch would not so frequently have urged loyalty to the bishops in his letters, if that loyalty had been an accepted fact of life. In BNA, at the same time that the episcopate was expanding, a balance was developing in favour of synodical government, along American lines. It came to fruition first in the diocese of Toronto, in 1853, when the assembly of clergy and laity presided over by John Strachan declared itself to be a diocesan synod, and petitioned the legislature to remove any doubt about its legality.

This movement towards democracy had grown up over the past decades out of financial necessity. SPG grants to Upper Canada were to be terminated; the clergy reserves were being abolished; and the formation of rectories was only an amelioration. Though it found the voluntary principle

distasteful, the Church of England would have to rely on its members for support. And there was a grudging admission that if she was to use the laity's money, she would have to give the laity a voice in determining how the money would be used. Bishop G.J. Mountain tempered his opinion that it was reasonable for them to have a voice in synodical deliberations, with the confidence that the laity "will not, on their part, seek to usurp more than their place." (12) It was wishful thinking.

When Herbert Binney was appointed to Nova Scotia in 1851, he was not only the first native Canadian to become a bishop, but also the last crown appointment. (Machray's appointment to Rupert's Land in 1865 is not really an exception, for the Hudson's Bay territory did not then have even colonial status.) Once diocesan synods had been recognized as legal entities, a vehicle had been provided for the local election of bishops. Still, Strachan had to convince the Governor-General that it was appropriate for the synod to choose a bishop, when Huron was divided from Toronto in 1857. (13) The Globe chuckled at the prospect of John Toronto presiding at an episcopal election; and Strachan himself would put limits on the laity: should they twice reject the person who led in the clerical ballot, they were instructed to switch their vote to the clergy's choice. In the event, Benjamin Cronyn won on the first ballot, so Strachan's instructions were not put to the test.

It was the first episcopal election within the empire, and was seen as a landmark. Mockridge said that bishops were no longer to be government officers, while T.E. Champion spoke of Cronyn as the first bishop to be appointed in "the emancipated Anglo-Canadian Church." (14) The process was not, however, an unqualified success. The experience of politicing at the election of Cronyn, and of Travers Lewis in Ontario (1861) had disturbed many people. At the start of the Huron election, an attempt had been made to bypass the process by referring the selection to the bishops of Quebec, Montreal and Toronto, but Strachan had refused to entertain the motion. There was a weightier challenge in 1864, when a memorial sought to allow the majority of synod at the next vacancy "to exercise its discretion as to a direct election or a reference to the Governors of the Church at home." (15) Strachan again rejected this opportunity to return to the old ways, expressing his pain that the memorialists should wish to neutralise the power of self-government which had been won by the church in the colony.

The divisions reflected in the elections had been between low and high churchmen, and though the laity tended to be evangelical, so far agreement had been met. When, however, it came to an election in the heartland rather than the hinterland of Toronto diocese, the case was different. At the Huron election, Strachan had sought to favour Bethune by his request for the laity to support the clerical candidate in the case of a stalemate. There was no suggestion of such enforced unanimity when a coadjutor was to be elected

in Toronto in 1866. In ballot after ballot, Provost Whitaker of Trinity College led with the clergy, while T.B. Fuller led with the evangelicals. Only when Whitaker withdrew did Bethune gain a majority. By forcing the capitulation of a candidate, or of his supporters, the laity could sway an election. As recently as the election for a suffragan bishop of Niagara in 1980, Dean Joachim Fricker had a majority in the first ballot, among both clergy and laity. But as other candidates withdrew, the new lay votes were attracted to Clarence Mitchell, while Fricker continued to lead with the clergy. The laity refused to change, and Fricker withdrew, allowing Mitchell to be elected on the seventh ballot. (16)

The lay voice could be influential in synods, not just in elections, but in initiating reforms. It was the laity who inspired the movement for prayer book revision at the start of the century, and carried it over episcopal roadblocks. The choice of bishops by popular election rather than by appointment has produced an episcopal bench that tends to be more pragmatic and pastoral than theological (in contrast to England), and that bias seems to be reflected in the Canadian church at large.

When the bishops of BNA met together in 1851, they had urged the formation of synodical government, not just on a diocesan, but also on a provincial level. The inaugural sessions of the legally recognized synods of Quebec, Montreal and Toronto in 1859 passed resolutions petitioning the Queen to appoint a metropolitan bishop for the ecclesiastical province of Canada. Huron refused to follow suit, claiming the time had not yet come for such an action. Letters patent were issued to Fulford as Metropolitan, giving him power to convene provincial synods. Huron delegates did attend the first provincial synod of Canada in 1861, though they withdrew in protest. Three factors fed Huron's hesitations.

One was a fear that the new provincial body might erode diocesan privileges. The Quebec delegates to that synod were also instructed to safeguard diocesan rights. Canadian Anglicanism has a strong diocesan bias which tempers the power of larger bodies like provinces and later the General Synod. Thus the experimental liturgies of the 1960s and 1970s progressed at different paces under the various restrictions of the different dioceses. Even doctrinal matters are subject to diocesan strictures. Where the Presbyterian Church in Canada would enforce its stand on the ordination of women, General Synod action on the same question or on communicating the baptized is permissive, to be done at the discretion of the bishop. Pensions were a diocesan responsibility, and though moves at reciprocity and a widening General Synod pension plan have taken place, this has been a factor in limiting mobility from one part of the country to another. The efforts to retain diocesan control have not always been successful. When the rector of St Peter's, Hamilton was acquitted early in this century by a civil court in a paternity suit (the mother withdrew her accusation), a diocesan court tried to evict him from his parish. When he appealed to a higher church court,

Niagara tried unsuccessfully to change the canon which would allow such an appeal.

Local particularism was also a factor in Huron's objections to the provincial synod. Such local feeling helped change the original intention that the metropolitan office should be linked to the see of Montreal, as the English primacies are tied to the sees of Canterbury and York. By 1879, when Medley became Metropolitan, the office was no longer tied to one see. (17)

The third cause of Huron's worries about provincial government was the threat it posed to the evangelical cause. Their fear had substance. Fulford died when the provincial synod of 1868 was in session, and the Lower House nominated Machray to be his successor. Three of the four remaining members of the Upper House refused to assent to the nomination, even when it was sent back to them a second time, because Machray was an evangelical. (18) The evangelicals had been concerned from the start that a provincial synod might serve to thwart their movement. As D.C. Masters has stated, Huron had become an "Evangelical preserve. It was to the Evangelical movement what the Province of Quebec is to French Canadian nationalism. In the minds of Huron Evangelicals any menace to diocesan rights was likely to be regarded as a menace to the position of Evangelicals." (19)

The formation of a provincial synod, despite the hesitations, weakened the hold of Canterbury over Canadian dioceses. Fulford's letters patent expressed in vague terms that he was to be "subject...to the general superintendence and revision of the Archbishop of Canterbury for the time being, and subordinate to the Archiepiscopal See of the Province of Canterbury." The other bishops now came under the jurisdiction of the Canadian metropolitan rather than of Canterbury.

As the link to Canterbury was diminishing, that to the crown was disappearing. Although Cronyn had been elected as bishop, it had still been thought necessary to obtain letters patent from the Queen before he could be consecrated. Two missionary bishops--Mackenzie of Zambezie and Patteson of Melanesia--were consecrated without patents in 1861. Mackenzie was consecrated in Cape Town, the first bishop to be consecrated in a colony; the following year Lewis would be the first to be consecrated in BNA. In the complicated legal battle between Bishop Colenso of Natal and his metropolitan, Colenso felt the crown would provide the only neutral tribunal, and appealed to it on the basis of his crown appointment. The Privy Council decision (1865) held that letters patent created "ecclesiastical persons" but could give no jurisdiction within a colony with its own legislature. (20) That is, the law recognized him as a bishop, but not as a bishop of anywhere. The New Zealand bishops recognized their anomalous position, and immediately petitioned the Queen for permission to surrender their patents. Archbishop Longley received permission from the Colonial Secretary to consecrate bishops for the self-governing colonies without patents. The Secretary (Lord Carnarvon)

later wrote Fulford that they would not be necessary for the consecration of A.N. Bethune as assistant bishop of Toronto (1867), or of future Canadian bishops. (21)

As the final separation from Canterbury and the crown was taking place, Canadians were looking for a new way to express the wider unity of their church. Before the Colenso case, Fulford had looked forward to a representative meeting of the Anglican communion. After Colenso, there seemed a new urgency about the matter.

There was, however, another motive. In 1864 (after the Essays and Reviews judgment, but again before Colenso), Bishop Lewis urged a council to combat the heresy of the day: "a national council of the English Church, with representatives from every Ecclesiastical Province of the Empire, should meet under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury and reaffirm the Catholic doctrines now endangered." (22) Only thus could Anglicans be reassured about the literal inerrancy of the bible, and their hope of hell. It was the colonial fear of isolation, and their terror at the higher criticism, which led to the first Lambeth Council. Archbishop Longley had rejected the idea that such a gathering should be a legislative one, enabling it to be inclusive of the whole Anglican communion, rather than just of the imperial church.

It had been the creation of an ecclesiastical province, rather than the formation of a General Synod in 1893, which marked the independence of the Canadian church, though 1893 did underline the fact. The new Canadian House of Bishops decided that each Metropolitan should be dignified by the title of Archbishop. The assigning of that title had been discussed at the previous Lambeth Conference (1888), but left unresolved, since the Archbishop of Canterbury (E.W. Benson) disliked the idea. Benson was annoyed when the Canadians decided to go ahead. Machray sought to placate him, assuring him, "The reverence and precedence given so lovingly to the See of Canterbury as the Mother Church of the Church of England would be none the less if as in the case of Rome Your Grace were still styled Bishop and the Metropolitans of Daughter Churches--Archbishops." (23) But he acknowledged that the creation of provinces and metropolitans was a separating step, and that Rupert's Land was "by those changes somewhat more severed from the See of Canterbury, to which we strove to nestle as closely as possible--but our fortunes are indissolubly connected with those of the rest of Canada...." He left unspoken the conflict between the two men about jurisdiction in British Columbia. (24) The titles symbolized the independence of the Canadian church, and in England the Guardian congratulated her on being the first of the daughter churches of the communion to take the step.

John Moir has said that the mission status of the Church of England had involved such a strong dependence on the mother church "that the umbilical cord seemed almost to be made of iron." (25) But it was not one simple cord

which bound together the two bodies; there were many threads which would be cut, while others remain. Long after the curtailment of support to the older parts of Canada had encouraged the structural independence of the Canadian church, the British societies continued to fund work in the west and north. Only the outbreak of the second world war prompted the Canadian church to take over financial responsibility for all its mission work. The poverty of the Canadian church prompted ecclesiastical independence on one hand and continued financial support on the other. The Anglican image of itself as a national church, which lay behind its early attempts at establishment, led it to over-extend itself; while its presumption that it could indeed be present throughout the country led it to hold aloof from the union conversations early in this century, which might have led to its participation in a more truly national body. The English church had provided many bishops for Canada, though pace Porter, few in this century. (26) It provided university teachers long after comparable non-Anglican institutions no longer relied on foreign sources for their staffs. The Fellowship of the Maple Leaf in the first third of this century sponsored the immigration to the praries of public school teachers who would, in the words of its motto, "Keep Canada Christian and British." The Archbishops' Appeal brought clergy to serve on the Railway Missions and in missionary districts; and the diocese of the Arctic still depends heavily on British clergy to supply her needs.

The modern world disowns the past, and in this respect the Anglican Church of Canada is very contemporary. She shares the faddish embarassment at her past involvement in missionary activity, while wondering at her people's lack of enthusiasm for work beyond the local focus. And the British heritage of which she was once so proud now makes her blush. When William Bothwell was Dean of Montreal, he deprecated his church's penchant for gaiters and regimental flags--it needed, he said, to develop a Canadian character. (27) But he went on to lament that it was too small to produce a liturgy or a strategy of its own. His solution was to draw closer to the American church. He hadn't noticed that, like the wolf in sheep's clothing, appearance does not neccessarily match substance. By now, even the appearance of the Canadian church is becoming more American. Under southern influence, cassock-albs are replacing traditional attire, and bright banners draw the eye away from battle honours. In architecture and liturgy, British examples are forgotten for American ones. The weight of American influence has overpowered the balance, upsetting the via media between the old and new cultures. But perhaps this is simply the modern way of becoming Canadian.

Notes

1 "The Present Position and the Future Prospects of Canadian Theology," Canadian Journal of Theology, I, 1 (April 1955) 5-10.

2 "The Purpose of the Journal: An Editorial," Ibid., 1-2.
3 H. Martin Rumscheidt, "A Theology of Nation: A Position Paper" in Graham Scott (ed.), More than Survival: Viewpoints Toward a Theology of Nation (Don Mills: Canec Publishing, 1980), 54-66.
4 Northrop Frye, The Stubborn Structure (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 282.
5 Ibid., 281-5. Frye is writing as an Upper Canadian, suggesting that Canada has no Atlantic seaboard.
6 T.E. Champion, The Anglican Church in Canada (Toronto 1898) 6.
7 W.W. Manross, A History of the American Episcopal Church (New York 1950), 154-171.
8 Judith Fingard, The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia (London 1972) 14.
9 Robert Machray, Life of Archbishop Machray (London 1909) 397.
10 Quoted in Richard Ruggle, Some Men and Some Controversies (Erin 1974) 89.
11 Ibid.
12 Address to Wycliffe College Alumni, 6 November 1974.
13 Sir Edmund Head's instructions were to designate a clergyman "after consulting with the Bishop and other authorities of the Church in the Colony." Cf. S.W. Horrall, "The Clergy and the Election of Bishop Cronyn," Ontario History, LVIII, 4 (December 1966), 205-220.
14 Champion, Op. cit., 11.
15 Quoted in J.L.H. Henderson, "Episcopal Elections and the Memorialists of 1864," Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society (September 1950).
16 Niagara Synod Journal, 1980, table facing K-2.
17 The centre of Canadian Anglicanism moved westwards from the original inclusive see of Nova Scotia. Mountain of Quebec had been offered the office of Metropolitan, but turned it down because of his age--some of his supporters, unaware of his refusal, thought he had been sleighted. When the General Synod was formed in 1893, the church headquarters was located in Toronto. A memorial from the diocese of Qu'Appelle to the 1921 General Synod, to move the offices to Winnipeg, was unsuccessful. The feeling that central Canada is unaware of the problems of other parts of the country has often been expressed in the church.
18 Life of Machray, 154.
19 D.C. Masters, "The First Provincial Synod in Canada," Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society, IV,4 (June 1962), 3.
20 Cf. Peter Hinchcliff, The Anglican Church in South Africa (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963) 96-7.
21 21 November 1866. Quoted in John Moir, Church and State in Canada 1627-1867 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967) 264.
22 Ontario Synod Journal, 1864, 230.
23 Quoted in D.N. Schurman, "The First Archbishops in the Canadian Church," Journal of the Canadian Church Historical

Society, V,1 (March 1963).

24 Life of Machray, 397.

25 The Church in the British Era (Toronto: Ryerson, 1972) 190.

26 Cf. David Nock, "Anglican bishops and indigenity: John Porter revisited," Studies in Religion, 8,1 (1979) 47-55.

27 William Bothwell, "The Anglican Church of Canada," Anglican Dialogue, II,3 (Summer, 1963) 62-71.