

# WITNESS

Transforming broken lives  
into world-changing disciples

THE MAGAZINE OF ST. GEORGE'S IN THE CITY

152 METCALFE STREET, OTTAWA, ONTARIO, K2P 1N9

SPECIAL 1885 EDITION

## ASK THE ST. GEORGE'S SCHOLAR

### What were the main issues facing Anglicans in 1885, when St. George's was founded?

*Prof. The Rev. Greg Bloomquist*

There were essentially four issues: doctrinal/liturgical, biblical, moral, and scientific.

First, Anglicans in 1885 were experiencing significant movement in their understanding of what it meant to believe and worship as an Anglican.

From the 16th century, Englishmen, at home and abroad, primarily understood themselves to be Anglican because the King (or Queen) was English.

Whatever the king or queen believed, the English people believed: *cuius regio eius religio* ("the religion of the ruler will be the people's religion"). From the 16th century onwards, this meant that the English were Anglicans, whether they had faith or not! Naturally, this led to a kind of middle-of-the-road "liberalism": no extreme beliefs, no jarring church reforms, social peace at all costs, and toleration ... even at the cost of truth! <sup>1</sup>

But, Anglicanism also had within it two streams that were unhappy with this liberal approach: on the one hand, a Reformed/Puritan and eventually Evangelical stream, and on the other a more Catholic one. The Catholics, for example, primarily asserted Anglicanism's clear historical continuity with world-

wide Catholic Christianity, of both the West and the East. This took clearest shape in relation to bishops and sacraments, and thus led to Catholic Anglicans being called "High Church." In the 1800s this position came again to prominence through the Oxford Movement. The leaders of this movement, often termed Anglo-Catholicism (e.g., John Keble, John Henry Newman, Edward Pusey), attacked both main-line "liberal" Anglicanism, which was leading the Church of England to secularism, and Evangelicalism, which was deemed to be too weak to stave off the growing forces of secularism.

Reformed Christians (including Puritans), who based themselves on Scripture alone, sought to purge both "liberalism" and any remaining vestiges of Roman Catholic belief from Anglicanism. In many respects, the Evangelical movements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, led by the Wesleys, Whitefield, William Wilberforce, the Clapham Sect, and others, were the natural continuation of this stream, with the difference being that, by the 1800s, it was clear that the battle lines had changed: the enemy was no longer Roman Catholicism but rather secularism, which, in England, arose in large part

from religious "liberalism." The simple, unadorned worship, based on Scripture alone, that characterized St. George's life and liturgy in 1885 arose from this stream of Anglicanism.

In spite of the jostlings and strainings between the Catholics and Evangelicals of the 19th century, both shared something fundamental, something that was always in jeopardy in the more common expression of Anglicanism, namely, a firm belief in Scripture and the Holy Spirit's ongoing witness to Scripture. The more common "liberal" approach was always in danger of doing what in our day has actually happened: Anglican bishops and theologians are no longer content to interpret Scripture; they will now rewrite it to suit the theology of the day! <sup>2</sup>

And this leads to the second issue facing the church of 1885, Scripture. Because the rewriting of Scripture that is now happening in our day actually began about the time that St. George's was founded. <sup>3</sup>

The changes began as Anglican scholars, among others, undermined the special character of the Bible. In 1888, for example, Edwin Hatch asserted an idea that had been 'in the air' for Anglicans for some time, namely, that the Bible's presentation of Christian doctrines "are in reality Greek theories and Greek usages changed in form and colour by the influence of primitive Christiani-

“ Anglican scholars, among others, undermined the special character of the Bible ”

ty, but in their essence Greek, still.”<sup>4</sup> Worse yet, W. R. Cassels’ 1874 work, *Supernatural Religion* had gone even further: Cassels asserted that any supernatural element found in Scripture should be eliminated, leaving only moral teaching: “We gain far more than we lose in abandoning belief in the reality of Divine Revelation. Whilst we retain pure and unimpaired the light of Christian morality, we relinquish nothing but the debasing elements added to it by human superstition.”<sup>5</sup>

But, the question would inevitably be asked: could Christian morality, as presented in Scripture, be maintained? Wouldn’t it also be accused of just being “human superstition”? As we know, this is exactly what revisionists are suggesting today, namely, that Biblical teaching on divorce, same-sex relationships, even adultery, as well as almost any other issue, are mere “human superstition” and have no place in a truly ‘enlightened’ [sic!] morality.

In fact, as the third issue facing the church in 1885 – morality – makes clear, the erosion of a Christian morality, derived from Scripture, had already begun as well in the 1880s. We know this merely by looking at issues raised at the Lambeth Conference of 1888. (The Lambeth Conferences are assemblies of the bishops of the Anglican Communion. Though it might seem ironic, the Lambeth Conferences began in 1867 at the request of the 1865 synod of the Anglican Church of Canada to deal with challenges to Biblical orthodoxy arising from liberal bishops elsewhere!)

Lambeth 1888 dealt with an issue that had especially disturbed Canadian bishops 20 years earlier, namely, polygamy, an issue facing the growing Anglican Church throughout Africa. The Canadian bishops were particularly disturbed by the unbiblical morality being proposed by some of the liberal, English bishops who had become bishops in Africa. As well, orthodox bishops – again especially Canadian! – were disturbed

by a growing liberalizing of practice around divorce and remarriage. So, Lambeth 1888 pronounced itself firmly in favour of the New Testament teaching on polygamy, as well as on divorce and remarriage.<sup>6</sup>

The issues dealt with at Lambeth 1888 also reveal that, in the 1880s, the Anglican Church was beginning to face issues that were arising largely as a result of the success of the mission work that for years had been shared by Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals in the English colonies. The rise and blossoming of Anglican churches throughout Africa,

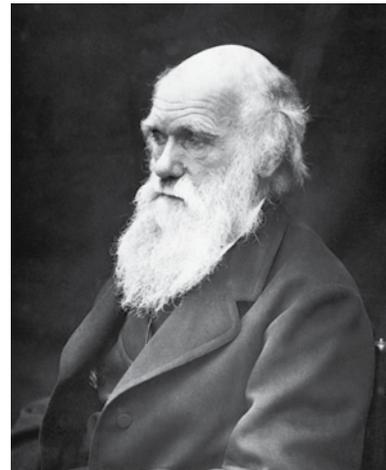
the East, and the Caribbean, as well as the growing desire of new Christians in

those regions to maintain orthodoxy but at the same time not be dominated by English colonial lords, was going to present Anglicanism with both challenges and rich, new possibilities that had never been envisioned by the Anglicans of the 1500s. In fact, even now, into the 21st century, we are only just beginning to realize the implications of the Global South’s rise within Anglicanism.

Of course, as today, in the 1880s there were also other important moral issues that were facing Anglicans in North America. For example, the United States was still profoundly wounded by the horrific Civil War that had ravaged the country for nearly five years just 20 years earlier. A document that eventually became the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral was produced from within the then-Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America (PECUSA) to resolve continuing conflicts and hostilities between Christians there.

This document was received in a revised form during the 1888 Lambeth Conference. It is a marvel of succinctness and orthodoxy: “*That, in the opinion of this Conference, the following articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God’s blessing made towards home reunion: 1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as “containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith. 2. The Apostles’ Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith. 3. The two sacraments ordained by Christ himself - Baptism and the Supper of the Lord - ministered with un failing use of Christ’s words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him. 4. The historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church.*”

Fourth and finally, Anglicans in 1885 were faced with significant challenges from science. One need go no further than the challenge presented by the work of Charles Darwin, whose *Origin of Species* had appeared in 1859.<sup>7</sup> Darwin’s work shocked Christians, especially clergy in England, when it appeared (though it was applauded by a growing group of Anglicans who had now begun to jettison any pretence of faith at all, people like



Charles Darwin

Thomas Huxley, who now called himself an episcopophagus (a ‘bishop-eater’)). Orthodox Christians, including especially Anglo-Catholic theologians, wisely saw that if

Darwin’s views were followed, humanity would be reduced from something greater than beasts but less than God to mere animals, a conclusion that Dar-

“... could Christian morality, as presented in Scripture, be maintained?”

“Darwin’s work shocked Christians ...”

win himself had drawn in his *Descent of Man*,<sup>8</sup> and the result is known as “naturalism”.<sup>9</sup>

The millions slain on the battlefields of 20th century Europe – including many Anglicans and many Canadians – as well as on the “killing fields” in Russia, China, and Cambodia, were not killed as a result of conflicts among Christians but as a result of the impoverishment and even disappearance of orthodox Christian faith. Its replacement by naturalism provided a natural opening for a view of “man” as a highly evolved jungle creature who was encouraged by evolution to utilize special tools designed to ensure his survival and those like him.<sup>10</sup> This was – and remains! – the ultimate justification needed to destroy the weak (those “broken lives” who are not deemed worthy of survival) and to ensure the survival of the fittest and most privileged. Shockingly, even now more than a century later Darwinian scientists, like Stephen Jay Gould, do not shirk from boldly making claims that open the door to worse atrocities still: “[Humans] are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age; because a small and tenuous species, arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a ‘higher’ answer – but none exists.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Conclusions:**

As is clear from the above, not much has changed between 1885 and today:<sup>12</sup> one need only think of the doctrinal and liturgical issues that have led to our realignment with ANiC and that we have recently explored in our “We Believe” series; of the ongoing debates over Scripture and its teaching on faith and morality; of the moral challenges arising from issues of sexuality and globalism; and of the challenges presented by science<sup>13</sup> and those who debunk all religion and traditional morality in the name of science. Our challenges today fall within the same battle lines as those that had already begun to appear in

1885. But, that isn’t too surprising. After all, it’s only been 125 years. And in the span of world history, that’s not much; in the span of eternity, which dwarfs even geological history, that’s nothing.

But, let’s hold on to this: Those who founded St. George’s in 1885 did not shirk from the command of our Lord to face these issues in light of His words to us, “Follow me.” Can we do less today?

*For the issues discussed in this “Ask the St. George’s Scholar” I have profited from suggestions made by two colleagues, the Rev. Dr. Frank W. Hughes, interim priest, St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church, Alexandria, LA, and the Rev. Dr. John Gibault, chair, Faith and Order, World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.*

1. Historically, this approach also characterizes Anglican theologians who were known pejoratively as “latitudinarians”, that is, those who “attached relatively little important to matters of dogmatic truth, ecclesiastical organization, and liturgical practice”. See “Latitudinarianism”, in Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (2nd ed.; F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 803.
2. See Bishop Harvey’s interview on Anglican TV: <http://www.anglican.tv/content/conversation-bishop-harvey>
3. The first major revision of the King James Bible (KJV) was conceived in 1870 and occurred from 1881-1885. The result was a Bible that sought to be more faithful to the Greek and the Hebrew than the KJV had been. The American Standard Version was not produced until 1901, but it led to a further revision in the mid-20th century (the Revised Standard Version). This translation “was of great significance... [it] pointed the way for future translators.” Luther A. Weigle, “English Versions Since 1611,” in *The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (ed. S. L. Greenslade; vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of the Bible*; 1963; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 372.
4. Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (1888 Hibbert Lectures; with a foreword by Frederick C. Grant; New York: Harper and Brothers, Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 350.
5. Walter Richard Cassels, *Supernatural Religion: An Inquiry Into the Reality of Divine Revelation* (London: Longmans, Green, 1874), 2.489.
6. See <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1888/>
7. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection of the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (ed. Hampton L. Carson; 1859; repr., New York: Washington Square Press, 1963).
8. Robert E. Fitch, “Darwinism and Christianity,” *The Antioch Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1959): 20–32.
9. Evangelical Christians in the US were known for their opposition to Darwinism but Anglican Evangelicals less

so. See David N. Livingstone, *Darwin’s Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans ; Edinburgh, Scotland: Scottish Academic Press, 1987).

10. For an eloquent and tragic view of the implications of late 19th century secularist views of man on the 20th century, see George Steiner, “The Muses’ Farewell,” *Salmagundi* 135–136 (2002): 148–56.
11. Stephen Jay Gould, “The Meaning of Life,” *Life Magazine*, December 1988, 84 cited in J. P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (Veritas Series; London: SCM in association with the Center of Theology and Philosophy University of Nottingham, 2009), 49.
12. The issues facing Anglicans in 1885 were also not that different from those facing all Christians at the end of the 19th century. In 1916, A. C. McGiffert (1861-1933) had identified the major trends in theology that had most deeply influenced theology, and church leaders trained in seminaries, from the American Civil War until 1916. They were Darwinian evolutionary theory, changes to an orthodox reading of the Bible, and the challenges to a Biblical morality. See Arthur Cushman McGiffert, “The Progress of Theological Thought During the Past Fifty Years,” *American Journal of Theology* 20 (1916): 321–32 cited by E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 506.
13. Special mention should be made of the ‘new atheists’ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006); Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004); Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Toronto: M&S, 2007).