

CONCERN

Vol. XIX Number 3

Published by the Community of Concern within the United Church of Canada

October 2008

“THEN AND NOW”

By Anonymous

The front page item in the March *Concern* was a bitter-sweet read for me. And I am obliging the writer's request to share memories with her.

When I was born the United Church was just two years old. I worked for it my whole life and sang in the choir; all our children were baptized and reared in it; and my wife was active in every aspect of it, from superintendent of the Sunday School to president of UCW. So you can see how committed we were to it.

Then came the reports on human sexuality, insidious documents which would tear our beloved church apart. My wife and I marched for the first and only time in our lives at the London General Council, and watched as the General Secretary pulled the plug on the little boom box which was leading us in singing *A Mighty Fortress*, despite the senior Minister of Metropolitan United's rebuke. "It's only a record player, Howie," he said. I also watched Council proceedings. Led by a radical activist element that picked off the voting places in the organization, my church was hijacked. Clearly, *It* had left *me*.

This happened after I had attended, and worked to organize, a meeting in a west end Toronto church to promote establishing a COC branch in my city, followed by its first national meeting in Hamilton. This was the last time I was to experience fellowship as I had in the church I once knew. However,

my COC branch eventually concluded it had failed in its mission to reverse the hijacking of headquarters by ultra-liberals determined to:

- deny equity to dissenting congregations;
- promote a new hymn book which included one to the female goddess Sophia;
- exalt ultra feminism.

Meanwhile Human Rights Commissions were implementing political correctness, and the gay agenda was advocated by them to federal political parties. A harsh form of feminism was at its zenith, and abortions became the fad. The Bible could be interpreted by anyone who wished to change it, a new creed started and ended with negative statements, Sunday was just another day, and the federal government approved same-sex marriage.

And so I never darkened the door of my church again. In *Thanks for the Memories* you say that your minister became a Roman Catholic priest. But what were *we* to do? We would revert to our mothers' Anglican Church, but already it too, had become infected with ultra-liberalism, and we didn't feel we could ever trust any church again. The truth is that the church is bigger than the United Church, and God is bigger than the church. And, let me emphasize, the issue of ordination

was only the straw that broke the camel's back. The hijacking had roots much deeper than that: it was the abandonment of orthodoxy and the failure to see the difference between compassion and permissiveness.

COC is to be congratulated on withstanding the disease of conforming to the world, and for providing a resting place for scores of U.C. refugees. But what does it take to fire it up to be as it was in the heady days at the London General Council? You must abandon nostalgia and embrace reality. Be ever aware of the witness of Calvin, Knox, John and Charles Wesley. God bless you, and may your 20th Anniversary see you rise up in a passionate new beginning.

This thoughtful article was submitted by an anonymous supporter and is reproduced here in an edited and condensed form owing to Concern's limited space. We have also omitted some personal information to preserve his anonymity. Our sincere thanks to the author. In the latter portion of this account he also expresses the feelings of, we know, some of our readers; but we must respectfully disagree with his conclusion that perhaps it is time to consider closing down our mission.

For Your Information and Encouragement

Reading the daily press – and even the *Observer* – is often a shattering experience. We read both publications because we feel we should know the drift of current thinking, however little real thought they may contain.

But that's not all we read. We do come across excellent examples of orthodox religious scholarship, and from now on we will try to give you a sampling in each *Concern*. Here is the first of our I&E items.

* * * * *

...The purpose of this book is to lay out...why I firmly believe Jesus Christ to be who He claimed to be – the son of the living God, the One who came to seek and to save a lost humanity. At a time in our cultural history when the West is looking more like the East and the East is covertly trying to emulate the West, this is much needed. Religions are making a revival, but often as a hybrid of western marketing techniques and eastern mythology – a devastating combination of seduction through media and mysticism. The first casualty in such a mix is truth, and, consequently, the person of God.

Yet, if the human spirit is to survive and every legitimate discipline to find fruitful expression, truth cannot

be sacrificed at the alter of a pretended tolerance. All religions, plainly and simply, cannot be true. Some beliefs are false, and we know them to be false. So it does no good to put a halo on the notion of tolerance as if everything could be equally true. To deem all beliefs equally true is sheer nonsense...

Was Jesus who He claimed to be? Is the Christian claim to uniqueness a myth? Can one study the life of Christ and demonstrate conclusively that He was and is the way, the truth and the life? That is the question I propose to answer in this book. I believe there is overwhelming evidence to support Jesus' claims.

– Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (2000), pp. 3, 5

Princeton the Ivy League Dog

By Dawn Martens

McCartney. The name was perfect. After all, I was a music teacher and a church organist. A musical name like that *must* be a sign!

For weeks I had poured over the Sheltie rescue website. We already owned a Whippet and a Sheltie, but we had been a three-dog household before, and, believe it or not, missed the commotion of our own little pack. And the fact that there were dogs badly needing good homes haunted me. So I surfed the internet, and there he was: *McCartney*, with his beautiful merle face and one brown and one blue eye staring out at me.

But alas it was not meant to be. *McCartney*, I was told, had already been adopted. Probably he wouldn't have been the best match anyway since he was a wanderer and we spend most summers at our cottage. But, the friendly woman added, she did have another dog – a young male Sheltie. The poor creature was so traumatized that he was catatonic – the owners had called the Sheltie rescue saying that unless they

picked the dog up he would be put to sleep immediately.

“What's his name?” I asked tentatively. “*Princeton*,” the women replied. *Princeton*! Was this a sign? My Dad did his graduate work at Cornell, and this dog was blessed with an Ivy League name. My husband and I agreed to go and see him – just *see* him, mind you! Not necessarily to pick him up.

But we went, and there he was, running around with a bunch of fluffy little puppies like a hyperactive bowling ball ploughing through fuzzy pins. He was soon playing fetch with my daughter, knocking the puppies down and then carefully checking to see if they were OK. Despite the fact that he had a steel plate in his leg, *Princeton* was a lively, boisterous 14-month-old; a big Sheltie and not the tiny *Lassie* I had conjured up in my mind!

And so, against our better judgment (and to the chagrin of some of our friends and relatives), my husband and I decided to adopt *Princeton*. I came from a family that had adopted older children, so adopting a

third dog was a piece of cake compared to that! But Princeton had been neglected and probably abused, and so we faced some startling behaviour when he came home. He was noisy, with a bark so piercing that it set off the doorbell. He was wary of strangers, especially men in ball caps. And he was a counter-top grazer. A stellar moment in his life was when he jumped up and ate some turkey off my mother-in-law's plate in the middle of Christmas dinner! In desperation we signed him up for obedience school. Every week we watched our teenage daughter patiently teaching him to sit, heel, stay, and come, and in the end he received a "participation" certificate. But, they advised us, he should "try again".

Why? he was obviously a bright doggie. But there was one factor that the rescuers, the vet, the trainers, and we had all missed: *Princeton was deaf* – profoundly deaf! I had noticed he sometimes didn't react like the other dogs. For instance when I came home he would just stay asleep when I opened the door, nor did he often come when I called him. It wasn't until we had had him for several months that one evening we noticed that, unlike the other two dogs who were sitting with him, he didn't respond to his name when we called him. So we decided to experiment with hand signals and foot stomping techniques.

The result was almost miraculous. Here, now, was a dog who was an absolute joy. In fact we can't imagine our household without him. He has attached himself to our whippet and takes his cues from him, and despite occasional behavioural problems he is a happy, affectionate, beautiful dog with a winsome personality.

Before Princeton adopted *us*, if someone had said "would you like to adopt a dog who is deaf and has a steel plate with twelve screws in his leg?" my answer would have been a resounding NO. Give us a well-trained, physically perfect dog, one that would be easy to assimilate in our busy lives. But think what we would have missed!



What, you may be thinking, has a deaf dog to do with our United Church? And why would I write about him in *Concern*? Because just as I wanted an ideal dog, most people want a perfect church, one that meets all their spiritual needs and runs the way they'd like it to.

If I had been asked when I was younger what church I would like to belong to, I would have said one where things ran smoothly without a hint of conflict. But looking back, I wouldn't have missed my background in the United Church for anything in the world. Yes, there were spiritually desolate times, times when our family was persecuted for its connection with COC. But the spiritual and emotional

challenges I faced made me a stronger,

better person, and the faith of the kind

people I have got to know in the

United Church has been tested

because they have stubbornly

insisted their church can be

returned to orthodoxy. They are

not any less wonderful because

of an uncaring headquarters.

The United Church's inter-

weaving of Methodist,

Presbyterian, and Congregational

roots give it a unique strength, and

has made me a person who is com-

fortable in different ecumenical groups.

As I finish typing this I see Princeton

lying beside me as he sleeps off a busy day at the cottage. And I rejoice that our family is a part of his life, and we are his people. Looking back on my church voyage I thank God for the dedicated people I have met from coast to coast through the Community of Concern. A perfect church? Absolutely not! But a church well worth the struggles and rich rewards.

Besides being famous for her dogs, Dawn Martens writes and produces honest-to-goodness operas with children from Grades 1-6, is a skilled artist and doll creator, a church organist and music director, and the mother of two children. She has followed and supported the development of COC since its earliest days.

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Prayer Corner

As members of the Community of *Concern* we are bonded together in our faith and should carry in prayer those in need – and, as our Saviour said, to pray for those who despitely use us.

Let us remember the recently bereaved. Spread your comforting arms around them.

Let us remember the lonely, and those who have been betrayed in relationships. Remind us, to support them.

As Christ’s ambassadors, let us remember the sick. Pray for healing and relief from pain. Especially remember our Moderator as he performs his duties in the face of profound health challenges.

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS.



OF CEMENT MIXERS AND BUDGETS

What a summer this has been – rain, rain, rain! And on top of that we had to have a large chunk of our old cottage torn down because rot is threatening the foundation.

Day after day while we waited for workmen the heavens opened – and no men appeared. But this week we’ve had several dry interludes and even a little sun. So the construction *has* started, and I was struck by something the foreman said when the big cement mixer

was spewing out wet muck to fill the frames. “How do you know how much cement you’ll need?” I asked. “By experience,” he replied, “and careful figuring. I’ve learned that it’s better to order a bit more than to run short and have the expense of a state-of-the-art mixer and its trained driver all over again.”

It made me think of COC and its expenses, and how we try to judge how much we will have to spend per month. We do our best, and we know you do too in your gifts to us. We budget conscientiously (including the costs of a new computer and redesigned website), running a modest office with the assistance of talented volunteers in order to reduce operational expenses. In other words, we estimate how much “cement” *we’ll* need and try to stick to that amount.

So once again our thanks for all you do for us, not only through the money that keeps our machine going but also in your warm words of encouragement and your prayers. May God bless you all.