

# CONCERN

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## *A Note on General Council 2009*

*One of the positive actions COC carried out for General Council was to enlist three of our most knowledgeable and articulate clergy to write on subjects about which those representing us at Council should be informed. The following, the first of these, is written by someone known by you all, Rev. Dr. Allen Churchill.*

## A CHURCH IN DEFAULT

By Rev. Dr. Allen Churchill

Our denomination's membership is in radical decline to less than half since 1965. Attendance at worship is down to 200,000, and the youth are staying away in droves.

Clergy are losing respect for the historically orthodox Jesus. This began to be obvious from the studies of Prof. Reg Bibby some twenty years ago. In January 2005, *The Observer* (pg11) reported reasons for ignoring Jesus "and including televangelists' appropriation of His name; a move away from past use of Jesus' name in an imperialistic way; a greater freedom in speaking about the Spirit or God; a fear of being judged when talking about Jesus; the fact that Jesus has been over-analyzed; that ministers are ashamed to use the name of Jesus; that there isn't agreement on who Jesus is, and that many of the people in paid accountable ministry are in spiritual crisis and don't know Jesus."

Clergy have lost their belief in the necessity of atonement for sin through the cross. Some professors in some theological colleges in the 1980's reduced marks for work done by orthodox or evangelical



students. This was brought to light and stopped when complaints were raised. One theological college discouraged orthodox or evangelical students from applying for taking courses.

Some moderators have described our church in different but telling ways. One stated that we are in "free fall". Another, that we are "dying".

Another that many ministers confess not knowing what to preach, or how to apply the presence and power of Jesus in times of personal depression. Unfortunately, no one has addressed the cause. Without an accurate diagnosis, a cure cannot be prescribed.

The recent attempt to engage in evangelism has not been overly successful. The reason would seem to be a failure to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, the need for a dynamic doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the exercise of effective prayer, and an intimacy with our heavenly Father.

In preparation for the 40th General Council, the document "Called to be Church" has attempted to

consider the vision and purpose of our church. This is a laudable call embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. What is less than helpful in this document is the emphasis on "story", especially when referring to the Bible as "a sacred book of stories" (p.4). The Bible itself is adamant that its contents are based on eyewitness testimony (Luke 1:1-4; 1 John 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16). To deny this is to ignore the history of the people of God, the history of Jesus of Nazareth, and the history of the early church. These are substantive histories, especially when taken together. To deny this is to ignore also the otherness of the Holy Spirit, who takes us beyond "story" to a radical experience of faith seeded by the Three in One who takes us into a deeper encounter including an historical one.

If the category of "story" is overemphasized in this document, then it is not surprising to read "we find its messages most powerful when it is not read literally..."(p.4). But if the gospel is incarnational as the Bible claims in nearly every book, then not to read it literally in an historical sense is for us to control the text. We then make ourselves greater than the Bible, and make the Bible to mean what we want it to mean.

What do the writers of the document mean when they also say "we recognize that the Word of God is larger than the Bible?" What does "larger" mean here? There

are three aspects to the Word of God: the incarnate Word, the written Word, and the proclaimed Word (Acts 8:35). These are not in competition with each other, but are complementary. They work together co-operatively. They interconnect. One cannot function without the other. This is the richest understanding of the Word of God we can have.

The proposal (No. 1) to declare the Twenty Articles of the Basis of Union as only an historical document should be changed to reaffirm the authority of the Twenty Articles as the historical, theological, and legal foundation of the worship, life, and work of the United Church of Canada. Since the issue is of extreme importance to the future of our church, the Pastoral Charges should vote on any remit held. Moreover it should be noted that the proposal (No. 6) dealing with discrimination includes every group except non-believers and traditional or orthodox believers! The Lord has a wonderful sense of humour, much needed in these challenging days!



## RESERVE THIS DATE!

**When:** Saturday, November 7, 2009  
**What:** "Christ the Truth" Conference  
**Who:** Reverend Joe Boot  
 Senior Pastor, Westminster Chapel, Toronto  
**Where:** Compass Bible Church  
 Egelsfield Campus

For further information, phone the COC Office  
 905-318-9244

# No Cross, No Christ... No Christianity?

By David Dawson

It was my privilege to be a member of the 40th General Council held in Kelowna this August. Although I will not go into much detail, I could not help but note how controlling the General Council Executive was. Clearly, the Executive and the General Secretary simply wanted agreement to act on some very specific items without stirring up controversy.

Two of the main issues at Council concerned the Twenty Articles of Faith, and the more general question of Church Sessions having control over worship.

What Council did, then, on these two vital matters, can be summarized as follows:

1. In the Area of Doctrine, the United Church of Canada recognized the primacy of scripture with the "Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union", "the 1940 Statement of Faith", "A New Creed", and "A Song of Faith". Each of these is to be recognized as a subordinate standard as contemplated by Declaration 3(b) of the United Church of Canada act.
2. The United Church also declares that the "Doctrine" of the Church be as laid down in the Basis of Union, the bylaws, and that the Appendices of the Manual be subordinate to

Scripture, as approved by the United Church in accordance with the conditions contained within the "United Church of Canada Act".

3. The church also authorized a remit to Presbyteries and to Pastoral Charges to test the will of the whole Church on these matters.

In conclusion, I must say that I found it very troubling that the name of Jesus was hardly mentioned, and the Cross was nowhere to be seen. No Cross and no Christ can only result in no Christianity.

*David Dawson is the First Vice-President of COC, and was an elected Commissioner from Hamilton Conference.*



## Foredoomed to Failure

by L.M. Montgomery, author of *Anne of Green Gables*  
(written in 1926 concerning the birth of the new United Church of Canada)

Many United Church friends are already bitterly disappointed. They say it is going to be a bureaucracy, ruled by a few at the top... A too big church is not a good thing. It becomes clumsy and unwieldy... It is no use to say that people want a church for a "social community centre". They don't – not to the extent of sacrificing for it and paying for it, anyhow. If... Jesus of Nazareth is shelved, then the church will crumble, for he was her "one foundation" in whatever sense you take it. If the new church "tries experiments" I fear they are foredoomed to failure. People can get moving pictures and dramatics without keeping up a church to get them. They want something else, and if a church cannot give it, it may as well close its doors.

 *That All May Be One* 

*They tell us, Lord, "That all may be one",  
But, God, what's the plan if Your will's to be done?  
I feel ripped apart by a church family war ...  
Lift me above it and let my heart soar.*

**CHORUS:**

*Help me to follow Your Word.  
Help me to make Your voice heard.  
I want to take a strong stand  
But be led by your gentle hand.  
Help me to do this in love.  
May Your healing spirit soar like a dove.*

*We're sometimes told that nothing has changed --  
I know it's not so, and I feel the deep pain.  
A spiritual war has made former friends foes,  
Can we now rise above all our woes?*

*I try to look to some higher place,  
But struggles down here block my heavenward gaze.  
We're a church made to labour on this human earth,  
Can we survive such a spiritual dearth?*

*I look at the conflicts that raged in the past  
And hence a design that is both wise and vast.  
Guide our battles, our plans, and our hearts, Holy One,  
And maybe in heaven we'll see ... how "all may be one."*

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## From the Earliest Days of COC

The attached song was written by Dawn F.T. Martens, including both words and music. She teaches music as a primary teacher, and now produces real operas with her bright young students.

This song was first sung at a COC meeting by four young girls, and was so heartily applauded that it was

suggested it be our rallying song. It was used in this way for some time, and remains a valued part of COC archives.

Our prayers still continue "that all may be one".

## The Show Must Go On

Can the summer be over? Are the children back to school? Even harder to believe, can another General Council be over, with its usual mixture of discouragement and a glimpse of hope?

COC has had to shoulder expenses for our Council participation, one of them being the printing and distribution of 700 newsletters to be handed out to Commissioners (which we hope were read by many). It was an honest antidote – especially for beginners – for some of the materials councillors received.

Special thanks for the extra effort many of you made to help with our Council expenses. You made our participation possible; but as they say in theatre, "the

show must go on". We will be hiring a new secretary soon, and the expenses of running the office, though reduced to a bare minimum, cannot be pared back any more. A new expense, now up and running, is our Web Site connection. This means we are fully tuned in to modern technology, and should introduce many to COC and its efforts to maintain orthodoxy in our beloved Church.

Bless all of you who didn't take a holiday from donations during the holiday months, and who provide much needed encouragement to those of us who bear the brunt of concern for you all. The summer may be over, but the sun still shines!