

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this thesis I described my purpose in terms of a look to the past in search of spiritual and theological resources to support Christians who, having acknowledged the death of Christendom, find themselves alienated from the *status quo* and have become engaged in some action in the struggle to transform it. In the Introduction I also noted that, while Canadians have looked primarily to the Methodist-United Church tradition for such support, there have been no studies of the contributions which the Anglican tradition might offer, and I identified the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action as a potential resource. In the first chapter I described elements of the group's context: the tradition of sacramental or incarnational socialism in Britain; William Temple and the Malvern Conference; Canadian responses to Malvern; and the Second World War as an influence on the popular attitude to social change. The second chapter attempted to tell AFSA's story by outlining its origins, its goals and the means used to achieve them, the opposition it encountered, and the reasons for its decline. Finally, in the third chapter, I examined more closely the group's thinking on the state of society, the Church, and its relationship to the world. In so doing, I identified the Incarnation and "brotherhood" as two fundamental theological themes which informed AFSA's thought and I noted other individuals and groups, especially William Temple, by whom the group may have been influenced in this regard. In this Conclusion, I wish to return to the purpose stated in the Introduction and suggest some of the ways that AFSA may be a resource to Christians who cannot accept the world as it is and feel themselves called to change it.

In their recent book, *The Pastoral Counsellor in Social Action*, Speed Leas

and Paul Kittlaus list a number of the feelings experienced by those involved in "action ministries".<sup>1</sup> Three of these are: "feeling isolated", "feeling up against overwhelming odds", and "feeling unsupported by the Church." In general, AFSA is a spiritual resource as its story addresses these feelings. Christians engaged in their own struggles for justice can recognize in AFSA a group which shares their basic orientation to and relationship with the world -- AFSA was another small group, alienated from the Church and society, which struggled against the dominant forces of its day in an attempt to transform a sinful world. This discovery of a "sympathetic other" or an "ally" affirms their alienation, confirms their action in the world, and so ministers to their sense of isolation, powerlessness, and abandonment. AFSA's story, then, is a spiritual gift as it enables other alienated Christians to transcend, if only briefly, the debilitating elements of their experience and animates them to re-enter their situation with strength and courage to carry on. Of course, as I noted in the Introduction, this is a resource which can be and is offered as those involved in work for social justice meet and share their experiences. Supportive relationships are founded on such a sense of solidarity and collaboration. In the case of AFSA, the important discovery is of a solidarity with the past.

Beyond this general sense of solidarity, there are some specific elements of AFSA's story which may be or become supportive. I mention them here because they indicate ideas or themes for further study. For instance, AFSA's historical context and the official responses of the Canadian Church to the

1. Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, *The Pastoral Counsellor in Social Action* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1981) pp.22f.

Malvern Conference suggests that war has a deep effect on the Church's willingness to move beyond its habitual accommodation to capitalism. Such a conclusion might be upheld by an examination of the relationship of the Social Gospel in Canada and the First World War and of the American experience of Viet Nam. Similarly, the move to the right which followed the Second World War and the stand taken by the Church in that context suggests that the Church is timid in the face of a strident "capitalism in retrenchment". This could relate to the emerging situation of the "new right" in North America. In the light of its opposition, AFSA's supportive role is deepened. The group's resistance to the tide is empowering because it conveys a courage to persevere today in the proclamation of an unpopular gospel.

Both spiritual and theological support may be found in AFSA's theological "method" and its understanding of worship. As I have shown, the group was eclectic and activist. AFSA borrowed or imported theological ideas from a number of sources and so remained free of new orthodoxies or systems. Its primary goal was the transformation of sinful structures in the Church and society rather than the promotion of a particular point of view. This orientation may affirm the activist stance assumed by many of those currently involved in social change projects. It may also help to legitimize the use of a number of theological sources to support action. AFSA's example suggests that, rather than striving for a "system" and intellectual self-sufficiency, groups of alienated Christians should be free to adopt and develop the ideas of others. By remaining free of new orthodoxies, AFSA may have been able to respond more creatively and appropriately to its situation.

On the other hand, AFSA's story suggests that such eclecticism involves a risk. The lack of a consistent, integrated theological position prompted some to join the SCC and this eventually led to conflict in AFSA. While the

disagreement between the two groups may have been more a function of Hastings Smyth's dogmatism than the result of AFSA's lack of integration, the fact that some AFSA members looked to the SCC points to a need or desire for such consistency. Thus, while borrowing and interpreting the ideas of others may be more helpful in framing an apologetic for action, it may also become a cause of division within a group as these various sources enter into conflict.

AFSA's understanding of the Eucharist may be helpful as it points to a model of piety which acknowledges the social aspects of redemption. While it was critical of traditional forms of worship and their individualistic appeal, the group was able to transcend its critique and celebrate the Eucharist because it saw the bread and wine to be representative of the whole human life, including the social relationships which inform human-ness. Thus AFSA came to understand the liturgy as a sacramental representation of God's redemptive activity in the world. For many, alienation from the Church involves alienation from the Church's worship. The interpretation of the Eucharist promoted by AFSA may offer a way of worshipping together again which is focused on the struggle to act as God's agent in society. It may also offer a way of addressing positively the Church's failure to account for social justice in its daily worship.

In general, AFSA may become a theological resource as it points to interpretations of important doctrinal themes which are supportive of Christian social action. The ideas used by the group may help others to recover and reconstruct the theological traditions of Western orthodoxy. I have already referred to AFSA's view of the Eucharist. The most important example in this regard is the group's continual reference to the Incarnation as a symbol or sacrament of God's affirmation of the world as the arena of

redemption. For AFSA, the fact that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" necessarily implied that redemption involves both inter-personal and material dimensions. Because of this assumption, the group was able to avoid the kind of argument for social action which is based on a moral appeal to what "ought" to be considered within the realm of Christian faith. Rather, AFSA's emphasis on the Incarnation enabled it to argue for the transformation of economic and social relationships on the basis of a meditation on the very heart of the Gospel.

This reliance on the Incarnation, the image which lies at the core of the Christian tradition, suggests the most powerful sense in which AFSA may be both a theological and spiritual support to those who are disaffiliated or marginalized. The struggle to change sinful social structures often engenders anger directed at the institutional Church and its oppressive actions in the past which may have contributed to a sinful situation. Unfortunately, this anger occasionally leads to an unequivocal rejection of the Church's past, as if it were only in this generation that critical consciousness has emerged. The tragedy in this dynamic lies in the fact that many of those who reject the Church and its traditions feel they must do so because of their faith, yet they fail to understand that their faith was born of the same tradition which they reject. By turning their backs on the Church, Christians who are committed to changing the *status quo* may be losing a valuable resource for their mission. The story of AFSA may temper this trend and serve as a point of re-entry into the Christian tradition. The coincidence of a radical critique of the Church and the *status quo* with an appeal to traditional doctrinal themes such as the Incarnation and the Eucharist makes AFSA an example of self-transcendence.

It demonstrates how God enables the Church to move beyond itself without stepping out of its skin. If AFSA's story is heard, it suggests that alienated Christians can find in the past other individuals and groups representative of this self-transcendence whose ideas and actions may support the struggle against the principalities and powers of this world. It is my hope that, by hearing of the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action, others may return to their traditions to recover lost voices of radical prophecy and re-tell the stories of those who moved against the stream in faith.

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