

Reflection on Crisis in NA Church

The Rev'd. Dr. John Roddam | www.Pleroma.ca

Canadians were distraught when Stephen Harper called an election last year with an 11-week campaign – the longest since 1872! The last 10 campaigns have averaged 45.8 days! Our neighbours to the South have been embroiled in election fever for almost two years! Many Canadians have been caught up in the drama leading up to the US Presidential Election in November this year. It has been as captivating as any reality show! There is a deep ideological gulf between the two US parties.



Plato in his book “The Republic” written c.380 BCE posits that republics last about 200 years. In the end, the two-party system polarizes the nation as each faction becomes more concerned about their own party agenda than the country they are called to serve. Is this cycle being played out today?

Could the same be said about the Christian Church in North America? The Modernist Controversy which originated in the latter half of the 19th C. has torn the Church asunder. The progressive social activist wing has been in an acrimonious fight with the traditional orthodox “party.” All the while this is going on, on the global stage, the Church is in almost full revival. The Church in Asia, Africa, and South America is exploding while the church in the West (North America, the UK, and most of Australasia) is languishing. Why? At the root of the Modernist Controversy is the debate over the authority of Scripture. Bishop Stephen Neill, famous Anglican missionary and scholar chronicled this in “The Interpretation of the New Testament 1891 to 1961.” Like the US political parties, there is a deep rift on both sides of this theological divide.

An ideological divide was also played out in Jesus’ day between the two dominant religious parties in Judaism – Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees were the dominant power but fizzled out as a significant part of the Hebrew Tradition because of their interpretation of the Torah which diminished the supernatural, the afterlife, etc. The Pharisees despite their Biblical Orthodoxy spun downward, caught up in legalism. Jesus conflict with the Pharisees over their rigid interpretation of the Scripture is evidence of this. Both dynamics are rampant in the North American and Western Churches!



Religious commentators have sought to characterize the North American Church paralleling one of the seven Churches described in Revelation Chapters 2 & 3. For example, some see the Church in North America like the Church in Laodicea (Revelation 3: 14-22) – neither hot nor cold! Or perhaps we are like the Church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6) – having a reputation that they were alive but were dead! I believe the Church in North America (both factions!!) is best represented by the Church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7). WE HAVE LEFT OUR FIRST LOVE – JESUS!!

The prescription for health with accompanying warning is straight-forward: *I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works or else*

I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. (Revelation 2: 4-5)