

# Thoughts from a Canadian elder in the church

May 31

I was encouraged to read the letter by Jonathan Olson with the central point on the folly of the "one true way" doctrine and I applaud Jon's courage in taking the conversation there. Some may question how we get from CSA to the "one true way" issue but it's vital to understand that CSA exists anywhere a skewed hierarchical organizational structure exists. Large corporations. Professional sports. Religion. The military. Extended families. These are all systems that have a specific hierarchical organization that is intensely revered from within them. And these are all systems where sexual abuse and other kinds of abuse flourish. As serious as the CSA issue is - and is rightly being addressed more aggressively than it has ever been in the past - it remains a symptom of a far deeper issue of self-righteousness in the church, as Jonathan has correctly pointed out.

There's a common thread amongst us all and shown on this site and in the comments; that we're fighting to preserve the church. We don't actually want to burn the church down. NOT because it's the one true way, but because it's good. It's not perfect, it's good. And that's good enough. And maybe more importantly because it's OURS. It's what we've grown up with, or it's what we've come to love through a friend at school or a workmate or a random invitation on a community centre bulletin board. And we'd all be lying if we didn't admit to having enjoyed many days of encouragement and hope while going to meetings and conventions and that many of our closest friends are also professing. And we'd all also probably be lying if we didn't admit to being uncomfortable with the unwritten rules and regulations that have no scriptural merit. It's one thing to abide by a rule that is simply a tradition, Jesus warned specifically against that in Mark 7 and in John 15. It's another thing altogether - and not in a good way - to abide by a rule under the pretext that it achieves righteousness when in fact it's an empty tradition. Tradition in and of itself is not evil. We love our hymns. They're familiar to us and that's okay. God created us, God created music, God created our brains that migrate to a certain amount of traditional "comfort". God doesn't despise that in us. And although this may be open to other interpretations, in Matt 6:23 when Jesus said "But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" it could mean that if the things that we think are Light and righteous are actually things that are meaningless (darkness), how much greater is THAT darkness. Because now we're distracted from the true light . . . JESUS. If we can get a false sense of security by what we wear or because we don't have a TV or a bottle of wine in our home, or because we think we have a

membership card in the "one true way", then the enemy has us right where he wants us. He has us completely distracted from Jesus as the real way and the truth and the life.

I suggest that many of us would agree there is much about our church that is right and good. Clearly there's a growing mistrust in the leadership of the ministry (understatement), but I've no doubt every single one of us knows some workers that we love and respect deeply and that point us to Jesus, instead of just pointing us to a religion. And the reality is that our church HAS helped direct us to Jesus, which is exactly what it's supposed to do. Sometimes it's been done in spite of itself, but it's been done, and here we are. And many of us want to keep going to meetings in some way shape or form. But the minute we start worshipping the church, instead of where it should be pointing us (Jesus), that's when we've gone adrift. The minute we revere the vessel that holds the water more than the water that quenches our heart and soul, that's when the water spills and we wake up to the harsh reality that licking the cup doesn't quench our thirst.

Jesus didn't pull any punches in declaring that religion was over, and the veil would be rent. He was now THE way. The law pointed us to Him, but now that He'd arrived, the law could be put away, made obsolete (Heb 8:13). And this is not to suggest that anyone is esteeming the old law, but the point is that Jesus was trying to show us that the old law, and all religious law in general, was no longer needed now that we could have a relationship directly with God. At that wedding in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of John, Jesus could have turned the water into wine in any vessel. Surely there were empty bottles or skins laying around everywhere. But he chose to use the pots full of water specifically meant to be used for ceremonial hand washing (same ceremonial handwashing he mocked in Mark 7). He wasn't just performing a miracle, he was making a mockery of the tradition of ceremonial handwashing, a mockery of trusting in religion. And yet here we are, some 2000 years later, with new versions of ceremonial handwashing, new laws, albeit "softer laws", but laws nonetheless, that are just a distraction from Jesus as the way and the truth.

Doing certain things because we believe that's how they were done in the first century church is a noble, and possibly even worthy cause. But trying to prove that our church is the continuation of the first church is flawed at its core when Jesus himself promised that He would be with us. Jesus was unimpressed in Matthew 3:9 with their lineage connecting back to Abraham. And Jesus would be unimpressed today with the claim to be a religious continuation of the first century church. If we focus on Jesus, then THAT's the connection. Not lineage. Not provenance. The historical reality is that our church comes out of the radical reformation that followed the primary 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation, out of which came the anabaptist movement, of which we maintain many of the hallmarks of, for what remain as many good reasons. And all that is OKAY. It matters not where we've come from, it matters where we're going and what we believe in. And if we believe we're spirit led - as I've heard said often recently - then it's time to put our faith where our mouth is and cease with this borderline blasphemy of thinking we're saved because we belong to the correct religion. There's a big part of me that wants to post my name to this. But I'm committed to

"staying with the ship" so to speak; to fight to make it right from within instead of fleeing into the night. And to be clear, I applaud the ones that have left the church but continue to meet and enjoy fellowship. I'm not quite there yet and I fear that we still have a long way to go before comments like mine will be well received by certain workers with influence. I am the elder of a precious little Sunday morning meeting in our home and as long as we're not ostracized like some have been, we can slowly but surely be part of a rising crescendo of voices from within the church. So, I won't post my name, in an attempt to try to keep my place so that our family can try to uphold a standard of truth from the inside, and to slowly effect change. I know many are doing the same, some quietly, some loudly, but God sees and hears all.

A brother and friend from Canada.