

Could it be that this mystery in the *pericope adulterae* is now solved with the help of this first and greatest of all detective stories: Susanna?

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JOHN STRACHAN ON CHURCH AND STATE: TWO LETTERS TO WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE

I

WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE was both a mighty political force in nineteenth-century England and one of the most eminent Anglican laymen of his time. In an era of increasing discomfort in Church-State relations, he was inevitably drawn—sometimes on his own initiative, sometimes by the impertunity of others—into a succession of ecclesiastico-political controversies. Consequently, his published writings and speeches and private papers are an important source for the ecclesiastical history of the Victorian age. In two earlier contributions to this *Journal*¹ I have used unpublished materials from the "Gladstone Papers" to elucidate the views and policies of a great Anglican bishop of nineteenth-century New Brunswick, with special reference to the ecclesiastical politics of the day. In this note I propose to draw on the same source for illustrations of the outlook of John Medley's outstanding "Upper Canadian" colleague, John Strachan.

The first Bishop of Toronto was born a quarter of a century before the first Bishop of Fredericton, and his mind was formed by the older High Churchmanship rather than by the Oxford Movement. Naturally enough, then, through a great part of his career he held and expressed views both on the Anglican Establishment and on "Popery" and "Dissent" which the Tractarian Medley, sceptical of formal establishments and appreciative of the practical achievements of Roman Catholics and Nonconformists, must have found unrealistic.² It is his outspoken advocacy of these views that has made Strachan the leading devil of Ontario Protestant demonology.

But in reality he was never a mere defender of hierarchical or denominational privilege. Even the old-fashioned (and very unecumenical) language of the first letter printed below expresses, not a naked claim to power, but an honest conviction of the truth of the Anglican position and of the significance of the Anglican Establishment for the common welfare of the "British Dominions."³ In later years, when the cause of ecclesiastical establishments has

1. "John Medley on Irish Church Disestablishment: An Unpublished Letter," *CJT*, 7 (1961), 198-200; "John Medley as Defender of 'Ritualism': An Unpublished Correspondence," *CJT*, 8 (1962), 208-11.

2. Cf. E. R. Fairweather, "A Tractarian Patriarch: John Medley of Fredericton," *CJT*, 6 (1960), 15-24.

3. For these reasons Strachan was enthusiastic about Gladstone's early book, *The State in its Relations with the Church* (1st ed., London, 1838). At Strachan's Primary Visitation (September 10, 1841) the clergy of his diocese unanimously adopted a resolution commending Gladstone's work; a copy sent to Gladstone is in British Museum Add. MS. 44,358 (Gladstone Papers, Vol. 273), fol. 129. For Gladstone's early views on the subject, cf. A. R. Vidler, *The Orb and the Cross* (London: S.P.C.K., 1945).

obviously been lost, he wastes no time in brooding over what might have been. Instead, when he is already past seventy, he sets himself the task of shaping the institutions of a "free church"—notably a diocesan synod and a "Church University." In the end, what really matters to him is that his church should organize herself for her task in the world as it has come to be—even if he himself might prefer a different world. It is this "free-church"—or perhaps we should say this "Tractarian"—Strachan who appears in my second selection from his letters to Gladstone.

II

Our first letter was written at Toronto, Upper Canada, and dated January 22, 1840.⁴ Strachan saw that, for good or ill, the Clergy Reserves question was about to be resolved, and he wrote to beg Gladstone's support for a settlement favourable to the United Church of England and Ireland in Canada. The following paragraphs, selected from a long letter, clearly express Strachan's fear that his church will be crushed between a "virtually established" Roman Catholicism on the one hand and aggressive bands of "Sectaries" on the other. Obviously, he still hopes that the Anglican Church can find security in continued establishment.

As a measure for the settlement of the Canadas will be introduced into Parliament during this session, permit me to claim your protection for the Church of England, which the present administration⁵ threatens with destruction at home and abroad.

One of the prominent portions of the Constitutional Act of the Canadas (31 Geo. III. ch. 31. rendered so famous in England by the rupture between Mr. Burke & Mr. Fox) was the provision made for a Protestant Clergy, that the National Church of England might in time become a counterpoise in Upper Canada to the Roman Catholic form of worship virtually established in Lower Canada.

The great statesman⁶ who then presided over the Councils of the British Empire foresaw that an union of action in the principles of the British Constitution must prevail throughout the entire British Dominions, otherwise harmony would disappear & confusion ensue. Church & State are so vitally connected in the British Constitution that you cannot injure the one without injuring the other. . . .

The Romish Church is not only established in Lower, but also in Upper Canada, for the 14th. Geo. 3rd. respects the Province of Quebec, which embraced both the Canadas; & so complete is this establishment of the Romish Church that it cannot be touched either directly or indirectly by the Colonial Legislature, which may do it good, but can do it no harm.

Again, the 14th. Geo. III. virtually provides for the extension of the Romish Church, since it confers on her Clergy their tithes, dues & rights with respect to all persons professing the same religion within the Province of Quebec. . . . Cherished by so many gifts & privileges the Romish Church in the Canadas has flourished & increased, & now presents a formidable & powerful body; Bishops 5; Vicars General 10; Clergymen employed in cure of souls or Education, all comfortably provided for, 340; Lands possessed by Religious Houses, & four Colleges or Seminaries, upwards of two millions of acres.

By reserving one seventh of all lands hereafter to be granted when the Province of Quebec was by the Constitutional Act . . . divided into two Provinces, Upper & Lower Canada, for the support of a Protestant Clergy, Mr. Pitt hoped to make the National Church a full counterpoise to that of the Romish; & had the principle which he laid down been followed up, the result would have proved the accuracy of his foresight. But unhappily the wars in Europe from 1792 to 1815 diverted the attention of the Government from the Colonies; & the Canadas producing no tropical commodities advanced very slowly; nor was it till the tide of emigration began to flow towards them in 1824 that their rapid progress commenced, & the Clergy Reserves began to acquire value.

No sooner did these lands appear desirable than the cupidity of the members of the Church of Scotland, & all other Protestant denominations in the Province burst forth to

4. B.M. Add. MS. 44,357 (Gladstone Papers, Vol. 272), fol. 59-62.

5. Lord Melbourne's second cabinet; cf. E. L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform: 1815-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 636f.

6. William Pitt "the Younger."

get a share of them. In vain did the Heads of the Church here entreat the Government to take such measures as would settle this question for ever, in a way agreeable with the principles of the Constitution, & before it became troublesome by spreading religious irritation through the Colony. Nothing effectual was done. In the mean time the Colonial Legislature taking advantage of the 42nd. section of the Constitutional Act . . . conferring limited powers as to the future amount & regulation of the Clergy Reserves, has for many years sought to divert them from religious purposes, or to distribute them among all denominations. . . .

The great error of the Constitutional Act . . . was giving any power to interfere in the affairs of the National Church, to the Colonial Legislature, for though extremely limited, it has been acted upon as if the Church endowment were wholly at its disposition. Such interference should never have been permitted to any Colony. All laws & regulations respecting Church & State ought to be made by the Imperial Legislature and by it only.

Last year, after many struggles, a bill was sent home by the Legislature of this Province, inviting the Government to settle the question of the Clergy Reserves; but from some irregularity in the enacting clause it was disallowed, & the question was returned to disturb the Province.

Such was the state of this important matter when the Governor General, C. Poulett Thompson, arrived in Upper Canada to meet the Legislature in order to obtain their consent to a Union with the Province of Lower Canada.

As such a measure virtually places the two Canadas under a Popish legislature I found myself under the necessity of opposing it. . . .

The moment the question of the Union was settled, the Governor General sent a message to the Legislature with a bill disposing of the Clergy Reserves, a copy of which as it passed, I take the liberty to enclose. It robs the Church of three fourths of her acknowledged property, & leaves the fourth which it pretends to give her in some degree contingent, & by the rapid sale of the lands the value of her share will be trifling, and inadequate to maintain the present number of Clergy (about 80) in Upper Canada, scattered over a country nearly as large as England. It proceeds to degrade the Church to an equality with other sects, & gives the Presbyterians, whose numbers it purposely swells by adding to the Kirk of Scotland another division of Presbyterians, as much as to the Church of England, although after all they are inferior in numbers, & their Church Government being parity they are consequently liable to less expense.

The bill after assigning one half to the Churches of England & Scotland, gives the other half to all the Sectaries in the Province allowed by Law to celebrate Matrimony, on something like the New South Wales' plan. Some of these Sects are subdivided into 3 or 4 subdivisions, & are as follows: Presbyterians 3 kinds; Methodists 4 kinds; Baptists 4 kinds; Tunkers; Menonists; Moravians; Congregationalists; Calvinists; Independents; Lutherans and Roman Catholics. I need say no more on the provisions of the Bill, as a Copy is before you, but only that it is subversive of the Constitution & form of Government under which we live, seeks to destroy the distinction between truth & falsehood, & to degrade the Clergy of the Church of England to an equality with unauthorized teachers, & sacrifices to mistaken expediency the highest & holiest principles. Fortunately before it can receive the Royal Assent this bill must be laid on the table of each of the Houses of Parliament, & you will have an opportunity of arresting its progress, and of substituting in its stead a few clauses in any measure brought into Parliament for the pacification of the Canadas settling the Church Property, or Clergy Reserves on Constitutional grounds. . . .

Our second letter was sent from 19 Bury Street, St. James's, July 9, 1850.⁷ The Strachan who wrote it was apparently a very different man from the writer of our earlier letter. The difficulties rather than the benefits of establishment now come to the fore. Strachan is concerned for the liberty of the Church. He wants to know how he can be set free to establish a diocesan synod.⁸ He is making plans for his independent "Church University."⁹

7. B.M. Add. MS. 44,369 (Gladstone Papers, Vol. 284), fol. 318.

8. As early as 1832 Strachan, then Archdeacon of York, was formulating proposals for a diocesan synod, on the model of the diocesan conventions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. It was not until May 1, 1851, however, that 124 clerical and 127 lay delegates were convened in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Toronto, to take steps for the establishment of synodical government. Cf. A. N. Bethune, *Memoir of the Right Reverend John Strachan* (Toronto: Henry Rowsell, 1870), 249-52.

9. The Act of Incorporation of the University of Trinity College, Toronto, was passed by the Legislature of Canada on August 2, 1851, and the College was formally

I have read with much profit your able letter to the Bishop of London.¹⁰ The argument is conducted with great skill, strength and moderation, and the conclusions at which you arrive appear to me the fair results of the searching analysis of the various statutes proceedings and legal opinions which you have brought together.

In regard to the remedy you seem content with a smaller measure of relief than I had anticipated, but I speak with great diffidence for I have had access to no books on the subject. And on reflexion I think that as a commencement you are in the right. It is of vast importance to make a beginning in the true direction—by perseverance in the same you will at length prevail, and in the mean time patient waiting and long suffering are characteristics of the Catholic Church.

Can you from your extensive reading & inquiries respecting Ecclesiastical affairs put me in possession of the legal obstacles which are supposed to stand in the way of Colonial Bishops holding Diocesan Convocations or Synods to regulate their spiritual affairs?—and, if any, by what means they may be removed. My Clergy are now so numerous (about 150) that some movement may soon be forced upon me & in such case it will be wise for me to be prepared to take the lead rather than to follow, and so direct it into a safe and profitable channel. In this way I may be of use to the Church here.

I would further crave an interview respecting the matters, which have brought me to this country. I had placed them in the hands of the late Sir Robt Peel, who took a warm interest in them, and promised me his kind interference with the Government in obtaining a Royal Charter for my Church University, and which could not in his opinion be withheld without manifest injustice, but I fear nothing effectual was done previous to his lamented departure.¹¹

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opened on January 15, 1852. Since 1904 it has been federated with the University of Toronto. Cf. T. A. Reed (ed.), *A History of the University of Trinity College, Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952), 47-49, 127f.

10. W. E. Gladstone, *Remarks on the Royal Supremacy* (London: John Murray, 1850).

11. The Royal Charter was finally issued on July 16, 1852.