



Bill Phipps

Head of church denies Resurrection of Christ!

Interview with Bill Phipps, current moderator of the United church of Canada in October 1997, shows him to be an infidel and enemy of Christ!

1965 premarital sex approved

1988 Practicing gays approved for ordination

1997 Church head denies Christ's resurrection.

1997 Leaders unanimously approve Phipps after both these articles were published in the newspapers.

Jesus Divinity Doubted

Church leader holds controversial views

By BOB HARVEY Southam Newspapers "The Ottawa Citizen" October 30, 1997

The divinity of Jesus and the reality of heaven and hell are irrelevant, says the new moderator of the United Church of Canada.

What really matters, says Right Rev. Bill Phipps, is mending a broken world.

In a free-wheeling debate with the editorial board of the Ottawa Citizen, Phipps said Jesus was more interested in life on Earth than the afterlife and had more to say about economics than any other subject. "I don't believe Jesus was God, but I'm no theologian," Phipps said.

His lapel button, Phipps reading "Zero Poverty," reflects the views he developed in the mid 1960s as a student observing riots and civil-rights marches in New York and Chicago. "Biblically, it's an abomination that there are any poor people in Canada at all."

As a minister in Toronto, and most recently in Calgary, he has been quick to demonstrate against everything from nuclear arms to what he sees as the cultural genocide of Canada's aboriginal people.

Phipps, 55, was elected head of Canada's largest Protestant denomination in August. He believes what appealed most to the 400 delegates was his platform: putting the United Church's views front and centre in public policy debates.

His views on poverty are strong and definite. "Your soul is lost unless you care about people starving in the streets."

Canada's major churches can no longer be called mainline churches, Phipps said, because they now have relatively little influence.

But he believes Canadians are increasingly conscious of a moral void kind the church can contribute much to debates about world trade, employment, and the diminishing emphasis on health care and social services.

His views on the afterlife tend more to the agnostic. "I have no idea if there is a hell," he said. "I don't think Jesus was that concerned about hell. He was concerned about life here on earth."

Is heaven a place? I have no idea. I believe that there is a continuity of the spirit in some way, but I would be a fool to say what that is."

We've got enough problems trying to live ethically and well here to have any knowledge or understanding of what happens after we die."

Phipps said Jesus is central to his beliefs and motivates his compassion for others, but he doesn't accept the Bible as a valid historical record.

Nor does he accept the traditional Christian concept of Jesus as the Son of God.

"I don't believe Jesus is the only way to God," he said. "I don't believe He rose from the dead as a scientific fact. I don't know whether those things happened. It's an irrelevant question."

However, Phipps said he does believe in Jesus. "The bald statement that Jesus is not divine gives the wrong impression. I believe that Christ reveals to us as much of the nature of God as we can see in a human being," he said."

The whole concept of the nature of God is broader and wider and more mysterious and more holy than could be expressed in Jesus."

That doesn't mean that Jesus is the totality of God."

Phipps said the defining mark of evangelical Christianity—a personal relationship with Jesus—does not ensure ethical conduct. South Africa's regime of apartheid was unbiblical and obscene, but "it was put in place with all the Christian rhetoric by Christian individuals who loved Jesus."

It is not enough to go to church, pray and live an upright personal life. "Some of the great giants of Canadian commerce were upstanding, moral people in church. But they paid low wages and opposed unions. Or they had no compunction about making armaments for Third World countries and getting them deeply in debt," he said.

Phipps also acknowledged that the United Church of Canada continues to lose members, and cited its 1988 decision to ordain homosexuals as a reason why many people have left.

Article #2: Hamilton Spectator, Nov 27, 1997, Page A2

A church leader's view of Jesus, life

The national executive of the United Church of Canada has supported its moderator, Rev. Bill Phipps, whose comments have upset many church members. What exactly did he say? Here are excerpts from a transcript of his controversial comments.

Rev. Phipps (in introductory or. Phipps (in introductory marks to a meeting with the editorial board of the Ottawa Citizen): People are yearning for a strong moral voice again in public policy I think people sense that we've lost our moral centre, that society has lost its moral centre.

The United Church, over its 72 year history, has been one of the fairly strong moral voices, or strong social conscience, for Canada, and it has contributed a great deal over the years to the development of the Canada we once knew ...

But over the past 15 years, a lot of that, for a whole variety of reasons, has really diminished. We, along with a lot of the other churches, have gone from being mainline in terms of part of the moral centre to sideline. No one really cares or no one is really aware of what the church says.

Q: How do we recover the moral centre? Political activism, that sort of thing?

Phipps: My evidence for where I think it's gone are things like language. I have now been transformed from a student to a consumer of education, a consumer of health care, a consumer of social services. Our language over the past 10 or 15 years has almost been single-mindedly changed into a market-economy language.

I think the only value of, the primary value that we seem to have adopted in the past 10 or 15 years, is the market. Let the market decide. The market, the bottom line, profit and loss, winners and losers, have been the language of not only economic debate but all the other debates that go on.

If you express concerns about poverty and start using language that expresses compassion and solidarity with victims of social policy and so on, you're more accused now of being either wishy-washy or a bleeding heart or you don't understand the realities of the world, you don't understand that we are in a global death struggle with global competition and so on ...

So it's not just political activism, it's where the conversations take place that have to do with the development of social policy ...

Jesus talks about economics more than he talks about anything else. But what happens in experience is that moral questions get reduced to: I don't beat my kids, I get along with the public, the PTA, I don't have sex out of marriage and blah-blah-blah ... Some of the giants of Canadian commerce were Methodists who were absolutely moral, upstanding people in their churches but paid low wages to their workers and adamantly opposed unions.

Q: You haven't mentioned Jesus. Now, the Promise Keepers said that the critical thing is not whether you beat your dog or have extramarital sex; the critical thing, the foundation of everything, the centre of how you work is your relationship with Jesus, and it seems to me that a person who had a proper relationship with Jesus, who had opened his heart to believe in Jesus, would not engage in actions that harmed other people near or far.

Phipps: The experience has been otherwise ... One of the worst regimes outside of the Nazi regime of this century has been the apartheid regime in South Africa which was justified on biblical grounds by high-minded Christians ... it was put in place with all the Christian rhetoric by Christian individuals who love Jesus.

Q: Nevertheless, should the United Church parishioners not have a true relationship with Jesus?

Phipps: I think that goes on in every one of our 4,000 congregations every Sunday I know it goes on where I'm the preacher and where I lead prayer ... In fact I think, in many respects, another thing that's happened as we've kind of withdrawn a bit from the public world, the United Church has recovered a great deal of its Biblical study and spirituality and its personal understanding of the faith, personal relationships with God and so on...

So I think the United Church and other churches as well are doing a much better job than we ever did of that personal thing, and what I'm saying is we've never forgotten the focus, but we've got to be far more active and alive and let people know what we think about certain issues.

Q: Unless you believe in Jesus, you will not be saved. Do you believe that?

Phipps: That Jesus is the only way to God?

Q: Yes.

Phipps: No, I do not believe that.

Q: Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Phipps: I believe Jesus lives in people's hearts and did from the moment of that Easter experience.

Q: But did he die, spend three days dead and rise from the dead and walk the Earth?

Phipps: No, I don't believe that in terms of the scientific fact. I don't know whether those things happened or not. Actually, I'm far more open to strange things happening and all that kind of thing than I used to be. I think it's an irrelevant question.

Q: So if Christ be not risen, our faith is in vain.

Phipps: No. No, no. Christ risen in people's hearts is extremely important. Something extraordinary happened that hadn't happened before in biblical records of resurrection to those people after they experienced Jesus alive. Obviously something absolutely stupendous happened to turn a bunch of cowards into people who are willing to lay down their own life. But-I wasn't there. But I'm the recipient to people who had a passion that Jesus was alive and well and not only in my heart but cruising around the world, trying to mend a broken world ...

Q: But the gospel is reported as literally being fact.

Phipps: Well, the gospels were written by people with a theological axe to grind and an agenda and fine, that's what they are. But they weren't historical records of anything.

Q: Do you believe that Jesus is divine, that he was the son of God?

Phipps: We could have a whole discussion about that.

Q: Well, I would think the head of a Christian church would have a clearly defined position on the issue. You have a clearly defined position on this world, but I'm asking about theology What interests me about theology ... an after life is more important to me than a soup kitchen.

Phipps: It wasn't to Jesus and it wasn't to people of the Bible ... Your soul is directly tied (to) whether you care about people who are starving in the streets. Your soul is lost unless you care about that In a country as wealthy as Canada ... there is absolutely no excuse, speaking as a Christian, for there to be any soup kitchens, anybody living in the streets of Calgary any shelters for the homeless ...

Q: "The poor you will always have with you." That seems ...

Phipps: No, unless you read the rest of that passage in Deuteronomy People just like to lift it out and say there it is, Jesus said it. Read the whole Deuteronomy passage. If you have a Bible, we'll read it. Soul has to do with those very practical social justice issues. It always has in scripture and it certainly did with Jesus. That's why I said Jesus talked a lot more about economics than he did about anything else.

Q: In this argument, morality has become quite situational and is subject to fashion, and I'm wondering how you respond to that.

Phipps: Well, I think that's absolutely true, but those are two different things. "Subject to fashion" I think is absolutely right. What is the morality of the day? But you'd have to be more specific about that. Morality and ethics always has to relate to the situation in which you're in. I'm one of those people who's very wary about people who write down a bunch of rules and say that is going to pertain forever and ever. You look at some of morality and there's no way we'd follow those examples now. The main example is slavery and women. Those were just accepted parts of the social structure. It was not immoral to treat women as property Well, it certainly is immoral to do that now.

Q: Then what is the moral centre? If it's situational, then certainly there's no centre.

Phipps: The centre is in biblical terms, our concepts or words or experiences as compassion, justice, peace. The Jewish term "shalom" encompasses a whole lot of things. Peace with justice. There is no peace where, there is no justice. It's how you apply that in a given situation ... That's what God is concerned about. How we treat each other. What our relationships are like. Are they relationships of loving justice or, too often, you know, we cover up lack of love with elaborate social paraphernalia...

I believe that Christ reveals to us as much of the nature of God as we can see in a human being. Now that has some presuppositions to it, the major one of which is that life and death and God, the Divine and the Holy and all that, is a tremendous mystery of which anyone sees only a very small part. There is all kinds of stuff to discover that we don't know about. But as far as we are able to understand, Christ is that person who reveals to us the most about the nature of God, what God wants of us, who God is, of any human being.

Q: So was Christ God?

Phipps: No, I don't believe Christ was God.

Q: He's not part of the Trinity He's not the son of God.

Phipps: I think that's ... I'm no theologian.

Q: You're head of a Christian church, you have to be.

Phipps: No, I don't have to. I'm no theologian, but the beauty of the Trinity to me is that it recognizes various dimensions to the Christian understanding of God. If Jesus was God, there'd be no need for God in the Trinity.

Q: I guess what I'm trying to get at is, is there any truth that the United Church, or Bill Phipps, agrees with? Is there any truth that we can say: "You believe in this. This is what the United Church says, this is what the moderator says, whatever..."

Phipps: The fundamental truth to me in the biblical story is that God loves us and the world unconditionally, and part of that unconditional love is, for Christians, it was that unconditional love was poured into the person of Jesus. The whole biblical story is one of God's unconditional love. Taking people who betrayed God, who said no to God, who were unjust and converting them and turning them around. Moses would be one example. That's a huge truth as far as I'm concerned, because a lot of people want to have a conditional love of God. Part of the whole implication, to me, of the truth of God's unconditional love for the world is the freedom to try and bring justice and fail. The

ethical outgrowth of God's unconditional love is just relationships in the Earth among human communities. If God loves me and everybody unconditionally, it means I can try to act justly, I can be vigorous in my engagement with the world, and fail. And God will love me. That's a pretty strong statement.

Q: Is there a heaven?

Phipps: Is there a heaven, a place? I have no idea. I believe there is.

Q: Do we all join with God in the afterlife regardless of our conduct? Does anyone get shut out? Some people get the gate in the face?

Phipps: I have no idea. But I just want to say something about unconditional love, seeing God as a loving parent. Anyone who has children knows what it is to love your child unconditionally and have heartache about your child. But we know - that's what unconditional love is. The story of the prodigal son is one of the great stories about that and there are other stories and many religious traditions.

Q: What's the worst thing that could happen to me when I die?

Phipps: The worst thing that could happen to you is that your worst fears of Dante's Inferno are actually true, that's the worst thing that could happen to you.

Q: So there actually is a hell? And it's very bad?

Phipps: I have no idea. And I don't think Jesus was that concerned about hell. I think we're concerned about life here. And the Jewish tradition wasn't that concerned about hell either. They were concerned about just relationships here. I've got enough problems, and I think most of us have enough problems, trying to live an ethical life knowing all of the ways we compromise ourselves and all of the frailties that we've got. We've got enough problems trying to live ethically and well here to have any knowledge or understanding or worry about what happens after I die. I believe there is a continuation of the spirit in some form or another, but I'd be a fool to say I know what that is or what it's going to be like.

End articles.

Postscript: Leaders unanimously approve Phipps after both these articles were published in the newspapers.