



A 'man of radical compassion'

Former Anglican primate dragged his church into a global awareness of poverty, racism and inequality

By MICHAEL VALPY

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Most Rev. Edward Scott, killed this week in an automobile crash at the age of 85, was widely maligned as Red Ted in the once-elitist and at times still-stuffy Anglican Church of Canada that he tumultuously led for 15 years.

To one of his closest friends, he was, as she said endearingly, "kind of boring" -- and, indeed, there was a poker-faced, gothic reserve about Archbishop Scott that could be misleading; he did not tell jokes, slap backs, make small talk.

Instead, he did not shy away from the word genocide to describe what was happening to Canada's native people. And, as Anglican primate from 1971 to 1986, he shook up his church with his advocacy of the ordination of women as priests. He dragged his church -- and other Christian churches in Canada -- into a global awareness of poverty, racism and inequality. He denounced Western support for military dictatorship and cruise missile testing in Canada.

Only a few months ago, he accused his church of having lost moral vision by threatening itself with schism over what he called the "God-given sexuality" of committed homosexual partners while tens of thousands of Canadians live and die in poverty, the country's public schools crumble from underfunding, its health-care system is stretched beyond limit and much of the world staggers under the scourges of AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and malnutrition.

He was "your man of radical compassion," said Desmond Tutu, former Anglican primate of South Africa.

"The Anglican Church of Canada has lost a hero," said Terence Finlay, retired Anglican archbishop of Toronto. "He pushed the church to rethinking issues -- abortion, capital punishment, ordination of women, homosexuality and public and corporate social responsibility. Most of all he had a heart for justice."

Michael Ingham, bishop of the Vancouver diocese of New Westminster, who himself has stepped out in front of institutional Anglicanism by authorizing the church blessing of same-sex unions, said of Archbishop Scott: "He was one of the greatest church leaders this country has seen or is likely to see. He leaves a legacy of social justice and a globalized Canadian church."

Bishop Ingham told of being rector in the 1970s of a parish in upper-middle-class West Vancouver whose members were upset about the "pink primate" leading the Anglican Church down the road to godless socialism.

"So I invited Ted to come and talk to them. He took his jacket off, put his foot up on a stool, and within 30 minutes he had people eating out of his hand."

Archbishop Scott, the son of an Anglican priest, was born in Edmonton two weeks before the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919.

His lifelong heroes were the Christian prairie radicals of the social gospel movement, which applied the teachings of Christianity to the collective ills of an industrializing society -- often in opposition to the institutional churches -- and became a major force in Canadian religious, social and political life from the 1890s through the 1930s.

He believed passionately that people act their way into new thinking -- or, as the vogue phrase puts it: "Just do it." Don't wait. Change, he argued, happens from the perimeters, and works in from the edge, not from the centre outward.

He liked to point out that the ordination of the first woman Anglican minister in Hong Kong in 1944 gradually led to the acceptance and welcoming of women priests in more than half of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

On acceptance of homosexuals in the full life of the church, he walked his own talk -- becoming a spokesman this year for a national organization advocating the legalization of same-sex marriages while his church, a few weeks ago at its triennial general synod, or governing body, continued to dither on the issue, citing opposition to homosexuality in other Anglican churches around the world and the risk of fracturing Anglican unity at home.

He wrote in a foreword to Hugh McCullum's biography of him published this year, *Radical Compassion: The Life and Times of Archbishop Ted Scott*: "The road of the Spirit of truth and justice starts at the margins, among the historically oppressed and powerless, and those in solidarity with them."

He said the Bible -- so often cited by Christians as prohibiting this or decreeing that -- must not be seen as frozen words but be understood through "reason influenced by evolving or new knowledge."

Archbishop Scott could be frank, blunt, very political when he wanted to be, and he eschewed almost grumpily the pomp of a hierarchical, dress-up church.

At Anglican episcopal conferences, where the cute practice was for bishops to address each other by the names of their dioceses -- "What does New Westminster say about this?" "Would Keewatin care to make an intervention?" -- he made it frostily clear that he wanted to be called Ted.

On one occasion, having followed the liturgical ritual of removing his cope, his bishop's ceremonial cape, to deliver a homily, Archbishop Scott descended the steps from the pulpit to be met by Michael Ingham, lower down the priestly totem pole, waiting deferentially to drape the garment over his shoulders. Ted Scott took it from him, tucked it under his arm, and said: "When I can't dress myself, I'll retire."

Another time, being sworn in as a witness at the ecclesiastical trial of a priest ordered defrocked by his bishop for living in a homosexual relationship, Archbishop Scott stunned the church court by announcing that he could not swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, because no one, including him, knew what the full truth of the matter was.

"There [was] also the compassionate Ted Scott," Mr. McCullum wrote. "He had a great need, almost a compulsion, to be pastoral, to respond when individuals are in pain, especially individuals whom the institution has forgotten or ignored or crushed in the cult of efficiency -- such as overcame almost all main-line churches in the late 20th century."

Archbishop Scott, indeed, when he set out to help people, sought out the most in need. The friends he made and brought to his home were quadriplegics, the seriously depressed and heartbroken, and people such as sightless Toronto physician Jane Poulson, dying of complications of diabetes and congestive heart failure, whom he encouraged to spend her final days of life writing her autobiography.

Beginning in his days as a young bishop in central British Columbia in the late 1960s and his subsequent election as the youngest primate -- or titular leader -- of the national church, he had a strong appeal for young Anglicans who remained in their church but disdained what they perceived as its prim and fogeyish aloofness from the social problems of the society and world around them.

He refused to join elite business clubs to which former primates had belonged. "I felt I wanted to give every indication of the church's concern for people who cannot afford to belong to a club," he said.

For the eight years -- from 1975 to 1983 -- that he was moderator of the World Council of Churches in addition to being Canadian primate, he became a hero to many young Anglicans for the very actions that raised eyebrows among their elders: his outspokenness on North-South inequality, on systemic racism, on economic trading systems tilted in the First World's favour, on the ill treatment of Canada's native people.

"In 1978, when the WCC granted money to the Popular Front in the Zimbabwean civil war, he was crucified by the media, attacked by business interests in all churches, severely questioned by the conservative elements of the Anglican church," Mr. McCullum wrote.

At the height of the crisis over South African apartheid in the late 1980s, prime minister Brian Mulroney turned to him for help, appointing him in 1986 as Canada's representative to a Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group mandated to try to bring an end to apartheid without drenching the southern tip of Africa in blood.

Archbishop Scott's wife of 58 years, Isabel, died in 2000. He leaves his four children, Maureen Isabel Frances, James Douglas Edward, Patricia Anne and Elizabeth Jean, and seven grandchildren.

A private family funeral will be held in Toronto on Tuesday, followed by a public memorial service on July 13 in Toronto's St. James' Cathedral.

His companion and long-time family friend, Sonja Bird, was seriously injured in the crash that took his life.

Ted Scott said in a speech in 2003: "There are two key questions which I believe we as Christian persons ought from time to time ask ourselves: What kind of a person am I becoming, and what kind of a world am I helping to come into being."

They were questions that were stamped on his life.

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