

St Boniface Trust Essay Competition

Why I Am an Anglican and Believe That I Shall Remain So

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[This is the Essay which the judges agreed unanimously was the winner, in a form simplified with the consent of the author. Natasha is a lay person who lives in France. The full text of her essay is available on the website, http://www.stbonifacetrust.org.uk/documents/20120511_winning_essay.pdf]

'I have learned from Chenu that thinking is sacred ; the intellectual contains the spiritual!'

From Edward Schillebeeckx, 'Un Theologian Heureux'

As a communicant member of the Church of England, I am an Anglican because I believe Anglicanism constitutes the only Christian tradition where I can be allowed to live fully my baptismal vocation and be a witness of Christ.¹ As a matter of fact, because of the 'integral catholicity' of Anglicanism, I have chosen to join the Church of England, which is now my spiritual home.

My first actual experience of Anglican worship was Evensong on a rainy day about thirteen years ago. My intention was to have a taste of the Church of England without any commitment. Yet my life has been changed forever. It is very difficult adequately to describe how I felt during the service: my heart was caught by 'the humility of awe before the divine mysteries of faith,' and language is not very competent 'to define the ultimate paradox of experience.'² For the first time in my life, I encountered God during a service. His presence surrounded me and His love was made known to me in a most peaceful and spiritually uplifting experience. The strangely powerful and moving atmosphere of the service allowed me to pray in a totally new way. Whereas I was usually oppressed by bad

¹ I should like particularly to thank the community of my home-parish, and especially the priests.

² Paul E More and Franck L Cross, 'Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England', SPCK 1935.

liturgies which made me suffer a lot, suddenly I was experiencing a redeeming freedom which awoke a new serenity in my inner self. My rather dark mind was dazzled by an irradiated light. I was caught up in a tradition where the living present was closely connected with an ancient past. Above all, my soul was touched by the power of music which led me through a deep spiritual process admirably described by Richard Hooker:

*“The very harmony of sounds being framed in due sort and carried from the ear to the spiritual faculties of our souls is by a native puissance and efficacy greatly available to bring to a perfect temper whatsoever is there troubled, apt as well to quicken the spirits that which is too eager, sovereign against melancholy and despair ...”*³

I came ill, hungry and thirsty; I left fed, healed and renewed by the beauty of holiness. As the 17th century poet George Herbert has so beautifully expressed it, ‘I just sat down and ate,’⁴ tasting ‘the vision of ever-forgiving and welcoming grace-filled Love.’⁵ Evensong was definitively the liturgy which authorized me to have ‘the knowledge of God that can only come in praising God.’⁶ It caused my conversion, as Saint Paul was converted on his journey to Damascus, and has allowed me to understand that my experience of prayer is confirmed by the Anglican way of believing, which is illustrated by the adage ‘Lex orandi lex credendi’, based upon the argument used by a monk in the fifth century named Prosper of Aquitaine, who wrote, ‘the substance of prayer determines the faith of the one praying.’⁷ This also implies that the doctrine of the church is found in its liturgical resources and understood through the liturgical texts. This is particularly true of the Church of England’s doctrine which (according to its Canon Law) is found in the ‘Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal’.⁸ Note that two of these three historical formularies are liturgical resources; and also, how limited are its written sources of doctrinal authority. Therefore, Anglican doctrine is grounded ‘on the sound of Church bells’, as Michael Ramsey nicely put it⁹, rather than on a sophisticated juridical system. It is characterized by a certain economy. As a matter of fact, this doctrinal modesty is a consequence, as well an illustration, of an important notion for Anglican self-understanding: the principle of adiaphora, which implies that Anglican beliefs tolerate diversity relating to ‘things which do not make a difference, matters regarded as non-essential, issues about which one can disagree without dividing the Church’.¹⁰ This principle is found in the 39 Articles: ‘It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one or utterly alike; for at all times they have been diverse, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s word’.¹¹

³ Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, V.38.1, cited by Alan Bartlett, ‘A Passionate Balance, the Anglican Tradition’ DLT 2007, p2007.

⁴ George Herbert, *Love 111*, ‘You must sit down and eat, says Love, and taste my meat / so I did sit and eat’.
Cited in *ibid* p 187

⁵ *Ibid*, p 189

⁶ Ford and Hardy, ‘Praising and Knowing, Philadelphia, Westminster John Know Press 1982, p10

⁷ Cited by Paul DE CLERK, ‘Lex orandi, lex credenda: the original sense and historical avatars of an equivocal adage’, *Studia Liturgica* 24 (1994) p 181.

⁸ Canon 5A – *Of the Doctrine of The Church of England*

⁹ Michael Ramsey *The Anglican Spirit, Cambridge (MA), Cowley Publications, 1992, p 19*

¹⁰ Windsor Report, p38

¹¹ Article 34

This leads to 'the policy of reserving strong statements and conviction for the few things that really deserve them',¹² and distinguishes the Anglican tradition from the Roman Catholic one with its overdeveloped doctrinal system and ever-growing number of documents, most of them juridical.

The principle of *adiaphora* expresses the Anglican way of believing and its understanding of truth, which forbids not only a hazardous formulation of dogma, but an unquestioning submission to the teaching of a magisterium. This way is not an indifference to truth, but rather a 'perception of the conditions under which truth must be sought and defined',¹³ and the way in which 'beliefs are defined, legitimated, interpreted and maintained.'¹⁴ Indeed, as Archbishop Rowan Williams has underlined it, 'theological truthfulness is not fully at our disposal because holiness is not fully at our disposal.'¹⁵ Anglicanism implies a 'reasonable and rational faith',¹⁶ and is firmly committed to the 'liberty of prophesying' defined by Jeremy Taylor¹⁷, which does not merely rely on sound learning, but which gives it a very clear role in the search for truth, 'both by interpreting afresh the sacred text, and by certifying through independent research the true verdict of Christian antiquity.'¹⁸ It can even be said that the vocation of Anglicanism is not to determine and enunciate the truth, but rather 'to create the climate of spiritual liberty in which individuals may bear witness to the truth as they see it, submitting themselves to the criticism of their peers without fear of ecclesiastical censorship.'¹⁹ It says a lot about Anglicans' understanding of the divine-human relationship: 'God has delegated to the Church and to the individual Christians the responsibility to take informed and reasoned decisions.'²⁰ Every Anglican can therefore enjoy the immense privilege of being 'continuously engaged in doing theology, in the true sense of reflecting on the things of God.'²¹ Indisputably it is 'a serious theology of human maturity.'²² As Bishop Westcott has said, 'In the life of faith, our reason is not to be laid aside, but rather is awakened and stimulated. Reason and faith are not to be separated.'²³ For me this is a most important point, for I cannot separate my spiritual pilgrimage from my intellectual journey.

Born in France of French parents, I was brought up in the Roman Catholic Church. It has never been a spiritual home for my restless soul. Its apprehension of truth, its theology based on sin and culpability, the lack of intelligence in its discourses, and an erroneous conception of tradition have always oppressed me, hindered the strengthening and the deepening of my faith. Above all, my spirit has never been able to submit to the unquestioning and absolute teaching of the magisterium which destroys 'the obligation to Faith which ariseth from the rational evidence of Christian Doctrine.'²⁴ I could only agree

¹² Oliver O'Donovan, *On the Thirty Nine Articles*, Oxford, Paternoster Press, 1986, p14

¹³ Hensley Henson *The Church of England* CUP, 1939, p108

¹⁴ Paul Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism, Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology*, T&T Clark, 2007, p 49

¹⁵ Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities*, DLT 2003, p26

¹⁶ Paul Avis, *op cit*, p33

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ Hensley Henson, *op cit*, p59

¹⁹ Paul Avis, *op cit*, p34

²⁰ Alan Bartlett, *op cit*, p74

²¹ Paul Avis, *op cit*, p36

²² Alan Bartlett, *op cit*, p74

²³ Brook Westcott, *Essays in the History of Religious Thought in the West*, Macmillan 1891, pp380-381, cited by Alan Bartlett, *op cit*, p 153

²⁴ Edward Stillingfleet, *A Rational Account of the Grounds of Protestant Religion*, 1665, p111

with George Stillingfleet on the fact that deciding questions by infallibility 'destroys all rational evidence of the truth of religion.'²⁵ As Austin Farrer stated it,

*If God might be comprehended, he would not be God. An over-confident dogmatism is as fatal to theistic belief as scepticism itself; it pretends to prove and to define, only to discover that what it has defined and proved is not its Lord and God. You can no more catch God's infinity in a net of words than ... you can fish out of the sea the glories of the dying day.*²⁶

This is not to be interpreted as denigrating the importance of the search for God. Indeed, according to Joseph Butler's position as explained by A. S. McGrade, 'disinterested love of God is a rationally and psychologically appropriate response to God's goodness. How is God's goodness to be known?'²⁷ Reason is 'the only thing we have wherewith to judge concerning any thing, even revelation itself.'²⁸ 'Not only the meaning, but also the morality and the evidence of revelation'²⁹ can be assessed. Thus Jesus said that we must love the Lord our God 'with all our hearts, and with all our souls and with all our minds and with all our strength' (Mark 12: 29), a sentence beautifully commented on by Bishop Westcott:

*Those who are 'in Christ' are bound to serve God with their whole being, with their intellect no less than their heart and their strength and their substance ... For them all that falls within human observation is a potential parable of spiritual realities, through which fresh vision may be gained of the glory of God. They will be the keenest of men to watch for the dawn of new ideas. For them there can be no despondency and no indifference. They bring to the Lord the first fruits of all that He has lent them and commit their gains to his keeping.*³⁰

This occasioned an almost desperate intellectual quest for the truth of Christ which has led me to undertake a long educational journey that found its culmination in some post graduate studies. I was seeking to understand what I believed, according to the adequate formula of St. Anselm of Canterbury in the foreword of his *Proslogion*. As my reflection was developing, it progressively became clear that a move from the Church of Rome was going to be necessary. I was living in a fiction which had to cease. It was time to join a church where I would be able to discern freely the truth of Christ and to establish my conviction in the light of my conscience, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Although considerations were given to all the options which seemed reasonable enough, namely the Reformed and Lutheran Churches, the choice of Anglicanism reflected the reasoning that:

there is no Church whose every part so squares unto my conscience, whose articles, constitutions, and customes seeme so consonant unto reason, and as it were framed to my particular devotion, as this whereof I hold my beliefe, the Church of England (...) In brief, where the Scripture is silent, the Church is my Text; where that speaks,

²⁵ *Ibid*, cited in Henry McAdoo, 'Anglicans and Tradition and the Ordination of Women, Canterbury Press 1997, p82

²⁶ Austin Farrer, 'Does God Exist, in A Loades, R MacSwain (eds), 'the Truth-seeking Heart: Austin Farrer and his writings, Canterbury Press 2006, p215

²⁷ A S McGrade, 'Reason' in 'The Study of Anglicanism' (Ed: Sykes, Booty and Night), SPCK 1998, p 120

²⁸ *Sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel, 1726, cited Ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ Brooke Westcott, 'Christian Aspects of Life' Macmillan & CO 1897 p32, cited by Alan Bartlett, *op cit*, p166

'tis my comment; where there is a joynt silence of both, I borrow not the rules of my Religion from Rome or Geneva, but the dictates of my owne reason. ³¹

The Anglican understanding of truth has allowed me to accomplish my 'quest for the divine through the use of human reason.'³² This can be done because although 'Scripture, tradition, councils and fathers are the evidence in question', 'the ultimate judge' is my 'reason'.³³

My move into the Church of England has saved me. Although I have left the so-called Catholic Church, I am now really catholic in the sense I can experience God's transforming power. Archbishop Rowan Williams has written that, 'God speaks in a manner that insists we continue to grow in order to hear.'³⁴ The Church of England is the only part of the One Church where I can grow and consequently hear God. I am able to do so because the Anglican tradition which has welcomed me so generously not only allows me to be a mature believer but encourages me to be so. I enjoy the liberty that Anglicanism gives me as a scholar, and that I could not find anywhere else. I can pursue the truth without fear. Anglicanism is everything but an open invitation to intellectual laziness! I am now happy to put myself in this company —differentiated from those who seem 'to know more,'³⁵— not in order to affirm Anglican superiority over others but because I am confident in a tradition that invests each one of its members with a considerable dignity not only as human beings but also and above all as thinking Christians. That, combined with Anglican inclusivity, means that I am now an open, confident, and positive Catholic, who is able to be a witness of Christ without fear and shame. For the first time in my life, I now feel that my heart, faith and mind are in accordance with the teaching of a Church to which I am proud to belong. My quest for holiness is fostered by our liturgies, marked by 'an inclusive unity rather than an exclusive uniformity,'³⁶ which confers me a capacity for growth. I have become an Anglican by choice, a choice dictated not only by reason but also by the heart.

I believe I shall remain in the Anglican Communion because no other tradition possesses the 'integral catholicity' of Anglicanism, namely its completeness, expressed in the Anglican ecclesiology which defines the Anglican patrimony. (Patrimony is commonly defined as anything inherited from the past that characterizes something.) This inheritance allows those who belong to the churches of the Anglican Communion to live fully their catholicity.

The Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* providing for personal ordinariates for Anglicans entering into full communion with the Catholic Church mentions this 'Anglican patrimony' without specifying what it has given to the Church.³⁷ However, the Constitution does help us to understand how the Holy Father perceives it – 'the liturgical, spiritual and

³¹ Sir Thomas Browne *Religio Medici 1642-43*, ed L C Martin, Clarendon Press 1964, pp5-6

³² Michael Ramsey, *op cit*, p 31

³³ Benjamin Whichcote, cited in Michael Ramsey, *op cit* p31

³⁴ Rowan Williams, 'Why study the past? The Quest for the Historical Church', DLT 2005, p 112

³⁵ L William Countryman, 'The Poetic Imagination – An Anglican Spiritual Tradition', DLT 1999, p32

³⁶ David Stancliffe, 'Is there an Anglican Liturgical Style?', in Ed Stevenson and Spinks, 'The Identity of Anglican Worship', Harrisburg, Morehouse Publishing 1991, p132

³⁷ Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* providing for personal ordinariates for Anglicans entering into full communion with the catholic Church VI, §5: 'In order to address the particular needs of seminarians of the Ordinariate and formation in Anglican patrimony, the Ordinary may also establish seminary programs or houses of formation which would relate to existing Catholic faculties of theology'.

pastoral traditions of the Anglican Communion.³⁸ This erroneous apprehension reveals a total lack of understanding regarding the Anglican tradition. It rests on the idea that Anglicanism cannot stand on its own and that 'the faith, practice and spirit of the Churches of the Anglican Communion' are 'merely a product of the accidents of history, a legitimization, for reasons of expediency, of the way things have happened to turn out.'³⁹ This vision implicitly denies that Anglicanism is 'the embodiment of some genuine ecclesiological truth, insight and principle, with insight or principle, with some degree of abiding relevance and with something of value to offer to the whole Church.'⁴⁰ If Anglicanism is distinguished by its liturgical, spiritual and pastoral traditions, its main characteristic (which forms its distinctiveness) rests in its ecclesiology, expressing 'a dynamic orthodoxy'.⁴¹

The definition of Anglican patrimony implied by the constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* denies this quality and gives credence to the theory that Anglicanism has no doctrine or ecclesiology of its own. Some Anglican scholars have themselves defended this idea.⁴² Until the creation of the ordinariate, the dangers of such declarations have been probably underestimated. If, as Archbishop Robert Runcie has underlined, it is true that the churches of the Anglican Communion 'have never claimed to be more than a part of One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church,' it is very dangerous to assert that the survival of the Anglican Communion must not be 'an end in itself'; the affirmation of Anglicanism's provisional character must be cautiously done.⁴³ It can be made in accordance with the restraint which characterizes the Anglican tradition and in order to acknowledge that in the context of a divided Church Anglican churches are only a part of the creedal Church, as are all other Christian churches, seen in an eschatological perspective. But being modest does not mean we should deny Anglican integrity. At the present time, as Paul Avis has pointed out, our greatest need as members of the Anglican Communion is to affirm openly our confidence in, among other things, our 'definite and distinct ecclesiology', endowed with an 'abiding validity'.⁴⁴ This distinctive character of Anglican ecclesiology resides in what I call its 'integral catholicity' established on the combination of three essential bases 'mutually

³⁸ *Ibid.*, III: 'Without excluding liturgical celebrations according to the Roman Rite, the Ordinariate has the faculty to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and the other Sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours and other liturgical celebrations according to the liturgical books proper to the Anglican tradition, which have been approved by the Holy See, so as to maintain the liturgical, spiritual and pastoral traditions of the Anglican Communion within the Catholic Church, as a precious gift nourishing the faith of the members of the Ordinariate and as a treasure to be shared'.

³⁹ Paul Avis, *op cit*, pp18-19

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p49

⁴² J.W.C. Wand, 'Anglicanism in History and Today', Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1961, p. 46: 'it is the claim of the Anglican that he holds ... no exclusive or distinctive doctrine'; Stephen Sykes, 'Anglicanism and the doctrine of the Church', in 'Unashamed Anglicanism', DLT, 1995, pp. 102-103: 'Bishop Stephen Neill had been more sweeping still, denying not merely that there were no special anglican doctrines, but even that there existed a particular Anglican Theology'; Henry R. McAdoo, 'Being an Anglican', SPCK, 1977, pp. 12-13: 'there is then no distinctively Anglican Faith as such but rather the explicit claim of adherence to nothing but the faith once for all delivered'.

⁴³ See 'The Truth shall make you free : The Lambeth Conference 1988', ACC 1993, p 13, cited by Paul Avis, *op cit*, p4

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp 5,6

supportive and mutually interpretative: catholicity, reformation principles, and scholarship freely pursued.⁴⁵ Bishop Charles Gore has explained this unique alliance:

*It is the glory of the Anglican Church that at the Reformation she repudiated neither the ancient structure of Catholicism, nor the new and freer movement. Upon the ancient structure - the creeds, the canon, the hierarchy, the sacraments - she retained her hold while she opened her arms to the new learning, the new appeal to Scripture, the freedom of historical criticism and the duty of private judgement.*⁴⁶

This 'integral catholicity' constitutes the completion of the catholic paradigm, not yet achieved in every church. John Jewel underlined that the Church of England moved away 'from the errors of Rome, but not from the Catholic Church.'⁴⁷ The obliteration of Roman improprieties has conditioned the distinctiveness of the 'integral catholicity'. Consequently, an expurgated Catholicism could integrate the contributions of Reform found in the way by which beliefs are 'defined, legitimated, interpreted and maintained.'⁴⁸ If the Church of England professes 'the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scripture,' the Church 'is called to proclaim afresh this faith 'in each generation.'⁴⁹ To the Anglican inheritance of faith and thus to the Anglican patrimony 'belongs a concept of authority which refuses to insulate itself against the testing of history and the free action of reason. It seeks to be a credible authority and therefore is concerned to secure satisfactory historical support and to have its credentials in a shape which corresponds to the requirements of reason.'⁵⁰ It is expressed in the classical threefold Anglican cord of Scripture, reason and tradition. 'Scripture contains the elements which it is necessary to believe to be a Christian. Reason comprehends our experience as human beings who think and feel and act. Tradition is the reach of the past into present: the way in which we inherit from the past the experience and knowledge of others who have shared our belief.'⁵¹ These three sources 'are combined in a dynamic way in order to serve as mutual qualifiers, checks and balances, not merely to restrict and to relativize each other but also to generate innovative thinking in dialogue with the Church's cultural and ideological context.'⁵²

This classical feature of the Anglican tradition can be contrasted with the Roman Catholic trilogy of 'sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church.'⁵³ Only the magisterium, and not reason, allied with tradition and scripture, is able authentically to interpret 'the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition.'⁵⁴ This is why the paradigm of catholicity proposed by the Roman Catholic

⁴⁵ Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church : an Introduction*, SPCK 2000, p44

⁴⁶ Cited by Paul Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, op cit p26

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p32

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p 49

⁴⁹ Canon C15, *Of the Declaration of Assent: 'The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation'*.

⁵⁰ *Lambeth Conference 1988 Report pp82-83, cited by Henry McAdoo, 'Anglicans and Tradition and the Ordination of Women', p24*

⁵¹ Ian Bulting (ed), *'Celebrating the Anglican Way'*, Hodder and Stoughton 1966, p47, cited by *ibid* p57

⁵² *Ibid*, p 32

⁵³ *'Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation' 10, in Walter M Abott (ed), 'The Documents of Vatican II' 1967, pp117-118, cited *ibid* p10*

⁵⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 85: 'The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of*

Church is incomplete, as 'reason, never divorced from Scripture or apostolical tradition, sets us free from fundamentalism, traditionalism and theological idiosyncrasy'⁵⁵. This 'integrality' of Anglicanism allows the Anglican believer to live an 'integrated catholic faith'. In our aggressively secularized world, it offers a model which opens new, fresh, exciting perspectives not only for the disillusioned believer but for all. It is a message of hope for the world. Nevertheless, such a position raises a number of points it is necessary to address.

Anglicanism is often described as lacking coherence in central matters of faith. What does integrality mean in that context?

In Anglicanism, there is no substantial body of confessional material containing an exposition of the doctrine. Anglican faith is practical rather than confessional. The Roman combination of an 'inflexible scholastic official theology and an unchallengeable magisterium'⁵⁶ is utterly contrary to the intrinsic nature of the Anglican tradition. What Anglicans believe is stated minimally mostly in liturgical resources. It is simply the *lex credendi lex orandi*. 'The Anglican Faith, which is set forth uniquely in the Scriptures and is summed up in the Catholic creeds, develops and grows under the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Church, the Body of Christ.'⁵⁷ Therefore, integrality means that Anglicans are invested with a full ability of discerning the truth through the Anglican Way, as the Anglican faith is a faith in search of understanding.

In relation to matters of faith and order, the churches of the Anglican Communion are often accused of unilaterally altering the common catholic heritage, without the authority to do so. Surely catholicity means not deciding matters of faith on one's own, but in partnership with one's ecumenical sister churches? What about the 'ecumenical damage argument'?⁵⁸

The churches of the Anglican tradition confess that 'while their churches certainly belong to the One Church of Christ, they are only a part, portion of the whole catholic Church,'⁵⁹ thus admitting their provisional and incomplete nature. Consequently, in contrast to the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Churches, they can place the other churches 'on the same footing with their own Anglican Church, as fragments of the whole, acknowledging that all are victims of disunity, all share the responsibility for schism, and all are called to work for the healing of the wounds of the body of Christ.'⁶⁰ This major achievement not yet attained by every church implies that the catholicity of other churches is not denied. It is primordial as the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church do not regard the churches of the Anglican Communion as true churches with valid ministries and sacraments.⁶¹ So the 'ecumenical damage argument' does not seem realistic. To push things further, one can even wonder if those defending this position are really convinced that their church is a true, catholic and apostolic church. If so, they should not have any

the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.' This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

⁵⁵ Cited by Henry McAdoo, *op cit* p 57

⁵⁶ Paul Avis, 'The Identity of Anglicanism', *op cit*, p155

⁵⁷ Cited by Henry McAdoo, 'Anglican Heritage' *op cit*, p5

⁵⁸ Paul Avis, *op cit*, p128

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p4

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

⁶¹ See *ibid*, p129

problems with the fact that it 'has sufficient authority within itself' to determine matters of faith and order.

As for the decision-making process pertaining to matters of faith, it is always better and even desirable to enjoy the support of an ecumenical consensus.⁶² Yet, this most attractive notion in theory becomes an almost empty reality in the context of a divided Church. A relative hypocrisy also lies in the very conventional discourses of our ecumenical partners regarding the changes affecting matters of faith. The actual reality must be faced, even it is not the one which we would like to see: in the present state of the One Church, 'there is no machinery in existence for the churches even to consult together on fundamental questions of faith and order, let alone to take decision or act together.'⁶³ The meeting of an ecumenical council could be a solution for some. Unfortunately, given the current situation, it is not even possible to dream of such an eventuality. It is necessary to have in mind the miserable experience of the Council of Florence⁶⁴: a deficient conciliar experience can only become an element of further alienation. The consequence is sad, but ineluctable: as much as the credal Church is not an actual reality, the churches have no choice but to act 'unilaterally', which means 'that each particular church must act responsibly, in accordance with its conscience, and through its structures of conviviality and decision making, in fulfilment of its mission.'⁶⁵ The Roman Catholic Church, which regularly declares that it does not regard the Churches including itself, as authorized to change tradition, is not the last one to act 'unilaterally', to which the insertion of the Filioque into the Creed, papal infallibility, Marian dogma and much more testify.

Today, Anglicanism seems to be devastated by conflicts and divisions over gays and lesbians as well women bishops. If the media are not mistaken, Anglicans are permanently fighting against each other while Archbishop Williams desperately tries to hold the communion together in order to avoid a schism. How can I believe that I will remain an Anglican in this context?

Anglicanism has often been described as being the product of a secular will. The Church of England would have been created only to support and legitimate Henry VIII's ambitions, and as a result, the Anglican tradition would not be established on sound theological foundations. The churches of the Anglican Communion would not be invested with the inherent properties of true churches. Eventually, these gaps would mean that Anglicanism could only collapse. A more open perspective 'sees it as a distinctive inculturated expression of the Western form of the Church Catholic, shaped by the conciliar and reforming movements of the late Middle Ages and early modern period, to which sources the constitutional settlements under Henry and Elizabeth were subservient.'⁶⁶

From the beginning, the contingency of Anglicanism has been a matter of fact. Yet the Anglican experience is nearly almost five hundred years old and is still alive after having gone through very severe crises. The complicated situation of the Anglican Communion raises a number of important questions connected to the singularity of Anglican identity, but does not mean that a schism is about to come. The current conflicts from one

⁶² *Ibid*, p126-7

⁶³ *Ibid*

⁶⁴ 1442AD

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p168

perspective reveal the good health of our churches and testify to their integrality. Our distinctive appreciation of truth implies free and large debates to discern the right path as it cannot be given by a higher authority. The other churches are not very different from ours. They are not immune to pain and torments but these are not made widely known; they are often managed by an obscure and authoritarian governmental system and their burden is often carried by the innocent victims of an efficient system of censorship, promoting silence while the modesty and balance of the Anglican churches mean they deal publicly and openly with their problems. The Anglican Communion is not afraid to display its vulnerability. Nevertheless, a strengthened, more articulate and confident Anglican ecclesiology needs to be part of the future, both in terms of theological studies and greater awareness of our ecclesiological structures and how we resolve disputes between us.

Being an Anglican is much more than what is currently advertised by the media. Anglican global identity is not defined by a positioning in favour or against homosexual clergy and women bishops. The overall depth of our tradition, and particularly its spirituality and liturgy, still nurtures the life of millions of Christians, including some who have formally left. At the same time and although it is highly ignored, despite the so called desperate situation of the Anglican Communion, its churches welcome each year a considerable number of Christians who enjoy the spiritual solace provided by Anglican inclusivity. Faith in the Anglican Communion needs to be reaffirmed. With the help of the Spirit, as Jesus has promised it in John 6: 13, the truth will be discovered and will prevail. I still call myself an Anglican because I believe and hope.

In the final analysis, I am an Anglican and intend to remain so, because of love – ‘Love bade me welcome’⁶⁷ – the love of truth has brought me to the Church of England. The Church of England is the place where I experience God’s love. Through this experience, I am able to know God better, to love Him more deeply, and to serve Him with greater passion. As a result of ‘love’s redeeming work,’⁶⁸ I can try to become ‘a living Gospel that everyone can read’,⁶⁹ so that I can credibly testify of God’s love.

⁶⁷ George Herbert, ‘Love III’ – *Love bade me welcome*, cited by Stephen Sykes, *op cit*, p51

⁶⁸ From Charles Wesley’s hymn ‘Love’s redeeming work is done’

⁶⁹ Kenneth Letts, ‘L’unité des chrétiens : un témoignage donné à l’Europe’, *Cathedral of Metz, Le Neuf de l’Europe*, May 9 2010