

St Boniface Trust Essay Competition

Why I Am an Anglican And Believe I Shall Remain So

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Introduction

In this essay I will define what it is that makes me an 'Anglican', and I will explain why I believe I shall continue as an Anglican going forward, despite the anxiety caused by the high profile to which the Anglican Ordinariate has recently ascended.

The Nature of "Anglicanism"

In order to say I am an Anglican, it is necessary to define what Anglicanism actually *is*. This, it appears, is not a straightforward task! As is commented in the preface to *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, nearly every decennial Lambeth Conference wrestles with the issue of Anglican identity.¹

Since the early 19th Century, when people first began to speak about 'Anglican-ism', attempts at delineating and defining the term have been many and varied.² However, as is noted by Sykes in his article entitled "The Anglican Character".

"...an *-ism* may too easily suggest something too static to be true to the variety."³

¹ Booty J, Thomas O, Wolf W, Preface to *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, (Edinburgh 1979) p. viii.

² Sykes S, "The Genius of Anglicanism" in Rowell G, ed., *English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, (Oxford 1992) p. 227.

In a similar way, in his preface to the book *Anglican Evangelical Identity*, Tom Wright recalls being asked to speak on “What is an Evangelical?” He balked, however, at the possibility of providing yet another definition that would become a check-list, a means by which one could know if one was ‘in’ or ‘out’ of a particular group. He describes such a definition as a label which enables people to avoid having to think.⁴

It is sometimes felt that ‘Anglican’ is a vague and confused term.⁵ Many seek a definition of their own Anglicanism, and hope to relate it to concrete things such as the prayer-book(s), or the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.⁶ However, it is problematic to consider either of these things as constituting the substance of Anglicanism. As Findon states:

*“The Prayer Book and the Articles are capable, notoriously, of being interpreted in a variety of different ways. This was Thomas Fuller’s meaning when he said that the Thirty Nine Articles were like children’s clothes, made of a larger size so that the children might grow up into them.”*⁷

Hence it is not necessarily correct to assume that two individuals who consider themselves Anglican based on allegiance to a particular prayer book or the Thirty Nine Articles will necessarily agree with each other on the correct interpretation of any particular tenant therein, or on the subject of defining Anglicanism.

The Prayer-Book(s)—Our Practice?

Ask the average Anglican lay-person to describe or define Anglicanism, and almost always the first calling point will be *liturgy*.⁸ This is rooted within a historical understanding of Anglicanism because for a long time within international Anglicanism it was the English and Scottish prayer books which created a sense of familiarity and unity; Cranmer’s ideal of ‘but one use’ constituted the rallying point of Anglican praxis across the globe.⁹

However, even though the Lambeth Conference of 1948 was still speaking of the Book of Common Prayer as something which safeguarded the unity of the Anglican Communion, only a decade later, at Lambeth 1958, the bishops denied that the Anglican Communion owed its unity to the prayer-book at all.¹⁰

³ Sykes S, *“The Anglican Character”* in Bunting I, ed., *Celebrating the Anglican Way*, (London 1996), p. 22.

⁴ Wright N T, *Preface to “Anglican Evangelical Identity: Yesterday and Today”*, (London 2009), p. 10.

⁵ Sykes S, *“The Integrity of Anglicanism”*, (Oxford 1978), p. 1.

⁶ Kaye B, *“Anglican Belief”* in Bunting, I., *op. cit*, p. 51.

⁷ Findon J, *“Developments in the Understanding and Practice of Episcopacy in the Church of England”*, in *‘Visible Unity and the Ministry of Oversight’*, (West Wickham 1996), p.79

⁸ Wolf W, *“Anglicanism and its Spirit”* in Wolf W, ed. *‘The Spirit of Anglicanism’*, *op. cit*, p. 162

⁹ Buchanan C, *“The Winds of Change”* in Hefling C, & Shattuck C, *‘The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey’*, (Oxford 1988), p. 238.

¹⁰ Wolf W, *op. cit*, p.172.

Liturgical revision is now an ongoing work, performed at a local, provincial level.¹¹ This advent of new liturgies and styles of worship has led Anglican liturgy into a pluralistic phase, wherein some voices accuse that: “One man’s idea of it is now as good as any other’s.”¹²

Is this a negative development? Through their local work, liturgical revisionists may find themselves re-defining the boundaries of Anglican worship as a whole, but this is arguably not their primary concern. Their goal is to keep liturgy relevant and understandable, fit for purpose in a changing world. As Kaye puts it:

*“The Anglican theologian is someone who is intensely concerned to relate the faith which the Church has inherited to the demands and tragedies and the joys of the life which members of the Church now live in society.”*¹³

Archbishop Rowan Williams expresses similarly:

*“...the specific Anglican contribution to the theology of liturgical construction and reconstruction has to do with the making of liturgy that connects the catholic pattern of life in the body of Christ with the patterns of community that prevail in this place and this time.”*¹⁴

We might therefore say that liturgical reform is a good and necessary thing for the growth of the Church, and not (as one occasionally hears claimed) merely an unwarranted dilution of some kind of ‘original’ Anglicanism that was somehow purer and universal. Our liturgy is often distinctive, and the effects of a ‘but one use’ approach still occasionally give the fleeting sense of ‘home’ to a travelling Anglican worshipper, hearing a familiar form of prayer being offered up in the midst of the different sounds, sights and smells of another country. Nostalgia, however, is not always a good servant of worship, and therefore the 1988 Lambeth Conference endorsed enculturation of liturgy, in order that provinces might “seek that expression of worship that is appropriate to its Christian people in their cultural context.”¹⁵

The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral—Our Doctrine?

A doctrine is the teaching which informs religious and moral practice, a guide to living the Christian life.¹⁶ If we cannot agree a set mode of liturgical practice to unify us clearly as Anglicans, is there at least a universal set of teachings to undergird our differing expressions of faith?

¹¹ Sykes S, “The Genius of Anglicanism” in Rowell G, *op. cit.*, p.231.

¹² Packer J I, “The Evangelical identity problem: An Analysis by Jim Packer (1978),” in *Anglican Evangelical Identity: Yesterday and Today*, (London 2009) p. 67.

¹³ Kaye B, “Anglican Belief”, in Bunting I, ed., *op. cit.*, p.51

¹⁴ Williams R, “Imagining the Kingdom: Some Questions for Anglican Worship Today”, in Stevenson K, & Spinks B, ‘The Identity of Anglican Worship’, (London 1991), p. 6.

¹⁵ Buchanan C, “The Winds of Change” in Hefling C, & Shattuck C, *op. cit.* p. 238.

¹⁶ Wolf W, *op. cit.*, p.160.

The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (as the name suggests) has loosely four tenets:

- The Normativeness of Scripture
- The Sacraments as Instituted by Christ
- The Catholic Creeds
- The Apostolic Ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.

As of the 1888 Lambeth Conference, these four tenets are perceived by some to be the terms upon which Anglicans unify with each other.

However, as we have already seen expressed by Findon, building on such foundations as the normativeness of scripture, or a system of sacramental theology, implies that these foundation-stones have the necessary quality of a static, self-evident, timeless and uncontroversial character, which of course they do not. Wolf comments:

*“It is nearer to the truth, although an over-simplification, to say that Anglicanism has been more productive of Anglican Theology than that Anglican Theology has produced Anglicanism.”*¹⁷

Just as God is vivacious and boundless, so likewise are the tasks of theology and doctrine; they are ongoing and not fixed. True to the spirit of *semper reformanda*, our understanding of what such ideas mean not only is, but ought always to be, within a process of refinement and development.

Beyond Doctrine, Practice and Theology: Finding an ‘Anglican’ Identity

Just as we deceive ourselves if we think of Anglicanism as a fixed set of doctrines or a mode of practice, we are also misled if we credit what we think and do as being too strongly ‘Anglican’. This is illustrated by Sykes:

*“The history of Anglicanism will show us, I believe, how dependent we are on our fellow Christians, on the Catholic Church and tradition for so much in our spirituality, on Lutherans and Calvinists for vital elements of our theology, on Congregationalism for so much of our modern thinking about the laity, on Methodist impulses wherever evangelical revival has been effective—and these are but a selection of possible ways of seeing our interdependence.”*¹⁸

The spirit of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral was intended to be one of pioneering ecumenicalism which would unify Anglicans with one another and with the global body of Christ in a more complete sense. This was based on the idea that a return to certain principles instituted by Christ and the Apostles, and borne out in the life of the early Church, would be enough to restore Christian unity.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.139.

¹⁸ Sykes, S., “The Genius of Anglicanism” in Rowell, G., ed., ‘English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism’, (Oxford: 1992), p.235.

¹⁹ Wolf W, *op. cit* p.167

The Quadrilateral, however, is not without areas of contention. Straight off it was unclear whether the statement was propounding the ‘maximal’ or the ‘minimal’ elements required for Christian unity.²⁰ Furthermore, it is noticeable that the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral does not agree even with itself—the variant wording found between the American and Lambeth versions of the document giving rise to differing emphases.²¹

Thus we find that, though loosely perceived as the tenets around which Anglicans are unified, very few members of Churches of other denominations are aware of the document’s existence. Also, even within Anglicanism, there are differing interpretations of how the document should be understood. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral has given rise to a large body of Anglican secondary literature, anxious to explain exactly how one might interpret the nature of the Apostolic Ministry, or the Normativeness of Scripture— with as many different ideas as there are publications! At best, The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral gives only a very limited picture of what we might call ‘Anglican Doctrine’.

A Narrative Theology of Anglicanism

I hope I have shown that ‘Anglicanism’ cannot be defined by anything static in terms of doctrine or practice. It begs the question, therefore, to what exactly do I subscribe when I describe myself as an Anglican? Are there any particular characteristics at all that define ‘Anglicanism’, and if not, is there any point in fighting for the continued existence of the Anglican Church?

As Stevenson and Spinks point out in their preface to *‘The identity of Anglican Worship’*

*“It is our firm conviction that identity is not something that is self-consciously sought after. It is, rather, a quality of life that emerges with maturity. It is, indeed, an essential feature of the life of a Communion that has, over a period of time, listened to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.”*²²

As I see it, when we disrobe ‘Anglicanism’ from the ever-evolving doctrinal and practical considerations in which it is adorned at any time, we are nevertheless not bereft of something to call ‘Anglican’. Despite its ever evolving and maturing shape, Anglicanism’s existence endures. This is because it is, at its core, a narrative, one that is both personal and communal.

Such a definition of Anglicanism is disconcertingly vague and worryingly post-modern. However, former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey speaks of his own ‘conversion’ to Anglicanism in such auto-biographical terms for theological reasons. He states:

*“I believe that at the heart of our faith lies an experiential encounter with God.”*²³

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.167

²¹ *Ibid*, p.168

²² Stevenson K, & Spinks B, *op. cit*, preface p. x.

²³ Carey G, *“Celebrating the Anglican Way”*, in Bunting I, *op. cit*, p.13.

Within this thought, Carey is reflecting the contemporary theological thought of post-modern times. The Renaissance days of Bacon and Locke, when a thing was what it could be reasoned to be, have passed. Thinking has moved on, and the mood of the day is to describe what a thing is in terms of how we experience it as individuals, and our Anglicanism is no exception. At its core, theology 'must be at least biography'.²⁴ This movement is often termed 'Narrative Theology' and is rooted in the idea that since Christian faith is rooted in particular historical events which are recounted in the narratives of Christian scripture and tradition, then so our faith and understanding of God must continue to be assessed, and examined as a narrative entity.²⁵

Perhaps, for our purposes, we could more accurately say we are conducting a 'Narrative Ecclesiology' —defining Anglicanism as a confluence of personal narratives held in both tension and relationship with each other.

Since every experience will be personal and relative, consequently there is no one correct way of describing anything. The closest we can come to a full description is by pooling our experiences to create a communal narrative, or description.

This is something akin to the fable of Five Blind Men around an Elephant. One blind man grabs its tail and states that an elephant is like a snake, another touches the leg and states that the elephant is like a tree, yet another grabs the elephant's tusks and states that an elephant is like a horn. None of these men is incorrect, yet none can attain to the whole truth unless they pool their experiences. As Stroup explains it:

"One of the strengths of narrative theology has been that it provides a foundation for theology by uniting experience and reflection..."²⁶

Rowan Williams expresses a similar idea, mooting that there actually *is* something which he believes might be called distinctive Anglican Doctrine, but that it only becomes visible when one examines a number of historical strands of thought and reflects on a number of well-known Anglican figures in history.²⁷ Thus there is therefore no formula for becoming Anglican, no set of check boxes, "simply a description of how and where some kind of recognisable historical identity came to exist."²⁸

My Personal Narrative

Speaking personally, I might attribute my Anglicanism to a love of liturgy, but I attend a Church which sits loose to liturgical fussiness. I might wear my Anglicanism as a badge enabling me to stand in solidarity with great Anglicans of the past: William Wilberforce perhaps? or C. S. Lewis? I might claim that there is some great theological tenet of

²⁴ Stroup G W, *"The Promise of Narrative Theology"*, (London 1984), p.76.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.17

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.17

²⁷ Williams R, *"Anglican Identities"* (London 2004), p.1

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.7

Anglicanism which attracts me, or some distinct matter of praxis which no other Church has got quite right in my view.

All these options are available to me; there are many features of Anglicanism which are *characteristic* of it. However, on closer examination, we find that no one feature or characteristic can be argued to be necessarily *distinctive* or *unique*.²⁹ For example, were I to cite some great historical accomplishment—Wilberforce’s work towards the abolishment of the slave trade perhaps—it would be incorrect to imply that this accomplishment was attributable to his Anglicanism *per se*, as if a man from any other ‘branch’ of Christian faith would have failed where Wilberforce saw success.

However much I kick against the goads and search for a tidy ‘excuse’ for being Anglican, ultimately it transpires that my own Anglicanism is a choice of the heart. It is not a theological or *ecclesio-political* statement, but a response to God’s call to marry in to a particular branch of the family of Christ.

This thought is at once both confining and liberating. I have the example of Jonah to caution me in the working out of God’s call in my life, yet this marriage to Anglicanism, (incidentally, it is a marriage into which I entered not more than two years ago) is not a reluctant drag, nor an adoption in any childlike sense, by which I mean I am not a childlike victim or beneficiary of the highs and lows of Anglican family life. Contrary to this, and far more liberating, I find myself placed here by God as a partner, an equal player alongside every other Anglican. Archbishop Rowan Williams rightly states that the future course of Anglicanism is unknown.³⁰ I am a force for change and growth and encouragement within Anglicanism, if only I will choose to be so.

The strength and promise of creating a narrative account of identity is that it requires a spectrum of voices alongside my own. Again, as Stroup expresses it:

*“Narrative theology appears to open new channels of conversation between the systematic theologian, the biblical scholar, the social scientist, and, most importantly, the lay person who long ago gave up on the theologian as a resource for understanding the Christian faith.”*³¹

A Narrative Account of Anglicanism, furthermore, acts as something of a prophylactic against more negative effects of institutionalism. To cite Wolf:

*“Anglicanism, in committing itself to follow the way of comprehensiveness, has dared to face up to the need to die to what is specifically Anglican in order to be raised up by the power of God ...”*³²

²⁹ Sykes S, “The Anglican Character” in Bunting I, ed., *op. cit.*, p.23.

³⁰ Williams R, *op. cit.*, p.7.

³¹ Stroup G W, “The Promise of Narrative Theology”, (London 1984) p.6

³² Wolf W, *op. cit.*, p.182.

And Why I Shall Remain So

*“Is Anglicanism a church without a vision, one which has ceased even to pretend to believe that its decisions are guided by God’s Holy Spirit? ... In Modern Anglicanism there has taken place, through the involvement of clergy and laity in synodical government, a practical experiment in expressing authority in a process, rather than in the issuing of definitive decrees.”*³³

The journey into a narrative account of Anglicanism has highlighted one of its key strengths—which needs to be upheld—consisting of the *empowerment* that the Anglican system bestows upon its adherents. I cannot claim this as some distinct matter of praxis to explain why I became an Anglican, but I can claim that it is a significant factor in *why I shall remain so*.

As previously discussed, it is possible for certain features of Anglicanism to be characteristic without being unique or distinctive. I have thus far been attempting to define Anglicanism in and of itself; however there is some value in commenting on the Anglican Church as distinct from the Roman Catholic Church to which the members of the Ordinariate are transferring their affiliation.

At the heart of the distinction between the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Church lies the perennial barrier to ecumenical relations—a differing belief in the nature of authority, and the exercise thereof.³⁴ More specifically, even the word ‘Anglicanism’ in its emergent state in the 1830s appears to be a development of the French word ‘*Gallicanisme*’, which denoted an anti-Papal movement that had emerged within French Catholicism.³⁵ As previously intimated, there is very little which is pan-Anglican, but it is true to say that the Anglicans, right across the spectrum, do not make their allegiance to the Pope.³⁶

This, of course, cannot be called distinctive *Anglicanism*, since it is characteristic of Protestantism as a whole. Despite this, one might suggest (as Sykes does) that there is something of a uniquely *Anglican* standpoint regarding the dispersal of authority and the sheer inevitability of conflict within Christianity.³⁷ As a result, Anglicanism persists in preserving the historic structure of Bishops, Priests, Deacons and Laity.

With its beginnings (arguably) in scripture, this particular system of ecclesiastical polity has falteringly withstood time and trial to prove its convenience both within Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. (As Tolkien puts it, “The old that is strong does not wither.”³⁸)

³³ Sykes S, “The Genius of Anglicanism” in Rowell G, ed. *op. cit.*, p.238.

³⁴ Countryman L W, “The Language of Ordination”, (Philadelphia 1992) p.1

³⁵ Sykes S, *op. cit.*, p.235.

³⁶ Kaye, B, *op. cit.*, p.42.

³⁷ Sykes S, *op. cit.*, p.233.

³⁸ Tolkien J R R, “The Riddle of Strider” in ‘The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring’, (London 1995) p.167.

However, though both denominations retain this structure, and similar ordination rites, there are fundamental differences in the way in which this system of authority is worked out. Countryman points out:

*“Where an Episcopal bishop’s authority is fairly modest, that of a Roman bishop is much more extensive. Where an Episcopal bishop bears heavy responsibility for formulating the official teaching of the Episcopal Church ... a Roman bishop is seen primarily as a spokesman for a relatively uniform denomination whose policies are centrally determined.”*³⁹

Episcopacy—Our Modus Operandi

If liturgy is the first thought conjured in the mind of the average Anglican defining their Church, then the second is almost certainly *diversity*. Anglicanism has achieved a level of notoriety for the manner in which it has come to unify divergent views. Opinions differ as to the merits of Anglican diversity; arguably some would like to see a more unified statement of opinion on certain issues. Be that as it may, our diversity is assuredly here to stay, and such unity amid diversity requires incredibly pro-active maintenance, at every level of the ecclesiastical polity. As has been very recently expressed by Ramsden:

*“Anglicans, we believe, have been called to live a particular style of Christian witness which, because it is less juridical and confessional than that of some others, clearly requires a high level of mutual concern and respect.”*⁴⁰

It is a common misconception that diversity implies error. If there are ten variant opinions, then one must assume supremacy over the other nine by being ‘more’ correct. However, as we have seen through our examination of Anglicanism as a confluence of narratives, the truth of a matter is not always at its most attainable from examining one viewpoint alone. As Hooker once wrote, “In the mind of an Anglican, comprehensiveness is not compromise.”⁴¹

As Fuller once explained it:

*“We should not apologise for tensions within our Church; we should not be frightened of them; ... as you and those who disagree with you remain loyal and discuss, debate, argue, in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, then we may glory in the goodly heritage God has given us.”*⁴²

Herein lies the reason that most Anglicans agree on the necessity of retaining the episcopate, in order to maintain unity and co-ordinate our large and seemingly unwieldy decision-making process in the Anglican Communion.⁴³ As Krumm expresses it:

³⁹ Countryman L W, *op. cit.*, p.3

⁴⁰ Comments made by Right Reverend Peter Ramsden in “Papua New Guinea Approves Covenant”, <<<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2011/12/15/ACNS4998>>> (Accessed: 18.12.2011)

⁴¹ Hooker R, cited in Wolf W, *op. cit.*, p.179.

⁴² Fuller T, cited in Wolf, W, *op. cit.*, p.153.

⁴³ Wolf W, “Anglicanism and its Spirit” in Wolf W, *op. cit.*, p.140.

"...(The Episcopalian) soon discovers that he has been taken up into an extraordinarily democratic Church organisation, where each man's voice can be heard and where the free processes of discussion, deliberation and decision formulate major policy." ⁴⁴

It is commented by Sykes that such a public decision-making process is slow and seemingly lacking in authority.⁴⁵ Nevertheless we live in a time where every branch of the reformed Church is coming to a place of questioning its self-understanding in a post-modern world. It is my firm belief that the open structure of authority within Anglicanism is the best equipped to allow every voice to be heard in this discussion. It is through doing so that we can attain to our best idea of the truth and insight, and significantly, can chart the 'unknown' future of Anglicanism referred to by Archbishop Rowan Williams.

Conclusion

It is my firm belief that it is through a confluence of narratives that we best attain to what may or may not make Anglicanism distinctive in the present age. More importantly though, it is through such a confluence and coming together that we can best attain to a forward looking vision of where Anglicanism will go and what it will achieve.

As previously stated, diversity requires an incredibly pro-active maintenance. Wright expresses it as follows:

"Unanimity between workers is not an optional extra, but something in itself to be prayed and worked towards." ⁴⁶ (Philippians 2.2)

The characteristic Anglican structure of bishops, priests, deacons and laity equips us well to be thorough and pro-active in maintaining our unity at every level of Church life, and to ensure every voice is heard in the formulation of major policy and the way forward for the Church.

I am an Anglican because this is where God called me; because my narrative now forms part of what Anglicanism *is*, and (equally) Anglicanism now forms part of my narrative. Put another way: Anglicanism has become part of who I am, and I have become part of what Anglicanism is.

I believe I shall remain an Anglican, because as an adherent therein I have the opportunity and responsibility also to shape what Anglicanism *will be* in the future. As an equal player I am empowered to bring my story so far, and my sense of discernment and understanding of where God is taking us next, and to join it with other Anglicans, to discuss, to deliberate and to pray, until the way forward for Anglicanism becomes clear.

⁴⁴ Krumm J, "Why Chose the Episcopal Church?" (Cincinnati 1966) p.85.

⁴⁵ Sykes S, "The Genius of Anglicanism" in Rowell G, ed. *op. cit.*, p. 237.

⁴⁶ Wright N T, "Evangelical Anglican Identity" in 'Anglican Evangelical Identity: Yesterday and Today' (London 2009), p.82.

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