

St Boniface Trust Essay Competition

Why I am an Anglican and believe I will remain so

Arthur Middleton

[The judges thought this essay 'a delight to read'. The author is a retired priest who lives in Durham, England. He is an honorary fellow of St Chad's College, Durham.]

"When the Church of England was suffering persecution in the time of Cromwell, it was to Dr. Hammond, more than to any other single man, that she owed the continuance of her existence ... It was by his holiness, charity and devoted labours that a tone was given to the clergy of that period which bore good fruit afterwards."¹

Prof. Owen Chadwick wrote² '*... if High Churchmen of that age like Bramhall or Thorndike had been asked what led them not to compromise, they would have replied in terms like the following:*

Our paramount duty is to the Catholic Church; our subordinate and derivative duty is to the Church of England as the representative of the Catholic Church in this country. The Catholic Church is known by its faithfulness to the primitive model. The Church of England has no choice but to follow that model, must seek to apply the principle rigorously and exactly.³ "I am satisfied," wrote Thorndike in 1660, "that the differences, upon which we are divided, cannot be justly settled upon any terms, which any part of the Whole Church shall have just cause to refuse, as inconsistent with the unity of the Whole Church." ' ⁴

Chadwick continued,

'The argument ... represents a contention which has survived the centuries and must

¹ G. G. Perry, *Life of Henry Hammond*. S.P.C.K. No date. P.3. Bodleian suggests 1864, in the catalogue

² Preface, *From Uniformity to Unity 1662-1962*, edit, Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick [SPCK, London 1962], pp.13ff.

³ A. W. Haddan, "Life of Herbert Thorndike," *Works*, vol. vi, p.218.

⁴ "The Due Way of composing Differences on Foot," *Works*, vol. v. p.29.

*still be reckoned with ... Any act which divides Anglicanism from the universal Church of the centuries is to be rejected, even if that act offers temporary or local advantage; and the test of universality, in this sad, divided state of Christendom, may be found in appeal to the ancient and undivided Church of the first centuries. The question whether there are sufficient ambiguities or exceptions in the Episcopal practice of the ancient Church to warrant modern exceptions, Thorndike answered with a vigorous "no".'*⁵

On the one hand, this battle has re-emerged in the form of extreme conservative evangelicalism that accords exclusive priority to scripture over the sacramental life of the Church, disdains denominational structures and forms of worship such as the Prayer Book and liturgical worship. It is an attempt to set the agenda for the entire Anglican Communion⁶ and make us captive to that same Continental Protestantism as the interpretative principle of Anglicanism. On the other hand we are where we are because of another kind of battle that would make us captive to a sociological reductionism as the interpretative principle of Anglicanism. This uses political correctness to re-interpret the Bible and apostolic faith and order. It is a secularism that stalks the Church and would reduce Christian Faith and Life to a respectable secular humanism. It wants to set the agenda for the Anglican Communion and dresses it in Christian language. It is what I call genetically modified theology and like genetically modified crops we cannot tell where it will lead us as sight is lost of where we have come from. In a time like this it is crucial that we know what the spirit or patrimony of Anglicanism is as the great theologians of our Anglican tradition did. So let me turn now to this matter of the Anglican spirit.

The Constant

The constant of Anglicanism is the Catholic faith of the Primitive church, the *faith once for all delivered to the saints*, summarized in the Rule of Faith or Scripture and the Creeds. This is the doctrine of Anglicanism. She refuses to affirm as of the faith any doctrine not so qualified in or by Scripture or the Primitive Church. John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury in the time of the Reformers, affirmed in his *Apologia*, that "Scripture and the Primitive Church are the criteria by which the authenticity of a Church and the truth of its teaching are assessed;"⁷ and John Bramhall claimed that the Church of England was not "a new Church, a new Religion, or new Holy Orders."⁸ This constant of the Anglican spirit is found in different shapes from the 16th Century onwards.

Distinctiveness

There is a distinctiveness about Anglicanism. This derives from theological method not content and emerged with Archbishop Parker's theological interpretation of the Elizabethan Settlement in the 1571 Thirty-Nine Articles, *The Second Book of Homilies* and the "Canon of Preaching". Rooted doctrinally in Scripture and antiquity, we find this method in the works of Anglican divines and in our formularies. Richard Hooker articulated it in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, and Michael Ramsey describes its spirit as, "... doing theology to the sound of church bells," to stress the essential connection between theology, doctrine and

⁵ Chadwick, *op cit*, pp 15-16.

⁶ see Chris McGillion, *The Chosen Ones: the Politics of Salvation in the Anglican Church*.

⁷ 1562: *Apologia for the Church of England*, John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, being the chief author.

⁸ Archbishop John Bramhall Works, Vol 1. LACT. p.119.

Christian worship. *The Book of Common Prayer* is as much about a way of doing theology as about liturgy, *lex orandi est lex credendi*, which means that the Rule of Prayer governs the Rule of Belief; and as Athanasius' theology cannot be understood apart from the liturgy of Bishop Serapion, so Anglicanism cannot be understood apart from *The Book of Common Prayer*.

For Hooker, God's revelation in Christ and the Church, what is called *the Whole Christ*, is authoritative, but the language in which it is expressed is not infallible. In essence it is rational but mysterious, defying exact definition. Lancelot Andrewes put it succinctly: "One canon ... two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries and the series of the Fathers in that period ... determine the boundary of our faith".⁹

Divine Revelation

Speaking of God's revelation does not deny God's presence in creation. C.S. Lewis¹⁰, whose theology was greatly influenced by Hooker, noted that Hooker's universe was "drenched with Deity." In the *Oxford History of English Literature* Lewis speaks of Hooker's model universe as being "drenched with Deity" and Hooker's words "All things that are of God, have God in them and they in himself likewise, and yet their substance and his are very different." Lewis spells out what this presence of the transcendent God in his world implies, keeping together things that can easily be set in opposition,

"reason as well as revelation, nature as well as grace, the commonwealth as well as the Church, are equally though diversely, 'of God' ... All kinds of knowledge, all good arts, sciences and disciplines ... we meet in all levels the divine wisdom shining out through 'the beautiful variety of things' in 'their manifold and yet harmonious dissimilitude'."

This is nothing less than the patristic vision of God's creation filled with his energy and wisdom, the presence of God participating in his world which can be the only context within which to speak of man's participation in God in terms of deification. "The Word of God, who is God, wills in all things and at all times to work the mystery of his embodiment."¹¹ Within this context Hooker expounds a vision of man which finds its fulfilment in God, a theocentric humanism. "If then in him we are blessed, it is by force of participation and conjunction with him ... so that although we be men, yet being into God united we live as it were the life of God."¹²

This divine presence is one in revelation and nature, creation and redemption, consistent and reasonable. In revelation it brings to a climax what God does in nature and in nature it gives us the clue to revelation, because "The Word" that "became flesh ..." is the Word or *Logos* at work in all creation. So the Incarnation becomes central and primary to Anglican theology. We see this appreciation of the natural world in those great poets of our Anglican tradition — George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne, John Keble, T. S. Eliot and R. S. Thomas — who discerned God's presence in his creation. The *Private Prayers of Lancelot Andrewes* are sensitive to this same divine presence in the natural

⁹ *Opuscula, (L.A.C.T.) p.91.*

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, "English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding drama", *The Oxford Dictionary of English Literature (Oxford, 1954), p.460.*

¹¹ A. M. Allchin, *The Kingdom of Love and Knowledge (DLT: London, 1979), Ch 6.*

¹² Hooker, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Bk. I, xi, 2.*

world. It is a direct consequence of their embracing of a profound sacramentality that the Incarnation implies and is so often lacking in theologies where the Incarnation is not central.

Scripture, Tradition, Reason

Michael Ramsey claimed that it was the nature of Elizabethan theology rather than imitation of Hooker in the style of Lutherans to Luther or Calvinists to Calvin that made it possible to creatively appeal to Scripture and tradition and it must remain so today. Scripture is the supreme authority because it contains all things necessary to salvation, but not as regulations for everything in the Church's life, for the Church has authority to decree rites and ceremonies. Our Formularies affirm the Old Testament revealing Christ by pointing to him and the New Testament revealing Christ fulfilling what is foreshadowed in the Old. The Bible is about God's saving work and self-revelation through law and prophets, Christ being the head and climax.

Scripture became the self-evident basis but because the Bible without the Church becomes a mere collection of ancient documents, Scriptural interpretation depends on the appeal to antiquity as mutually inclusive. The Bible and the Church must be dancing partners and where the one is detached from the other it leads to an uncontrollable doctrinal space-flight. Anglicanism maintained the Catholic notion of a perfect union between Scripture and Tradition or the Church and Scripture in that the Church's authority is not distinct from that of Scripture but rather that they are one. The Jesuit theologian Fr George Tavard claimed that, in making Scripture the self-evident basis of Anglicanism but alongside Tradition as mutually inclusive, a consistency with the patristic spirit is maintained.

The Anglican Church ... tried to maintain the Catholic notion of perfect union between Church and Scripture. The statement of Johann Gropper, that the Church's authority is not distinct from that of Scripture, but rather that they are one, corresponds to the Anglican view of the Early Church, as it corresponds to the catholic conception of the Church at all times.¹³

Tavard pointed out that most theologians of the Counter-Reformation separated Scripture and Tradition, at different times making one or the other a partial source of faith. He added that "In both cases the theology of the catholic eras, patristic and medieval, was better represented by the Anglican view than by many Catholic writers in the Counter-Reformation period."¹⁴ Anglican divinity has an ecclesial context in which the Church bears witness to the truth not by reminiscence or from the words of others, but from its own living, unceasing experience, from its Catholic fullness that has its roots in the Primitive Church. This appeal is not merely to history but to a charismatic principle, tradition, which together with Scripture contains the truth of divine revelation, a truth that lives in the Church. In this spirit Anglican divines looked to the Fathers as interpreters of Scripture. The 1571 Canons authorize preachers to preach nothing but what is found in Holy Scripture and what the ancient Fathers have collected from the same, ensuring that the interpretation of Scripture is consistent with what Christians have believed always, everywhere and by all, the Vincentian Canon. So Scripture and Tradition or the Church, are the first two features of our patrimony which as Prestige points out required specific principles of interpretation.

¹³ George Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church* (Burns Oates, London, 1959), p.245.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

“The voice of the Bible could be plainly heard only if its texts were interpreted broadly and rationally, in accordance with the apostolic creed and the evidence of the historical practice of Christendom. It was the heretics that relied most on isolated texts and the Catholics who paid more attention on the whole to scriptural principles. Two presuppositions are implied: first, that the Bible does provide sufficient guidance to spiritual truth, to the actions and character of God; and second, that the Christian Church does possess sufficient inspiration to give a true interpretation of the records. Neither presupposition can be mathematically proved. Both are axioms of spiritual practice. Those who respond to the Gospel and obey its precepts are the best judges of its truth.”¹⁵

The third feature in this theological method is the appeal to reason. Hooker’s response to Puritan narrowness, which saw the Bible as a handbook of regulations for everything in life and religion was to elucidate a much wider and realistic understanding of divine law. God is Creator as well as Redeemer. The harmony and purpose in the natural order are expressions of the divine Reason which lies behind Scripture and the decrees of Church Councils, emanating from God himself and found in the lives of all his creatures. God’s revelation comes to us in various ways and our reason and conscience arrive at knowledge of God’s will by a number of concurrent means and faculties. In creation God reveals himself as the principle of rationality, purpose and unity, described as the divine *Logos* that informs our consciences and minds enabling us to perceive purpose and order in the universe. Such knowledge requires revelation to complete it and redemption to cleanse and free the heart and mind from things that inhibit and corrupt us. It is an appeal within the context of the appeal to Scripture and antiquity. Unbalancing in one direction degenerates into the ghetto mentality of either Scripturalism, or Traditionalism, or Liberalism. The 19th century scientific undermining of Christianity found this threefold appeal able to respond to and absorb scientific method and historical criticism.

The fashionable addition of *experience* is unnecessary because Tradition enfolds past and present, and embraces as its source and power the contemporaneity of the Gospel through which the true character of present experience is refracted and thereby critically evaluated. It is a way of looking at and experiencing the world; but with the kingdom of God, the *sui generis* experience of the Church and not the world as the ultimate term of reference. This threefold appeal is found in the Reformers and in divines after Hooker; Andrewes, Laud, Hammond, Thorndike and Taylor to name a few. An ecclesiastical use of antiquity and reason is found in Daniel Waterland, to defend the scriptural doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation against Deists and English Arians in the 18th century.

Inspiration and Poetry

Dean Church pointed out that Andrewes recalled an age that otherwise would have been stifled in the looms of Protestant scholasticism, into a diviner, purer, freer air, back to the many-sided thought, to the sanctified divinity of the undivided Church. By the influence of this divinity he led his contemporaries away from a theology which ended in cross-grained

¹⁵ G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics*, (1954 SPCK) p. 21.

and perverse conscientiousness to a theology which ended in adoration, self-surrender and blessing, and in the awe and joy of welcoming the Eternal Beauty, the Eternal Sanctity and the Eternal Love, the Sacrifice and Reconciliation of the world.¹⁶

This fusion of thought and feeling in Hooker and Andrewes is what drew that 20th century man of letters, T.S.Eliot, back to Christian faith and life and prompted his small book of essays *For Lancelot Andrewes*, who for Eliot embodied in himself the learning, the theology and the devotion which marks the best men of this age. For Eliot, Hooker and Andrewes made the English Church more worthy of intellectual assent, and in them, as in the actual life and worship of the period, he found a Catholicism which was not ignorant either of the Renaissance or the Reformation. Here for Eliot was a tradition which had already moved into the modern world that was a way of living and thinking the Christian tradition and which had taken humanism and criticism into itself, without being destroyed by them.

Throughout the centuries this tradition has, in addition to C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot, inspired other creative writers. Here are a number of representative names that is by no means an exhaustive list. John Donne (1571-1631) the famous Dean of St. Paul's, a metaphysical poet, preacher and convert from Roman Catholicism encouraged George Herbert (1593-1633) and influenced other poets such as T. S. Eliot. Herbert's poetry is representative of the Anglican Communion, his great book being *The Temple*. His writing is the fruit of an integrated life in which the vocation of poet, priest and pastor is richly blended. It is why he lives and continues to speak to every age bringing that touch of heaven into the ordinary. Herbert was the father of poets. Henry Vaughan, another seventeenth century poet, a convert from earthly to divine love, was a spiritual son of Herbert, a diligent and excellent churchman, who deplored the religious disharmony of his time, and whose desire was not so much for order in conduct as for unity in the soul.¹⁷

This sensitivity to see the extraordinary in the ordinary is present in the poetry of Thomas Traherne (1637-1674), like Herbert a priest and poet whose works were accidentally discovered early in the twentieth century. Traherne's poetry speaks of prayer and the vision that is born of it, the vision of a transfigured world which is seen in *The Way of a Pilgrim* and is at the heart of Eastern Orthodoxy but also is present in our own tradition. This devotional poetry emerges from an active state of mind and spirit sensitive to the presence of God that is seeking union with him in words. Thomas Ken (1637-1711), the non-juring bishop, is well-known for his two famous morning and evening hymns, *Awake, my Soul, and with the sun* and *Glory to Thee my God, this night*.

In the eighteenth century we have the evangelical piety of Henry Venn (1725-1797) in his prose work *The Complete Duty of Man*, the hymns and poems of John and Charles Wesley, Harriet Auber (1773-1862) the author of many devotional poems (*The Spirit of the Psalms* 1829) and the well-known hymn *Our Blest Redeemer, ere He breathed*. *The Hymnal* is a manual of doctrine and devotion, a treasury of creative devotional poetry from which the laity learn their theology. These were classical evangelicals in that while they stressed the importance of personal experience and commitment to Christ they accepted the ecclesiology of the Book of Common Prayer, along with the doctrines contained in the Articles, Prayer Book and Homilies. In this they differ from many contemporary

¹⁶ R. Church, "Lancelot Andrewes" in *Masters of English Theology*, ed. By A. Barry (London 1877), p.90.

¹⁷ Edward Dowden, *Puritan and Anglican: Studies in Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.)

Evangelicals whose emphasis is on Gospel ministry. It is in the nineteenth-century that we find another book in which the poetry of the Anglican Communion is happily represented, John Keble's *The Christian Year*. This collection is designed to exhibit 'the soothing tendency of the Prayer Book.' He uses the word 'soothing' that comes from finding the 'peace of God which passes all understanding.' The 'soothing' grace which Christ brings is the healing, strengthening and ordering power of the Spirit that is at the heart of Christian worship. Hence, Keble's sense that the Prayer Book has a 'soothing tendency'. In Keble's poetry we see the influence of that rediscovery of the symbolic, sacramental and imaginative character of the Christian Revelation.

In that same period is Christina Rossetti (1830-94), a devout member of the Church of England and one of England's foremost women poets, whose poetry and prose is characterised by spiritual longing. Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) was prepared for confirmation by John Keble and was described as 'the spiritual child of Mr Keble, whose novels and stories reached a wide public and won her a secure place in English literature.'¹⁸ She is securely placed as a loyal member of the Church of England and her books could be given out by parents to children in the certainty that they would improve their mind. She became a teacher and was the author of many fiction and non-fiction works, including her best-seller, *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853). She made the idea of the Church as a great living force really a working principle in the lives of many of her readers. Throughout her quiet, almost uneventful life she worked incessantly for the glory of God and the good of His Church. She showed in every book how intimately creed and character are intertwined; she tried to inculcate always, not by direct words but by implication, that the one thing needful 'is to find out what God requires me to do'.

The twentieth-century has alongside T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis, the poetry and prose of John Betjeman, the poetry of R. S. Thomas, the outstanding poet of the latter part of the century, the prose works of Dorothy L. Sayers and Evelyn Underhill. A Church that could nurture and satisfy such people with their humility, their wisdom, their learning and overflowing love, the strength and capacity of their conviction and unceasing devotion to God, is a Church in which the depth and richness of religious experience can be known. The final goal of all theology is union with God and in this sense theology is always mystical and is not a question of an exceptional experience reserved for a few. It is a question of the interiorisation of the revealed Christian mystery, to which Andrewes calls all the baptised. This theology is mystical in the sense that it is not an abstract reflection, but a concrete way of living the mystery in the deepening of the faith through prayer and the renunciation of one's own will. It is a way of the submission of the human to the divine will, which allows the Holy Spirit to impregnate human nature. For Andrewes this is only possible in fidelity to the given realities of revelation, that is to say, in the scriptural and patristic tradition or in other words in the catholicity of the Church.

Catholics and Evangelicals

Since the Reformation, there have been in fact two great movements of revival in the Church of England, the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century, and the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth. They gave their respective shape to the two principal traditions, the Evangelical and the Catholic, which exist to this day side by side and with great vigour in our Church. Yet both traditions are older than these revivals.

¹⁸ S. L. Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement* (Mowbrays, 1915), p.220.

*Their continuity and homogeneous development can be traced from Reformation times: through Nicholas Ridley, bishop of London, to Charles Simeon (1759-1836); through Lancelot Andrewes, bishop of Winchester, to Bishop Charles Gore (1853-1932); through Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding to Richard Meux Benson, the founder of the Society of St John the Evangelist at Cowley (1824- 1915). At all periods throughout these centuries, we observe men of great piety and devotion within both traditions: Henry Martyn, the Evangelical missionary (1781- 1812) and John Keble, one of the fathers of the Oxford Movement (1792-1866); Charles Simeon, one of the main leaders of the Evangelical Revival and Edward Bouverie Pusey, the outstanding Tractarian leader (1800-82); James Hannington, the Evangelical bishop of East Equatorial Africa (1847-85) and Frank Weston, the Angle-Catholic bishop of Zanzibar(1871-1924). Yet the differences between each pair of men seem to disappear, when contrasted with the Christ-centred devotion which enlivened them all ... The remarkable feature of the different types of devotion, shown by various saintly men of the Church of England, is not the tenacity with which each holds to his particular tradition, but their common devotion to Christ. This devotion has always grown, and still grows, out of the love and study of the Scriptures, and out of an affectionate adherence to the piety of the Book of Common Prayer. Neither the Catholic nor the Evangelical type of Anglican holiness can be explained in terms of a practical *via media*, or of a Church which is committed to some form of Anglo-Saxon compromise.¹⁹*

Such men like Henry Venn and Charles Simeon were not only Evangelicals but Churchmen because while they emphasized personal experience and commitment to Christ they held the doctrines contained in the Articles, Prayer Book and Homilies. I would describe these as classical Anglican Evangelicals in their commitment to an emphasis on personal experience of Christ and their adherence to the ecclesiology of the Book of Common Prayer that is often lacking in some Evangelicals today. The emphasis of many Evangelicals today is on Gospel ministry, and preaching is exalted above Sacraments, reducing salvation to *gnosis*, knowledge rather than grace, that Hooker condemned as Gnostic heresy. Sir Edwyn Hoskyns would always remind Evangelicals that the Gospel implied the Church. The fruits of Evangelical revival enriched the Oxford Movement when heirs from Evangelical homes became leading Tractarians. To quote again the Belgian Benedictine turned Anglican, de Mendieta,

“The fullness of Anglicanism will be utterly catholic and uncompromisingly evangelical at the same time”. Both these emphases are present in the New Testament making it necessary to set such Scriptural truths and realities in their Scriptural complementarity. Michael Ramsey claimed that the Anglican Church does not see the Evangelical and the Catholic views as alternatives, but in the Scriptural sense where both elements are one. This ethos has enabled the Anglican Communion to look not for a synthesis but rather for a symbiosis, a growing together in a living whole of the sundered Christian traditions and with humility seek to promote it. They can do so because in its own ecclesial life the Anglican Communion has found these evangelical and catholic elements to be complementary and necessary to the fullness of a Church’s life and mission.”²⁰

¹⁹ Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, *Anglican Vision*, (SPCK, 1971.), p.38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The spirit of the theological method of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, continued where the Incarnation became central, from Westcott, Gore and the *Lux Mundi* school, to William Temple, as they illustrated the presence of the divine *Logos* to pinpoint the unique revelation of God in Christ as the keystone of a continuous divine activity in creation, in nature, history, culture and civilization. The doctrine of the One Person and Two Natures of Christ defined by the Council of Chalcedon has had a continuous influence. Our understanding of Eucharistic sacrifice and sacramental Presence has been enhanced, and the doctrine of the communion of saints seen to be about the living and departed as one fellowship of common prayer and praise rather than in terms of mediation.

Reading from the Inside

Nicholas Lossky the Russian Orthodox theologian advises an Orthodox exploring Anglicanism, to read it 'from the inside' in the works of Anglican divines, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and *The English Hymnal*, and not only in Formularies. Here the living tradition of Anglicanism lies hidden, rather than in statements described as corporate acts of the whole Church. It requires sympathetically reading the other's experience with a total readiness to put one's own 'traditional' formulations in question with absolute confidence in the indestructibility of truth. The writings of the divine, the hymn, the prayer give commentary to the formulations, a definition of certain terms lacking in them generally yields an impression of Anglican spirituality and doctrine.

Today's Anglican will grasp its spirit by suspending most of the responses and unlearning most of the habits of the modern mind that have created the great gulf between this and all preceding ages. As we do not translate Shakespeare into modern English in order to understand him, so in these divines there is no easy process of changing the images. Tampering with their particular expressions will only result in losing the substance of what they are saying because as Bishop Ian Ramsey claimed, such images are *disclosure models*, specific images with a depth of meaning that develop an understanding of what is presented in several directions at once. They 'are rooted in disclosures and born in insight' and hold together two things in such a way that thought about one produces some understanding in depth of the other. Anglican divines use the language and imagery of patristic theology because the poetic vision of these Fathers could only be expressed as they, in fact, expressed it. When these divines are allowed to speak in their own language there is no substitute for reading what they say as they say it, not as mere relics of the past but as living witnesses and contemporaries with us, so that what constitutes the essential feature of these divines, their charismatic life in the Church, can continue to live in the apostolic tradition they have received.

Returning to Prescriptive Sources

As Gareth Bennett told us, it is the deliberate rejection of the balanced synthesis, a balanced relationship between Scripture, Antiquity and Reason that formed the core of Anglican theological method that is at the root of our problems. It is the distancing of the modern Church from what had been regarded as its prescriptive sources and the rejection of 'living in a tradition', that has produced the crisis in modern Anglicanism. In consequence we have lost the Anglican mind as God and His Church become imprisoned within the relativism of the present and accommodated to the transience of today's political correctness, the product of secular humanism that is allowed to be the re-interpreter of the Bible and the

‘faith once and for all delivered to the saints.’ Only a return to prescriptive sources in the *mind of the Fathers*, in Reformer, Caroline, Evangelical and Oxford Father, will lift us into a larger room and raise us, like Hooker, Andrewes, Hammond and our benefactors in the Oxford Movement, above the controversies and theological fashions of our age. Here in the larger room of the Christian centuries in which the Holy Catholic Church lives, we will find what will enrich, invigorate, and give beauty, proportion, and force to our theology. Our vision will have about it what Dean Church described as the catholicity, the wide-mindedness, the freshness, the suppleness and sanity of Christian antiquity, as we see the Christian faith as an integral whole with its natural centre in the Incarnation, the Church as an organism where dogma, prayer and life are one whole, and where as Michael Ramsey’s words, ‘... the issue is not only one of intellectual clarity but of a union of human lives with God in the way of holiness.’ Renewal in catholic truth will only come from a reconstruction of the *One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church*, not through the construction of some external religious or cultural form, or ideology. It can come only when the living pattern of catholic truth is embodied in people imbued with the life-giving power of God, who in Christ has taken our human nature, redeemed it and perfected it forever. The *lex credendi*, tradition, catholic dogma and doctrine are not a backcloth of abstract theory to be adapted to the fashions of the Age. This is the *reality* in which we live, *the union of human lives with God in the way of holiness*, the way of salvation, salvation-life. Through it we see refracted the meaning of all human existence, the economies of creation and redemption, and hence the need to know this truth in the personal depth of our being, for it is the Christ of the Apostles as the life-giving Spirit active in the history of humankind and leading it to conformity with his spiritual and perfect form. Here in the Mystery of Christ, present in the history of mankind and the Eucharist, is where catholic truth is found, so that our proper *sitz-im-leben* is *the life of grace* in which we as catholic persons need to grow and develop to the full potential of our humanity. Salvation then becomes, not the return journey of the individual soul to its Maker, but the catholic process, the gradual process of a universal transfiguration in which people are saved, not from the world, but with the world through the Church. It is walking in the way of holiness as we live in and serve the catholicity of the Church.

That is why we need to let these Fathers speak again — Ignatius, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose and Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, the Reformers, Jewel and Hooker, Andrewes and Laud, the classical Evangelicals, John Keble and the Tractarians, Michael Ramsey. They can speak to us today with that same sharpness and contemporaneity, for their writings are timeless, dynamic and always contemporary. We need to invite the piety and thought of these Fathers into the structure of our own theological vision and exposition by emulating these benefactors in the Faith, whose theological procedure could not be described as simplistic; and let us see what happens in the different perspective of today’s society and scholarship. Michael Ramsey said that the times call urgently for the Anglican witness to Scripture, tradition and reason, not only for meeting the problems Biblical theology is creating, but also to serve the reintegration of the Church and for presenting the faith as at once supernatural and related to contemporary man.

They will speak to an issue facing us that is far bigger than the saving of Anglicanism. In the face of an arbitrary liberalism that supplants the true liberality that is a generosity of spirit, and a facile comprehensiveness that too often lacks a theological coherence and discernment, what we are being called upon to save is the Apostolic Faith and Order of the

Church, for which Ignatius died. It will challenge the uncritical assumptions of much contemporary ecumenism and not be instantly popular because it is about principles not policies, but in its appeal to Scripture and antiquity it will face it with something deeper. At the same time it will show us how theology can, and cannot, be influenced by the culture of the age. In other parts of the world there are other Christians in the face of this same liberalism in their own churches who share our concern. Is God leading us into a new kind of unity with such Christians, a faithful remnant in which the world will see what it wants to see, a reintegrated and holy Church, reflecting the oneness and unity of the Blessed Trinity, because it is rooted in the Apostolic Faith and Order? Here lies the authentic note of a western Orthodoxy, Catholic Christianity, for the content and significance of the Christian experience enshrined in this Apostolic Faith and Order transcends all individual apprehensions and defies all final intellectual analysis. Its authority lies in its influence on the world of an insight more adequate than the world's own. It comes in all its saving power to identify with the world, but as soon as the world attempts to accommodate and trim that Apostolic Faith and Order to its own limited insights it is lost and the world ends up shipwrecked and the Church dysfunctional. The Fathers in every age have known this, that the only way of salvation for a shipwrecked world is to be conformed to the Eucharistic self-giving of God.

I believe Anglicanism has the potential for such a ministry of reconciliation, the way for people of the tradition today whose search for truth is within this living tradition that must be prayerfully embedded within heart, mind and life. Being an Anglican has revealed this mission to me and is the reason why I shall remain so in order to work for the re-integration of the universal Church in East and West. This was the prayer of Lancelot Andrewes in his *Private Devotions*, 'Let us pray for the whole Church; eastern, western, and our own' which had a broadening as well as archaizing effect upon the ethos of Anglican divinity. It helped it get right away from the medieval and post-medieval controversies and see some of these controverted questions in a larger perspective.

The Living Flame of Love

This essay would be incomplete without mention of the ethos of Anglican devotion as 'a distinctive approach to religion or prayer'. To deliberately use the word 'devotion' is to focus on this distinctiveness in the classical Anglican approach to religion and prayer, where the focus is not on experiencing a 'feel good factor', but on living the dogma of the revealed Christian mystery in such a way that, instead of the mystery being assimilated to our mode of human understanding, it is allowed to effect an interior transformation of spirit that enables it to be experienced mystically.²¹ It changes the heart and mind, renewing one's whole mental and emotional attitude, which begins in self-renunciation and is accomplished and sealed by the Spirit, so that one's life becomes conformed to the doctrine. In the Scriptural sense it purifies the character like gold in an 'assayer's fire'.²² That is repentance. Here lie the seeds of Anglican mystical theology that is consonant with the Christian Mystical Tradition. Michael Ramsey's point that '... the issue is not only one of intellectual clarity but of a union of human lives with God in the way of holiness,' is borne out by our being blessed by our saints, martyrs, scholars and the devotion of millions of people whose faith has been sustained by the worship and pastoral care offered by our church in this country. The pursuit of holiness has never departed from the Church of

²¹ V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (James Clarke, Cambridge and London 1973), p. 8.

²² *Wisdom 3.6; Ecclesiasticus 2.5.*

England, even in difficult and apparent barren times. What is distinctive about Anglican devotion, what qualities are native and integral to the Anglican understanding of devotion and religious practice? It is never an isolated individualistic pietism; always, it is concerned with dogma, doctrine, life, worship, and Christian discipline, which must colour and inspire the whole of life, where personal devotion and personal life are inseparable from liturgy and theology. From Jeremy Taylor and Lancelot Andrewes in the seventeenth century to Michael Ramsey and Austin Farrer in the twentieth, all of them spoke the same language, at least where prayer is concerned: the language of loving desire for God.

Practical Divinity

Anglican devotion is life as a way of practical divinity. Seventeenth-century Anglicans called moral theology 'practical divinity' to which ascetical theology was completely united. In other words the moral life and the life of prayer are inseparable. The life of prayer was to affect how the Christian behaved. Today, the life of prayer has been separated from the way we behave as the devotional life is reduced to 'spirituality', where the emphasis rests on feelings as the measure of spiritual health rather than behaviour. Ascetical theology has been separated from moral theology. Anglican devotion is about the Christian-in-the-Church, the full co-operation with grace in a total Christian life.

In our devotional heritage *belief, devotion, duty, and discipline*, are inseparable. How we live and how we pray cannot be separated in Christian living. Each affects the other, becoming a practical matter for the devotional life of all who live through a *Life* not their own, transmitted to them by the Spirit through the means of grace, the Book and the Bread, within the Eucharistic fellowship of the baptized who share in the apostolic faith. The purpose of positive and practical divinity is to bring us to Heaven. So it affects our judgments, settles our consciences, directs our lives, mortifies our corruptions, increases our graces, strengthens our comforts, and saves our souls. The meaning of responsible discipleship, of growth in grace, of incorporation in Christ, is that 'if any man be in Christ he is a new creature.' The aim of such practical devotion is to make a person 'a new creature' 'sincere in his obedience', a favourite phrase that illuminates what is meant by 'the perfection of wayfaring men'. In classical Anglicanism this is the ideal being presented to the members of the Church and it is to be found within our devotional classics, catechetical books and books of private devotion. So the wayfarer's perfection depends upon response to grace and responsibility in obedience. 'There is no surer way to the full perfection of the whole man than the perfect following of Christ in the communal life of the Church.'

Practical divinity requires fostering in each individual what has been called 'a conscience made of obedience'. This is at the heart of Anglican devotion. The personal responsibility of the individual in Christian living must be guided by his own reason. Matters of conscience require a person to be a judge for himself ready to account for himself, which does not prevent a person from seeking spiritual counsel and absolution in particular cases, as *The Book of Common Prayer* advises. Faith and repentance are inseparably linked in the Prayer Book (as in the Holy Communion invitation, the Catechism and the Homilies), and this is essential to a devotion held up as the achievable ideal to the members of Christ's Family. Anglican devotion strives to inculcate a life of discipleship rather than one of spiritual accountancy. It is a matter of standards and serious commitment for those who are alive to their imperfections as they try through grace to follow Christ and seek a devotion, which as John Hales taught, claims every part of our life.

There is richness in Anglican devotional literature in the devotional classics, the catechetical books and books of private devotion that flows from something deeper than torrential intellect, or even high poetic gifts. Nearer our time Austin Farrer's slim Lent Book, *Lord I Believe*, points out that 'no dogma deserves its place unless it is prayable, and no Christian deserves his dogmas who does not pray them.' No article of the Creed is unprayable or remained unprayed among the devotional writers of classical Anglicanism. Martin Routh, President of Magdalene College Oxford in the nineteenth century and the last man in Oxford to wear a wig, always had William Laud's *Private Devotions* on his desk and used the devotions for each hour. Bishop Westcott's son described his father as reading and working in the very mind with which he prayed; and his prayer was of singular intensity. In Westcott's episcopate it bore fruit in his continuous labour for social justice that flowed immediately and naturally from his study of the Incarnation by way of his prayer. There is an austerity of study about this commitment to prayer that affects study with the austerity of prayer, affecting a grace-informed reason that makes prayer the connecting link between belief and action. Study as well as prayer requires a disciplined way of living, asceticism, because learning is a spiritual discipline and the communication of it is a pastoral task, and more especially when teaching divines were concerned for the 'care of souls'. What we see in such people is that learning has become a spiritual discipline, a spiritual way, and their communication of such learning in a teaching ministry is in essence a priestly and pastoral task. Central to it is not 'vanity', not 'self-glory' but 'disinterestedness', seeing things as God sees them.

In Conclusion

I live in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic faith, professed by the whole Church in East and West before the disunion of East and West, and my concern is to continue to live in communion with this Catholic and Apostolic faith along with those Anglican divines who have professed it in the Church of England. It means thinking and praying and reading, with such men as Hooker, Andrewes, Hammond, Thorndike and their successors, in their living love for sacred scripture and tradition, Laud in his hope and fear and grief, with Taylor in his fruitful exile, with Baxter, Herbert and Ken in their marvellous integrity, with Whichcote and John Smith in the depths of their wisdom, with Venn and Simeon and their successors in their evangelical zeal, with the Tractarians and their successors in their love for the Church and all in their union with the living Christ. It is to be exalted to a total reaffirmation of the mystery and grace of God, healing the heart, cleansing the mind and establishing the will. It is to affirm myself as the Anglican I will always remain. Even if 'a new interregnum' were to emerge, like them I would continue to work for the restoration of the Church of England and the reintegration of the Church in East and West.