

Viewpoint: Why I am Anglican

The Rev. Chuck Collins

I am Anglican because Anglicanism at its core is generously orthodox, biblical, and liturgically beautiful.

It is the generosity in Anglican Episcopal ethos that sets this church apart from some other Protestant churches. For example, the Church of England determined early on that the Bible is God's revelation without having to say that it speaks to every earthly thing. Determined that we are predestined to life without saying that Jesus died only for the elect. Determined that Jesus is really present in Holy Communion without saying that he is objectively present whether or not there is faith and belief. Determined that every aspect of our nature is affected by sin without saying that we are pond scum. It's a compassionate and gracious view of doctrine and morals that, in its traditional view, is generous, but when pushed to its antinomian extreme is called "comprehensiveness" or "roominess." Generosity doesn't mean, "anything goes." The church that stands for nothing will fall for anything.

Anglican theology is limited and guided by biblical essentials and Anglican teaching. The English reformers didn't see themselves as starting something new. They wanted to return the church to the authority of the Bible and to ancient consensual Christianity from which the Medieval Catholic Church had departed. The theology of the English reformers, captured in the first Prayer Books, the Ordinal, the Homilies and the Articles of Religion, defines our theological core. These formularies have consistently been upheld as authoritative throughout Anglican history. The 39 Articles, relegated to the basement of the 1979 Prayer Book, is a particularly neglected statement of Anglican theology. The formularies describe the parameters over which someone steps to depart from the Anglican heritage.

No other church in the world hears more Bible than Anglicans do every Sunday. Our prayers are largely verbatim portions of Scripture. What distinguishes Anglicans from churches that over-emphasize the divine aspects of the Bible and churches that over-emphasize the human aspects is our belief in its dual authorship. We believe that real human beings wrote the 66 books of the Bible with evidence of their humanity found throughout. We also believe that God inspired them and blessed them in their writing to accurately and fully communicate God's Word. It more than just "contains" or "speaks of" the Word of God; it is the Word of God written. Scripture is our primary authority by which all other authorities are judged. This means that the ideas of "three equal sources of authority" (Scripture, reason and tradition), and "our theology comes from our prayers" (*lex orandi lex credendi*) rather than from Scripture, are nonsense and modern inventions.

Lastly it is the beauty of God's character that focuses Anglican worship. The service of Holy Communion does not begin, "Bless me, Lord," but rather, "Blessed be God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Of course we want to be "fed," but our real objective is to honor God in his glorious majesty as he is revealed in Trinity of persons. It means that we worship God for who he is, not for what we can get from him. In corporate worship we

use words that have been found worthy of his character over the centuries, rather than the passing, extemporaneous thoughts of individual pray-ers. It means that we recognize Jesus for who he said he was: the one and only mediator between God and humankind. And it means that any attempts to reinvent the Trinity (e.g. “mother, child, womb” or “creator, sustainer, sanctifier”) are at the very least diversions from the God who is revealed in Scripture, and at worse they describe another god altogether.

Retired Scottish Archbishop Richard Holloway’s characterization of the Anglican Church that it is “a tolerant, fairly detached and amused mother of lazily permissive standards...” misses the mark altogether. He has joined the ranks of those who either don’t know history or abandon it at the drop of a hat to protect their personal agendas. The Anglican Church is not the only church with a generous orthodoxy, committed to the Bible, and liturgically beautiful, but this is our rich heritage. And it is these very things that are being threatened today by false teachings and half-truths. Most of the rest of the Anglican world gets it, but unfortunately the Episcopal Church is desperately trying to be something new. Instead of standing on the anything-goes side of the fence motioning for people to “come over here!” I hope that we will return to the values that have always defined Anglicanism and that connect us to the wider Communion.

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