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### My identity as an Anglican

A campy song from my childhood captured the quirky, confused, and slightly superior feeling of Anglicanism.

*I am an Anglican,  
I am C.E.: (Church of England)  
Neither high church  
Nor low church,  
I am Protestant and Catholic and Free!*

*Not a Presby,  
Nor a Luth'ran  
Nor a Baptist, white with foam;  
I am an Anglican –  
Just one step from Rome!  
I am an Anglican —  
Just one step from Rome!*

*To the tune of God Bless America.*

As a child and a teen I have a host of memories from church. The smell of hot tea with cream and sugar, served in china cups from a silver tea service, after Morning Prayer, on a warm Sunday morning. Evening Prayer canticles sung to the old tunes, with a slight Caribbean lilt while sweating away. The smell of incense, and wine mixed with the warmth of walking into the Nave on a cold winter day. A preacher exhorting people: “come to the altar rail and commit yourself to Christ.” A somber sermon so deeply intellectual that only a few could actually follow the logic. Dimly lit naves with deep rich colored stained glass, and buildings with clear windows where the outside trees and sun seem sure to break in at any moment. Churches made of sticks and palm leaf thatch, and churches with beautiful polished brass, silver, and gold adornments. Clergy in a bewildering array of adornments; in chasubles and copes, cassock and surplice, coat and tie, and guayabera, slacks and sandals. Monks and nuns praying the offices. Regal organs, guitars, clapping and swaying, and somber chant. All these contrasting elements from my childhood blend together when I think, “What does it mean to be an Anglican?”

As a small child in Colorado and New Mexico, I grew up in a “High Church” family, where communion was preferred to Morning Prayer, and incense was part of worship on some occasions, and altars were up against the wall, and clergy could casually flip a chasuble on before celebrating.

But when we moved to Costa Rica, I discovered that there were those who thought the High Church tradition dangerously papist, and knew that Morning Prayer was the service

being done in heaven. There were people with passion for mission and evangelism and others who thought that church in Spanish was something to be tolerated, but not encouraged. (*Surely if God wanted you to be in the Church of England, he would have given you the gift of English!*)

When we moved to Guatemala, I discovered the Anglican Church seeking to become indigenous in Central America. A church with roots in the Anglican tradition, struggling to reconcile the strange mix of English history and subculture with a clergy and educated lay leaders of deeply Latin and Spanish heritage. A church struggling to adapt to reach semi-catholic, superstitious, tribal village cultures. A church bringing the Gospel to the poor, and downtrodden while struggling with its own peculiar identity.

As an adolescent, I observed, and was taught, that being Anglican meant holding a great many things in tension, around a deeper unity. And yet as I grew, and learned, and matured, I began to question whether Anglican's truly agreed on what the foundation of that deeper unity meant. Was our unity the Book of Common Prayer, our Liturgy, our Worship, our Theology, the Bible, the Archbishop of Canterbury, a love of things English? Was our unity founded on a belief that simply holding things in tension was in and of itself a good thing?

Now as I am well past adolescence, I have am sure that what it means to be Anglican will change in ways that none of us can foresee. We are at a point where paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln reflects our state.

*“Five hundred years ago, a new church, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition, that a native church, dedicated to the scripture, tradition, and reason, trumped the extreme reformation, and extreme allegiance to Rome. Now we are engaged in a great discord, testing whether that church, or any church so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.”*

Some have talked about how horrible it is that we are in these ecclesiastical battles. We forget that our church was forged in the fires of civil, and religious discord, that Anglicanism was for several centuries a political, and ecclesiastical tightrope-walking act. We are a church that now celebrates Catholic and Protestant martyrs. Perhaps we do so a bit too casually because the sufferings of that time are so far past.

The great miracle is that in the midst of our ancestor's disagreements, and struggles, God in his providence used a tiny English church, and a commerce driven British Empire, to spread the Good News of Christ to many parts of the globe. It grew beyond colonial chaplaincies to be a mission driven community, seeking to be in all places an indigenous church. And in many ways and many places it has been an instrument of God's great love.

Hidden away in the back of the prayer book are two documents that should probably be in the opening pages. On pages 876-878 are the Chicago-Lambeth quadrilateral, and the

Lambeth resolutions. The stated purpose of those documents is to seek unity with other Christian bodies.

In the seventeen chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus prays that the church will be one. Is it any wonder that we are struggling in our church? If we are not one body, will there not be struggles until that is accomplished?

Perhaps our present struggles are because God took us seriously in 1886 and 1888. We committed to unity with other Christian bodies, and in so doing became willing, (at least on paper), to put our own heritage and identity below the cause of Christian unity. It may be that what we call the Anglican Communion will someday cease to exist because of the greater purposes of God.

So what it means to me to be Anglican, is to be willing to engage in the struggle with the uncertainty of the future. It means that I am praying for humility deeper than anything I have asked for before. It means that I seek to maintain relationships with Christians within and without the Anglican fold, people with whom I agree and disagree. It means I seek to build up my little corner of the Anglican Communion, while we struggle with what that Communion will look like.

After 500 years we are in a new stage of growing up. 1 Cor. 13:11,12 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

I enter this struggle of Anglican identity and purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with great hope in the future of God's Church. "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." (2 Timothy 1:11)