

What is Anglican Theology?

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Anglicanism and the Reformation

In order to answer the question “What is Anglican theology?,” we must first ask another question the answer to which will inevitably determine how we answer the first question: How does one view the English Reformation, particularly in relation to the history of the western Roman Catholic Church that had preceded it?

Stephen Neill, in his book *Anglicanism*, has nicely laid out the following different ways in which this question has been answered.¹

1) The “Protestant Revolt” was not a Reformation at all, but the sundering of the unity of Catholic Christendom. This is the way the question was typically answered by pre-Vatican II Roman Catholics, by English Recusants, and by many formerly Anglican/Episcopalian converts to Roman Catholicism even today.

2) The Protestant Reformation was mostly a bad thing, but had some good results, for example, putting worship and the Bible in the language of the people. This is way that the question has been answered historically by many Anglo-Catholics.

3) The English Reformation was generally a good thing, but was too violent, and lost some elements of Catholicism that should have been retained. (This was Neill's own position.)

4) The English Reformation was the perfect "middle way" (*via media*) between the superstitions and legalism of Roman Catholicism on the one hand and the excesses of Protestant fanaticism, especially the Puritans and the Radical Reformation on the other. This would be the answer given by some Anglican Evangelicals.

5) The English Reformation did not go far enough. It was still too "popish," retaining many elements of Roman Catholicism that should have been abandoned. This is how the Puritans answered the question, how many continental Protestants would have answered it at the time of the Reformation and how many non-Anglican Evangelicals would still answer it, and even how some Evangelical Anglicans would answer it today.

How one answers this question of the relation between the English Reformation and the Medieval Roman Catholic Church that preceded it will inevitably depend on what one thinks of Medieval Catholicism, of the Protestant Reformation, and how one understands the relation of the Church of England to both. That there are such a number of different ways of answering the question makes clear that there can be no neutral or non-theological position concerning Anglican theology. It is necessary to take some position.

Because one's assessment of the English Reformation is directly related to how one assesses the Protestant Reformation in general, it is also helpful first to note that the Protestant Reformation was not just one thing. There were several Reformations.

1) The Roman Catholic Church responded to the Reformation both by entrenching itself in some of the practices criticized by the Reformers (for example, the Latin mass, the supremacy of

the pope, the doctrines of purgatory and transubstantiation, rejection of justification by faith alone), but also at the same time by reforming many of the abuses of the late Medieval Church. Polemically referred to as the “Counter-Reformation” by Protestants, this “Catholic Reformation” created the identity of Tridentine Catholicism that extended from the Council of Trent until the Second Vatican Council of the mid-twentieth century. Major “Catholic Reformation” figures included Ignatius Loyola (founder of the Jesuits), Robert Bellarmine (the foremost Roman Catholic apologist at the time), and mystics such as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.

2) The Lutheran Reformation prevailed primarily in Germany, but also in the Scandinavian countries. It was defined not only by the writings of Martin Luther, but also by the Augsburg Confession, and other texts found in the Book of Concord. Despite the severity of Luther’s polemics (identifying the pope with the antichrist, for example), the Lutheran Reformation was in many ways a moderate Reformation. Luther affirmed justification by faith alone, rejected the Latin mass, and eucharistic sacrifice, but he affirmed a real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, baptismal regeneration, and the practice of private confession of sin and absolution or “penance”; Lutherans retained liturgical worship and the wearing of vestments by clergy; Luther was opposed to iconoclasm; the Augsburg Confession was an attempt to mediate differences between Rome and the Lutherans.²

3) The Reformed churches trace their roots to the Swiss Reformation in which Ulrich Zwingli was the initial leader. Later, John Calvin, author of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, became the central figure in defining Reformed identity, to the extent that “Reformed” and “Calvinism” are sometimes used as synonymous terms.³ Reformed Protestantism became dominant in parts of Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scotland. The Reformed churches are confessional, with

documents such as the Heidelberg Catechism, the canons of the Synod of Dort, and the Westminster Confession, being standards. Reformed churches tend to be Presbyterian in polity, to place a high view on divine sovereignty (Calvin affirmed double predestination), an iconoclasm that led to the removal of all images from churches. The Reformed either greatly simplified liturgy, or, in some cases, rejected it completely.

4) The “humanist Reformation” was a movement within the Roman Catholic Church that hoped to reform Catholicism through many of the ideals of the Renaissance, including “return to the [patristic and biblical] sources” (*ad fontes*). Major figures included Sir Thomas More, as well as Desiderius Erasmus, who published the first printed Greek New Testament. The Council of Trent marked the defeat of this approach to reform.

5) The Radical Reformation was characterized by its rejection not only of the Roman Catholic Church, but also of the “magisterial Reformation” (Lutheranism, Reformed, Anglicanism). Although too diverse to summarize succinctly, its adherents often rejected both infant baptism (“Anabaptists”), and the state church. Many (such as the Mennonites) were pacifists. In England, dissenting groups included Congregationalists, Baptists, and other “non-conformists,” but also, both inside and outside of the Church of England, the Puritans.

While the English Reformation had some relation to each of these movements, Anglicanism has its own distinct identity. To understand Anglican theology, it is helpful to notice a number of significant peculiarities of the English Reformation that distinguish Anglicanism from all of these varieties of the continental Reformation.

First, the Reformation in England was as much political as theological. English monarchs (Henry VIII and his children) were as important as ecclesiastical leaders in the way that

the English Reformation developed. This does not mean that the continental Reformation was a non-political affair. Martin Luther could not have accomplished what he did without the support of the German princes. John Calvin's Geneva had its own unique relation between church and magistrate. Ulrich Zwingli died in battle. The Radical Reformation had its own political side, ranging from the theocracy of Thomas Munzer to the pacifism of Meno Simmons. But in no other version of the Reformation did monarchs play such a prominent role as they did in England. As a result, the problem of erastianism has plagued Anglicanism since the sixteenth century. (Even today, the prime minister of England and the British monarch play significant roles in the choosing of the archbishop of Canterbury.)

Second, the theological identity of Anglicanism was worked out at its conclusion, not its beginning. The more Protestant Church of England under Edward VI differed significantly from the "English Catholicism" of Henry VIII. During the reign of Mary, England returned briefly to Roman Catholicism, and it was only under Elizabeth that Anglicanism was finally and permanently established. Until her reign, it was very much an open question whether Anglicanism would even survive, and what form it would finally take. Moreover, although the English Reformation produced several leading theologians, there was no single theological leader of the caliber or significance of a Martin Luther or a John Calvin who singly defined the identity of the Church of England. Anglican Christianity has never been called "Cranmerism" or "Hookerism" in the manner of "Lutheranism" or "Calvinism."

Third, Anglicanism from its beginnings was marked by debates about the theological identity of and the future of Anglicanism, debates between Anglicans and those who looked for their identity to the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, and debates with those who preferred the model of the continental Reformation (particularly in its Reformed or

Calvinist versions) on the other. In these debates, the question of historical continuity between the historic Catholic Church (not simply the Medieval Roman Catholic Church, but especially the patristic Church) and the Church of England was as important as the question of the continuity of faith between Scripture and Anglican identity. In contrast to most of the continental Reformation (Lutherans were largely the exception), Anglicans retained many of the practices of historic Catholicism that had been lost or renounced by the mainstream Protestant churches on the European continent. The historic episcopacy and the three-fold orders of bishop, presbyter/priest and deacon continued. Liturgical worship was retained in the Book of Common Prayer, translated into English, but based largely on patristic and Medieval Catholic models. There was a daily office of Morning and Evening Prayer based on the monastic Benedictine Office. The clergy wore vestments, although simplified. The Prayer Book contained translations of Medieval Catholic collects, as well as a lectionary for the reading of Scripture.

Reformed Catholicism or Catholic Evangelicalism

Given the controversy surrounding the relation between Anglicanism and the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, and the continental Protestant Reformation on the other, the lack of a single defining theological figure, the lengthy period it took for the Church of England to firmly be established, and the ever present opposition from those who looked toward either Rome or continental Protestantism for identity instead, does it make any sense to speak of an Anglican identity, apart from that of an Erastian Elizabethan political establishment? Does Anglicanism have a theological identity? Does it make sense to speak of Anglican theology?

I would suggest that Anglican theology can be understood as "Reformed Catholicism" or "Catholic Evangelicalism." What do I

mean by this?

When I use the adjective "Reformed" I am not referring specifically to the branch of the Protestant Reformation identified with the Reformed churches, or "Calvinism." Nor when I use the word "Evangelical" am I specifically referring to either the twentieth century movement associated with such figures as Billy Graham in the United States or J.I. Packer or John Stott among Anglicans. Nor am I referring specifically to the nineteenth century movement within the Church of England that self-consciously identified as "Evangelical" in contrast to Anglo-Catholicism. Rather, I am understanding the terms "Reformed" and "Evangelical" broadly to refer to several specific affirmations of the Protestant Reformation:

1) The primacy, clarity, and sufficiency of Scripture: *sola scripture* (or "by scripture alone"). The canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the final source of authority in the church. The Triune God alone is the final authority in the church, but God has made himself known by acting and speaking in the history of redemption, and this revelation has been uniquely witnessed to and recorded by inspired prophetic and apostolic writers in the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testament, which are, accordingly, the single and sufficient normative authority in the church. This is not to disregard or denigrate tradition or church authority, but it is to say that no post-canonical church tradition possesses the authority of inspired Scripture. Bishops, church fathers, and saints are successors of the apostles, but they are not apostles, and church authority is exercised through the interpretation of and application of Scripture.

2) Justification by grace alone through faith alone: *sola gratia, sole fide*. The person and work of Jesus Christ in his incarnation, life, death and resurrection are the means by which God has redeemed sinful humanity. One's right standing before God depends entirely on Jesus Christ's atoning work,

and not on one's own meritorious works of any kind, not even on the sincerity of one's appropriation of that work. Justification by faith alone means that one trusts in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

3) The priesthood of all believers. This does not mean what is sometimes either embraced or denigrated as "private judgment," the notion that individual Christians are capable of deciding all theological questions on their own, or that they are capable of interpreting Scripture entirely without study or heeding the voice of Christian tradition or those who have been trained in theological studies and biblical exegesis. It does mean that every Christian has both the responsibility and the inherent ability to read the Bible profitably, to pray, that conscience must be obeyed, and that even the most respected church authorities are capable of error.

4) One of the corollaries of the "priesthood of all believers" is that all Christians have a responsibility to worship and to read Scripture, and thus, worship should take place in the language used by ordinary people so that they can understand what is being said and done, and that Scripture should be translated so that they can read the Bible responsibly.

By "Catholic," I do not mean the Roman Catholic Church, and certainly not the post-Reformation church of the Council of Trent, but the patristic Catholic Church that succeeded the apostles. This catholic church established its identity in two conflicts: that with gnostic heresy in the second century, and the conflict with christological heresies such as Arianism, Nestorianism, and Apollinarianism that led to the ecumenical church councils, particularly the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon.

In the second century conflict with Gnosticism, the early fathers first designated the church as "catholic" (meaning universal) in contrast to the "private knowledge" (*gnosis*) claimed by gnostics. The catholic writers of the second

century named four marks that distinguished catholic identity.⁴

1) The canon of Scripture. All of those churches that could trace their origins to the apostles identified the canon of Scripture, including both Old and New Testaments, as being the single normative witness to the God who had created the world, made a covenant with Israel, had redeemed sinful humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and had left the apostles as his successors – this, in contrast to gnostic sects that rejected the Old Testament (because its God was the creator of matter) or added gnostic gospels to the New Testament. (Unresolved was the question of the authority of the “deutero-canonical” texts, those books in the LXX translation of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament not found in the Hebrew canon, and written in Greek during the period between the writing of the last books of the Hebrew Bible and the writing of the New Testament, and designated “apocrypha” by Protestants.)

2) The Rule of Faith. All of those churches that could trace their origins to the apostles, and acknowledged the authority of the biblical canon, acknowledged “the Rule of Faith” as the proper interpretation of Scripture. There are several variations of the “Rule,” but versions found in Irenaeus, Origen and others both summarize the core content or subject matter of the Old and New Testaments and also anticipate the outline and even the texts of the later creeds. The “Rule” has a trinitarian structure, and summarizes God the Father’s creation of the world, the redemption sinful humanity through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Holy Spirit’s presence in the church, the Scriptures, the return of Jesus Christ in judgment, and the resurrection of the dead.

3) Apostolic succession. All of those churches that acknowledged the authority of the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and interpreted Scripture through the

lens of the Rule of Faith could also trace their historical continuity through their bishops back to the apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ's ministry and who had written the New Testament scriptures.

4) Worship in word and sacraments: Many accounts of the distinguishing marks of the second-century Catholic church mention only the previous three characteristics, but a fourth should be added as well. All of those churches who acknowledged the canonical scriptures interpreted through the lens of the Rule of Faith, and who could trace their lineage back to the apostles through their bishops also worshiped using a pattern of word and sacrament. Accounts of this basic structure are found in some of the earliest Christian writings outside of the New Testament, works such as *The Didache* or Justin Martyr's *First Apology*. When early Christians worshiped, they read the canonical scriptures, and they preached on the read texts. After the reading, they celebrated the sacraments. Newcomers to the community were baptized; those who were baptized shared the body and blood of Christ through eating and drinking of consecrated bread and wine.

Note that there is a reciprocal relationship between these four practices. Those churches that acknowledged the Scriptures were also the ones who interpreted them through the Rule of Faith, who could trace their history through their bishops to the apostles who were disciples of Jesus, and had written the New Testament, who worshiped by reading the canonical texts in the service of the Word, and celebrated the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist that were given to the church by Christ. Those churches that acknowledged the Rule of Faith, used it to interpret the Scriptures, had received the Rule from the church that traced its history through bishops to the apostles, and the Rule later formed the basic outline of the questions that were asked of catechumens when they were baptized when the church gathered to worship. Those churches that could trace their history through bishops were also those

who acknowledged the canonicity of the Scriptures written by the apostles of whom they were the successors, who acknowledged the Rule of faith, who led the worship of the church. Those churches that worshiped in Word and sacrament read the canonical Scriptures in their services, used the Rule of Faith as a baptismal creed, and were led by bishops in their worship.

Note also that there is an additional item missing from this list – the papacy, or a magisterial authority of the bishop of Rome over other bishops. Although bishops of Rome later interpreted Matthew 16:18 to mean that the bishop of Rome was the unique successor of Peter, this did not take place for several centuries, and Eastern fathers consistently interpreted this passage to refer to all bishops, not simply to the pope.⁵

What were the characteristics of the Nicene-Chalcedonian catholic orthodoxy of the Christological councils in opposition to heresies such as Arianism and Nestorianism?

1) A Christology that worshiped Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human, one divine person, with two natures – one divine, one human.

2) A trinitarian doctrine of God as three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – with a single divine nature. This is the God who had created the world and redeemed it through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and who continued to be present to the church through the mission of the Holy Spirit.

3) A participationist soteriology (*theosis*, deification). The God who redeemed the world through Jesus Christ brought the redeemed into a participatory relation with the trinitarian divine persons mediated through the crucified and risen humanity of Jesus Christ, a relation that was genuinely transformative, and was itself brought about through faith in

Christ, and the sacraments of baptism and eucharist (the body and blood of Christ) which united the church to the risen Christ so that it could become his body. If the patristic Christological dictum was "What is not assumed is not redeemed," its corollary was that what is assumed is redeemed, expressed in the corresponding dictum "God became human so that humanity could become God [deified]."

4) Mediation. As Jesus Christ is the unique mediator between God and humanity – God became an embodied creature with a physical body, and retains that body in the resurrection – so God uses created means to sanctify redeemed humanity. These include primarily the sacraments, but also various mediating practices, such as the reading of Scripture (*lectio divina*), praying the monastic office, and the veneration of icons.

5) Conciliarism. It is through the meeting of the universal church in Councils that the church resolves disagreement. Seven of these early councils came to be considered as ecumenical, and their decisions as binding on the church.

How were these distinguishing characteristics of patristic catholicism and Reformation evangelicalism appropriated by Anglicanism to form its distinct identity?

The Sufficiency and Primacy of Canonical Scripture

First, Anglicanism affirms the primacy and sufficiency of canonical Scripture. Article VI of the 39 Articles states: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Article XX states: "[I]t is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God's word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another." Every deacon,

priest, or bishop who is ordained in an Anglican church is required to assent to some variation of the question asked in the 1662 ordinal: "Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain all Doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined, out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge; and to teach nothing, as necessary to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?"

Thus, Anglicans historically affirm three things about Scripture: (1) The Scriptures contain "all things necessary for salvation." (2) Nothing can be required as necessary for salvation that cannot be found in Scripture. (3) Scripture cannot be expounded against itself, but ultimately must be understood to have a single coherent meaning.

A key characteristic of Anglican worship using the Book of Common Prayer is the reading of Scripture using a lectionary, both in the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as the Daily Office. Anglicans understand the "word of God" in worship to be as much the reading of Scripture as the "preaching of the word." Anglican preachers are expected to base their sermons on the assigned lectionary readings. Finally, much of the historic Book of Common Prayer is itself composed of quotations from Scripture.

From the beginning, Anglicans have insisted that Scripture should be translated into the vernacular, and that it should be read regularly by the laity. The first of these translations was the Great Bible, and the Authorized Version (the "King James" Bible) was the standard biblical text until new translations appeared in the twentieth century.

Anglicans have taken a stance in reference to the "Deuterocanonical" or "apocryphal" books that is neither that of Rome or Orthodoxy on the one hand, nor that of the continental Reformation on the other. The Apocrypha is not

recognized as canonical Scripture, but is nonetheless considered edifying and valuable. As the 39 Articles state: “[T]he other books (as Hierome [Jerome] saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine.” Apocryphal readings are included in the lectionary, and the Apocrypha was included in the original Authorized (King James) translation, placed between the Old and New Testaments (as in the Luther Bible). (When Puritans complained that apocryphal readings should not be included in the lectionary because the Apocrypha contains error, Richard Hooker responded [in essence] in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*: “You’re right, but those aren’t the parts we read.”)

Justification by Faith

From the beginning, Anglicans have affirmed the Reformation doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone. However, they have also taken sanctification as seriously as justification, understanding it as a real participatory union with the risen Christ, insisting that, while Christians are justified by faith alone, and not by merits or good works, nonetheless, justification is effective, and inevitably produces good works in the justified. Thomas Cranmer spoke of justification using the expression “lively faith.” Richard Hooker clearly distinguished between justification (for which he used the Reformation language of “imputation”) and sanctification (for which he did not hesitate to use the Catholic language of “infusion”). While affirming justification by faith alone, writers like Lancelot Andrewes also spoke of sanctification in language that echoed patristic notions of *theosis* or deification.

Rule of Faith/Creeds

In line with the patristic church, Anglicans have affirmed three of the historic creeds as normative: the Apostles’

Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. The Apostles' Creed is recited at Morning Prayer, and, in the form of questions addressed to the one baptized, at baptism. The Nicene Creed is recited at every Eucharist.

Nicene/Chalcedonian Conciliar Orthodoxy

Anglicans historically have subscribed to the first four ecumenical councils: Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451). Historically, Anglicans have been trinitarian and chalcedonian, as is evident in the first two of the 39 Articles. At the same time, Anglicans have affirmed the teaching of the ecumenical councils not because it is believed that councils in themselves are inherently authoritative, but because the trinitarian and christological dogmas of the councils is the necessary implication of the plain teaching of the Old and New Testaments about God and Christ. As article VII of the 39 Articles originally stated: "The three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius' Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." It is sometimes asked why Anglicans do not affirm all seven ecumenical councils. There seems to be no straightforward answer to this question. Article XXI of the 39 Articles states that councils "may err and sometime have erred," and that councils have authority only insofar as what they teach can be taken out of Scripture. However, the article does not list any specific errors. Historically, Anglicans certainly have affirmed the Christological dogmas of all seven councils, including repudiation of variations of Apollinarianism and monophysitism, such as monothelism, and all versions of Nestorianism. The seventh Council has been historically controversial, because of its endorsement of icons, which some Anglicans (Evangelicals in particular) have understood to be a violation of the second commandment (against worshiping images), – a misunderstanding, in my opinion, but that is a discussion for

another time.

Liturgical Worship

In contrast to many historic Reformation churches, Anglicanism has always been a liturgical church. The liturgical worship of the Book of Common Prayer follows the patristic pattern of worship in word and sacrament. The Book of Common Prayer is crucial to Anglican theology and spirituality, both of which are related to and grow out of worship. The Book of Common Prayer is structured liturgical worship. Its central services are those of the Eucharist, based on earlier Medieval Catholic (the English Sarum rite) and Patristic models, as well as Morning and Evening Prayer, based on the Benedictine monastic office. Other significantly Anglican contributions to Cranmer's Prayer Book included the Litany and the Ordinal.

Mediation

One of the implications of historic Anglican views of the sacraments, liturgical worship, as well as how Anglicans understand the significance of the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture is that Anglicans (in contrast to many Reformation Christians) have embraced what might be called the patristic principle of "mediation." There has been a clear divide between Reformation churches that accept this principle and those that do not. The notion of mediation was a clear theological dividing point in the controversy about the Eucharist between Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. Against Zwingli's insistence that material realities such as the resurrected physical body of Christ have no role to play in a salvation that is exclusively "spiritual," Luther insisted to the contrary that God *always* acts in the created world through material means: "The Spirit cannot be with us except in material and physical things such as the word, water, and Christ's body and in his saints on earth." (LW 37:95).

The principle of mediation was a dividing issue between

Puritans and Anglicans in their understanding of the sacraments. The Puritans' understanding of predestination led them to approach the sacraments with lowered expectations, as merely authenticating the predestining grace previously given by God in his sovereign will. Later "Arminian" types of Evangelicalism tended to move the focus from the prior will of God to the response of the human free will. In both cases, the sacraments tended to be superfluous. This voluntarist focus tends to divorce the relation between grace and the objectivity of the sacraments in the direction of subjectivity. In contrast, historic Anglicanism, for all its resistance to a Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, nonetheless understood the sacraments as instrumental "means of grace." The Anglican understanding is that "both God's will and our response are linked to him by places and means, which include the sacraments."⁶ Thus, all of the Anglican Reformers rejected Zwinglian theologies of the Eucharist, and did not hesitate to use the language of baptismal regeneration, even in reference to infants.

This distinctive can also be seen in the differences between Anglican and Puritan understandings of the reading of Scripture. The Puritans objected to the liturgical use of a lectionary to read Scripture, and seemed to have regarded the primary motive for reading the Bible in church to be instruction or teaching, and particularly to acquaint the congregation with the content of the passage that the preacher would expound in his sermon. They objected to the lectionary as containing vast amounts of uninterpreted Scripture. From the beginning, Anglicans understood the reading of Scripture to have primarily a liturgical and edifying function instead. Thus Thomas Cranmer in his "Preface to the Book of Common Prayer" focuses on the edifying quality of the repetitive liturgical reading of Scripture: "[T]hat the people, by daily hearing of Holy Scripture read in the church, should continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion."

Richard Hooker, in contrast to the Puritans, insisted that the reading of Scripture is not something that precedes worship, but is itself an essential aspect of worship. The congregation is not being instructed about something it does not know, but, rather, by hearing over and over again the message of the gospel, it can reappropriate a message that it already knows.⁷ The understanding of sacraments as “means of grace,” of regular worship using liturgical texts, of the repeated lectionary reading of the entire content of Scripture in the context of both the Eucharist as well as the Offices of Morning and Evening prayer is indicative of an understanding of salvation as mediated through material means, in times and places, and as a progressive working out over time of salvation as a participation in the life of the risen Christ and the Triune God.

The principle of mediation appears in Anglicanism in a number of ways. First has to do with the way in which Anglicans understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Anglicans have tended to be skeptical of “enthusiasm,” the tendency to identify the working of the Holy Spirit with extraordinary manifestations. In terms of hermeneutics, Anglicans historically have rejected the notion that the Spirit would lead the church to new revelations beyond the clear teaching of Scripture, and certainly not contrary to Scripture. Neither does the Spirit provide exegetical insights into the reading of Scripture that are not evident in the plain meaning of the text. Rather, as Richard Hooker argued against the Puritans, because we are not prophets, interpreting the Scriptures is a basic exegetical task, using such tools as ordinary reason and knowledge of biblical languages to arrive at the best meaning of the text.

One of the implications of the principle of mediation is that Anglicans tend to understand the work of the Holy Spirit along the lines of the Thomist dictum that “grace perfects nature.” It is through the daily reading of Scripture in the context of the lectionary, in the corporate worship of the Prayer Book

and the praying of the Daily Office, that God is known, along with ordinary private verbal prayer. This gives a particular character to Anglican spirituality and theology, which tend to flow out of the ordinary worship of the church and the reading of Scripture. In a time of “seeker-oriented” services and “contemporary worship,” Anglican worship and spirituality might seem to tend to the humdrum and the everyday. However, this is intentional. Anglicans believe that God is found in the “everyday.” In the area of spirituality, Anglicans tend to be neither Pentecostals nor mystics. On the other hand, Anglican theology is inevitably a theology grounded in spirituality. It is found in the sermons of figures like John Donne and the poetry of George Herbert as much as in the *Ecclesiastical Polity* of a Richard Hooker.

Another characteristic of Anglican mediation has been what might be called the aesthetic dimension of Anglican worship. Anglicans have cared about such things as attractively decorated church buildings and beautiful hymnody. Anglican chant, the church music of William Byrd, the hymns of Charles Wesley, John Mason Neale, and Ralph Vaughan Williams have been, in some ways, almost as significant as the Prayer Book. Anglicans wear vestments. In churches in which clergy wear academic robes or business suits, Anglican quarrels about whether clergy should wear chasubles or stoles might seem a trivial occupation, but the very fact that these quarrels have occurred says something about the significance that Anglicans place on the principle of mediation. What the clergy wear, whether there is a cross on the altar, or whether it is referred to as an altar or a table, points to the significance that Anglicans find in physical objects. Worship and prayer are not matters of individual subjectivity.

Historical Continuity

One of the significant differences between the Anglican Reformation and the continental Reformation is a concern for

historical continuity, not only between Scripture and the church, but also between the contemporary church and the catholic church of the earliest centuries. This is perhaps largely a matter of emphasis. Lutherans, much more than Reformed, retained many of the practices of the Medieval Church, including liturgical worship, and a high sacramental theology. Luther and Calvin could appeal to the fathers, but at the same time, there is a clear tendency among the mainline Protestant Reformers to pit Scripture against church tradition. In contrast, the Anglican Reformers tended to interpret Scripture in continuity with tradition, especially patristic tradition, whenever possible. The Anglican Reformers understood the English Reformation not to be the creation of a new church, but a return to the catholicity of an earlier church. Episcopal order was retained, as was liturgical worship. Anglican Reformers consistently refer to church fathers in their arguments, not only Augustine, who was popular with the continental Reformers, but others as well. For example, in Thomas Cranmer's "Preface to the Great Bible," he acknowledges that he is primarily paraphrasing a sermon by John Chrysostom. One of the key apologetic issues in Anglican conflicts with adversaries, both Roman Catholic and Puritan, was that of continuity with authentic catholic tradition, with John Jewel arguing against Roman Catholics that the Anglican Reformation was a return to catholic tradition, and Richard Hooker arguing against Puritans that Anglican ecclesiology and church practices were preferable precisely because they were in accord with catholic tradition. Accordingly, the polemics of Anglican Reformation writings tend as often to be concerned with the correct interpretation of the church fathers about such matters as eucharistic theology as they are about the correct interpretation of Scripture. In the preaching of the Caroline Divines, following the period of the Reformation, one notices frequent analogies and imagery drawn from the church fathers alongside interpretation of Scripture, often as aids in interpreting Scripture.

There are three principles that follow from the above characteristics of Anglican theology, worship, and spirituality. It is important to conclude by mentioning them, but also important to explain the specific way in which they are understood because they have been so often abused and (sometimes deliberately) distorted in recent years.

Christian Liberty or the Non-Regulative Principle

The “primacy and sufficiency of Scripture” can be interpreted in more than one way. *Sola scriptura* can be understood to mean that the Bible contains everything that Christians need to know or can know, and so no other sources of knowledge are necessary. It can also be understood to mean that the Bible is interpreted in contrast to the tradition of the church. Anglicanism has not understood the “Scripture principle” in either way. In contrast to the Puritan “regulative principle” – that nothing can be allowed in church practice or worship that is not specifically commanded in Scripture – Richard Hooker articulated the contrary position, that all things may be embraced by the church as long as they are not contrary to either Scripture or reason. Even in this case, not everything that is taught in Scripture is binding on the church. For example, the church does not follow the Old Testament civil or ritual laws. Christians do not sacrifice animals. They can eat pork. Hooker’s major task in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* was to lay down the hermeneutical principles of interpreting Scripture in terms of Christian liberty. The church is absolutely bound by the teaching of Scripture in matters of “doctrine and morals.” For example, the church is not free to abandon the teaching of Scripture about such matters as the Trinitarian nature of God or the person and work of Christ. Nor, contrary to what some might wish, may it come up with a new sexual ethic. However, it is perfectly free in matters of worship or polity. Anglicanism has not interpreted this permission in a libertarian manner, as a license to do

whatever particular individuals want. Rather, this permission allows the church the freedom to pay attention to the wisdom of those who have gone before us. The church is free to follow the catholic tradition by the use of liturgical worship, by retaining the historic three-fold polity of bishops, priests, and deacons.

Sanctified Christian Reason

Anglicanism is a church tradition that has placed a high value on learning, especially the learning of the clergy. In contrast to the polemical language of Luther in which he referred to reason as the “devils’ whore,” Anglicanism is known more for Hooker’s proverbial “three-legged stool” of “scripture, reason, and tradition.” Without bogging down in detail, it needs to be made clear that “reason” for Hooker and traditional Anglicans is not the autonomous reason of Descartes and post-Enlightenment thought, nor is it the “common sense” of modern Americans. Reason in classical Anglicanism echoes Augustine’s *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand) or Anselm’s *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). It is hermeneutical use of the intellect to interpret Scripture in its original setting and the tradition of the church, and to apply it in the present. Hooker’s “three-legged stool” is not a stool at all, since Scripture and Scripture alone is normative and authoritative. Reason does not function as an independent source of authority. Its purpose is to understand Scripture in order to follow and obey it.

Comprehensiveness

The Elizabethan settlement attempted to create a church that was comprehensive in its scope, that was broad enough to include all Christians in the nation, but would inevitably exclude those who could not embrace its comprehensiveness. Anglican comprehensiveness inevitably excluded those who

rejected Prayer Book worship or infant baptism or episcopal polity (Puritans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists). It also excluded those who insisted that communion with the bishop of Rome was essential to Catholic identity (Roman Catholics). One of the consequences of this comprehensiveness is that Anglicanism is not a confessional tradition. Although they are important, the 39 Articles have not played the same role in Anglicanism that the Lutheran Confessions have played among Lutherans, or the Westminster Confession or the canons of the Synod of Dort for the Reformed.

This comprehensiveness is sometimes confused with the post-modern concept of inclusivity, that Anglicanism embraces anyone and everyone except for those who insist that there are some kinds of barriers or boundaries to the church. To the contrary, although Anglicanism is not confessional (in the Lutheran or Reformed sense), it is, and always has been creedal, and has always affirmed the above distinctives of "Reformed Catholicism" or "Catholic Evangelicalism." Comprehensiveness does not mean permission to abandon Nicene faith or the binding theological and moral authority of Scripture. To be an Anglican does not mean that "anything goes."

If the above represents an attempt to lay out the essential characteristics of Anglican theology and identity, there have also been numerous examples within Anglicanism of "getting it wrong." These have been attempts to identify Anglican theology with something besides "Reformed Catholicism."

No Distinctive Identity

There have been Anglican theologians who have denied that there is any such thing as either Anglican theology or Anglican identity. In the late twentieth century, Anglican theologian Stephen Sykes wrote a book entitled *The Integrity*

*of Anglicanism.*⁸ Sykes's main contention was that contemporary Anglicanism did not have any – integrity, that is. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Anglicanism had been lacking in systematic theologians, and, in consequence, had become muddled. Without distinctively Anglican theologians, there could be no Anglican theology. The position against which Sykes was protesting was a triumphalist claim that had been repeated frequently by Anglicans throughout much of the twentieth century – that Anglicans had no theology, or at least no distinctively Anglican theology, because Anglican theology was simply the theology of the whole church. Anglicanism was distinguished by its comprehensiveness. Appealing to the Vincentian Canon, proponents claimed that Anglicans simply believed what had always been believed by Christians, everywhere, and by everyone. Far from regarding this position as distinctively Anglican, Sykes criticized it for being distinctively incoherent – and lazy.

Partisanship

In contrast to the “no distinctive identity” position is the position of Anglican partisanship. There is an inevitable tension entailed in a church that attempts to be both Catholic and Evangelical, and the temptation is always strong to make things simpler. There have always been Anglicans who have tended to identify more with either the Evangelical or the Catholic side of Anglican identity. Sometimes this has taken the position of looking either toward Rome or Geneva for greener grass on the other side of the fence, and has produced inevitable conflict, and even violence. Disagreements between high church Anglicans and Puritans led to a revolution and the beheading of a monarch and an archbishop of Canterbury during the seventeenth century; the partisan battles between Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics during the nineteenth century over such questions as baptismal regeneration and ritualism saw both sides appealing to secular courts to prevent clerical appointments (the Gorham case) or even to imprison

recalcitrant clergy (Public Worship Regulation Act). Each side in its own way represented an embrace of only one side of Anglican identity. If Evangelicals claimed to be in the tradition of the Anglican Reformers, they tended to emphasize the authority of Scripture and the doctrines of justification by faith, but often downplayed the importance of the liturgy and the sacraments, and the concerns of the Reformers to defend the catholicity of the Church of England. If Anglo-Catholics were concerned to maintain the necessity of apostolic succession, they sometimes dismissed the Reformers completely, looking toward Rome and Orthodoxy in preference to the Reformation (the Three Branch Theory), and too often tended to view apostolic succession in a mechanical fashion, not clearly related to the central trinitarian and Christological dimensions of the gospel.

In light of this history of conflict, Oxford theologian Mark Chapman recently has made the opposite claim to that against which Sykes protested. In a book entitled (ironically) *Anglican Theology*,⁹ Chapman argues that there is no such thing as Anglican theology because Anglican theology has no center. Chapman's basic thesis is that Anglican identity is a "myth" because the entire history of Anglicanism has been a series of conflicts, beginning with the Puritan rejection of the Elizabethan Settlement, and continuing with fights between Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics in the nineteenth century, and culminating in modern disagreements over same-sex sexual activity. Of course, the proper conclusion should be exactly the opposite. That the Puritans rejected the Elizabethan settlement does not mean that there there was never any such thing as Anglican identity. It means that there was, and the Puritans did not like it. Similarly, that the issue of same-sex sexual activity is dividing the Anglican Communion does not mean that Anglicanism has no historic position on sex or marriage. It means that it has, and some people are unhappy about that.

Disagreements about whether Anglicanism has coherence or identity are reminiscent of nothing so much as the kinds of disagreements about the unity of Christian Scripture and the corresponding question of Christian identity that have plagued biblical scholarship since the rise of the historical-critical method in the nineteenth century. It is no surprise that there is often a correlation between the interests of those making the claims either for or against identity and the conclusions that are reached. In a post-modern era where the question of whether any texts have coherence or meaning is challenged, it is perhaps convenient during a period of ecclesial crisis to respond to those who appeal to Anglican identity with the claim that there has never been one. In an era when texts are read as self-interested attempts to impose power on the marginalized, pointing to the Erastian dimensions of the English Reformation can be a satisfying way to forestall unpleasant theological discussion.

Nonetheless, theological questions have to be addressed theologically. The question of Anglican identity is primarily a theological one, and the way to assess the question is by the theological reading of texts. That Anglicanism has been marked by conflict from its beginnings is not itself a controversial claim, but the existence of controversy does not mean that there is nothing for theologians to argue about. It is my contention that Anglicanism has a coherent theological identity, the main outlines of which can be discerned in the primary texts of the English Reformation and after, and that a genuine continuity can be detected between those earliest positions and later developments reaching through the contemporary period. Conflict does not mean lack of identity. Traditions that do not remain static are contested, sometimes because they are rejected, sometimes because they need to address and accommodate themselves to new challenges.

Anglican Identity: Evangelical and Catholic

There is a well-known saying of Lancelot Andrewes that Anglicanism affirms “One Canon (of Scripture) reduced to unity by God Himself, two Testaments, three Creeds, four General Councils, (over) five centuries.” This essay has been an attempt to lay out something of what that means. Anglicanism is not “Roman Catholicism without the pope”; neither is it Lutheranism or Calvinism with bishops. Anglicanism is “Reformed Catholicism” or “Catholic Evangelicalism” as a reforming movement within the Western Catholic Church. It does not understand itself as a new church that began with Henry VIII, but the same Catholic Church in continuity with the Celtic Church and the Church of Augustine of Canterbury, reformed of Medieval distortion and abuses, while also embracing the central doctrinal distinctives of the Reformation: *sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*.

The Catholic and Evangelical identity of Anglicanism should not be viewed as an incoherence, as if Anglicans have abandoned the law of non-contradiction, attempting to hold together the contrary positions of Tridentine Catholicism and Genevan Calvinism, affirming that it is in some way possible to both embrace and reject justification by faith alone, to embrace and reject *sola scriptura*, to both believe in and deny transubstantiation. Nor should “Evangelical and Catholic” be understood to mean a kind of hybrid or half-way compromise, mixing a cup of Catholicism with a cup of Reformation, and whisking both together to produce a diluted cocktail that is neither one nor the other. Finally, “Evangelical and Catholic” should not be understood to mean “live and let live,” as if Anglicanism were simply a way for the partisan advocates of Catholic and Evangelical theology and piety to live in their respective camps, politely ignoring one another, but at least no longer beheading, imprisoning, or excommunicating one another.

The church must be both Evangelical and Catholic because both dimensions are essential to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The faith expressed in the creeds of the ecumenical councils is the faith of the New Testament that the Triune God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, who lived, died, and rose again for our salvation. The catholic order and worship of the church are the way in which this salvation is worked out in the history of the church. The church recognizes the supremacy and sufficiency of the Scriptures because the canon is the authoritative witness to God's revelation written in the words of inspired prophets and apostles who were the disciples of Jesus. The church is led by successors of those bishops who were themselves successors of the apostles. The church worships in word and sacrament because the reading of Scripture is the way that God continues to speak to the church, and the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are the means by which Christians are born into the church and continue to be united to the risen Christ and are nourished with his body and blood. The church also embraces the doctrine of justification by faith not because it is the Reformers' doctrine, but because it is the teaching of the Scriptures that it is Jesus Christ who saves and Jesus alone.

I close with two quotes from two of the twentieth century's great theologians. From Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury:

To understand the Catholic Church and its life and order is to see it as the utterance of the Gospel of God; to understand the Gospel of God is to share with all the saints in the building up of the one Body of Christ. Hence these two aspects of Anglicanism cannot really be separated. It possesses a full Catholicity, only if it is faithful to the Gospel of God; and it is fully Evangelical in so far as it upholds the Church order wherein an important aspect of the Gospel is set forth. To belittle the witness of the Reformers and the English church's debt to the Reformers is to miss

something of the meaning of the Church of God; to belittle Church order and to regard it as indifferent is to fail in Evangelical insight since Church Order is of the Gospel. Hence "Catholicism" and "Evangelicalism" are not two separate things which the Church of England must hold together by a great feat of compromise. . . . A church's witness to the one Church of the ages is a part of its witness to the Gospel of God.^{[10](#)}

And from the great Reformed theologian Karl Barth:

The expression "evangelical" . . . cannot and should not be intended and understood in a confessional, that is, in a denominational and exclusive, sense. This is forbidden first of all by the elementary fact that "evangelical" refers primarily and decisively to the Bible, which is in some way respected by all confessions. Not all so-called "Protestant" theology is evangelical theology; moreover, there is also evangelical theology in the Roman Catholic and Eastern orthodox worlds . . . What the word "evangelical" will objectively designate is that theology which treats of the God of the Gospel. "Evangelical" signifies the "catholic," ecumenical (not to say "conciliar") continuity and unity of this theology.^{[11](#)}

It is this Evangelical and Catholic unity of the gospel that is at the heart of what Anglican theology is supposed to be about. Whether actual Anglicans have lived up to this goal is another question.

¹ Stephen Neill, *Anglicanism* (NY:Oxford University Press, 1978), 31.

² For the defense of Lutheranism as a reforming movement within the Catholic Church, see Carl E. Braaten and Robert Jenson, *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 1996).

[3](#) As in John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[4](#) Robert W. Jenson, *Canon and Creed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); J. N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, Green, 1960); *Early Christian Doctrines*, revised edition (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978).

[5](#) For an Orthodox account of how the East interpreted this passage, see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (NY: Fordham University Press, 1999).

[6](#) Christopher J. Cocksworth, *Evangelical eucharistic thought in the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 55.

[7](#) John Halliburton, John Barton in in The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, "Story and Liturgy," *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of faith* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981) 96-99.

[8](#) Stephen W. Sykes. *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (NY: Seabury Press, 1978).

[9](#) Mark Chapman, *Anglican Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2012).

[10](#) Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans, Green, 1956), 208.

[11](#) Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 5.