

able to move beyond the arid debate between liberal and conservative which so often moves only on the level of unreasoned opinion and personal preference, which you know, is like the argument of a screech against a scream, signifying nothing. So it only as we understand our modernity and are thus enabled to transcend its limits that we can really enter into the rich legacy and spiritual insight which belongs to the Christian centuries and is our rightful inheritance. We must earn it to make it our own. And that is an undertaking which demands great labour, and not only labour; it also demands much courage and deep humility.

In our present predicament, and I think we all have a sense of predicament, we naturally cast about for solutions, for shortcuts, or at least for clear and feasible and practical solutions. But I am afraid our situation admits of no easy answers. "I tell you naught for your comfort, yea naught for your desires, save that the sky grows darker yet, and the sea rises higher!" But let us be assured that, whatever our confusions and conflicts, whatever our tribulations, nothing can ever, ever, for the least instant, fall outside the all knowing and all loving providence of God. Not a sparrow falleth and every hair of your head is numbered (Matt. 10:29,30). "*The trying of your faith worketh patience,*" says St. James, "*But let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire*" (James 1:3-4). "*Therefore, my beloved brethren,*" says St. Paul, "*be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*" (1 Cor, 15:58).

END NOTES: ¹G. K Chesterton, *The Ballad of the White Horse* (London: Methuen and Co., 1928), p. 24.

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Dr. Robert Crouse



The Essence Of Anglicanism

The Anglican Communion, the fellowship of Anglican Churches throughout the world, exists by virtue of a voluntary allegiance to a common tradition of Christian faith and worship. Faithfulness to that tradition, and that alone, constitutes the definition of Anglicanism, and that tradition is its principle of cohesion. It has, after all, no racial unity. People of Anglo Saxon origin who once dominated its membership are now a small proportion of it. It is not a linguistic unity. Its liturgies have been translated into many languages and most of the world's Anglicans nowadays are not English speakers. It is not even really an organizational unity, not really. The Archbishop of Canterbury has a primacy of honour and the Lambeth Conferences bring together Bishops for consultation from all over the world. But no Primate, no Conference, no Council has any legislative authority over the Anglican Communion. So the Communion adheres only by faithfulness to a common tradition, and if that faithfulness falters it moves toward disintegration. No one can legislate for the Anglican Communion. Insofar as its member churches fail in their allegiance to the common tradition the communion disintegrates. And that, I think, is the nature of the current crisis in global Anglicanism.

Signs of disintegration are, as you well know, manifold. The Primates at their meeting in Portugal several years ago deplored the fact that repudiations of the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference have come, as they said, to threaten the unity of the Communion in a profound way. And they strongly urged those repudiating Lambeth "to weigh the effects of their actions and to listen to the expressions of pain, anger, and perplexity from other parts of the Communion." Another sign of the times was, of course, the consecration of bishops to be missionaries to the Episcopal Church in the United States. And, of course, we have all become familiar with the phenomenon of separated or Continuing Anglican Churches in our own country and elsewhere and we have learned to live, somehow, with the condition of what is somewhat euphemistically called "impaired communion," a condition brought about by unilateral decisions on the part of some Provinces of our Communion.

But these and other disquieting phenomena are merely symptoms of a malaise which threatens the continued existence of the Anglican way. The fundamental issue, I would insist, is faithfulness to a tradition of Christian faith and worship. But just what is that common tradition, and what precisely are its elements? What is the essence of Anglicanism?

As an answer to that question I think we could hardly do better than the Solemn Declaration 1893, whereby the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada was established. That declaration, which you can find in the front of any Canadian Prayer Book, seems to me such a complete and accurate statement of the essence of Anglicanism that I am going to begin by simply quoting what it says:

WE, the Bishops, together with the Delegates from the Clergy and Laity of the Church of England in the Dominion of Canada, now assembled in the first General Synod, hereby make the following Solemn Declaration:

WE declare this Church to be, and desire that it shall continue, in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world, as an integral portion of the One Body of Christ composed of the Churches which, united under the One Divine Head and in fellowship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, hold the One Faith revealed in Holy Writ, and defined in the Creeds as maintained by the undivided primitive Church in the undisputed Ecumenical Councils; receive the same Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as containing all things necessary to salvation; teach the same Word of God; partake of the same Divinely ordained Sacraments, through the ministry of the same Apostolic Orders; and worship One God and Father through the same Lord Jesus Christ, by the same Holy and Divine Spirit who is given to them that believe to guide them into all truth.

Well, there you have the essential elements: the Scriptures as the Word of God written, which is the fundament; the ancient ecumenical Creeds and Councils; the ministry and Apostolic succession; and the divinely ordained sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Supper of the Lord. The Scriptures, the Creeds, the Apostolic Ministry, and the Sacraments--these really are the substance of the so called Chicago/Lambeth Quadrilateral, which served Anglicans as the basis for ecumenical discussion all through the Twentieth Century. Now, all these elements are held together in the life of a worshipping community, and thus the Solemn Declaration adds its final paragraph:

And we are determined by the help of God to hold and maintain the Doctrine, Sacraments, and Discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded in his Holy Word, and as the Church of England hath received and set forth in 'The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church according to the use of the Church of England; together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches; and the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons'; and in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion; and to transmit the same unimpaired to our posterity.

Now there are certainly other ways of being Christian, and we should never presume to say otherwise. But that is the Anglican way. And in no other Church in Christendom, I think, at least in Western Christendom, has the Church's liturgy such a determinative role. And because for us the official liturgy constitutes our standard for maintaining the doctrine, sacraments, and discipline of Christ, liturgical innovation has a kind of importance peculiar to Anglicanism and has great potential for destruction if undertaken unwisely. In abandoning or eroding that tradition, you see, Anglicanism loses shape. It loses definition. All things become possible theologically, morally, liturgically; and the institution, as institution, moves rapidly towards dissolution. Or perhaps it continues only as a bureaucratic arrangement without any genuine religious significance.

The Anglican way, as a particular form of the Catholic and Apostolic Church, exists authentically only under that principle of authority which governs and authenticates the Universal Church. The Word of God has been revealed, the Truth of God has been proclaimed, and the authority of that Truth is universal and absolute--and, of course, not peculiarly Anglican. "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world*" (Heb. 1:1-2). The divine word, the divine authority, was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). And in his presence, as St. John says, we have touched and handled of the Word of life (I John 1:1). And yet, none of us has grasped the truth of God in all its purity, completeness and simplicity. We grasp it haltingly, in our divided human passion. We "*see through a glass darkly*" (I Cor. 13:12). We "*know in part and we prophesy in part.*" (I Cor. 13:9). And thus, within the universal church we have particular traditions and distinctive differences. We are granted spiritual discernment, to be sure, and yet the Spirit's gifts also are divided. To one is given the spirit of wisdom, to another the gift of knowledge by the same Spirit, and so on, "*dividing to every man, severally, as he will*" (I Cor. 12:11). Therefore, it is not just the individual and not just the particular church but the whole body unified by the good will of charity that approaches the truth of God, each one making his partial contribution with due humility: "*Till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:13). We come to the unity of God's truth only in and through the diversity of community and communities.

That means, I think, that we must not expect to find in the Universal Church any very specific human locus of authority. What we must look for, rather, is the Church's common mind, what is technically referred to as the *Consensus Fidelium*, the common mind of the faithful in relation to the Word of God revealed. It was the Church's common mind which, over a period of several centuries and not without dispute, established the Canon of Holy Scripture. It was the Church's common mind which promulgated credal affirmations and conciliar formulations. It was the Church's common mind which defined the Church's mind on the forms of apostolic ministry and sacramental practice and established the norms of moral and aesthetical life. By common mind, *Consensus Fidelium*, we do not mean current popular Christian opinion. It is not a matter of counting heads or taking plebiscites. Truth is not established that way. You know, if you had tried that method, say, in the middle of the fourth century, the result would probably have been Arianism. If you had tried it in any later century the result would almost certainly been a kind of unwitting Pelagianism. No, the *Consensus Fidelium* is the mind formed (and by no means always popularly) by the Church's ongoing, serious, and devout attention to and submission to the Word of God, unconformed to the wisdom of this present age. It is then expressed with greater or lesser precision and in varying degrees of authority in credal and conciliar pronouncements, in liturgies, canon law, and in the

theological tradition as a whole.

By *Consensus Fidelium* of the faithful we do not mean the opinion in one diocese or one province of the Church but the mind of the whole Church. We do not mean the mind of the Church just as it might be isolated as at this particular moment, you know as a kind of chronological provincialism, but the coherent development of Christian thought and life from the very beginning. What we are speaking of, then, is the living, developing tradition of the universal Church, as it is guided by the Spirit in relation to the revealed Word of God. Now that traditional consensus is really the only fundamental authority in the Church of God.

Bishops, in their *Magisterium*, as it is called, their teaching office, have true authority only as they are faithful guardians and interpreters of that traditional consensus. They have the particular duties of discerning and defending it. Well, all of us, of course, have the duty of shaping our thinking and our lives in accord with it in humility and obedience.

So the Church's authority resides in the *Consensus Fidelium*. But grave problems arise inevitably as to the authoritative interpretation of that consensus and the practical applications of its demands in the life of the believing community. Christian Emperors, Kings, Parliaments, Popes, Ecclesiastical hierarchies, Councils, Synods, Canon Laws, charismatic leaders, and so on, have all made their claims in various configurations and emphases. In the Nineteenth Century, for instance, the rapid secularising of Christian States tended to isolate the authority of the Episcopate. And I think Twentieth Century Anglicans are still inclined to have a very exaggerated notion of the authority of bishops. Among more radical Protestants much is made of the interpretative authority of the saved individual, the spiritual man who "*judgeth all things and is judged of no man*" (I Cor. 2:15). And the same tendency, of course, in other terms, underlay the promulgation of the dogma of papal infallibility in 1870. Modern democratic tendencies, on the other hand, have been inclined to exalt the authority of synods, sometimes in violation of their own constitutions, and even in disregard for the traditional consensus from which derives what ever real authority they legitimately possess.

The authority of consensus is not easy to live with. It involves learning and deliberation, debate and controversy, when we would prefer, perhaps, the peace of easy compromise. It involves the patience which must sometimes think in terms of centuries instead of months or years. It involves reverent, careful, and humble attention to the past when we are, perhaps, inclined to be preoccupied with the latest findings of Biblical Criticism or the Social Sciences or with the latest popular causes. And in the divided state of Christendom, the divided state even of our own communion, it involves, or should involve, the frustration and self discipline of refraining from local decisions which are not clearly justified by the *Consensus Fidelium* as more universally conceived in time and space.

So far we have been speaking of the authority of the universal Church. But how does all this apply more directly to particular traditions within

the Church, especially the Anglican? You know, in recent centuries with the fragmentation of Christian tradition, particularly in western Christendom, the problem of authority has inevitably become acute, as one looks for a consensus from the standpoint of a National Church, or a denomination, or even from the standpoint of provincial or diocesan groupings within denominations. So far as Anglicans are concerned, the problem was poignantly stated at Lambeth, in 1978 already, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who remarked then: "We have been searching, somewhat uneasily, to find out where the centre of authority is."

For three centuries, more or less, the Crown served as a kind of locus of authority for the Church of England. But even more practically important than the establishment at the locus of authority was the Book of Common Prayer, which played an incomparably greater part in fashioning Anglican unity, shaping our religious outlook, and giving us a *Lex Orandi*, a rule of prayer, wherein our *Lex Credendi*, our rule of belief, could be defined and expressed. For Anglicans of all persuasions the Prayer Book served as the common authority in matters of doctrine, worship, and pastoral practice. And whatever we might mean by Anglican spirituality, you know, whether one thinks of John Donne, or George Herbert, or William Law, or John and Charles Wesley, or Edward Pusey, or William Temple, always it is fundamentally a spirituality fostered under the guidance of the system of Common Prayer.

Thus in the very essence of Anglicanism there is fundamentally the authority of a tradition, an Anglican *Consensus Fidelium*, fostered and expressed by the liturgy, by the Book of Common Prayer. And really everything distinctively Anglican is, in fact, embodied in that tradition. It is a tradition at once firm and yet flexible, keeping the mean, as the Preface of the 1662 edition puts it, "between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and too much easiness in admitting any variation from it."

The Church must, indeed, respond to the intellectual and moral revolutions of recent times; but there are different ways of responding. Response, surely, should not be that we should undertake to conform ourselves to the fashions and conventions of the present age. One hopes that our response could be more constructive than that. Liberated from a merely dogmatic attachment to the past, we must now recognize ourselves, I think, as free to approach that same past with new understanding and appreciation of it. That does not mean, you see, a rejection of our past. It means learning for ourselves the meaning of that past. It does not mean wholesale and radical revision of the forms of our tradition. It means, rather, a thoughtful re-appropriation of the faith once for all delivered to the Saints (Jude 3) as that faith has been received and lived in the ongoing *Consensus Fidelium* of the Church. And for Anglicans that includes the specifically Anglican consensus expressed in the living tradition of common prayer.

Now, I have said a good deal about faithfulness to a tradition and about the authority of a tradition as the essence of Anglicanism, and I am concerned not to be misunderstood in that regard. There are many Anglicans, you know, who would speak of the essence of Anglicanism with the curious analogy of a three legged stool. It is somehow the

favoured image of three parallel authorities: Scripture, authority, and reason. Some commentators would wish to add a fourth leg, experience. I think that analogy involves quite extraordinary folly and nothing of it should be attributed, as is sometimes done, to Richard Hooker, who thinks quite otherwise. For Anglicans, as for Christians generally, the ultimate authority is the Word of God, God's gracious self revelation in Jesus Christ witnessed to by Holy Scripture. What constitutes Anglicanism as a distinctive form of Christianity is a certain way of reading, understanding, and living in obedience to that Word. And that particular way is embodied in and explicated by the tradition of common prayer. Tradition so regarded is nothing other than faithful obedience to God's Holy Word. That is something the English reformers and Richard Hooker knew perfectly well. And that has nothing to do with three legged or four legged stools.

Anglicans nowadays are much concerned about questions of authority and church government, concerned about the character and structures of the institution and the future of the Anglican Communion. But the cohesion of Anglicanism will not be recovered by bureaucratic structures, by councils and conventions and committees. Such is surely not the way of renewal. Genuine renewal, instead, requires an understanding of the tradition in all its fullness and its unity and a certain humility of spirit in relation to that tradition. And I think this way about the wholeness and unity of Christian tradition. I don't mean, really, to gloss over what is obviously, historically, and in present practice a very fragmented tradition, with many conflicting and opposing currents. The fact is that all our traditions, all our recollections, all our representations of the primary and essential tradition are imperfect and incomplete. "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels*" (2 Cor. 4:7). It is only in and through all the imperfect recollections that we approach the wholeness and the unity. I am not suggesting, therefore, a narrow traditionalism which would hold to certain fragments of tradition thoughtlessly and stubbornly, although I do think that stubbornness has something to recommend it in the current ecclesiastical climate. But to fix upon the fragments in a narrow way is to fail to understand even that part of tradition which we claim to embrace. For the past will not rightly be received in that way. I am suggesting, rather, that genuine renewal depends upon a more profound and generous traditionalism which seeks to find the wholeness of divine tradition in and through and behind all the fragmentary and imperfect representations and apprise those interpretations, those recollections accordingly.

In the first scene of Goethe's *Faust*, Wagner claims that he already knows much and he desires to know everything. To whom Faust replies, "What you have received from your fathers, you must earn in order to make it your own." To endeavour to understand tradition, to earn our tradition in its wholeness, and thus to make it our own, is a tremendous and therefore fearful labour--not least of all, because it requires a liberation of the mind beyond anything so called liberals have ever contemplated. What I mean is that if we would ever really understand and embrace Christian tradition and be renewed thereby, we must acquire a critical and self-critical grasp of what constitutes our own standpoint as moderns. Only then will we be