

Unpacking "Anglicanism"

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Anglicans are:

1. Biblically orthodox

"Orthodox" means - in this case - "right thinking" about God's Word. It means, thinking about Scripture the way the Church first thought of it prior to the unhappy divisions in the 11th and 16th centuries!

We believe that the Bible is God's Word...full stop...no apologies...no "revision" for modern sensibilities. We believe that God's Word speaks its own Truth, and that Truth is not negotiable, nor capable of being "voted on" in a General Convention of 21st century Christians taking council of their own opinions. Further, we believe that Scripture is its own interpreter: that is, we believe that any questions or apparent contradictions in God's Word can be resolved by a wider, more integrated reading of the whole of the Bible...both Testaments, each of the 4 Gospels, and all the New Testament Letters...from John and Peter, James and the author of Hebrews...as well as from St. Paul, the Bible's greatest theologian of all!

As Anglicans, our Way of worship bespeaks our dependence upon, love for, and celebration of God's inerrant Word: the Bible. Our Book of Common Prayer would be largely empty without the direct or paraphrased versions of the Bible. We love God's Word so much, that we use it to worship Him every day and twice on Sunday.

2. Creedal

Biblical Truth has always been something with which Christians have had to struggle. The deepest things of God *would be* difficult to completely fathom, wouldn't they?! In fact, one of the Church's greatest minds, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, proclaimed that the Blessed Holy Trinity and the deep recesses of God's Nature are something that we must admit is - in the end - beyond our mere human capabilities to describe!

Why then, do we Anglicans bother with "Creeds?"

The answer fits our condition. Without a godly summary of our Faith, a godly summary which the Ancient Church proclaimed as TRUE beyond question, we would be left to our own contemporary devices as to how to pass on to the next generation the great, wise, and holy insights of the Fathers of the Church in the first 10 centuries. We would be subject to all the delusions and passing passions of our current cultural issues...whatever those might be. We would be unprotected from charlatans who might say, "THIS [my own opinions] is the new, truer Way of knowing who God is."

The Creeds we use most...the "Apostles Creed" and the "Nicene Creed"...are beautiful, biblically sound, triumphantly True declarations of who God is, and who we are, in His image. Actually, when we pray the Creeds during the Daily Offices of Morning or Evening Prayer, and in the Sunday and week day Eucharists, we are doing just that: Praying. Notice, this Sunday, what comes at the every end of the Creed: the word "AMEN."

Saying the Creed is *praying* the Creed. It is an offering up to God, anew, our utter dependence on His self-revelation (through the Bible and through His Incarnate Son's Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension) and our joy at belonging to Him.

As Anglicans, our Creedal way of praying means that we may avoid heresy, stupidity and unfaithfulness by making sure what we preach, teach and talk about is in agreement with the Ancient Church's understanding.

Can we "vote" on what we believe? Well...no. We live in the "Kingdom" of God...not the United States of God...nor the Peoples Republic of Christianity. So...we joyfully accept and do not dare argue with the Creeds. Or else, if we argue, we must be prepared to show how the greatest minds over 10 centuries were collectively wrong and we...in the 21st century know ourselves to be "right" How could we be that arrogant?

3. Spirit-Filled, Soul Winning

Anglicans believe in the Holy Spirit. Further, we believe that, at Holy Baptism, every new-born believer is filled with The Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches this. The Church's experience confirms it. The only way we can authentically follow Jesus Christ is by the same Holy Spirit which conceived and lives in the Lord Jesus. We are the Body of Christ. That means we participate in and are held together by the Spirit of Christ. Not every spirit is the Holy Spirit. So, to be "spirit-filled" might mean "emotionally stirred", "inspired to great praise", "enthusiastic for the Kingdom". But, for Anglicans, being "filled by the Holy Spirit" applies to every avenue of our life: from brushing our teeth in the morning, through worship throughout the day, to seeking and serving Christ in everyone we see, to using the Holy Spirit's Gifts for the Glory of God the Father. All of life is lived in the Holy Spirit...if we will let Him have His way in our lives.

One very specific manifestation of being "Spirit Filled" is the pursuit of what the Holy Spirit is always in pursuit of: winning souls to Jesus Christ.

Of course, the first soul we are most responsible for "winning" with the Holy Spirit's help and direction is...our own! Before we bless (inflict) our own understanding of how another person is being called to know and serve Jesus Christ, we must tend our own garden. Yet, having said that, the Bible is clear: the mission of believers is to go out in faithful service to God with the Good News that Jesus loves them, died for them, and that they can have eternal life through trusting in Him alone. In short: we are called to help the Holy Spirit win souls to Christ. We are to have evangelical ("filled with the message") hearts: God wants to use us to help others come to repentance and Faith in His Son.

As Anglicans, our primary means of "soul winning" is Friendship with others. That is, we believe in the method Jesus Himself used to call sinners to the love of God. Jesus reached out to serve, heal, and exemplify the Good News He proclaimed. Never do we see Him simply "down loading" a teaching. Always, His Message is lived out in tangible demonstrations of the "Love" He is proclaiming. Likewise, Anglicans are at their best when they are not self-promotional, but living, loving, and sharing Christ by a "living sermon." In one of the most powerful Renewal movements of the 20th Century, "Cursillo", a method is taught which is so very simple: "Make a friend; Be a friend; Introduce your new friend to Jesus." I can't sum it up any better than that!

4. Little "c" Catholics who practice a Traditional Moral Life

To be a "little c" Catholic is to be a Catholic who is not in obedience to the Bishop of Rome. We Anglicans are not, in the Roman sense of the word, "Catholic." However, and this is extremely important, we are indeed "reformed Catholics." That is, we hold the Faith which the Church held prior to its sad divisions in the 11th and 16th centuries.

We have certainly *behaved* as if we didn't really believe the Catholic Faith. At times, we have had a kind of self-inflicted amnesia about what a Catholic Christian is. But, that does not mean that Anglicans can't know who we are as reformed Catholics. We certainly can...and should. Here's a very short and incomplete list of what Catholics practice, as opposed to those who do not:

- i. We accept the three-fold ordained ministry of Bishop/Priest/Deacon as the Anglican Way of providing godly, pastoral leadership in the Church.*
- ii. We worship according to a prayer book.* We accept and rejoice in other, more extemporaneous forms of worship, but hold as precious the heritage of Anglican Prayer Book Worship as our primary celebration of the "Lord's Day," i.e. Sunday worship.
- iii. We observe the Ancient Calendar of the Church:* with the seasons of Advent/Christmastide/Epiphany/Lent/Easter tide/Ascension/Pentecost every year without fail. We do not give ourselves permission to take a year off from this observance! It is invariable. Why? At least one good reason I know: it keeps our minds and hearts focused on the Mystery of Jesus Christ...His birth, life, passion, death, resurrection, Ascension, etc. Following the church Year also keeps us relatively in harmony with other catholic bodies...the Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, for example.
- iv. We exercise shared authority between the ordained and lay ministers of the Church.* Bishops rule in our Church. That means, when there is a final decision in our Church, and there has to be a singular 'decision maker', that decision maker is the duly elected, Holy Spirit-anointed Bishop of the Diocese. For us, that means the Rt. Rev. Jack Leo Iker. There is no other diocesan bishop other than him. And, the claim that a national "presiding bishop" has spiritual or legal power over our bishop is inaccurate, legally and historically. Just as the Archbishop of Canterbury has no authority over any bishop/priest/deacon/lay person in our diocese...so, neither does the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church have any authority in our diocese. However, "shared authority" means that the bishop of the diocese shares his

authority with other clergy, and with the duly elected representatives from every congregation in his diocese.

v. *We share a traditional moral life.* Catholic Christians follow the moral and ethical teachings of God's Word and the godly direction of the Church for our family, parish and community lives.

This means, for an example, that we teach the Commandments of God...from both Old and New Testaments. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount give invaluable direction to how to live a godly life in Christ. Furthermore, we apply the Commandments of God without twisting them to mean what we would like them to mean. We do not, for instance, take the Command to join ourselves into one flesh in marriage as man and wife...one male and one female...and twist it to mean that any two people...regardless of sex ...can be "married" in God's Eyes. So: *Faithful* Anglicans do not accept or practice so-called "same-sex" marriage as God-blessed. This, of course, can give rise to controversy and resistance from a culture which is obsessed with individual rights over accountability to God. So be it. Anglicans must be faithful to the Lord, even if it gives heart-burn to the cultural leaders in the USA in current times!

Of course, so much more can be ...and should be...said about what is the Traditional Moral Life for an Anglican. Certainly, the "same-sex marriage" issue is not the only important cultural challenge to Catholic Christians. However: I use it because it is such a clear example of why we must distinguish ourselves from the National Episcopal Church's unfaithful promotion of immorality amongst its members. We cannot be "unequally yoked" with those who have lost their way morally, and are teaching the next generation to accept and applaud what has been known to be an abomination in God's eyes. We simply cannot "wink" and call it "okay" for our Day!