

Being Anglican: Our Faith, Our Ministry and Our Witness

Many persons believe that the Anglican Church came into being during the period of the Reformation in the 16th Century, but the truth is that the Anglican Church has its roots in the pages of the New Testament church that quickly spread throughout and across the Roman Empire. The pages of our New Testament reveal that, as new churches were planted in different parts of the empire, they each emphasized certain elements of the Christian faith while others needed the pastoral correction from people like St. Paul. There were so many Old Testament images and models that had been taken or given new meaning in a church that was still struggling with its identity. They saw themselves as the New Israel in Romans 9, 10, 11, now claiming the promises of God for themselves. They saw themselves as the Body of Christ, that despite their diversity of gifts there was unity and purpose to their work and ministry according to I Corinthians 12. They considered themselves as the Bride of Christ, committed to One Husband, Christ Himself, and therefore there ought to be absolute fidelity to Him (II Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:32). They saw themselves as the temple of the Holy Spirit that called them to a new way of living individually and collectively as a community (I Corinthians 3:16; II Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:20). They saw themselves as the Priestly Community that had walked out of darkness into Christ's marvellous light and life (I Peter 2:9). St. Paul encouraged them to be the New Creation and Ambassadors of Reconciliation in II Corinthians 5:17ff. They were a Eucharistic centred community where the Breaking of

Bread was the central act of worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7). They saw their lives intimately connected to Jesus like the vine on the branches (John 15); they saw themselves as the sheep rescued by the long awaited Good Shepherd who came to save them (John 10); they saw their witness as being important and consistent in the images of the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World (Matthew 5: 13-16); they saw their lives as being grounded in the Word made flesh (John 1); they saw themselves as soldiers in the Lord's army, dressed for action (Ephesians 6); and they viewed themselves as servants to servants of God by following the example of their Lord and Saviour (John 13). They became known as "Followers of The Way" long before they were called Christians-and the title "Christians" when first used at Antioch was used in a derogatory and contemptuous way-Oh these Christ-like folk!!! This "**melting pot**" of images and ideas along with the theology of the New Testament and Early Church provided enough energy for the church to struggle over the next few centuries as it defined and redefined its apostolic and catholic=or universal faith. As one theologian has put it:

"The catholic faith is therefore that faith foretold by the ancient prophets, revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, proclaimed by His apostles, recorded in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, taught by the Early Fathers of the Church, defended by the seven ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church and expressed in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and later on by the Creed of St. Athanasius."

During the first few centuries, and from that “melting pot” certain defining points became important in the life of the church.

1. The belief in a triune God
2. Salvation in no other but Jesus Christ Himself
3. Commitment to Christ and His mission was both corporate and individual in nature with no room left for thought of self preservation
4. The continuing work of the Holy Spirit for our salvation
5. Baptism and the Eucharist as the two sacraments ordained by Christ Himself which are considered as necessary for salvation
6. The importance of Creeds (Baptismal and The Nicene Creeds) which came first before the scriptures were decided upon
7. The Holy Scriptures which contain all things necessary for salvation
8. The threefold ordained ministry of the Church-Bishops, Priests and Deacons
9. The ministry and priesthood of all believers
10. Commitment to the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the transformation of their environment to His honour and glory.

Christianity came to Britain from as early as 200 A.D. long before Pope Gregory decided in 597 A.D. to send St. Augustine to Canterbury. So Christianity was in Britain long before the

Roman church arrived. With the arrival of Augustine and His successors, the “**melting pot**” was once again put into motion and the English Church was a result of a combination of three streams of Christianity

- a. The remnants of the Old Romano-British Church
- b. The Celtic tradition coming down from Scotland and associated with people like St. Aidan and
- c. The Roman Tradition of St. Augustine and His Successors.

The church in Britain or the English church was therefore in the mainstream of the Christian Church of the West.

But just like everything else, if there is no growth, transformation, renewal or reform it is easy for things to fall into disrepair. And the state of the church deteriorated during the middle ages in many quarters with the Church in England being no exception to the rule. It was more than Henry’s divorce that precipitated the break between the English Church and the Church of Rome.

You see, even religion can get sick and that was the case in the 15th century in the English Church

15th Century England

The fifteenth century (and possibly earlier), saw the development of the ground for the English reformation. English

Christianity had in it much of the corruption that could be found in the rest of Western Europe. Here I will only list them:

Pluralism-Bishops hold post in more than one Diocese

Absenteeism-Bishops holding post in a Diocese in which they did not have direct contact and therefore many cures were neglected

Decrease in Scholasticism

Church owned one-fifth to one-third of the Land

Church possessed special and independent rights in justice and in paying taxes

The Church had more say in politics than the King

Popes used this power to control states

Many Bishops became engrossed in the affairs of the state and frequently neglected their dioceses

The laity wanted reform

The clergy, by persecution in some cases, tried to force the laity into submission

The reformation on the Continent was beginning to spread to the West

The English Monarchy was depending on the support of The Church

Slow economic times

The decline in imperialism

Demands for a revolutionary change

Abuse of the Sacraments

Indulgences

Weak in teaching and doctrines of the church

Salvation by grace and works

The Papal See was too occupied with temporal matters than spiritual ones

The Papal See had become part of the political shakers and makers of the age.

All of these issues were present long before the issue of Henry's divorce became an issue.

The struggle over the divorce case was clearly only one of the factors that contributed to the final break with Rome. One must bear in mind the anti-papal, anti-clerical, patriotic feelings of the people and how they were used to affect the final break with Rome. Henry's need to have a male legitimate heir, his

anger over the Pope's inability to make a decision because the Pope seemed more concerned with his own political survival, and Henry's conscience, all played a part in that final break with Rome. No one factor can be singled out and it should be seen as a combination of factors that contributed to the final break.

And when the break came even with the introduction of Henry's Six Articles of Faith, the church retained its Catholic nature.

What did become important for the Reformers was to go back to the teachings of the scriptures and the Early Church to once again gain their bearings and order the church's worship, life and witness under the "**melting pot**" that began the whole process. Under the Kings and Queens that follow Henry the movement went back and forth between papal authority and further acts of reformation while trying to keep the puritans at bay. While some strove to keep the church catholic, others found their governing force was the return to the "**melting pot**" of the Scriptures and the Early Church.

By the 17th Century with Cramner's Prayer Book and the old Church of England Episcopal system restored, as well as the establishment of the thirty nine articles of faith, the Anglican Church had moved between the Reformed Churches on the Continent of Europe and the Roman Catholic Church taking the

best out of the two churches—a broadness that many interpreted as weakness, but it contained the best of two worlds.

In the 18th Century the moral and spiritual life of England declined, and with the rise of new intellectual movements that questioned accepted beliefs, and with the industrial revolution it changed the nature of the society. This gave rise to the evangelical revival led by three Anglican clergy, John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield. It led the church to return to its missionary task which had gotten lost in all the politics and poli-tricks. Both Wesley and Charles lived and died as Anglican priests leaving behind a rich tradition of Hymns, writings and insisting on a systematic approach of engaging the faith. Anglicanism began to spread throughout the colonies via Mission Societies. The Evangelical Tradition emphasized the Protestant aspects of the Church such as:

- The importance of the scriptures
- The Preaching of the Word
- Justification by Faith
- Personal conversion
- Personal Formation
- Personal evangelism

- Commitment to Mission.

The 19th Century saw a group of Tractarians led by persons such as John Henry Newman, John Keble, and Edward Pusey gave rise to the Oxford Movement which stressed the catholic nature of the church such as:

- The continuity of the Church of England with the Early Church
- The importance of commitment to the visible church
- The threefold ordained ministry, especially the episcopacy as signs of the church being catholic and apostolic
- The importance of the sacraments
- Importance of church order.

The Oxford Movement had three distinct phases. The first was the issuing of tracts and trying to bring the church back to what they saw as its roots. The second phase tried to bring back the dignity and order to the worship and the state of churches. They also were keen on doing social work and outreach to the neighbourhoods in which they found themselves. But the final phase led to the Anglo-Catholic Movement with many persons re-introducing Roman missals, prayer books, and practises from the Roman Catholic Church, wearing of vestments etc.-claiming

that they had only gone back to some of the early Anglican fathers to make their point.

It is clear that, whatever tradition made it to our countries/colonies in this province, they influenced what we have become and what we emphasized. It is even clearer why so many of us fight over the trivial matters rather than seeing that we have so much to learn from the broadness of Anglicanism, and we have now been placed in an even greater “**melting pot**”. Yet so many of us fight feverishly to maintain the status quo rather than using our dynamic position to develop a distinctly broad enough church grounded in the past yet open for mission in the present and making a vibrant change for the sake of Christ as we move forward into the future.

The Charismatic Movement in the 19th and 20th Century has caused many churches to go back and take seriously the work of the Holy Spirit in a church that has become rigid to His freedom and movement and pre-occupied with producing good “English-churchmen” rather than people who have been able to add their distinctive flavour to the “**melting pot**” of Anglicanism in this region.

The 19th Century saw another movement which became known as The Post–Enlightenment Liberalism which introduced much

of the scepticism being applied to many aspects of biblical teaching and basic Christian doctrine as a result of unbridled reasoning. No longer does **scripture, tradition and reasoning** govern much of our intellectual quests, but we simply allow human reasoning to run amuck under some strange concept of the love of God that has no limits, no absolutes, no rules, no ethics period and it is amazing what we can justify that stand so strange to the faith delivered to the saints of old. For the most part this new form of Christianity has adapted to the world's view and the culture becomes the major driving force in many situations.

Remaining in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conferences attended by bishops from around the world, the Primates Meetings, and the work of the Anglican Consultative Council have all help the Anglican Church over the years maintain its unity

The “**melting pot**” has allowed us to benefit in so many ways.

Archbishop Robert Runcie, former Archbishop of Canterbury in 1981 put it this way

“Compared to Rome, Anglicanism has a higher evaluation of the primitive over the medieval tradition of the church. Compared with Constantinople, it has a higher evaluation of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, and a greater respect for the

autonomy of the scientific method and the realm of ethics. Compared with Lutheranism, it is less sharply defined doctrinally, but more insistent on the centrality of the Liturgy and worship in the life of the church...In the matter of doctrine, the Anglican tradition has insisted on adherence to the primitive catholic faith while allowing a greater diversity of theological opinion than permissible in other Episcopal churches, and not proceeding to what has been seen over-systemization and definition of doctrine which was given unhappy impulse by religious quarrels of the sixteenth century and which has proceeded to our own day, creating new dogmas out of inessentials, which really ought to be left in the realm of theological opinion/speculation.” Even archbishops know when we are fighting over trivial things and making the inessentials- the essentials.

Our Faith- in a Caribbean Setting

Just as we have become a “**melting pot**” for various cultures, I believe the time has come for us as the Anglican Church in the West Indies to use **the melting pot approach** and take out of what we have received things old and things new, marry them together so that we may faithfully carry out Christ’s mission and ministry in our present context. So often we treat our Anglo-Catholic heritage as being mutually exclusive of our evangelical background, when they are not. We need both so

that we can get on with the mission of the church in the West Indies. A strong biblical base is needed in a society where we are bombarded by those who provide proof text to show how wrong the Anglican Church is without ever remembering that this was the church that authorized the original English bible. A church that not only points out the importance of the sacraments-but shows not only how they are biblically based, but the sacraments themselves invite us to encounter Christ and to move on with the work Christ has set for us. The balance will also help us to avoid the preaching and teaching of cheap grace that once we are baptized and taking communion frequently, we need not worry about the mission, the task, the life, or the way we live or the depth of our ongoing relationship to Christ. The intellectualism and enlightenment does not mean that we reject the charismatic movement or vice versa, nor does it mean that we throw out the essentials of our faith for the sake of fitting in with the rest of the world, finding a theology that is politically correct. There is so much that we can gain from taking the **“melting pot”** approach to what we have received in this part of the world rather than believing we have a monopoly on the truth or “What is really Anglican”. It takes a lot to be faithful to all that we have received but the average Anglican would prefer it to be “business as usual” which is far from what we have experienced in terms of our received traditions.

So what effect does that have on our understanding of ministry???

Let me deal with this in two ways: The ordained ministry of the church and the laity of the church.

If we are to adopt the “**melting pot**” model that I am proposing to you, then we need to look again at the way in which we prepare those who are being ordained.

1. They need to be not only well rounded in understanding the scope of Anglicanism, but I would be daring to say that **they need to keep the main thing the main thing**. As the New Testament writers saw some things as being essential, so we need to see the same in our context-and too often we end up with intellectuals but people with very little faith.
2. It is one thing to be knowledgeable about the faith, but it is another to be able to relate, inspire and equip a generation to live the reality of that faith in their every day journey and cease this dichotomist view of life where we believe we are living in two worlds-secular and religious, when there is only one which is under the Kingship of Christ.
3. Embrace our heritage and struggle to make sense of it and the theology we share with our people

4. Know the cults that surround us and rescue our people by developing a strong didactic ministry
5. Realize that many of our people are perishing because of a lack of knowledge-TEACH, TEACH, TEACH SOME MORE.
6. We need to be committed to allowing the laity to develop their ministries and use their gifts to empower the church for mission and ministry rather than believing we, the clergy, are the be all and end all of the process.
7. Clergy need to be committed to the Mission of Christ in their setting
8. The Day has come to consider specialized ministries for clergy persons to mobilize and equip both clergy and laity to get on with their mission, work, ministry and witness in the world.

What about ministry for the laity???

1. Gone are the days when they believe that they are the pay and pray crowd in a given congregation. The laity and the clergy must have a renewed vision that the mission of the church is theirs and it does not belong to some special group of persons-we are all in this together. The truth is Christ is counting on you!!! He expects us to not only know Him but to make Him known-that is the task of all of us. So

you need to commit yourself to Him and the task that He is calling us to. All of the sacraments call us to get involved and answer His call on our lives.

2. Confirmation can no longer be viewed as something simply necessary for taking Holy Communion, but Confirmation is but the beginning of lifelong service in the mission and ministry of Christ that requires us to be equipped, empowered, and sent on a daily bases for the task at hand.
3. You need to get to know the context of your diocese, your archdeaconry, your deanery or your local parish. Too many of us drive in and drive out for worship on a Sunday morning without ever making a connection with the people around the local parish setting. Do you know their needs??? Have you tried to be-friend them??? What gifts, talents, and resources does your church have to offer them??? Who can you refer them to for help??? Have you identified the gifts and the personnel to help meet those needs???
4. Develop a strategic plan of how you are going to tackle the needs within your parish/archdeaconry/diocese boundaries.
5. Set realistic goals and identify short and long term goals

6. Communicate your successes. Celebrate what the Lord is doing in your context.
7. Evaluate the process and make the adjustments
8. Go back to the “**melting pot**” and see what is there to help you.

What is Our witness in Our West Indian Context???

1. The message has not changed after 2000 years. We need to proclaim the good news, make disciples for Christ, help those who are in need, seek for justice, exercise proper stewardship over what has been given to us, arrest the violence and crime in our midst, to bind up the broken-hearted, and liberate people so that they could reach their highest potential in the grace of God.
2. We must address the difficult issues and our response in the case of those inflicted with HIV, AIDS, Violence, Identity crisis, pornography etc.
3. The time has come for the sharing of resources and this must be intentionally done.
4. There is an urgent need for the development of Family Life Ministries.
5. We need as a Province to make use of the media and our internet portals-get the message out-television is a must

6. The sharing of Tracts, books, teaching DVDs, on new doctrines, new philosophies, and documentaries should be encouraged.
7. We need to learn once again to relate our message with what we do in worship, to the sacraments, and to our Book of Common Prayer, etc.
8. We need to present an intelligent faith in the face of the movements of cults and sects in our context.
9. The message must be clear; there are no prerequisites to join this church!!!
10. We need to come to grips with the fact that some people now enter our churches in three ways-via the sacraments, by conversion, by the charismatic experience.
11. Whatever we do please make sure to package it with a punch-the broadness of Anglicanism does not mean that everything is watered down
12. Ensure proper follow up and follow through are carried out
13. Explore at all levels the concept of God's agenda for the church in the West Indies.
14. Review how we train, empower, and deploy persons in ministry (both laity and clergy)

15. Review the way in which we presently choose persons for leadership role based on popularity and/or personalities.

What am I suggesting to you from this talk on being Anglican; Our Faith, Our Ministry and Our Witness???

In order to be effective Anglicans in our context it is time for us to draw on all that we have inherited, take the best, train and equip all persons involved in mission and ministry so that we could have an effective witness that deals with the issues in our present context. Let us not get so bogged down in the non-essentials that we forget that all of this is for the sake of Christ and the advancement of His kingdom, to know Him and to make Him known, to hear His call to discipleship and answer that call and get on with the work of Christ in our generation.