

ANGLICAN IDENTITY: HISTORICAL, ECUMENICAL AND CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS

GEOFFREY ROWELL
Bishop of Basingstoke

In the first of the *Tracts for the Times* John Henry Newman famously posed the question of Anglican Identity, 'On what ground do you stand, O presbyter of the Church of England?' He answered his own question in terms of the apostolic commission and succession of the episcopate, and concluded—possibly drawing on what he had learnt from the Evangelical Joseph Milner's *Church History*, with its high praise of the martyr bishop St. Cyprian as an exemplar for all Christian bishops—that he could wish the episcopate of the Church of England no more 'blessed termination of their course than the spoliation of their goods and martyrdom'.

In *The Lectures on the Prophetical office of the Church* Newman engaged more fully with the issue of Anglican identity. In these Lectures he took over the correspondence begun by Archdeacon Benjamin Harrison with the French Abbé Jager, and endeavoured to defend the position of the Church of England in relation both to the Church of Rome and to 'Popular Protestantism'. The Lectures were to be reprinted later, together with other articles, under the title *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*. The 'Prophetical Office' in the original title is the teaching office of the Church, and it is with the articulation and transmission of the faith that Newman is chiefly concerned. Newman looks back to the seventeenth century—to Andrewes, Laud, Hammond, Taylor, and the other Caroline divines. He believes himself to be building on their theological foundation. They represent what he calls either 'Anglicanism' or 'Anglo-Catholicism' (both terms are used), for they are the theologians and expositors of the English branch or cultural embodiment of Catholic Christianity.

For Newman a living religion is animated by an inner spirit, which shapes it and gives it power and expression. It has the ability to 'cast nations in its mould'. Later on, when he expounds his understanding of doctrinal development in *The Essay on Development*, Newman powerfully evokes the way in which Galilean fishermen became theologians and teachers, and how a vast theological enterprise grew out of the Gospels and the Pauline letters. His concern about the religion of the Caroline divines is that it has been largely a paper theory. Colleges, churches and cities need to be shaped by its spirit if the *Via Media* is to be a reality.

Newman argues (at this stage of his theological development still convinced of the truth and viability of Anglicanism) that Rome is flawed because Rome has not only added to the faith by new doctrinal definitions, it has done so unilaterally and by fiat. It is both authoritarian and rationalist (he cites the doctrine of transubstantiation—as Pusey also did—as an example of this). Thus Rome neglects the mystery which is a necessary concomitant of revelation. On the other hand 'Popular Protestantism' fails to answer the question of a holy book needing an authorised interpreter. To get rid of the Pope to set up 10,000 Popes in his place (as Bishop Jebb of Limerick put it) created as many problems as it proposed to solve. Both Popular Protestantism and Rome were also neglectful of antiquity—the creeds, councils and liturgical pattern which shaped Christian belief and gave order to the unsystematic Scripture. In the Oxford Movement context of a protest against Erastian interference with the structure of the Church (the abolition of Irish bishoprics against which John Keble protested in his Assize Sermon), the seventeenth-century Anglican appeal to the early centuries of the Church as provid-

ing a foundation for a Reformed Catholicism needed to be given a new emphasis.

In *The Lectures on the Prophetic Office* Newman develops his ecclesiology by drawing on the offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, and applying them to the Church. The Prophetic Office is the teaching role; the Priestly office, the devotional and worshipping role; and the Kingly office is seen in the Church as a political, governing institution and an imperial power. When Newman republished the *Lectures* as a Roman Catholic he added an important Preface, in which his *Via Media* theology appeared in a new guise. Following the Aristotelian Golden Mean he expounded an ecclesiology which sought to avoid the excesses of superstition and arid rationalism in the priestly office, of tyranny and absence of authority in the kingly office; and speculation and authoritarian control in the prophetic office. Balanced *within* themselves the three offices needed to maintain a balance *between* themselves for a church to be healthy. It was a theme that was to be developed by Von Hugel with his exposition of the three elements of religion.

The Oxford Movement arose in part as a protest against interference by the state in the organisation of the church. Anglicans were challenged about their identity as the old confessional state was modified. What was happening in England was part of a wider movement throughout Europe which resulted in almost all churches becoming more ecclesially conscious. Gallican confessionalism in France had suffered severely from the excesses of the French Revolution. After the Bourbon restoration it was not surprising that Ultramontanism developed as a way of emphasising the independence of the church from the state. Culturally and architecturally the Gothic revival witnessed to a renewed interest in the mediaeval church which combined a strong sense of its theocratic identity with an organic and sacramental understanding of society.

The Anglican sense of identity was powerfully shaped by the role of the Church of England as the church of the nation. In Scotland Anglicans had become a small and persecuted minority. In America there had been a need to work out an Anglican ecclesiology in practical terms. Newman wrote a significant essay on 'The Anglo-American Church' in which he saw the church of Bishop Hobart, the Bishop of New York who stood in the High Anglican tradition, and whom Newman found a puzzle when he visited him in Oxford—how could sound High Church principles be linked with American republicanism?—as possibly pointing the way for a greater sense of ecclesial roots and identity for English churchmen. American Anglicans became the first to explore an unestablished role in a serious way. When missionary activity resulted in the growth of Anglican churches overseas, questions of Anglican identity were raised, and with them the question of church structures. Bishop Selwyn, the first Bishop of New Zealand, commented that Anglicans abroad were like an army without the mutiny act and articles of war, and it was Selwyn who gave powerful expression to the development of forms of synodical government.

In South Africa the case of Bishop Colenso, the author of the celebrated commentary, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua critically examined* (published between 1862 and 1879), in which Colenso applied his computational skills acquired as a mathematics teacher at Harrow to the rate per minute of the slaughter of sacrificial lambs in the outer court of the Tabernacle, and other similar situations, posed questions not just of historical criticism of the Bible, but of Anglican ecclesiastical authority. Colenso questioned the claimed right of Bishop Robert Gray of Cape Town to try and depose him from episcopal office and appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. As we know, from that case sprang the Church of England in South Africa, descended from those who remained with Colenso as Bishop of Natal. Gray's claim to metropolitan jurisdiction raised questions of provincial autonomy.

The Colenso case and its ramifications in the relationship between the Church

of England and Anglicans overseas was one of the proximate causes behind the summoning of the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, though it was certainly not the only one. A synod of the Anglican Church in Canada held in 1865 with a view to counteracting the unsettling effects of Colenso's work and the slightly earlier *Essays and Reviews*, asked for an Anglican council to define doctrine. The conference happened but the demand for a Council defining doctrine was not met. Among the Anglican bishops who attended that first conference there were a number who hoped that the gathering would become a clearly authoritative international Anglican body. The Archbishop of Canterbury, C. T. Longley, and A. C. Tait after him, had no intention of it having more than a consultative role. To set it up in a way that would give it legislative authority would pose too many questions and difficulties for the Church of England as an Established Church, intimately bound up with the authority of Parliament. Lambeth thus began with what it has continued to claim, a moral and persuasive, though not a binding authority. The central and international forum of Anglican cohesion and identity was thus in terms of legally and doctrinally binding character a weak one in its inception and in its subsequent development.

The spread of Anglicanism overseas followed largely, though not entirely, the spread of the British empire. Missionaries sometimes preceded, and sometimes followed, trade, imperial expansion and conquest. English expatriates abroad needed religious services, and those services they needed, and were provided, were for the majority the services of the Church of England. The Church which so expanded overseas was, of course, a church which was historically two provinces (or four, counting Ireland and Scotland) of the Catholic church in the West, and it could be argued that there was something that there was something ecclesiologicaly curious in this overseas enlargement of these two provinces, though the counterbalance to this is the clear missionary imperative in the title deeds of any part or branch of the church. A national church expanded overseas, carrying with it the self-understanding of a national church, but finding itself in a missionary situation in which such self-understanding did not correspond to the reality of the new context. Theologically the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of the 1880s pointed to an Anglican identity grounded in Scripture, the historic creeds, the sacraments and the ministerial structure of continuity in the historic episcopate. Doctrines of 'dispersed authority' and 'provincial autonomy' have their origins more in an accommodation to the pragmatics of Anglican history than in theological principle. The repudiation of the Roman primacy, and the assertion of national episcopancy over against more radical Reformation doctrines, was also grounded in an appeal to antiquity. Bishop Jewel, the first defender of the *ecclesia anglicana* of the Elizabethan Settlement, argued that the English Reformers had tried to conform the doctrine, order and worship of the Church of England to that of the primitive church. Anglicans argued their identity as a return to the Christianity of the early centuries over against Roman accretions and the more radical programmes of Independency. In the Commonwealth period, particularly when Anglicans were driven into exile, and experienced years during which they were not the established Church of England, Anglican apologists, concerned to defend Anglicanism against Continental Protestants and Catholics, stressed the appeal to antiquity. At a later stage the Non-jurors again argued for their understanding of Anglicanism in terms of reference to the undivided Church, and set that understanding forward by liturgical change, and in their ecumenical overtures to the Orthodox.

It has, of course, to be recognised, that in the context of a historical religion, such as Christianity, all reformations are in a measure revolutions by tradition and seek to provide their legitimacy by an appeal to primitive precedent. Such arguments are also inevitably *post hoc* rather than *propter hoc*. Calvin's Presbyterian polity was as much as Anglican defences of episcopacy an appeal to primitive prac-

tice; the only difference was in what that primitive practice consisted, and the extent to which the principle followed was *sola scriptura*, scripture and tradition, or tradition as the interpreter of scripture. Church history was told and re-told in particular ways to give credence to and justification for ecclesiastical splits and the revoking of former authorities. On the Continent Flacius Illyricus and the Magdeburg Centuriators wrote a Lutheran Church History (*Historia Ecclesiae Christi* (1559–74)), Cesare Baronius (1538–1607) supplied a Catholic alternative version (*Annales Ecclesiastici* (1588–1607)). In England Archbishop Parker looked to an Anglo-Saxon Christianity which enjoyed a certain autonomy from Rome, and collected manuscripts to undergird his theory. The revivalism of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to a church history which saw such history as essentially the continuity of the converted, lights shining in the encircling (usually mediaeval) gloom. The German Pietist Church history (*Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie* (1699–1700) of Gottfried Arnold is one such example; the *History of the Church of Christ* (1794–1820) of the Evangelical Joseph Milner is an English parallel. The Biblical precedents of the Old Testament history of ‘the remnant’ provided a scriptural model to be drawn upon in such an understanding. On the whole it is this ‘pietist’ history in broad outline which has shaped much Anglican historiography.

Although Anglicans did not often work with the idea of a Fall of the Church, as some Lutherans did, the appeal to the church of the undivided centuries (which became a classic Anglican definition of antiquity) left the Middle Ages generally equated with ‘dark ages’. The ideology of Reformation, and the repudiation of Papal authority, carried with it the sense of a return to a primitive ideal that had been lost, even though the English Reformation was so much an act of state. Evangelicals (and contemporary charismatics) tended to leap over the centuries to the New Testament church (viewed through revivalist spectacles); Tractarians had a greater sense of historical continuity, but still needed to discriminate in the mediaeval period. Newman looked to the primitive church; Hurrell Froude ‘smitten by the love of the theocratic church’ looked to the independence of the church symbolised by the stance and martyrdom of Becket. The Reformation might be ‘a limb badly set which needed to be broken again in order to be mended’, but that did not endorse (except for W. G. Ward in his *Ideal of the Christian Church* (1844)) all Roman claims and Roman doctrine. Newman carried with him from his Evangelical years the conviction that the Pope was Antichrist, and claimed that he was stained by that doctrine until two years before his 1845 conversion from the Church of England to the Church of Rome.

Unlike the Reformation Churches of the Continent the Church of England did not appeal to a confession of faith, such as the Augsburg Confession or the Helvetic Confession, or like the Westminster Confession of the Church of Scotland. The Thirty-Nine Articles, though a religious test for the holding of ecclesiastical office, and, until the early to mid-nineteenth century some offices in national and local government and for matriculation in the university of Oxford and for graduation in Cambridge, did not function in the same way. The *Book of Common Prayer* on the other hand provided a standard of worship which remained important for Anglican identity, though only printing made such a test of identity really possible. It was Prayer Book worship which was exported to the various churches of the Anglican Communion and gave a cohesion and identity (along with an expatriate and later English-trained episcopate). One of the many questions challenging Anglican identity today is common worship. This is true in England with the consequences of liturgical revision, combined with the informal worship influenced by the charismatic movement, and the technological revolution of the word-processor (as significant, if not more so, than the invention of printing). In overseas Anglican churches it is the question of inculturation that can pull

sharply against the cohesiveness of common worship (though there is a long way to go in some parts of the Communion in this respect as I witnessed in January at the enthronement of Archbishop Livingstone Mpalanyi-Nkoyoyo as Archbishop of Uganda—an entirely 1662 liturgy, divided up between the Ugandan bishops and celebrated with little sign of either knowledge of the liturgical movement or of local culture!).

If common worship can no longer be defined in terms of the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* or close variants, then we must recognise that an important historic ingredient of Anglican identity has been weakened. The controversy surrounding the ordination of women to the priesthood has likewise weakened another element in the structure of Anglicanism, a commonly shared and recognised ministry. The Act of Synod in this country was necessary in order to continue to include within the church those unable to recognise the decision to ordain women to the priesthood. That decision itself, as far as the Anglican Communion was concerned, though having an early anticipation in the wartime action of the Bishop of Hong Kong, was really decided at the Anglican Consultative Council in Limuru in 1971, when it was agreed by a small majority that each constituent church of the Anglican Communion was free to take its own decision in this matter. The Council, it is acknowledged, was a relatively frail and arguably unrepresentative body, and certainly one which ought not to have borne the weight of such a significant and historical decision. The subsequent establishment of the Primates' Meeting is an indication of a need to provide a further instrument of international cohesiveness. The debates about the ordination of women to the priesthood, and the deliberations of the Eames Commission, have all served to demonstrate the weak formal structure of international Anglicanism. The different decisions of different provinces have resulted in a situation of impaired communion. The unilateralism of provincial autonomy has militated against catholic coherence, as indeed it must as one form of the tension between the local and the universal.

The ecumenical movement has also had an impact. Because churches have often for historical reasons defined themselves over against one another, a movement of convergence necessarily has an impact on identity. Local ecumenical projects in this country, and the promulgation of the ecumenical canons have inevitably modified in one way or another Anglican self-understanding, though it may well be maintained that the norms remain clearly in place. Ecumenical agreement will also have its own particular impact, and raises the question of how the Anglican Communion as a whole, with only a morally binding and occasionally meeting central body, can in fact commit itself in a legally binding way to ecumenical agreement. The overwhelming vote at Lambeth 1988 in favour of the ARCIC I *Final Report* was impressive, but it could not be definitively binding. In a more internal Church of England matter, as a member of the Doctrine Commission, I remain concerned about the status of reports of the Doctrine Commission approved by the House of Bishops and Synod, at least in so far as their getting into the life-blood of the Church is concerned. If the ordination of women to the priesthood was an example of a potentially divergent action having an impact on Anglican identity, ecumenical agreement with a convergent consequence can have a similar impact on what it means to be an Anglican.

Churches, however, cannot remain fossilised. We can recall that Newman ended his *Essay on Development* with the words 'in a higher world it may be otherwise (the realm of Platonic forms) but here below to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often'. 'Here below to live is to change'—and change takes time to be assimilated. Newman warned against a picture of Christian origins which maintained that the water was clearest at the source; rather, he said, when the spring first bubbled up it threw up a mass of muddy debris, which took time to settle. Only as the stream flowed away into a broad channel did it become clear and

limpid. The Christian church took time to develop away from Judaism, and to develop clear structures. Perhaps the same might be said of other upheavals, so that our judgement on the English Reformation (and therefore on Anglican identity) ought to take into account not just the iconoclasm of Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell, but the theological achievement of Richard Hooker and the Caroline divines. One of the questions must surely be, in talking of the English Reformation, is Where do you draw the chronological line?

Any discussion of Anglican identity must include a general caveat against supposing that there is, properly speaking, a theology of Anglicanism, or of the Church of England, or of the Anglican Communion. There can only be an Anglican theology of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church; an Anglican attempt to explore how the Church of England and the Anglican Communion relate to that fundamental credal affirmation. All churches have to do this. The Roman Church, until quite recently, took an exclusivist line. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus est*—and that church outside which there was no salvation was the Roman Catholic Church. It was proposed at one stage that the Vatican II declaration on the Church, should say that the Church of Christ *est* the Holy Roman Church. Later, and most significantly, it was altered to *subsistit*. The Orthodox churches of the Byzantine tradition can likewise maintain a fairly strong affirmation of identification that they are the one true church of Christ, certainly this would be true of some of the monks of Mount Athos.

The Oriental Orthodox family of churches, of which I have considerable experience, does not make such a claim, and has some interesting resemblances to the Anglican Communion. The five churches which comprise the Oriental Orthodox family—the Copts, the Syrian Orthodox, the Malabar church in India, the Armenian Orthodox, and the Ethiopian Orthodox churches—recognise each other, exist in a relationship of full communion, and yet maintain their own languages, cultures and liturgical practices. The Ethiopian church and the Armenian church are national churches which are still central to national identity, the Copts and the Syrians are churches which embody the Christian culture of their nations, but as minorities in an overwhelmingly Muslim society. The Malabar Christians of Kerala in south west India have historic (and complicated) links with the Syrians, are a minority in a largely Hindu and Muslim society in India as a whole, but carry the identity of the Malayalam speaking people of Kerala. The Ethiopians, the Copts and the Syrians worship in liturgical languages (Ge'ez, Coptic and Syriac) that are no longer the *lingua franca* of everyday. They share a common non-Chalcedonian or Cyrillian Christology (commonly called 'Monophysite'), but their separation from the Greek-speaking Chalcedonian churches in the fifth century was as much a consequence of nationalism, and geographical situation on the fringe of or beyond the Empire as it was of theology. The five churches although in communion with each other have little in the way of common structures and decision making process. The old dependence of the Ethiopian church upon the Coptic (which for centuries provided the Ethiopians' sole bishop) has disappeared—and indeed there are current tensions in relation to jurisdiction over the church in newly-independent Eritrea. Similar tensions manifest themselves from time to time in relation to the historic link and hierarchical claims of the Syrian Patriarch and the Malabar Church. Anglicans define themselves as in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. There is no such *primus inter pares* as a focus of communion among the Oriental Orthodox churches. Both the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch and the Coptic Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria take their titles from ancient Patriarchates with apostolic foundations, which had an historic rivalry, but which were not set in an hierarchical order. Contemporary attempts, both real and perceived, by the Coptic Pope to present himself as the chief spokesman of these churches are clearly resisted. The Patriarchs communicate with each other

and gather (rather infrequently) in conclave, but these churches are essentially a model of national/cultural churches in communion with each other; but without any strong inter-church links. The Diaspora situation which has resulted in as many or even more Syrian Orthodox in Sydney or Saõ Paulo as in their historic monastic heartland of the Tur 'Abdin in south-east Turkey, to give but one example, has put pressure on these churches, which are now no longer geographically and locally focussed. This means a pulling apart in one way (distance, immersion in very different cultures) and in another a stronger focussing of identity. Because these churches separated from what became the mainstream of Christendom after the Council of Chalcedon, they have also defined their identity over against the Chalcedonian churches. Now that the Byzantine Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox have arrived at substantial christological agreement, and full communion may well be restored, further questions follow about owning the history of others (theologians venerated as saints, and even martyrs, in one church may have been anathematised as heretics in another; councils are labelled as ecumenical and authoritative in one context but repudiated in another). And there are still more questions about a theology of episcopacy which sees the bishop as the focus of unity, and which in theory holds there can only be one bishop in one place, and yet which provides culturally (and is likely to continue to provide culturally) for bishops of different communities. Aleppo in northern Syria has, I believe, one of the largest numbers of archbishops of any one city, boasting Latin (Roman Catholic), Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Chaldean, Maronite, Greek Catholic, and Armenian Catholic. Both culture and the realities of power, identity, and to some extent language, mean that even after substantial ecumenical agreement there is unlikely to be a coalescence into a single episcopal structure. Perhaps the Church of England's Provincial Episcopal Visitors are not so very wide of the mark in practice after all.

Anglicans have, as we have seen, appealed historically to 'the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and set forth in the Catholic creeds'. Antiquity has been important as an interpreter of Scripture, for, as Newman pointed out, Scripture is unsystematic. Tradition supplies the proportion and matrix for the exposition of and understanding of Scripture, and Tradition is not simply the historic creeds and the decrees of Councils (though even there there is a question of which Councils are to be reckoned authoritative and ecumenical) it is also a liturgical tradition, and an inheritance of order. The debate over the ordination of women to the priesthood focussed a number of important issues for Anglicans. (1) Was this admitted innovation congruous with Scripture and tradition? (2) How should decision be taken about a matter of order, claimed to be held in common with the great communions of East and West, in a divided church? (3) How does the Church of England cope with its historic claim in relation to antiquity, framed as part of its protest against Roman innovations, when in law the due process of the passing of legislation through the General Synod is by that very fact held to make what is so affirmed part of the doctrine and order which is stated to be 'uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds?' It is, I think, well known that Graham Leonard believed that there was a flawed and inescapable circularity in the *Worship and Doctrine Measure*—a Measure which after all had liturgy rather than doctrine and order primarily in its sight when it was passed.

The ecumenical process for all churches requires a wrestling with historic confessions and formularies of self-definition, which for clear historical reasons are often confessions which define a church over against another. Ecumenical agreed statements, which often proceed by an entirely laudable attempt to go behind the wording of formularies to establish areas of common agreement, frequently run foul of those concerned with ecclesial identity, who not unnaturally look to see

that the symbolic definitions and turns of phrase with which they are familiar in their own tradition and self-understanding are maintained. If transubstantiation is relegated to a footnote in the ARCIC agreed statement on the Eucharist, then it is not surprising that a number of Roman Catholics will be highly suspicious that they are being short-changed. If, on the other hand transubstantiation were to be highlighted as an agreed expression of eucharistic doctrine then defenders of the Thirty-Nine Articles would be out in force. Ecumenical and ecclesial agreement can pose questions to law formulated to define over against, and emphasise differences.

When the constitutional position of the Church of England was modified in relation to Parliament in the late 1820s and early 1830s by the demise of the confessional state as it had been known, the Oxford Movement wrestled with questions of authority and identity. Ecumenism, and controversial issues touching order and ethics, has brought these questions to the fore for Anglicans in recent years. As an historian of the Oxford Movement I found it surprising that what I had been teaching and researching suddenly became of much more central concern. It has been said that every ecumenical agreement results in more not fewer Christian denominations, because there will always be those for whom the agreement is a betrayal of a cherished tradition. The coming into being of the United Reformed Church did not mean the end of Congregationalism, for there were some local churches who continued to be Congregationalist. It is not only Anglicans who have continuing churches, and it is interesting, though not surprising, that it is the continuing churches (those with most strongly emphasised Anglican features) which are the most distanced in terms of official ecumenical relations. Add to these questions the fact that within Anglicanism there have been those who found their real ecclesial identity either in a transdenominational Evangelicalism, or in claims to a Catholic belonging, and the situation can become even more confused. There would certainly be room for an interesting comparative sociological study of 'belonging' both among Anglican Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics.

These historical, ecumenical and contemporary reflections on Anglican identity are offered in the hope that they may at least serve to highlight some of the difficulties with which we are faced when we try to elucidate that identity, both in terms of our history and in terms of contemporary ecumenical agreement.