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The Petrine Spirit of Global Anglicanism: A Summary & Threefold Approach

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*“So Jesus said to the twelve,
“Do you want to go away as well?”
Simon Peter answered him,
“Lord, to whom shall we go?”*

John 6:67-68

Introduction

To answer the question, “what is Global Anglicanism?” first we must answer what is Anglicanism? A history textbook will say Anglicanism is a liturgical Protestant denomination formed out of the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648), more specifically, the English Reformation (1534-1603). It will undoubtedly mention Thomas Crammer and Thomas Cromwell, the English monarchs, and even an interesting fact like, “Did you know C.S. Lewis was an Anglican?” However, the trouble with approaching the question “What is Anglicanism?” from a historical perspective is that this approach better answers *how* Anglicanism came to be rather than *what* Anglicanism is. Moreover, *how* Anglicanism came to be assumes an Anglo-centricity that is no longer true; the Anglican Communion is not centered around England or the Church of England in the same way Roman Catholicism is centered around Rome. Another way of putting it, the flower that is Anglicanism has outgrown its pot that was England and its roots are spreading throughout the world. Anglicanism ought no longer to be identified as strictly “English” because the Anglican Communion throughout the world has transcended the geographic boundaries of England and is a global collection of the Body of Christ.

In the wake of the most recent Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON IV) in Kigali, the conference determined that the Archbishop of Canterbury no longer held the confidence of Primates and Provinces of the Communion to uphold and administer orthodox

Christian practice.¹ Which has emphasized, whether intended or not, the de-centralization of England in Anglicanism. Priest and theologian, Urban T. Holmes III summarized this de-centralization forty years prior in the work *What is Anglicanism?*; in it, Holmes writes,

We are at our best when we love the Lord and his church more than our style of life. We do not believe in our country, right or wrong. [...] We are not monarchists, republicans or socialists, although our membership includes them all and more. We are pilgrims, who want to pass through a land that will support our journey to the Kingdom; and, if need be, the noblest of us will choose to occupy that land for a bit shorter time than usual rather than deny the Lord of the Kingdom.²

Holmes' words hit upon the new reality the Anglican Church faces today. We in the Anglican Communion are not defined by countries, socio-economic status, or political parties. Holmes says, "We are at our best when we love our Lord and his church," which translates to us in the Anglican Communion being at our best when we throw away geographical or political identifiers and embrace an identity cruciform to Christ. It is in accepting this Christ given identity that we encompass St Peter's meaning, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9) As the flower of Anglicanism outgrows its pot, a new opportunity arises to take hold of Peter's exhortation to "become a holy nation." Archbishop Henry Orombi (Uganda) foresaw a decade ago, "The long season of British hegemony is over;" how will the Anglican Communion define this new season on the horizon?³ How will we imminently define Global Anglicanism and participate in it.

An Essence of Anglicanism

What, then, is Anglicanism? Better put, what is *an essence* of Anglicanism? I preface "an" as means to say that I cannot depict *all* of what Anglicanism is in this essay. Though Lancelot Andrews distilled it generally into a sentence, "One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period – the centuries that is, before Constantine, and two after, determine the boundary of our faith."

In light of these past years, it seems Anglicanism comes to a crossroads where either Anglicans distance themselves from Andrews' distillation or have revealed themselves to be a

¹ Laurent Mband, *GAFCON*, "Gafcon Response to Archbishop of Canterbury," June 14, 2023, (accessed on June 16, 2023), para. 6, <https://www.gafcon.org/news/gafcon-response-to-archbishop-of-canterbury>.

² Urban T. Holmes III, *What is Anglicanism?*, (Wilton, CT: Morehouse – Barlow, 1982).

³ Henry Orombi, "What is Anglicanism?," in *First Things*, August/ September addition, 2007, (accessed on June 18, 2023), para. 2, <https://www.gafcon.org/sites/gafcon.org/files/resources/files/What-is-Anglicanism.pdf>.

tradition of Christians steadfast to forego the sinful attractions and trends of this world to hound after the orthodox practice of religion that adheres to the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ as has been revealed to the Church in the Holy Gospels and Holy Scriptures. What do I mean by the latter? The nucleus of Anglicanism is an essence of the *Petrine spirit*. St. Peter is perhaps the most relatable and frustrating of Christ's disciples; though flawed and at times wavering in his devotion to our Lord, his character is one of *obedience* and *striving*. The word ἀγωνίζομαι appears eleven times and is translated as “strive,” “fight,” and “struggling.” It is a Petrine spirit that captures ἀγωνίζομαι and encourages one to seek obedience and to strive for the glory of Christ.

With the Petrine spirit in mind and an allegorical hermeneutic, Anglicanism finds itself as Peter in St John's gospel in the sixth chapter. Jesus has given His beloved but difficult teaching on “the Bread of Life,” which results in many of Jesus' followers turning their backs and no longer walking with Him. (John 6:66) To Jesus' remaining twelve, He says, “Do you want to go away as well?” Peter replies, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:68-69) The twelve no doubt perceives the difficultness and discomfort about Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life, “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?’” (John 6:60) Despite the discomfort, amidst people walking away, Peter may have felt a similar appeal but acknowledges the raw futility of the situation; “to whom shall we go?” Standing before Peter is “the bread of life,” the one whose words have eternal life, the Holy One of Israel. (John 6:35, 68-69) To walk away in the presence of Christ would be irrational, and so in obedience and striving, Peter, and the rest of the twelve remain.

Herein lies an essence of Anglicanism: the Petrine spirit striving obediently to remain faithful to Christ. By post-modern standards, Church's traditional doctrine on homosexual relationships is difficult. Such a doctrine and cultural phenomenon imbed itself into the deepest tissues of our society on personal, familial, political, and religious levels. No one can blame another for having difficulty articulating the Church's traditional doctrine on homosexuality; here we acknowledge the initial striving or struggling against the impulse to waver from Christ. It is in our response to this impulse where we find whether we are like those who leave Jesus at difficult teachings or are like St. Peter, who may strive with Christ but remain obedient to Him.

An Essence of Global Anglicanism

If an essence of Anglicanism is the Petrine spirit, then this spirit should pervade itself throughout the entire Global Anglican Communion worldwide. However, it is essential to

acknowledge, that though bonded in “a fellowship of people united in the communion (koinonia) of the one Spirit and committed to work and pray together in the common mission of Christ,” our cultural contexts of iniquity isolates us.⁴ The sins keeping people in bondage to death in North America are not necessarily the same sins keeping people in bondage in South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Australia. The Global Anglican Communion finds itself in a similar position to the seven churches that Christ addresses in Revelation 2-3; each church isolated with the affliction of a particular sin, though each church also united in their demonstration of obedience and striving to remain faithful to Christ even when the temptation of sin is ever-present internally and externally.

Therefore, when asking the question, “What is Global Anglicanism?” one may summarize: Global Anglicanism is the communion of Christians spanning across the world united by the Petrine spirit to strive obediently for our Lord, Jesus Christ; a communion of saints on earth that have witnessed their brothers and sisters fall away either into apostasy or false teachings at the presentment of the traditional doctrine on sexuality. Even though it is tempting to follow those brothers and sisters as it may have been tempting for the twelve disciples and tempting for the seven churches, *an essence* of Global Anglicanism is to remain in the Petrine spirit – a state of being in faith and tradition that is steadfast and uncompromising on God’s command over our lives despite difficulty or discomfort.

Participation

One may say that Global Anglicanism is the embodiment of the Petrine spirit over the human temptation to be allured by heterodoxic teachings away from orthodoxy, but how is this spirit applied practically in Global Anglicanism? How is it acted upon and participated in at the clerical and lay level?

The 2008 “Jerusalem Statement” provides us with that answer. The Global Anglican communion is united in a Petrine spirit as “a fellowship of people united in the communion of the one Spirit and committed to *work* and *pray* together in the common *mission* of Christ,” – work (liturgical worship), common prayer, and mission. These are the components of the Petrine spirit the Global Anglicanism participates in and is united by.

Work, Prayer, & Mission

⁴ GAFCON, “The Jerusalem Statement,” June 29, 2008, (accessed on June 18, 2023), para. 9, <https://www.gafcon.org/about/jerusalem-statement>.

Liturgical worship is the *work* of the people, it is that which the people participate in and labour for with the end of glorifying God. Whether it be the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, Baptism, Matrimony, etc. these are examples of sacred moments when the people of the Anglican Communion participate in the work of celebrating God's manifested grace in the world, and the Church, all Communion rejoices in these liturgical works. By obediently abiding in the God's sacraments, the Church perpetually abides in God's love.

Similarly, in moments of *prayer*, morning, noon, evening, and compline, those in the Anglican Communion unburden themselves from the servant yolk of earthly authorities and burden themselves with the light yolk of Jesus Christ. In unburdening their backs, they burden their hearts to commune with their God, intercede for others, and put forward those deep wordless groanings that only the Holy Spirit can interpret. The beauty and intention of the *Book of Common Prayer* is that the language is inclusive; when praying the Confession of Sin in the offices, the prayer is "Almighty and most merciful Father, *we* have erred and strayed... *We* have followed too much the devices and desires... *We* have offended against your holy laws..."⁵ Yes, one may personalize this text to say, "I have erred... I have followed too much... I have offended," but in doing that, one accomplishes repentance for their sin but fails to repent on behalf of other's sins. As proscribed in the *Book of Common Prayer*, prayer for one another accomplishes global participation in the Anglican Communion because it encourages each person to pray for themselves and outside themselves. In these interceding prayers, our hope is that other brothers and sister strive, like athletes of God, to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

The world is the mission field, and it is the responsibility of all Christians, not only Anglicans, to be ambassadors of Christ to the world and fulfill the great commission to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [and] teaching them to observe all that [Jesus has] commanded [us]." (Matthew 28:19) Within the Anglican Church in North America, specifically, this is being met through the "Global Mission Initiative," whose aim is to "encourage, coordinate and expand global mission engagement."⁶ Whether it be the *Matthew 25 Initiative* – which engages "in works of justice, mercy, and reconciliation [...] for the vulnerable, marginalized, and under-resourced in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, the *Every Tribe and Nation Network* – which builds relationships

⁵ Book of Common Prayer 2019, (Huntington Beach, CA: Anglican Liturgy Press) 12.

⁶ New Wineskins Missionary Network, "Global Mission Initiative," (accessed on July 15, 2023), para. 1, <https://newwineskins.org/global-mission-initiative>.

“between diaspora communities in North America and the ACNA,”⁷ or the *Anglican Relief and Development Fund* – which provides disaster relief, community development, and funding to impoverished leaders and communities.⁸ These three missionary initiatives within the ACNA province are only a few examples of the importance of fulfilling Christ’s great commission and serving the Global Anglican Communion, domestically and globally. Hereto the Petrine spirit is embodied in the Anglican Communion’s mission in striving to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth through obediently following Christ’s commissions.

Conclusion

Now several months after GAFCON IV, which saw 85% of the Global Anglican Communion depart from Canterbury, that 85% is poised to set onward by first answering the question, what is Global Anglicanism? Above I have put forth how Global Anglicanism is akin to John 6; the Global Anglican Communion in the place of St. Peter is watching other followers walk away from Christ – there is a natural impulse to follow them; however, the Church realizes this futility, where else will we go but with Jesus? So, we strive against the impulsive temptation and obediently maintain a *Petrine spirit* in adhering to the Gospel and its teachings. This is Global Anglicanism.

How can we as a congregation participate in the broader movement of Global Anglicanism? We strive as the Jerusalem Statement suggests: in work, prayer, and mission. The Church liturgically *working* to glorify Christ. The Church *prayerfully* interceding for one another on each other’s behalf. The Church acting out its *mission* to serve our brothers and sisters domestically and abroad. This is the threefold approach to how the congregation can participate in the wider movement of Global Anglicanism.

The flower, that is Anglicanism, has outgrown its pot and its roots are spreading throughout the world. Whether or not the root will deepen depends on how the Global Anglican Communion proceeds forth in its obedience and striving for the Gospel by its work, prayer, and mission.

⁷ Every Tribe and Nation Initiative, “About,” (accessed on July 15, 2023), <http://etnn.org/about/>.

⁸ New Wineskins Missionary Network, “What is ARDF?,” June 22, 2023, (accessed on July 15, 2023), para. 3-5, <https://newwineskins.org/blog/ardf>.

