

THE ARCHBISHOP'S 2023 ANNUAL SUMMER ESSAY CONTEST

Third Place Winner

Priest/Deacon

To be an Anglican is to be global Christian

The Rev'd Timothy M. Matkin

“They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him” (Romans 15:21)

The Apostle Paul became a legend in his own time for his passion for traveling to new lands and starting new churches. As someone with a pastor's heart, he kept up with the congregations he planted and visited. Thankfully for us, several times he wrote letters back to those new communities of believers, answering their questions, and giving them guidance as the true shepherd that God called him to be.

But one of his letters was a little different. When he wrote to the Church of Rome, it wasn't a community that he had planted or even visited before. Instead, he was introducing himself before his arrival with a kind of theological treatise. This is who I am; this is what I preach. And in it, we see his passion as an evangelist.

What drove Paul toward Rome was the possibility of hitting the hub from which the whole world found connection. After all, in Jesus' final words before ascending into heaven, he had commissioned his Church to take the gospel to the whole world. To take the gospel to Rome (and Paul hoped through his legal appeal to witness even to the Emperor himself) was to take the gospel to the whole world.

Toward the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote: “From Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ, thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man's foundation” (Romans 15:19-20). And then he quoted Isaiah 52:15 as a promise of God that he personally strove to fulfill, “They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him.”

But what really stands out for me, is how it seems that even Rome is not far enough for St. Paul. Many of the pilgrims who walk the *Camino de Santiago* across Europe through Spain to the great shrine of St. James, also continue on a little further to the coast, to a rocky cliff in Galicia called the *Cape Finisterre*, Spanish for the cape at “end of the earth.” And in Roman times, it was indeed regarded as the westernmost tip of land, quite literally at the end of the earth.

The Apostle noted in his letter to the Romans, “Now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little” (Romans 15:23-24). True, Rome was the center of the world, but that only made it a vehicle advance to the ends of the earth.

As Paul traveled, he met many people from all walks of life and saw how a greatly diverse collection of people from all over the world and all walks of life had been united—joined together in unity of Spirit in their connection to Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord. The diversity of people was like the sand of the sea, and yet they shared “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.” Traveling to churches across the world gives you this rich perspective.

Consider another world traveling pastor, one of those successors to the Apostles—the 99th Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher. Today, he is probably remembered most as the archbishop who crowned Queen Elizabeth II, of recent memory. He left the bishopric of London and took up his post at Canterbury in 1945, as the Second World War was coming to an end. The hardship of war and challenge for travel during those difficult years had taxed the connections between Anglicans around the world. It was time to get reacquainted.

So Fisher became a traveling prelate, much like the later globe-trotting Pope John Paul II, visiting Anglican provinces all over the world from Europe and Asia to Africa and the Americas, restoring fellowship and reconnecting with the Anglican faithful across the globe until his retirement in 1961.

Of course, the Anglican Communion was in many ways a result of the growth of the British Empire as the English expanded their colonies and influence across the world. Wherever they went, they took their faith with them. They took their prayer books and priests and churches, but this was not simply to be chaplaincies for expats, but to spread the gospel and build the kingdom of God wherever God’s people went.

That gospel is the saving message of our redemption through Jesus Christ. God created the world good, and he created us as creatures made in his image with free will, so we would

have the capacity to love him in return. But the world God created was broken by our rebellion, by our sinful rejection of God. But God didn't give up on us. He came down from heaven in the person of his divine Word, incarnated as a human being. He suffered and died to offer himself as an atoning sacrifice to purchase the forgiveness of our sins with his own blood. As God incarnate, he rose victorious from the dead and now reigns in heaven as Lord. He offers the free gift of salvation to all those who respond to his love in faith and are joined through baptism to his death and resurrection.

About midway through his globe-trotting time as archbishop, in 1951 Fisher and his wife returned from an extended tour through the place that, from England, is just about as far as one can go in the world before one starts coming back—New Zealand and Australia. As reported in the *Church Times* (February 2, 1951), “The Archbishop travelled thirty thousand miles during the four months of his tour. . . . In that time he had given a hundred and thirty-eight addresses and sermons. On an average, he had travelled a hundred and thirty miles a day and had spoken more than twice daily.”

Upon their return to England, Archbishop Fisher was welcomed home with a grand celebration at Westminster Hall. The Prime Minister and the Archbishop of York greeted Dr. Fisher, who then delivered a speech that was repeatedly punctuated by cheers and applause. The faithful in London wanted to hear about the life of the Church abroad and the spread of the gospel around the world. In his talk, Fisher left us with an axiom of what it means to be an Anglican in the global perspective today.

Prime Minister Clement Attlee began with an observation of how the archbishop's trip had strengthened the bonds of the British Commonwealth, noting that what binds it together are not just legal ties, but even more so, a spiritual unity. This prompted Fisher to speak to the nature of that spiritual unity.

The *Church Times* noted that Dr. Fisher replied with his own speech, in the course of which he observed, “The Anglican Communion, with its fellowship of Churches, has a special responsibility at this time in the world. We have no doctrine of our own—we only possess the Catholic doctrine of the Catholic Church enshrined in the Catholic creeds, and those creeds we hold without addition or diminution. We stand firm on that rock.”

In his many travels, both on this trip and others, Fisher had met with many kinds of believers—a diverse collection of people like the sand of the sea. There were many connections between that group of people linked to those British cultural and legal bonds—one thinks of white powdered wigs on local magistrates, afternoon tea, and even driving on the wrong side of

the road. But the strongest connection, the deepest connection, was what they shared with believers of every place, every time, and every nationality—the faith, a truly universal faith. It was not tradition with a lower case “t” that bound them together; it was Tradition with a capital “T”—divine revelation, and their response of faith in one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

Dr. Fisher went on to argue that the eclectic tradition (lower case) of Anglicanism opens itself up to a broader unity of a shared Tradition (upper case) of the Catholic faith, a solid rock on which to build any society in any culture. He spoke about the Anglican approach to using the tools of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, saying, “We know how to bring to bear on our Christian devotion and creed all the resources of charity and reason and human understanding submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So we have a freedom and embrace a faith which, in my belief, represents the Christian faith in a purer form than can be found in any other Church in Christendom.”

To be Anglican means to live the Catholic way of the Christian life according to the English temperament, culture, and theological tradition. But those are only English tools to appreciate a universal treasurer. According to Martin Thornton, the Anglican temperament is characterized by moderation and balance between speculative prayer and meditation joined to an optimistic and lively homely divinity (the real *via media*), a devotion to rule and public liturgy, and a family pastoral model. Thornton described England as the “Land of the Benedictines” as many of the same characteristics mark the spirituality of that order.

We see it in our Anglican way of living the faith, with its emphasis on public worship, keeping a rule of life, private prayer, and the family character of parish life. And, of course, an appreciation of the unique contribution of Anglican theologians from the first centuries to the current is central to our outlook as well. To be Catholic is to be deep in history and keep everything in perspective.

That’s why we have the Rule or “Canon” of St Vincent of Lerins, reminding us of the measure of what it means to call our faith “Catholic” (*kata-holon*, or “according to the whole”). Vincent argued that his standard for the Catholic faith is “that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.” It is the faith which has stood the test of universality, of antiquity, and of consent by Christians.

Dr. Fisher, the symbolic leader of the global Anglican Communion in his day argued, “It is a reminder to us of the immense treasure that is committed to our charge — the immense responsibility on us in these days to maintain unshaken those common traditions that we have inherited from those who have gone before us.” The treasure he spoke of was that “faith once

delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Only on the solid rock of divine and supernatural faith can a global Christian culture be maintained in the face of the corrupting influence of secular values and ideas alien to the gospel.

As we strive to serve the Lord in the renewal of global Anglicanism through the GAFCon Movement today, our binding tie is that shared universal ‘faith once delivered to the saints,’ and our tool for building the kingdom is the gospel of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul expressed it when he told the Corinthians about what happened at the Last Supper, “I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you” (1 Corinthians 11:23). We have no right to add to what we have received from the Lord, nor to take anything away. As Dr. Fisher argued, we were given a great treasurer. It is our heritage of faith, and with it comes a great responsibility, which it to hand it over to others in its purest form.

Anglicans have long regarded their approach to the Christian faith as being one of fidelity to the common teaching of the Scriptures as understood through the consensus of the Fathers, rather than as something bound to any specific national culture, prelate, or reformer. This frees it from the bondage to any particular people or place and makes the gospel freely available to all.

As Anglicans, the Catholic faith is our birthright. On his deathbed, in 1711, the non-juring Anglican Bishop Thomas Ken who had been frustrated by his involuntary retirement through church politics, took refuge in his faith as he faced his own judgment day, and said, “Behold, I die in the holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith professed by the whole Church before the disunion of East and West, and more particularly, in the communion of the Church of England, as it stands distinguished from both papal and Protestant innovation, and adheres to the doctrine of the cross.”

Although our faith was handed down to us by those from the British Isles—Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Normans—the particularly “Anglican” things about it are only the *incidentals*. But the *essentials* are the same as what we find in the Church in every place and every culture and every time.

We have no doctrine of our own—we only possess the Catholic doctrine of the Catholic Church enshrined in the Catholic creeds, and those creeds we hold without addition or diminution. We stand firm on that rock.