

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Christian Education: Religious Identity and Anglicanism

To date we have focused on very general categories of religious identity, on how we gain knowledge of God and of His will for us, and of the differences between different categories of belief. This week we will begin to focus more specifically on what is peculiar to Anglican belief and practice.

1. Anglican origins:
 - a. What in the world does the Church have to do with the king's marriage?
 - i. Henry VIII and the Reformation.
 - b. How did we get *The Book of Common Prayer*?
 - i. A very brief history.
 - ii. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: The law of prayer is the law of faith.
 - c. How is the Anglican Communion organized?
 - i. What do we share in common with other Anglican provinces?
 - ii. What is different about The Episcopal Church?

Henry's succession crisis: Henry VIII to his dying day considered himself to be a loyal Catholic. The title *Fidei Defensor*, which is still claimed by British monarchs (and still appears on British coinage, although in the case of a woman the phrase is *Fidei Defensatrix*) was granted in 1521 to Henry by Pope Leo X, following the publication of Henry's treatise (which was ghost written by Thomas Cranmer) defending the seven sacraments against Martin Luther's assertion that only two sacraments (Baptism and Holy Eucharist) obtain.

Henry did not intend to split with Rome. He became convinced that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was illegal due to Catherine having first been married to Henry's older brother, Arthur. Henry thought that the lack of male issue from his marriage was a judgment from God upon him and upon England.¹

To Henry's time there had not been a female ruler of England. Henry sought to have his marriage annulled as invalid. Annulments of royal marriages had happened before, but the pope was constrained by the fact that Catherine was the niece of the Holy Roman Emperor, who's troops occupied Rome.

Henry's power struggle with Rome: Henry and his advisers became convinced that the pope acted as an Italian prince, and not as the head of the Church. Henry sought to consolidate his own power through a series of legal changes which prohibited English subjects from appealing from an English court to Rome, and which recognized the king as the supreme head of the Church in England. The statutory changes were drafted,

¹ The fertility issue in Henry's marriages likely related to Henry, not to his wives, and may in fact have related to Henry being infected with a sexually-transmitted disease.

mainly, by Thomas Cromwell, who persuaded Henry to a more Reformed view of the relations between Church and State. Henry came to believe that royal supremacy rested on the Fourth Commandment (“Honor thy father and mother ...”), as argued by Luther. In this argument, and in his dissolution of the monasteries (which controlled about a third of the wealth in England), Henry’s “theology” was certainly opportunistic.

The Prayer Book: During the early Reformation in England, no material changes were made in public worship, which remained in Latin. Adoption of the vernacular use began in Germany in 1523, with the full Mass in German in 1526. In 1539, the English Church adopted the use of the Bible in English. This was the first substantial liturgical reform under Henry VIII. In the same year a manual of private prayers (*Hilsey’s Primer*) was authorized, published by the bishop of Rochester. *Hilsey’s Primer* was succeeded by the *King’s Primer* of 1545. This set forth a catechism, private prayers and devotions, a liturgical calendar, and certain lessons, all as found in the liturgy used at Salisbury Cathedral (the “Sarum Use”)(as translated into English).

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer was instrumental in the adoption of the Primer. In 1544 he wrote and published *The Great Litany* in response to the king’s request. This was to address national set-backs in France, and was prayed in all churches. *The Great Litany* remains in our prayer book (pp. 148-155).

Henry VIII died in 1547. In 1548, Archbishop Cranmer issued his “Order of Communion”. This was an English supplement to the Latin Missal (Sarum). A order of service for Holy Matrimony was also set forth in English. Cranmer, basing much of his work on the Sarum Use, published the first *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549. “Common” prayer refers to prayer in public liturgy, as opposed to the private prayer of a person. The 1549 prayer book includes no major liturgical or theological reforms. Subsequent prayer books *did* change doctrine. An outline of the subsequent history can be found on the parish website on the Christian Education page, under “A History of the Book of Common Prayer”.

The Prayer Book and the faith: Anglicanism does not involve detailed codification of the content of the faith. Our *Catechism* is only an outline,² not the detailed statement of faith found in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This brevity arises from two causes. The first is the rule *lex orandi, lex credendi* (“The law of prayer is the law of faith”), which recognizes that our faith is defined in how it is expressed. What we say in common prayer defines what we believe. The second cause relates to the *via media* (“middle path”) that is characteristically Anglican. This itself flows from the so-called “Elizabethan Settlement,” under which Elizabeth I decreed that the various Reformation battles over doctrine and discipline would be resolved through tolerance of divergence in opinion. The prayer book was amended to include language allowing one to espouse different sacramental theology (for example). That’s why (to continue the example) there are alternative words of administration used in actually giving Communion to one who receives it.

Elizabeth’s settlement by no means settled the important disputes in Anglicanism, but it did provide for a way-of-working by which disputes could be held in tension. In our own day this heritage of tolerance is under renewed assault.

² BCP 845-862.

Given the reality that our prayer book functions, in effect, as our statement of faith, we need to pay close attention to *all* that is in the prayer book, not just to what we may say on a Sunday. We need to understand, as well, that changes in prayer are material.

The Anglican Communion: In the fourth week of this course we will examine how The Anglican Communion is governed; how it reaches decisions. But, we first need to examine just *what* The Anglican Communion is.

The Anglican Communion is comprised of thirty-eight provinces, all in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who sits as a first among equals (*primus inter pares*) of all the provincial primates. Most provinces comprise a national church, but “national” churches often include more than one internal province.³ All provinces except The Episcopal Church have a primate with “metropolitan” powers (*i.e.*, with hierarchical, archiepiscopal powers over bishops). In The Episcopal Church the presiding Bishop is not an archbishop. The constitution of the Church does not grant metropolitan powers. The Presiding Bishop functions as a *primus inter pares* in The House of Bishops, and is granted additional executive powers by canon. In the rest of The Anglican Communion primates are all, to date, men. The Church of England has recently consecrated a woman as a diocesan bishop.

The Episcopal Church shares in common with all of the communion an Anglican heritage of prayer book use, but we don’t all use the same prayer book. Our prayer books are more alike than dissimilar. We do share a common canon of Scripture, the recognition of Baptism and Holy Eucharist as sacraments, the three-fold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon in apostolic succession, and the common Creed. Like all provinces, we look to the Archbishop of Canterbury as *primus inter pares*, but this relates more to his function is summoning and presiding over the decennial Lambeth Conference (about which we will learn more in week 4).

The average Anglican is an African woman under the age of thirty. The Anglican Communion has about eighty million members, but we need to be careful about numbers. For example, by this number Anglicans would comprise the third largest group of Christians in the world (after the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox), but if we were to aggregate all of the congregational churches that call themselves, for example, Baptist or Pentecostal, we would likely discover a larger number. The Episcopal Church has about 1.8 million members, but the Average Sunday Attendance is about 624,000. By contrast, The Church of Nigeria has about twenty-one million members, with an Average Sunday Attendance of about 80% of that number.

What is different about The Episcopal Church? TEC is more different from other parts of The Anglican Communion in flavor than in substance. In other words, TEC is more different in ways that are not important to salvation, in *adiaphora* (“that which is not necessary to salvation”). Regardless of the theological weight of these differences, they are not well understood in other provinces, and this has led to a current diminution in trust within The Anglican Communion. For example, in other provinces it is not well understood that the Presiding Bishop lacks metropolitan powers. It is not well

³ A church may have more than one internal province, as in The Episcopal Church, which has nine internal provinces. The Episcopal Church is one province, however, for purposes of The Anglican Communion, even though Province IX of TEC comprises five countries and one commonwealth in Latin America and the Caribbean.

understood that *The Articles of Religion* are not mandatory, but are considered an historical document.⁴ An additional lack of understanding and trust results from TEC acting unilaterally. For example, when a partnered gay man was consecrated Bishop of New Hampshire, this was done after the then Presiding Bishop had promised the primates of The Anglican Communion that this would not happen. Just as much of the world complains about what it perceives to be American high-handedness, and the exercise of power founded on wealth, much of The Anglican Communion questions the motives expressed in actions of TEC. But, we are far more alike than not. In the coming weeks we will explore Anglican identity as defined by what we agree that *does* matter.

⁴ The “Thirty-Nine Articles” will be discussed in week 4.