

Keynote Address to the Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen. August 22, 2006.

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I have been asked today to speak on the question, 'What does conservative Anglicanism have to contribute to the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church?' At least that was the initial statement of the subject given to me. Before offering something of an answer to something like this question, I wish to refine the subject and consider some of its terms. Then I will offer four possible answers to the refined question:

Let me begin with a challenge to what seems to me to be the most problematic element of the question, namely the term 'conservative Anglicanism'. 'Conservative' is a relative term with little absolute meaning. To be conservative is to seek to conserve or preserve something, to resist change, or to be less inclined towards change than others. In the 1970s foreign policy experts spoke of 'conservative' members of the Soviet Politburo: an odd concept which, nonetheless, shows the vagueness of the adjective. Since radical changes have rocked the Anglican world at its highest levels since the 1960s, and since such changes still are in process in the Canterbury Communion, 'conservative' could refer to a vast array of positions, which need share little with each other beyond a resistance to some element in one of the revolutions of the last 30 or 40 years.

Consider, if you will, this hypothetical example. Jane Smith is an ordained clergyperson of the Episcopal Church and worships exclusively with the modern language forms of the 1979 Episcopalian worship book. Ms. Smith opposed the consecration of Gene Robinson, opposes all efforts to equate homosexual liaisons with Christian marriage, and is opposed to inclusive or gender-neutral language for the Deity. Ms. Smith subscribes to the Christological definitions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council. Ms. Smith favors legalized abortion on demand. Ms. Smith is, I submit, in the context of the contemporary Episcopal Church, a conservative. She may even describe herself as 'orthodox' because of her views concerning the classic Christological formulas. Ms. Smith may plausibly be described as conservative in 2006 because of her views on homosexual genital acts, although she embraces all of the three revolutionary changes wrought by the Minneapolis General Convention in 1976: namely priestesses, the 1979 book of prayers, and abortion. Ms. Smith is relatively conservative, yet I submit to you that an adjective that groups Ms. Smith and me together is of little heuristic value. So until 'conservative' is given more content - until we name the issues about which any given person or group is said to be conservative - the term is almost useless.

If 'conservative' is nearly useless, the alternative 'orthodox' is even worse. 'Orthodox' simply means that a given view meets the criteria a given speaker has in mind for correctness or truth. If Ms. Smith and I agree that the Christological formulations of the ecumenical councils are an essential element of doctrinal orthodoxy, well and good. But until we know what criteria a given speaker holds for defining orthodoxy, this term also has little or no content or heuristic value. At least 'conservative' clearly suggests opposition to some change or novelty. 'Orthodox' can mean almost anything. I sometime think that for some Anglican commentators - the estimable David Virtue comes to mind - 'orthodox Anglican' means simply 'opposed to homosexuality'. This reduction of meaning leads to the curious conclusion that Muslims, Hasidic Jews, and Mormons are orthodox Anglicans.

More useful as a general term than 'orthodox' or 'conservative' is 'traditional'. While this term also is very broad, it does at least have some content. Some things have clearly, objectively, and historically characterized Anglicanism or most Anglicans or many Anglicans, and so can properly be called 'traditionally Anglican', while other things are clearly excluded by the term. In the 1970s William F. Buckley, Jr., said that no one from Mao Zedong to Pope Paul VI could be sure that he *wasn't* an Episcopalian. That was a clever and telling comment about the post-revolutionary Episcopal Church. Nonetheless, we may reasonably assert that the Society of Jesus, Karl Barth, Planned Parenthood, Gene Robinson, the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, and the writings of B.F. Skinner are not traditional Anglicanism or classically Anglican. The historically-defined content supplied by the adjective 'traditional' makes this term more helpful than 'conservative' or 'orthodox'.

Nonetheless, the term 'traditional Anglicanism' is very broad and comprehensive, even if it is not as elastic and vague as the other terms. Any competent historian or theologian can make a powerful argument that Calvinist soteriology is embraced by the term 'traditional Anglicanism', since most of Elizabeth I's and James I's bishops, not to mention many later Evangelical Anglicans, were Calvinists in their soteriology. Most of the clergy in Sydney, Australia, have read more Calvin than Hooker. Most 18th century English clergymen held a kind of high Calvinist Eucharistic doctrine. So Calvinism, or at least many Calvinist ideas, may plausibly be described as 'traditionally Anglican'. But likewise sacramental and soteriological views that approximate those of the Council of Trent also have a long history and distinguished supporters in the Anglican world. Such Anglicanism also may plausibly be called 'traditional'. So too the Cambridge Platonists, the 18th century Latitudinarians, and the later Modernists ensure that liberal, rather anti-doctrinal Anglicanism may plausibly be called traditional. So too, finally, the Philo-Orthodox views of many Anglicans represent a traditional strand of Anglican thought. If 'traditional Anglican' has some content and excludes much else, still it embraces a vast field of often mutually contradictory views. Some would go so far as to define the essence of Anglicanism as the very fact of this variety, coexisting in tension perhaps, but still held in a kind of unity.

In any case, 'traditional' is a clearer adjective than 'conservative' or 'orthodox'. Therefore, let me revise my initial question ~~by~~ by using this somewhat more helpful term. Let us ask, 'What does traditional Anglicanism have to offer the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church?' I will offer next four possible answers.

The **first** and most depressing possible answer is that traditional Anglicanism now has little to offer the universal Church save scandal, confusion, and a cautionary example of comprehensiveness run amok. An absolutely open house will soon have no contents. An absolutely open mind will have little of interest to say. A religious tradition characterized by unceasing revolution, by a refusal to impose moral and doctrinal limits, and by supine accommodation of the *Zeitgeist* will experience steady, and finally a terminal, decline. Insofar as traditional Anglicanism is tied to the Episcopal Church or the Canterbury Communion, such decline is its obvious and already far advanced tendency. I doubt most of us here need elaboration of this point. Let me just emphasize that insofar as Anglicanism has in fact traditionally included a powerful anti-dogmatic, Modernist wing, the term 'traditional

Anglicanism' is not sufficient to exclude this melancholy sickness unto death. Therefore, if traditional Anglicanism is to survive, at least one element that in fact has characterized that tradition is going to have to be jettisoned or at least radically modified.

A **second** possible answer is essentially cultural. That is, we may argue that our tradition offers the wider Church, particularly our Roman and Orthodox friends, a culture, a system of religious artefacts and expressions, which powerfully assist the evangelical task facing all Christians. The glorious Anglican patrimony of liturgical English, sacred music, architecture, devotional and homiletic literature, theology, poetry, and even humor and fiction, provide tools for the enculturation of the Catholic faith in the English-speaking world. Let me just offer some names and titles which by themselves make the point: the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Authorized Version, Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes, John Donne, George Herbert, Thomas Traherne, good Queen Anne, Matthew Wren, Thomas Ken, William Law, Charles Wesley, Jonathan Swift, William Wilberforce, *Barchester Towers*, John Keble, William Gladstone, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Herbert Howells, T.S. Eliot, *Merrily on High*, W.H. Auden, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, Kenneth Kirk, Eric Mascall, Ian Ramsey, Austen Farrer. Or if you prefer, think of the Anglican converts without whom the Roman Catholic Church in the English-speaking world would be so much poorer: Richard Crashaw, St. Elizabeth Seton, John Henry Newman, Cardinal Manning, Father Faber, Gerard Manley Hopkins, G.K. Chesterton, Ronald Knox, Evelyn Waugh, and so on down to the Duchess of Kent, William Oddie, Edward Norman, Graham Leonard, and many others today.

I am personally persuaded that much of what Anglicans of any sort have to offer the wider Christian world may be described in these essentially cultural terms. Our own tradition has produced a religious civilization which is probably essential if the Catholic and Orthodox faith is to be successfully enculturated in the English-speaking world. The problem with this point for Anglican Churchmen now is that most of what I am here describing could be appropriated by others without much difficulty and without our assistance. Such theft of our clothes is probably only possible if others have more wit and imagination and generosity of spirit than they have shown heretofore. Nonetheless, a real Anglican Rite Uniate Church or a real Western Orthodoxy could incorporate most of what I have just described as our patrimony. As evidence and a foretaste consider what has been contributed to the English-speaking Roman Catholic world by the converts whom I have just named. Even a chauvinistic, triumphalist Roman Catholic must acknowledge the hope expressed by John Paul II that when the separated brethren return, they will not do so empty handed. While this papal observation gives hope for much of what we love about our tradition, it does not necessarily make our own separate ecclesial survival more likely – rather the contrary. If our clothes are borrowed successfully, we ourselves may be left naked.

Furthermore, it is not clear that traditional Anglicans of any sort will continue to be much of a cultural force. We are at risk of being so reduced in number as effectively to lose our influence. Mr. Auden asks, 'And where should we find shelter / For joy or mere content / When little was left standing / But the suburb of dissent?' It's a good question. And if we have trouble finding shelter for ourselves, how can we serve the wider Church? Other self-described Anglicans have already abandoned in a fit of folly the powerful sources of our distinctive cultural and aesthetic contribution. What do we

have to offer Christendom once we toss out the Authorized Version and classical Tudor liturgical language? Mr. Auden again: 'The *Book of Common Prayer* we knew / Was that of 1662: / Though with-it sermons may be well, / Liturgical reforms are hell.' In any case, if our task is simply to die in order to fertilize other traditions, then most of us should go elsewhere as quickly as we can and stop meetings of the present sort. This, needless to say, is not what I advocate, and not only because I enjoy your splendid company.

A **third** possibility, which I suspect animates many who consider themselves traditional Anglicans is that Anglicanism basically had things right, until the bad people got power in the mid- and late 20th century, and that our proper goal should be a restoration of the *status quo ante*, with the date of the *ante* being subject to debate: perhaps 1975, 1965, 1928, 1662, 1549, or when you will. On this view Anglicans offer the wider Church many positive theological goods, many of which would be lost if Anglicanism does not continue an independent, institutional existence. These restorationists might note the generosity of spirit and the admirable eirenicism of classical Anglicanism; the vision of a 'Reformed Catholicity' which embraces both the best of the Reformation and also of the Fathers; or, alternatively (or perhaps not), a distinctive theological position defined by the Reformed Anglican formularies of the Prayer Book, the Ordinal, the *Thirty-nine Articles*, and the Tudor divines. The difficulty with this position is that it really does not seem to offer anything that is both distinctive and viable. The classical Anglican balancing act has failed historically. If the tremendous glue of old and venerable institutions and historical identification therewith failed to keep the old Anglican parties together, it is unlikely that Humpty Dumpty, having had his great fall, can or should now be reconstituted. Rome today is sufficiently open to the 'separated brethren' to embrace what is valuable in all of the Reformation traditions without Anglican assistance. And the Evangelicals have achieved sufficient theological subtlety and security from an overweening papacy to benefit from the Catholic tradition without our tuition. In short, the old Anglicanism, with its theological ambiguities, with its parties in sometimes creative tension, and with its sometimes self-conscious posturing as a bridge Church, cannot be reconstituted, and if it could it probably should not be.

I should add that the idea of reconstituting an Anglican Communion in a conservative mode, centered perhaps in Sydney and Lagos, is silly. There is nothing distinctively Anglican about Sydney or most Evangelical and neo-pentecostalist Anglicans, and Lagos is compromised by continued full communion with half-revolutionized Churches such as those of Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. There can be no lasting Anglicanism either with priestesses or with full communion with priestesses. Those who are trying to build a big coalition that will ignore this problem will fail and deserve to fail. They build upon sand and have preserved in their new bodies the virus that destroyed the Episcopal Church in 1976.

So I myself favor a **fourth** answer to the question, 'What does traditional Anglicanism have to offer the universal Church?' In part to answer the question I would borrow from some of the other possibilities I have just considered. Anglicanism historically and traditionally does have distinctive and valuable characteristics which can benefit the Christian world as a whole and which, indeed, are needed by the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The culture of Anglicanism, which I have already spoken of, is one of those beneficial things. So too is the theological method of the best

Anglican theologians in their approach to Scripture through the reasonable interpretation that we find in the tradition of the Church, particularly in the Church of the Fathers. Another permanent good that we offer the wider Christian world is our pursuit, when we are at our best, of the consensus principle.

However, if these valuable goods are not simply to be Egyptian jewels to be borrowed by a more godly and favored people, and if our tradition is to demonstrate any stable and permanent value, then we must face frankly the problems revealed by the last 30 or 40 years.

The central problem in Anglicanism historically has been the toleration, if not the positive cultivation, of a deep doctrinal ambiguity. In the 1970s in North America, and 15 years later in England, this ambiguity led to a heretical claim by the old Anglican Churches. That heretical claim was that the Anglican Churches have the authority to alter doctrine. The initial instance of this claim was made by the adoption of the ordination of women to the priesthood, though in retrospect the claim to make women deacons is similarly heretical. Once this change was made, official Anglicanism abandoned Catholicity and became merely another Protestant sect. The old claim to be mere, undifferentiated Catholicism, without Protestant subtractions or Roman additions, was abandoned. In the face of this situation, it is no longer desirable or indeed possible to return to the former rather vague or ambiguous Catholicity. The only possible way to continue any form of Anglicanism that will have any permanent value for the Catholic Church as a whole is through a self-conscious, clear, unambiguous return to the central Tradition of Christendom. That is, Anglicanism can only continue in a form that is clearly both Catholic and Orthodox and which submits all Anglican formularies and all that is peculiarly Anglican to the higher authority of the consensus of the central Catholic Tradition. This position is firmly asserted by *The Affirmation of Saint Louis* and the Anglican Catholic Church, and it alone in my view continues to carry any notable good to the whole Church.

How many sacraments are there? Anglican formularies suggest that there are 'two only'. Many Anglican theologians say, 'There are two only that are generally necessary for salvation, but there are five others.' But Rome and the Orthodox and *The Affirmation of Saint Louis* all say clearly and unambiguously, 'Seven.' So seven is the answer. So too with the number of ecumenical councils. So too with the Real, objective Presence of our Lord in the Eucharistic elements quite apart from the subjectivity of the recipients of the sacrament. So too with the invocation of the prayers of our Lady and of all the saints. There are many, many such issues about which Anglicans classically debated. In the light of the crack-up of Anglicanism since 1975-6, I am confident when I say that such debates and resulting ambiguity are fatal. Insofar as Anglicanism does not stand firmly with the central Tradition, it deserves to die and it will die. In its liberal, modernist form it is dying in ECUSA now, already, visibly, and unmistakably. In its evangelical Anglican form it will die a bit later either by merging into evangelical Protestantism (consider the Diocese of Sydney) or by a slow-motion revival of the comprehensivist virus through general worldly influences. In its Continuing Church forms comprehensivism will die in a generation or two as the classical Anglican virus returns to virulence. The only alternative to theological death, sooner or later, is unambiguous adherence to the central Tradition, as summarized in *The Affirmation of Saint Louis*. We must humbly submit everything in our Anglican patrimony to the judgement of the whole Church, rather than pick and choose from the central Tradition according to our interpretation of peculiarly Anglican authorities or according to

essentially private and erroneous interpretation of Scripture. I would add that Rome and other traditions too need to submit their peculiar ideas to the wider consensus of the Undivided Church, and so grow stronger. A joint commitment to pursue consensus will lead us all closer together while itself preserving a profoundly Anglican theological tendency.

The Anglican Catholic Church, and others who are committed to *The Affirmation* in a consistent way, do have something to offer the universal Church. What we have to offer is the culture of Anglicanism and the generosity of the Anglican theological method at its best, in a form that shows the Orthodox how one can be Western and not Roman, and which shows Rome how one can be Orthodox and yet Western. That is what I think we have to offer. But that 'we' is far more restricted than the initial form of the question suggests. I am suggesting principles that will exclude and divide as well as include and unite. And many who heretofore have thought of themselves as conservative, orthodox, or traditional Anglicans will, I am afraid, be numbered among the excluded. I see no way to avoid this implication if we are to survive in and to serve the Universal Church.

Let me offer a final, brief point. I foresee the obvious objection that I am proposing a kind of sectarian vision. It will be noted that the ACC is tiny, and that the addition of like-minded folk from elsewhere does not much expand our numbers. The matter of size is also a matter of fact, and the objection is understandable. It certainly points to a danger. I would only say in response that the animating principle in the *Affirmation* is self-conscious adherence to the central Tradition of Christendom. That principle, whatever its immediate or short-term institutional effects, is directly opposed to sectarianism. It rests on the observation that Anglicanism in fact and historically went astray precisely by its own susceptibility to sectarian impulses – what we might call the will to heresy. To avoid a repetition of Anglicanism's recent fate we must strap ourselves to the mast of the central Tradition so as to resist the Siren song of heresy. In the long run this principle will impel Anglican Catholics towards the Roman Catholic and Eastern Churches, and that is entirely appropriate. What God will do with this impulse is not for me to know or say. I only know that I can and must be an Anglican Catholic now, and that God will take care of the rest as he pleases.

Thank you very much for your attention.