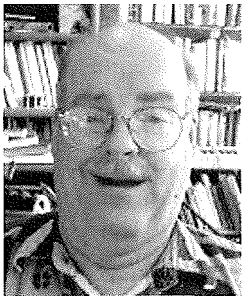
The Development of Anglican Doctrine

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By the 1970s the notion that the phrase "Anglican doctrine" is an oxymoron had become widespread enough that many considered it self-evident. This notion was ably refuted by Stephen Sykes in his 1978 work *The Integrity of Anglicanism.* Nevertheless, when we approach the topic of Anglican doctrine we should tread carefully, knowing that while in much of the western world it may often appear that Anglican doctrine is such an amorphous thing as to be barely definable, in much of the rest of the global church Anglican doctrine is still quite clearly definable. We in Canada are not in a position to make authoritative pronouncements about the status of doctrine in other parts of the world, nor are they in a position to make authoritative statements about it here. To begin then, with basic definitions is appropriate.

1. What is dogma or doctrine?

At the earliest period in the church, "doctrine" meant simply "teaching", as is still true today. As the church evolved into an institution it became necessary to qualify what was meant by church doctrine, but even today Anglicans define doctrine (or dogma) as: "The teaching of our faith; what we believe in the light of the witness of Scripture and the living tradition of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."[1]

2. What are considered to be doctrinal statements?

What can be said with greatest certainty are the Ecumenical creeds of "the undivided church". The creeds of the early church were accepted by the church of the Middle Ages, but the question of what was essential within the larger body of the deposit of the faith became crucial in the midst of the turmoil of the Protestant Reformation. In the Reformation period, the Church of England attempted to define its doctrine more clearly through the 39 *Articles of Religion.* Article 8 of the 39 Articles reads:

> VIII. *Of the Three Creeds.*
> The Three Creeds, *Nicene* Creed, *Athanasius's* Creed, and that which is commonly called the *Apostles'* Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture.
> (Canadian BCP, 1962, pg. 701.)

In the Reformation period, Thomas Cranmer's 1542 *Book of Common Prayer* became one of the basic doctrinal standards for the Church of England. In its 1662 revision it reached a form that is still considered authoritative for the global Anglican Communion today, at least at the official level.

The Solemn Declaration of 1893, which as one of the foundational documents of the Anglican Church of Canada, forms part of its constitution, reads as follows:

> WE declare this Church to be, and desire that it shall continue, in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world, as an integral portion of the One Body of Christ composed of Churches which, united under the One

Divine Head and in fellowship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, hold the One Faith revealed in Holy Writ, and defined in the Creeds as maintained by the undivided primitive Church in the undisputed Ecumenical Councils...

(Canadian *BCP*. 1962, pg. viii)

It is generally agreed that "the Creeds" here are at least the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The 39 Articles and the Canadian *BCP* (1962) include the Athanasian Creed, so many Anglicans also include it. Some statements also include the first seven ecumenical Councils as a corollary.

The Creeds seem to have even acquired the status in the Canadian church of "core doctrine", a phrase made popular in the 2005 *St. Michael Report*, and approved by resolution at General Synod meeting in Winnipeg, 2007. It is by no means clear that "core" is even a helpful way to designate doctrine, implying as it might to some, that anything not "core" is therefore "*adiaphora*" or not essential to the faith. is even a helpful way to designate doctrine, implying as it might to some, that anything not "core" is therefore "*adiaphora*" or not essential to the faith.

In current Anglican discussions, it is sometimes pointed out that many doctrines are not mentioned in the creeds, such as questions of marriage or sexual mores, yet are so important that the approach one takes may affect one's relationship to God and to fellow humans in such a way as to endanger shalom/salvation. Thus, while those doctrines cannot be said to be "core" doctrines in the credal sense, they may nevertheless be intertwined with credal doctrine in such a way as to be of a similar level of importance. This was recognized in the Saint Michael Report.

To some, however, the resort to the term "core doctrine" appears disingenuous when used by those in the church who either don't want to affirm anything in the Creeds, or at best accept them in only the most qualified or coded manner. In such cases it can appear to be a useful prop for a transitional political position, rather than a theologically grounded, long term sustainable approach.

3. Who can make doctrinal statements?

In Anglican thought this has undergone considerable change. Bishops have always played an important role. Theologians have had some role in shaping doctrinal formulae, though their pronouncements are not usually authoritative for the church until well after they are dead. The crown of England played a key role in directing the church in the 16th century: Queen Elizabeth I played a key role in engineering the Settlement that steered a middle path between Catholic and Protestant doctrines, comprehensive of both. Since that period monarchs have usually had little to say on matters of doctrine.

The Anglican Communion is said to be "episcopally led and synodically governed". Synods began in the early Middle Ages, and have generally increased their powers over time. The Anglican global movement, stemming as it does from the Church of England, shares this approach to church government.

As the Anglican Communion grew, it became apparent that controversial issues would need an international mechanism for consultation and resolution. Thus the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops was born in 1867. In 1886-88 "the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral" was developed as a concise statement of the authorities that hold Anglicanism together. It is still considered vital today, as is acknowledged in *The Lambeth Commission on Communion The Windsor Report 2004* (p.73). Its four elements are:

(a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the revealed Word of God.

(b) The Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith.
(c) The two Sacraments, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord, ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of institution and of the elements ordained by Him.
(d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church.

Ecumenists today will note with interest that the quadrilateral was deemed not only vital to the unity of the Anglican Church throughout the world, but also as: "essential to the restoration of unity among the divided branches of Christendom."

In Canada, General Synods have met since 1893, when the Anglican Church of Canada became a self-governing body within the Anglican global communion. At that time three of the four ecclesiastical provinces in Canada ceded power to the newly formed General Synod. The province of Rupert's Land did not officially cede power; thus all General Synod resolutions must be ratified also by the Rupert's Land Provincial Synod.

In recent decades a general disregard for authority of any kind has called into question both the authority of doctrine itself, and any of the individuals or bodies that express it. Philip Turner describes what he calls the "working theology" of the church: in a 2005 article in *First Things* entitled ***An Unworkable Theology***:

> Every denomination has its theological articles and books of theology, its liturgies and confessional statements. Nonetheless, the contents of these documents do not necessarily control what we might call the "working theology" of a church... one must review the resolutions passed at official gatherings and listen to what clergy say Sunday by Sunday from the pulpit. One must listen to the conversations that occur at clergy gatherings—and hear the advice clergy give troubled parishioners. The working theology of a church is, in short, best determined by becoming what social anthropologists call a "participant observer."

The recent crisis and division in the Anglican Communion has brought to the fore once again, more sharply than before, the question of who makes doctrine and who may resolve doctrinal disputes. Proposals such as giving more authority to the Primates Meeting, or to the Archbishop of Canterbury to resolve disputes run into difficulty with the tradition that these offices have not had jurisdiction outside their own Province, in most cases, though there are exceptions even to this rule.

4. The relationship between Doctrine and Revelation

From the Apostolic era until the Enlightenment period it was generally taught that the whole of Scripture was divinely inspired. In the Reformation period there was considerable discussion concerning the nature of God's revelation to humanity. The English Reformers chose to call the Bible "God's Word written" as distinguished from God's Word Incarnate in Christ. The written Word witnesses to and points to Christ, in a similar way to that in which John the Baptist bore witness to Christ, saying "He must increase, but I must decrease." The position taken in #6 of the 39 Articles was as follows:

> VI. *Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation.*
> Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those

Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the church.

(Canadian BCP. 1962, pg. 700)

Scripture was not an exhaustive account of truth, only the account that provides "all things necessary for salvation." More extensive claims for Scripture would be made by some groups, but Anglican approaches eschewed extremes in favour of moderation.

Stephen Sykes has documented carefully the implications for doctrine of post Reformation developments in Anglican thinking. He observes that the term "compromise" so often used to describe the *via media* that marked the Anglican path between Roman Catholicism and the more extreme forms of Protestantism is incorrect, at least when applied to later developments since the late 19th century.

The Anglican ***via media*** originally encompassed a church that considered itself both reformed and catholic, and could always be said to contain within it views that leaned towards either the more "catholic" or the more "reformed" end of the spectrum. If we must say that there were "camps", then there was also, in the 18th century a broad church middle "camp" that earned the name "latitudinarian" because it allowed a great deal of latitude to the diversity of views then present.

But in the 19th century a new theological force developed, first in Germany, and later, often with more moderated effect, in England: liberal "modernism" in which all aspects of Biblical authority could now be brought under the scrutiny of higher criticism. Sykes suggests that the rise of these views in the English church brought a problem far greater than that of accommodating a fourth new "camp" within the already "big tent" of Anglicanism. He says that the real problem was that as a "camp", the liberal view set a precedent by ***not*** presenting any one new doctrinal approach; instead it brought the freedom not to hold ***any*** doctrinal view. So now there was a fourth camp whose distinction was not holding to any ancient doctrines.

By the 1920s there were a large number of clergy influenced, in varying degrees, by modern critical views. One of the leading lights of that age, Bishop Charles Gore, advocated a moderate liberal criticism, and was thought by many to be dangerously liberal. But when it was suggested by some radicals that adherence to the Creeds was outdated, he wrote that clergy must be required to hold to the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. A crisis ensued, in which the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1925 appointed a Commission on Christian Doctrine that ended up creating more room for those who dissented from the Creeds and accepted higher criticism. Liberalism had become just a new "school of thought" within the Church of England, to the horror of Bishop Gore.

Of even greater significance, though, was the shift increasingly evident since the mid-nineteenth century: whereas earlier latitudinarian liberalism had appealed "to the simplicity and diversity of scripture against the complexity and uniform rigour of subsequent dogmatic orthodoxy, the biblical critic subjected the Bible itself to liberal interpretation" (Sykes 1978, 29). Once the clear statements of Bible and creed concerning matters long believed central to the salvation story, such as the Virgin birth, or the Resurrection, had been subjected to criticism and doubt, no one could tell where the process would end.

In Canada, the rift between conservative and liberal modernist criticism, already present in the 1880s[2] became very prominent by the turn of the 20th century.

Subsequent revisions of the requirements for ordination, as expressed in The

Examination before ordination, softened the understanding of the authority of Scripture and omitted mention of the 39 Articles. The ordination service in the Canadian *Book of Alternative Services* (1985, pg. 646-7) removed the requirement of ordinands to: "be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word". (BCP. 1962 p. 652).

Any consideration of the relation between revelation and doctrine must wrestle with the various views of "revelation" that have arisen in the modern era. The ancient church saw the message of God to humanity as separately revealed, first through prophets, and last of all through our Lord Jesus Christ, a revelation that cannot be arrived at through philosophical reasoning alone; by contrast the modern era generally relegated prophetic utterance to the realm of superstition. The rise of such and similar views within the church changed all discussions of "revelation" forever.

The move towards greater theological inclusivity strains the concept of "creative tension" which has for so long encouraged and blessed Anglicans. In view of the current reduction of biblical authority, it is not uncommon to hear people say that "anything goes in the Anglican Church." However, this is clearly not the case: if it were so, then why would it be necessary to have any ordination vows at all? Further, the Book of Common Prayer (1962) remains the official doctrinal standard of the Anglican Church of Canada, according to Canon Law, [3] and reaffirmed in resolutions of recent General Synods. (2004, 2007)

The Prayer Book(s) are often alluded to when Anglicans speak of ***lex orandi lex credendi***, underlining that liturgy is of paramount importance in the lives of ordinary Anglicans in reaffirming their basic belief in the story of God's salvation of the human race in Christ. To the extent that revelation of that story is expressed in the Scriptures and encapsulated in the Book of Common Prayer (primarily), the Book of Alternative Services and other liturgies approved by General Synod or by the Ordinary (secondarily), these liturgies continue to express the doctrine of the Anglican Church of Canada.

1. So, the Working Glossary of *The Report of the DOCTRINAL COMMISSION on the Blessing of Same-sex Unions* Submitted to Bishop George Bruce, Easter, 2004.)

2 We may note that Trinity College, Toronto, was founded in 1851. In 1877 Wycliffe College was founded, the presenting issue for which was the rights of the laity to ensure adequate theological training according to evangelical convictions. The addition of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that raged from about 1906 into the 1930s would deepen the rift between the two schools; and to many observers, still poisons Anglicanism in the diocese of Toronto, and beyond, today.

3 Stephen Sykes noted (1978, p. 45) that in terms of corporate discipline the Church of England is "quite probably the least law-abiding of the provinces of the Anglican communion, ... to assume that canon law is a dead letter in Anglicanism may well be a piece of English provincialism." Some might quibble the title "least law-abiding" rightfully belongs to The Episcopal Church USA (TEC). But the most important idea here is that there is a provincialism that tends to see only what happens in white western provinces as noteworthy. Many African and Asian scholars have called this "eurocentrism", with justification.

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