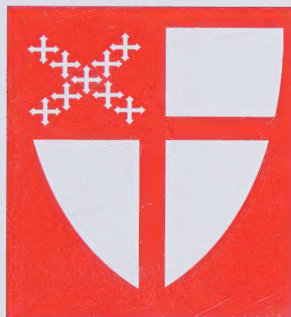


A PEOPLE
CALLED
EPISCOPALIANS



A Brief Introduction to Our Peculiar Way of Life

by

The Rev. Dr. John H. Westerhoff

-Revised 1998-



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THE ANGLICAN WAY



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*Dedicated to
my wife, friend, and colleague
Caroline Westerhoff*



I

INTRODUCTION

As Jesus, before his passion, prayed that his disciples might be one, we Episcopalians pray that the church, “being bound together in love and obedience [to God], may be united in one body by the one Spirit” (1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 255). When Christians representing the various communions within the major branches of the Church—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant Reformed, and Protestant Radical Anabaptist—pray a similar prayer, each has a somewhat different understanding of this union’s nature.

Within the United States, in our most recent past, the dominant image among most mainline Protestant denominations and Episcopalians was that of a melting pot. The emphasis was on similarities and the depreciation of differences. Typically denominations sought to attract new members through services rendered. Few explained carefully their historic distinctiveness, and many sought to be everything to everyone.

As a consequence, many people changed denominations solely for personal reasons, brought with them understandings and ways of life from the denominations to which they previously belonged, and sought to influence the new communion to be more like the one they had left. As might be expected, the distinctiveness of denominations became blurred. The result was confusion, loss of identity, and competition. Having concluded that this was a serious error, these same Christian communities are beginning to arrive at new understandings of church union. If the old image was that of a melting pot, the new vision is that of a fruit basket. Denominational distinctiveness and a rediscovery of each one’s historic roots and character or ethos are being affirmed.

The future of church union is being focused on each tradition's maintaining its particular and distinct identity and seeking to attract only those who believe they can best live into their baptism and grow in their relationship to God within it. Each recognizes the unique contribution the other can make to the whole. This understanding of unity should not appear strange, since Roman Catholics have had numerous diverse religious orders such as Jesuits, Benedictines, Franciscans, and Carmelites. And Anglicans have been composed of various "parties," namely Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic, Liberal, and Broad Church.

If we Episcopalians are to participate fully in this new vision of church union, we will need to become more conscious of what it means to be Anglican Christians. The importance of this effort cannot be minimized, for many of the debates and estrangements taking place within the Episcopal Church are a result of unclear and conflicting understandings of our way of life.

What follows, therefore, is intended to address this foundational issue and provide a stimulus as well as a basis for conversation among us. It is hoped that these brief essays, while not intending to be authoritative, will become a resource for study and conversation between and among those who are Episcopalians and those who are inquiring about reception into the Episcopal Church.



II

ANGLICAN IDENTITY

The Anglican tradition, like every other Christian tradition, is founded upon the affirmation that Jesus Christ is Lord. That affirmation is essential to and the foundation of the unity of the church. As Anglicans, we believe that Christ's transcendent presence in the Holy Spirit has continually formed, reformed, and informed who we are as one major branch of the tree, which is the Christian church.

As such, our Anglican tradition represents the continuous tradition of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in England, which became a distinctive political entity, the Church of England, during the Reformation, and of those churches around the world that owe their origin to the English church. The Episcopal Church, originally and officially known as the Protestant (meaning not Roman Catholic or Orthodox) Episcopal (paradoxically meaning not Protestant) Church in the United States of America, is one branch of this **Anglican Communion**, which is found throughout the world.

As might be expected, over the years the Anglican tradition has acquired a distinctive character. Our historic emphasis has been on the practical, as contrasted with the speculative, side of religion. We understand Christianity as a way of life, a matter of practice, rather than theory, in which religion and morality, theology and ethics are one.

Fundamentally, Anglicans are Christians who worship according to some authorized edition of *The Book of Common Prayer* and are in communion with the **See of Canterbury** in England. Our primary identity is as a community of practice. That is, we are bound together by our **liturgy** rather than doctrinal emphasis or social organization. Orthodoxy for us is right worship and not right belief. Our life of prayer shapes our beliefs and behaviors.

Through the years, in our ever constant quest to be faithful, we have revised *The Book of Common Prayer* and reformed our worship. This has often been painful and difficult because our liturgy is at the heart of our identity and the basis for our theological and ethical convictions.

In other branches of Christianity, the decisions of councils, the writings of particular theologians, catechisms, confessional doctrinal statements, the decisions of bishops, particular interpretations of Scripture, and polity have significance unknown to Anglicans. If anyone wishes to know what Anglicans believe about issues of faith and life, he or she needs to turn to *The Book of Common Prayer* and engage in the process of interpreting this document.

For us, theological and ethical issues are resolved through decisions concerning liturgy more than doctrine. This should help to explain why our most serious arguments are about liturgical practice. We make few pronouncements in council concerning issues of belief and behavior, and we have no distinctive Anglican theology or doctrinal positions. We shape our understanding of faith and life through participation in our liturgies. We reflect on what we believe about the Christian faith and life by studying our liturgies. And we reform our understandings and ways of life by reforming our liturgies. Changes in the historical development of our understandings of Christian belief and practice are seen through revisions of our prayer books.

Within Christendom, we Anglicans represent a tradition in which liturgy implies a people's public activity, including both cultic or ritual life of communal worship and daily life and work as ministry. For Anglicans, therefore, the answer to the question "What is it to be an Anglican Christian?" is "Come, worship and minister with us," that is, join us in liturgy. Our styles of worship in different congregations may be quite diverse, but our substance and content are consistent. Other denominations might initially invite inquirers to study Scripture or explore doctrinal teachings, but we would save these activities for later as aspects of our reflection on our experience of worship and ministry.

Nevertheless, while it is our liturgy that defines who we are, what we believe and how we are to behave as Anglican Christians, *The Book of Common Prayer* is not the authority or basis upon which we make decisions on matters of faith and practice or the content of our prayer books.



III

ANGLICAN AUTHORITY

The word “authority” as used in this essay refers to the author or source for our life of faith. Clearly God as revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is our ultimate, supreme and sole authority. We are called upon to know the mind of the triune God fully so that we might do the will of God perfectly.

However, the question is, how do we come to know the mind of this triune God? The answer is to be found in our understanding of authority and how it functions. Without this common authority and agreement upon how it is used there is no way to maintain a common life, especially when persons and groups arrive at different conclusions.

As we stated earlier, during the time of the English Reformation in the 16th century, the Anglican Church became a political identity, that is, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in England. At that time there were two divergent understandings of authority within the Christian church. Roman Catholic Christians maintained a dual authority for discerning the mind of God, namely Scripture and tradition, with the emphasis being placed on tradition (the authoritative teachings of the church, which resulted from the bishops’ interpretations of the Scriptures). Protestant Christians, on the other hand, contended that the Scriptures alone were the authority of the church and that the meaning of the Scriptures was to be determined without recourse to any established tradition. Indeed, tradition was to play no role in determining the mind and will of God. Only what was contained in the Scriptures was to have any authority.



Rather than take sides in this debate, Anglican Christians chose a middle way. For example, in the “Articles of Religion” (1571) the Church of England asserted that the Scriptures contain all that is needed to be known for salvation. Therefore, one need not believe anything that is *not* in the Scriptures; one might, however, believe anything that is not *incompatible* with the Scriptures. This implied, for example, that Anglicans may believe (as Roman Catholics do) in the assumption of Mary, a doctrine not denied in the Scriptures; yet it implied that Anglicans do not *have* to believe in this doctrine (as Protestants do not), for it is not a doctrine contained in the Scriptures. Another way of stating this middle-way position is to say that revelation as contained in the Scriptures about God and God’s will is essential to our salvation, but revelation in the Scriptures is not the source of all our knowledge about God and God’s will.

Further, Richard Hooker, an Anglican theologian, in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Book Two, 1534), advocated a diffuse authority composed of three interrelated, dependent, authoritative sources: Scripture, reason, and tradition. This understanding has become the hallmark of our unique Anglican understanding of authority.

Hooker argued that while the Scriptures are to be our primary source of authority, they are not to be isolated from reason and tradition. Why? Because God communicated his revelation as contained in the Scriptures in a manner sensitive to the specific needs of a specific group in a specific time in history and, therefore, intended that they be interpreted to make sense to a different people in a different time. God’s revelation was, therefore, to be both inside and outside of the Scriptures, guarded and guided by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are intended, Hooker asserted, to be a living word and not a collection of dead letters. That is, the Scriptures (and tradition) are not self-explanatory but require the use of reason to determine their meaning. Reason, of course, is not autonomous or individualistic. Nor are there three independent authorities. Rather, there is a single authority composed of three intersecting sources, the Scriptures being the normative authoritative source, reason and tradition being necessary interpretive authoritative sources.

The implications of this understanding are profound. While maintaining that the Scriptures provide us with a unifying plumb line, Anglicans are willing to live with diverse and changing interpretations, rather than infallible certainty and binding prescriptions for all times.

The authoritative sources of the Scriptures, reason, and tradition have aided Anglicans to maintain unity through the centuries. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that today there are some Episcopalians who appear to be unaware of this understanding of authority and others unwilling to accept it; many more do not agree on how this historic Anglican understanding of authority functions, especially in terms of the Scriptures, when discerning the mind and will of God. We will, therefore, explore this question in some detail.



The Holy Scriptures

Christianity is a religion of a person, Jesus Christ, and not a book. Jesus is the Word of God absolutely. Yet because our means for knowing this Incarnate Word is contained in the Scriptures, especially in the Gospels, the Scriptures are the Word of God relatively. Therefore, continuing and never-ending conversation with the Scriptures is a necessary aspect of our life in the Church. And Jesus promised that God would send his disciples the “Spirit of truth” to continually inform them (John 14:25–26) as they went about this task.

As our catechism in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* explains it, the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and still speaks to us through them today. We understand their meaning through the aid of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in their true interpretation.

Revelation is God's self-disclosure to persons and communities. The Scriptures are a record of that revelation. That is, they contain God's revelation, but they are not to be confused with the revelation itself. As the Scriptures were written and edited over a long period of time, their writers and editors were in conversation with earlier spoken traditions and written documents, quoting them, allegorizing them, correcting them, harmonizing them, interpreting and reinterpreting them, as well as adding new material. The Scriptures, as the Church finally established them as **canon**—its measuring rod or standard for the Christian life of faith—were understood as living, fluid records of the community's experience of God over time and therefore carried more meanings than their immediate and plain literal sense.

Because this was so, a host of methodologies for interpretation and schools of interpretation developed. More importantly, the New Testament became a commentary on the Old Testament in the light of the Christ event. This in turn gave special authority to the Gospels, which contain the narrative of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and of his teachings. Note how in our Eucharistic liturgy we use a special Gospel book and give its reading special attention.

Nevertheless, the New Testament itself is filled with differing messages and interpretations, many in conflict with each other. While there is a unifying element in the Scriptures, there is also great diversity of opinion. Each and every statement is historically conditioned and context specific. The Scriptures are a literary, historical document in need of critical examination and interpretation. As might be expected, controversies over interpretation developed even as they were being written. This explains why for the first 1,500 years of the church's history the primary authority became the tradition, that is, the authorized interpretations of the Church, rather than the literal words of specific texts. The real issue for the church now is not whether the Scriptures have authority (of course, they do) but how they are to be read and heard within the Church.

As Anglicans we are part of a scriptural tradition, but we have never held to a doctrine of biblical supremacy (no other source of knowledge has value), literal interpretation (everything is literally true), or verbal inerrancy (God wrote each and every word). Rather, we have always supported all forms of biblical

scholarship and accepted diverse opinions. While holding the Scriptures in high regard, we do not describe them as having ultimate authority in all matters (for example, we allow science to inform us as to how the world was created. The creation story answers why and by whom). Nor do we assert that everything found within them is binding on us (for example, we do not follow Old Testament dietary laws). Further, Anglicans do not believe that the Scriptures provide specific, final judgments on every moral and theological issue or question (for example, the writers were unaware of the possibility of genetic manipulation and they misunderstood how babies were conceived).

Importantly, we have believed that the Scriptures are to be taken as a whole. No one part of Scripture is to be taken in isolation from the whole. Each is to be heard in relationship to other themes and passages. We are not literalists or legalists and therefore avoid proof-texting, that is, using single passages for theological or ethical conclusions unless that reference summarizes the whole or is the only reference on the subject.

So it is that Anglicans contend that the Scriptures were intended to be interpreted and reinterpreted over and over again in the light of contemporary knowledge and experience within a believing and worshiping community open to the leading of God's Spirit into new truth.



Reason

Our Anglican emphasis on the role of reason in discerning the mind and will of God is founded upon an awareness that human experience and reflection upon it are foundational to both the Scriptures and tradition. Indeed, both were formed by reason. Reason plays a significant role in that it provides the means by which we express and communicate God's revelation. Reason is the divinely implanted

faculty for receiving and understanding the divine revelation. For Anglicans, human reason was never totally corrupted by the fall, but only weakened, and God's grace has been ever present to our rational minds, making it possible for God's Spirit to lead us into truth. While our use of reason can distort and deny the mind and heart of God, it can also discern and comprehend it.

Reason, as Anglicans understand the meaning of the word, is not limited solely to an intellectual way of thinking and knowing that turns all of reality into an object for human investigation and manipulation. Reason is more than logical analysis. It includes the intuitive way of thinking and knowing and is therefore prayerful, contemplative reflection on contemporary human experience and knowledge in the light of the Scriptures and tradition. And it is prayerful reflection on the Scriptures and tradition in the light of contemporary human experience and knowledge. Understood in this way, reason is the means by which the Holy Spirit works within the church to enable it to discern the mind and will of God. Reason requires the revelation contained in the Scriptures and to which tradition attests, but revelation also requires the use of reason if it is to inform and influence the life of faith.

While rationalism—an excessive concern for the sole use of the intellect—is a heresy, so are anti-intellectualism and the denial of the use of the intellect regarding religious subjects and an excessive concern for right feelings or emotions. While reason is not infallible and is in need of the judgment placed upon it by the Scriptures and tradition, it remains our God-given means for understanding the Scriptures and tradition and discerning the working of God's Spirit in present experience. Reason, which emphasizes both the intellectual and intuitive ways of thinking and knowing, assumes and employs contemporary subjective human experience or consciousness as a doorway into the mind and heart of God in the past and present.

Reason as an authoritative source is, of course, not distinct from nor superior to the Scriptures or tradition; it is a faculty of the mind that aids in our interpreting the Scriptures and tradition, and through the operation and influence of the Holy Spirit, aids the church to discern the mind and will of God, in terms of God's continuing revelation through contemporary experience.



Tradition

Our Anglican acknowledgment of the proper role of tradition or antiquity in discerning the mind and will of God is founded upon the awareness that the Scriptures themselves are the product of tradition; tradition formed them and has interpreted them throughout history. As St. Paul wrote, “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I had in turn received . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:3). It was an oral tradition, and the liturgies and practices of the early church were used in the formation of the New Testament. Further, insofar as these Scriptures did not speak plainly or clearly on all issues and by their nature required interpretation, the wisdom of the community throughout history has always been an important guide to our life of faith in the present.

Tradition, of course, is much more than the history of the interpretation of the Scriptures. Tradition, for Anglicans, is also expressed in our liturgies with their propers, appointed collects, lessons and so forth. Tradition’s role is to guard and give witness to the Scriptures, especially through worship, and thereby provide an ongoing resource for discerning the mind and will of God. Just as the Scriptures inform tradition, then, tradition informs the Scriptures.

In this regard Anglicans give special attention to the first five centuries, the formative years of the church in which the canon of the Scriptures was established, its seven ecumenical councils, the creeds, and the work of its classical theologians—the “church fathers”—and their various imaginative means for interpreting the Scriptures.

Tradition for Anglicans also includes such things as bishops’ pastoral letters and the actions of General Conventions, the canons of the church, and historic documents such as the “Articles of Religion” and catechisms, along with various

editions of our authorized hymn books. It is a tradition inclusive of elements from Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, but has many of its own distinctive elements.

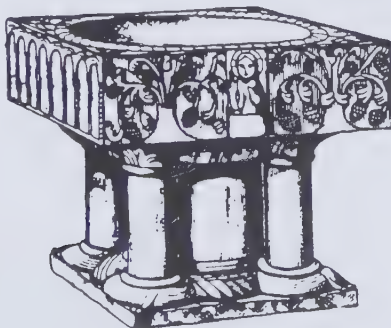
Nevertheless, insofar as the church is not infallible, neither is tradition; it, too, must be interpreted continually and open to reform. It is important to acknowledge that we Anglicans are a people who at our baptism are incorporated into a living, changing tradition, established by a community of faith that continually strives to know and do the will of God through the use of its three authoritative sources: Scripture, reason and tradition. Such efforts cannot help but result in disagreement and creative tension within the church. Therefore, the church must be held together finally by the authority of love, or as St. Paul would advise us, we are “. . . to live a life of humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace” (Ephesians 4: 1–3).

Authority and Community

As a means of maintaining our Anglican understanding of authority, the church has over time ordered its life around four “parties” or communities of emphasis. While each affirmed the appropriate roles of the Scriptures, reason, and tradition, an Evangelical party emerged, composed of many of our biblical scholars, biblical theologians and preachers to remind us of the centrality of the Holy Scriptures and the truths of the Protestant reformers for our common life. An Anglo-Catholic party, composed of many of our church historians, historical theologians, and liturgists, formed to remind us of the place of tradition and the truths of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians for our church. A Liberal party, composed of many of our systematic theologians, ethicists, and social activists, surfaced to remind us of the importance of human experience, the use of reason, and the truth that comes from outside the church. And last, a Broad Church party, composed of many of our pastoral theologians and bureaucrats, was created to remind us that if any of the others becomes dominant or excludes another we will fall into a heresy, either biblicism, traditionalism, or rationalism.

While each of these parties has an essential contribution to make, none can dominate or diminish the important place of the others. Each needs to consider seriously the insights of the others. Each needs to listen carefully to and reflect prayerfully on the convictions of the others. Each needs to believe that another may have discerned the mind and will of God more fully than itself. Each needs to be open to the working of the Holy Spirit and be willing to change long-held convictions if the community as a whole comes to a new discernment. And all must be committed to maintaining the unity of the church.

While particular lay persons, bishops, priests, deacons, dioceses or parishes may have a particular leaning, we are all obliged to deal peacefully and constructively with our differences until we can achieve consensus or live with our differences, praying together and for each other until God helps us to reconcile them. At all cost we need to avoid arguing past each other, accusing each other of faithlessness, and either no longer financially supporting or separating from each other when our own position is not held by the majority. As St. Paul reminds us, the body of Christ is composed of many parts, each of which needs the others if the body is to be healthy (I Corinthians 3 and 12). And may we always remember that St. Paul worked among all his congregations to elicit their financial support for the church in Jerusalem, despite their theological differences (II Corinthians 8–9).





IV

ANGLICAN SPIRITUALITY

In the end, what holds the body together is its common prayer. Our spiritual life is ordinary everyday life lived in an ever deepening and loving relationship with God and therefore with our true self, all others, and creation. Prayer is the many and varied means by which that relationship is enhanced and enlivened. Anglican spirituality—our approach to growth in this relationship with God—has numerous characteristics, which together compose our distinctive life of prayer.

Liturgical/Biblical

Anglican spirituality is rooted in communal daily prayer: Morning Prayer, Noon-day Prayers, Evening Prayer, and Compline, as found in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Anglican prayer, therefore, tends to be more formal and ritualistic than prayer in many other traditions. Typically, Anglicans are not as at home with spontaneous, extemporaneous prayer as they are with established written prayer. Our prayer is ordered by the Gospel narrative as manifested in the church year with its seasons and emphases.

Intending to shape our relationship with God, our common prayer is informed and shaped by the Scriptures, the divine reading of Scripture in course, and the prayerful meditation on the psalms. We are a tradition that believes in a daily discipline of formal ritual prayer, composed of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession and petition, with a focus upon the prayerful engagement with the Scriptures. Indeed, Anglican spirituality would rule out any spiritual practices which neglected the Scriptures.

Communal

For Anglicans, communal prayer always comes before and this shapes personal prayer. *The Book of Common Prayer* is intended to teach us how to pray. While we maintain the importance of personal prayer, we hold a continuing concern that prayer not become individualistic or privatistic. For this reason prayers of intercession are central to our common life. The communal calendar of feasts and fasts in *The Book of Common Prayer* assigns persons and events to be remembered so as to help focus our personal spiritual lives. Any privatized understanding of the spiritual life is antithetical to Anglican spirituality.

For this reason, before decisions are made by the church meeting in council, the community gathers in the context of communal prayer and meditation on the Scriptures so that the Holy Spirit might inform and influence our decisions. We are also prone to wait for consensus rather than make win/lose decisions, prayerfully listening to and pondering the discernment of others, especially the least among us. Further, because we can easily deceive ourselves, personal discernment needs confirmation by others.

Sacramental

Anglicans understand the **sacraments** as outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace. A grace is any unearned and undeserved action of God toward us for our benefit. For Anglicans there are two great sacraments: Baptism and Eucharist; and five lesser sacraments: confirmation or baptismal reaffirmation, holy matrimony, reconciliation of a penitent, unction or anointing (that is, ministrations to the sick and dying) and ordination. Anglican tradition makes great use of symbols and symbolic actions. We depend upon the sacraments and sacramental actions to make Christ present to us, that is, to make us aware of God's presence and action in our lives.

Through baptism, God adopts us as children and establishes us as members of Christ's body, the church. The norm or standard of believer's baptism in

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that baptism is a sacrament, that it requires a moral response, and that it is to be a mature act of faith. The prayer book's affirmation of infant baptism reminds us that the community's faith comes before ours, that God's grace is given to us before we respond, that participation in the sacraments grants us the gift of faith, and that we are always living into the reality of our baptism, that is becoming who we already are. We therefore put a great deal of emphasis on baptismal renewal throughout our lives.

We also emphasize the importance of weekly **Eucharist**. Through our participation in this sacramental action we are reconstituted as Christ's body, infused with Christ's life, and empowered to be Christ's presence in the world. Each week we come to experience life in God's reign, where all people are restored to unity with God and each other in Christ, and where God's will is known and done, so that we can return to our daily lives and work as a sign and witness to God's reign.

Our sacramental spirituality informs our conviction that just as Christ was the sacrament of God, the church is called to be the sacrament of Christ in the world. This implies that our spirituality is political, combining both the contemplative and the active.

Pastoral

Our emphasis in *The Book of Common Prayer* is on commitment to Christian adoption of a child, reconciliation of a penitent, ministrations to the sick, ministrations at the time of death, and burial of the dead. These sacramental emphases, the intercessions we regularly pray at worship, and our baptismal promises support a spirituality that maintains that our relationship with God is measured by our relationship with our true self, all people, and the natural world. Prayer as devotion to God and prayer as service to the neighbor in need necessarily go together.

Incarnational

Our Anglican emphasis on God's entry into human life and history has resulted in an earthy spirituality. We believe that the extraordinary is to be found in the ordinary. We affirm life in this world and believe that the body, pleasure, and material reality are fundamentally good. Similarly, the natural world is God's good gift to us. What matters is what we do with and how we care for these gifts. We are to honor them, care for them, and share them with all people. Therefore, care for our physical health and for ecology are aspects of our spiritual life; so are fun, play, and pleasure.



Mystical

In spirituality there are two understandings of our human quest for the experience of union with God, namely, pietism and mysticism. Pietism emphasizes immediate experiences of God and assurance of divine election, a single, dramatic, emotional conversion experience. Mysticism emphasizes a long, slow journey into union with God through spiritual discipline and prayer, a series of conversion experiences toward new loyalties, new convictions, and new commitments. Anglican spirituality has an inclination toward mysticism.

ANGLICAN TEMPERAMENT

Temperament refers to a tradition's characteristic ways of thinking and behaving. Anglican temperament is comprehensive, ambiguous, open-minded, intuitive, aesthetic, moderate, naturalistic, historical, and political.

Comprehensive

Anglicans affirm a principle of comprehensiveness or the *via media* (literally, nothing too much, or the middle way), that is, the conviction that truth is known and guarded by maintaining the tension between counter-opposite statements concerning truth. This principle is exemplified in the conviction that Jesus was fully human and at the same time fully divine, in the Anglican commitment to be simultaneously both fully Catholic and Protestant, and in the stated necessity of holding in tension personal freedom and communal responsibility. While applying this principle of comprehensiveness is extremely difficult to do in practice, the struggle to do so is an important aspect of our tradition.

Anglicans, therefore, affirm both the sacred and the secular; both the material and the nonmaterial nature of reality; the speculative illumination of the mind and the affective illumination of the heart; the possibility of a direct, unmediated experience of God, as well as the indirect mediated experience of God; both the transcendent mystery of God and the immanent intimacy of God; and the contradictory convictions that faith is a gift that results from participation in the sacraments and that faith is a necessary precondition for participation in the sacraments.

Further, this principle provides a means to resolve what may appear to be severe disagreements. For example, Anglicans contend that we live into our baptism by the process of becoming who we already are. This conviction makes possible the affirmation of two conflicting convictions, namely, that every transformational benefit is given to us fully at our baptism and that we must engage throughout our lifetime in efforts to achieve the benefits of baptism.

Ambiguous

The category of ambiguity has often been misunderstood. It is not a political category that can be used to justify incompetence and sloppiness. It is rather a theological category that makes possible living with what may appear to be irreconcilable differences. To affirm the ambiguous implies that when we are faced with new experiences or complex issues we will remain open to various interpretations and demonstrate a willingness to live with uncertainty of meaning until a resolution can be found.

Indeed, Anglicans affirm an openness to all experience and believe in the developed capacity to be sensitive to and accept what our senses tell us even when it does not fit into a neat, comprehensible established category, that is, is ambiguous, incomprehensible, obscure, or strange. Anglicans are able to tolerate theological and ethical messiness; we do not need to have everything resolved or settled immediately. With a developed sensibility we tend to be more inductive and pragmatic than deductive and systematic. We are willing to live with trial and error as a means toward establishing truth. Anglicans believe that conflict, when handled in reconciling ways, is healthy and not to be avoided. Indeed, conflict is a necessary aspect of the theological-ethical task.

This ability to live with ambiguity helps us to deal with situations in which two or more biblical texts, theological principles or ethical norms appear logically incompatible. When this does occur, we are able to wait patiently (neither fleeing the situation nor fighting it), to pray with a discerning heart, and to listen with an open mind until the conflict can be reconciled through the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Open-minded

Anglicans encourage a searching, questioning, reasonable mind always open to new insights and change. We listen carefully to everyone, search for wisdom everywhere, take seriously the secular world and its work, and recognize that contemporary knowledge is not necessarily in conflict with faith and indeed may offer wisdom. Of course, it needs to be noted that each of these character traits of Anglicans has its negative side and can manifest itself in serious distortions. For

example, being open-minded can result in the acceptance of all truth claims uncritically and the blessing of the secular world and its understandings and ways. Similarly, the theological ethical category of ambiguity can be used to avoid all decisions on what is good and true. Further, we need to be careful to include all these character traits and not be selective.

Intuitive

While affirming the intellectual way of thinking and knowing, Anglicans have also affirmed the intuitive way of thinking and knowing. We are at home with art as much as philosophy and are comfortable in the world of symbol and myth as well as ritual than systematic theology; more comfortable with liturgy that makes use of the arts (drama, dance, music, poetry and the visual arts) as well as discursive prose; and at home with the “feminine” as well as the “masculine” dimensions of life. Anglicans affirm the anagogical, the metaphorical, the paradoxical, the symbolic, and the prerational in dealing with human experience. Recognizing that human nature and society are more deeply motivated by images and tabulations than ideas and concepts, we are apt to emphasize the imagination while keeping in tension objective consciousness and rational ideas with subjective consciousness and non-rational impressions.

Aesthetic

Truth, goodness, and beauty are related to each other in that the presence of one is judged by the presence of the other two. For example, beauty can be defined as a revelation of the presence (priestly) or the absence (prophetic) of goodness and truth. While some traditions emphasize truth or goodness, Anglicans have made beauty the doorway into truth and goodness. We have a strong respect for and belief in the beauty of holiness and righteousness. Money spent on beauty, priestly and prophetic, is justified insofar as it is our way of revealing and advocating truth and goodness. Our churches are intended to be works of art and we make every effort to ensure that the arts used in our churches are of high quality. Artists have always been at home in our congregations and played a significant role in our worship and common life.

Moderate

Anglicans believe that they are called to live a godly (manifesting the divine image in ourselves), righteous (living in a right relationship to God and neighbor), and sober life. That means that Anglicans typically avoid extravagance, extremes, and excessiveness in any aspect of personal and communion life, thought or emotion. We are a people of moderation and restraint who strive to model a temperate, balanced, reasonable approach to life. It is a life in which prayer, work, study and play have a rhythm.



Naturalistic

Anglicans have a reverence for and take a delight in the natural earthy rhythms of life, the seasons and their changes, the natural world and all of creation. Not only have we affirmed historically natural theology and natural law—means by which God has made possible to all reasonable human beings some knowledge of his will and his ways—but we have always taken seriously the contributions of the natural sciences to human life. Through the years our poets have filled us with an awareness of nature and ecology. We have always taken pride in using live flowers, real candles, and surrounding ourselves with natural things in the church. At our best we have been committed to the ecological movement.

Historical

Anglicans have a great sense of history and a desire to honor tradition. At times this tempts us to turn our churches into museums and refuse to remodel them for more faithful contemporary worship, but mostly it has encouraged us to take history and traditions seriously and respect what we can learn from a careful reflection on the past, as well as strive to maintain our roots in Anglican history and culture. This historic consciousness is manifested in our concern for an **historic episcopacy** as the way to link the church with its past.

Political

And last, our English history has made us a political church. That is, we value the civic virtues and affirm free, peaceful, public debate as a basis for political unity. We believe that such civic debate should be encouraged and that the church is an appropriate place to engage in it. We believe that the church has an obligation to attempt to influence social, political, and economic life. We, therefore, have always shown a concern for the government, its policies and actions; an assumed responsibility for participation in public life; and accepted leadership roles in politics. Further, we have emphasized that our ministry—the context in which we serve God and represent Christ and his church—is our daily life and work.



ANGLICAN POLITY

A tradition's polity is its political structure and organization. Misunderstandings about how we Anglican Episcopalians govern our common life can result in serious divisions among us.

Historically there have been four polities within Christian bodies: congregational, presbyterial, episcopal, and Anglican. The Episcopal Church in the United States is founded upon an Anglican rather than an episcopal polity.

Congregational polity rests on the principle of governance by each and every member of a local, autonomous, independent congregation.

Presbyterial polity rests on the principle of governance by elected representational bodies of clergy and laity ordered in a hierarchy.

Episcopal polity rests on the principle of governance by bishops, either elected or chosen, for life or a stated term, typically in apostolic succession, but not always.

While Anglican polity rests on a principle of governance which combines elements of presbyterial and episcopal, congregational is denied. Further, while Anglican polity has many common elements, there are elements within the polity of the Episcopal Church in the United States that are different from other Anglican bodies.

More than any other church in the worldwide Anglican Communion, the Episcopal Church is deeply rooted in a representative form of church government. This is because the birth of the Episcopal Church coincided with the birth of the nation. The constitutions of the nation and the Episcopal Church were ratified in the same city (Philadelphia), in the same building (Independence Hall), in the same year (1789). Authority in the Episcopal Church is conferred through representatives duly elected by the people.

For example, vestry members are elected by the parish; representatives from each parish to Diocesan Convention (Council) are elected by the parish vestry; and deputies to General Convention are elected by the representatives to Diocesan Convention (Council).

What follows will not be a comprehensive or complete description of our polity but a summary of some important and unique elements aimed especially to help those who come from other traditions understand our political ways.

For example, congregational polity is a dominant protestant polity in the United States, and many Episcopalians come from denominations with a congregational polity, for example, the Baptists. These persons often assume that they should have the right to vote on parish issues, such as who will be their priest, how their money will be spent, what hymns they will sing, and what curriculum should be used in the church school.

Those from a presbyterial tradition, such as former Presbyterians, often believe that votes taken by representative bodies, such as a vestry decision to build a new building, should not require the consent of the bishop.

Those from an Episcopal tradition, such as former Roman Catholics, sometimes expect that they can influence their priest by appealing to his or her bishop.

We are neither a church in which a few persons have absolute authority to make unilateral decisions, nor are we a church in which everyone has equal authority to make communal decisions. We understand power as the ability to influence rather than to coerce. We understand authority as the right to be heard rather than the right to be obeyed. While some persons are granted structural authority—that is, the right to be heard because of their office—most often our understanding of authority works best when it is founded upon a person's proven wisdom, moral example, spiritual being, or charism.

If the Episcopal Church has a weakness, it is the reluctance of the system always to hold everyone accountable. For example, if a bishop, out of conscience, chooses not to follow the mind of the House of Bishops, that person is rarely censured.

Such reluctance to act diminishes the proper role of authority throughout the church, though its pastoral concern can make it possible for us to be a reconciled community composed of very divergent people.

At our best those in authority listen carefully to every voice, reflect seriously on every side of an issue, and pray faithfully before they make a decision. And when a decision is reached they communicate as best they can how they arrived at their decision with the hope that while everyone may not agree, everyone will understand why and therefore be willing to accept and support it. In general we believe that important decisions should be made by consensus. A consensus does not mean that everyone wholeheartedly supports a decision but that everyone can live with it and support it. On those occasions when responsible, representative bodies have believed they must act without consensus, they have deliberately acted to maintain unity by providing some way out for those who cannot in conscience live with or support the decision.

As Anglicans we have typically intended to live by the virtues of honesty, loyalty, good manners (being polite, courteous, and gracious), mutual respect, restraint, and patience. Nevertheless, we need also to understand the political structures and organization of our church.

Our polity is contained in a small volume (approximately 200 pages) entitled *The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church*. The first edition of *The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church* was published in 1789; it has been revised when the church has met in General Convention every three years. Each diocese also has a constitution and canons to govern its life.

Canon law, however, does not dominate our life as it does in some traditions. We have very few professional canon lawyers, and canon law is not considered a major subject in our seminaries. Each diocese has a chancellor, someone knowledgeable in both secular and church law, who acts as the canon lawyer for the diocese.

Having our foundation in English jurisprudence, it is rare to find a strict constructionist of canon law among Anglicans. Most of the time we maintain a

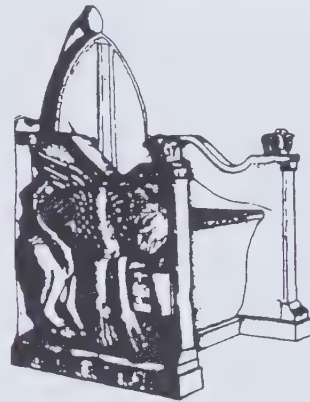
very loose constructionist interpretation and application of our canons. This fact can make our common life appear chaotic, but it has helped us over time to maintain that tension between continuity and change, unity and diversity so characteristic of our way of life.

The Anglican Communion

When we think about our political structures and organization we begin with the Anglican Communion, that worldwide assembly of churches that, in communion with the Church of England, recognizes the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, unlike the Bishop of Rome, the archbishop has no canonical authority over the Anglican Communion. In general, our understanding of clergy—bishops, priests and deacons—is more in terms of symbolic than functional roles.

This means that, while ordained clergy are assigned numerous functions, such as preaching and celebrating, which they are to perform, those called by the people and God to be bishops, priests, and deacons are to point beyond themselves to those qualities intended for all the baptized.

For example, because we believe in the “priesthood of all believers” we have priests whose purpose it is to illumine the priesthood of the community. The bishop is to be the symbol of unity—reconciled community—in which we are to live as a sign and witness to God’s reign; the priest is to be the symbol of our common ministry of bringing all people into God’s loving embrace and God’s suffering, redeeming love to all people; the deacon is to be the symbol of our common ministry to care for those in any need or trouble.



Each member church sends its bishops every ten years to a **Lambeth Conference** to discuss mutual concerns. This body has moral influence, but no legal authority over the bodies represented. There is also an Anglican

Consultative Council or representative advisory group of bishops, clergy, and laity selected by member churches of the Anglican Communion that meets periodically to provide consultation and guidance for the whole Anglican Communion.

This Anglican Communion is composed of numerous national church bodies, each with some functional autonomy. Each has its own constitution and canons, its own authorized prayer book or books, its own authorized hymnal or hymnals, and its own authorized translations of the Scriptures. Many have different names. There are the Episcopal Church in the United States, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Church of England in Australia, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, the Holy Catholic Church in Japan, the Episcopal Church of Brazil and so on.

However, the Episcopal Church in the United States, every Episcopal diocese, and every local Episcopal parish (congregation) are intended to understand themselves fundamentally as an integral part of the Anglican Communion and not as autonomous bodies. For this reason we pray each week for the Archbishop of Canterbury, for other Anglican churches and their spiritual leaders around the world, for our presiding bishop and other dioceses, for our own bishop(s), and for other parishes in our diocese.

The Episcopal Church is divided into nine provinces composed of a group of geographically adjacent dioceses usually with a diocesan bishop as president and administrative officer. Having no authority or power, their purpose is to promote cooperation among dioceses.



The Episcopal Church

The official governing body of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America is the General Convention, which meets every three years. Delegates sit in two legislative bodies; a House of Bishops, composed of all living bishops and chaired by the presiding bishop; and a House of Deputies, composed of not more than four elected clergy and not more than four elected lay persons from each diocese and chaired by a lay or clerical president. Legislation may originate in either house, but approval must come from both houses; a majority of both lay and clergy is necessary in the House of Deputies. The agenda of General Convention includes matters of canon law, policy and program, questions of theology and ethics, and foundational issues such as the content of the Prayer Book and Hymnal. This body tends to take limited actions and make minimal decisions.

Between conventions, the business of the church is conducted by an Executive Council, which meets three or four times each year. It has forty-five members and consists of the presiding bishop as president and chair, the President of the House of Deputies as vice-chair, a treasurer, the secretary of General Convention, and a group of elected lay and ordained members who are divided into a number of standing commissions. An example is the Standing Liturgical Commission, whose episcopal members are appointed by the presiding bishop and whose lay and clerical members are appointed by the president of the House of Deputies. (There are also commissions on ecumenical relations, health, peace and justice, evangelism, stewardship, etc.). These commissions have oversight responsibilities for various areas of the church's life. To help them with their work, the council employs a staff of persons who operate out of its national headquarters in New York City.

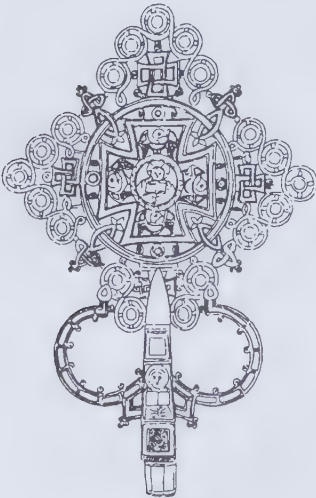
The bishops elect a presiding bishop, with the consent of the House of Deputies, who serves for twelve years. The presiding bishop is the chief pastor and primate (first among equals) of the church. Note, however, that we do not have a primate such as the Archbishop of Canterbury in England, nor do we have archbishops with jurisdiction over a number of dioceses within a province. The presiding bishop, until recently, was at the same time the bishop of a diocese who would preside at official church functions, but with limited political power.

A Diocese

A **diocese**, formed with the consent of the General Convention, is the fundamental unit of the church. A **parish** is subordinate to the diocese and may only call itself “Episcopal” if it is in union with the bishop and the diocese. All church property is held in trust by the vestry for the diocese and secured against alienation from the diocese. However, the rector and vestry control the use of the property and are responsible for its maintenance and upkeep.

Now, because ours is functionally a diocesan church, tension like the tension that exists between the states and the national government in secular politics may occur between dioceses and the national church. But with a few exceptions the rights of the diocese tend to prevail.

The **bishop** is the chief pastor of the diocese. He or she is elected for life (with a mandatory resignation at age 72) by the diocese meeting as a representative body of laity and clergy. Because the bishop cannot be present each Sunday in



every parish, presbyters, that is, priests, serve at his or her will as personal delegates and representatives of his or her ministry. We have ceremonial bishops, not lordly, authoritarian bishops. Roman Catholic, and even United Methodist, bishops have far more power than ours. This does not mean that bishops have no authority or power, just that it is very limited. This is especially true in the Episcopal Church in the United States. A diocese may elect a suffragan bishop (subordinate bishop) to help the bishop of the diocese. This bishop does not automatically succeed the diocesan bishop. Or a bishop, with the permission of the diocese, may appoint an **assisting bishop** (a bishop no longer active in a diocese) to assist him or her. And a

diocese may elect a **bishop coadjutor** who assists the bishop until the bishop retires and who then becomes bishop of the diocese.

A **rector**, in principle, has life tenure and leaves a parish only by death, resignation (with the consent of the vestry), or removal under provisions of canon law for reasons such as crime or immorality. Regretfully, some calls prove to be a mistake in judgment. When that occurs, the bishop works with the rector and vestry to achieve closure in the relationship and reconciliation. The bishop is the final decision maker. Between rectors it is not unusual for the bishop and vestry to appoint an interim rector to aid in the transition. This person usually cannot be called as rector.

Deacons serve directly under their bishop, who assigns them to a parish for liturgical purposes. Vocational deacons increasingly are persons who serve in specialized ministries to the poor, sick, and needy. Transitional deacons are persons serving for a short time on their way to be ordained as priests.

While the bishop visits each parish at least every third year, the bishop's primary pastoral relationship is with the clergy of his or her diocese. Nevertheless, the bishop is not a visiting dignitary or guest when visiting a parish. As the chief pastor of the diocese, the bishop is the pastor of every parish in the diocese.

A **diocesan council** (in some dioceses called a convention) chaired by the bishop is held annually to conduct the business of the diocese. Generally, all clergy resident in a diocese and a designated number of lay persons elected by a parish compose the convention (council).

A body of lay and clerical members serves the convention (council) between annual meetings to oversee the program of the diocese. In dioceses that meet in council this body is usually known as the **Executive Board**; in dioceses that meet in convention this body is usually called a **council**. There is also a diocesan **Standing Committee** composed of lay and clerical members elected by the diocese to be a committee of advice and consent to the bishop. This body must approve of all persons to be ordained, consent to the consecration of a bishop in another diocese, approve the sale of all church properties, and in case there is no bishop act as the diocese's ecclesiastical authority.

For administrative and other purposes a diocese is divided into convocations or deaneries with a parish priest appointed by the bishop to be its dean. These deans also act as a consultative body for the bishop.

Clergy are not members of a congregation but are members of the diocese. All clergy are canonically resident in a diocese and responsible to its bishop. Clergy are only licensed to function sacramentally in one diocese, though another bishop on request may license them for a particular sacramental purpose in his or her diocese. It is possible for clergy to change dioceses, but only with permission of their present and new bishop. No Episcopal priest can perform a clerical duty in a parish without the rector's or vicar's invitation. Clergy from other Christian churches may only assist an Episcopal priest, for example at a wedding or baptism, and then only at that priest's invitation.

A Parish

A parish exists when the congregation is self-supporting and contributes proportionally to the ministry of the diocese. A congregation that receives financial aid from the diocese is an aided parish, sometimes called a **mission**. Their clergy leader is appointed by the bishop and called a **vicar**.

Each parish has an annual meeting whose primary purpose is to elect its **vestry**, or governing body. The vestry, presided over by the rector, has jurisdiction for the economic and business aspects of parish life. The wardens are charged with providing all things necessary for worship, for making sure the building is in good condition, for keeping the parish register, and for acting as the ecclesiastical authority in the absence of a rector. The size of the vestry is authorized by diocesan canon. It is the vestry who calls the rector. The vestry may have a nominating or search committee to help it identify candidates, but the ultimate decision is the vestry's to make with the approval of the bishop.

Unless the laws of the state or of the diocese say otherwise, two members of the vestry are elected by the vestry as the parish's wardens. Frequently the vestry grants permission to the rector to select the senior warden, who is therefore known as the rector's warden. The vestry elects the junior warden, who is therefore known as the people's warden. The vestry also elects a clerk and a treasurer, neither of whom needs to be a member of the vestry.

Committees can be appointed in a parish, but they are programmatic rather than legislative. Often a member of the vestry who is charged with responsibility for that area chairs the committee.

Throughout most of the Anglican Communion the priest in charge of a parish is called a **vicar** (from the Latin for substitute). A vicar is placed in a parish by the bishop and represents the bishop and the bishop's will. In our church we have rectors (from the Latin to rule), who are called by the vestry of a parish and approved by the bishop. To rule is to guide the conduct of the parish. It was chosen as a symbol of the democratization of the church in the United States. While promising to respect and be guided by the pastoral direction and leadership of the bishop, rectors have a significant amount of autonomy. However, those congregations that require financial support from the diocese have a vicar appointed by and fully accountable to the bishop.

The rector or vicar is responsible for worship and music, Christian education and the church school, decisions on curriculum, and the appointment of teachers. He or she is also responsible for the presentation of persons for baptism, confirmation, and marriage as well as stewardship education. The rector has exclusive jurisdiction over every aspect of parish life except the economic.

Other clergy in a parish, no matter what their title, are called by the rector and serve at the will of the rector. When a rector leaves, the other clergy are to submit their resignations. A vestry may employ them during the interim and the new rector may reissue their call.



Miscellaneous

Persons elected to an office or to a representative body are never sent to a meeting to represent, defend, or vote for a position established by those who elect them or the group they are to represent. Persons are to be elected because it is believed that they can think for themselves and deal openly with complex matters. They are also to be spiritually mature enough to listen for the leading of the Spirit so as to be set free to vote their conscience. No proxy votes are acceptable. Decisions must be reached by those who have been party to the conversation and prayer of the body called upon to consider a matter of concern.

There are four orders of ministry: lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons. (To understand the responsibilities of each order see “The Catechism,” pp. 855–856 in *The Book of Common Prayer*). A member of the Episcopal Church is a baptized person listed in a parish registry. A **communicant** is a member of the Episcopal Church who participates in the Eucharist at least three times a year. An adult member or communicant is over sixteen years of age. A communicant in good standing is one who participates regularly in the Eucharist and other activities of the parish including making an annual pledge to the support of the church. A member or communicant who has made a mature affirmation of faith in the Episcopal (or any other Christian) Church and on whom a bishop has laid hands is called a “**confirmed**” member or communicant. It is necessary to be a confirmed communicant in good standing (at least 18 years of age) to be elected to the vestry.

Lay persons can be authorized and licensed by the bishop to be lay readers who officiate at prayer services; pastoral leaders to administrate a parish without a rector or vicar; lay Eucharistic ministers either to help serve communion in the parish or to take communion to those unable to attend the Sunday or Holy Day Eucharist; lay preachers to preach in parishes; and catechists to prepare persons for baptism, confirmation, reception or baptismal renewal. Lay persons who are lectors (read the lessons) or intercessors (lead the Prayers of the People) need only be authorized by the rector or vicar.



SUMMARY

Our Anglican way of life is composed of the integration and application of these characteristics. Others may share some of them with us, but together they establish our unique Anglican character. We Episcopalians will best make our contribution to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church when we manifest authentically our Anglican identity, understanding of authority, spirituality, and temperament, while acknowledging the important contributions others make to our common life as believers in Jesus Christ and members of his church. It is hoped that this brief introduction to the Anglican way of life will have made a small contribution to that end.

GLOSSARY

(For a complete lexicon of words used in the Episcopal Church, see John N. Wall Jr. *A New Dictionary for E.pis.co.pa.lians.*)

Anglican Communion – The worldwide assembly of churches which are in communion with the church of England and recognize the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Book of Common Prayer 1979 – The official book of worship and historical documents of the Episcopal Church.

Canterbury – A city in England and the site of the cathedral in which the primate of all England and spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion resides.

Liturgy – The public prayer and worship of the church.

Canon – A standard for the Christian life of faith, but also an honorary title for someone who works in a cathedral or for a bishop.

Sacraments – Words and actions intended to make us aware of the loving presence and action (grace) of God in our lives.

Eucharist – The most common name for what is also known as Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, or the Mass.

Historic episcopacy – The unbroken line of bishops ordained by other bishops in a line that goes back to the apostles.

Lambeth Conference – A consultative meeting every ten years at Lambeth Palace in England of all the bishops of the Anglican Communion.

Diocese – A geographic area with its churches and clergy overseen by a bishop.

Parish – A worshipping community or congregation.

Bishop – Chief sacramental officer, guardian of the faith, and chief pastor of a diocese.

Rector (*sometimes called Vicar*) – An ordained priest who is the spiritual leader of a congregation.

Diocesan Council (*sometimes called Convention*) – The yearly meeting of the clergy and lay representatives of congregations with the bishop to do the work of the diocese.

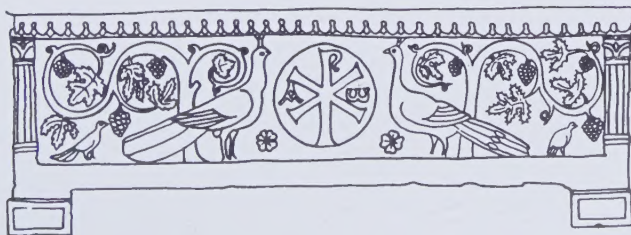
Executive Board – Oversees the business of the diocese between council meetings.

Standing Committee – An elected group of lay and ordained people who serve on a committee of advice and consent to the bishop.

Communicant – A member of an Episcopal church who has received Holy Communion at least three times in the past year.

Confirmed or Received Member – A baptized person who either publically confirms or reaffirms his or her faith before a bishop who lays hands on them.

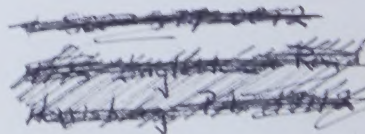
Lay person – A non-ordained Christian and one of the four orders of ministry: lay, bishops, priests and deacons.



Having taught at numerous Anglican, Roman Catholic and Protestant theological schools around the world, Dr. Westerhoff was Professor of Theology and Christian Nurture at Duke University Divinity School from 1974 to 1994. He is now associate rector for Adult Education, theologian-in-residence, and founding director of the Institute for Pastoral Studies at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He is married to the former Caroline Hughes, Canon for Education in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, and is author of more than twenty-five books. These essays are a revision of material that first appeared in the Diocese of Atlanta newspaper, *Diolog*.



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