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The Issue of Anglican Identity

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Institutions and communities in the twenty-first century are experiencing identity crises, a phenomenon from which religious traditions such as Anglicanism are not immune. Contemporary Anglicanism is becoming more diverse and, therefore, more contested and difficult to define. This article offers a nuanced definition of Anglicanism as a means of enabling Anglicans to understand themselves more clearly, a self-understanding which, in turn, will facilitate any future reform.

Key Words: Anglican identity, identity crisis, religious identity, definition of Anglicanism, postmodernism, unity and diversity

Introduction

Everywhere we look in Western culture, people are experiencing identity crises: individuals, families, neighborhoods, and nations. The Church and her members are not exempt from this modern crisis of identity, and one of the Church traditions most famous for having a troubled identity is Anglicanism.

In spite of our troubled identity, because of our troubled identity, it is essential that Anglicans have some clear sense of who we are. After all, if you don't know what a particular Church tradition is, how could you possibly know if it was the "best" tradition for you to be a member of?

Therefore, as we launch *Cranmer Theological Journal*, the focus of our inaugural issue is Anglican identity. My purpose in writing this article is to explore the issue of Anglican identity, which I will do in four sections. I will first discuss the notion of identity and why identities are experiencing crises, followed by a presentation of the nature of our own Anglican identity crisis. I will then present a brief model of religious identity that will serve as the basis for attempting to define Anglicanism and will help explain why religious identities are so difficult to define. Finally, I will pursue a nuanced definition of

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Anglicanism so that we can get our bearings in understanding Anglican identity and make sense of the bewildering diversity in this unity we call Anglicanism. This foundational work of definition will provide a basis for further understanding and dialogue, both in this journal and elsewhere.

The Issue of Identity

Before I can discuss the nature of the Anglican identity crisis, I must first introduce the concept of identity and why it has become such a necessary obsession since the late twentieth century, if not before. An identity is a sense of who you are and may be either *received* or *constructed*. You may know who you are because you have received an identity that you have not chosen and which you rarely, if ever, question. Such received identities have been characteristic of humanity for most of its history, and received identities are those that people experience in traditional societies. On the other hand, your identity may not be inherited or received but conceived of as something that must be constructed from the plethora of choices offered to you. Anglicans today, among others, now have to live somewhere between received and constructed identities.

The tension between these two views is captured in Robert Schreiter's work, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*. Schreiter discusses the construction of religious identity in terms of two models of culture, what he terms "integrated concepts of culture" and "globalized concepts of culture." Schreiter's "integrated concepts of culture" parallels my "received identity," and his "globalized concepts of culture" parallels my "constructed identity."

According to Schreiter, "integrated concepts of culture depict culture as patterned systems in which the various elements are coordinated in such a fashion as to create a unified whole."[2] This patterned nature provides a sameness that gives a sense of identity to its participants and provides a feeling of security or "feeling at home." The integrated model is patterned after traditional societies that are relatively self-enclosed, self-sufficient, and governed by rule-bound tradition. It serves as a firm basis for the values a group desires to uphold and speaks of a wholeness that stands against the

2 Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 47–48.

fragmentation of society and the competitive pressures of capitalism, evokes an image of communion, and brings a sense of coherence to diverse elements.[3]

Schreiter contrasts the "integrated concept of culture" with what he calls the "globalized concept of culture," a concept in which culture is something to be constructed and is a ground of contest in relations. Identity is viewed as fragmentary or multiple, constructed, and imagined, and change is assumed to be the normal state of affairs. Global-local encounters often produce a disorienting mixture, or *tiempos mixtos*, in which the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern exist together in the same place. These *tiempos mixtos* create incompatible, coexistent logics, which may, at times, seem like an apt description of contemporary Anglicanism.[4]

Nancy Ammerman also articulates two sides to religious identity, what she variously calls "structured" and "emergent," "constructed" and "constrained," and "fluidity" and "constraint." In her view, while continuity of identity clearly prevails in religions, at the same time, a complex society continually challenges that continuity.[5]

Traditional communities, including religious communities, have *received* identities that are relatively stable over time but which are also founded on the assumption of *corporate personality*, a concept that has eroded since the time of the Reformation. Corporate personality may be summarized in terms of three basic tenets: organic unity, a representative figure, and the many-and-one oscillation. The organic unity of a corporate personality means that "the group possesses a consciousness which is distributed among its individual members,"[6] and the group considers itself organically one, as if a single body extended throughout time and space. Cultures with a corporate personality have an individual who serves as the representative figure who embodies the whole group.[7] For example, David in the Psalms represents all of Israel and not just himself, and the covenant representatives of the Scriptures (culminating in Christ) all act as representative figures: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. The one-and-many oscillation means that the one represents the many, and the many are in the one so that there is not a sharp antithesis between the

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3 Ibid, 47–51.

4 Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 53–58.

5 Nancy T. Ammerman, "Religious Identities," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 207–24.

6 Robinson, "Corporate Personality," as quoted in Joseph C. Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family: The Domestic Church* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2014), 164. My discussion of corporate personality closely follows that of Atkinson.

7 Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family*, 165.

individual and the community. The community is treated as an individual, and the group is all to the individual so that the individual finds his identity in the group. The individual is not himself a personality but a bearer of the community personality.[8]

In other words, in traditional communities, you are your tribe, from whom you derive your personality. You may be King David, Julius Caesar, or Plato, but most fundamentally you are an Israelite, a Roman, or an Athenian. This traditional, received corporate identity that is so salient in the Old Covenant continues in the New Covenant, where we are in Christ, and he is in us, and we have our identity as members of the one Body of Christ and not purely as individuals with their own separate relationship to God.

Since identity in traditional communities is received, relatively stable, and corporate, individuals in traditional societies have a relatively strong sense of who they are. For this reason, they don't think much about their own individual identity and question who they are.

On the other hand, identities may be not only received but also constructed, a phenomenon closely associated with the rise of the autonomous individual. If the individual does not know who he is by virtue of a relationship with the corporate community, then it is incumbent on the individual to construct his own identity in some manner. Initially in history, as the self was increasingly conceived as an autonomous person, the individual would naturally identify with received communities. However, as the ideal of individual autonomy became more dominant, and as various communities began to break down and lose their ability to communicate their identity to their members, individuals have increasingly been compelled to choose their identity or identities.

Families, churches, the nation-state, and other corporate entities no longer have the same ability to give identity to individuals. The identity-giving power of each of these, to some degree, has been dissolved by the acid of autonomous individualism.[9] This means that in postmodern culture, the individual is left to choose who he wants to be. For many, this may still mean choosing to identify oneself in terms of a particular church tradition, family, or the American nation. But the truly significant fact is that even when one makes these traditional choices, identity, to some degree, has to be chosen. This is illustrated by the phenomenon of searching for a new church to attend when you have moved to a new town. You may choose to continue to be a member of your former

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8 Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family*, 166.

9 Carl Trueman, in his *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), discusses in some detail the autonomous self in its relation to dissipating communities.

denomination, but today you are also likely to decide which church to attend based on several factors related to the desires of the individual family.

Identity, therefore, is largely received in traditional cultures with strong corporate personalities but is largely chosen in cultures where communities such as the Church, the nation, and the family are weak.

One of the consequences of this culture of choice is that whatever identity is chosen takes on the characteristics of consumerism. If an individual constructs his identity from the menu of options, it's likely that the identity he creates will be a pastiche or a hodgepodge collection of choices that may have relatively little coherence or integrity. Increasingly, this is how American Christians are choosing their churches, a phenomenon I have frequently observed among Anglicans and would-be Anglicans. In the first place, the Christian identity of postmodern Christians is frequently only one identity among many categories of identity, and commonly not the most important of these categories. Secondly, people often come to Anglicanism via some collection of individual elements they find attractive, and not through an understanding of the whole of Anglicanism.

While received identities are consciously affirmed by individuals, they are not so much chosen, and when identity is thought of, it is in order to reflect on how I fit in with and abide by the terms of the community. On the other hand, those with constructed identities exhibit much more anxiety about their identities since they are the constructors of their identities, and their felt needs and desires may be changeable and uncertain. Constructed identities are relatively fickle and fluid,[10] subject to the changing ideas and whims of the individual who is offered enticing identity choices every day.

Questions of identity such as "Who am I?" are relatively rare in traditional societies whose members have received their identity, but they are an essential element of constructed identities.

The Anglican Identity Crisis

Therefore, identities, including religious identities, may be received, constructed, or hybridized. But identity is only anxiously sought in times of instability, conflict, and change, a truth that helps explain why identity is a ubiquitous pursuit in the twenty-first century.

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[10] On the fluidity of postmodern culture, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Oxford: Polity, 2000).

It is not only individuals but also communities which are currently experiencing identity crises, a phenomenon to which churches are not immune. While the contemporary Anglican crisis of identity is most visibly manifest in the global struggles over an Anglicanism that faithfully maintains a biblical view of anthropology and human sexuality and one which does not, this battleground is itself only the most obvious sign of much deeper forces at work. As I have explained in my *Orthodox Anglican Identity*,[11] even those who are orthodox Anglicans in terms of biblical anthropology are experiencing an ever-increasing degree of diversity in terms of how they define Anglicanism.

Every community, if it is to survive and thrive, must have some relatively clear sense of its identity, including what distinguishes it from other similar communities and how it knows if any individual is inside or outside of the community. A one-celled organism provides a simple, useful illustration. The one-celled organism (although not sentient) has a sense of its organic unity and integrity, and in a one-celled organism there is a clear boundary line (the cell membrane) between what is inside the cell and is an integral part of it and what is outside of the cell and not part of it. Boundary markers of religious identity are not as clear-cut as those of cells, and yet the analogy holds.

In maintaining an identity, a religious community, like the cell, has to have some sense of who it is, how it knows who is part of it and who is outside of it, and some means of defending the boundaries it has defined. In terms of Anglicanism, we ask the questions: "What is an Anglican?" and "How do you know if someone is an Anglican or not?" Whatever answers we give to these questions must address the pressing issue of unity and diversity. On the one hand, Anglicanism and every religious identity must manifest a relatively large degree of unity, or else the identity in question will be meaningless. Too much diversity (and fluidity) threatens any clear identity. On the other hand, if a religious identity is too narrow in defining and defending its boundaries, it is likely to leave out desirable diversity and act more like a sect.

Therefore, the theme of unity in diversity, exemplified by the American political slogan *E. pluribus unum*, is exceedingly important in understanding identities, including religious identities. Too much unity or conformity in religion often results from coercion and is thus a characteristic of sects. Too much diversity, on the other hand, threatens clear and meaningful identities. In a religious context, this often entails moral and theological infidelity.

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[11] Charles Erlandson, *Orthodox Anglican Identity: The Quest for Unity in a Diverse Religious Tradition* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2020). Much of what I write in this article about Anglican identity is discussed in greater detail in *Orthodox Anglican Identity*.

Anglicanism in the twenty-first century is experiencing an identity crisis, a crisis precipitated by many interacting factors. In the first place, Anglicans now live in a culture where identities are primarily constructed. This means, inevitably, that the collection of individuals and diverse churches within Anglicanism will continue making individual choices about Anglican belief and practice without understanding or perhaps even caring how these choices relate to the larger community or identity over both space and time.

Second, as we shall see when I attempt a definition, Anglicanism has an unusually complex identity that lends itself to a large degree of diversity. Anglicanism is somewhat more difficult to define than many other Christian identities because it has no pope, no magisterium, and no one confessional standard that is uniquely the primary norm.[12] This diversity has historically been kept in check, largely because of the restraining and defining power of the State to enforce religious structures, beliefs, and practices. The normative shape of Anglicanism that resulted from the Elizabethan Settlement of the sixteenth century was especially dependent on the authority of the State, and the erosion of that authority has, perhaps, enabled diversity and confusion in Anglicanism to be more exaggerated than in other Christian traditions.

Third, the trend ever since the Reformation is towards greater diversity both within the Christian tradition and among religions in the West. Anglicanism, as a religious identity, is not immune to such a trend and may, in fact, be more susceptible to this trend than other religious identities. It's not that Christianity in England before the Reformation lacked diversity. Rather, this diversity did not threaten a coherent identity because for most of English Church history it was not possible to assess the degree of diversity, nor was it possible to impose strict, universal norms to contain it. As England developed into a unified nation with its own emerging identity, and as this nation increasingly came under the unifying influence of the Roman Church after the Papal Revolution of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the diversity that existed was controlled by a combination of pope and king.

After the English Reformation and especially after the English Civil War, the initial diversification that included the majority Anglican population and the recusant Roman Catholic remnant developed into a much greater diversity that included Puritans, Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists, and many smaller groups.

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12 Theological norms in Anglicanism are distributed between the Scriptures (which have a unique and fundamental authority), the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-nine Articles as distinctly Anglican formularies, and the Creeds, the Ecumenical Councils, and the Church Fathers as more general Christian norms.

Over time, these Dissenting groups gained more and more religious freedom and became a permanent part of the English religious landscape. The nineteenth century added agnosticism and atheism as religious options.

During these centuries of profound transformation, the State went from supporting and vigorously defending one privileged religious identity, to supporting a variety of Christian identities, to defending a complete freedom and diversity in religious options. In other words, when the Christendom model broke down, under which the State supported and promoted a particular religious identity, religious diversity exploded.

A Model of Religious Identity

To understand this increasing religious diversity and better understand Anglican identity, it is worth considering a model of religious identity I have developed. The model states that religious identities consist of four definitional factors (or identities) that interact in complex ways: ecclesial, normative, practical, and historical identities.

The *ecclesial identity* of a religious group focuses on official relationships between communities that claim a shared identity. These relationships may exist at the local, regional, national, or international level and across time. The ecclesial identity involves the key leaders, corporate structures, and institutions that bind churches together. The ecclesial identity of religions is closely related to the concept of culture as used, for example, by Philip Rieff, when he writes, "A culture survives principally . . . by the power of its institutions to bind and loose men in the conduct of their affairs with reasons which sink so deep into the self that they become commonly and implicitly understood."[13]

Ecclesial identities are accompanied by *normative identities* which are based on norms or standards deemed essential or critical to a religious identity. Such normative definitions are useful because they provide clear boundaries. They also make the acts of definition and identification more possible. Normative identities are maintained by the institutions and authorities of ecclesial identities.

While ecclesial and normative identities provide the basic structure and boundaries that make a religious identity possible, often what seems most characteristic of a church is its *practical* identity. Practical religious identities are concerned with a particular tradition of ethos, behavior, and practice.

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[13] Phillip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud,* 40th anniversary ed. (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 2.

These first three religious identities correlate fairly well with one of the traditional expressions of Anglican identity: its “doctrine, discipline, and worship.” “Doctrine” corresponds to normative identity, “discipline” to ecclesial identity, and “worship” to practical identity.

Finally, every religious group is identified as well by the development of the life of the religious group over time, that is, the *historical* identity. Every community (and even individuals) must have some sense of who they are based on their history, including their familial, tribal, or national history. In the case of churches, sometimes this history is of fairly recent origin, but, for a Catholic Christian tradition such as Anglicanism, the sense of history may be very ancient.

Even a cursory look at the model of religious identity I have so far sketched illustrates that religious identities are more complex than is usually believed. To add to the complexity, we should remember that religious identities are not static over time. For example, when we speak of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, we are not only talking about a great deal of diversity over geographic space at any given time but an even greater degree of diversity over time. For example, the pope was not always the pope in terms of his claims to universal jurisdiction asserted aggressively after the Papal Revolution of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and many beliefs and practices that have been dogmatized since the Papal Revolution were not the norm before this Revolution.

When trying to comprehend the religious diversity present today, both in general and in terms of Anglican identity, we must also understand how religious diversity is limited so that a coherent identity may be maintained. Remember: too much diversity threatens any coherent identity. In its simplest terms, religious identities are created and maintained most clearly when strong ecclesial authority and clear norms are present.

In the absence of a strong religious authority, diversity becomes the default. When the religious activity of a society is unregulated, it will tend to be very pluralistic, but when the State uses coercive force to regulate religious activity, religious monopolies are more likely. Whenever a strong authority is willing to act strongly, diversity will be limited to some degree, and religious identity will be more clearly preserved. This strong authority that employs coercive force to regulate the religious economy often comes from the State, but an ecclesiastical

authority, such as the Roman Catholic Church of the medieval period, may also act to limit religious diversity.[14]

The role of ecclesial authority in establishing and maintaining religious identities is accompanied and supported by the religious norms that interact with this authority. Often, these norms are theological in nature, although in Anglicanism the liturgical norm of the Prayer Book has a unique and critical importance. Preserving core teachings that undergo little change is critical to the long-term vitality of churches. Such core teachings generate high levels of member commitment and tight social networks, and they can preserve the religious capital accrued and valued by existing members. When these core teachings are inimitable, they help to retain members and prevent schisms. When, therefore, religious organizations revise core teachings, they threaten organizational vitality.[15]

This model of religious identity has great power to explain important distortions of Christian identities: norms without an ecclesial identity will tend to become contested, fragmented, and heretical; ecclesial authority without clear norms will tend to become arbitrary and tyrannical; behaviors and practices without an ecclesial identity and norms will tend to become moralistic and then relativistic. This is exactly what most religions are experiencing in the Western world today, including Anglicanism.

We are now in a position to understand that religious diversity is the norm in the contemporary postmodern condition, and churches will continue to experience their own varieties of identity crises. What we are experiencing is a later stage of the end of the Christendom model of Christianity and Anglicanism, in which the religious identity of Anglicanism was preserved (and to some degree created) by the power of the State. As Powicke famously stated (and perhaps overstated): "[T]he one definite thing which can be said about the Reformation in England is that it was an act of State."[16] In the Elizabethan Settlement of the sixteenth century, subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles was established and to some degree enforced by the State, as was the prescribed usage of the Book of Common Prayer.

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[14] See Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 193–99 and Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 99–125.

[15] Roger Finke, "Innovative Returns to Tradition: Using Core Teachings as the Foundation for Innovative Accommodation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 1 (2004), 20–23.

[16] Maurice Powicke, *The Reformation in England*, (United Kingdom: Oxford UP, 1941), 1.

It is an uncomfortable truth that throughout history, Christianity has often been spread, fostered, and enforced by the coordinate power of the Church and State, including the instantiations of Christendom experienced after the conversion of Constantine, during the time of the Frankish ascendancy and Carolingian Renaissance, and after the Papal Reformation. Now that Christendom has deteriorated, we should both expect religious diversity to increase and also seek somehow to limit this diversity, a limiting that must now take place by churches (ecclesial identity) defining and defending various norms (normative identity), as well as exercising discipline for individuals and churches that manifest undesirable diversity.

Anglican Identity

Where does this leave us as Anglicans? Now that we have some idea of why religions today are experiencing identity crises and have a model of religious identities and how they are maintained, we need a definition of Anglicanism that will enable us to evaluate Anglican identity, the all-important topic that is the focus of the first issue of the *Cranmer Theological Journal*. Such a definition will enable us to comprehend Anglican identity, perceive why that identity is now in crisis, understand why Anglicans often have no agreement on what Anglicanism is, and chart a way forward for Anglicanism in the twenty-first century.

Declining to define Anglicanism has become an Anglican pastime in recent decades,[17] and extended definitions of Anglicanism are surprisingly difficult to find, at least in part because it turns out that religious identities are inherently complex. This helps explain the reluctance of Anglicans to define just who they are. In a book titled *Anglican Identities*, former Archbishop of Canterbury and celebrated Anglican scholar Rowan Williams overtly forswears "any aim to provide a fresh rallying-point for Anglican identity in these pages."[18] Williams's

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17 When I was researching Anglican identity, I sought out many well-known Anglican authorities. One, who, in all honesty, I was hoping would decisively settle the issue for me so that I wouldn't have to, fumbled around for a coherent definition. When I attended a well-known orthodox Anglican conference and a leader asked the question "What is Anglicanism?" the participants gave a Blind Man and the Elephant series of answers, some drawing attention to the liturgy or beauty, some because of doctrine, etc. When I attended a three-day intensive seminary class on Anglicanism, at the end of the class the professor opened the class up for questions. Immediately, I raised my hand and asked the dreaded question: "What is Anglicanism?" After a few seconds of ponderous silence, the professor did what any good teacher would have done: he turned the question back on the class, saying "What do you think?"

18 Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 2004), 7.

title seems to concede that defining a single Anglican identity may be an impossibility.

Many vague, confusing, and even conflicting definitions of Anglicanism have been offered, a fact that reflects the problem of Anglican identity. Some definitions are so broad and weak that, if they were generally accepted, they would strongly suggest that Anglicanism does not have a coherent enough identity to effectively discuss an Anglican future. Some say, "You are an Anglican if you think you are,"[19] while others say that because Anglicanism stresses continuity with the universal Church, it has no separate identity.

Any definition of Anglicanism should take into account the four different aspects of religious identity that my model has illuminated: the ecclesial, normative, practical, and historical.

My definition of Anglicanism, therefore, is this: "*Anglicanism is the Catholic Church that was planted in England in the first few centuries after Christ*; *reshaped decisively by the English Reformation that reformed the received Catholic traditions and also by the Evangelical and Catholic Revivals and other historical movements of the Spirit*; *and that has now been inculturated into independent*, *global churches*."

This definition requires some explanation, especially in terms of the four identities I have outlined earlier.

The first of the four religious identities, the *ecclesial*, shows up in my definition of Anglicanism in two places. First, Anglicanism is essentially a part of the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church—the part that was planted in the British Isles before the end of the second century. The ecclesial identity of Anglicanism appears in my definition as well in my acknowledgment that Anglicanism is now more than the Church of England but includes the national churches that the English Church has birthed.

To a large degree, you know if you are an Anglican if you belong to an Anglican church, which means that in some way, the ecclesial identity of a church is privileged and helps answer the question: "Who is an Anglican?"

We should extend the ecclesial identity of Anglicanism to include the truth that the bishop is the locus of unity, and so Anglicans have dioceses that consist of related parishes under the head of a bishop. Anglicans also have national churches, as well as international bodies, such as the Anglican Communion and GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference), but these are not bound in the same way or to the same degree as national churches.

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[19] John Whale, *The Future of Anglicanism* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1988), 89.

The great realignment taking place in global Anglicanism is an *ecclesial* realignment. This realignment has been developing for at least a few decades and has resulted in the creation of the ACNA (Anglican Church in North America) and GAFCON and the GSFA (Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches) internationally. More recently, the "Kigali Commitment" that resulted from the 2023 GAFCON meeting states that the GSFA and GAFCON Primates share the view that "due to the departures from orthodoxy articulated above, they can no longer recognize the Archbishop of Canterbury as an Instrument of Communion, the 'first among equals' of the Primates," and that "We welcome the GSFA's Ash Wednesday Statement of 20 February 2023, calling for a resetting and reordering of the Communion."[20]

For decades, many Anglicans have asserted that to be part of the Anglican Communion and in communion with the See of Canterbury is what makes one an Anglican, regardless of adherence to particular norms or practices, such as adhering to biblical morality or using the Book of Common Prayer. This form of Anglican ecclesial identity has been vigorously challenged by the leaders of the global Anglican churches that contain 85% of Anglicanism's members. The ecclesial structures that will replace the Anglican Communion for these orthodox Anglicans are a work in progress.

The *normative* identity of Anglicanism appears in two places in my definition of Anglicanism. First, when I define Anglicanism as the Catholic Church planted in England, I am assuming within this ecclesial identity of the Catholic Church in England certain Catholic norms that contemporary Anglicanism still adheres to: the three Creeds, the Ecumenical Councils, the ancient liturgy, and the patristic consensus. The second place that Anglican norms appear in my definition is assumed in the phrase "reshaped decisively by the English Reformation that reformed the received catholic traditions." One component of this decisive reshaping that has persisted as a part of Anglican identity for more than 450 years is the use of the specifically Anglican formularies, the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-nine Articles.

Part of the current Anglican realignment and identity crisis is due to the fact that two manifestly different forms of Anglicanism, orthodox and liberal, adhere to different norms. While both orthodox and liberal Anglicans claim the Scriptures as a norm, they employ the Scriptures in very different ways, especially regarding issues related to biblical anthropology. While orthodox Anglicans most commonly claim the Thirty-nine Articles as a theological norm,

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[20] Global Anglican Future Conference, "GAFCON IV – The Kigali Commitment," April 23, 2023, https://gafcon23.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Kigali-Commitment-2023.pdf.

liberal Anglicans do not. While both groups claim the Book of Common Prayer as a norm and appear to have similar liturgical practices, they differ over what they believe the Prayer Book teaches and embodies. Within the orthodox Anglican camp, some prefer to rely on the English Reformers and Continental Reformers as privileged norms, while others prefer to give preference to the Church Fathers and the patristic consensus.

The *practical* identity of Anglicanism includes their understanding and practice of baptism and the Holy Communion, the five lesser sacraments, the use of the Prayer Book and liturgy, the Church year, and other practices. Some Anglicans, especially on the more liberal side, believe that practically, Anglicans are defined as well by an ethos of comprehension and toleration, notions of a dispersed authority, and the so-called "Hooker's three-legged stool" of Scripture, tradition, and reason. In such cases, the practical identity of Anglicanism is often used to undermine the firmness of doctrinal norms.

Many Anglicans today are drawn to Anglicanism especially because of some aspects of practice, such as the use of the ancient liturgy, the adherence to the Church year, or certain other practical elements such as those that convey a sense of beauty and reverence.

As with many other things, Anglicans disagree about their *historical* identity, not only about its meaning but even about when Anglicanism began. Some Anglicans begin Anglican history with the planting of the church in the British Isles in the first few centuries after Christ and stress the continuity of the church of England with the early, pre-Roman Catholic Church, in spite of centuries of the Church of England falling under the aegis of the Roman Catholic Church by degrees. More commonly, many define Anglicanism as beginning with the reconstitution of the English Church under Henry VIII because at this point the *de facto* distinctiveness of Anglicanism began.

My own belief is that the term "Anglicanism" may properly be employed to refer to the earliest origins of the planting of Christianity in the British Isles.[21] This is reflected in that portion of my definition of Anglicanism which reads that Anglicanism "is the Catholic Church that was planted in England in the first few centuries after Christ." I realize that I am, therefore, pitting myself against the majority of scholars, including the various editors and authors who contributed to the five-volume *Oxford History of Anglicanism*, who have chosen to begin

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21 I establish this point at length in my forthcoming book, *English Church History in 4 Acts: from the Beginning through Henry VIII*.

Anglicanism in 1520.[22] However, the relatively large element of continuity in the English Reformation with what came before is one of the hallmarks of Anglicanism: likewise, with preceding eras of religious transformation in the British Isles.

Conclusion

The issue of identity, then, is an inescapable part of living in a postmodern, post-Christian culture. The difficulty Anglicans have in articulating their own identity is both a part of the complex nature of all religious identities and also a reflection of the diversity in religion that manifests itself when religion is not supported by the strong authority of the State, the Church, or some combination of both.

This does not mean that Anglicans are without hope in our post-Constantinian milieu: far from it! The Church existed and even blossomed before the conversion of Constantine and the promotion of Christianity by the Empire. There can, however, be no simple return to the pre-Constantinian situation, not only because contemporary Western culture is centuries removed from Constantine but also because the strong communities that provide a secure, received identity—the Church, families, and the nation—are themselves fragmented and relatively weak.

Anglicanism has survived turbulent periods before, including the Anglo-Saxon invasions, the planting of the Roman Church in 597 and its blending with the indigenous British Church, the Viking invasions and attendant dislocations, the Norman invasion, the Papal Revolution, the English Reformation, and other subsequent traumatic events and eras. However, without a frank, reasoned, and conciliar discussion of Anglican identity, Anglicans will have no idea of what their identity is or should be.

Into this historic and exciting context, *Cranmer Theological Journal* is launching its first volume to discuss such issues of identity. In the two issues of the first volume, our authors will explore Anglican identity in terms of its history, churchmanships, and tensions. These inaugural issues will serve, the editors hope, as a strong foundation for our continuing discussions of what it means to be an Anglican in the twenty-first century as we continue to explore Anglicanism through articles related to Biblical theology, dogmatics, pastoral theology, liturgy, and Church history.

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[22] *Oxford History of Anglicanism*, Rowan Strong, gen. ed., 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017–2019).