

Looking forward to our sessions on Christian Orthodoxy in the Anglican Tradition, with today's talk about **the roots of Anglicanism.**

First some a couple of terms:

Anglicanism – refers to the Christianity that took root in the British Isles and specifically to a worldwide communion of 38 provinces and 70 Million Christians. If you are quote in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, you are an Anglican.

Episcopalian – That is the name of one of the 38 provinces and includes churches in the United States as well as 15 other countries and territories: Taiwan, Micronesia, Honduras, Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Churches in Europe in six countries – and Haiti – with 16,631 members making it the largest diocese in the entire church.

Let's start at the beginning by that I mean the beginning of Christianity in the British Isles.

By tradition Joseph of Arimathea was who brought Christianity to England. And with him came the chalice of the Last Supper known as the Holy Grail. The legend goes that Joseph set his walking staff on the ground to sleep, it miraculously took root, leafed out, and blossomed as the "Glastonbury Thorn". The retelling of such miracles encouraged the pilgrim trade at Glastonbury until the Abbey was dissolved in 1539.

This is all tied up with the Myths of King Arthur and the Round Table. Closer to the truth is some evidence that the earliest certain historical evidence of Christianity among the Britons is found in the writings of such

early Christian Fathers as Tertullian and Origen in the first years of the 3rd century, although the first Christian communities probably were established at least some decades earlier. It came to England most likely with the Roman Army but it didn't leave when the Romans abandoned England around 380. Without the Roman government in place, Christianity started a unique evolution. Pelagius who did oratorical battle with Augustine was one of the clearest examples of a unique Anglican theology.

It wasn't until 597 that the Pope sent St. Augustine, (not St. Augustine) to re-establish Roman control. What he found was an indigenous Christianity that celebrated Easter on a different date, had a different approach to monastic life including co-ed monasteries led by men and women in partnership.

Certain aspects of Celtic Christianity were developed in those days and are either direct sources or re-appropriated sources for Anglicanism today. From 600 until the time of Henry VIII in the early 1500s, Christianity in England was primarily monastic with Roman influence of Benedictine and the Irish influence of Celtic (Iona and Lindisfarne).

Now in popular belief Henry VIII started the Anglican Church so he could divorce Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn. Not quite that simple.

It was much more Elizabeth who gave birth to the distinct and unique expression of Christianity that we call Anglicanism. It was called the Elizabethan Settlement or the Via Media or middle way. The middle of what? Well, splitting the difference between Catholics and Protestants.

How we are like the Catholics:

- Retained bishops and cathedrals

- Had 7 sacraments (though two major that we share with the Protestants and five minor as a nod to our Catholic roots)

- Believe in Apostolic succession

Like the Protestants:

Clergy can marry

Democratic processes

Women in ministry

It is in the question of what our tradition versus those two traditions consider as sources of authority that you really find our uniqueness.

Authority – For Roman Catholics. The primary source of authority has always been tradition as represented in the ecumenical councils of the church. In the earliest days, you read about the first Ecumenical Council in the book of Acts where James the brother of Jesus convenes the council to which Paul comes, and Peter comes and they work out that there will be a mission to the Gentiles that's written up an access to the first Ecumenical Council. And then there were other ones that came along. The probably the most famous for us was the one in Nicea that gave us the Nicene Creed. So Roman Catholics saw scripture, the books of the Bible as part of their tradition, right alongside all of the other traditions and ceremonials that they had

Then at the time of the Protestant Reformation, in people, particularly like Martin Luther or Zwingli or Calvin there became this new idea that tradition by itself is not authoritative and is in fact in many instances corrupt. The only authority for them became scripture – the Bible. This is summarized in Luther's famous statement: Solo Scriptura – Scripture alone.

So what it really boiled down to is that we are what you would call the Via Media or the middle way between Catholicism and Protestantism. But the importance of this third or middle way is achieved by adding a third way to access authority – Human Reason.

This is what makes Anglicanism a unique expression of Christianity, not following Scripture alone, or Tradition alone, but considering both along with the third leg of our stool – Human Reason.

It is to an Anglican theologian and priest named Richard Hooker, that most people attribute the idea of us having what's called a three-legged stool as our source of authority.

The closest we come to a definitive quote from Richard Hooker is found in his book, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity:

What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason over-rule all other inferior judgments whatsoever.

That's the three-legged stool, scripture, tradition and reason. But you can see by his last sentence, what he's putting into the foreground as a new innovation is this idea that it is by which we settle on what it is by doctrine, we believe, so that's the piece right there.

If you Google, a three-legged stool, and all this, you'll see this quote turns up over and over again. It was buried in a 500-page book, and it wasn't at the time considered so revolutionary. It was only after the fact as it was applied throughout the 1600 and 1700s that it became such an important part of our tradition.

So we find the emergence of reason, with Hooker under Elizabeth, and then under King James I. His calling for an English Bible (the King James) was a major act in support of every believer having access to materials upon which they could reasonably assess their faith.

So the Elizabethan Settlement was established. But it didn't at first settle anything.

Things didn't calm down. We had already gone through the bloody times of Edward and Mary, and then into reign of Elizabeth. And now we came into a second bloody season in the 1600s. Archbishop Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, was a primary opponent of returning to the Roman Church, but he did not want to go all the way to the stark ways of worship of the Protestants.

While he was Archbishop of Canterbury, there was what was called the Puritan parliament, who swung things all the way to Protestantism. So in 1645, the Archbishop of Canterbury was taken out of his office, taken to the Tower of London and beheaded.

Then Oliver Cromwell became the Protector of the Realm. He beheaded King Charles I. Cromwell was a fierce Protestant and felt that even the Anglican compromise contained too much of Catholicism. And so we went into a very fierce Puritan stage that really only lasted a single generation, during which they went through churches and took out all the statues, changed everything.

Then we came with the restoration, Charles II was brought back.

But it turns out he was very, very Catholic in his understanding. So there was a second revolution and who became the new king after Charles the second William of William and Mary who was brought over from the Netherlands; he's very Protestant. So back and forth between *Are we going to be Protestant? Are we going to be Catholic?* But through all of that, what prevailed? This; we are a Catholic Church, but we're also a reformed and Protestant church, and the means by which we move forward is through the use of God-given human reason.

Well, Hooker was writing at the very beginning of the 1600s. The Episcopal Church was created in the early 1790s.

So what was going on in the world of philosophy in the 200 years that intervene between the Elizabethan Settlement and the American Revolution? Well, just think of it, it was the scientific revolution, it was Descartes. It was Newton. It was the entire enlightenment. It was Voltaire, all of these places where this idea of human reason as the highest good started to emerge in all the disciplines: the sciences, in philosophy, and in the arts, in Christianity on the Protestant side, starting with John Calvin. But then in the Calvinist leaders, they used this what I call hyper-reason where they wanted everything to be by the rule and strict. And what became their primary theology? Predestination. They felt that they had in the authority derived from Scripture, the clear teaching that all of Christianity is based on a predestined group of people who will meet salvation. This never caught on in England. It caught on in Scotland, but it didn't catch on in England as human reason continued to prevail. Well, within our church during this period, we weren't sinking down into this Hyper Realism. The greatest theologians of this time of our denomination in the 1600s and the 1700s, were the poets. During the Scientific Revolution rather than taking a hyper-rational approach as Calvinism and Puritanism did, we wrote poetry eg. Jeremy Taylor, John Milton, and Andrew Marvel. And truly our greatest poet, Archbishop Cranmer, the author of the first Book of Common Prayer. We love our poetry, particularly in our worship.

We turned to poetry rather than prose as the means by which we would express what human reason was coming to understand about scripture and tradition. We were using human reason not like Newton did, or like Calvin did; we're using it for creativity and expression, we're trying to grasp God's mysteries through beautiful language. And so we have this tradition when human reason gave birth to the poetry and hymnody that has become such a legacy of the Anglican Church.

Episcopalianism which grew out of Anglicanism was created in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and then most critically the American Revolution. That was

a revolution based on a Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson.

That was a high doctrine of the Enlightenment.

At its founding it became the first independent province of the Anglican Communion and has had its own particular history since then, particularly with regard to honoring reason.

Well, as glorious as that is for our history think how tough that was for the clergy and members of the Church of England, in the colonies, the Anglican Church and the colonies. The Church of England was the established church in the colonies of New York, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. And now all of a sudden because of this revolution, they are very unwelcome within their communities. Over half of the Anglican clergy left the country during the revolution, many of them went to Nova Scotia and other places in Canada, but others went back to England. So who remained within the Church of England? The people that chose to stay were the people who had a very high regard for the enlightenment and for this new expression of human reason. Who was left within our church were these theologians and preachers and teachers who wanted to explore even further, this idea of human reason being a counterbalance in our theology. It is a wonderful founding myth which at the same time is actually true that almost the very same people in Philadelphia that wrote the US Constitution went right across the street to Christ Church when they were finished and wrote the Constitution for the American Episcopal Church.

Our church's constitution had a bicameral legislature – the General Convention, a full judiciary branch and an executive branch with what we called a Presiding Bishop (not an Archbishop, that would have been too Catholic in its tenor.)

This makes sense. If you believe in human reason as a full authority on a par with tradition and scripture, how do you operationalize that? Through democracy.

Human Reason as church authority finds its expression in the methods and practices of democracy as practiced by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

The General Convention of the Church first met in 1785. I once served on a committee of the Convention called the Committee on the State of the Church that first met in 1801.

It has been at General Convention, through the tool of human reason that is democracy in action, that many key turning points in our history of taken place. I want to give two examples before close.

Two examples:

Women's ordination

Gene Robinson's consecration.

The legislative branch of our church structure meets every three years for 9-11 days. It has two houses, the house of Bishops and the house of what are called deputies that are an equal number of lay people in priests. 110 dioceses, 880 deputies, half clergy, half lay people. It is General Convention, rather than a pope deciding what we believe, rather than just a council of Bishops deciding what we believe, or how we're going to practice. All legislation must pass both houses in the exact form, just like in the US congress. Nothing is presented to be voted on until it has had a committee hearing, just like in the US congress.

So it was at the General Convention in 1976 that women became eligible to become priests and deacons.

The same resolution had been proposed, debated and voted down in 1967, 1970, and 1973 with women who had already gone to seminary hoping that the General Convention in one of those years was going to do a new thing. But It didn't.

And then in 1976, the General Convention decided that, theologically, the Episcopal Church embraces the Ministry of women in all orders. That was my first fall in seminary as a 22 year-old guy at Yale Divinity School and the General Convention have been held in early September in Minneapolis, and all of the women in our senior class came back from that General Convention, now realizing they were going to get ordained at the end of this year, and they wouldn't have to wait for three more years.

So that's one great example of human reason in action changing our church's theology.

I want to share another example, how it was that our church decided that it was okay to consecrate a gay man as a bishop in the church. That happened in 2003 again at a General Convention in Minneapolis, and I was a deputy and it was an amazing experience.

Okay. The General Convention is the place where bishop's elections are concurred to if they had been elected within 120 days of a General Convention. Otherwise standing committees around the diocese vote. The people of New Hampshire had within their ranks a very beloved, very respected priest, a wonderful choice if you're going to have an exemplar for a first time occurrence. Gene Robinson, had been elected so his election would have to be concurred with at the General Convention. What came about was not a grand statement about the church's teaching on Human Sexuality. It was simply the concurrence to a vote by a particular diocese. This was about a particular incarnate being chosen by the people of New

Hampshire. As I pointed out, our General Convention works just like Congress does. Nothing gets voted on the floor of the General Convention that hasn't been voted out of a committee. So the committee on the consecration of Bishops was assigned the task of considering concurrence to the election of Gene Robinson. They had eight other bishops that they were also considering and those eight sailed through.

The Committee held a special hearing about Gene Robinson's election. It was held in a ballroom with a capacity of 1600 people, and there was another ballroom with closed-circuit TV that had another 600 people.

The two co-chairs of the committee were a liberal seminary classmate of mine named Sam Candler who was the Dean of the cathedral in Atlanta and Kendall Harmon who's a conservative from the Diocese of South Carolina. Each opened the session with a 10-minute statement, Sam speaking for concurrence and Kendall speaking against. Then for the next 90 minutes at two different microphones, three minute speeches for an against for and against. What I heard was our entire church history and theology in a nutshell. The "against" arguments held up scripture and church tradition whereby they claimed homosexuality was outside the norm of Christian practice. They pointed out that if we took this action we would break our traditional ties with other Christian denominations and other parts of the Anglican Communion. At the "for" microphone, much of the argument looked to human reason. So it goes back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Then the session ended by Sam Candler who had spoken "for" originally, now gave his best 10-minute argument "against." He was followed by Kendall Harmon who had been against y gave his best argument "for." Meeting adjourned.

The committee met the next morning and voted to move Gene Robinson's name to the floor of the General Convention. It was taken up in the regular order of business, right in the midst of adding new Saint's Days to our calendars and giving permission for the sale of some property then – the Big One, the concurrence to the election of Gene Robinson comes up on the agenda. Again, one microphone for, one against, back and forth, back and

forth. The House of Deputies then votes using a special procedure called a Vote by Orders. Okay, remember what I said the house the deputies has four priests or deacons and four lay people from everyone of the 110 dioceses.

If there is a call for a vote by orders, each diocese only gets one vote, there's only going to be 110 votes. All eight representatives cast a ballot. If it's evenly split, four to four, that is considered a no vote. So you have to have a super majority when there is vote by orders. All controversial decisions of the Episcopal Church have been passed by a vote by orders.

The vote is tallied and Gene Robinson's consecration is approved by the House of Deputies. Now, it has to go to the House of Bishops. They fancy themselves like the US Senate, the greatest deliberative body in the world. They sit around tables, and they do a more open kind of discussion. They have a whole day discussion on it. And then at the end of the day, they vote and it passes. 18 bishops walked out of the House of Bishops upon the announcement of the vote.

So that is how we came to the place where the Episcopal Church recognized gays and lesbians as being able to be nominated to be consecrated as Bishops. It wasn't a vote on an abstract notion, it was a vote about this one person. But just like in the Supreme Court, once there's a decision - that becomes precedence. So that's what went down. I imagine a number of you might have been tuned into this historic occasion but I wanted to offer my blow by blow so you could see how our church practices theology and exerts ecclesiastical authority. It was an amazing experience to witness how we conducted ourselves – the listening the formal, measured debate, the reacting back and forth; it was is a very moving experience for me.

Looks like we are about out of time. There is so much else that we could cover, actually an entire class on the Anglican Tradition would be

fascinating. Next week, the entirety of Church of History. Wow. Sorry about the shortness of time. If you would like, I could hold an extended session after the 11 am service next Sunday to cover these first two weeks in broader detail and with much more discussion. Anyone interested.

If you had to sum up the unique expression of Christianity that Anglicanism represents it would be this: We honor human reason as well as Holy Scripture and the Church's long-standing traditions as the sources of authority for our faith.

I would humbly submit that within all the Christian denominations the one that holds up the three-legged stool is the best seat in the house.