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The other quadrilateral

*What is Anglicanism? It has four main characteristics:
It is catholic, canonical, creedal and comprehensive.*

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The Lambeth Quadrilateral, set forth in 1888, 1897 and 1920 and effectively entrenched in the Anglican Church of Canada's Solemn Declaration of 1893, lists four non-negotiables for explorations of Anglican identity and church union: the whole Bible; the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds; the two sacraments of the gospel that Jesus instituted, baptism and the Lord's Supper; and some form of the historic episcopate. Some now define Anglicanism simply in these terms, as if everything else in our heritage is now up



for grabs, or for sale. We should realize, however, that Anglicanism in effect defined itself for practical and theological purposes long before, in terms that go back to Thomas Cranmer and Richard Hooker; terms that embody an ideal of church life, and that yield a quadrilateral with a somewhat different flavour. There is an overlap with Lambeth, as you would expect, but when our task is to formulate Anglican Identity it is from the older quadrilateral that we should start.

Here, then, are the four characteristics by which Anglicanism, meaning the reformed faith and practice of the Church of England and all other churches

descended from it, is best and most basically defined.

First: Anglicanism is **catholic** Christianity. Its catholicity is not just a matter of seeking worldwide fellowship, cooperation and, where possible, church communion with all Christians and congregations everywhere, but a matter also of seeking to discern and embrace the fullness of the historic faith, as opposed to a merely partial view of it. Evangelicals, though historically hesitant to call themselves catholic because of what they see as incomplete Christianity among those, Roman and Anglican, who claim the name, are as catholic in purpose as anyone else, and their reluctance to use the label is a pity, just as it is a pity that self-styled Anglican Catholics who love the Lord Jesus should hesitate to call themselves evangelicals. The essence of evangelicalism, as today's scholars usually define it, is bible-based, cross-centred, commitment-oriented (I forgo the word conversion here, since it begs questions), and mission-focused: four qualities that, one way or another have marked the Christian Church as such since it began (if you doubt me, look at St. Paul!). To suspect those who call themselves evangelicals of being standoffish within the church to the point of sectarianism, as has been done in times past, is unworthy and untrue.

Part of the significance of the historic episcopate in Anglicanism is as a sign of the intention to maintain the whole of the apostolic faith, which the bishop's first job,

according to the Ordinal, is to guard. This too is an agreed element in Anglican catholicity.

Second: Anglicanism is **canonical** Christianity. This means that its faith and practice are based wholly on the Bible, in the double sense in which Anglicans, as Stephen Neill used to put it, challenge the world. The challenge is: if you can show anything in the Bible that we do not teach, we will teach it; and if you can show that we are teaching something that is not in the Bible, we will drop it. The Thirty-nine Articles were ratified in 1562, so their title page proclaimed, “for the avoiding of diversities of opinions, and for the establishing of consent touching true religion,” which goal determined what ground they covered. So, after the first five had reaffirmed the key points of the Creed in the face of Anabaptist unorthodoxy, Articles 6-8 affirmed the sufficiency of Scripture as a guide to salvation and the authority of Scripture as the final warrant for believing the Creed; and then articles 20-21, while honoring the Church as “a witness and a keeper of holy writ,” stated flatly: “it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.” The Solemn Declaration undertakes to “hold and maintain” this authority of canonical Scripture as the rule of the Anglican faith.

Third: Anglicanism is **creedal** Christianity. The Anglican Churches, historically, have all agreed on the importance, not just on keeping the two ecumenical creeds in the constitution, but of using both liturgically, so that worshippers define themselves as believers every time they join together in a church service. Thus Anglicanism aims to keep before all our minds the truth of the Trinity, and of Christ the Mediator, and of new life and hope through the Spirit’s work uniting us to Christ. Creedal Christianity is firmly doctrinal, and authentic Anglicanism always was and always will be creedal.

Fourth: Anglicanism is **comprehensive** Christianity. This does not mean that in Anglicanism anything goes, and that the Church may lawfully turn into what Bishop J.C. Ryle called “a Noah’s Ark of religions.” It means, rather, that a distinction is recognized between what is primary and essential, on the one hand, and what is secondary and non-essential on the other, and that it is the former category that is regarded as the ground of Anglican unity. Deviant and non standard views on secondary matters are tolerated, and it is left to the discipline of intramural debate to sort them out. But comprehensiveness has never meant, and must never mean, taking on board denials of essentials truths -- doctrines of the Creed, or the basic ethics that Scripture teaches as following from those doctrines (repentance, obedience, loving service within biblical parameters, and so on). Comprehensiveness means theological and pastoral hospitality within limits, not an intellectual and moral fee-for-all.

Clearly, denial that our self-revealed and self-revealing God uses words – specifically, the words of the Bible – to tell us what he did, does, and will do, and what we as his servants are to do, makes classical orthodox Anglican identity, and authentic Anglican unity, impossible to maintain. This stubborn and painful fact must be squarely faced as we try to work through our church’s current conflicts.

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