

REVISED: What is Classic Historic Anglicanism?

Written by Calvin Fox

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The Church in England was established before 300 AD. References are made to it in historically reliable writings in the 3rd and 4th Centuries. There are theories and stories about the Apostles or Joseph of Arimathea or missionaries from Greece or Turkey or Roman soldiers bringing the Gospel to the British Isles. Members were the original Britons as well as Celts, Saxons and Angles from Germany. The rather scattered Church was organized and came under the authority of the Pope by the end of the 6th Century. It remained Roman Catholic for almost 1000 years until King Henry VIII in the 16th Century managed to have it severed from Papal authority in 1534. But the "Church of England" did not begin with Henry and his famous pursuit of a divorce in order to have the required male heir to the Throne. The beginning of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation in England started at least with the work of John Wycliff who died in 1384 and of William Tyndale who died in 1536. The work these men began, and for which they died, was translating the Bible into the English of their day. It became the major source of the King James Bible of 1611. Reading the Book was eye-opening to many and created doubt about Catholic Doctrines and Church practices. These are the distant roots of Anglicanism or the Church in England. All this is important for historical reasons and to those who value belonging to a Church which goes directly back to Apostolic times. I am one of them.

The Anglicanism I consider to be "Classic and Historic" is the Reformed or Protestant Church of England that began in the time of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, who died in 1556. Many English Clergy studied in Europe and were greatly influenced by the Teaching of Martin Luther and then by John Calvin and other Reformers. Protestant Doctrine and practice is evident in the founding Documents of the Church of England, the "Book of Common Prayer" and the "Articles [of its] Religion". Cranmer wrote the first version of the latter in 1553 and it was revised in 1563, 1557 and its final and present version came in 1571. The BCP, also primarily the work of Thomas Cranmer, first appeared 1552, 1559 and finally in 1662. [It remains the classic, but there have been other versions since] Both the Articles and the Prayer Book are basically Protestant and Calvinistic in their Doctrines and Practice (increasingly with each revision) with some traces of Lutheran influence.

The Church of England was Reformed during the short reign of Henry's son, Edward VI, became Roman Catholic under his successor, Mary, and then returned to being Reformed under Elizabeth I and the Elizabethan Settlement and the Act of Conformity in 1558. It remained that way into the next Century. Mid-way through that Century, Arminianism became dominant and by the end of the 17th Century the Anglo-Catholic Party was dominant.

Evangelicalism does not appear until the Wesleyan Revival in the mid-18th C and therefore is not "Historic" Protestant and Reformed Anglicanism. There have been many "Parties" within the Church ever since (and each has its own variations). Today it is common to talk about the 4 Streams: Protestant, Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical and Charismatic, with their often conflicting variations. "Anglicanism" has come to mean whatever anyone who claims membership in it wants it to mean. And that seems to be determined by personal experience and circumstance rather than by Theological or Historical study. There is no one clear definition that all agree on. Not being a "cradle" Anglican and coming from a conservative Baptist background, my

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understanding of Anglicanism has come from my study of its evolving History and Theology.

Personally, I am seeking a Church which is Liturgical and Sacramental as well as Reformed (not only Calvinist). It is also important to me that such a church be Catholic, i.e.- Creedal, and have a history going back to the Apostles. And that Church is the Church of England of the 16th and early 17th Centuries with its 39 Articles of 1571 and 1662 BCP. That Church was not perfect and it does not exist today. So I seek a modern (improved) form of that Church which most closely resembles it. I am not interested in a Liberal or Anglo-Catholic or Evangelical or Charismatic version of it or in a Church that seeks to unite all the "Streams". This search increasingly seems to be totally unrealistic and futile and not important to anyone I know.

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