

9 Things You Should Really Know About Anglicanism

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1. Since the arrival of Christianity in Britain in the 3rd century, British Christianity has had a distinct flavour and independence of spirit, and was frequently in tension with Roman Catholicism.

The Britons were evangelised by Irish missionary monks, and it wasn't until the 7th century that the Roman church established its authority over Christianity in the British Isles, at the Synod of Whitby. But tensions continued until the 16th century.

2. The break with Rome in the 16th century had political causes, but also saw the emergence of an evangelical theology.

The Church of England was not just a church of protest against the pope's authority and his interference in English affairs. It was also a church that adopted a distinctly evangelical theology. The English Reformation cannot be reduced to the marital strife of Henry VIII.

3. Anglicanism is Reformed. The theology of the founding documents of the Anglican church - the Book of Homilies, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion - expresses a theology in keeping with the Reformed theology of the Swiss and South German Reformation. It is neither Lutheran, nor simply Calvinist, though it resonates with many of Calvin's thoughts.

4. Scripture is the supreme authority in Anglicanism. Article VI, "Of the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation," puts it this way:

Holy Scriptures containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

In Anglicanism, Scripture alone is supreme as the saving Word of God. Reason and tradition play an auxiliary role. This was the view of divines like Thomas Cranmer and Richard Hooker. There is a popular myth that Anglicanism views reason, tradition, and Scripture as a three-legged stool of authorities, but it is quite false.

5. Justification by faith alone is at the heart of Anglican soteriology. In its liturgy, its view of the sacraments, in its founding documents, and in the mind of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the Church of England holds that works do not save and cannot save a person. Only the blood of Jesus Christ is effective to save.

6. In Anglican thought, the sacraments are "effectual signs" received by faith. For Anglicans, the sacraments - the Lord's Supper and baptism - do not convey grace in an automatic sense, or by a grace adhering to the objects used in them.

7. The Anglican liturgy - best encapsulated in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer - is designed to soak the congregation in the Scriptures, and to remind them of the priority of grace in the Christian life. There is grace on every page - it is not only the heart of Anglican theology, it is the heart of Anglican spirituality.

8. Anglicanism is a missionary faith, and has sponsored global missions since the 18th century. The sending and funding of missionaries to the far reaches of the globe to preach the gospel has been a constant feature of Anglican life, although this has happened through the various voluntary mission agencies as much as through official channels.

9. Global Anglicanism is more African and Asian than it is English and American. The centre of contemporary Anglicanism is found in places like Nigeria, Uganda, and Kenya. In these places there are burgeoning Anglican churches, and a great deal of

evangelism and church planting. There are strong Anglican churches too in Asia and elsewhere. Noticeably, where liberal theology has become dominant in Anglicanism - mainly in the "first world" - Anglicanism is rapidly shrinking, and is possibly only a generation from its demise.