



The Great Tradition — A Great Labour

Studies in Ancient-Future Faith

Edited by
Philip Harrold
and
D.H. Williams



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This collection of essays is dedicated to

Andrew Walker

who was originally scheduled to speak at the Ancient Wisdom – Anglican Futures Conference (Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania) in June of 2009 but was unable to attend due to a debilitating illness. Andrew is Professor of Theology and Education at King's College London. His contributions to, and editing (with Luke Bretherton) of, a collection of essays entitled *Remember Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church* (London: Paternoster, 2007) were a major inspiration for the conference. He is widely appreciated in the United Kingdom and the United States for reminding contemporary evangelicals of C.S. Lewis's appreciative inquiry concerning the common historical Christian tradition – 'Deep Church.' May this volume reflect the spiritual realities 'down in the depths' of Christ's Church for the sake of witness and mission today and in the future.

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Introduction

Philip Harrold

What does it mean to inhabit the “Great Tradition” authentically? This question prompted a gathering called “Ancient Wisdom—Anglican Futures” at Trinity School for Ministry (Anglican), Ambridge, Pennsylvania in June of 2009. Based on their theological and liturgical catholicity and historic episcopate, Anglicans can be rather self-conscious about their “Great Tradition” status. But what the conference had to say about the Anglican tradition (with a small “t”) applied to the Great Tradition (with a capital “T”) as a whole. This is most apparent in the definition of *the* Tradition provided by theologian Daniel H. Williams: “The foundational legacy of apostolic and patristic faith, most accurately enshrined in Scripture and secondarily in the great confessions and creeds of the early church.”¹

One of the ways that Anglicans identify themselves is by appealing to universally recognized sources of the Christian faith rather than to particular doctrinal formulations. In the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (1888), for example, four articles are deemed necessary to a reunited Church: the Bible, the Creeds (Apostles and Nicene), and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. The fourth touchstone is the historic episcopate, which is not so universally recognized but, nevertheless, gives

1. D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 24.

Anglicanism a distinctive link to the polity of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. Even the distinctively Protestant flavor of the Anglican Articles of Religion (or Thirty-Nine Articles) is “born of an attempt (neither wholly successful nor wholly unsuccessful) to achieve comprehensiveness within the limits of a Christianity both catholic and reformed.”² The *mere Christianity* represented by the Quadrilateral or the Articles inspires a great deal of reflection on what it means to be a historic church rooted in the canonicity and catholicity of Christian faith. It also brings Anglicans into dialogue with a resurgent *ressourcement* of the Great Tradition—what Robert Webber referred to some years ago as “ancient-future faith.”

This volume of essays considers the possibility that the future of the Great Tradition in North America is not just about restoring or rebuilding something lost to the acids of modernity, the therapeutic amnesia of contemporary spirituality, or the pragmatism of entrepreneurial evangelicalism. These are pressing concerns, but the authors focus on what it means actually to receive and pass on the distinctive inheritance of historic Christianity for the sake of transformative worship, community, and mission in a postmodern world. They do so as theologians representing—or, at least, reflecting—Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, and Eastern Orthodox perspectives in varying degrees of dialogue with the Anglican tradition. In their different ways, the essays illustrate how bearing the Great Tradition is, to quote T. S. Eliot, a “great labour.” It requires a kind of allegiance, vision, and praxis that is foreign to much of the contemporary evangelicalism which swells the ranks of those most eager to follow the Canterbury Trail.

For some time now, evangelicals in North America have been showing uncharacteristic interest in the history of the Church, especially in its ancient practices and enduring liturgical forms. The many works on spiritual disciplines by Richard Foster, stories of conversion to liturgical traditions by Peter Gillquist, Thomas Howard, and others, and Thomas Oden’s prolific recovery of the early Fathers, are reactions to what J. I. Packer has called a “stunted ecclesiology,” and John Stackhouse calls a “perpetual adolescence” in the subculture of evangelicalism. Writing in *Christianity Today* (February 2000), Chris Armstrong recalls that prior to his own journey into Anglicanism, “I felt like we were missing something

2. Oliver O’Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1986) 12.