Introduction

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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.

. . ." There was "no sense of the mystical massiveness of a church that had stood firmly for 2,000 years."

The late Robert Webber, himself an evangelical-turned-Anglican, was the most attuned to this angst and the most eager to nurture an "ancient-future" response. North American Anglicans have been the chief beneficiaries of his well-documented "Canterbury Trail" phenomenon, but at a particularly awkward time of tension and conflict in their history. The idea of an ancient-future is disorienting enough without being assimilated into a venerable tradition that has fast become unsure of its own pedigree. And what of the dizzying array of expectations that the so-called "younger evangelicals," in particular, bring with them? Included in their "profile" from Webber's book, *The Younger Evangelicals* (2002), are concerns as wide-ranging as how to live in a post-9/11 world, standing for "the absolutes of the Christian faith in a new way," communicating the faith "through stories" or "performative symbol," longing for "community," demanding "authenticity," and nurturing a "facility with technology."[3]

Can—or, perhaps, *ought*—the Great Tradition, whether refracted through the lens of Anglicanism or some wider field of vision, accommodate this profile? Given its long history of dynamic transmission of the faith once delivered to the saints, can the "foundational legacy of apostolic and patristic faith" be remixed with the wild imaginings of self-styled "emergents"? The conversionist activism of evangelicals? The deconversionist impulses of post-evangelicals? Will the "great convergence" of evangelical biblicism, charismatic experience, and liturgical practice produce a faithfulness that is both timeless and timely in an increasingly bewildering late-modern world?

Both participants in, and observers of, the so-called "emerging church" have highlighted a varied and, at times, bewildering movement of protest within the contemporary evangelical and post-evangelical world.[4] Self-styled "emergents" now speak of a more mature stage of

3. Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 54.

4. Recent descriptions of emerging, emergent, and various dissenting movements, especially in contemporary evangelical Christianity, are found in Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church," *Christianity Today* (February 2007) 35–39; "McLaren Emerging," *Christianity Today* (September 2008); and Phyllis Tickle, "The Great Emergence," *Sojourners* (August 2008). McKnight makes a distinction between *emergent*, as represented in Emergent Village and its leaders Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt, and *emerging*, which is a "mix of orthodox, missional, evangelical, church-centered and social justice leaders and lay folk." Tickle uses *emergence* in a broad

critical self-awareness, focusing on internal problems like "institutional naivety" and "commodification" while celebrating a vibrancy of reflection on missiology, Christology, and ecclesiology. It has become more readily apparent to observers that a certain strand of the postmodern emerging church has begun to move in a premodern direction—perhaps the latest version of that late-twentieth-century phenomenon known as "the Canterbury Trail."

Robert Webber was not the first evangelical theologian to talk about postmodernity, but in 1999, he broke new ground when he linked the resources of the ancient Church to the sensibilities of postmodern people. It is important to note that Webber never capitulated to postmodern epistemology. He believed that the answer to the postmodern philosophical impasse was to be found in the ancient Christian faith with its strong emphasis on faith (the kind you stake your life on), taught, believed, and lived out in a community of commitment. Now, a decade later, elements of Webber's theological-cultural-liturgical-ecclesiological integration have flourished and become commonplace among evangelicals. Various academic and pastoral enterprises are now elaborating the ways that ancient faith can inform and renew evangelicalism. According to David Neff, another ten years will likely bring maturity to a number of these enterprises.[5]

Key to this maturity is recognition that genuine participation in the Great Tradition is hard work. Recalling T. S. Eliot's observation about how any valued and time-honored tradition can only be obtained by "great labour," Williams proposes that the next phase of evangelical *ressourcement* of the early Church must go beyond the current fascination with ancient liturgies and recitation of a few creeds. More precisely, evangelicals will need to engage the faith with a critical reception of the Church's dogmatic

historical sense for those movements within Christianity that, about every five hundred years, break through the institutional "carapace" of the Church "in order that renewal and new growth may occur." Included here is a diverse assortment of "young evangelicals," post-evangelicals and dissenting Catholics—all seeking "a new, more vital form of Christianity." At the "Ancient Wisdom—Anglican Futures" Conference, participants received introductory overviews of the *emergent* and *emerging* phenomena from Jason Clark (Co-ordinator for Emergent–UK) and Holly Rankin Zaher (Director of Student Discipleship, St. George's Episcopal Church, Nashville, Tennessee).

5. These observations are based on a presentation by David Neff (Editor in Chief and Vice President of Christianity Today Media Group) at the "Ancient Wisdom—Anglican Futures" Conference. He provided additional insights concerning the influence of Robert Webber on the "ancient-future" strand of the *emergent/emerging* movements.

inheritance; at least its doctrinal core, which is housed within confessional, apologetic writings, along with histories and biblical commentaries. If the early Church was grounded on theological issues deemed indispensible to the Christian identity, how can evangelicals appropriate the ancients without serious acknowledgment of this pattern? They will be able to do so only by nurturing a unique Christian culture that will have to interact with and yet withstand the intellectual winds of our time.

Tony Clark provides an illustration of how *not* to engage in the retrieval called for by Williams. In the first part of his paper, Clark reviews Phyllis Tickle's recent and widely read book, *The Great Emergence*. The book claims that the Church's history conforms to a pattern in which periods of struggle, arising every five hundred years, resolve in the emergence of a radically transformed church. There is some irony in the fact that Tickle's "emergent" appeal to a postmodern "rummage sale" in the Church relies heavily on a modern sense that history is guided by internal structures and mechanical processes that can be discerned objectively and predicted by the well-trained observer. Clark suggests otherwise. Rather than attempt to understand the Church and its emergence according to a grand scheme discerned from a detached perspective, a more authentic approach is one in which understanding arises from a deep and committed participation within the tradition. In making this claim, Clark shows that our knowledge of the tradition is rooted in the very practices that constitute it. Although we do articulate this knowledge in terms of creeds, confessions, etc. (an important practice in itself), there is much that we really know that we cannot tell.

Together, Williams and Clark remind us that the Great Tradition is carried along by two forms of knowing—one articulate, in the form of creeds, confessions, etc., and the other embodied or practical in nature. To participate in the Great Tradition means that we will indwell it through a wide array of practices that teach us the "grammar" of the faith. This happens as much through nurture and internalization as reflective endeavor, which brings us to the themes of worship, community, and mission.

Edith Humphrey draws on the experience of being overwhelmed or struck with wonder, and how readily this can be diminished in Christian worship. In varied ways, worshipers frequently approach the divine in terms of contract and exchange—perhaps as a pre-emptive move to mitigate their fear of the unknown. Alternately, others have thought it necessary to create drama in the worship-moment, as though it were necessary

to amplify the significance of what is happening. The matter is complicated for many Western Christians, who continue in the Protestant tradition of reaction against a magical view of worship, but who yearn for awe and reverence in a world of instant yet shallow gratification. Humphrey's essay considers the clashing presuppositions concerning worship that make it difficult for those in the free-church tradition to understand the stance of humility in traditional Christian services. With the help of the Scriptures (Isaiah, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, John, Revelation), and through examples from Western and Eastern liturgies, she considers the difference between presumption and Christian boldness (*parrēsia*), the necessity of continued preparation and penitence, and the astonishing hope that we may, in worship, reflect the perichoretic union of the Holy Trinity.

Certainly the ancient liturgies—from both East and West—offer strong Trinitarian foundations for Christian worship. That is why they are receiving more attention from evangelicals and Pentecostals who are attempting to recover what Simon Chan calls "*the* defining characteristic" of the Church. But this interest in early Christian worship is also bringing three streams together in a way that is *mutually* beneficial. The Great Tradition is not only received and passed-on but revitalized by what evangelicals and Pentecostals bring to the table. Chan draws attention to the possibility that an implicit Pentecostal sacramentality coupled with a practical doctrine of the Holy Spirit could greatly enrich what he perceives to be the pneumatologically deficient Western liturgical traditions, including the Anglican tradition. He shows how Pentecostals acknowledge, at least implicitly, the *epicletic* orientation of the Church in their emphasis on invocation of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of healing. They do so in a way that contrasts with the relatively subordinate role of the Spirit in the Western liturgies. Surely, Chan argues, the theology and practice of the Spirit witnessed in the Pentecostal stream can enrich the Great Tradition, ensuring that it will continue as a *living* tradition.

Just as Chan calls for a mutual exchange between the Great Tradition and contemporary Pentecostalism, D. Stephen Long points to a major contribution from historic evangelicalism that is often overlooked in today's ancient-future faith. He reminds us that the great eighteenth-century evangelist John Wesley understood the Great Tradition in profoundly "communal" terms. Wesley wrote, "I shall endeavor to show that Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary relation is indeed to destroy it. . . . Secondly, that to conceal this religion

is impossible." Wesley was no innovator in stating this. Instead, he drew on the historic faith in order to make two claims. First, Christianity is not about a solitary, individual relation with God, but can only rightly be understood as "communal." Second, the communal character of Christianity cannot but be a public witness. This is evangelism. Long explains both of these points, and in a case study, shows how Wesley's understanding of the communal character of Christianity can contribute to the vitality of a newly born liturgical community today.

The Great Tradition has little to say about community apart from the Church and, especially, the Church gathered around and defined by "apostolic ministry." George Sumner's paper turns to the subject of mission in light of this ministry. From Luke's account of the early Church in Acts, to the Northumbrian Church of the seventh century and Leslie Newbigin's revisioning of the episcopate in the founding of the Church of South India, we see a persistent interdependence between the strength and vitality of the Christian community and its apostolicity. Sumner underscores the dynamic relationship of charism to order and their convergences in some of the most pivotal moments of Church history. He also suggests how a renewed concept of apostolic leadership can be realized in the Great Tradition today.

Dominic Erdozain follows suit with a vivid history lesson from the English Victorians and, in doing so, ends where we began with an intersection between the Great Tradition and the emerging/emergence conversation. He argues that history can enrich contemporary debates on church, mission, and society by providing both a "vertical" dimension of contextualization and internal, "traditioned" resources for renewal. Erdozain's paper interprets the evangelical voluntarism of nineteenth-century Britain as a forerunner of the emerging church, highlighting creative appropriations from, as well as more precarious accommodations to, contemporary culture. While such pioneer ministries claim a just place within the Great Tradition, translating the gospel into a compelling vernacular, they also demonstrate the tendency of pragmatism, practicality, and specialization to "occlude" gospel imperatives—a process that presages what Andrew Walker and others have termed "gospel amnesia." Erdozain's presentation concludes with a discussion of the late-Victorian search for a more exalted ecclesiology—presaging, perhaps, the more recent search for an evangelical doctrine of the Church.

These papers demonstrate the growing importance of the Great Tradition within a broad spectrum of contemporary evangelical, Pentecostal, and, yes, emergent faith. *What does it mean to inhabit the "Great Tradition" authentically?* The convergences are interesting in themselves—certainly key to the highly dynamic transmission process that characterizes any living tradition, capital "T" or small "t." But also of interest are the negotiations that make these convergences possible. The contributions to this volume show how "profitable and commodious" (borrowing from Richard Hooker) a Great Tradition can be in the worship, community, and mission of the Church in late modernity. If there is any lingering unease regarding the integrity and durability of the Great Tradition, perhaps it is to these lively elements that we should turn for deep insight and, borrowing from C. S. Lewis, "deep church." In this faithful witness, the ancient becomes future in God's mission to the world. Indeed, this is the great labor of the Great Tradition.