

“If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”

C. S. Lewis

The Anglican Church

The Anglican 'communion' is a world-wide family of Churches in fellowship with the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose status amongst the heads of other Anglican Churches is 'first among equals'. Anglican Church makes its decisions and 'does its theology' by its three-fold referral to scripture, reason and tradition. It is a 'broad' church managing to hold within its boundaries a real spectrum of opinion and emphasis. There is a three-fold ordained ministry - bishops, priests and deacons.

The Church of England (C of E) is part of this world-wide Anglican communion and is the largest Church in England. It grew out of the Roman Catholic Church which began in England with the arrival of St. Augustine, sent by Pope Gregory the Great of Rome, in 597 AD. Also present in its roots are the distinctive ministries of the Celtic monasteries originating in Ireland in the 5th century, which spread across the country at the same time as St. Augustine's mission. In the 16th century, for political reasons under King Henry VIII, the Church seceded from the Papacy to be ruled by the English Crown. Over the following 150 years it was partly influenced by the Protestant Reformation, but some also sought to maintain its Catholic roots. The comparative strengths of these two influences waxed and waned according to various external influences.

Martin Luther pioneered a religious reformation (the Protestant Reformation) primarily in northern Europe which challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, stating that the Bible, and not the Pope, was the supreme authority. The Lutheran Church, founded by converts, has some similarities with Anglicanism, with whom it has recently entered into a covenant.

At the start of the 18th century, the Church more or less took its present form and its relationship with the state was formalised. Various social changes, together with Evangelical and Catholic movements, further formed it. Finally, from the latter half of the 20th century, the Church's relationship with the State is being loosened, though it still firmly remains the

Established Church in England. One of the glories of the Church of England, then, is the division of the whole country into parishes, thus allowing the pastoral care and ministration of the church to everyone who would require it.

There are various strands within the Church of England which often overlap with each other. There is the Evangelical strand whose roots lie in the legacy of the Reformation and its deep calling to bring others into the Church as well, greatly emphasising the scripture as a base upon which to lead one's life. There is the Anglo-Catholic strand which, as mentioned before, goes back to the original Catholic nature of the Anglican Church, both in terms of theology and doctrine (see Roman Catholic section). There is the Charismatic strand, which occurred as a result of the influence of the Pentecostal movement and emphasises, both in terms of doctrine and practice, the central role of the Holy Spirit. And finally, there is the Liberal strand which attempts to reinterpret Christianity in the light of past and current context and place a heavy importance upon rationality as the tool of interpretation.

The Church of England is, therefore, unique in Christendom as having a wide range of traditions, with some individual churches looking and feeling very different from others. What binds it together is a common understanding of the Christian faith as a belief in the Trinity - God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the use of the same service books - 'Common Worship' was published in 2000 and has the capacity to be adapted according to the tradition of the church - and the ordained ministry of bishops, priests and deacons.

The Church of England is therefore both Catholic and Reformed, as is the Anglican Communion that emerged during the days of the British Empire.

Further information

Diocese of Leeds
<https://www.leeds.anglican.org>