What is distinctive about the Anglican way of being a Christian, and what part do saints, synods and society play in making this a reality?

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Like all Christians, Anglicans are called to love God and neighbour, to pray and worship faithfully and share, in word and action, the good news of Jesus Christ. Famously, the metaphor of the three legged stool sees authority and guidance for Anglicans as balancing Scripture, Tradition and Reason, in true interdependence. Immediately, this is expansive, giving us the Bible, of course, the wisdom and practice of Christians gleaned over centuries, and allowing us to take seriously what God is still doing in and through people and the world today.

For Anglicans, then, there is no singly defined authority and that, I believe, is a gift. It's not always easy, but it provides rich spaces. The task is to identify the enduring melodies – truths that persist down the centuries - whilst being open to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit who continues to lead us into all truth. I became an Anglican by accident of birth but I'm an Anglican now, by conviction. It isn't a perfect system – nothing is – but it is beautiful and full of possibilities.

Built into our DNA is the principle of unity in diversity. In a world riven by division, Anglicanism seeks to *include* rather than *exclude*; to set generous boundaries, so that difference can be celebrated rather than drive apart. The four instruments of the Anglican Communion are: the Lambeth Conference, the ACC (Anglican Consultative Council), the Primates' Meeting, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Each is designed to provide a focus for unity without constricting diversity – essentially, they are about relationship and crossing boundaries.

None of this means 'anything goes'. Because at the same time we're an ordered church. There is the threefold pattern of ministry in bishops,

priests and deacons, rooted in the priesthood of all believers; there are democratic governance structures, through councils and synods that include lay voices; and there are the canons – the laws - which regulate our shared life.

At a time when we're increasingly driven towards binary opposites, Anglicanism defies the trend and leans towards both/and, rather than either/or. Our theology, spirituality and praxis have always provided space for nuance, for questions to be asked, and differences debated, and for solutions that are complex and multifaceted rather than simple and one-dimensional.

So without explicitly saying so these patterns which I've identified, speak to the saintliness of our inheritance. It was the great Anglican Divine of the 16th Century, Richard Hooker, who gave us the three legged stool which I've already mentioned. The governance structures ensure that Bishops lead in synod, where the laity and clergy work together to discern through mutual listening (at least in theory) and in shared decision making. And then there's our intention to **include** rather than **exclude** and *to draw generous boundaries* - surely now more than ever our society needs to hear that. To be sure, the message is being drowned out by loud, intolerant voices, both in the church and more widely, BUT the intent to find unity in diversity is at the heart of Anglicanism.

So the great **Saints** of Anglican history bring added holiness to our tradition. The **synods** make us accountable; and we still sit at the heart of a **society** that cries out for our distinctive witness. Many of you will know that I'm a product of the Anglican Communion, originally from Iran and the small and fragile diocese there. Anglicanism runs through me and has informed my ministry in every context in which I've served. Now more than ever, in observing a fractious and anxious world, I see our tradition as a precious gift, which we need to nurture and cherish.

For the remainder of the talk I want to consider, in turn, the Anglican Communion, then the Church of England, and last but not least, the local.

So first, considering the *Communion* I've identified three themes: Gospel and culture, relational bonds, liturgy.

As Anglicanism spread around the globe, so too came **positive engagement between Gospel and Culture**. Western missionaries grappled with this, and contextual theology has taught us that while there is one Gospel, there are many different expressions of it and faith, if it is to take root, must make sense within the language and conceptual framework of different peoples and cultures.

Christianity is for the whole people of God, each context providing different insights, in turn, helping us learn from and be challenged by one another. And this is totally at odds with much of the so called "Christian Nationalist" movement of today, not just in the UK but in other parts of the world, which seeks to use the gospel to divide rather than bring together.

But as Anglicans we build on the positive meeting of gospel and culture through the **relational bonds** that a world wide communion provides. I know that for the Diocese in Iran, for example, feeling connected and being part of something bigger is of huge importance. I see it too in the need for Christians in Palestine today, to know they're prayed for and supported. Indeed, I believe it should be true for all of us. Our perspectives are broadened, our understanding deepened, when we know ourselves to be part of a greater whole, sharing each other's joys and sorrows. This is what it means to belong to the body of Christ.

And although technically it is not a synod when bishops (together with spouses) gather together every 10 years in the worldwide Lambeth Conference, in the very act of meeting and discussing and learning, we are saying something profound about our connectedness. (And not to get distracted, but connectedness has many expressions, there's much I could say about the last Lambeth Conference and the bonds that were

formed but one abiding memory is of my husband Lee (who many of you will remember as Rector of the Oakham Team for 13 years, and who sends his good wishes) falling into a lake late at night, and being rescued by a former rugby playing Maori bishop from New Zealand.)

Perhaps the most profound expression of our Anglican identity and relationality is in our **liturgy**, and especially the Eucharist. No matter where I am in the world and whatever language the worship, I can recognise the service and participate. That provides a divinely inspired bond and shared identity. And again it is the legacy of our Anglican saints: of Cranmer and the other liturgical reformers. We owe them much in our own age and context.

We all know that the relational bonds, designed to draw us together, are currently under considerable strain. Relationships don't strengthen automatically. We have to want to belong to one another and be intentional about building our common life; and not just those in leadership, but all of us.

Now the national Church of England where I've identified the parish system, Englishness and Establishment. And all three of these speak to how we influence Society.

We have a very particular ministry of presence in England through **the parochial system**. It provides extraordinary opportunities, not to be taken for granted. We should never forget that we are a church *for* England as well as *of* England. As we strive to grow the church, we must beware the risk of defining too sharply, what it is to be 'in' or 'out' lest we lose our porous edges, demarcating too firmly, the boundaries of insider/outsider. For we lose the connection with our fringes, at our peril.

Those who are hanging on by their fingertips, who bring their children for baptism but can't quite articulate why, who come to light candles in times of national or personal crisis – they too have a place. And their presence, and their right to be baptised, married, buried, demonstrates that we are a

place of welcome for everyone, where belief is confident, yet generous; where faith has a communal expression as well as an individual one.

When, I wonder, did you last hear the Church speak of itself in this way, rather than counting those who are 'in' and measuring outcomes according to numbers present?

The Church of England has a charism all of its own because of its essential **Englishness**. The life, history, culture, language, music, legal system, architecture and so much more in this nation has been shaped by Anglicanism over the centuries. We could be bolder in speaking about this at a time when British values have become somewhat dislocated from their Christian roots and yet where many are searching for meaning beyond the immediate and the physical. And it needs to be said, that if we don't claim our heritage other groups with less noble motives will claim it. We see that clearly in the Unite the Kingdom agenda.

And that brings me to **Establishment**. It's often perceived as being about power and influence and there are, indeed, inherent risks. But at its best Establishment gives us opportunities which come with heavy responsibilities, allowing us many platforms to speak of Jesus, and to represent all people of faith. We have a presence at significant national events, we have a voice in parliament, we still have an extraordinary convening power. All these must be navigated with wisdom, humility and sensitivity. They are gifts to be cherished and used for the Common Good.

<u>And last but not least, the local, which I've identified as everything that is Anglican, with an added more personal touch</u>

I often say to people in Chelmsford Diocese, that the church is at its best at the local level. When storms swirl around us in all kinds of media headlines – whether it's the issue of housing migrants, reparations for slavery, safeguarding or sexuality – whatever it is, locally, Anglican churches up and down the country, along with chaplaincies, church schools and fresh

expressions, faithfully continue their ministries, touching lives, serving communities, preaching good news.

The local church embodies much of what I've already talked about. With a commitment to faithful presence over centuries, churches sit at the heart of so many communities. They are the place where worship is offered, where people are gathered and sent out, where relationships are formed, life events marked, and partnerships created; where difference is celebrated and all are welcome.

And because it's local, it can do these things in a profoundly personal and tangible way. Though they cause us many challenges, our buildings stand as a witness to God's presence, the church bells still ring out proclaiming the Kingdom and inviting people to worship and to quiet reflection, in times of joy and sorrow. All these are at the heart of what it is to be Anglican Christians.

It's fair to say, that currently, we're lacking in confidence in many regards. We've been rocked by scandals and internal conflicts, all in an increasingly secular age where many are suspicious of authority. But we have the foundations to help us start telling a different story; one that moves us beyond fear and anxiety. One that is honest, recognises sin *and* redemption, and helps build up, not destroy; one that will enable us to love God's church once more.

I'd like to end with an illustration. One I often use when I meet with confirmation candidates. It's the story of my episcopal staff which originally belonged to my father, gifted to him when he arrived in this country as a bishop in exile. He and my mother lived the last few years of their life here in Oakham and were faithful worshippers at All Saints. I used to sit with them and the children every week over there. Many of you will remember them and I'm so grateful that they were so happy here.

At any rater, in the last couple of years of his life he sawed a section off his staff, turning it into a walking stick which supported him in the frailty of old age. After he died it sat in our umbrella stand in the Vicarage for nearly 10 years until Lee had it to its full height, for me to use, with the addition of a new piece of wood and a metal cuff.

It always reminds me that like the new piece of wood, I'm my own person, distinct from my father and with a very different ministry. But through the original upper part of the staff, I'm connected with him and Christians in my Iran, and through them with God's church in every place and time.

What is true for me is true for every Anglican throughout the world: each is unique and loved by God, connected through the local church to the national and the international, and to the saints that have gone before and are yet to come. That, I believe, is a source of hope and good news.

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