

“On the Gathering of the Anglicans”
The Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus

A Pastoral Letter to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the
Traditional Anglican Communion

20th January 2010

My Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

Introduction: the dreams of Christian unity

Few things could be expected to excite more controversy than the reunion of churches that have long been living in animosity.

Europe, and the world that Europe colonised, has been shaped in its languages, its politics, its law, as well as its religion, in large part by those animosities. The identity and culture of people and nations have been significantly shaped by religious conflict and division.

The healing of religious division has been one of the most welcome features of 20th century Christianity. The great conflicts of the last century between Christianity and communism, and between Christianity and Fascism, that turned that century into one of the most persecuting since the great persecutions of the Roman Empire, diminished the sense of division and emphasised the wisdom of unity.

In the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church embraced the vision of unity. For Anglicans, dramatic meetings occurred between Archbishops of Canterbury and Bishops of Rome. With great optimism the two churches embarked on theological examinations of the issues that had divided them for centuries and began what at first were tentative and awkward steps in cooperation. Even praying in each other’s churches demanded a confrontation with the habits and assumptions of generations.

At the same time, Christians in Europe and in the Third World began to experience the challenges of a militant and fundamentalist Islam. Confrontation and persecution began afresh. In Europe and the developed world, a renewed interest in pagan and humanist philosophy, combined with a diminished sense of identity of Christians with their churches led to a dramatic diminishing of religious practice and belief.

It was against this background that the Anglican/Roman Catholic dialogue took place. At first optimistic, the dream of full organic unity – what Pope Paul VI described as *the supreme grace of true and perfect unity in faith and communion* – faded from reality.

I raise these issues because it is of great importance now that people in our Communion clearly understand why Archbishop Falk, Bishop Crawley of Canada and myself stood in St Peter’s Square, Rome, just over 25 years ago. We had spent the day with the Pontifical Council for Christian unity, briefing it on the developments within the Anglican Communion that had led to the formation of the Traditional Anglican Communion and of our yearning for the unity that was even then becoming improbable between the Anglican Communion and Rome. The publication by Pope Benedict XVI of the Apostolic Constitution is the culmination of the prayers, dreams and efforts of Traditional Anglican Communion bishops for a quarter of a century, and of the prayers, dreams and efforts of many other Anglicans around the world. In his recent letter to our bishops, Cardinal Levada spoke to us *of the delicate process of discernment that will no doubt need to be embarked upon by many of our*

Anglican brothers and sisters, and no less of the many difficult practical issues that will need to be faced. I speak to you now, as the one whom my fellow bishops elected to carry through the work of unity between the Traditional Anglican Communion and the Holy See, to assist and deepen that delicate process of discernment.

Our Petition

As is normal in such circumstances, our petition to the Holy See has remained confidential until a formal response has been received. The letters to those who signed the petition mark that formal response. As a result, in order to deepen our understanding and promote discussion, I am releasing the petition with this pastoral letter.

The petition notes the history of recent Roman/Anglican conversations, and the extraordinary note of optimism in the 1960s. It then notes the abandonment by the Anglican Communion of those things held by Rome and Holy Orthodoxy as essential to Apostolic Faith. It then notes the development of the Anglican resistance and the faithfulness that began with the conference at St Louis. The teaching of the Affirmation of St Louis is set out, particularly as it relates to the sacramental life of the Church and the nature of the Church itself.

The petition particularly notes the words of the Affirmation where it states *we declare our firm intention to seek and achieve full sacramental communion and the visible unity with other Christians who worship the Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity and who hold the Catholic and apostolic Faith in accordance with the foregoing principles.*

Our Communion has always understood that those words apply most significantly to the Catholic Church. (I might add, lest there be any confusion, that I use the word Catholic Church as the formal entity headed by the Bishop of Rome, and which consists of a number of Rites, some in the East and some in the West, of which the Roman Rite is the most populous. In common conversation, of course, it is called the Roman Catholic Church in many parts of the world. In a part of the petition where we quote a Roman authority, the words Roman Catholic Church are actually used.)

The petition then notes the formation of the Traditional Anglican Communion and its spread. It indicates the way in which its growth has been shaped by the advice given at that first meeting 25 years ago in Rome. It notes the expansive process of consultation and synodical debate that had already taken place as a precondition for the petition being submitted.

Then comes the heart of the petition. Firstly, it knowledge the wide consultation with Roman Catholic people throughout the world. One observation was particularly influential in the 12 months during which the petition was being prepared. It accurately describes the founding purpose of our Communion, and then goes on to acknowledge the four great aspects of the Anglican heritage that we desire to be cherished in any unity:

Because the Lord has not yet returned in glory, the complete unity and communion of believers for which He prayed has not yet been achieved, but each believer and each church and ecclesial community, recognising the life-changing unity engendered by our shared baptism, is called to make Christian unity a lifelong commitment, just as we are called to spread the Gospel to the whole world.

Recognising that obligation, and with great confidence in the Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit, a worldwide community of Anglican Christians has united under the name "The Traditional Anglican Communion" for three main purposes:

- *To identify, reaffirm and consolidate in its community the elements of belief, sacraments, structure and conduct that mark the Church of Christ, which is one throughout the world:*
- *To seek as a body full and visible communion, particularly eucharistic communion, in Christ, with the Roman Catholic Church, in which it recognises the fullest subsistence of Christ's one Church; and*
- *To achieve such communion while maintaining those revered traditions of spirituality, liturgy, discipline and theology that constitute the cherished and centuries-old heritage of Anglican communities throughout the world.*

The Bishops and Vicars-General who assented to the petition and solemnly signed it on the altar then make four solemn declarations.

The **first** concerns the Ministry of the Bishop of Rome. The late Pope John Paul II wrote to the churches that are not in communion with the Bishop of Rome, setting out in fresh language and in the light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council the ministry exercised by that Bishop, and seeking the views of those churches on the way in which they could use his ministry of unity and authority. Unity and authority are the two qualities that have most eluded the churches of the Reformation. Anglican history is riddled with the problems caused by lack of authority. Recent Anglican history has seen the creation of one instrument of unity after another, but no one has discovered an instrument by which authentic teaching can be given to God's Anglican people. The bishops in their petition described the limits on their exercise of authentic apostolic authority that is created by their lack of communion (especially Eucharist in communion) with *catholic bishops throughout the world*.

The **second** declaration concerns the nature of the Church. It is fundamental to the life of the church that its bishops and the churches they lead be in Eucharistic Communion with the See of Rome to which bishops of the ancient church looked as the instrument of unity and Catholic authenticity. At the same time, reflecting the Second Vatican Council, the bishops did not deny the unity that already exists among Christian communities. This petition is about more perfect unity – a unity so deep that the Eucharist can be shared.

The **third** declaration concerns the teaching of the Church as it has been received from Jesus through the Apostles and their writings, confirmed by the authentic tradition of the Church and proclaimed to the world at this time. The fullest statement of contemporary Christian belief, the bishops believe, is to be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is deeply biblical and patristic, and addresses matters that puzzle and confront Christians at the present moment. The bishops understand that not everything in the Catechism is of equal authority, and also understand that the faith must be proclaimed to every generation in language that accurately portrays what the Church has received. Therefore they acknowledge that the Catechism is *the most complete and authentic expression and application of the Catholic faith in this moment of time*, and that they signed a copy on the *alter* as *attesting to the faith they aspire to teach and hold*. None of the bishops would claim to understand every aspect of the faith with perfection, and none would claim to teach perfectly at all times. But they do claim to aspire to teach and to hold the faith that is set forth in the Catechism.

The **fourth** declaration is in effect the actual petition. The Bishops state that we *seek a communal and ecclesial way of being Anglican Catholics in communion with the Holy See, at once treasuring the full expression of catholic faith and treasuring our tradition within which we have come to this moment. We seek the guidance of the Holy See as to the fulfillment of these our desires and those of the churches in which we have been called to serve.*

The petition concludes with an act of trust and faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Response: the Apostolic Constitution

You may recall that Cardinal Levada wrote to me in July 2008 acknowledging that the situation within the Anglican Communion in general had become markedly more complex since the submission of our proposal. At the same time the Cardinal assured me of the serious attention which the congregation for the doctrine of the Faith was giving to the prospect of corporate unity raised in our petition.

An Apostolic Constitution is a document of the highest authority, making a permanent addition to the body of Canon Law. There is also a set of norms, which are in effect the regulations for implementing the Constitution. There is also provision for norms unique to each place where the Constitution is implemented.

It requires and deserves detailed and careful study. As with any body of law, the Constitution must be interpreted accurately and carefully.

Before discussing sections of this document, I would draw at your attention to the title. It speaks of *Anglicans entering into full communion with the Catholic Church*. There at the outset are the three critical factors: Anglicans, full communion, and Catholic Church.

Section 1: the Church

Everything else flows from this section. Once we are clear about the Church that Jesus founded and left to us “until the end of time”, our duty becomes clear. False understandings of the nature of the Church have encouraged the endless creation of new “churches”.

In the second paragraph of the Constitution, there are three statements that set out the reason why the Pope felt bound to respond positively to the petitions of the Anglicans.

- The first statement is that of the Church as a people gathered into the unity of God. It is the unity of the Trinity that is the unity of Christian people. Founded by Jesus Christ, the Church is *an instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people*. Unity is therefore of the sacred essence of our relationship with God. It is not in any way a political option that can be taken or left.
- The second statement is that every division among the baptised wounds the very nature of the Church itself and distorts its ability to fulfil its purpose. There is a telling quotation from the Second Vatican Council (reflecting Saint Paul at his most passionate) that disunity “*openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.*”
- The third statement reminds us all that at the most sacred part of his ministry, Jesus prayed to the Father for the unity of his followers.

In the light of this understanding of the Church, the Constitution goes on to speak deeply of the way in which our unity as Christians in the Church is manifested, particularly in the Breaking of Bread. It then speaks, and this is important for Anglicans, of the governments of the Church by the College of Bishops united with the head of the College, the Bishop of Rome.

It then speaks of the many elements of sanctification and of truth – note sanctification, not just truth - that are beyond those *visible confines* of the bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome. And it states that these gifts which belong to the Church of Christ are forces

“impelling” towards Catholic unity. In other words, where we have cherished our traditions and been faithful to the Gospel, we have created a force that drives the unity of the Church!

The gathering of all Christians into a single Eucharistic communion is the imperative of all unity. This section concludes, once again, with a reference to “Anglican faithful who desired to enter into full communion in a corporate manner”.

Section 2: “Ordinariates”

The instrument by which the Constitution creates communities of Anglicans in full communion with the Catholic Church is the “Ordinariate”. This is essentially a new structure created for this purpose, but with some affinity with structures created for military personnel. The integrity of Anglican communities is protected (among other things) by the fact that each of these structures is equivalent to a diocese. Each of these structures is ruled by an “ordinary”. Section 5 of the Constitution spells out the powers of the Ordinary. The Ordinary exercises these powers jointly with the local diocese in Bishop or Bishops. Not under or over, but jointly. In section 6, these powers are amplified. It is the Ordinary who accepts candidates for Holy Orders, including those who have exercised the Ministry of Deacon, Priest or Bishop as Anglicans. It is the Ordinary who can apply to ordain married men to the priesthood. It is the Ordinary who can receive clergy from other Rites of the Catholic Church. It is the Ordinary and the local Diocesan Bishop or Bishops who can create agreements for common pastoral and charitable activities with other local catholic clergy. It is the Ordinary who establishes seminary programs and houses of formation for the particular needs of students to be formed in the Anglican Patrimony. It is the Ordinary who can establish religious houses and other institutes of consecrated life.

The Ordinariates will have governing structures designed to replicate the structures of Anglican dioceses. The governing council, comparable to a standing committee, has the right to nominate the ordinary. This is a major change to the practice in the Western Church, a safeguard to Anglican identity, and an important part of Anglican ways. The election of a bishop has an important bearing on the pastoral relationship of a bishop and his people.

Finally it has provided that admission to an Ordinariate is by application in writing, or by receiving the sacraments of initiation (baptism and confirmation) within the Ordinariate.

The Standard of Belief

The wording of the Constitution is very significant. The Statements of Faith that have previously been used for people coming individually into communion with the Catholic Church have been replaced in this case by Catechism.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the authoritative expression of the Catholic faith professed by members of the Ordinariate.

This reflects the statement made by the bishops of the Traditional Anglican Communion in their petition. It is a deeply pastoral solution to the question of statements of faith. Many members of our community have been using the Catechism as a reference and a sourcebook for years. Its language is contemporary and its methodology, based on the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and the liturgical Creeds, is already familiar to Anglicans.

Many of the things being denied at this moment in the world have been taken for granted for centuries. The nature of God, the revelation of God in Christ, the nature of holy scripture, the authority of Christian moral teaching about life and sexuality, the attack on the nature of marriage, and the widespread abandonment of holiness of life (especially among some of

those consecrated to religious and priestly life), have all posed enormous problems for those who seek to teach and understand the Christian faith. The Catechism is a contemporary document addressing contemporary problems of contemporary unbelief.

Liturgy

The Constitution has a particularly beautiful passage when it speaks of the liturgy that will be practiced within the Anglican Ordinariates.

Without excluding liturgical celebrations according to the Roman Rite, the Ordinariate has the faculty to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and the other Sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours and other liturgical celebrations according to the liturgical books proper to the Anglican tradition, which have been approved by the Holy See, so as to maintain the liturgical, spiritual and pastoral traditions of the Anglican Communion within the Catholic Church, as a precious gift nourishing the faith of the members of the Ordinariate and as a treasure to be shared.

In the norms, it is further explained that clergy will have the right to celebrate not only the Anglican liturgy but also both current forms of the Roman rite. A great deal of work has already been concluded in the updating and expanding of Anglican service books. The calendar of saints for instance in the Prayer Book of 1662 has no additions since then, in spite of the manifest sanctity of so many Christians since that date. Much more work needs to be done and will be a very high priority for those engaged in implementing the Constitution.

Questions

Over the past several months a number of questions have been raised. Some of these have been raised in a spirit of controversy and denial of the actual provisions of the Constitution and its norms. I regret this.

Each of our communities, and each person within them, must address the very profound issues that the Constitution raises. These issues include their relationship to Christ in his Church, the needs of the church in our present world of intense difficulty for Christians, the long-standing policy concerning unity of the College of Bishops of the Traditional Anglican Communion, which has often been publicised in the official organs of our Communion, the state of global Anglicanism and the possibility of it returning to some resemblance of catholic order which might allow a person professing catholic faith to maintain with a clear conscience life within it. We also need to be aware of the very close way in which the Constitution addresses our petition. As I stated recently, we ought not to rush into a rash or hasty decision, but equally we ought not to delay what is clearly the will of Christ for his Church.

Does the Constitution adequately protect the heritage of Anglicans?

The structures proposed for Anglican Catholics are entrenched in canon law, are governed by Anglican pastors and Ordinaries, and protected by governing councils that have specific rights to give consent to the Ordinary and in some cases to determine matters of policy and to nominate the Ordinary. The clergy elect half the members of the governing councils.

Matters of the formation and admission of clergy, liturgical matters, the establishment and regulation of parishes, and the maintenance and deepening of Anglican spirituality, history, theology and pastoral practice are all within the competence of the Ordinariate.

The establishment and ongoing support of these structures has been left with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, where we have already found a warm and understanding reception.

The Ordinaries will meet as a college since they will visit Rome at five-year intervals as a distinct group to report on their progress, to find mutual support, and to pray at the tombs of the Apostles. I would hope that the Concordat of the Traditional Anglican Communion could be adapted to provide a meaningful structure that supports the Anglican Catholic Ordinaries.

What of those who are not yet ready to make this decision?

I have been discussing this question with national groups of our bishops and with some of those whom Catholic Bishops Conferences have appointed to liaise with us. There is no time limit on the acceptance of this Constitution. It is designed to have a lifetime of centuries. Some people are ready and anxious to move now; others are seeking more time for prayer and reflection. Others are confused by the surge of public argument about the Constitution. We are committed to the pastoral care of all our people, those who will quickly move into full communion and those who are not yet ready. We are already discussing the structures for this. The Traditional Anglican Communion will not disappear, but will endure for the same purpose that it was created to fulfil, and which is so clearly described in the text of our petition.

What of the re-ordination of clergy?

One of the most controversial aspects of the Anglican/Roman relations in the past century has been that of Anglican orders. Rome ruled in 1892 that Anglican orders were null and void.

The Anglican response at the time was a beautifully written argument. More significantly, Anglicans began to seek the involvement in their Episcopal and priestly ordinations of bishops whose orders Rome recognized. This was a tacit admission that there might be value in the Roman argument, while arguing against the Roman argument. A very Anglican position!

In more recent times, because of this involvement of others in Anglican ordinations, some Anglican clergy entering into full communion with the Catholic Church have been conditionally ordained rather than ordained absolutely. In very recent years, this practice has been abandoned and absolute re-ordination has been adopted.

There are several reasons for this. The first is the practical abandonment of apostolic practice and belief in the Anglican Communion in the matter of the sacrament of Holy Order. Not only the ordination of women to all three sacred orders, but the redefining of the Anglican understanding of itself as part of the “Church Catholic” that the ordination of women has necessitated, has introduced more than grave doubt about the validity of any Anglican Communion ordinations. It is now difficult to determine whether any particular Anglican Bishop has any intention to do as the Church has always done, when he (or she) specifically intends to do that which the Church has never done. The almost complete elimination of what was once a dominant Anglo-Catholicism from many provinces of the Anglican Communion has removed the clearest statement of Catholic belief about Holy Orders from the Anglican consciousness.

Our own Traditional Anglican Communion has been very careful to do the best that was available. At that original meeting in Rome, we were encouraged to use consecrating bishops from the Polish National Catholic Church. We already had, and we received an assurance that Rome recognised their orders. We have used Anglican Rites for ordination that have been submitted by Anglican authorities to Rome in the early days of ARCIC.

We have done our best, in the context of an ecclesial body actively seeking catholic unity. Our conversations about the situation regarding Orders that we have conferred are serious and continuing.

The following points are important:

- For some 30 years, Rome has required Anglican priests who are ordained as priests in full communion with the Catholic Church to date their ordination from the Anglican ordination.
- Re-ordination is an issue because the church requires absolute certainty in the matter of future sacramental life. I have been told that the TAC should understand this because we ourselves moved beyond the Anglican Communion in order to ensure the validity of sacramental life. Rome is now seeking the same assurance.
- The present Pope has written meaningfully of the situation of the sacramental life within churches separated from fullness of communion with the Catholic Church. There is no denial of the fact that God acted through our ministry to confer sacramental grace.
- There is quite deliberately not a judgement on the past, which is left to God and His Providence, but there is a demand for certainty in the future. It is my wish, and I believe the wishes of my fellow bishops, that every deacon and priest in our Communion has a certainty of validity that rests, not on the winning of a theological argument, not on the best that was available at the time, but on the indisputable certainty of Catholic practice. I have said to a number of priests that when they are saying Mass in the crypt of St Peter's on the tombs of the Apostles, I want them to be able to look to one side and the other and not know with absolute certainty that their priesthood has the same objective reality as the priesthood of those on either side.

Finally, I commend this development to your prayers and the deepest parts of your conscience. I believe with all my heart that this is a work of God and an act of great generosity by Pope Benedict. The Anglican tradition that we treasure will only survive, I believe, across the generations yet to come if it discovers the protection of apostolic authority. It is my cherished wish that each of us can stand at the altar with our fellow Christians and receive the same Eucharistic Christ. That is the ultimate test of unity. In the centuries since the church in the West became fractured there has been no offer such as the one that is now before us. For Anglicans, Unity has been a dream beyond reach. Now it is a dream that can be fulfilled. I understood when I became a member of the Traditional Anglican Communion (in a dark period of my life when it became impossible to practice my priesthood in a diocese about to ordain women) that this was a Communion heading towards a goal. It had separated from the Anglican Communion. Instead of drifting at the whim of wave and the wind, it had chosen to head towards the only realistic destination, that from which Anglicans had separated centuries before. I was grasped by that vision of those who founded this Communion. We are now in the waves just beyond the harbour entrance. Pray God that we have the courage to enter and make our homes there.

May God bless and cherish each one of you.

Archbishop John Hepworth
Primate