

“Anglicans in the Catholic Church”

St. Therese Little Flower Parish

Our Lady of Hope Society

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I. Mutual respect is where ecumenical dialogue begins, and it can lead to a better understanding of what we have in common as well as distinctions. I do not intend to argue against the Anglican Church or list any ways that the Anglican Church may have departed from Catholic faith and practice. The Anglican Church prepared me for the Catholic faith – she is my mother. And when I became a Catholic, I was never asked to renounce my Anglicanism but was invited to bring it with me into the Catholic Church.

I will argue that the fulfillment of Anglicanism is to be found in the Catholic Church. It is my premise that Anglicanism itself believes that it is essential to be Catholic and not essential to be Anglican. I will demonstrate from the Book of Common prayer that Anglicanism prays for the Catholic Church, believes in the Catholic Church, proclaims that the Catholic Church is highly desirable if not essential for salvation, that the goal of Anglicanism is the restoration of unity with the Catholic Church, and that only the Catholic Church is equipped to proclaim the entire faith without compromise to all people for all time.

A. I used to believe that I could be a Catholic in the Anglican Church, that is was possible to be fully Catholic outside the faith and order of the Roman Catholic Church. But believing that the Anglican

Church was Catholic kept me in an irresolvable conflict of being unable to reconcile the faith and practice of Anglicanism with Catholicism. If the Anglican Church is Catholic, why doesn't the Anglican Church believe like or act like the Catholic Church?

B. But Anglicanism itself led me to change the order of my identity so that I could identify myself as a Catholic first, and accept the Catholic invitation to bring my Anglican heritage into the Catholic Church.

C. I came to the conclusion that Anglicanism outside the Catholic Church is a preference and not a faith to believe in, and that personal preferences have to give way to more important considerations.

D. I invite you to consider with true amazement that the Catholic Church has made room for us to celebrate a liturgy like this one this morning.

II. How do people get the idea that they are Catholics while belonging to the Anglican Church?

A. It is hard to say in what essential way Anglicans believe themselves to be Catholic. We used to joke about "Catholic Lite: all of the flavor and 99 and 44/100 guilt free." But Anglicanism is so broad, that

there is very little which Anglicans believe to be essential.

1. Anglicans disagree among themselves about whether the articles of the Catholic Creeds are essential.

2. Anglicans disagree about whether Catholic morality is essential.

3. Catholic sacramental life is not essential to being an Anglican. Some believe in two sacraments, some in seven. Some celebrate “Mass” every Sunday, some have “Holy Communion” once a month. Some believe ordination by bishops in apostolic orders is essential. Some are willing to suspend apostolic ordination for ecumenical reasons.

B. A person could believe that Anglicans are already in the Catholic Church if he or she believes that all the baptized are in the Catholic Church. Anglicans are certainly among the baptized.

C. But hardly anyone outside the Roman Catholic Church would tell others that they are Catholic and expect to be treated as a Catholic except in some very particular or theoretical sense. Some Anglicans,

Lutherans or Methodists would describe themselves as being “Catholic, too.”

D. Even in a theoretical sense most Anglicans would reserve the title Catholic to Roman Catholics, themselves, and the Orthodox and exclude others.

E. “Catholic” in the Anglican Church could be a “party label” for a sub-group of Anglicans, which could also include other subgroups of Evangelical Anglicans, Liberal Anglicans, and combinations of the three.

F. But my argument is that all Anglicans, whether Evangelical, liberal, or Anglo-Catholic, are directed by their faith and worship to a Catholicism that is larger and deeper than any party label. I also present evidence that Anglicans know - perhaps only in a subliminal way - that this deeper Catholicism is not found in the Anglican Church, and that to fulfill the Anglican faith one must unite oneself in the faith and order of the Catholic Church.

III. The Book of Common Prayer unifies Anglicans. The way Anglicans express their faith and the way they pray reinforce the idea that being Catholic is at least highly desirable if not essential. But even though Anglicans would only identify themselves as Catholic in some qualified sense, they also express more faith in the Catholic Church than the Anglican Church, and pray for the Catholic Church in ways that that they

would never pray for the Anglican Church. This has always led me to the conviction that it is essential to be Catholic, while Anglicanism is only a preference. Once convinced that Anglicanism was not Catholic, I had to go to the church that had the most reasonable claim to be Catholic. Let's look at the evidence.

A. **Apostles Creed** said twice a day in Morning and Evening Prayer, at every baptism, and funerals, and in the Nicene Creed at every Eucharist: “**We believe in the Holy Catholic Church.**” Anglicanism believes in the Catholic Church, and Anglicans would never say they believe in the Anglican Church.

1. *As far as I know, there was never any opposition to this wording of the Creeds, even when the Book of Common Prayer was being revised for the church in the new United States and many things were up for discussion. However, I believe it is true that some Lutheran versions of the creed substituted the word “Christian” for Catholic at this point. I am told that my father in law would never say the word Catholic in the Creed, even when it was printed in the text. Perhaps that is simply an indication of an honest critique among some people that led them to proclaim what they knew to be true: that the Protestant churches are not Catholic.*

2. *Perhaps the reluctance among some people to say they believe in the Anglican Church is a recognition that belief in something has something to do with a deep seated trust of almost a divine nature, and that to say that they believe in the Anglican Church or the Lutheran Church would be saying something more than they intend to say. It would perhaps be honest to say that the Anglican Church is simply a preference as a denomination but not a Church to believe in.*

3. *Among Anglicans, it is honest to say, "I believe in the Catholic Church", but it would not be honest in the same way to say, "I believe in the Anglican Church."*

4. What does it mean to "Believe in the Church?" *C.S. Lewis says, "You never know how much you really believe in anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life or death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?... Only a real risk tests the reality of a belief." (A Grief Observed, p 25)*

B. Anglicans pray for the Catholic Church, but hardly ever pray for the Anglican Church.

1. Form III of the Prayers of the People at the Eucharist begins: **“Father, we pray for your Holy Catholic Church.”** (BCP p 387)

a. We used this prayer this morning.

b. Just as the Anglican Church would probably never claim that it is the church to believe in, it also expresses a reticence in praying for itself.

2. On Good Friday, the Solemn Collects include this prayer for the Catholic Church. On a day this solemn, of such universal importance, a prayer for the Anglican Church would seem almost trite, while prayer for the Catholic Church seems quite appropriate.

“Let us pray for the holy Catholic Church of Christ throughout the world; For its witness in service, For all bishops and other ministers and all the people they serve; ... That God will confirm his Church in faith, increase it in love, and preserve it in peace.” (BCP p 278)

3. **Prayers for the Church #7** (BCP p 816) is a wonderful prayer, and deserves to be prayed often:

“Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior. Amen.”

a. Where does this reticence about praying for the Anglican Church come from?

b. It certainly does not mean that that the church has no need of prayer.

c. I think it is a recognition that at a fundamental level that prayer for the Anglican Church would be smaller and more self-centered than the prayer intends, and that some essential qualities are lacking in Anglicanism that are not lacking in the Catholic Church.

E. Anglicans believe the Catholic Church may be very desirable or even essential for salvation, but would hardly ever, if at all, say the same thing about the Anglican Church.

1. A prayer by the great Caroline Divine, Bishop Jeremy Taylor expresses a desire for God's help in "Holy Living and Holy Dying":

"O God, whose days are without end: Make us, we beseech thee, deeply sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of life; and let thy Holy Spirit lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days; that when we have served thee in our generation, we may be gathered unto our fathers, having the testimony of a good conscience; in the communion of the Catholic Church; in the confidence of a certain faith; in the comfort of a sensible, religious and holy hope; in favor with thee our God; and in perfect charity with the world. All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." (BCP p 489)

a. Taylor is praying as one who sees his life as a time of preparation, of getting ready to stand face to face with God.

b. In getting ready to meet God, Taylor holds it to be essential or at least highly desirable, to be a Catholic.

2. In the historic English Book of Common Prayer, but not the American until 1979, the Athanasian Creed proclaimed that being a Catholic was not just desirable, but was the most essential thing in salvation itself.

“Whoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith. Which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.” (BCP p 864).

a. Admittedly the Athanasian Creed is not accepted in the Episcopal Church as an authoritative statement of the church’s faith. In the 1979 BCP it is included only in the Historical Documents section.

b. But the 1662 BCP still in authority in England mandates its use on feasts of the Apostles, or about once a month, in place of the Apostles’ Creed. For most Anglicans it is still a statement of the faith.

c. If one were to believe that the Athanasian Creed expresses the faith of the church as it certainly does to this day for many Anglicans, eternal destiny depends on having the Catholic faith. But this leads to two very important questions:

i. *"Does either the Catholic Church or the Anglican Church have anything to say to people today about eternity?"*

ii. *Which church has the best claim to be able to teach and proclaim the Catholic faith with authority?*

C. When Anglicans ordain priests, they do not act as if they have the authority in themselves to do so, but act as if the authority lies in the Catholic Church. Even the Certificate of Ordination expresses itself as if the ordination should be accepted by Catholics worldwide. But many Anglicans would not want to say they believe the same thing about the nature of the priesthood as the Roman Catholic Church.

1. At the **ordination of a priest**, as the candidate is presented to the bishop, the presenters say, **"...(W)e present N to be ordained a priest in Christ's Holy Catholic Church."** (BCP p 526)

2. *It used to give me great comfort that when I was ordained an Anglican priest, never in the entire liturgy was that mentioned. My intention, and perhaps that of the authors of the Book of Common Prayer, was to emphasize that the Anglican Church believes itself to be acting for the entire Catholic Church.*

3. *But Anglican priests would never identify themselves as Catholic priests. Perhaps deep in our hearts we wanted to be recognized as being on an equal basis as Catholic priests, to be recognized that we were priests, too. But it would have been dishonest to tell someone, as an Anglican, that I was a Catholic priest. It would have been misrepresentation and perhaps illegal.*

4. *Even calling ourselves priests depended on the context. We were taught in seminary that when Protestants have a problem calling an Anglican clergy person a priest, that we should point out that priest does not really mean “priest” as in the Catholic Church, it really means “elder.” We were told to point out that the English word priest does not mean the same thing as the Greek work “hierus” or Latin “sacerdos,” which mean one who offers sacrifice. One could honestly say that a Catholic priest – sacerdos – offers sacrifice, but an Anglican priest – elder – does not.*

5. *Logically, it seems to me that a priest is a priest in all situations, that one’s audience should not make and unmake ones priestly identity.*

D. In 1886 – 122 years ago - the Episcopal Bishops stated that purpose of the Episcopal Church is to return to unity with the Catholic Church. (BCP p 876)

1. “Our earnest desire that the Saviour’s prayer, ‘That we all may be one,’ may, in its deepest and truest sense, be speedily fulfilled.”

a. If unity was an urgent necessity in 1886, has that urgency decreased in the last 122 years? Does the world need a unified witness to Christ less than it used to? Witness to the sanctity of life less? Witness to the crying need for justice less?

b. How important is it that each individual seek unity, no matter what institutions may do?

2. “...(T)his church is ready in the spirit of love and humility to forgo all preferences of her own.”

a. If love and humility lead to a willingness to forgo personal preferences, does that apply to individuals, parishes, dioceses, as well as to the Anglican Church?

b. If the Anglican Church is willing to forgo her own preferences for the sake of

unity, what is the reason for continuing to remain separated from the Catholic Church?

c. What preferences of your own are you willing to forgo in order to participate in the unity Christ prayed for?

3. “But furthermore, we do hereby affirm that the Christian unity ... can be restored only by the return of all Christian communions to the principles of unity exemplified by the undivided Catholic Church during the first ages of its existence, which principles we believe to be the substantial deposit of Christian Faith and Order committed by Christ and his Apostles to the Church unto the end of the world, and therefore incapable of compromise or surrender by those who have been ordained to be its stewards and trustees for the common and equal benefit of all men.”

a. If Christian unity requires a return to the Christian Faith and order entrusted by Christ and his Apostles to the Church, is it not the Catholic Church to which Anglicans believe they must one day return?

b. *What Church can most truly claim to keep the faith without compromise or surrender?*

c. *What Church's stewards and trustees have been ordained to Christ to share Him for the common and equal benefit of all?*

d. *Is it possible to imagine that the unity and content of the faith could be maintained "without compromise or surrender" without a magisterium, the Pope, the bishops, and the entire Catholic faithful around the world?*

e. *Is it possible to imagine that the faith could be maintained "without compromise or surrender" by a church whose highest authority is a triennial convention which claims the authority change the faith every three years for Anglicans who live only in the US? How can the Catholic faith change for some but not all?*

4. The Episcopal Catechism affirms that Catholic Church is founded on the proclamation of the whole faith to all people to the end of time (BCP p 854).

a. *I came to the conclusion that the Anglican Church was not equipped to maintain the whole faith, separated as she is from the rest of the Catholic Church.*

b. *One of the members of Our Lady of Hope Society shared that she is becoming Catholic so that her children and grandchildren will have a church that proclaims the whole faith.*

IV. What I learn from the Anglican Church's prayers is that while the Anglican way may be the preferred way of expressing their faith for some people, if any church is to be believed in, provided with clergy, or prayed for, or determine a person's eternal destiny, it is the Catholic Church.

A. *I came to the conviction that it is OK to remain Anglican if one believes in good conscience that the Anglican Church is already Catholic in all essential ways.*

B. *It seems to me that if Anglicans are already Catholic, Anglicans could substitute the word Anglican for the word in the creeds, prayers, and in ordinations. It might not express the fullness of the Anglican faith, but ought to express enough of it, that a person would not be queasy in saying it.*

V. Are Anglicans already in the Catholic Church? *A simpler approach might supply additional help. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck what is it?*

A. *If you asked a person on the street to point you to the closest Catholic Church, where would they send you?*

B. *If needed to find a Catholic priest, where would you go to look for one?*

C. *How many people would you have to ask before you found one who sent you to an Anglican Church?*

D. *How many Anglicans would you have to ask to send you to a Catholic Church before you found an Anglican who would send you to one of their churches? The same question applies to any other denomination also.*

V. I came to the conclusion that to be a Catholic, the only logical place to be one is within the Catholic Church.

a. Expecting any other church to act like the Catholic Church and proclaim the Catholic faith is expecting the impossible.

b. Expecting to be recognized as a Catholic outside the Catholic Church is expecting the impossible.

c. It is possible to be an Anglican within the faith and structure of the Catholic Church, but not a Catholic within the faith and structure of the Anglican Church

VII. To become an Anglican in the Catholic Church there are three possibilities.

A. Wait for the healing of the division that took place during the Reformation. The Catholic Church and the Anglican and Episcopal Churches are working toward a healing of the schism that occurred in the Reformation.

1. We pray for unity at every mass.

2. High level dialogues will continue, though reunion seems impossible in earthly terms. Yet all things are possible for Christ.

3. There will be a healing of division when Christ returns.

B. Anglicans are welcome to become Catholic at any Catholic parish.

C. Or consider the Catholic Church's offer of the Pastoral Provision.

1. The Pastoral Provision is a most gracious and humble welcome to Episcopalians and Anglicans to return to unity with the Catholic Church as individuals, groups and parishes

2. No requirement to renounce past identity or past ministry.

3. An invitation to bring important aspects of Anglican identity and ethos into the Catholic Church.

4. An invitation to put into practice what the Anglican Church believes about the Catholic Church according to her statements of faith, her prayers, her ordinations, and her calls for unity.

5. An invitation to recover some aspects of Catholicism that Anglicanism lost through separation from the Catholic Church in the Reformation.

6. The fact that we are sharing this liturgy is a witness that the fulfillment of Anglicanism can be found in embracing the fullness of the Catholic faith in the Catholic Church. Becoming Catholic is simply the logical outcome of my Anglican roots. I invite you to consider whether it might be the logical outcome and fulfillment of your faith roots also.