

God Christianity

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*Address to "Anglican Use Conference"
in Houston, Texas, June 11, 2009*

Fifty-one years ago, when I entered seminary, the Episcopal Church still contained a sizeable number of "Anglo Catholics", that body of Catholic-minded Anglicans which the nineteenth century Oxford Movement had brought in its wake. I was fortunate to spend my transitional diaconate year in an area of my diocese where several Anglo Catholic clergy were in charge of parishes. One such priest taught me how to celebrate the Eucharist, or the "Mass", as we called it, with my instruction coming from the English publication, *Ritual Notes* (E. C. R. Lamburn, ed.), the Anglo Catholic version of *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described* (by Adrian Fortescue and J. B. O'Connell). As I recall, each time Fortescue and O'Connell was revised to reflect a minor rubrical change by the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome, then *Ritual Notes* was also revised to reflect the same change. This meant for the Anglo Catholics of the time that the Anglican Mass in shape and ceremonial form, and except for language, was virtually indistinguishable from the Catholic Mass or what is now known as the "extraordinary rite" or *usus antiquior*.

With advent of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, some Anglo Catholics began to hope that if not the entire Anglican Communion, at least a significant portion of it might be reunited to the Holy See, and that even that generation might live to see it.

Dark clouds existed on the Anglican horizon, however, soon to be joined by others. As a body, the American Anglican bishops were proving themselves unable to discipline their own. Over several years Bishop James Pike went about speaking and writing statements obviously heretical concerning some basic Christian tenets such as how that the orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity should be jettisoned. After several years, the bishop did finally retire, and, while the Episcopalian House of Bishops did not publically deny the Holy Trinity, during the whole fiasco their utter weakness in dealing with this maverick was manifest. This was to prove part of a seemingly unending slide down a slippery slope. The body was reaching a point where it could not utter a clear "No" to those who wanted to change the Faith nor a strong, clear "Yes" to the upholding of that Faith. While it may indeed be easier to ask forgiveness than to ask

permission, for the American House of Bishops it appeared there was no longer any need to ask forgiveness.

The most active organization of Catholic minded Episcopalians, or the “Anglo-Catholics”, to oppose this sort of thing during these years was the American Church Union, the approximate American counter-part of the larger Church Union in England. As some here still remember, the Reverend Canon Albert J. DuBoise was the long time executive secretary of the American Church Union and editor of its newspaper, *The American Church News*. Father Dubois was a chaplain in Patton’s army in Europe in World War II and later served as rector of the Church of Saint Agnes in Washington D.C. In 1950, he became the full-time head of the American Church Union. Perhaps his military experience never left him, for he was an ardent, energetic leader of the A.C.U., as it was often called. He always made it plain where he stood. If you usually agreed with him, you saw him as a champion. I saw him as a champion.

The A.C.U. had many adherents; it also had even more opponents. If one were the type of Anglican who believed the Methodists had more going for them than the Catholics, then the American Church Union with its traditional view of the Seven Sacraments was not something you would support and, and if a priest or bishop, you might actively oppose it.

This opposition took various forms, sometimes with unexpected results. Thirty-nine years ago, the Episcopalian triennial convention met in Houston. As was its custom, the American Church Union prepared to celebrate its special triennial con-celebrated Mass by its member-bishops. As I recall, twelve bishops were scheduled to participate. It was the custom to hold this triennial Mass in the cathedral of the convention’s host diocese especially if it were convenient to the convention site. I had been present myself at such a Mass in the cathedral in Saint Louis in 1964. However, when the national organization contacted the cathedral here, which was the most convenient site to the convention site, it was informed that the cathedral’s schedule was booked up – even though the convention lasted over several days. These twelve bishops would have to go elsewhere.

Local clergy sympathetic to the American Church Union were asked for aid in finding another site. My own church was at Prairie View University at that time about forty-five miles distant from Houston, and a Houston rector and I decided we would approach the pastor of another church only two blocks away from the cathedral to see

if it might be possible to have the Mass there. This church was Annunciation Catholic Church. We called on the pastor, Monsignor Anton J. Frank, of blessed memory. Monsignor Frank graciously arranged for this with the permission of Bishop John L. Murkowski, apostolic administrator and coadjutor bishop of Galveston-Houston.

Since twelve Episcopalian bishops were to concelebrate this Mass, Bishop Morkowski, out of courtesy and as an ecumenical gesture, announced his intention of attending this service. He no doubt assumed that the local Episcopalian bishop also planned to attend, and after Bishop Morkovsky's announcement, the local Episcopalian bishop decided that, after all, he, too, would attend this Mass. I feel certain still that this was the only time he ever attended an event sponsored by the American Church Union, one for which his own cathedral had had no room. They both were in the procession, and sat in bishops' chairs facing each other across the chancel - at what turned out to be a very beautiful occasion.

As I recall that scene, this Mass, with the papal flag near the altar, was an event heavily tinged with the metaphoric - as indeed was the entire episode. God does indeed work in interesting ways.

In a 1993 article, Father Jack D. Barker discusses the approaches to Rome by groups of American Anglican clergymen in the mid to late 1970s. (The Rev. Jack D. Barker, *The Pastoral Provision for Roman Catholics in the U.S.A.*, published now on the internet.) His primary focus is on the group of which I, Father Ramsey, Father Christopher Phillips, and others were a part, the group led by Canon duBois. It was our hope to enter the Catholic Church and also bring with us elements of our Anglican liturgical heritage. Like its English counterpart, the American Church Union was committed to furthering the cause of union with the Catholic Church. There were differences on how this might be pursued. Many, like the Venerable Cardinal Newman concluded that individual conversion was the correct path, although when Father Paul of Graymoor and Mother Luranna followed this same path in 1909, they also brought their respective Anglican religious communities with them en mass, becoming Catholic communities instead of Anglican.

By the mid 1970s Canon Dubois believed that the corporate reunion of Anglicanism with the Catholic Church had been blocked, probably permanently, by actions of the American branch of Anglicanism, the Episcopal Church. It was then that he and others began to approach the Holy See. In 1978, Canon DuBois visited various

areas of the country discussing with interested clergy and laity this approach to Rome seeking entrance into the Church, with elements of the Anglican liturgy and with the possibility of the re-ordination of Anglican priests as Catholic priests, including those who were married. Several of us met with him when he visited Houston in July, 1978, during which time he also met with laity. I remember how enthusiastic one of the laity was after meeting with Canon DuBois. Like me, he had driven to Houston, in his case, to a meeting primarily of laity. I remember how he approached me the following week, asking if I would assemble a prayer for him to use daily for the success of Canon DuBois' efforts. It seemed such a wonderful but unlikely dream at the time, but even as an Anglican, I believed it could be a helpful act to approach the divine Lord through his mother's Immaculate Heart. So I framed the prayer that way using as a kind of model the "Morning Offering" of the Apostleship of Prayer. Canon du Bois later published the prayer in his newspaper, "Anglicans United", and a number of us offered this prayer daily for what was in 1980 to be embodied in the Pastoral Provision.

Those of us who are married Pastoral Provision priests owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our wives for their joining with us on this faith journey into the Church and their ongoing support as we pursued ordination to the priesthood. We could not have made this journey without them. At the time I met with Canon du Bois in Houston in July, 1978, my wife and I had quite small children and more would be on the way. In the time ahead, we would have to give up our house, my salary, and I would have to seek secular employment in order to support us. My wife knew all of this, yet she never wavered in her support and was always a source of tremendous encouragement.

In February 1979, Canon DuBois presided at a meeting at Casa San Jose, a Catholic retreat center in San Antonio, of about fifty clergy from various states and a few from England. The Vicar General of the San Antonio archdiocese was on the program and extended greetings to us from Archbishop Furey. (*Anglicans United* 3:1 [April 1979].)

Now what was all this about? What were the Anglo Catholics really seeking? For me personally, these questions began to be answered at this meeting. A number of Catholic priests from other states were present, two of whom continue to stand out in my mind, one was a Croatian born Franciscan, Father Milan Mikulich, a long time friend of Cardinal Franjo Seper, then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the

Faith. He was not part of the official program, but he had a lot to say in only a few words spoken in informal conversations with groups of four or five. One had to listen carefully, for he had a heavy Slavic accent, but Father Milan told us what the real problem was, really the problem that faced all of us. His message was succinct: Christians stood at the brink of an historical precipice, and many would lose hold of even the basic Christian truths. "In fifty years", he said, "there will only be two kinds of Christians: Christians [by which he meant Christians in a nominal sense] and God Christians." The sooner we got into a place where "God Christianity" had a sure chance of survival, the better. The words rang true. He put it all in focus. Thirty years later, his words still ring true, louder than ever. We were at Casa San Jose because we wanted to be "God Christians." Therefore, eighteen months later when the Pastoral Provision was announced, what was it really about? Being a "God Christian". Thirty years later, in 2009, what is the Pastoral Provision really about, "God Christianity."

Also present at Casa San Jose, and on the program, was Monsignor Richard J. Schuler, pastor of Saint Agnes Church in Saint Paul, Minnesota, a great pastor, an accomplished musician, and a noted liturgist, whose work was carried on PBS from time to time. He, too, of course encouraged us to enter the Catholic Church, but in his session of the conference, great care was taken in encouraging us, in our approach to Rome, to seriously request that a means be granted for the survival of the rich Anglican musical and liturgical tradition within the Catholic Church. "We want your hymnody, we want your rich liturgical and musical traditions... ", he said. As he presented it then, such a provision would not only be of benefit to converts, but could contribute to the augmentation of Catholic liturgical life in future years. As some will know, his interest in the Anglican Use continued until his death in 2007. When he visited Our Lady of Walsingham about twenty years ago, he would take no travel expenses from the parish. He simply wanted to be of assistance and, indeed, was a helpful and every ready source of advice for us over the years.

Both of these men were sources of encouragement to pray first and foremost to be with the "God Christians" and for the survival in the Catholic Church of those areas of the Anglican patrimony which God deemed worthy of survival. In the autumn of 1979, Canon duBois, accompanied by Father Mikulich, led a group of Anglican clergymen to Rome where they were received by Cardinal Franjo Seper, the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. On All Saints' Day, a

petition to the Holy Father seeking both of the above goals was signed on the altar of the American Martyrs at the American College in Rome by Canon du Bois, Fathers W. T. St. John Brown, Jack D. Barker, and other clergy in the delegation and was presented to Cardinal Seper. The following year, 1980, when Pope John Paul II made public the Pastoral Provision, a way was opened for both possibilities. (*Anglicans United* 3:1 [April 1979].)

For Canon duBois, however, his work was almost done. He returned to the United States and continued into early 1980 speaking in various parts of the country in support of union with the Holy See. His already fragile health began a severe decline, and he died in June of that year. He was received into full communion with the Catholic Church prior to his death. (The Rev. Jack D. Barker, *The Pastoral Provision for Roman Catholics in the U.S.A.*, 1993.)

Today and in the future, one of the most hopeful responses to the Pastoral Provision is the existence of this organization, the Anglican Use Society and gatherings such as this. For one thing, perhaps our organization can help us reach out to those who are not yet with us. After all, the Pastoral Provision is part of the gospel and so many Anglicans in “continuing” ecclesial bodies and elsewhere need to hear this good news. Secondly, our Society can give us greater opportunity to share our experiences, to encourage each other, and draw strength from each other’s prayers.

In that regard, today, when new Catholic Anglican Use parishes seek to form, the question of viability is sometimes raised. This can be daunting, and perhaps some groups never get beyond the question. Here our experiences can be sources of strength for others, and each group of us has a good story to tell or we wouldn’t have survived. It was a godsend for us at Our Lady of Walsingham that neither in 1982, when we began the Pastoral Provision process, nor in 1984, when we were constituted a personal parish, Bishop Murkowski never raised that question. Of course, we were on our own in terms of our parochial expenses, but if we were willing to set out in faith in spite of the odds, then Bishop Murkowski was willing to allow us this. This worked to our good for it made us realize all the more our reliance on our Lord, and the prayers of the Our Lady of Walsingham and Saint Jude. We have been blessed with a strong laity containing saintly and self sacrificing individuals. The three priests who have served here, Father Ramsey, Fr. Bruce Noble, and myself, have known we could

depend on them, and since 1987, Deacon Barnett who serves Our Lady of Walsingham tirelessly.

When Bishop Morkowski, during Father Ramsey's and my ordination Mass in April, 1984 at the large Saint Cecilia Church asked the parishioners to stand as he announced his decree establishing the parish, our small number must have made our chance at viability seem doubtful indeed. The Bishop was not deterred and neither were we on that happy day. Fortunately for us, we did not know that day that it would be eight years before we would move into our own building which had been built on property we had purchased. Even so, those eight years spent in borrowed or rented facilities were productive years in terms of what a parish should be about, for in those eight years our numbers increased, and two vocations for holy orders were forthcoming from this parish: Father Wayne Flagg, one of our original parishioners, entered St. Mary's Seminary and was ordained to the priesthood, and another, Deacon James Barnett completed the diaconal training program and was ordained to the permanent diaconate. Other vocations, of course, are still being realized in this parish, for instance, one young woman has entered religious life, and two men are nearing the time for ordination, one to the priesthood, the other to the permanent diaconate.

We owned nothing but what was necessary for the celebration of Mass, the clergy had to have secular work for livelihood, yet vocations came forth from our ranks. We were viable. With God, the Blessed Mother, and Saint Jude: we are still viable!

In all of our parishes and communities, this has been learned time after time. You never know what God has planned for you. The first time I picked up the phone and was told the parish building fund was receiving a gift of one million dollars, my head started spinning. When I notified the parish bookkeeper, she began to weep. We were in shock. Yet, that was not the last time such a gift would come. Pastoral Provision parishes and communities are still being blessed, and continue to have a mission to fulfill in the strengthening of the Catholic Church.

Today, the Pastoral Provision parishes and communities have a special calling, to support our holy Father's vision of Catholic liturgical renewal, in view of our musical, artistic, and linguistic traditions as well as our Anglo Catholic origins which many of us have. Perhaps the fact that *Ritual Notes* was based on Fortescue and O'Connell should not be lost on us today. Within our tradition, the form of the *Usus Antiquior* or the

Extraordinary Rite, has been preserved but with the use of English rather than Latin. It would seem to me that we possibly have a small contribution to make in this area, particularly should the extraordinary rite have influence on future revisions of the *Ordinary* Roman rite, as is sometimes suggested. The Holy Father in his June 3, 2009 Angelus Message, reminded his hearers that the “experience of faith” involves not only “mind and heart” but the totality of man, “spirit, soul and body.” “The faith,” he said, “is not only thought; it touches the whole being...”. God created us with flesh and blood, placed us in a tangible world, and at the Incarnation entered himself this way into this world, therefore we ourselves must seek to encounter God with all the facets of our being: “In this way, the reality of God, through faith, penetrates in our being and transforms it.” We can readily see how the Holy Father applies this truth to his approach to the Church’s liturgical life. In the Anglican Use, we can clearly understand this and can readily reflect this in our liturgical life, because, if we learned nothing else as Anglo Catholics, we learned this. That was the liturgical thrust of the tradition which produced us.

The opposition to “God Christianity” is continuing to increase. The Anglican Use Catholic parishes and communities are called now to be more faithful than ever, and do all we can to encourage Anglicans to enter the Catholic Church.

Do not forget that at this moment, hundreds of thousand of Anglo Catholics exist but they are not with us in the fold of Peter. Why? Maybe we in the Pastoral Provision need to be better Catholic apologists. For all their mistakes, the Anglo Catholics still want to be “God Christians.” And, I have never known an Anglo Catholic to equivocate about the identity of Jesus Christ. As part of our apostolate, where they are right let us reach out to them and encourage them, and in this way become better able to help them in the areas where they have lost their way.

Perhaps we are already praying daily and offering Masses for groups like these. Surely this should be part of our Pastoral Provision’s particular apostolate.

I wish to close my remarks with words from Canon duBois at Casa San José in February, 1979:

May God bless and prosper our deliberations and grant success in our efforts to in some small way contribute to the fulfillment of our Blessed Lord’s will for the unity of His Holy Catholic Church. “That the world may believe” that Jesus was sent by our Heavenly Father for the salvation of all mankind.

(The Rev. Canon Albert J. duBois, D.D. Senior Priest, *Anglicans
United* 3:1 [April 1979].)