

The "*Catholic*" Church

The Rev. Kurt J. Henle, Ph.D., Rector, Holy Trinity Anglican Church,
Webster Groves, MO 63119

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How *Catholic* are we as Traditional Anglicans?

If the question refers to our liturgy and worship style, I suspect that we are rather more "*sectarian*" – than "*catholic*" – if we use the word in the sense of "*universal*". By this, I mean that the number of Anglican churches that continue to use a 1662/1928 liturgy, as we do at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in St. Louis, is the distinct minority, even among Anglican Christians who retain a "*catholic*" theology and who contend for the "*faith once delivered*" (Jude 3).

With our adherence to the historic liturgy, lectionary, traditional music, and evangelical principles, Holy Trinity is a minority even within the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA), our own jurisdiction. The majority of AMiA Parishes lean more toward the charismatic end of the Anglican spectrum. However, the AMiA fully embraces all three of the major historical streams of Anglicanism: Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic, and Charismatic. I feel a close kinship with other traditional Anglican jurisdictions that share our preference for this Anglican minority position in North America.

In my secular vocation in cancer research, and in my concurrent avocation in church music for more than 40 years, I was exposed to the full denominational spectrum of Christendom. Against this background, JoAnn and I accepted the call to a ministry in the Anglican Church for its magnificent combination of orthodox theology and the timeless beauty of its liturgy and music, specifically as it comes to us in the historic tradition. But I am fully aware that the practice of historic Anglicanism is hardly "*universal*" within the Christendom of North America.

I am delighted to be among this historic minority, though. The majority of Christian churches, it would seem, have succumbed to what Richard Mouw, in his book, Consulting the Faithful. What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion called the "*embrace of bad taste*". Mouw, in that book, quotes Abp. Holloway, who observed, "*evangelical liturgical and spiritual tastes have tended toward 'fast food rather than haute cuisine'*". This is clearly not the case for historic Anglican Parishes, which have been called "*boutique*", or "*bonsai churches*". Those terms point to highly specialized, beautifully crafted organisms, with appeal to a limited group of people who might even be considered "*idiosyncratic and quirky*" (The Rev. Todd Wetzel, conference commentary, Aug. 23, 2006). So, for traditional Anglicans, worship style is certainly not "*catholic*" in the sense of "*universal*."

What about organizational "*catholicity*"?

Traditional Anglicans appear to have a strong aversion to institutional "*catholicity*". They display real fervor for re-inventing themselves. The Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen itself may be a case in point. I believe the FCC was the 1st umbrella

organization for various traditional Anglican Churches in North America, founded in 1973, a first "*refuge*" from The Episcopal Church USA's "*progressive drift away from Biblical truth*" and time-tested tradition.

In his Sewanee thesis "*Episcopal Splinter Groups*," Donald Armentrout labeled the FCC the "*leading organization for the dissatisfied*." Historically, the FCC issued their 1st public challenge to ECUSA in the 1973 "*Louisville Declaration*." Newspapers then projected an exodus of 150,000 Episcopalians over the issue of women's ordination to the priesthood alone. In subsequent years, ECUSA lost many more than that number, but the displaced did not simply move to traditional Anglican churches. Instead, the membership in traditional Anglican groups remains rather modest. Unfortunately, there are few published numbers. Unlike The Episcopal Church, virtually none of the traditional Anglican churches publish relevant data.

With each new mini-exodus from ECUSA, new jurisdictions and organizations are formed, generally bypassing the ones that already exist. I noticed that one of the most recently formed organizations has an acronym that is even the mirror image of the FCC. It is called the CCF (Common Cause Federation). The proliferation of traditional Anglican organizations is simply bewildering even to the interested observer like myself.

Bp. Paul Hewett constructed a chart of the major Anglican jurisdictions; using arrows of differing thicknesses to show the degree of affinity among various "*catholic*" groups. Neither the chart, nor any other publication can explain why the need for so many splinter groups, and what continues to keep them apart. The rationale for simplifying such a chart of relationships is surely plain. I am glad that the AMiA is actively working toward an Anglican re-alignment in North America, and intends to eventually blend into that larger, more "*universal*" catholic group of Anglicans.

When AMiA was formed in 2000, to their credit, they did not want to be yet another Anglican denomination. The obvious question then and now, of course, is why they did not simply join one of the many already existing organizations. Any new organization certainly has a momentum and enthusiasm that outperforms that of already mature organizations. Unfortunately, later unions are so much harder to achieve than initial separations.

Occasionally, a merger movement wins the day over fissiparous tendencies within Anglicanism. The well-publicized merger of the Reformed Episcopal Church and the Anglican Province in America is certainly commendable for setting an example. But a timetable of 8 years, more or less, I believe, is a luxury we cannot afford, especially when we consider the relatively small number of parishes and church members involved.

Some argue that various Anglican bodies are too individualistic to fit into one "*universal*" Anglican Church. We should remember, however, that the Church of England and ECUSA historically have accommodated a broad spectrum of churchmen. The acceptance of three historical streams of Anglicanism within the AMiA affirms an entirely "*catholic*" practice of liturgical tolerance, as long as this does not compromise the essentials of the faith.

The Anglican continuum and the AMiA are certainly not liturgical or theological *free-for-alls*. The 1662 BCP is the general gold standard, both liturgically and

theologically. Freedom to adjust this norm to local conditions is granted in the AMiA, but again, only in so far as the underlying orthodox Biblical theology is not compromised. A new comprehensive Anglican Church built on this principle could bring all of us much closer to reclaiming our Anglican institutional "*catholicity*".

Beyond liturgical practice and institutional organization, most of us firmly believe that the true foundation of Anglican unity is the "*catholicity*" of our theology. The catholicity of the faith once delivered is really THE essential and eternally significant issue for the "*One, Holy, Catholic, & Apostolic Church*". This type of catholicity is not limited to the traditional Anglican movement; but happily, it is always present there, affirmed in every Worship Service, in virtually identical forms, by Anglicans all over the world.

This "*catholic*" foundation includes: first and foremost, **Holy Scripture**, then the Historic Creeds, the Dominical Sacraments, and "*the doctrines of grace substantially as they are set forth in the 39 Articles of Religion*". The Episcopal form of church government, and/or Apostolic Succession, is also a common feature in traditional Anglicanism and will be discussed by Fr. Kennedy.

Overall, I believe that the "*catholic, universal*" elements of our faith are sufficient to unite all traditional Anglicans. They should suffice to create much needed organizational unity. A united Anglican Province in North America would be large enough to be visible in the religious market place as a divine medium of God's grace.

The appearance of a new, distinctly Non-Catholic, Non-Universal Episcopal religion offered by TEC under Presiding Bishop-elect Catherine Jefferts-Shori demands a visible and vocal "*catholic*" Anglican alternative. The widening gulf between heterodoxy and orthodoxy within Anglicanism should provide a powerful driving force for organic and institutional unity among traditional, orthodox Anglicans. We must admit that the major argument for orthodox Episcopalians remaining within TEC is the historic failure – up to now - of traditional Anglican "*splinter groups*" to thrive, to live in unity, and to grow in missions and church membership.

Bp. Hewett made a public statement that, in his estimation, traditional Anglican groups had a 5-year window of opportunity to achieve true functional unity. If that opportunity for unity is missed, the residuals of traditional Anglicans will die off in isolation. Many of us know of parishes that have gone that way already.

When Jo-Ann and I came to St. Louis in 2003, we took on one of the small Anglican outposts, a mission of the REC, which had already discussed closing its doors. As a matter of survival we looked at all the options for such a small group.

Within a year we moved from the REC to the AMiA for a good "*catholic*" reason: namely Anglican unity. By God's Grace we began to grow and thrive once we had overcome our isolation. We remain traditional and continue to worship with the historic 1928 BCP, as under the REC. Our larger sister church, which came out of ECUSA in 2004, however, is more contemporary, mildly charismatic, and continues to worship with the 1979 BCP, which they used as members of the ECUSA.

Our jurisdictional affiliation and the different liturgical personalities of each parish are necessarily subordinate to our need for unity, mutual support, and common

commitment to the growth of God's Kingdom in the St. Louis area. Regional unity among theologically "*catholic*" Anglicans cannot be overemphasized. In my opinion, it is much more important than the creation of ever more national jurisdictions or federations.

I follow with interest the effect of "*Common Cause*" partnerships and the degree to which they create functional Anglican unity at a regional level. But to my knowledge, there are few regions where this concept is working well – Memphis is one notable success to my knowledge. Much work needs to be done in other regions. All too often joint mission work is hindered by fears of "*sheep stealing*" instead of concern for Anglicans of various backgrounds and liturgical preferences to find a comfortable fit in a theologically orthodox Anglican Parish.

In St. Louis, for example, we offer information to visitors on sister parishes with different liturgical formats. We also have links to each other's web sites. We share resources among parishes, ranging from joint youth group events, to clergy training, and advertising. I would like to hear more about "*common cause*" interactions among Anglicans from our Anglican news services. *Virtue Online* and others, devote much of their energies to the coverage of high-profile national and international meetings. But we read too little about the growth of the various Anglican groups, and their cooperation in "*catholic*" partnerships, like "*Common Cause*".

With more information, we would gather momentum toward greater organizational unity – uncomfortable at times, perhaps, but surely resulting in greater fruitfulness in our service to the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be constructive to analyze those factors that fuel divisions that hinder true "*catholicity*," within Anglicanism, and in the Christian Church generally. We should ask "*Why is unity so intangible, when catholicity is so natural to Anglicanism?*"

The nature of centrifugal and centripetal forces in the dynamics of the Anglican movement after the Affirmation of St. Louis in 1977 remain to be analyzed by historians. Alan Guelzo set a high standard for excellence in such analytical work, in his masterfully crafted history of the dissipative forces at war within the Episcopal Church of the 19th century. I strongly recommend a careful study of his book, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom. The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians.*

Guelzo relates the history of the events that led to the formation of the REC. Significantly, the book shows how both Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals attempted to revive a languishing spiritual life that had suffered from a century of control by Anglican Latitudinarianism. Tragically, neither side understood the other's motives. A long and bitter fight ensued and the church was torn apart. Even after Bp. George Cummins led the Evangelicals out of the Protestant Episcopal Church, the fighting did not end.

In Guelzo's words, the insiders "*spun a cocoon of recriminations and suspicions: over vestments, liturgy, nature of episcopate*", and in dealing with troubled personalities in leadership. Again, according to Guelzo, the **Irony** of the movement was that "*Conservatives ended up destroying past legacies, promoting fragmentation, and inviting marginalization.*" In the process, the REC lost its historic opportunity to unite Evangelical Protestants across denominational lines, to create a truly "*catholic*" union with a potential membership in the millions. A cautionary tale – in our quest for true

“*catholicity*,” we must repent of those mistakes, and avoid repeating them in our own day and situation, whenever possible.

The Lord commands his faithful people to be united in Him, "*catholic*" in the faith, and fruitful in His service, as together we "*contend for the faith once delivered*." Amen.