

Convocation of the Union of Scranton 2019

Part I

Introduction and Greetings

Dear Prime Bishop Anthony, Reverend and Right Reverend Fathers, I have been invited to speak to you about the journey of a small group of Anglican priests who four years ago searched for a way to bring back Anglicans into full Communion with the Union of Scranton, with the help of the Nordic Catholic Church, and what has been learned.

Background

Everything I say is based on my concern for the Christian Faith in Europe – a near endangered species - and especially in Britain it is in a very weak and friendless place and therefore: what we do here in North America will have consequences for us in Europe.

In Britain from the very beginning, our predicament was not just opposition to women in Holy Orders but changes in the language of scripture, of liturgy, softening baptism, marriage, the abandonment of classical devotion and the “dumbing down” of priestly formation, abortion of babies, and of course gender issues. But now, it is the whole mind and opposition within the culture itself that is punishing us. We have our backs to the wall. We are “fighting in the trenches” against a militant secular atheism in the World and principally with the help of the media - which had already captured the minds of the population and their message has been swallowed by the leaders of collapsing institutional Churches. To use dramatic words, Edith Stein writing a lifetime ago said, *“the world is in flames the battle between Christ and anti-Christ has broken into the open”*.

The Start

We are convinced that the Union of Scranton has the opportunity and possesses crucial gifts of doctrine, of structures and as well as a transparent and undiluted Apostolic Succession, so that together we have the chance to re-group and restore wholeness.

Our hope was for a coming together of a refreshed and conviction based Non-Papal Catholicism in which we would play a part.

I am not a stranger to American Anglican life for whom I have great affection and respect and, I hope, understanding. Perhaps a brief word about my history might be appropriate.

My ordination in the Church of England was just after the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I, on the Mount of Olives in 1964. It was a time of great ecumenical hope and a driving force for me as a broken Christian world would struggle to face the growing storms.

In 1967, I was a licensed Episcopalian priest assisting in a Manhattan parish and then returning to London in 1969, I was to be an incumbent of one of the cities slum parishes. I was joined by a certain deacon Paul Clayton Hewett, in 1972. Since then our colleague, Bishop Paul has become my longstanding friend and fellow traveler.

What I saw in New York and what Father Paul told me, alerted me to the slippery slope upon which the institutional churches were set. He returned to Philadelphia, I went to another troubled outer London parish, and we have both remained good friends. It was during 21 years in this second parish, I was elected as a Proctor of Canterbury in the General Synod to fight the innovations in England. That is the place that revealed to me the full horror of the way things were going. (During this difficult time, I also joined the Anglo Orthodox Society and was a founding member of Forward in Faith.)

I finally resigned all my posts and in 1994 joined my friend Fr. Paul to be his assistant in one of the Continuing Churches in Virginia for over five years. It was this time in Virginia that I got to know something about the Polish National Catholic Church and what it had to offer.

When I came home to England, I became more certain that in the Church of England, choices were exhausted because the situation was exactly as Pope Benedict had said many times, "Paganism has overtaken the whole culture but even more troubling it had penetrated the main institutional churches. Joseph Ratzinger was by no means the first to warn the Churches, T.S.Elliot and C.S.Lewis had foreseen the crisis too.

Part II

At the time of Joining the Nordic Catholic Church

One of my colleagues had written a book called Apostolic Orders for the Wholeness of the Church. This title was crucial as we began our meetings with Bishop Roald in England. Over the decades, Apostolic Orders have moved increasingly into crisis. We lost our way after years of questioning about our purpose. Among Anglicans

the endless debates and compromises over women's orders, had put everything into even more confusion and division.

Yet Anglo Catholics believed then, and still believe today, they could sit tight in the transformed Church of England and fight their way out of the damage that had already been done. This could not and has never happened.

Two Crucial Questions

1. How could we get out of this and where to go?
2. If the Union of Scranton could give us a way, how to do this keeping Catholic Orders and the Integrity of the Union of Scranton intact?

Everything we studied, from the Fathers: Ignatius, Irenaeus, Cyprian; the Caroline Divines and the Oxford Movement, the first Lambeth Quadrilateral made it clear that the continuity of apostolic succession is a sign and guarantee of the apostolic faith and was part of Anglican Tradition.

The Affirmation of St Louis, restates this classical Anglican position in Paragraph 2 Holy Orders, stating explicitly "the perpetuation of Christ's gift of apostolic ministry to His Church, asserting the necessity of a bishop of apostolic succession.

The Declaration of Scranton, again stating explicitly that Apostolic Orders is essential for the life of the Church in their tradition.

So, what was once believed in the Anglican world, today in its diversity, has now surely been lost.

While we were preparing ourselves, other Anglican priests were joining the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. These Anglican Priests had submitted to Chrismation, were made deacons and received absolute ordination to become Roman Catholic priests in effect denying their past. This was required because there is no way around arguments, set out in the Papal Bull, *Apostolicae curae*, of Leo XIII in 1896 declaring Anglican orders to be null and void.

Whatever we think of this and we continued to reject the theological thinking and the political motivation behind *Apostolicae curae*; we still believed that Apostolic Succession had been historically present in the Church of England, but it had been damaged by the innovations in the autonomous provinces. This had produced a toxic situation for Anglicans. Moreover, several of us had been ordained under the terms of the Bonn Agreement prior to all the troubles, and we believed we had shared the same orders with Old Catholics in the PNCC.

1. Would the Catholic bishops of the Union of Scranton, having formerly recognised the validity of historic Anglican orders, be willing to offer their own unique rite of Conditional Ordination where appropriate in a non-Roman form to break the log jam?
2. Could a template be created that would fit others who found themselves scattered in different places?

With nowhere else to go, we had been forced to live in the wilderness of divisions, confusion and uncertainty. The proposal for a rite of Conditional Ordination would mean the removal of doubt that had hung over us, however much we had attempted to be faithful, and a return to clarity. If this could happen, those incardinated would be second to none in guarding to our utmost, the precious gifts of the Union of Scranton

In this special circumstance, a purpose-built Rite of Conditional Ordination would only be used to reconcile and restore, Anglican priests ordained prior to the decision to ordain female presbyters. We are grateful for all who supported us, including Prime Bishop Anthony, and clergy from America and Norway, when this was first used in September 2016 in the chapel of Grimsthorpe Castle.

Thus, we had recognised that however valid orders had been, because of the unsatisfactory compromises, the confusion into which we had been forced, we had been able to achieve a clarity which could be upheld. In the case of ordinations that took place in Provinces after the adoption of women priests, or for those from other uncertain apostolic lines, this will not be used, and absolute ordination would still be required, and this has been used by request.

[The Conditional Rite made clear that historic Anglican Orders were not disputed by using words by Prime Bishop Thaddeus by giving thanks for....*the many years of faithful priestly ministry of the Anglican priests, whose fruitfulness for salvation and spiritual life has been derived from the very fullness of grace entrusted to the Catholic Church. Confirming their fellowship into full communion with the Nordic Catholic Church.* (A similar approach used by the Antiochians.)

Priests conditionally ordained assented to the doctrinal requirements of the Union of Scranton and authority of the Bishops, making promises of obedience, and being received into the heart of the college of priests and absorbed irrevocably into the whole Union of Scranton.

A month later we met the International Bishop's Conference of the TAC in Lincoln and presented this scheme as a template. + Shane Janzen and + Brian Marsh were at that meeting.

I recall an agreement that our predicament as Catholics required courage and that we had indeed produced a possible template that could be used urgently in England.

Every Anglican group will come to this point from a different route. That is what makes it so difficult for the Union of Scranton to deal with so many variants. No Anglican family since the breakdown of the Communion is exactly the same. The wilderness experiences of each group are so different, so we work to find a way to bring these wandering Anglicans together into a new ecumenical catholicity which treasures the contributions of each.

Since then we have seen the need to make this process really secure. First, it is because we have encountered the aggression and unpleasantness especially from those who had been our friends and colleagues. In the UK we were called vagantes and schismatics at the time by the leaders of Forward in Faith.

Second, even sadly at this moment the clergy in southern Europe are being attacked by establishment leaders not least Roman Catholic bishops seeking to exploit any weaknesses in our structures denying us the right to witness as true Catholics and seeking to divide us by calling the Nordic Catholic Church a sect. We have all had some experiences similar to these and will not wish to give ammunition to those whom we threaten and will try to undermine our new structure.

At the same time this is not a one-way process because former Anglicans do have gifts that could flow within the Union of Scranton just as the Polish National Catholicism has great wisdom to bring us.

1. Anglicans have all experienced fighting in the trenches and fighting within the Churches. They have known the uncomfortable places, the losses and rejection of friends. This enables us to respond to the hostile world that Rod Dreher speaks about in his Benedict Option. It is a world in which we are seeking to protect and keep alive the flame of faith and the wholeness of the church in turmoil. Furthermore, Anglicans can see the downside of privileges in Institutional religion and Parliamentary Synodical government and its Anglican offspring Provincial Autonomy and the inevitable divisions. These have been the tools that destroy.
2. Nurtured for nearly two thousand years, Anglicans also have a long and precious history, of our Celtic Christianity which we happily share with our Scandinavian

colleagues. A part of the ancient patrimony of the British Isles, are the traces of Eastern Orthodoxy in their DNA, which had been recognized by Nicholas Lossky and others. We have a long history of holy men and women, of teachers of devotion and mysticism, poets and hymn writers drenched in the English language, scholars and missionaries within the English-speaking cultures. The Book of Common Prayer is a treasury of language and liturgy that although not without flaws, takes us back in the collects, lectionary and offices to the roots of pre-medieval ancient Church. All in all, there is, although mislaid today, an authentic Anglican theological mind that can be resourced and live within the Union of Scranton.

Part III - The Vision

My friends in England have urged me to share with you our simple image and vision for our part in the Scranton Churches. It is an image of a reservoir filled and supplied by a variety of ecclesial streams and rivers. The streams then are able to bring distinct minerals into the reservoir, to marinate and enrich the whole, providing life and power to the surrounding world.

But a good reservoir must have boundaries, and its dams and walls must be sound and structurally secure. We have seen even very recently, dams in various parts of the world that were poorly constructed, design flawed and thus collapsed bringing havoc and death to surrounding inhabitants. The reservoir is our vision of confessing catholicity, where wholeness could flow again with power, and the life-giving water of the same faith that was once delivered to the saints.

In conclusion there has been a thread running through my presentation that I wish to return to, the phrase Wholeness.

Important as it is for us to uphold the authenticity of Apostolic Succession, it is not an end in itself or a guarantee of integrity and wholeness. For wholeness means the complete health of the body of the Church. Apostolic orders are therefore not only a sign, but a means of health and completeness and a crucial aspect of Catholicity. (The Road to Unity speaks of the broader sense of the *"Continuity of the Lord's work of Salvation."*)

We see at close hand, not least among Roman clergy, as we have seen among Anglicans that the wholeness of the Church has been undermined by those who had received valid Apostolic Orders, but with a limited understanding of its fundamental purpose within the Church.

Not merely undermined by immorality but shallow attitudes have produced a mind that has nurtured institutionalism and clericalism and compromise which have been cancers eating away the body of Christ. At the outset of our journey we had detected these two strands. Therefore, Catholic Orders are the sign of Apostolic Authority, but also the instrument for the health of the whole body of the Church, its deepest Wholeness or Catholicity.

Going forward we need to take our apostolic orders back toward its original structure of the early centuries and to recover something of the Ignatian structure that was the foundation of the early Church. To recover a ministry of the bishops who were the *Pater familias* of the church rather than princes, potentates and Chief executives of the institutions. To recover the college of presbyters who are not parochial popes, but the collective college together supporting and serving the bishop's flock.

But most important, the raising of the dignity of the holy order of deacons, not to be part time or retired assistants to the priesthood, but the most Christ-like of all the orders and the foundation of every other order serving the flock.

Above all the precious order of laity must no longer be thought of as pew-fodder and a passive audience, but the front line, an informed ministry and its cutting edge in the world.

This Ignatian model would at least be compatible with the Ratzinger vision of the "*smaller Church of the meek, out of which a great power will flow from a more spiritualised and simplified church finding her essence afresh*". In many of our groups perhaps because of the circumstances some of this is already happening! So let us go forward in Christ-like confidence.

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