

# TAC LETTER TO THE HOLY SEE

From the Bishops and Vicars General of the Traditional Anglican Communion, gathered in Plenary Meeting at Portsmouth, England, in the Church of Saint Agatha, to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, concerning their desire for unity with the See of Peter.

**5th October 2007**

**Grace and peace in the Name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour!**

“A new hope arises that those who rejoice in the name of Christians, but are nevertheless separated from this apostolic see, hearing the voice of the divine Shepherd, may be able to make their way into the one Church of Christ....to seek and to follow that unity which Jesus Christ implored from his Heavenly father with such fervent prayers.”

In these words in his moto proprio, *Superno De Nutu*, the Blessed John XXIII, responded to the visit of Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher.

A few years later, in the Sistine Chapel, in March 1966, the next Bishop of Rome, Paul VI, told the next Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, that he should look on his journey as an approach to a home:

As you cross the threshold we want you especially to feel that you are not entering the house of a stranger but that this is your home, here you have a right to be.

The Holy Father warned of the difficulty of the task of bringing about the unity of “the Church of Rome and the Church of Canterbury”:

In the field of doctrine and ecclesiastical law, we are still respectively distinct and distant; for now it must be so, for the reverence due to truth and to freedom; until such time as we may merit the supreme grace of true and perfect unity in faith and communion.

The next day, at the Basilica of Saint Paul’s Without the Walls, the Holy Father placed his ring on the Archbishop’s finger. They had just signed the Joint Declaration that was intended to begin a dialogue that would lead to full communion between Anglicans and the See of Rome. The Pope used the phrases “our dear sister church” and “united but not absorbed”. These phrases inspired Anglicans who yearned for the reuniting of the Anglican Communion with the Holy See. They waited in prayerful optimism for the fulfillment of the work of the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission. The Lambeth Conference of 1968 powerfully endorsed the approach to the Holy See of the Archbishop and the proposed work of the Commission. The Holy Father noted this acceptance in his homily at the Canonization of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales in 1970, when he reflected on the nature of the unity that he anticipated:

There will be no seeking to lessen the prestige and usage proper to the Anglican Church.

These words exchanged between Anglican bishops and the Holy See transformed centuries of profound mistrust and unconsummated dreams of unity.

And yet they were set against contemporary Anglican developments that were already separating the Anglicans who most cherished these new hopes from their churches.

The ordination of women to the diaconate and presbyterate, at first in North America, Hong Kong and New Zealand, and in more than half the churches of the Anglican Communion by the mid – 1990's, created a crisis of conscience among those who termed themselves Anglican Catholics, and who held the faith of the Catholic Church on matters concerning Holy Order, the primacy of the Eucharist in the life of the Church, and the authority of the Bishop of Rome in teaching with divine authority concerning matters contested in the Church and the world.

The Holy See, in direct and frank communications with the Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as – with increasing finality – in specifically addressing these innovations in its Apostolic Teaching, defined these Anglican innovations as “new and grave” obstacles to unity.

At St. Louis, just thirty years ago at this time, Anglican Catholics tormented in conscience as much by the disintegration of sacramental life in parish and diocese as by the slipping beyond reach of such recent expectations of unity, met and adopted the Affirmation. This was a confession of catholic faith, a determination to maintain the pursuit of unity, and a commitment to create an ecclesial structure sufficient to achieve these desires, while maintaining communion with those churches of the Anglican Communion that remained true to the commitments of only a few years before. It was explicit about unity:

We declare our firm intention to seek and achieve full sacramental communion and 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.

It was just as explicit in its Eucharistic teaching:

... the Eucharist as the sacrifice which unites us to the all-sufficient Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and the Sacrament in which He feeds us with His Body and Blood...

and about the sacramental life of the Church:

...the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, Holy Matrimony, Holy Orders, Penance and Unction of the Sick, as objective and

effective signs of the continued presence and saving activity of Christ our Lord among His people and as His covenanted means for conveying His grace.

And it speaks about the nature of the Church itself:

We gather as people called by God to be faithful and obedient to Him. As the Royal Priestly People of God, the Church is called to be, in fact, the manifestation of Christ in and to the world. True religion is revealed to man by God. We cannot decide what is truth, but rather (in obedience) ought to receive, accept, cherish, defend and teach what God has given us. The Church is created by God, and is beyond the ultimate control of man. The Church is the Body of Christ at work in the world. She is the society of the baptised called out from the world: In it, but not of it. As Christ's faithful Bride, she is different from the world and must not be influenced by it.

At almost the same time, the Holy See agreed to the creation of the Anglican Use, by which parishes composed of Anglicans reconciled to the Catholic Church could maintain an Anglican liturgical and communal existence. It sadly remained only a possibility in parts of the United States, and did not necessarily allow for the endurance of Anglican characteristics over time. Then, and again in the 1990's, large numbers of Anglican clergy joined the Catholic Church without formal recognition of their Anglican heritage so recently acknowledged in Papal and Conciliar pronouncements.

Following the Congress of St Louis in 1977, the then Archbishop of Canterbury rejected the idea that the ecclesial communities (often small, remote from each other and whose very existence was bitterly contested by local and national Anglican churches) that emerged from the determination at St. Louis could be considered part of the Anglican Communion.

In spite of this, the Lambeth Conference in 1998 called for a new tolerance and understanding of Anglicans separated from Canterbury. In practice, it is our experience of the Anglican Communion at this time that the acceptance of the ordination of women in particular, and a strong conditionality on the acceptance of catholic order in general, has made full and organic unity between Canterbury and Rome a remote possibility within our lifetimes, in spite of the ongoing friendliness of Anglican – Roman Catholic relationships.

In 1990, a group of bishops representing churches of this "Anglican Diaspora" met in Victoria, British Columbia, and agreed to a Concordat establishing the Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC). The initial gathering represented churches in Australia, Canada, Guatemala and the United States. The Concordat sought to establish a single College of Bishops of a single ecclesial communion of local and regional churches, expressly denying (in deliberate contrast to contemporary Anglican praxis) that these local churches have authority

...to derogate from Holy Scripture, or to determine unilaterally any question of Faith or Order, the authority for determining such residing in the College of

Bishops of this Communion acting with such competent advice as may be available to it.

In 1991, leaders of the new Communion were invited to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Led by Archbishop Louis Falk, who had been elected the founding Primate, and accompanied among others by Father John Hepworth, who has since been elected Primate in succession to him, they met with the late Archbishop Pierre Duprey. At the conclusion of a day-long consultation, in which the desire to achieve unity with the Holy See was clearly expressed, the late Archbishop gave this advice: "You must learn to grow and show that you can grow; you must show us that you can develop good relationships with the local Catholic Church in the places where you both co-exist; and I beg you to not needlessly amplify your episcopate".

Since that time, the TAC has accepted and sought to implement that advice.

A substantial part of the historic Anglican Church of India (consisting of bishops, clergy and people who had refused to join the Churches of North and South India in order to maintain an authentic sacramental life) was the first addition, just after the Concordat was ratified.

The TAC has Provinces, Dioceses, Parishes and Missionary Districts worldwide, and has a presence in Canada, the United States, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, India, Pakistan, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Torres Strait, Great Britain, Ireland, several European countries, South Africa (including a substantial part of the Order of Ethiopia – the Church of Umzi Wase Tiyopiya), Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, Kenya, DR Congo, Cameroon, El Salvador, Columbia and Argentina.

The Communion exists only where there is a breakdown of sacramental life and order that endangers the spiritual welfare of faithful people. It has a firm policy of waiting until there is a locally expressed need that cannot be met by provisions made for conscience by local Anglican churches. Very few Anglican provinces have made such provision.

Warm and practical relationships have developed at the personal and parochial level in many places. The Servants of the Sacred Cross, a religious institute for women, approved by the Holy See, with both Traditional Anglican and Roman Catholic women members, has grown strongly and spread from North America to Australia. Other Institutes of Dedicated Life, reflecting the traditions of Anglican history, have been founded and grown with Roman Catholic co-operation and encouragement. Our ordinands in some places have been able to complete theological studies at Catholic Universities and theological institutes. Friendships have grown between our bishops and Roman Catholic bishops.

In these growing relationships, we have been sensitive to the fact that formal processes designed to achieve unity between Canterbury and Rome continue to exist, and our presence can be a source of friction between local Anglican and Catholic bishops, particularly where the Anglican bishop has initiated

canonical and legal measures against those whose conscience has driven them towards us. This Communion has active Concordats of Communion with Forward in Faith (an ecclesial body whose membership is largely if tenuously within the Anglican Communion) in Britain, North America and Australia, allowing the fullest possible cooperation with those Anglicans whose faith matches our own, but who have managed to maintain an existence within the Anglican Communion. These Concordats are being actively contested in parts of the Anglican Communion, to the further straining of local ecumenical relationships, loyalties and friendships.

There are presently thirty-eight bishops actively holding Episcopal office in this Communion.

Since 1990, this Communion has sought to form its clergy and people in such a way that the College of Bishops could reach a decision to seek the further guidance of the Holy See in the fulfilment of its desire to come as an ecclesial community into communion with the See of Peter, with confidence that they have the support of their clergy and people.

In the past five years, the Diocesan and National Synods of the Communion have discussed and supported this desire of their bishops, often with a longing expressed with moving passion. We acknowledge that this testing of the depth of our support for unity with the Holy See has often attracted media interest, to the embarrassment of our Roman Catholic friends. We grieve for any hurt that our necessarily open processes have caused, at the same time asking for understanding in our desire not to place before the Holy See a proposal unsupported by our clergy and the leaders of our laity.

During that time, we have taken counsel from a number of Roman Catholics, many formerly Anglicans. In the course of that consultation, which was at once informal and rigorous, descriptions of our Communion have been written by our mentors in the context of our quest for unity. One in particular we have been moved to make our own, encapsulating as it does our desire to accept the catholic faith in all its fullness, while bringing that faith to reality in an ecclesial community faithful to our history and tradition:

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 of this Communion, now meeting in Plenary Session in the Church of Saint Agatha, Portsmouth, England, on the Feast of Theresa of the Child Jesus and in the days following, have reached the following mind which they have asked their Primate and delegates to report to the Holy See:

1. We accept the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, which is a ministry of teaching and discerning the faith and a "perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity" and understand this ministry is essential to the Church founded by Jesus Christ. We accept that this ministry, in the words of the late John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*, is to "ensure the unity of all the Churches". We understand his words in the same Letter when he explains to the separated churches that the Bishop of Rome "when circumstances require it, speaks in the name of all the Pastors in communion with him. He can also – under very specific conditions clearly laid down by the First Vatican Council – declare *ex cathedra* that a certain doctrine belongs to the deposit of faith. By thus bearing witness to the truth, he serves unity". We understand that, as bishops separated from communion with the Bishop of Rome, we are among those for whom Jesus prayed before his death "that they may be completely one", and that we teach and define matters of faith and morals in a way that is, while still under the influence of Divine Grace, of necessity more tenuously connected to the teaching voice of catholic bishops throughout the world.

2. We accept that the Church founded by Jesus Christ subsists most perfectly in the churches in communion with the See of Peter, to whom (after the repeated protestation of his love for Jesus) and to whose successors, our Divine Master gave the duty of feeding the lambs and the sheep of his flock.

3. We accept that the most complete and authentic expression and application of the catholic faith in this moment of time is found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and its Compendium, which we have signed together with this Letter as attesting to the faith we aspire to teach and hold.

4. Driven by these realizations, which we must now in good conscience bring to the attention of the Holy See, 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.

With profound expressions of regret for the divisions of Christ's Church, and for our own failings that may have deepened and extended those divisions, and with the most affectionate regard for the Holy Father, who at key moments has strengthened us by his concern for our plight, and with great hope in the overshadowing power of the Holy Ghost, who can make pliable what has become rigid, we affix our signatures to this Letter and to the accompanying Catechism in the midst of the Holy Sacrifice and commend our cause to Your Excellencies,

[signatures of all TAC Bishops and Vicars General present]

#### Certificate

I certify that I have witnessed the signing of this Letter with the Catechism and its Compendium by each of those attending the Plenary Meeting of the College of Bishops of the Traditional Anglican Communion, having also witnessed each of the above bishops and Vicars General vote with unanimity to support the attached resolution taken after a day-long debate on 3rd October 2007.

Lay Canon Cheryl Woodman  
Secretary to the College  
5th October 2007

(Source:

<http://www.themessenger.com.au/Annoucements/20100127.html#Story2>  
accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2010)