

ANGLICANORUM COETIBUS. AN ANALYSIS by Fr P. L. Burgess

Recently there has been some excitement about the Church of Rome throwing open its doors to Anglicans.

This has excited some people and horrified others. The reality is that the announcement of the Pope has made few concessions to the Anglican Church.

Historically the principal stumbling block to unity has been Rome's refusal to recognize Anglican orders of Ministry, and Anglican refusal to recognize the Pope as the head of the Church on earth, plus our disquiet with some Roman doctrine.

So what has changed? Rome has offered as a sop the acceptance of Anglican liturgies and Anglican governance up to a point. Bishops may run dioceses and hold a certain authority among their people.

But, (and here's the rub) any priest who enters this new arrangement has to be re-ordained at the hands of a Roman bishop, must accept the authority of the Pope and be bound by Roman Catholic doctrines.

I have always regarded my Ordination to the priesthood as being both valid and sacred. To accept Roman ordination would be to deny this, and that I will not do.

Any Anglican bishop who wants to continue as such, has to be ordained priest, by the Roman Catholic Church, so his situation is much the same. His elevation to the episcopate seems to be simply that he is given the job of having the oversight of a diocese. A point on which we would differ again, as we recognize our Anglican bishops as being consecrated and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to be true shepherds to his flock.

Married priests would be accepted, for a time. My reading of the Papal formula is that new priests ordained by Roman authority must be celibate. There will be exceptions, as I think in the case of candidates who have been married for some time. They won't have to put away their wives as has been the case in the past.

So what does all this mean? It means that the R.C. church continues to refuse to recognize the Anglican church with its Holy Orders of Bishops, Priests and Deacons as part of the true Catholic Church on earth, commissioned and empowered by Christ. Nothing has changed there.

Secondly the acceptance of married priests in to the Roman church is not quite what it seems.

Rome could not have married priests its ranks because a great number of its own priests would want to marry.

Thirdly the acceptance of Anglican traditions with our Liturgy and doctrine has never been a real sticking point. Up to the Reformation it was Roman, and subsequent to that happening the differences have been only over doctrinal matters such as transubstantiation in the Mass which is a matter of semantics and has been largely resolved. The real sticking point is the authority of the Pope as the Vicar of Christ and Master of all Christians, with its subsequent refusal to recognize Anglican orders - and so on.

This is the thing that matters and the thing that has not changed.

I worry about Anglican priests and bishops who undertake this Roman Catholic ordination, still holding onto the belief that their own Anglican ordination is valid, and regarding the Roman ordination as a kind of overlay - something to go through to keep the Romans happy. To go through this second ordination with tongue in cheek and fingers crossed, I think is dishonest and devious.

Ordination is ordination without qualification. The argument for doing this is for 'unity', "that they may all be one".

When our Lord prayed "that they may all be one" I'm sure he didn't mean at the cost of integrity - the blanket acceptance of what we don't believe is against the will of Christ, so much of which has been, and is, the fault of the Roman church.

In truth, by accepting all this we would be far from creating unity. We would just be creating another sect - another division.

Pray with our Lord that we may all be one, and pray for those who would venture into something which is not what He would desire.