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**THE "PERSONAL ORDINARIATE":
POPE BENEDICT'S OFFER TO ANGLICANS**

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At the Reformation, King Henry VIII and his daughter Queen Elizabeth I ruthlessly separated most English Christians from full communion with the Catholic Church. Since that time there have always been Anglicans who regretted what was achieved by royal decrees and acts of parliament, and by force and terror - "come rack, come rope". They hoped and prayed that one day unity with the Pope would be restored. They knew that, from earliest times, Christians in the British Isles had been in full communion with the See of Peter.

This nostalgic tendency lingered within the "high church" side of the Anglican spectrum. It took on new life in the Nineteenth Century with the rise of the Oxford Movement. This movement that revived and recovered Catholic doctrine, liturgy and spirituality among Anglicans, is best known to Catholics through Blessed John Henry Newman (1801-1890). The convert scholar finally made his own peace with Rome and inspired many Anglicans, such as myself, to follow him "across the Tiber".

However, other "Anglo-Catholics" did not follow him. They remained within the Anglican Communion, working to Catholicise it from within, developing a sacramental life and liturgy almost indistinguishable from Catholicism. You have no doubt been to some Anglican churches where you felt completely at home! The Oxford Movement also fostered the founding of religious orders for women and men. At the more extreme end of this movement, prayer for unity with Rome was required as a duty, and various groups of "Anglican Papalists" committed themselves to work for reunion.

The Ecumenical Spring

It was the ecumenical movement of the mid twentieth century that raised wider hopes that before long Anglicans and Catholics would be one. In 1958, Blessed John XXIII welcomed Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury on a discreet low key visit in the Vatican. This broke the ice. Anglican observers were present at the Second Vatican Council in 1964, when the *Decree on Ecumenism* made friendly reference to the Reformation denominations, but with a distinction: "Among those in which Catholic traditions and institutions in part continue to exist, the Anglican communion occupies a special place."¹

After the Council, in 1966 Pope Paul VI welcomed Archbishop Michael Ramsey in a more public and splendid way during a moving ceremony in the Sistine Chapel. I recall a moment in the following year when Archbishop Ramsey proudly showed a

¹ Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, November 21 1964, 13.

group of Oxford students the noble ring the Pope had given him as a token of his prayer for unity.

Blessed John Paul II furthered these good relations through his visit to England and by praying with Archbishop Robert Runcie at Canterbury Cathedral in 1982. An International Commission of theologians (ARCIC) had been set up to advance dialogue between Anglicans and Catholics on key doctrinal and moral questions. The commission still meets.

A Winter of Discontent

However, starting in the United States, much of Anglicanism was moving in a very different direction. Hopes for reunion with Rome began to fade with the rise of practices and doctrines incompatible with Catholic Faith and Apostolic Order. The last decades of the twentieth century have seen the ascendancy of a liberal Anglican agenda, particularly the feminist-inspired ordination of women as priests and bishops, together with more liberalised views on faith and morals, including the breakdown of the indissolubility of marriage and sexual ethics.

In spite of earnest warnings from Rome, the ordination of women priests went ahead in England in 1992. The final stage of this project was achieved in New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the US with the ordination of women as bishops. For many people “The Vicar of Dibley” is a somewhat suggestive comedy. For traditional Anglo-Catholics it is a bizarre tragedy.

What then could these Catholic-minded Anglicans do? They now felt excluded, isolated and powerless. They had been defeated in complex legal battles that broke down their cherished Catholic traditions and effectively destroyed the tolerant comprehensiveness that hitherto had characterised Anglicanism. Labelled as “disaffected” or “dissidents”, they quietly began to negotiate with Rome. They asked whether some special arrangement might be made whereby they could come back into full communion, not just as individuals but as groups, communities, even parishes. They sought a welcome for the distinctive heritage they had maintained.

Seeking Full Communion

These requests to the Vatican came from two circles. First there were the Anglo Catholics who were trying to hold on within the Church of England. They were organised under an umbrella movement known as *Forward in Faith* which had opposed female ordination in the Synods. The Archbishop of Canterbury had granted these Anglo-Catholics special bishops who would care for parishes that could not accept women clergy. Because they moved freely across diocesan boundaries, these prelates became known as the “flying bishops”. But traditional Anglo-Catholics could see that a tolerated position is fragile. They were being compromised more and more as time went on, particularly once the ordination of women bishops emerged as a distinct possibility in England. So they began to negotiate with Rome, seeking some concrete arrangement whereby they could come into unity but maintain their identity and ethos.

At the same time, and in a more formal ecclesial way, requests came to Rome from a second more structured circle, from the hierarchy of an independent Anglican body, the Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC). This communion forms a major part of what is called the Anglican “continuum”, that is, a series of independent Anglican denominations that broke away from the Episcopal Church in the United States after the ordinations of women began in 1978. The TAC took various initiatives to affirm the intention of seeking Catholic unity, particularly a gesture of commitment, when the bishops of the Traditional Anglican Communion signed the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in Portsmouth in October 2007.

Anglicanorum Coetibus

Two years later, on November 4th 2009, Pope Benedict XVI responded to these requests. In his Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* he set up a new community within the Catholic Church, primarily for traditionally minded Anglicans. There seem to be three defining areas for these Anglicans: (a) that they have a Catholic faith in the Church and sacraments, (b) that in conscience they reject current liberalising trends within Anglicanism, such as the ordination of women and (c) that the clergy will agree to be ordained Catholic priests. The project of establishing ordinariates has been entrusted by the Pope to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

What is this structure set up by the Holy Father for traditional Anglo-Catholics? It is a kind of national diocese. Known as an “ordinariate”, it is very similar to the military ordinariate where a bishop and clergy care for members of the armed forces and their families. We find these ordinariates in various countries, such as Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Such a structure within the Church is called a “*personal* ordinariate” because it is designed for the pastoral care of specific persons, in this case former Anglicans and their families.

The Personal Ordinariate may also be compared to a national diocese or eparchy that is provided beyond for members of an Eastern Catholic Church beyond their home base, such as we see in Australia in the case of Ukrainian and Maronite (Lebanese) Catholics. However, even if its distinctive characteristics make it similar to these communities, a Personal Ordinariate for former Anglicans does not have this status of a Church or “Rite”.

These autonomous Churches of the East are in communion with Rome, but their members are not “Roman Catholics”, that is, not Catholics of the Roman Rite. This shows us that the Catholic Church is not a monolithic structure. She is a *communion of Churches*, led by bishops who are in communion with the Bishop of Rome, our Holy Father the Pope, and in communion with one another, as members of one apostolic college. This unity through a communion of particular or local Churches is set out in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church promulgated by the Second Vatican Council. *Lumen Gentium*, 23. The Personal Ordinariates will find their place in full communion with Rome and in communion with all the Churches that make up the Universal Church on earth.

The generous papal offer may be summed up as “*united in communion but not absorbed*”. Those words resonate with the ecumenical vision of the recent past,

particularly the era of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey. Now “*United in communion but not absorbed*” is realized in “*a Personal Ordinariate for Anglicans who wish to enter full communion with the Catholic Church*”, to use the Holy Father’s words in his Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*.

The Ordinariates Emerge

The first fruit of the Holy Father’s offer to Anglicans is the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. This was established early this year in England when three former Anglican bishops were ordained priests in Westminster Cathedral. Two of these priests had been “flying bishops” and had ministered to scattered Anglo-Catholic parishes. One of them is the first Ordinary, Msgr. Keith Newton. Now with over sixty clergy and a thousand laity, the first Ordinariate is steadily growing and finding a welcome place within the wider English Catholic community. Other Ordinariates are on the way for the United States, Canada and Australia, and also in the Torres Strait and regions around the world where traditionally minded Anglicans want to respond positively to the papal offer.

As the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* defines it: “The Ordinariate is composed of the lay faithful, clerics and members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, originally belonging to the Anglican Communion (now *Anglicanism*) and now in full communion with the Catholic Church”, to which is added significantly “or those who receive the Sacraments of Initiation within the jurisdiction of the Ordinariate.”²

The future of what amounts to a national diocese for specific people is not restricted only to former Anglicans. Please note that any Catholic will be free to worship and receive the sacraments in Ordinariate parishes once they are established. The beautiful liturgy, good music and attentive pastoral care will no doubt attract Catholics to these churches.

Entering an Ordinariate

The decision to be reconciled through an Ordinariate can only be made through following personal conscience, that is, after prayer, study and reflection. This is a step of faith in Jesus Christ and his Church. It involves accepting all the teachings proposed by the Catholic Church on faith and morals. But the faith of the individual is maintained in a group, hence the model of “groups” of Anglicans coming into unity as envisaged in *Anglicanorum Coetibus*.

Anglicans take their first step to become full members of the Catholic Church in the Ordinariate by applying in writing,³ Application forms for the Australian Ordinariate will be issued soon. After courses of preparation and instruction, they make a Profession of Faith and receive the Sacraments of Christian Initiation (in practice Reconciliation Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist). They are then registered as members.⁴ The rule of faith for the Ordinariate is the *Catechism of the Catholic*

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, I # 4.

³ Cf., .Ibid. IX.

⁴ See, *Complementary Norms*, Article 5 #1.

Church.⁵ Therefore courses for groups intending to be reconciled with the Church through an Ordinariate are based on the catechism, such as the highly successful *Evangelium* program.

Anglican priests who enter the Ordinariate may also seek to be ordained to the Catholic priesthood, so that they can continue their ministry by leading and serving their people within the new structure. Anglican clergy are already making application to become Catholic priests and their formal requests are forwarded to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to be examined and assessed. Those who are married apply for a papal dispensation from celibacy, which is granted under specific conditions in accord with law and precedents.

Understanding these Personal Ordinariate

At the same time, these generous provisions should not distract us from the fact that Personal Ordinariates form a new part of the Roman Rite in the Catholic Church. Thus they are subject to the Canon Law of the Roman Rite, including Church teaching and discipline on marriage and divorce. As the Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* and the *Complementary Norms* from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith affirm, each Ordinariate is meant to relate pastorally and practically with the “particular Church”, that is, with the local Catholic diocese. The Ordinary, whether he is a bishop or monsignor, is a member of the Episcopal Conference of the nation or region where his Ordinariate has been established. From the very beginning, the Ordinariates work with the Episcopal Conference. Relations with Episcopal Conferences and Diocesan Bishops are spelt out in the *Complementary Norms*.⁶

Nevertheless, we need to focus on what these Anglicans bring into the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church. As we can now see in England, enjoying full communion with the Catholic Church in their own distinctive community, these former Anglicans maintain what is called the “Anglican Patrimony”. A patrimony may be understood as an inheritance, a heritage of various traditions, of culture and customs, Christian spiritualities and theology, including liturgical privileges and fine church music.

An international commission, on which I sit, is preparing a special liturgy for the Ordinariate. As it awaits Roman approval, this rite is drawn from Catholic and Anglican sources. At the same time, clergy in the Ordinariate may celebrate Mass in either the ordinary or extraordinary forms of our rite. The new ICEL translations are welcomed by clergy and laity moving towards the Ordinariate because they can hear these richer and more poetic texts resonating with the gracious prose of the Book of Common Prayer.

The Australian Ordinariate

The process of forming the Personal Ordinariate in Australia moves steadily forward on three levels. Soon after the publication of *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, the Bishops appointed me as their Delegate for the process of forming and Ordinariate. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith recognised my role.

⁵ *Anglicanorum Coetibus*. I # 5

⁶ See, *Complementary Norms*, Article 2.

Having an Anglican background, the son of a vicar and former candidate for Anglican ministry, I am very sympathetic with the groups seeking unity. I can understand where they come from and the issues they confront in their own lives, not forgetting the sufferings they have endured. I have endeavoured to promote and advance the case for the Ordinariate, which is not without its critics. I argue that it will not undermine ecumenical relations, rather that it should facilitate those relations which have steadily grown since the time of Blessed John XXIII and Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury.

Even if the initial numbers will not be great in this country, the task is complex. Therefore, at the May meeting of the Catholic Bishops of Australia, an Ad Hoc Commission for the Australian Personal Ordinariate was established at my request. Through the Commission the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference (ACBC) supervises and facilitates the whole process, working with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is chaired by Most Rev. Denis J. Hart, the Archbishop of Melbourne, and the other members are Most Rev. Geoffrey H. Jarrett, the Bishop of Lismore, Most Rev. Brian Finnegan, Apostolic Administrator of Toowoomba, and myself. We are assisted by Fr. Brian Lucas, Secretary of the ACBC.

At the second national level, the Australian Ordinariate Implementation Committee (AOIC) brings together the main "players", that is members of the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) and the bishops, clergy and laity of the Anglican Catholic Church in Australia (Traditional Anglican Communion, TAC). In a collaborative way this committee brings before the Commission grass-roots concerns, practical issues and proposals to facilitate progress towards an Ordinariate. At a third level, local working groups, beginning in Melbourne, already anticipate various practicalities and the kind of detailed planning that is needed for a smooth transition, for example organizing events such as festivals and information days.

In Melbourne a parish has been designated to become the first base of the Ordinariate. The existing Catholic community in that parish is strong but small. The parishioners will be invited to share their facilities with Anglicans who are becoming Catholics. Once the Ordinariate is formally established I hope that the parish will benefit from the ministry of the newly ordained priests. In other cities either an existing TAC parish or a church owned by the Catholic diocese will form the visible base for the communities made up mainly of groups of Anglicans seeking full communion. These groups are not large, but they are already gathering in the major cities and some other centres.

The Other Anglicans

However, let me make it clear that most Australian Anglicans are not interested in coming into Catholic unity through an Ordinariate. Those who are comfortable with religious liberalism do not want to become "Roman Catholics". They believe in women clergy and accept more liberal attitudes to faith and morals and sacramental practices.

At the same time, a very significant number of Anglicans may be found on the more strictly Protestant of "Low Church" side of the wide Anglican spectrum. These Evangelical Anglicans also reject the feminist agenda of women clergy and

liberalising trends, for example regarding the question of homosexuality. I believe that Evangelicals are making their own plans for some form of autonomy or independence, which seems to centre around the Diocese of Sydney and Evangelical regions such as Nigeria.

Some Evangelicals have indicated good will towards the Personal Ordinariate project as it applies to Anglo Catholics. But they would not want to join it themselves because they do not accept Catholic doctrine on the papacy, the Mass and sacraments and Our Lady. We should welcome their good will, and bear in mind that they are part of a significant revival of Bible-believing Christianity. We need to work with them, even when we do not always agree. This is another dimension of Ecumenism.

Welcoming Them Home

What lies ahead is the challenge for all Catholics to welcome and accept our new brothers and sisters. I am confident that the Catholic Women's League will be at the forefront in welcoming Anglicans into the peace and unity of the Church. I would hope that every Ordinariate parish in Australia will be able to set up a branch of the Catholic Women's League, or to be affiliated with an existing branch. This development would perpetuate an interesting part of the Anglican patrimony, those fine Anglican associations for women such as the Mothers' Union. These organisations have brought women together for spiritual nourishment, scriptural studies and social activities, offering them scope for service and a distinctive mission that draws on the feminine charism. Devotion to our Blessed Lady has been quietly cultivated through these groups, for is Mary not the "eternal feminine"?

To be welcomed involves getting to know people. Personal friendships with Catholics are most important during this time of transition for these Anglicans. We are also considering another complementary approach, that is, when an Anglican group on the way to the Ordinariate is "adopted" by a nearby Catholic parish. There is no sense of being "absorbed" in this possibility, rather the offer of a mutual enrichment in charity and faith which can arise when two communities come together on a shared journey. This also is part of the greater journey of the whole Church, appropriately described at the Second Vatican Council as the Pilgrim People of God.