

THE CONGRESS OF TRADITIONAL ANGLICANS

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An Address by

The Most Reverend Mark Haverland, Ph.D.

***Acting Primate,
Anglican Catholic Church***

**At the Holy Eucharist - Mass of the Ascension
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**METROPOLITAN'S ADDRESS TO
THE CANADIAN CHURCH CONGRESS**

Your Grace Archbishop Provence, Your Grace Archbishop Robinson, My Lords Bishop, Venerable, Very Reverend, and Reverend Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

We are not born Christian. We are made Christian, by baptism. I was made a Christian, the child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, in an Episcopal church in Niles, Ohio, when I was three months old. I lived within the Church of my baptism until January 1, 1977, the effective date of decisions made by the 1976 Minneapolis General Convention. By accepting a new liturgy radically different from any historic *Book of Common Prayer* the Episcopal Church proved itself to be sub-Anglican. By claiming authority to alter Holy Orders by the so-called ordination of women as priests, the Episcopal Church proved itself to be sub-Catholic. By adopting a pro-abortion policy the Episcopal Church proved itself indifferent to the natural law and to the lives of helpless unborn children.

From this bundle of erroneous decisions flows everything that has since happened in the Episcopal Church. All the recent errors are merely elaborations of principles established in 1976, of which the chief error, the *fons et origo*, is the implicit claim that Anglicans have authority to alter doctrine and moral teaching. Anglicans quite correctly deny that the Bishop of Rome has authority to add doctrines. But at least the Popes confine themselves to defining new developments of doctrine at the rate of about one per century. The Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church do not merely add new doctrines, but also change existing ones; and, far from limiting themselves to one per century, they seem to come up with a new enormity every year.

In Canada, as most of you know better than I, the situation was not quite the same as in the U.S. The Prayer Book was not abandoned in Canada so clearly or decisively as in the U.S. General Synod's embrace in 1975 of women's ordination was not combined here with an all-fronts

abandonment of Catholic faith, worship, and morality. Nonetheless, for those with eyes to see—including notably Carmino de Catanzaro and Roland Palmer—1975 was the Canadian point of no return.

And so it was that in 1977 both Canadian and U.S. Churchmen gathered in St. Louis in a great Congress to affirm orthodox Anglican faith and practice, with particular emphasis on those points most in question at that time in the Episcopal Church and in the Anglican Church of Canada: namely, the male character of Holy Order—all Holy Order including the diaconate; the desirability of retaining the Prayer Book liturgical tradition; and the sanctity of unborn life and the importance of traditional Christian morality in general. These principles were enshrined in the *Affirmation of Saint Louis*, which my own Church in turn has wisely embedded in its formularies and Constitution.

I believe that the importance of the *Affirmation of Saint Louis* cannot easily be overstated. In recent decades the decay of our former ecclesial homes has progressed so that more and more clergy and laymen have left them, by joining non-Anglican churches, by staying at home of a Sunday, or more recently by joining one of the *soi-disant* Anglican bodies which I call neo-Anglican. The largest of the neo-Anglican bodies is the Anglican Church of North America, led by Archbishop Robert Duncan. Others include the Anglican Mission in America, 'AMiA'. I cannot call such groups 'Anglican' *simpliciter* because they have in various ways accepted the central error of the 1970s: the claim to authority to alter doctrine. But my views on the neo-Anglicans are published and are readily available, and I will not repeat them now in detail.

What I would like to do today is to consider the importance of the *Affirmation* by examining a phrase near its end. In the final section of the *Affirmation* the claim is made that, 'We do nothing new.' What does this phrase mean? In what sense is it true? In what sense might it be misleading?

As someone brought up in the Canterbury Communion and the Episcopal Church, I can say on the basis of personal experience that some things about the Anglican Catholic Church—and I might make bold to add also some things about the Province of Christ the King and the UECNA, with which the ACC is in full communion—some things about us all are certainly different. What is different is that within our Churches there is great doctrinal seriousness and there is no tolerance for the rejection of basic creedal orthodoxy. We have no party inclined towards what in Anglican history developed from Latitudinarianism into Church Deism, Modernism, and then the various theological pathologies of recent decades. To put the difference briefly, the 'Broad and Hazy' party has been excluded from the *Affirmation* Churches. Now some people might take the assertion that 'we do nothing new' to be falsified by the very fact that one important strand of Anglican tradition has been excised. We note this possibility, are not moved by it, and so may proceed.

Another important sense in which the *Affirmation* has done something new is in its crystal clarity concerning a number matters which could once excite debate among Anglicans and which still can excite debate among some who profess and call themselves Anglican. Consider, for example this simple assertion:

The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, Holy Matrimony, Holy Orders, Penance and Unction of the Sick, [are] objective and effective signs of the presence and saving activity of Christ our Lord among His people and [are] His covenanted means for conveying His Grace.

Or, again, consider this assertion: the 'received Tradition of the Church' is 'especially...defined by the Seven Ecumenical Councils'. The clear, simple, unambiguous assertion of seven Sacraments and seven Councils is different, at least in the sense that it would have met contradiction or heavy qualification in many Anglican quarters prior to the *Affirmation*. But for us 'seven and seven' are principles and premises to be celebrated, explored, taught, applied, and elaborated, and are not propositions for debate or for equivocation. In short, while we enjoy classical Anglican generosity concerning matters indifferent, and seek to emphasize the common deposit of the Faith rather than multiply items to impose on tender consciences, nonetheless we define the essentials more carefully than many Anglicans once did. We do not permit every opinion once tolerated among self-described Anglicans, but rather place ourselves squarely and firmly in the center of Catholic and Orthodox Christendom. If asserting 'seven and seven' is in some sense an Anglican novelty, we are, again, not concerned. 'Seven and seven' unites us to the great mass of Christians, East and West, living and dead, and we are not interested in recapitulating older intramural Anglican debates on these subjects.

It is at this point that we may move on from the sense in which we are somewhat different in look and feel and so come to the sense in which our heart is not new, but rather is the same as classical Anglicanism at its best. On this point we may return to that phrase the 'received Tradition of the Church'. The *Affirmation* does nothing new in essence because its greater clarity and renovated orthodoxy are clear implications of the classical Anglican commitment to Scripture as the source of all necessary doctrine and to patristic tradition as the essential interpretive lens through which Scripture is to be read. The *Affirmation* asserts that 'all Anglican statements of faith and liturgical formulae must be interpreted' so as to be consistent with the *Affirmation* itself, including its assertions concerning seven Councils, seven Sacraments, the male character of Holy Orders, the three Creeds, and so forth. That is to say, the *Affirmation* in effect provides, not a new body of doctrine, but rather an interpretive lens for viewing the doctrines of the Bible and of the Patristic corpus which all classical Anglicans affirm. But where Hooker and Andrewes might speak of four Councils and tended to draw a kind of limit in the fifth century, the *Affirmation* effectively extends the Patristic consensus into the eighth century and the Second Council of Nicaea.

In this broadening of the limits of the patristic era—or perhaps in this greater definition concerning those limits—the *Affirmation* is also itself a major ecumenical advance towards the great Churches of Rome and the East, as I have already suggested. The *Affirmation* explicitly embraces Councils which Rome and the Orthodox also enthusiastically and explicitly accept as part of 'the received Tradition of the Church'. In a sense the *Affirmation* may extend and clarify of the content of the received Tradition, but it does so in a way that is entirely consistent with Anglican principles and with the living consensus of all the great Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The classical Hookerian and Anglican principles of consensus and Patristic authority are more truly understood and applied by the *Affirmation* than by the older Anglican Churches,

which all too often embraced doctrinal ambiguity and neglected the living Catholic consensus of East and West, which consensus does certainly extend to Nicaea II.

In brief, then, insofar as the *Affirmation* does something new, that something is consistent with basic and classic Anglican principles. We have an orthodoxy and catholicity that are somewhat new in their authoritative clarity, while also being quite consistent with Anglican theological method and principles. What is new provides an answer to the distortions that were at work in the official, Canterbury Communion in the 1970s. What is new also brings us into a deeper unity of faith with the great Churches of the East and West. And what is new does no violence to anything truly valuable in our tradition.

As my topic is the *Affirmation* I would like to conclude with a brief comment on an abuse of that document currently being made by some Anglo-Papalists. At the beginning of its final section, the *Affirmation* says that we 'should actively seek' full communion 'with all other Apostolic and Catholic Churches, provided that agreement in the essentials of Faith and Order first be reached.' This statement of aspiration has sophistically been read as justifying—as requiring, even—submission to Rome under the terms opened by *Anglicanorum coetibus*. This reading erases the *Affirmation's* reference to prior agreement in essentials. And this reading is sophistry because nothing has changed in Roman Catholic ecclesiology or in Roman understanding of the Petrine Office, since 1977. If James Orin Mote and Carmino de Catanzaro and Roland Palmer and Robert Sherwood Morse and those others who wrote and then approved the *Affirmation* could not simply become Roman Catholics in 1977, then there is no reason why they or any other person committed to the Continuing Church now should become Roman Catholic.

The text from the *Affirmation* which I have just read to you does not refer particularly to Rome, but rather speaks of 'other Apostolic and Catholic Churches'. It refers to Churches in the plural and it refers to 'other Apostolic and Catholic Churches' so as clearly to assert that Continuing Anglicans now, and other Anglicans earlier, also belong to an Apostolic and Catholic Church. But anyone who joins an Ordinariate under *Anglicanorum coetibus* must consent to the Roman position that Anglican orders are invalid, that our episcopal sacraments are null, and that we are not and never have been an Apostolic and Catholic Church. While not requiring any admission of subjective fault, Rome does require all Anglican converts to accept that objectively they have belonged to a schismatic and defective 'ecclesial body'. The *Affirmation* text does not require conversion to Rome because there has been no movement by Rome towards agreement with us in the essentials of Faith and Order. In fact the *Affirmation* also necessarily implies that no submission to Rome is permissible until Rome alters its rejection of our orders and of the fullness of our apostolicity and catholicity. The attempt to convert the text of the thoroughly Anglican and non-papalist *Affirmation* into justification for the current batch of Anglo-Papalist conversions is so misleading and so contrary to the plain text itself as to seem disingenuous. And that is yet another reason for us to admire the *Affirmation* and to rejoice in the sound foundation it provides us all.

Thank you very much for your attention.