

The following article, by Father Hans Küng, is available in its entirety at guardian.co.uk.

The Vatican thirst for power divides Christianity and damages Catholicism

October 27

After Pope Benedict XVI's offences against the Jews and the Muslims, Protestants and reform-oriented Catholics, it is now the turn of the Anglican communion, which encompasses some 77 million members and is the third largest Christian confession after the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches. Having brought back the extreme anti-reformist faction of the Pius X fraternity into the fold, Pope Benedict now hopes to fill up the dwindling ranks of the Catholic church with Anglicans sympathetic to Rome. Their conversion to the Catholic church is supposed to be made easier: Anglican priests and bishops shall be allowed to retain their standing, even when married. Traditionalists of the churches, unite! Under the cupola of St Peter's! The Fisher of Men is angling in waters of the extreme religious right.

... As I wrote in 1967, "a resumption of ecclesial community between the Catholic church and the Anglican church" would be possible, when "the Church of England, on the one side, shall be given the guarantee that its current autochthonous and autonomous church order under the Primate of Canterbury will be preserved fully" and when, "on the other side, the Church of England shall recognise the existence of a pastoral primacy of Petrine ministry as the supreme authority for mediation and arbitration between the churches." "In this way," I expressed my hopes then, "out of the Roman imperium might emerge a Catholic commonwealth."

But Pope Benedict is set upon restoring the Roman imperium. He makes no concessions to the Anglican communion. On the contrary, he wants to preserve the medieval, centralistic Roman system for all ages – even if this makes impossible the reconciliation of the Christian churches in fundamental questions. Evidently, the papal primacy – which Pope Paul VI admitted was the greatest stumbling block to the unity of the churches – does not function as the "rock of unity". The old-fashioned call for a "return to Rome" raises its ugly head again, this time through the conversion particularly of the priests, if possible, en masse. In Rome, one speaks of a half-million Anglicans and 20 to 30 bishops. And what about the remaining 76 million? This is a strategy whose failure has been demonstrated in past centuries and which, at best, might lead to the founding of a "uniate" Anglican "mini-church" in the form of a personal prelature, not a territorial diocese. But what are the consequences of this strategy already today?

First, a further weakening of the Anglican church. In the Vatican, opponents of ecumenism rejoice over the conservative influx. In the Anglican church, liberals rejoice over the departure of the catholicising troublemakers. For the Anglican church, this split means further corrosion. It is already suffering from the consequences of the heedless and unnecessary election of an avowed gay priest as bishop in the US, an event that split his own diocese and the whole Anglican communion. This friction has been enhanced by the ambivalent attitude of the church's leadership with respect to homosexual partnerships. Many Anglicans would accept a civil registration of such couples with wide-ranging legal consequences, for instance in inheritance law, and would even accept an ecclesiastical blessing for them, but they would not accept a

"marriage" in the traditional sense reserved for partnerships between a man and a woman, nor would they accept a right to adoption for such couples.

Second, the widespread disturbance of the Anglican faithful. The departure of Anglican priests and their re-ordination in the Catholic church raises grave questions for many Anglicans: are Anglican priests validly ordained? Should the faithful together with their pastor convert to the Catholic church?

Third, the irritation of the Catholic clergy and laity. Discontent over the ongoing resistance to reform is spreading to even the most faithful members of the Catholic church. Since the Second Vatican Council in the 60s, many episcopal conferences, pastors and believers have been calling for the abolition of the medieval prohibition of marriage for priests, a prohibition which, in the last few decades, has deprived almost half of our parishes of their own pastor. Time and again, the reformers have run into Ratzinger's stubborn, uncomprehending intransigence. And now these Catholic priests are expected to tolerate married, convert priests alongside themselves. When they want themselves to marry, should they first turn Anglican, and then return to the church? Just as we have seen over many centuries – in the east-west schism of the 11th century, in the 16th century Reformation and in the First Vatican Council of the 19th century – the Roman thirst for power divides Christianity and damages its own church. It is a tragedy.

A Question of Rights Inactive Priests & Sacramental Validity

Dr. Biechler, an emeritus professor of religion, is a member of ARCC's board of directors. He also holds a licentiate in canon law and is a longtime member of the Canon Law Society of America. He is the author of the following commentary, which appears at <http://arcc-catholic-rights.org/rights2.htm>

"A recent article in a Catholic paper reported how a midwest parish, closed by its bishop, successfully persuaded a married priest to celebrate the Eucharist there each week. An adjacent story told of a Catholic woman who has produced a brochure advising Catholics of the procedures they can follow in obtaining the services of married priests. The article claims there are nineteen canons which 'give married priests the continued power to minister the sacraments and lay people the right to receive them.' Are these people anarchists or can a serious case be made in canon law for their actions?"

--P.M.B., Lisle, IL

I think I read the same stories you did and am not at all surprised by your question. In the story I read, the reporter did not go on to cite any of the canons which allegedly legitimate public ecclesiastical ministry by married priests. The clear assumption of the articles is that the priests in question either have lost the clerical state by laicization or have been suspended (prohibited from exercising sacramental ministry) by their "attempting" marriage. These two categories would include nearly all of the 110,000 "former" priests in the world.

It is generally understood that the Code of Canon Law prohibits resigned priests, even those who remained unmarried, from exercising the normal ministerial functions reserved to priests. Since the sacramental priesthood cannot be lost -- a priest cannot be "unordained" -- those sacraments which require only Holy Orders for their validity, i.e.,

Holy Eucharist and the Anointing of the Sick, can be validly performed even by resigned or “non-clerical” priests. When sacramental validity depends upon jurisdiction in addition to Holy Orders, then the sacraments of Reconciliation and Confirmation for those in danger of death can be added to the list. Canon 976 specifically allows a suspended priest to grant absolution to a person in danger of death and Canon 883, n. 3 does the same for Confirmation. Canon 1335 goes even further in permitting those suspended from the exercise of the priestly ministry, as long as their suspension has not been juridically declared (an extremely rare procedure), to celebrate the sacraments, sacramentals and acts of governance whenever requested by a member of the faithful “for any just cause whatsoever.”

Thus we see how the Code of Canon Law implements its general rule given in Canon 213 which states that “the Christian faithful have the right to receive assistance from the sacred pastors out of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the sacraments.” The very last canon of the Code (1752) states that “the salvation of souls...is always the supreme law of the Church.” Canon 843 gives another general principle about the sacraments when it states that “the sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.” The clear intent of canon law is to insure that no one is denied any of the resources of spiritual ministry.

We must conclude that not only may a priestless parish request the services of a married priest, the priest himself ought to respond in a positive way if he is able. A Catholic group need not wait until the situation is dire before taking steps to find a suitable Eucharistic minister. In matters of this kind the broadest interpretation of the law should be used. In fact, there are good theological arguments supporting a priestless group’s right and duty to simply designate one of its members to preside over the celebration of its Eucharistic meal. The grace of God cannot be confined by the laws of men.

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