

Can Rome be Home? Yes and No Answers from 2 Canadian Anglicans.

Colleagues,

*[Marie here. Ed's pretty sick. He's had erratic blood sugars, headache, nausea, developing into double vision and weakness. Blood tests, CAT scan, ophthalmological examination for intraocular pressure are all normal. No one knows what's up. Duration now 12 days. Will see a neuroophthalmologist, but not for another 8 days. And with no diagnosis, there's no treatment. Suggestions welcome. Ed says: Even before that, you know what to do. Ed had this one put together before he got sick.]*A handful of Canadians get these ThTh postings. Some must even read them, for they respond now and again. Wayne Holst, who has supplied ThTh posts of his own in the past, told me the other day about the recent move to Rome by well-known Canadian Anglican Ian Hunter. I downloaded Hunter's story.

From what I've learned, Ian Hunter is Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Law at Western University in London, Ontario. He has written a biography of Malcolm Muggeridge, and a number of newspaper articles for national papers. One source told me: "His conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism won't have the effect John Henry Newman's did in 1845—when 150 Anglican clerics followed Newman to Rome—though in Hunter's circles he would cause ripples."

The only other person I know in Canadian Anglicanism—and a ThTh reader—is Archdeacon Michael E. Averyt, Diocese of Saskatchewan. I asked him to give me—and also to you on the listserve—his evaluation of Hunter's move and his "apologia pro vita sua" for

why he did so. [Today happens to be the Eve of St. Michael's and All Angels, so hearing from a Michael today is liturgically in order. Why not read the pericope for the day as well? It's proper too, Rev. 12:1-7, the christological cornerstone of that whole bizarre book. Clue: "Mi-cha-el" is a riddle question, expressed in Hebrew: "Who is like God?" The persecuted believers addressed in Revelation knew the One-Word answer to that code-word question. To wit, Whoever that was who threw out the accuser of sinners before the heavenly judge.]

Herewith Hunter's article and then Averyt's thoughts about it.

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

This Summer, I Swam the Tiber
by Ian Hunter

[This article first appeared in the September 2006 issue of Catholic Insight.]

This summer I swam the Tiber. Not literally, of course – but theologically, spiritually. I was received into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church.

Why?

Well, all such stories are long ones, and just as aspects of one's human birth remain mysterious, so also do aspects of one's spiritual rebirth, perhaps opaque beyond human explanation. One does not readily find language appropriate to such experiences. But here is what I know.

In terms of the mechanics, since last year I have taken instruction from a discerning and compassionate priest, to whom I owe much.

As a result of his instruction, and a growing personal conviction that there is no viable Protestant alternative, I am returning – definitely not to the religion of my father (a Calvinist Presbyterian) – but to the religion of my father's fathers.

Who can relate all that impels such a step? Three factors for sure: Rome's authority, historicity, and universality. But more even than these considerations, I have come to believe not just that the truth is to be found within Rome but – something quite different – that in a unique way, the truth is Rome. Incidentally, from within Rome's embrace I do not expect modernity to appear any more comely, but perhaps more bearable.

Unlike much of Protestantism, Rome is innately suspicious of feelings and enthusiasms; still, I can report that my predominant feeling was of a home-coming, of responding to a bell I had long heard toll, of taking my place at a table that had long been set, of finding spiritual companionship among those unashamed to profess the faith of the fathers.

Fifty years after his conversion to Rome, Maurice Baring wrote that it was the single decision about which he had experienced never a moment's regret. I pray that it may be so for me.

I leave the church of my adulthood – the Anglican Church – with mixed emotions; the Anglican ideal, which sought to incorporate the best of the Reformation into Catholicism, still seems to me a worthy – if today largely unnecessary – goal.

Spiritually, I have been nourished by Anglican liturgy, particularly the Book of Common Prayer which, alas, Anglicans

have almost completely abandoned. The trouble is that the more one becomes immersed in the Book of Common Prayer, its 39 Articles, its history, liturgy, and theology, the more inexorably one is led to Rome. This is why John Henry Newman memorably described Anglicanism as “.the halfway-house on the road to Rome”.

I loved, too, the splendid Anglican hymnody, and would be sorry to leave it had it not today been “revised” almost beyond recognition.

I leave with nothing but contempt for what passes for Anglican “leadership”, particularly its Bishops, and many of its clerics, those without seeming conviction about matters of faith or doctrine, although erupting regularly with predictable pronouncements about a handful of social issues; clergy without eloquence or spine when it comes to defending the Christian faith, pathetic creatures, really, who have depleted their spiritual patrimony in the vain hope of looking progressive. By contrast, I have noticed that Rome does not alter its message to suit shifting fashions, nor tailor its doctrine, however persistent or clamorous the public outcry against it may be.

I discovered too that I had grown to believe that only Rome can trace a direct line to the church’s rock, St. Peter. It was to St. Peter, after all, and to his descendants, that our Lord promised that the gates of hell would not prevail. Against most contemporary churches, the gates of Hell seem to be prevailing very well.

When Christians say (in the Nicene Creed) that they believe in “.one, holy, catholic and apostolic church”, they are making apostolicity a cornerstone of belief. I no longer comprehend how denominations which have severed themselves from the apostolic succession they profess, manage to recite the creed.

Nor is this some arcane objection: if the Anglican experience teaches anything, it is that a Church cut off from the apostolic succession, without a real (not a "Let's Pretend") hierarchy, and without the sacred magisterium to guard against heresy, cannot be expected either to preserve or to proclaim the faith once delivered to the saints. Only the Roman Catholic Church, the repository of teaching and traditions that date to our Lord's first disciples, ".the unmoved spectator of the thousand phases and fashions that have passed over our restless world" (Ronald Knox's phrase), has the guts, the inner wherewithal, to survive. Rome's claim to speak with authority in matters of faith and morals is the last refuge, or so I now believe, against the all-corrosive acid of postmodernism.

"Rome, sweet Rome, be you never [Ed. should that be "ever"?] so sinful, there's no place like Rome". So, mockingly, wrote the wisest man I ever knew, Malcolm Muggeridge. A few years later, on November 27, 1982 to be exact, and nearly 80 years old, Muggeridge knelt and was received into the Catholic Church. When I asked him why, he said: "The day will come, dear boy, when you must decide whether to die within the church or outside the church. I have decided to die within the Church." A few years later, he did. And so may I, I pray, when the silence of eternity beckons.

That doughty old warrior, Hilaire Belloc, once wrote to a friend that the Catholic Church was like a landfall at sea, at first glimpsed hazily and only through the mist: ".but the nearer it is seen, the more it is real, the less imaginary: the more direct and external its voice, the more indisputable its representative character . The metaphor is not that men fall in love with it: the metaphor is that they discover home. 'This was what I long sought', they say. 'This was my need'."

I am conscious of a special debt that I owe Catholics, some

virtually unknown to me, who have told me that they had prayed for this day. Such prayers flood the universe with light. I also acknowledge a Christian reading group to which I have long belonged; since all of us admire C. S. Lewis and since none of us is getting younger, we call ourselves "The Wrinklings". In those long droughts when my own Church provided little or no spiritual nourishment ("The hungry sheep look up and are not fed", I used to mutter through clenched teeth on innumerable Sunday mornings), I was invariably fed by these – my Christian brothers.

But above all, first, last, and always, Deo gratias.

Ian Hunter

A Response to 'This Summer, I Swam the Tiber'

There are many legitimate reasons for leaving the Anglican Church and being received into the Church of Rome. I doubt that a week-if not a day-goes by without my considering that action, and open letters such as this one keep me from hiding from the question as to why I, a conservative Anglo-Catholic churchman, continue sunning myself on the banks of the Thames with its garbage polluted waters. But if I do decide to brave the Tiber, I want to be sure it is for the correct reasons.

Mr. Hunter raises several issues in his open letter explaining why he has left the Anglican Communion and been received into the Church of Rome. Obviously much thought has gone into this decision, although the logic is not always clear in his statement.

There are two separate concerns. The first is the decision to leave one ecclesiastical body; the second is to be received into another. One might assume the reasoning behind the two

decisions would be mirrored in the two, but such is not the case.

The apparent cause for leaving the Anglican communion has to do with 'what passes for Anglican "leadership"...those without seeming conviction about matters of faith or doctrine...clergy without eloquence or spine when it comes to defending the Christian faith...in the vain hope of looking progressive.' He continues with the claim that 'Rome does not alter its message to suit shifting fashions, nor tailor its doctrine, however persistent or clamorous the public outcry against it may be.' That may indeed be his experience of Rome, but a cursory examination of church history as reported by such 'conservative' Roman Catholic historians as Eamon Duffy should disabuse him of that fiction. It is a temptation at this point to engage in some hearty Rome-bashing by citing specific examples, but that is neither appropriate nor helpful, and only one without sin dare cast a stone. What is of concern here is that Mr. Hunter seems to be looking for a perfect institution, whose clergy and leadership are perfectly orthodox in faith, morals, and conduct. As long as there are human beings involved in the institution, this is an impossibility, and one wonders what will happen when Mr. Hunter discovers this in his own experience.

Anglicanism, like Rome, condemns the Donatist heresy: the efficacy of the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments according to the Gospel is not hindered by the unworthiness of its ministers, and in that condemnation both Communion recognize the need for this to be clearly stated, because each knows their clergy to be fallible, human beings. Perhaps what really concerns Mr. Hunter is that Rome has a more effective and efficient way of dealing with errant clergy, whereas the Anglican machinery for exercising discipline in such matters has become so rusty with disuse as

to be unusable-a legitimate point.

Lack of discipline may be the reason for leaving Canterbury, but the reason Mr. Hunter opts for Rome is its 'authority, historicity, and universality...Rome is Truth.' 'Only Rome can trace a direct line to the church's rock, St. Peter.' Again, we have an expression of the desire for the perfect institution. Just what is that direct line? A hand on pate succession? An institutional continuity? A consistent apostolicity of teaching? Again, a study of history will demonstrate the logical difficulties here in making such a claim.

It is curious that nowhere in his letter does Mr. Hunter state that the Anglican Church in its formularies (the Book of Common Prayer or the Articles of Religion) has abandoned or contradicted the faith. In fact he speaks positively about them as leading 'inexorably' to Rome. They may lead one to the catholic faith, but to think they lead to Roman Catholicism is erroneous, as may be seen in the Article relevant to this discussion.

Article XIX of the XXXIX Articles of Religion carefully does not bind the visible church to any ecclesial body, institution, or polity: 'The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all things that of necessity are requisite to the same.' In other words, the visible Church is dynamic, it comes into being as a result of a particular activity, viz. when the Gospel is proclaimed and heard and when the Sacraments administered and received according to that Gospel. The operative authority behind this activity is the promise and command of Christ, who chooses to work through the Holy Spirit in the proclaimed word and the administered Sacraments.

I wonder if the authors of this article were thinking about the story of Moses and the seventy elders. Two didn't show up for their ordination service, but God's Spirit fell on them anyway. Anglicans admit that God might very well be working in other ecclesial bodies with different polities and formularies than its own-and working just as effectively 'outside the camp' as within. This is not simple charity, but a theological principle. Like the Eastern Orthodox Churches, we can state with confidence in certain instances that 'This is church,' but we are more reticent to say of others, 'This is not church.' Even conservatives in present day Rome are reluctant to repeat baldly the claims of the Medieval Church that outside of the church which has the successor of Peter as its head there is no salvation. The church's rock is Christ, not St. Peter: Truth is Jesus, not Rome. The church does not exist by the 'authority, historicity or universality' of an institution, but by virtue of our Lord's promise attached to the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Unless Mr. Hunter can demonstrate that the Anglican Church does not in its polity and official teaching proclaim the Gospel in its purity and rightly administer the Sacraments and therefore unable to witness to the Truth, there is no reason to swim the Tiber because 'Truth is Rome'. Scholars tell us that several forms of church polity can be identified in the New Testament. Who can say definitively that only one is de Deo, and the others are false? At the first council, recorded in the Book of Acts, it was St. James that presided, not St. Peter, and the resolution in the conflict between Ss. Peter and Paul in the latter's favour puts paid to any concept of Petrine infallibility.

In summary: *to leave a communion in search of a perfect leadership and clergy is to doom oneself to a never ending search and inevitable disappointment, if not despair. To tie the authority and efficacy of the Gospel to a particular polity*

or institution or anything less than the very promise of Christ is to construct an idol: our faith is in Christ, not an ecclesiastical institution.

*What then would be legitimate reasons for leaving the Anglican Communion? Certainly official repudiation of its understanding of the Gospel as outlined in its formularies would be grounds to leave (assuming those formularies to be true expressions of the Gospel). Yes, there are those in its hierarchy who do contradict its teachings, but that does not of itself destroy the whole. Those who see the truth are obligated to witness to that truth, identify hypocrisy, and work for the reformation of discipline of such individuals rather than running away from the church in its hour of need. Such are also called to suffer the blows for remaining steadfast in their witness to the truth. A mark of the church has never been success, but suffering. Prof Schroeder can say more here about the triumph of the *theologia crucis* over *theologia gloriae*. Being thrown out of the church for one's witness to the truth would also be a legitimate reason for leaving a particular communion.*

Another reason for leaving has to do with the human condition. Because of our fallen nature, we are not always able to see and perceive the Gospel in the proclamation and sacramental ministrations of a particular situation. In these circumstances God works through the scandal of denominationalism to bring all types of personalities and tastes within His saving embrace. But to leave one body for another for this reason is not to pass a judgement on the former's Gospel witness, but merely on one's capacity to overcome certain adiaphoristic barriers to apprehend it. And sometimes individuals in an institution-who might even be acting in the name of the institution-have hurt us so badly that we can no longer hear its Gospel proclamation and we feel the need for our own salvation to separate ourselves to avoid the sins of anger, uncharitableness and the

unwillingness to forgive, so that we can still receive the Gospel proclamation and administration which will eventually, in God's time, transform us and empower us to forgive.

For such in these circumstances Rome may indeed be the place for them-not because she possesses an infallible hierarchy with an unbroken papal pedigree-but because in her preaching and sacramental ministry one is better able to hear God's word and receive the grace one needs to grasp hold of Christ's promise.

In closing, a parenthetical, personal note. In the words above I've tried to be impersonal, sticking to theological principle and reasoning, though I am aware that understanding is not easily separated from the affections. Having personally experienced a major schism in another ecclesial body and subsequently left it for the Anglican Communion for very specific reasons, I am greatly pained by what is now facing the Anglican Church. I know firsthand the damage this does, not only to personal relationships and family, but also to one's faith and spirituality. For those like me, to whom the church means so much, it is a crucifixion to have to give up our desire-our lust-to belong to a 'perfect' institution. But if Christ calls us to give this up, it is only that by entering more fully into the mystery of His passion and cross we might come to rely only on Him, and nothing else.

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