

Watching Global Anglicanism Fall Apart

What was most noticeable about last year's prayer-and-photo op at the Vatican was the lack of meaningful media commentary. The commentators were unable to interpret the symbolism of a Roman Pope greeting an Anglican King. When it comes to history and tradition, we in the Anglosphere are now like goldfish, drifting mindlessly around our fishbowl, insensible to who we are, where we came from, where we are going; or like Eliot's hollow, stuffed men, leaning together, headpiece filled with straw (alas).

The insensibility is on both sides. On the Catholic side, there is the catechetical failure to inculcate the teachings of Vatican II in the Church—broadly—and poorly understood messages from the papacy since Paul VI. John Paul II, Benedict, and Francis were very different men, whose respective pontificates seemed to confuse the faithful. Many of us believe Leo is the right man, at the right time, to guide the faithful through their confusion.

On the Anglican side, there is the perversity of confusing Biblical faith with the gender-and-identity zeitgeist which has deranged the Anglosphere since the sexual revolution. An unfortunate consequence of this zeitgeist has been the "Great Feminisation" of the Church, elevating women to its highest offices while simultaneously adopting a managerial model of ministry in which the primary goal is not preaching the Gospel but creating nesting opportunities for self-actualising women and practising homosexuals.

The paradox is that, until recently, Catholics and Anglicans understood each other as siblings in the Universal Church—One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic. For Catholics, the future of this understanding depends on assimilating the teachings of Vatican II. For Anglicans, it depends on reconciling its commitment to the deranging zeitgeist with its historical claim to be part of the Universal Church.

Last year's prayer-and-photo op was staged for a reason. Behind the symbolism of a Roman Pope greeting an Anglican King lies the historical reality of the English Reformation, which did not

occur because Henry wanted a divorce but because Catherine would not give him one. In a fundamental sense, the buck still stops with Leo and Charles, monarchs of different kinds.

Leo is Supreme Head of a global Church with a great commission, although the nature of his power is regulated. His challenge is negotiating the consequences of his predecessor's widely misunderstood "Who am I to judge" comments about homosexuals. Those in thrall to the zeitgeist took the comments to mean that God is non-judgmental, which is incorrect.

Charles is Supreme Governor of a national Church whose global claims were wholly dependent on the colonial project. With de-colonisation, global Anglicanism now depends on each national Church understanding what One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic means. If the photo-op's message is "Let's do this", what is "this" which must be done?

The arc of contemporary Anglican-Catholic relations begins with Catholic emancipation in the 1800s. The United Kingdom's Catholic Relief Act of 1829 removed restrictions on Roman Catholics, allowing Rome to restore a hierarchy of Catholic bishops/dioceses and priests/parishes in the UK. The Oxford Movement of the 1830s encouraged Anglicans to reflect on their Catholic heritage, which drew attention to the nature of their apostolic claims. Until recently, John Henry Newman's conversion in the 1840s—and eventual elevation to cardinal, saint, now Doctor of the Church—kept the issue of Anglican faith, order, and apostolic succession alive.

In *Apostolicae curae* (1896), Leo XIII declared Anglican orders "absolutely null and utterly void". While the Anglican Communion made no official reply, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York responded with *Saepius officio* (1897). The Pope had deemed Anglican orders invalid because he found the Edwardine Ordinals deficient in form and intention—he believed they created a different

priesthood from the Catholic sacrificial one—which reduced Anglican ordination to something ecclesiastical rather than sacramental. He raised similar objections to the consecration of Anglican bishops. Using the measure of an Ordinal’s form and intention, Leo dismissed the idea of apostolic succession in the Anglican Church because its validity was lost in the sixteenth century. (My Sacramental Theology lecturer—a Passionist—once asked me a difficult question, whether Archbishop Matthew Parker was a receptionist—that is, in what spirit did he receive his episcopal consecration in 1559.)

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York—the authors of *Saeptius Officio*—noticed that the required references to sacrificial priesthood at the heart of Rome’s argument did not exist in the ancient ordination liturgies of the Latin rite or, indeed, the Eastern Catholic ordination liturgies which Rome considered valid. They believed the differences between Anglican and Catholic views of what happens during ordination and consecration are matters of tradition or custom and indicate no intention to exclude a sacrificing priesthood. During the Laying on of Hands, both Anglicans and Catholics invoke the Holy Spirit—*Veni Sancte Spiritus*, “Come, Holy Spirit”, is always sung in honour of the Trinity’s Third Person. As John 3:8 reminds us, “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

The mystery of what happens to the bread and wine during consecration is not confined by language. The term *Transubstantiation* was invented in 1215, but the term *Real Presence* is more appropriate. As Queen Elizabeth I is reported to have said:

’Twas Christ the Word that spake it,
He took bread and brake it,
And what that Word did make it,
That I believe and take it.

In a March 1981 Lenten address at Westminster Abbey, Robert Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury, described how the arc of Anglican-Catholic relations developed in the 1900s after *Apostolicae curae* and *Saeptius officio*. He began with the fate of the Malines Conversations—five informal ecumenical conversations between 1921 and 1927—which explored possibilities for the corporate reunion between the two Churches. Despite Rome’s attachment to Transubstantiation—rather than Real Presence—its tacit recognition of the Anglican ecclesial reality was remarkable.

The bishops of the 1930 Lambeth Conference were particularly disappointed, Runcie reports:

because the approach of the Malines Conversations had been set aside: that approach had encouraged the Anglican Church to think about being united, not absorbed. At the penultimate Malines Conversation in 1925 Cardinal Mercier had read a paper “L’Église anglicane uni non absorbée” ... Some details of the paper, now known to have been written by Dom Lambert Beauduin, seem rather fanciful today: his stress on the pallium, a woollen stole blessed by the pope for archbishops, which caused no end of prelatical rivalry in the Middle Ages; his contention that progress towards unity would be wrecked over the questions of the precedence of archbishops of Canterbury over cardinals or vice versa—Cardinal Basil Hume and I will not lose much sleep over this. Nor did he really take seriously enough the indigenous English Roman Catholic tradition: on his view the new sees created at and after the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850 would simply be suppressed.

Yet despite its serious flaws—which were seen by the Lambeth Fathers in 1930—the paper remains significant, because it is the first clear recognition that the Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound to seek a unity which respects their autonomous tradition. It is the first systematic essay on the *kind* of unity Rome and Canterbury seek. The nineteenth century debate had focused on “Anglican Orders”. In the eighteenth century an archbishop of Canterbury thought of a union with an *Independent* Gallican Church. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries both sides saw unity in terms of the Crown imposing a statutory uniformity. So, despite its oversimplifications, Beauduin’s essay makes its point: we cannot tolerate an Anglican Church *separated* from Rome and we cannot tolerate an Anglican Church *absorbed* by Rome: The Anglican Church, united not absorbed.

Runcie poses two questions in conclusion. What would the relations be between the Vatican and the various Synods of the Anglican Communion? What is involved (and not involved) in an Anglican acceptance of the Bishop of Rome’s universal ministry? The latter cannot be answered until Anglicans and Catholics reach some consensus on what acceptance involves.

As the result of a meeting in 1966 between Paul VI and Michael Ramsay, the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was established. Its mission was to examine the doctrines separating the two Churches, to see whether

there were areas of consensus which could open a path to eventual reunion. When its work was completed, John Paul II and Robert Runcie set up a new Commission—ARCIC II—after a meeting in 1982. Over the decades, ARCIC produced a number of agreed statements and elucidations on subjects important to both Churches.

While such high-level ecumenical dialogue was met with hostility from many Catholics who identify as “traditionalist” and many Anglicans who identify as “orthodox”, it grew from the spirit of Vatican II. And most Catholic hierarchies in the world gave enthusiastic endorsements to ARCIC agreements. Despite the enthusiasm, the Vatican was careful to point out that the ordination of women was an insurmountable barrier, since there was no apparent possibility of reversal in any province that had already ordained women, and neither was there any possibility of a Church that ordained women achieving unity with Rome. Also, from a Catholic perspective, ARCIC was fatally compromised in 2003 by the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson, an openly gay man in a non-celibate relationship.

The end of overly-optimistic or blinkered ecumenism was not a cause for despondency, however, since the work of ARCIC has been summarised by a new body, the International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM), which released an agreed statement, *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* (Growing Together) in 2007. The statement is a comprehensive, measured, and hopeful summary of the issues. When considering ministry and authority, both Churches agree that:

- In *Apostolicae Curiae*, Leo XIII ruled against the validity of Anglican orders. The question of validity remains a fundamental obstacle to the recognition of Anglican ministries by Rome. In the light of ARCIC’s agreements on the Eucharist and ministry, and in the official responses of both Communion, there is evidence of a common intention in ordination and celebration of the Eucharist.

- In the twentieth century there was much discussion across the whole Christian family on the question of the ordination of women. Rome points to the unbroken tradition of the Church in not ordaining women, and John Paul II expressed the conviction that “the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women”. After careful reflection and debate, a growing

number of Anglican Churches have proceeded to ordain women to the presbyterate and some also to the episcopate. They have done so, sometimes despite strong differences of belief within those provinces, in the conviction that there are no theological objections to such a development, and that they are not departing from the traditional understanding of apostolic ministry, or the nature of ministry as set forth in agreed ARCIC statements.

- Anglicans and Catholics share a considerable agreement on Church authority, although there are a few remaining issues, including the binding authority of ecumenical councils, and the infallibility of the teaching office of the Church. Anglicans and Catholics continue to reflect on the relationship between local and universal in the Church’s life, and in particular: on the place and authority of regional and national structures; on the place and role of the laity at every level of the Church’s life, particularly in relation to the councils and synods of the Church; on the relationship between collegial and synodical gatherings; and on the place of agreed ARCIC statements in the Church’s mind.

- The question of whether the Anglican Communion is open to instruments of oversight that would allow decisions to be reached which, in certain circumstances, would bind the members of every province is an important and topical one. In turn, it has been asked whether in the Catholic Church enough provision has been made to ensure consultation between the Bishop of Rome and local churches prior to the making of important decisions affecting either a local church or the whole Church.

- While some Anglicans are coming to value the ministry of the Bishop of Rome as a sign and focus of unity, there continue to be questions about whether the ministry exercised by the Bishop of Rome exists within the Church by divine right, about the nature of papal infallibility, and about the jurisdiction ascribed to the Bishop of Rome as universal primate.

- Anglicans and Catholics both believe in the indefectibility of the Church, and that the Holy Spirit leads the Church into all truth. For Catholics, indefectibility is secured by the faith that—in specific circumstances, and under certain precise conditions—those with a ministry of oversight, assisted by the Holy Spirit, can come to a judgment regarding matters of faith or morals that is preserved from

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error. This is what is meant by the Church teaching infallibly. Anglicans—believing the indefectibility of the Church is preserved by fidelity to the Scriptures, the catholic creeds, and the sacraments and the ministry of bishops—do not assign an infallible ministry to any group or individual within its life. They hold that doctrine, however proposed or defined, must be received by the body of believers to whom it is addressed as consonant with Scripture and Tradition.

Ultimately, Anglicans and Catholics must address that prayer-and-photo op at the Vatican in late 2025. By virtue of his office, as Supreme Head of the Universal Church, there is Leo's need to inculcate the teachings of Vatican II in the Church—broadly—and manoeuvre the faithful through their confusion from the mixed messages of John Paul II, Benedict, and Francis. By virtue of his office, as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, there is Charles's need to reconcile Biblical faith with the deranging gender and identity zeitgeist.

It will be easier for Leo than for Charles, because Catholics take Natural Law more seriously than Anglicans, who have fallen prey to the lie that Synods can legislate the Church's faith, as if Christian belief is an artefact of Positive Law. When the Provinces of the Global North consecrated themselves to the deranging zeitgeist—to elevating women to their highest offices, to adopting a managerial model of ministry focused not on preaching the Gospel but on creating nesting opportunities for self-actualising women and practising homosexuals—they wilfully divorced themselves from a Christian anthropology of personhood.

In this regard, the appointment of Dame Sarah Mullally as Archbishop of Canterbury has sent an unfortunate but entirely predictable message to those committed to Christian unity and Biblical faith. Obviously, Mullally is a DEI hire, appointed to be the face of a progressive, pen-pushing hierarchy—the spiritual facade of the intersectional nanny state—which protects itself by hiding behind managerial, bureaucratic processes. For example, in 2024, the English House of Bishops issued an update on the process by which the Church might bless same-sex relationships and recognise civil same-sex marriages among the clergy. The bishops declined to comment on the theology/morality of this, they simply noted what percentages of votes in Synod were required to legislate it.

In relation to same-sex relationships, Mullally has said: "It is time for us to reflect on our tradition and scripture and together say how we can offer a response that is about it being inclusive love." In relation to LGBT+ people in the church, she has

said: "What we have to remember is this is about people, and the Church seeks to demonstrate love to all, because it reflects the God of love, who loves everybody." In relation to abortion, Mullally has said: "I would describe my approach to this issue as pro-choice rather than pro-life although if it were a continuum I would be somewhere along it moving towards pro-life when it relates to my choice and then enabling choice when it related to others." In other words, she would not have an abortion, herself, but will empower others to.

In 2016, Justin Welby tasked Mullally with investigating the Church's safeguarding procedures (the Elliott Review). Gilo is a survivor of clerical abuse from the 1970s whose case led to the review. On hearing of Mullally's appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury, Gilo's reaction was mixed: "From a survivor's and safeguarding point of view, I would say it's a rather disappointing day." His initial experience of Mullally was positive, but after later meetings he said:

my experience was not positive at all. She silenced and blanked. I don't know whether she was instructed by others to close down key questions, but certainly in response to key questions about the Elliott review, she just blanked and silenced. I've heard from others that that's been a pattern.

Gilo said he and other victims of abuse would have preferred other bishops on the shortlist:

There are notable bishops ... determined to see a cultural shift, particularly around accountability and transparency and integrity, right at the very top of the church, in the senior tier. I think that sadly, Bishop Mullally is the continuity candidate after Archbishop Welby. I don't think she particularly represents a desire or willingness to bring about accountability.

In her address shortly after being announced as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Mullally promised to "continue to listen to survivors, care for the vulnerable, and foster a culture of safety and well-being for all ... Safeguarding is everyone's business. But for those of us in senior leadership, it carries an added weight of accountability." If Gilo is telling the truth, Mullally is not.

Michael Giffin is a retired Anglican priest in the Diocese of Sydney. He trained for Anglican orders at St Paul's National Seminary, Kensington, under the House of Bishops, and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.