

# THE ANGLICAN PATRIMONY AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION:

## Reflections of a pre-Vatican II Convert

*Rev. John Jay Hughes*

Let me start by inviting you to take a walk with me down Memory Lane. Those of you who were brought up, as I was, on the American Book of Common Prayer of 1928, the year I was born, will recall that on Sundays we used to pray the *Gloria in excelsis*, the “Glory be to God on High,” as a thanksgiving, after receiving Communion. On Sundays in Advent and Lent, however, we replaced it with the Eucharistic hymn by St. Thomas Aquinas, “O saving victim, opening wide / The gate of heaven to man below.” As you may also recall, the second verse of that hymn is a doxology. It begins as follows: “All praise and thanks to thee ascend / For evermore blest one in three.”

Until age five, when I started to learn how to read, I was unaware of the “t” on the word “blest” (an archaic form of “blesséd”). I was firmly convinced that the words were a prayer. We were asking God to bless not all people, but one in three. That seemed to me entirely reasonable. Given the magnitude of human iniquity – clear to me from having been reminded so often of my own iniquities – we could hardly ask God to bless everyone, I thought. But we could, at least, ask him to bless one in three.

Now you may be wondering why I have related this example of childhood theological speculation. I have done so in the hope that it will help you understand why I have turned out so badly.

After that important caveat, I would like to turn to this new evangelization which we hear so much about. What is it? To answer that question we must first take a brief look at Church history.

From its first beginnings, the Church founded by Jesus Christ has been a missionary Church. One of the first words that Jesus speaks in the gospel according to John is “come.” And in Matthew’s

gospel his final command is “Go.”

Toward the end of chapter one in John, John the Baptist sees Jesus walking by and says: “Look! There is the Lamb of God.” When the Baptist’s two disciples start to follow Jesus, he asks them what they are looking for; to which the two reply with another question: “Where do you stay?” “Come,” Jesus answers, “and see.” (John 1:36-39). And the final word which Jesus speaks in Matthew’s gospel is “Go – Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19). We know that the early Christians obeyed this command to be evangelists, even at the price of martyrdom.

A big change came in the fourth century, when persecution ended and the Church became no longer small and scattered, but over time strong, powerful, and a part of the Establishment. This led to attempts by emperors and kings to control the Church. The central concern of Church leadership during much of the Middle Ages, at least in the West, was not missionary outreach, but the struggle for Church freedom. Franciscans and Dominicans evangelized, true. But the theology they developed, scholasticism, was not a missionary theology. It was created, as the name indicates, by and for professional theologians, pursuing subtle theological questions with great acumen.

In the sixteenth century the German reformer Martin Luther protested with explosive force against this inward-looking theology. Luther’s ferocious single-mindedness, combined with the tragic blindness of Church leadership in his day, brought about not the renewal of the Church for which Luther contended, but the departure of whole nations from Catholic unity and the setting up of altar against altar. The consequence, for Catholics, was the development of a fortress mentality. Drawbridges were raised and the Church’s fortress walls strengthened against outsiders. Obedience rather than love became the supreme virtue.

There were, of course, always exceptions: Philip Neri and Ignatius Loyola in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, St. Vincent de Paul in the century following, and the great missionary pioneers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the latter were members of religious orders, charged with

planting the Church in distant countries, where it had no roots.

This brief and cursory overview is over-simplified, of course. But I can testify from personal experience that the fortress mentality was still alive and well as recently as the 1950s – the decade preceding the Second Vatican Council. In those years I was still an Anglican. The Catholic Church I encountered was a private club in which outsiders were not welcome. Herewith three examples:

On an Atlantic crossing aboard the *Queen Mary* in 1950 I attended one of the many Masses celebrated daily in the first class lounge. I made the Latin responses, but did not communicate. The celebrant, bishop of a Midwestern diocese, encountered me on deck later that day and struck up a conversation. He failed to understand my statement that I was an Anglican seminarian, for he asked whether I was in philosophy or theology. I explained that we did not have this division, emphasizing that I was an Anglican.

“Oh,” he responded with obvious displeasure. “But you were answering my Mass.”

“Yes,” I replied, “our own Mass is much like yours. And I know Latin.”

“Oh,” he snorted angrily, turning immediately on his heel and walking away. I was all of twenty-two.

During my subsequent studies at New York’s (Episcopalian) General Seminary, my field education involved shepherding a group of Episcopalian public school children to their weekly religious instruction under the “released time” provision of state law. Waiting with me was always a young Catholic priest, who was there to gather his larger contingent of Catholic children. He invariably crossed to the other side of the street to avoid contact with a heretic. And a few years later, after ordination, I experienced similar treatment from a well known monsignor in Tucson, Arizona, who regularly refused to return a friendly greeting from me or any of the other Episcopalian clergy in town.

I do not claim that this is the whole story. Others, I am sure, could cite evidence of better Catholic attitudes pre-Vatican II,

and greater charity toward outsiders. But my experiences may help explain something which Pope John XXIII said to his priest-secretary secretary on the eve of the Council: "I have never had a single doubt about the faith. But one thing bothers me. For two thousand years Christ has been hanging on the cross with outstretched arms. And how much progress have we made in proclaiming the good news? How can we best communicate his authentic teaching to people today?" Failure of the Church's mission to win more people for the gospel of Jesus Christ was at the heart of John's plan for the Council. That explains why he wanted a pastoral and a missionary Council, and not doctrinal one.

"The goal of all the Council's work," Pope John said as the Council preparations began, "is to make the Church's face shine with new light. The Church's countenance must manifest the pure and simple qualities given to her by her divine founder ... which alone can enable her to appeal to and win people today." And in his celebrated opening address to the Council the Pope said: "The main point of this Council will not be to debate this or that article of basic Church doctrine. .... This authentic doctrine has to be studied and expounded in the light of the research methods and the language of modern thought. For the substance of the ancient deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented in another." What Pope John XXIII looked for from the Council, he said often, was "a new Pentecost."

What actually followed in the decades after the Council was something quite different: not dynamic missionary outreach to the world, but inward looking debates about structural reform within the Church, including demands for more democratic forms of Church governance.

Such demands were not contrary to the mind of the Pope who called the Council. Pope John's own style of governance was collegial. He even made all his enemies cardinals. But collegiality within the Church was something he took for granted in a family in which all were brothers and sisters, though with different roles and functions. Pope John's primary concern was always missionary outreach: proclaiming the Church's timeless faith, and the good

news of God's unmerited love, in language and with methods understandable and persuasive to people today. So what we call today "the new evangelization" is simply implementation of the program which Pope John XXIII intended for the Council from the day he called it.

The Popes who followed the Council encouraged and modeled this evangelistic task. Pope Paul VI began his 1975 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* by speaking about "the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today," saying that he wanted "to encourage our brethren in their mission as evangelizers, in order that, in this time of uncertainty and confusion, they may accomplish this task with ever increasing love, zeal, and joy." And later in the same document we find the oft quoted sentence: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers; and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." (No. 41)

Pope John Paul II, now Blessed John Paul, modeled the task of evangelism by traveling the whole world proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, even at the cost of neglecting Church administration, in which he was never particularly interested. And who can forget the witness of perseverance in discipleship which this Pope gave in the closing years and months of his life, despite failing health and the loss of physical powers?

Pope Benedict XVI has made evangelism central in his pontificate. On June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the eve of the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul, Pope Benedict established the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization to offer, he said, "appropriate answers so that the entire Church, allowing herself to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit [there's Pope John's "new Pentecost" again] may be able to present herself to the contemporary world with a new missionary impulse in order to promote a new evangelization."

What can our Anglican patrimony contribute to this new evangelization? Three things at least:

- Deeply reverent, prayerful celebration of the vernacular liturgy given to us by the Church, enriched by Anglican formularies approved by the Holy See;

- Our rich treasure of hymnody and other sacred music; and finally
- Sound preaching, inspired and permeated by Scripture, that joyfully and enthusiastically proclaims the good news of the Gospel: that God loves sinners with a love that will never let us go.

Let me speak briefly about each of these three.

I don't like to speak about myself. If I do so, it is only to bear witness to what I myself have experienced in a now fairly long life. From 1956 to 1959 I was Rector of a small Episcopal parish in Bisbee, Arizona, a mining town close to the Mexican border. A man who was then new to Anglicanism (he is long since a Catholic, I am happy to say) remarked to me after a Sunday liturgy: "Father, you really love that service." He was referring to the reverence and devotion with which I led the rite. I didn't learn that from Catholics. I learned it from my father and grandfather, both Anglican priests. I learned it also from Bishop William Thomas Manning of New York, a hero of my youth whose equal the Episcopal Church has not seen since his death in 1949; and from many other holy Anglican priests who taught me almost all the Catholic truth that I know, even now. Still today, when I celebrate Mass in a church where the people do not know me, the most common remarks at the church door is: "Thank you, Father for a beautiful Mass."

Before I leave this subject of liturgy, I am going to say something which, I fear, will upset some people. I'll say it anyway, because it needs to be said. If we narrow our focus from our Anglican to our Anglo-Catholic patrimony, we see two separate strands. There is the reserved, quintessentially English strand of John Henry Newman. And there is the flamboyant, in-your-face, Italianate strand of Newman's contemporary and frequent *bête noir* Frederick William Faber.

Anglicans and former Anglicans who insist today on wearing Italianate "fiddle-back" chasubles and maniples are in the Faber tradition, trying to prove that they are "really Catholic." Brothers, once you are in communion with the successor Peter, you don't have

to prove anything. If Newman wore those vestments, it is simply because in his day the church furnishers offered no others. Were he alive today, there is surely little question that Newman would choose to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice in vestments which have a longer history, and which because of their ample cut and pleasing folds are more beautiful.

Moreover, if you belong to the Ordinariate, your first choice among liturgical forms should be those Anglican ones approved by the Holy See. The whole purpose of the Ordinariate was to bring the treasures of Anglican liturgy and spirituality into the Catholic Church. It is well known that Pope Benedict and those who came with him to England from Rome in September 2011 were blown away by the beauty of Anglican Evensong which they attended in Westminster Abbey. Why can't we have that too, they asked? Upon his return to Rome, the Pope invited the Westminster Abbey boys' choir to sing at the Pallium Mass on June 29<sup>th</sup> of this year. If you spurn that liturgical tradition, preferring for instance the largely silent Tridentine Mass, then you don't belong in the Ordinariate. You should be in the Pastoral Provision, or be an ordinary Latin Rite priest like myself.

Unlike most Catholics, I understand where you are coming from. Many of you have spent years, some of you decades, fighting Anglican bishops and other Church authorities who have departed from Christian and Catholic belief. Your default position in confronting Church authority is opposition. That is not the default position of Catholics. Now that you have joined us, drop your fighting stance. Relax, and enjoy the rich treasures to which you are now heirs.

This brings me to the treasure of our hymnody. Recently I came across a noteworthy quote from an archbishop of Paris – I think after World War II -- who remarked: "Every Sunday 30,000 sermons are preached in France; and the people still believe." Friends, every Sunday some 17,000 out of perhaps 18,500 Catholic parishes in the United States offer God and the worshippers music which is hardly above the level of finger painting in the realm of visual art – and can we wonder that few of the people sing? The Lord God, whom we are there to worship, deserves better. So do our long-suffering people.

After more than 52 years as a Catholic, the one thing I still miss from my Anglican past is the glorious congregational singing of hymns – too few of which have made it into the Catholic repertory:

“Praise, my soul, the king of heaven”

“When I survey the wondrous cross”

Newman’s glorious “Praise to the holiest in the height”

“Abide with me, fast falls the eventide” (Mother Teresa’s favorite)

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds, in a believer’s ear”

“O Jesus, thou art standing, outside the fast closed door”

“Just as I am, without one plea / But that thy blood was shed for me”

“Let all mortal flesh keep silence / And in fear and trembling stand”

I could go on and on. But I think you get the message.

That brings me finally to preaching. Many people are allergic to that word today. “Don’t preach at me,” they say. This is because almost all the sermons or homilies they hear are exhortations to do better. It was an Anglican, William R. Inge, Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London from 1911 to 1934, who said: “The gospel was not good advice, but good news.”

Dean Inge was right. His younger colleague at the same cathedral, Canon V.A. Demant, explains it thus:

Tell people only what they must do, and you will numb them into despair; you will turn the gospel into a shabby replica of the world’s irreligious and nagging moralism, with its oceanfuls of good advice. But tell them what they are, of their dignity as made in the image of God, and that their sins are wicked perversions of their nature; . . . tell them that the world with all its horrors is still

God's world, though its true order is upside down; tell them that they can do all things through Christ, because in him all the powers of their nature are directed to fruition . . . and you will help to revive hope in this dispirited generation.

Friends, it is some eighty years since those words were written; but they remain true today. Ignoring them undermines the whole evangelistic project.

Pope Paul VI's words about teachers being heard today only if they are witnesses are true also of preachers. People today will listen to preachers only if those who deliver "the old, old story, of Jesus and his love," (as an evangelical hymn has it) are themselves witnesses. An old saying expresses the same truth negatively: "What you are speaks so loud, that I can't hear what you say." The new evangelization summons all of us, laity and clergy alike, to renewed and deeper commitment to Jesus Christ – the necessary prerequisite and *sine qua non* of the "new Pentecost" proclaimed by the man who called the Second Vatican Council, Bl. John XXIII.

Before I conclude, let me briefly revisit Memory Lane. At age nine I became a choirboy at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the largest church building in North America, and started to sing the psalms daily. I'd like to see your cradle Catholic who can match that! I loved it, though there was of course much that I did not understand. One verse in particular puzzled me. I hadn't the faintest idea what it meant. After more than half a century as a Catholic, I understand it; and I say it today with a full heart and with deep thanksgiving: "The lot is fallen to me in a fair ground; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Let me conclude by quoting words of Pope Benedict XVI at the start of his Petrine ministry on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2005. As you will hear, he quotes from his predecessor Bl. John Paul II. The words are exhortation, yes. But as you will also hear, they are accompanied and supported by eloquent proclamation of the good news – not only for the young to whom he directs his words, but to all of us of any age. The Pope's words are an example of evangelical preaching

at its best.

“At this point, my mind goes back to October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1978, when Pope John Paul II began his ministry here in Saint Peter’s Square. His words on that occasion constantly echo in my ears: ‘Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ!’ The Pope was addressing the mighty, the powerful of this world, who feared that Christ might take away something of their power if they were to let him in, if they were to allow the faith to be free. Yes, he would certainly have taken something away from them: the dominion of corruption, the manipulation of law and the freedom to do as they pleased. But he would not have taken away anything that pertains to human freedom or dignity, or to the building of a just society.

“The Pope was also speaking to everyone, especially the young. Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? And once again the Pope said: No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.

“And so, today,” Pope Benedict concluded, “with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen.

*Fr. Hughes was born in New York City in 1928, the son and grandson of Anglican priests. Following six years as an Anglican priest himself, he became a Catholic in 1960 and received conditional ordination as deacon and priest in 1968. A priest of the St. Louis archdiocese, he is the author of the memoir, No Ordinary Fool: A Testimony to Grace.*