

An Ordinariate Catechism: Prospects and Possibilities

Hugo Mendez, M.A.

In the first week of October 2007, a Plenary Session of the Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC) at Portsmouth, England approved a petition for corporate reunion with Rome. Included in their petition was the following affirmation:

We accept that the most complete and authentic expression and application of the catholic faith in this moment of time is found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its *Compendium*, which we have signed together with this Letter as attesting to the faith we aspire to teach and hold.¹

This gesture apparently established a precedent for all Anglicans seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. Within two years, Rome released *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, establishing Personal Ordinariates for such individuals, and explicitly affirming: “The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the authoritative expression of the Catholic faith professed by members of the Ordinariate” (AC I.5). In 2010, Anglicans received into the first Ordinariate, the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham (England and Wales), underwent “a programme of catechetical formation” with the intended goal of assuring “that the faithful are able to adhere fully to the doctrinal content of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and, therefore, make the profession of faith.”²

It is hardly surprising that certain detractors of the Ordinariates continue to interpret the TAC’s signing of the Catechism as an Anglican capitulation to Roman Catholic theology. The U.S.-based Anglican Catholic Church (a Continuing Anglican body) characterized the apostolic constitution as a provision for “one-sided conversions of former Anglicans,” that excludes “joint consideration” of disputed matters, and is “addressed to those who are already essentially Roman Catholic” in faith.³

It is difficult to fault these concerns. “The authoritative expression of the Catholic faith professed by members of the Ordinariate” is not a document of Anglican origin. The TAC college of bishops embraced as their own a statement of faith written by scholars of another denomination. No attempt was made to draft a consensus document or joint declaration. If this is not theological “absorption,” what is? Although the Catechism cites the liturgies and fathers of various Catholic rites, it never expressly incorporates the distinctive insights of the Anglican tradition. How, then, can it authoritatively express the Catholic faith for Anglicans?

Of course, joint declarations take years to draft, discuss, and compare with existing statements of faith. The TAC House of Bishops sought a more efficient solution: simply adopting a statement of faith promulgated by the other party. If a group of continuing Anglican bishops can identify the Catechism as “the most perfect expression of the Catholic faith in the world today,” why would it be necessary to delay sacramental unity any longer? A bolder and more committed request for reunion can hardly be imagined. And in fact, Rome needed only two years to respond favorably to the petition.

Nevertheless, talk of “submission” and “absorption” is unlikely to disappear among critics of the Ordinariates so long as its faith is defined by a non-Anglican document. To counter these claims, Anglican Catholics must be confidently and manifestly Anglican in their theological articulation of the Catholic faith. This will require a new Ordinariate catechesis, and I believe, a new catechism at its heart.

Local and Ritual Catechisms

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) may be a convenient first word in the theological life of the Ordinariates, but it was never intended to be a final word. *Fidei Depositum*, the 1992 Apostolic Constitution promulgating the CCC, cast the new catechism as a mother catechism, provided to assist all particular churches in communion with Rome in the creation of their own local catechisms:

The approval and publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic*

Church represents a service which the Successor of Peter wishes to offer to the Holy Catholic Church, to all the particular Churches in peace and communion with the Apostolic See. . . . This catechism is given to them that it may be a sure and authentic reference text for teaching catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local catechisms. . . .

This catechism is not intended to replace the local catechisms duly approved by the ecclesiastical authorities, the diocesan Bishops and the Episcopal Conferences, especially if they have been approved by the Apostolic See. It is meant to encourage and assist in the writing of new local catechisms, which take into account various situations and cultures, while carefully preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to catholic doctrine. (FD, 3).

The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is one such local catechism, published by the USCCB in 2006. Its enculturated presentation of the Catholic faith prioritizes moral issues of concern to Americans, highlights significant moments in American Catholic history, and includes short biographies of American saints and beatified.

Christ Our Pascha, a local catechism released this summer by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church *sui juris*, takes the principle of “local catechisms” a step closer to the Ordinariate situation. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is an Eastern Catholic church, which, while in communion with Rome, preserves the unique theological and spiritual heritage of Eastern Orthodox Christianity., *Christ Our Pascha* was designed precisely to articulate and preserve this unique heritage. In his preface to the catechism, UGCC Major Archbishop Sviatoslav writes:

The central point of the catechism is faith in Christ, the same as it is in the rest of the Catholic Church. However, this faith we received from our bishops, martyrs, confessors and our Eastern tradition. That is why we practice it in our own way. . . . in language, services. . . and practices. . . . The catechism definitely looks to the future of our church and unites the people of God in holiness.⁴

The Ukrainian situation should resonate with Ordinariate

Catholics in their calling “to maintain the liturgical, spiritual and pastoral traditions of the Anglican Communion within the Catholic Church” (AC III). Looking forward to the future of their own “particular Churches in peace and communion with the Apostolic See” (as the Ordinariates are canonically defined: CIC 638; AC I.3), the Ordinariate faithful should prioritize the creation of a similar catechism.

It is not hard to see how such a project could define catechesis at every level of the emerging Ordinariates. Bishops and priests could reference it in sermons and pastoral letters. Local catechists could utilize it as the basis for adult religious education classes and lifelong theological formation. Sunday School teachers could adapt its content for the needs of Ordinariate children, ensuring they will receive a comprehensive education in the Anglo-Catholic tradition inherited from their parents, and lived within their home parish. Ordinariate seminarians, who require “formation in Anglican patrimony” (AC VI, 5), could study the catechism in great detail as part of their formation. (In fact, the catechism could be developed by the theological faculties of Ordinariate “houses of formation.” [AC VI.5]). Most of all, the catechism could become an indispensable tool for evangelization. Inquirers and visitors from other backgrounds could receive copies as gifts, and discuss its content in exploration groups. Naturally, the catechism would also figure prominently in the formation of Ordinariate initiates (i.e., local RCIA). Unlike materials designed for general converts to Roman Catholicism (like the “Evangelium” course presently in use in the UK, or the *US Catholic Catechism for Adults*, which is slated for similar use in the U.S. Ordinariate⁵), a catechism produced by the Ordinariates themselves could speak directly to the concerns of inquiring Anglicans, address their most common questions, and outline the extent to which their Anglican patrimony finds a home in the Catholic Church. Its authority would be secure, having been promulgated by Ordinariate authorities, and approved by Rome.

In all these areas, a catechism marrying Catholic faith and Anglican patrimony would meet a number of needs, presently felt or unfelt. However, what is necessary to ensure that the catechism will authentically capture the Anglican heritage, and reflect the unique

vocation of the Ordinariates? This question would easily represent the greatest challenge confronting the drafters of such a document, and its resolution would be the project's highest priority (fidelity to Catholic faith being a given). Over the remainder of this essay, I would like to offer concrete suggestions particularly touching upon this very question.

Writing an Anglican Catholic Catechism

To authentically reflect the Anglican tradition, a Catholic catechism must preserve two principles at its core. First, the catechism must always speak from the scriptural and patristic outlook of classical Anglicanism. Secondly, a catechism of Anglican heritage must embrace the outstanding contributions of Anglican writers and theologians throughout the centuries, both indirectly (in tone and approach) and directly (in quotes).

The first principle is relatively uncontroversial, but absolutely vital. Highlighting the biblical foundation of each doctrine must be the first aim of every chapter of the catechism, mirroring the historic Anglican concern that every teaching “be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture” (Article of Religion VIII). Furthermore, ancient witnesses to the doctrinal consensus of the early Church (e.g., councils, fathers, etc.) should be liberally quoted. Anglicanism has historically sought to remain faithful to the wellsprings of Christian faith, and every page of the catechism must manifest that commitment.

The second principle, however, is truly where a particularly “Anglican” identity is to be found. The active use of Anglican sources, ideas, and quotations, while novel and groundbreaking for a Catholic catechism, guarantees that its final text will be recognizably “Anglican.” To speak with an Anglican voice, a catechism should naturally include Anglican voices.

Happily, precedents are emerging for this bold step. Anglican voices are already poised to fulfill a devotional role in the liturgy of the English Ordinariate. As Fr. Aidan Nichols, O.P., recently indicated, “the larger number” of second readings prepared for the Matins of the Ordinariate “derive from the Anglican patrimony (the

Caroline divines and their Restoration successors, the Tractarians with particular reference to Newman, and a selection of later Anglo-Catholic writers).⁶ Msgr. Andrew Burnham seemed to corroborate this fact in a recent essay, noting that “an enormous wealth of English spiritual writing, hardly explored as yet in the liturgical life of the Catholic Church,” may be available to enrich Ordinariates around the world.⁷ The inclusion of post-Reformation, non-Catholic sources in a book of Catholic liturgy is a bold and welcome development. Following the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, it would also invite the inclusion of similar source material in the formal theological catechesis of the Ordinariate. One can easily envision a future catechism liberally incorporating insights and quotes from post-Reformation Anglican sources in its text. (In fact, from a Catholic perspective, this is a far less startling step than the inclusion of such material in official liturgy.)

Following this precedent, it seems the inclusion of Anglican sources is principally possible in those sections outlining Ordinariate devotional and spiritual life (akin to CCC, part IV: “Christian Prayer”). Again, the Ordinariates are called to preserve the “spiritual... traditions of the Anglican Communion within the Catholic Church, as a precious gift nourishing the faith of the members of the Ordinariate and as a treasure to be shared.” It is only natural that these spiritual traditions be learned with reference to those writers of the Anglican Communion who decisively shaped them. However, given the preservation of the ecumenical creeds in Anglicanism, it is reasonable to suggest that historic Anglican reflections on the Trinity and the life of Christ (CCC, part I, section II) frame those corresponding sections of the new catechism.

A few sections, however, may employ more selective sampling of Anglican literature. For instance, those chapters outlining the sources and transmission of revelation (CCC, part I, section I), ecclesiology, and sacramental theology (CCC, part II), will likely exhibit a greater (or sometimes exclusive) reliance on the writings of historic Anglican converts to Roman Catholicism, especially Newman, or Anglicans who expressed sympathy with Roman Catholic positions, such as the Tractarians.

At least one other source would be especially fruitful in the creation of a new Ordinariate catechism: the agreed statements produced by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). In light of recent ecumenical setbacks, and the creation of the Ordinariates, various news channels and columnists have come to discount the achievements and prospects of the ARCIC dialogues.⁸ Nevertheless, Pope Benedict XVI expressed gratitude to the commission's work on several statements, including "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ" (2005) and "The Gift of Authority" (1999).⁹ In a February 2011 address, Bishop Peter Elliot affirmed, "The ARCIC conversations and the fruit of these conversations in the documents will also be honoured in the Ordinariates."¹⁰ They are, to a great extent, the inheritance of the Ordinariates, who are called to realize, on a smaller scale, the dream of Anglican-Catholic reunion explored by the ARCIC.

To illustrate the potential usefulness of certain ARCIC documents in the creation of an Ordinariate catechism, I will reproduce selections from "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ." Reading them, I am struck by how similar these selections are to a catechism in content and tone:

Immaculate Conception

The definition [of the Immaculate Conception] teaches that Mary, like all other human beings, has need of Christ as her Saviour and Redeemer (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 53; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 491). The negative notion of 'sinlessness' runs the risk of obscuring the fullness of Christ's saving work. It is not so much that Mary lacks something which other human beings 'have', namely sin, but that the glorious grace of God filled her life from the beginning.[12] The holiness which is our end in Christ (cf. 1 John 3:2-3) was seen, by unmerited grace, in Mary, who is the prototype of the hope of grace for humankind as a whole...In view of her vocation to be the mother of the Holy One (Luke 1:35), we [i.e., Anglicans and Catholics] can affirm together that Christ's redeeming work reached 'back' in Mary to the depths of her being, and to her earliest beginnings. This is not contrary to the teaching of Scripture, and can only be understood in the light of

Scripture. Roman Catholics can recognize in this what is affirmed by the dogma—namely “preserved from all stain of original sin” and “from the first moment of her conception.” [MGH, 59]

The English Reformers continued to receive the doctrine of the ancient Church concerning Mary...Following Augustine, they showed a reticence about affirming that Mary was a sinner. Their chief concern was to emphasize the unique sinlessness of Christ, and the need of all humankind, including Mary, for a Saviour (cf. Luke 1:47). Articles IX and XV affirmed the universality of human sinfulness. They neither affirmed nor denied the possibility of Mary having been preserved by grace from participation in this general human condition. It is notable that the Book of Common Prayer in the Christmas collect and preface refers to Mary as ‘a pure Virgin’. [MGH, 45]

One will immediately realize that the teaching expressed in these excerpts is in agreement with that of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They “affirm” what the Ordinariates will affirm. Most exciting of all, the source document is a consensus statement, crafted jointly by Anglican and Catholic scholars appointed for this task by their respective communions. Their citation in a future Ordinate catechism could reassure all who struggle with these doctrines that it is more than possible to affirm them from an Anglican perspective.

Of note, these paragraphs possess an apologetic dimension absent in the CCC. They discuss the Immaculate Conception not as a long-established dogma (as the CCC does), but as a deeply disputed and misunderstood doctrine, which nevertheless can be received by the Anglican Communion even while preserving its theological nuances and concerns. To encourage openness to these doctrines, the ARCIC sought precedents in scripture, patristic tradition, as well as Anglican liturgy and theology. It is easy to see the significant overlap between this goal of the ARCIC and the call and mission of the Ordinariates. Additionally, one can appreciate the fact that the Anglican participants in the ARCIC dialogues have never been extracted from a particular movement within Anglicanism (Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical, Affirming Catholic, etc.), but reflect a broad spectrum of Anglican thought. The ARCIC documents are designed

to encourage consensus across the Anglican Communion. Therefore, their approach to certain questions can prove useful to an Ordinariate catechism as it speaks to Anglicans of many viewpoints.

Other Anglican Elements

Moving beyond the above core principles, I would like to suggest other Anglican elements for inclusion in an Ordinariate catechism. First, since a catechism serving the entire Catholic Church already exists, a local catechism promulgated by the Ordinariates should highlight the particulars of their life and spirituality in greater detail. Marian titles of significance to England, the Ordinariates, and the Anglican Use seem obvious candidates for exploration (most especially Our Lady of Walsingham, but perhaps also Our Lady of the Atonement and Our Lady Help of Christians). Following the lead of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, the Ordinariate catechism could also include vignettes of many of the unique saints of the Ordinariate calendars (which calendars, it appears, will be distinct from the calendars used in local Roman Catholic dioceses).¹¹ This would naturally include the patrons of the Ordinariates (e.g., Bl. John Henry Newman) and historically Anglican nations (e.g., St. George), but I also hope embraces British saints whose veneration and shrines were once a principal feature of pre-Reformation life, even if lesser-known today. Catholic saints of Anglican heritage (e.g., St. Elizabeth Ann Seton), and uncanonized individuals whose influence and gifts may be felt in the worship life of the Ordinariates (Fredrick W. Faber) should also be considered for inclusion in the Catechism.

Along the same lines, I hope that significant passages in the catechism be devoted to pilgrimage, shrines, monasticism, and other integral facets of pre-Reformation English spirituality. An official catechism affords the Ordinariates a significant opportunity to direct the faithful towards these devotions, restore their pride of place, and encourage their growth. It is an opportunity not only to look back, but also, to plan ahead.

Furthermore, beyond a general survey of the theology of the Mass and of worship, the catechism should explore the distinctly Anglican elements of Ordinariate worship (whether in the Mass,

the Funeral Service, the Service of Holy Matrimony, or the Divine Office). Here, one can envision passages explaining “Whitsuntide” and “Michaelmas,” detailing the meaning and benefits of Evensong, or outlining the genius of Anglican worship entire (in the words of John Wesley: “a solid, scriptural, rational piety”). In this way, the Ordinariates can secure that the faithful will have “a good understanding of the rites and prayers” in which they will uniquely participate (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48).

Wherever possible, excerpts from Ordinariate liturgy could also be interwoven into theological discussions. The Collect for Trinity Sunday would be a touching devotional conclusion to the chapter outlining Trinitarian doctrine. Likewise, the section outlining Christian morality (which in catechisms is traditionally guided by the structure of the Ten Commandments) could invoke the recitation of the Decalogue at the beginning of the Order of Mass, with a pervasive hope that God would “have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law.” In fact, it might be worthwhile to frame every section of the catechism according to some element of the Order of Mass (Decalogue, Creed, General Confession, Eucharistic Commemorations, Our Father, etc.). The Anglican tradition has long seen its Common Prayer as a catechetical tool; what better way to showcase this gift? It would certainly encourage an ever-deepening psychological link in the minds of the faithful between the words and gestures of worship and the theology professed by the Ordinariate.

Finally, it seems reasonable to suggest that some historical survey of Christianity in the British Isles, and Anglicanism worldwide, be included. As long as the Ordinariate faithful will read selections from the writings of the Caroline divines, or hear references to the the Oxford movement, future generations ought to be introduced to these in some capacity. Visitors to Ordinariate parishes, especially those who may remain for the long-term, will certainly appreciate even the briefest education in these matters. Most of all, this material will provide the Ordinariate space to reflect, positively and critically, on the Anglican experience. It will address, before skeptical audiences of all backgrounds: why preserve an Anglican heritage when an English Roman Catholic heritage already exists? What aspirations of historic Anglicanism are valid? Why is Catholic communion desirable? How

should Catholics relate to a Spirit-filled, gifted tradition outside the visible boundaries of the Church? How should Anglican-Catholic reconciliation proceed, even on a local or interpersonal level? An Ordinariate catechism can become an opportunity to celebrate, challenge, and honor a 500-year journey of faith.

Words of Caution

Before concluding, a few words of caution are in order. First, although brief Question-and-Answer catechisms have a long tradition in Anglicanism (even appearing in the *Book of Common Prayer*), I would urge the Ordinariates to write a catechism approaching the scope and style of the present *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (each over 600 pages long). There will always be opportunity to write briefer, derivative catechisms for a variety of audiences, youth or adult, like the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. What is needed at this historic time, however, is a basic text that speaks to all, and definitively and comprehensively outlines the unique faith, hope, and vision of the Ordinariates.

In turn, the drafters of any such catechism must avoid designing an introduction to Christian or Catholic faith in general; these already exist, beginning with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. What this essay envisions is a supplementary text that will nurture the unique faith of Ordinariate Catholics, and inspire them with a passion and devotion for their Anglican-Catholic experience and heritage. The Ordinariate faithful themselves are poised to pass through some early crisis of identity (as of yet, they have not so much as settled on a common name for themselves, whether “Anglican Catholic,” “Anglican Use Catholics,” etc.!). The preparation of a catechism will provide each Ordinariate a unique opportunity to define itself. Only after such an event can the Ordinariates open a dialogue of love, and share the spiritual treasures of Anglo-Catholic Christianity with the wider Church and world.

In this light, it is appropriate that only one catechism be written for all the Ordinariates around the world. The Ordinariates of each country will be jurisdictionally distinct; they will not be placed under a single common synod, but each will answer directly to the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and cooperate with their local episcopal conferences (*Complementary Norms for the Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus*, I-II). Opportunities to assert their common identity must be sought; a catechism defining their shared faith, values, and life, could prove invaluable. The project would ensure stability and coordination across the Ordinariates in catechesis, seminary formation, and evangelization. These are key ingredients for harmony and long-term growth. In fact, I believe the creation of an Ordinate catechism is even more vital to the long-term success of the Ordinariates than the search for permanent houses of worship. The Ordinate faithful may have to worship for a time in borrowed churches, but in a catechism they will have something already their own—unborrowed and lasting. Its text will be a concrete and communal touchstone, instilling a sense of common identity long before every parish has the money to erect a church sign. From the day of its promulgation, it could make an immediate, positive impact on the Ordinariates worldwide.

Conclusion

I hope this article initiates an important discussion among the present and prospective members of the world Ordinariates. A project of the scope envisioned in this paper will no doubt require careful planning, coordination of resources, and consensus. However, as I conclude this piece, I would like to reiterate the most important prerequisite for a successful Ordinate catechism—namely, the courage to be *Anglican*. The Ordinate faithful themselves must believe that their calling is to be a “beloved sister church,” “united but not absorbed” within the Catholic Church. In the choir of the universal Church, their voice must always remain distinct.

Toward this end, it would be well for Anglicans to consider the example and struggles of Eastern Catholics, who are similarly committed to preserving a dual-identity. In his 1970 Christmas Pastoral Letter, Archbishop Joseph Tawil addressed the Melkite Greek Catholic Church reminding them that “to be Catholic one does not have to conform to the Roman model.”¹² As he makes clear, to do so would, in fact, undermine the meaning and future prospects of Catholic unity:

By our fidelity to maintaining our patrimony, by our refusal to be assimilated, the Eastern Churches render a most precious service to Rome in still another area of Church life. Latinizing this small number of Easterners would not be a gain for Rome; rather it would block—perhaps forever—a union of the separated Churches of the East and West. It would be easy then for Orthodoxy to see that union with Rome leads surely to ecclesiastical assimilation. Thus it is for the sake of ecumenism—to create a climate favorable to the union of the Churches—that the Eastern Catholic must remain faithful to his tradition. This providential vocation which is ours opens to the Church an unlimited perspective for preaching the Gospel to all peoples who, while they accept faith in Christ, must still remain themselves in this vast assembly of believers.¹³

As surely as “the Western Church ‘needs’ a vibrant Eastern Church to complement its understanding of the Christian message,”¹⁴ the Catholic Church needs a vibrant Anglo-Catholic community within it, speaking with purpose, courage, and conviction. The future of Christian unity, especially that of Catholics and Anglicans, partly depends upon it.

This requires that the Ordinariate faithful be as sensitive to what makes their faith Catholic as they are to what makes it Anglican. The question “what is ‘Anglican patrimony?’” can no longer remain a speculative or academic point. Its answer is the entire life, calling, and identity of the Ordinariate faithful. It must be internalized even on an individual level. If prospective members of the Ordinariates must undergo months of preparation and catechesis to consolidate their Catholic faith, they should also devote time to reflect upon and preserve the lasting aspects of their Anglican identity. The future of Ordinariate catechesis must reflect this dual identity. Such exploration is beyond the scope of “Evangelium,” the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, or even the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It will require a new set of catechetical materials, with, I hope, one definitive text at its core.

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Hugo Mendez is a third-year Ph.D. student at the University of Georgia, with interests in Eastern Christian languages and literatures, and contemporary ecumenism. He holds an M.A. in Religion from the same institution.