

General Synod's decision-making process revealed about the true nature of the Church of England. The key question was—"Is the Anglican Church a Catholic Church or a Protestant church? If she wishes to be considered Catholic then she does not have the authority to ordain women as priests. But if Protestant—like all Protestant groups—she may indeed take the decision to ordain women ministers. So when the General Synod took the decision, I was in a quandary. Everything within me said a Catholic church could not make such a decision on its own. Yet I hated taking a negative position about anything. According to my motto I was denying women priests and I was wrong to do so.

Then Fr. Leo Avery, the late Abbot of Quarr, gently pointed out that greater affirmations often include smaller denials. In other words you can't have everything. Choices need to be made. Denying women priests was merely the negative side of affirming something greater—the apostolic ministry; and affirming Catholicism had to include the denial of those things contrary to Catholicism.

Affirming All Things

The next few years were a terrible time of indecision. By now I was married and we had two young children. I hadn't trained for any other career and if we left the Anglican Church there seemed nothing but an uncertain future. One Sunday evening I went to Quarr Abbey for Vespers and Benediction. As the monks chanted I agonized over the decision to leave the Church of England.

"But I only wanted to serve you in the ancient church in England!" I cried out to the Lord.

As the incense wafted heavenward and the monstrance was lifted, the still small voice replied, "But THIS is the ancient church in England." Then the struggles ended. My mind was made up, and in the Autumn of 1994 my wife and I began our course of instruction with Fr. Joe McNerny at Quarr.

There was grief at losing our home and church, but at the same time we received a tremendous welcome from our new Catholic friends. It was during this time that Keith Jarrett—the secretary of the *St. Barnabas Society*—offered friendship, help

and encouragement as he has done for so many who have taken the same step. Once we were received the *St. Barnabas Society* continued to be there with practical advice and financial assistance.

As we went through our instruction I not only read the documents of Vatican II, but did further reading in the Apostolic Fathers. Day by day I discovered that all the things I had come to affirm intuitively were part of the great unity of the Catholic Faith. When I became an Anglican I felt my Bible Christian background was being completed, and as we prepared to be received into the Catholic Church I realized that I could still affirm everything my non-Catholic friends and family affirmed, I simply could no longer deny what they denied. F.D. Maurice's little snippet of wisdom had brought me across the Tiber, and in becoming a Catholic I was affirming all things and denying nothing that was true.

Our reception took place in a quiet service one February evening in the crypt of Quarr Abbey church. That night all was harvest. There, as the monks sang their ancient and moving plainsong and we were finally received into full communion, the simple faith of my Mennonite forebears, the Bible Christians' love for the Scriptures and the ancient beauties of Anglicanism were all gathered together and fulfilled in a new and dynamic way.

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Pamphlet 009

Affirming All Things

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American Gothic

Taking dramatic steps of faith runs in the family. In the eighteenth century my ancestors left Switzerland for the new colony of Pennsylvania to find religious freedom. The two Longenecker brothers were Mennonites—members of an Anabaptist sect so strict that they were persecuted by Calvin.

Seven generations later my part of the family had left the Mennonites, and I was brought up in a Bible Christian church. Like many churches in the sixties, our independent Bible church was a strongly evangelical and conservative group of Christians who were disenchanted with the liberal drift of the main Protestant denominations in the post-war period and set off to do their own thing.

That same independent movement included the foundation of a fundamentalist college in the deep South by the Methodist evangelist Bob Jones. So after the war my parents and aunts and uncles went to study there and it was natural for my parents to send my siblings and me there in the 1970s. In the heart of the so-called Bible belt, Bob Jones University incongruously mixes hollerin' hell-fire fundamentalism with grand opera and a famous gallery of fine religious art. BJU are the folks who gave Northern Irish firebrand Ian Paisley his honorary doctorate and who brand even Billy Graham as a liberal.

The religion in our own home was simple, Bible-based and balanced. Like our Mennonite forebears there was a quiet simplicity and tolerance at the heart of our faith. We believed Catholics were in error, but we didn't nurture hatred towards them. At BJU the tone was different. There the Catholic Church was clearly the 'whore of Babylon' and the Pope was the Anti-Christ.

Anglican Orthodoxy

Ironically it was at BJU that I discovered the Anglican Church. We were allowed to go to a little Episcopalian schism church named 'Holy Trinity Anglican Orthodox Church.' The church was founded by a 'bishop' whose orders—an Anglican bishop later told me—were 'valid, but irregular'. He had been ordained by a renegade Old Catholic as well as a breakaway Orthodox bishop.

Along with some other disenchanted Baptists and Bible Christians I went to the little stone church and discovered the glories of the Book of Common Prayer, lighting candles and kneeling to pray. I was taken with the experience, and after searching for God's calling in my life, decided to be an Anglican priest. I had studied English literature and visited England a few times and thought it would be perfect to minister in a pretty English village in a medieval church.

I wrote to the evangelical Anglican J.I.Packer and he suggested a few English seminaries. Oxford was the Mecca for devotees of C.S.Lewis, so when the opportunity to study at Oxford came my way I jumped at the chance and came to England for good. After theological studies I was ordained and a life of ministry in the Anglican Church opened up.

The Affirmative Way

This whole period was a time of great growth and learning. Often it is the little bit of wisdom that makes the most impression; I will never forget a little quotation from the great Anglican social commentator F.D.Maurice I came across while I was studying theology. He wrote, "A man is most often right in what he affirms and wrong in what he denies." After the negative attitude of American fundamentalism and the cynical religious doubt which prevailed at Oxford, Maurice's statement was like a breath of fresh air.

It was sometimes tempting to feel guilty about leaving the religion of my family and upbringing, but with Maurice's viewpoint I increasingly felt the Anglican riches I was discovering were not so much a denial of my family faith, but an addition to it. So I

took Maurice's dictum as my motto, and whenever I came across something new, I asked myself if I was denying or affirming. If I wasn't able to affirm the new doctrine or religious practice I wouldn't deny it—I would simply let it be.

So when a Catholic friend in the USA suggested I visit a Benedictine Abbey, I took her advice and made arrangements to go to the closest one to Oxford—Douai Abbey. There I found a world as alien to evangelical Anglicanism as Oxford was to Bob Jones University. The monks impressed me with their sense of solemn self-mockery, and there was a sense of touching a Christianity far greater and wider than I had yet experienced.

St. Benedict the Balanced

My link with the Benedictines continued after I was ordained and went to serve as an Anglican curate. I made my annual retreat at Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight—just off the South coast of England, read about the history of monasticism and felt drawn to the Benedictine Way. There seemed to be a balance, a simplicity and a profound spirituality which echoed back to the simple sincerity of my Mennonite ancestors.

Just as I was about to visit Quarr Abbey for my annual retreat a friend brought me a rosary from Walsingham. I had never touched such a Catholic artifact, but F.D. Maurice's wisdom touched me and I thought, "If so many Christians pray this way, who am I to deny it?" So I bought a book about the Rosary and learned how to pray the it. Any ideas of accepting the Marian dogmas were out of the question. I substituted different glorious mysteries which were more Christ-centered. My five Biblical glorious mysteries were: Transfiguration, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost and Second Coming. Despite my individualism another window was opened and something new affirmed for I found that the Rosary grew in importance and I started to receive great graces through the prayers of Our Lady.

When my curacy was finished I had three months free and decided to hitchhike to Jerusalem. So with backpack and a pair of sturdy shoes I headed across France and Italy staying in various religious

houses along the route. I found my journey went best when I fit in with the monastic routine. So I would begin a day's journey with Mass and morning offices in one monastery, say my Anglican office whilst travelling, then arrive at the next monastery in time for Vespers, the evening meal and Compline.

The pilgrimage to the Holy Lands also took me further into Christian history. Part of the appeal of being ordained into the Church of England had been to leave the modern subjective church of Protestant USA and find deeper routes in the history and faith of Europe. Suddenly travelling through France, Italy and Greece to Israel I was immersed in a religion obviously older and deeper still than Anglicanism.

The Benedictine houses put me in touch with roots of faith which were deeper and more concrete than I imagined could exist. Although I realized my views were becoming 'more Catholic' I didn't fight it. I wanted to 'be right in what I affirmed.'

The Apostolic Ministry

I had been ordained for about six years when my dream came true and I went to be vicar of two beautiful old churches on the Isle of Wight. By this time I was not an Anglo-Catholic, but I did regard my ministry in a very Catholic way. I knew we were separated from Rome, but I considered my ministry to be part of the whole Catholic Church. Despite the formal separation, I thought of Anglicanism as a branch of the Catholic Church, and prayed for the time of our eventual re-union.

My pilgrimage to the Catholic Church had—for the most part—been intuitive. I simply adopted the Catholic practices that seemed suitable, and when it came time to question certain doctrines I looked at them and made every effort to affirm and not deny. This mindset brought me almost unconsciously to the very doorstep of the Catholic Church. What I said to some friends who were considering conversion was true of me as well—I was more Catholic than I myself realized.

It was the Church of England's decision to ordain women as presbyters that helped clear my vision. Suddenly things became crystal clear. Women priests were not the problem. Instead it was what the