

Becoming an Anglican Christian! Is this realistic as a convert in 2009?

A discussion starter from Peter Toon

Let us imagine a small family where through one or another means (e.g., reading about Anglicanism, watching a DVD of Anglican Service, or hearing Anglican choral music) the parents have decided to become Anglican Christians, rather than say continue as members of a lively, independent Bible Church.

Let us also imagine that they are free to travel around in their search for the Anglican Way in reality to the local congregations of any of the current brands or expressions of Anglican existence in the U.S.A. Thus the whole spectrum of current Anglican Life in the U.S.A. is open to them for preliminary inspection.

Now let those of us who have been Anglican for a while, and have taken notice of this mainline “brand” in the U.S.A., recall what the options in this spectrum of Anglican expressions are and can be. Here is an illustrative List but not a complete one:

- The Episcopal Church (formerly ECUSA, PECUSA)
- The Anglican Church in America (ACA) –continuing Anglican
- The Anglican Catholic Church—continuing Anglican
- The United Episcopal Church—continuing Anglican
- The Anglican Province of Christ the King—continuing Anglican
- The Anglican Province of America—continuing Anglican
- The Episcopal Missionary Church
- The Anglican Orthodox Church
- The Christian Episcopal Church

The [from Dec 4 2008) “Anglican Church in North America” (being unique in

that it is made up of various networks, former TEC dioceses, missions, denominations and organizations, each of which continues in the federation/coalition to function with its own “distinctives” of liturgy, Ministry, mission and internal polity).

And so on...

In all, there are probably thirty-plus Anglican denominations and jurisdictions in the U.S.A. which have web sites and at least a dozen-plus churches. It is very difficult to keep track of them all.

Of course the size of each of the above differs tremendously – for example the first, TEC, claims two million members and the last as a federation has about 100,000 members, and some of the others have less than 5,000. However, all of them in their original state claim to be a church or denomination for the whole territory of the 48 states, and from small to large they have the whole land divided into dioceses or networks. This claim to be a national church applies for example both to the Reformed Episcopal Church (now inside the coalition of December 4 2008) and to the Anglican Church in America (outside the coalition). So there are many parallel and competitive dioceses.

Now back to the family! Having done their exploration and research (happily gas is cheaper right now) they are at best confused and at worst depressed – for their initial acquaintance with the Anglican Way as an ideal but realistic Way has not been proven or supported by the empirical evidence on the ground.

On the one hand, they have seen much diversity, innovation, controversy, and lack of outreach. On the other hand, they have met some wonderfully kind and devout Anglicans and some learned and godly priests of all stripes and churchmanships; but, still, they wonder why it is that there is such open division and competition amongst even those who claim to be “orthodox”, and

why, even within the new “Anglican Church in America,” the claimed new bastion of “orthodoxy”, the very same divisions amongst the “orthodox” are affirmed and continue, howbeit, at the moment, in a restrained way!

So for the time being the family in search of the orthodox Anglican Way continues to go to the Bible Church! They could choose to go to one of the better parishes they have visited whether in TEC or elsewhere but for the time being they decide not to disrupt the habits of the family.

In sadness, if the truth be told, they now suspect that the classic, historic, Anglican Way in the U.S.A. actually does not truly exist. Rather Anglicanism is like so many other groupings in the American supermarket of religions: that is, current “Anglicans” value their grasp of the truth and their own opinions greater than their practice of unity in comprehensiveness with fellow believers, and that their form of religion to succeed requires to be within the religious toleration and rights-monism that are the keys to the current American ethos and mindset.

Thus the cultural centrifugal forces pulling and forcing them apart dominate the context for Anglicanism, and the centripetal forces seeking to bring Anglicans together as one people, in a religiously challenging context, are greatly restrained or even destroyed.

END

Dec 5, 2008 St John of Damascus. drpetertoony@yahoo.com