

Fr Jacob Mariano was approached by a Anglican colleague in 2015 to consider ministry within the Episcopal Church. Father had already been ministering in a parish without a licence (with the knowledge of the Bishop) but the request was for Father to formalise his connection with the Anglican Communion. Here's his response:

To be or not to be...

William Shakespeare's famous words: *"To be or not to be... that is the question."* inappropriately titles this document. Hamlet is contemplating suicide and whilst this is titled as such, you will find that suicide is not the basis of this, but conversion.

Conversion is a process that takes time and even years. In other cases, not so, because the answer is clear and the way leading to conversion is obvious and within reach. We Christians are encouraged and excited when we hear the testimonies of converts to the Faith. I say encouraged because being a Christian is a life-time commitment. Our beliefs may be a cause for contention and will often be contrary to that of popular thought and depending on the circumstances, the consequences can be anything between rejection to acceptance.

What is not often emphasised is that conversion is an ongoing process, it is not complete merely because one has made the change, no, it goes deeper than that. When we convert to the Faith, we understand that God takes us deeper into His infinite and unending love. The process of conversion then takes a different form. Whilst we journey with God, Who is and remains the same, it is us, who change, because the desire to seek God develops, it then becomes a part of our will to change, and more fully understand the infinite love of God. One cannot wallow in the idea of that which has passed, in the hopes that that which is to come will be granted, merely because we changed yesterday, is it necessary to change again? Everyday we convert our ways to that of Christ. Such is the need for conversion.

I can think of three scriptural accounts (among many) that speak of different forms of conversion.

The first is that of Ruth who decided to go with her Mother-in-law and convert to her ways. One culture for another, one religion for another:

"Do not ask me to abandon or forsake you! For wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Wherever you die I will die, and there be buried. May the Lord do so and so to me, and more besides, if aught but death separates me from you!"
(Ruth 1:16-17)

The second is that of King David. Not so much in the sense of conversion from one faith to another, but in terms of repentance. Psalm 51 is one of the seven penitential psalms of the King asking God for mercy:

*"Have mercy on me, O God, in your abundant compassion blot out my offence."
(Ps. 51:1)*

The third is that of St. Paul. Often mistaken as being misogynist (because of certain epistles 'attributed' to him), this would have to be one of the best conversion stories in Christendom.

"For you have heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it, and progressed in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my race, since I was even more a zealot for my ancestral traditions." (Galatians 1:13-14)

He was clearly in direct opposition to the Church. What transpired? He sees Jesus, his convictions compel him to change, and now here is Paul not in opposition any longer, but very much for the Church!

These conversion examples, whilst encouraging and exciting, are not related to anything that I am in the predicament of at present. Thousands of Christians undertake the conversion process from one Christian denomination to another. The process of change for those who convert seems to be a smooth transition. I like the analogy of the milkshake. Christianity is the milkshake. The different denominations of Christianity are like the different flavours. Most flavours I like and I consider (as would most people) vanilla and creaming soda to be among the best. However, to say that one flavour is superior to another is a matter of opinion. Over the years, the process of making a great milkshake has developed, with the use of different utensils and ingredients, but nothing can beat a vanilla milkshake.

I am a Catholic priest in the Independent Sacramental Movement (ISM). Like most of the mainstream denominations that have the three-fold ministry of the episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate, and claim apostolic succession, we too lay claim to this through our bishops, having that connection to antiquity and the Divine.

Being a 'Catholic' is an expression, not necessarily of my entire belief system, but it is a way that more fully expresses what I believe. How a person identifies is essential to the individual's make-up. If a person cannot identify who they are, where they are from and the like, then who are they? I do not identify as an Anglican, not because of its historicity, but because it does not definitively express the traditions and teachings that I so value as a Catholic. Yet, I can feel quite at home worshipping and participating in liturgies of the Anglican tradition.

Bishop Kristen Stendahl had three rules for interfaith discussions.

The first is: if you wish to know about another religious tradition, go to the adherents of that tradition and not to its critics as it may be based on speculation and that breaks the commandment *"thou shalt not bear false witness."* (Exodus 20:16)

The second is: compare bests with bests. One religious tradition may place itself at their very best and paint caricatures of others. It does not build nor does it encourage Christian dialogue.

The third is: leave room for holy envy. One tradition desiring it could in some way incorporate in its own the good practices, traditions and values of another.

My vocation is to serve the Church as a teacher. I know that to have a working relationship, prayer, discussion, dialogue and reflection are necessary in order to work as a Catholic priest within the confines of the Anglican Church.

The Roman Catholics as does the Eastern Orthodox, have two types of priests. They are: Diocesan (secular) and Religious (regular). For the Orthodox: Married (secular) and Monks (regular). The Orthodox, choose for the episcopacy men from the ranks of the monks.

Both types of priests have the same priesthood faculties, acquired through ordination by a bishop. The differences between diocesan and religious priests lie mainly in their way of life, work, and the Church authority they answer to and are directed by.

Secular priests make their promises of obedience (and in some cases chastity) to their bishop. They work within the boundaries of the diocese. Religious priests receive ordination at the hands of the bishop, but the vows (with the addition of poverty and others) are made to the Superiors of the Community. If a religious priest is working within a diocese, this means that the diocesan bishop has invited the religious Community to work in the boundaries of his diocese. The religious priest fulfils the duties assigned to them under the jurisdiction of the bishop, whilst retaining obedience to their superior.

If I were to work within the Anglican Church, would you and my bishop come to an arrangement? Or would you prefer that I become an Anglican priest? You have already made the offer to accept my Orders and simply transfer over, but of that in the future?

To be or not to be... that is and still remains, the question?

Respectfully yours in Christ,

Revd Jacob Mariano