

# The Failure of Anglicanism

By Frederick Joseph Kinsman

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[The following letter was written by the Right Rev. Joseph Kinsman, Bishop of Delaware, U.S.A., on July 1, 1919, to the Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America, in order to explain why he could no longer continue to hold Episcopal office in that Church. It is interesting to Catholics, not because it tells them anything which they did not know about the character of Anglicanism, but because it illustrates the difficulties which those born and reared in that heresy encounter in their search for the truth, and the grace and courage necessary if they are to overcome them. Anglicans glory in the "comprehensiveness" of their Church; it was this very "note" which at last convinced Dr. Kinsman that it was not the Church of Christ. Christ's Church is a teaching Church, whereas "to tolerate everything is to teach nothing," as the disillusioned Bishop came finally to realize. He was, of course, an advanced Anglican clinging pathetically to the "catholicity" of the sect in which he was ordained. He took his degree at Keble College, Oxford, and received his "orders" in England. In America he was a pillar of the High Church section, a vehement writer on its behalf, and the recipient of many testimonies to his erudition in the shape of academic honours. He states in the following candid lines the reasons why he found it impossible to hold jurisdiction in a Church which does not know her own mind, much less the mind of Christ.]

The story of the author's life and conversion is given in detail in his volume *Salve Mater* (Longmans).

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To the Right Reverend Daniel Sylvester Tuttle, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D., Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

My Dear Presiding Bishop:

I hereby present through you to the House of Bishops the resignation of my jurisdiction as Bishop of the Diocese of Delaware.

## Resignation of Office

I take this step with utmost regret, both as relinquishing a post assigned me by the Church to which I owe the greatest blessings of my life, and as severing my connection with the State of Delaware and its warm-hearted people, for whom during eleven years I have come to have an ever-deepening affection. The only post I could wish for myself is that of Bishop of Delaware. I resign it because I can no longer hold any post of authority in the Protestant Episcopal Church. Fuller experience which has come to me as Bishop and more thorough study of the history of our communion have forced me to abandon the interpretation of the Church's position which I held at the time of my consecration; and I can adopt no other which would warrant my continuance in office.

## Reasons for Resignation

A brief statement of the opinions I have come to hold cannot attempt fully to justify them, though it will show the necessity of my present action. The Bishops will think me wrong as to facts or as to inferences, possibly as to both; but, right or wrong, the opinions have been deliberately adopted, and must determine both my action and theirs in dealing with my case.

The view of the Church's position which I have held, certainly the prevailing view in the House of Bishops, is simply that the Episcopal Church, strong in its "appeal to antiquity," stands firmly for the doctrine of the Incarnation as contained in the Scriptures and the Creeds, and, by emphasis on its sacramental character, perpetuates the life of the Catholic Church. But I have ceased to believe — and here I part company with the Bishops, and contradict my convictions and teaching in past years — that the actual facts bear out this contention. In spite of the greatest unwillingness, I have come to feel that the interpretation of the Anglican position which connects it chiefly with the Protestant Reformation is the one more consistent with its history viewed as a whole; and that its dominant tendencies are increasingly identified with those currents of thought and development which are making away from the definiteness of the ancient Faith towards Unitarian vagueness. This would seem to me to be due not merely to local or temporary conditions but to certain informing principles always more or less apparent in Anglican history. To preserve balance and proportion of the truth, the Episcopal Churches have aimed at comprehension by compromise. I have come to believe that this habit of compromise involves increasing surrenders of truth, in spite of religious revivals aiming at stronger insistence on the ancient Faith.

## Results of Over-Comprehensiveness

The chief causes of difficulty for me have been three: (1) tolerance of denials of the Faith, seeming to indicate failure to defend the Church's doctrine; (2) tolerance of imperfect views of Sacraments, seeming to result in failure rightly to use them; (3) a theory of Orders which seems to nullify them.

### 1. Denial of Dogma

*Creeds.* — It is unquestionable that the Anglican Communion is officially committed to the doctrines of the Scriptures and the Creeds. Authoritative declarations have always asserted this, and would do so now. But custom seems to nullify this theoretical position: *Consuetudo est optima legis interpres*. Attacks on Creeds in general and on specific doctrines are common; they are tolerated, sometimes encouraged, by those in authority; they are made by those officially appointed to teach Creeds and defend them.

For example, the Episcopal Church accepts without question the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of our Lord as recorded in St. Luke's Gospel. The clergy, bound by oath "with all faithful diligence to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrine," are theoretically bound to combat denials of the Virgin Birth in as resolute and business-like a way as the Bishop of Ohio did thirty years ago. But is this now possible? Denials of this doctrine have become common, e.g., among eminent divines in the English universities and in the larger American dioceses. Even in some cases formally brought to the attention of Bishops, there has been no public condemnation. In refusing to notice them, ecclesiastical rulers have represented a very general impatience with doctrinal discussions, an abhorrence of heresy-trials, and a disparagement of theological truth. No one Bishop can set up for his diocese a standard notably at variance with that of the Church at large,

nor try to banish as "erroneous" from his own territory what is notoriously not "strange" elsewhere. In conniving at doctrinal laxity, he fails to vindicate the Church's theoretical position; but he usually represents the tone and temper of his people due to the habitual restiveness at the supernatural prevalent everywhere in Protestantism. After long struggle against the conviction, I have been forced to admit that this toleration of doctrinal laxity seems to me to indicate that the Church's discipline fails to express and defend its doctrine, and creates an insuperable difficulty for those who believe in the fundamental importance of the historic doctrine of the Incarnation.

## **2. Uncertainty about Sacraments**

*Sacraments.* — The Episcopal Church permits and encourages a variety of views about Sacraments. Its standard, however, is determined by the minimum rather than the maximum view tolerated, since its official position must be gauged not by the most it allows, but by the least it insists on. Its general influence has fluid qualities always seeking the lowest possible level. The stream of its life cannot rise higher than its source in corporate authority. Individual belief and practice may surmount this; but they will ultimately count for nothing so long as they find no expression in official action; nor can the Church be judged by the standard of individual members acting in independence of it.

Like many others, I attach the highest importance to the doctrines of Baptismal Regeneration, of the Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist, of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, of the sacramental character of Confirmation and Penance. All these doctrines the Church tolerates; but, so long as equal toleration is given to others of a different or even neutralizing sort, it does not definitely teach them. To tolerate everything is to teach nothing. Hence though individuals among us may urge the importance of these definite beliefs, they cannot claim the full authoritative backing of that portion of the Church to which they profess allegiance.

The sacramental teaching of the Episcopal Church is non-committal, with the consequence that its official teachers are habitually vague in their utterances, and that the beliefs of many of its members are approximately or actually Zwinglian. A general policy of comprehension by reduction of requirements to the lowest terms prevents conversion by rising to highest possibilities. Although there has been marked advance among some of our people owing to deeper hold of sacramental truth, there has been even greater advance among others toward rationalistic scepticism. On the whole, the Church seems to be swayed by the tendencies of the age — opposed to the supernatural owing to ambiguities inherent in its system, always subject to an intellectual law of gravitation.

## **3. Orders Doubtfully Valid**

*Orders.* — The immediate occasion of my resignation has been a change of view concerning Anglican ordinations. I received and have conferred Orders in the Episcopal Church, believing Holy Orders to be a Sacrament of Divine appointment, necessary for valid ministrations. In this I simply shared the conviction of many English and American divines, certainly of most of the Bishops with whom I have had closest contact. Hesitation about the use of the word "Sacrament" as applied to Orders, as not one of those "generally necessary," cannot obscure the sacramental character of the formula, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office of a Priest (or Bishop) in the Church of God." In the best of company I have taken this as representing the true teaching of the Anglican Communion about Orders, though it involved explaining away dubiousness elsewhere in formularies and in practice.

During the past three years, however, I have been reinvestigating the question of Orders, being largely influenced to do so by arguments that Anglican Orders "have no special theory attached." This contention, though lacking support from many whose judgement is of special weight, has that of many great names, of the preponderance of lay opinion, and of important precedents. In comparing the arguments for *esse* and *bene esse* (the theory that the Church in ordination confers a Sacrament though many clergy do not know it, as contrasted with the other that the Church confers no Sacrament though some of the clergy think so) I have been forced to admit that the defenders of the latter seem to make out the stronger case, and that this must be taken as the more probable opinion of Holy Orders in the Anglican Communion. I have yielded to the arguments for this; but I give up the Orders.

## Final Disillusionment

Consideration of this matter had created such grave doubts in my mind last December, that I had to refuse requests from the Bishops of New York and Pennsylvania to hold ordinations for them during Advent, at which time also I finally decided to resign my diocese. Only during the past month, however, have I been able to see what must be the further consequences for myself.

To my mind, Orders to which "no special theory is attached" are Orders to which no special importance is attached. Orders of this description do have the theory attached that no special theory is necessary, which excludes the sacramental view. To the Orders of the Catholic Church the theory is always attached — or rather, in them the principle is inherent — that Orders is a Sacrament, perpetuating the Apostolate instituted by our Lord. If the "no special theory" be the more correct one, Anglican Orders are proved dubious, if not invalid through defect of intention. If so, I for one cannot perpetuate them, nor can I hold them.

Doubtfulness about the character of Orders and the assumption that special forms in ordination are non-essential seem to underlie many prevailing schemes for promoting unity. Too often we are content with names without regard to the things they signify, giving the titles "bishop" and "priest" without clear apprehension of the offices they represent; laying great stress on "Holy Communion" without full apprehension of what the central Christian rite really is; urging the use of the ancient Creeds, yet letting it be understood that those who wish may say "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," meaning thereby that Jesus was one of the sons of Joseph.

"Is the Creed worth defending?" "Are the Sacraments Divine mysteries?" "Is Holy Orders a Sacrament?" I believe the only answer the Church should make to all of these questions to be a prompt and emphatic "Yes"; yet I have come to feel that our communion by its non-committal attitude virtually answers "No." Hence I have no choice but to resign my place and to declare my withdrawal from the ministry: the Bishops have no choice but to accept the resignation and proceed to my deposition, since resignation for these reasons involves renunciation at least of the Discipline and Orders of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

I ought not to regret doing what under the circumstances is necessary and right. I do sincerely regret that the action will cause pain to many and sever ties and associations which I supremely value. Though forced to give up the ministry of the Episcopal Church, I have not ceased to appreciate the depth and reality of its religious experiences, or to believe that through it Our Lord gives His grace to all who approach Him in good faith; nor have I ceased to recognize that it is a training-school for

saints and is making valuable contribution to American Christianity. My personal feelings for it can only be those of gratitude. To it alone I owe the convictions which have led to my present action.

With great respect and affection,

Sincerely yours,

Frederick Joseph Kinsman.

Birchmere, Bryant Pond, Maine, July 1, 1919.

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