

The Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum coetibus* of Pope Benedict XVI from an Anglican Perspective

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Having illustrated the various responses among Anglicans to Benedict XVI's offer to allow Anglicans who enter into full communion with Rome to retain aspects of their Anglican heritage, the article analyses and evaluates the detail of what is actually proposed. The article argues that for all its generosity and creativity in seeking a pastoral accommodation for ex-Anglicans, Anglicanorum Coetibus does not measure up to the aspirations of Anglican ecumenism. In particular it is not the unity without absorption hoped for by Paul VI and Cardinal Willebrands. Nonetheless the offer is a significant step that, seen rightly, augurs well for future ecumenical relations.

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As soon as people got wind of the forthcoming Apostolic Constitution there was a flurry of excitement. The Pope, it seemed, had launched an attack upon the Anglican Communion, precisely at its moment of weakness. Just as Anglicans were struggling in the face of hard issues arising out of clashes concerning the development of doctrine, especially with regard to homosexuality and the ordination of women as bishops, it seemed that Rome was attempting to woo traditionalists away. The language got quite colourful. Ruth Gledhill, *The Times'* correspondent for religion, wrote on 21 October 2009: "Rome has parked its tanks on the Archbishop of Canterbury's lawn...".

It was just as one would expect, given the press that the Pope usually has. And in any case a good story always involves conflict. Put the two together and, with differences according to the information available or the creative perception of the writer, one has a tale of the Pope's latest act of aggression.

It would be unfair, however, to say that the negative reaction was only dreamt up by an unsympathetic media. Many Anglicans felt just as the journalists did. Instinctively, it seemed, they felt that Rome was up to something unpleasant. Behind this there is a long history of hurts and rebuffs that Anglicans have felt from the Holy See, which in its broad sweep in recent times began with Leo XIII's declaration of Anglican orders as "utterly null and completely void" in *Apostolicae Curiae* in 1896, was underlined in the tepid if not cold response to ARCIC's groundbreaking agreements, and culminated