

Obstacles to Christian Unity

By Mark Mayberry

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Introduction

According to Mr. Brian Farrell, who serves as a [Bishop](#) in the Roman Catholic Church, and also as secretary of the [Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity](#), the appointment of Anglican women bishops in the Church of England is an “enormous obstacle” to unity between the Anglican and Catholic churches. Granted, Mr. Farrell gives voice to typical Roman Catholic errors: misunderstanding the role of a bishop, overemphasizing the role of tradition, etc. Nonetheless, he correctly acknowledges that Christian unity cannot be divorced from doctrine/practice.

Vatican official: Anglican women bishops an ‘enormous obstacle’ to Christian unity

July 16, 2010

In an interview published July 15, Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, called the prospect of the appointment of women bishops in the Church of England an “enormous obstacle” to Christian unity.

“All the Churches of the first millennium, Catholic, Eastern and Orthodox, state that only men can be ordained,” he said. “These Churches see the ordination of women as an illegitimate abandonment of authentic Tradition.”

“It saddens us that on this point the Anglican Communion has left what we consider the essential Tradition of the Church since its beginning,” he continued. “But the process began a long time ago.”

“We will continue the ecumenical dialogue with a realism that accepts things as they are and is aware that the road ahead is long and arduous. Knowing, however, that dialogue is a task imposed by Christ himself and sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit, soul of the Church of Christ.”

Bishop Farrell emphasized even apart from the provisions of *Anglicanorum Coetibus*-- the 2009 document that paved the way for Anglican communities to be received into the Catholic Church-- individual Anglicans may be received into the Church in local parishes at any time they wish.

Source: <http://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=6943>

Understanding the Role of Tradition

We would agree that the ordination of women is, indeed, “an illegitimate abandonment of authentic Tradition,” so long as emphasis is placed upon the authority of divine traditions (1 Cor. 11:2-3; 2 Thess. 2:13-15; 3:6-9) rather than the human variety (Matt. 15:1-9; Col. 2:20-23; Titus 1:13-14).

1 Corinthians 11:2-3 ... 2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. 3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. (NASB95)

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 ... 13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. (NASB95)

2 Thessalonians 3:6-9 ... 6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. (NASB95)

Matthew 15:1-9 ... 1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” 3 And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 “For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’ 5 “But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 9 ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ ” (NASB95)

Colossians 2:20-23 ... 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (NASB95)

Titus 1:13-14 ... 13 This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. (NASB95)

According to the inspired apostle Paul, “women are to keep silent in the churches” (1 Cor. 14:34-36). Additionally, he said, “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (1 Tim. 2:11-15).

1 Corinthians 14:34-36 ... 34 The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35 If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. 36 Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? (NASB95)

1 Timothy 2:11-15 ... 11 A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. 12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. 13 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. 14 And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (NASB95)

Moreover, the qualifications of a bishop/overseer restrict the office to men. If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. He who would serve in this capacity must be the husband of one wife, managing his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity, etc. (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

1 Timothy 3:1-7 ... 1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (NASB95)

Titus 1:5-9 ... 5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (NASB95)

The teaching efforts of women find proper expression in the home, with mothers instructing their children (Prov. 31:10, 26-27), in private, as when Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:24-26), or among themselves, as when older women instruct younger women regarding domestic and familial duties (Titus 2:3-5).

Proverbs 31:10 ... 10 An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. (NASB95)

Proverbs 31:26-27 ... 26 She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. (NASB95)

Acts 18:24-26 ... 24 Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; 26 and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. (NASB95)

Titus 2:3-5 ... 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. (NASB95)

Understanding the Role of a Bishop

It is important that we have a proper understanding of the role of a bishop. The New Testament uses a family of Greek words to identify the office and work of a bishop. The Greek noun *episkopos*, occurring 5x, refers to a guardian, overseer, superintendent, or supervisor (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:25). A related noun, *episkopē*, twice refers to an office of responsibility or oversight/supervision (Acts 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:1). The Greek verb *episkopeō*, occurring 2x, means to give attention to (Heb. 12:15), and also signifies the acceptance of responsibility for the care of someone, i.e., to oversee (1 Pet. 5:2).

*Acts 20:28 ... 28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NASB95)*

*Philippians 1:1 ... 1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the **overseers** and deacons: (NASB95)*

*1 Timothy 3:2 ... 2 An **overseer**, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (NASB95)*

*Titus 1:7 ... 7 For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, (NASB95)*

*1 Peter 2:25 ... 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and **Guardian** of your souls. (NASB95)*

*Acts 1:20 ... 20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead be made desolate, And let no one dwell in it'; and, 'Let another man take **his office**.' (NASB95)*

*1 Timothy 3:1 ... 1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to **the office of overseer**, it is a fine work he desires to do. (NASB95)*

*Hebrews 12:15 ... 15 **See to it** that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (NASB95)*

*1 Peter 5:2 ... 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, **exercising oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (NASB95)*

Let us recognize that the terms elder/presbyter, bishop/overseer, and pastor/shepherd refer to the same function or office. The Greek word *presbuteros*, translated "presbyter" or "elder," identifies one who is an older man, one advanced in life, an elder. The Greek word *episkopos*, translated "bishop" or "overseer," identifies a superintendent, an overseer, one who sees that things are done properly. The Greek word *poimen*, translated "pastor" or "shepherd," identifies one who does in the church what a shepherd does for a flock of sheep. Just as the words "church," "body," "kingdom," etc., collectively refer to the people of God, so each of these words refer to the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

*Acts 20:17, 28 ... 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** [Greek: *presbuteros*] of the church. 28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers** [Greek: *episkopos*], to **shepherd** [Greek: verb form of *poimen*] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NASB95)*

*Titus 1:5-7 ... 5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** [Greek: *presbuteros*] in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the **overseer** [Greek: *episkopos*] must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, (NASB95)*

*1 Peter 5:1-2 ... 1 Therefore, I exhort the **elders** [Greek: *presbuteros*] among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that*

is to be revealed, 2 shepherd [Greek: verb form of poimen] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [Greek: variation of episkopos] not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (NASB95)

Finally, we must distinguish between universal and local oversight. Jesus Christ, the Shepherd and Guardian of our Souls, possesses absolute authority (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 1:20-23). As ambassadors of Christ and inspired agents of revelation, the apostles exercised authority over all the churches (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 14:33; 16:1). However, the oversight of elders is limited to the local congregation of which they are members (Acts 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:1-2).

Matthew 28:18-20 ... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (NASB95)

Ephesians 1:20-23 ... 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 4:17 ... 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 7:17 ... 17 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 14:33 ... 33 for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 16:1 ... 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. (NASB95)

Acts 20:17 ... 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. (NASB95)

Acts 20:28 ... 28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NASB95)

Philippians 1:1 ... 1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: (NASB95)

1 Peter 5:1-2 ... 1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (NASB95)

Understanding the Role of Doctrine

It is important that we have a proper understanding of the role of doctrine. Some mistakenly restrict the application of 2nd John 9 to those who deny that Jesus has come in the flesh. Certainly the humanity of Christ must be affirmed, but acceptance of His deity is equally important. What is meant by “the doctrine of Christ?” I affirm that it refers, comprehensively, to the teaching that came from Christ and was communicated through inspired apostles and prophets (2 John 7-11; cf. John 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15).

2 John 7-11 ... 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. 9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; 11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (NASB95)

John 14:25-26 ... 25 “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. 26 “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (NASB95)

John 15:26-27 ... 26 “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, 27 and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning. (NASB95)

John 16:12-15 ... 12 “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 “All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you. (NASB95)

When Jesus said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me,” He was not only speaking of the doctrines relating to His person (i.e., His deity and humanity), but also to the gospel message as a whole (John 7:14-18). Similarly, when Solomon said, “My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother,” his emphasis was not on the identity of one’s father/mother, but rather on the instruction that they provided (Prov. 6:20-25).

John 7:14-18 ... 14 But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach. 15 The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" 16 So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17 "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. 18 "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. (NASB95)

Proverbs 6:20-25 ... 20 My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; 21 Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you. 23 For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life 24 To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. 25 Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids. (NASB95)

In warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus was not so much concerned with who they were, but what they taught (Matt. 16:5-12). The same principle applies to "the teaching of Balaam" and "the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (Rev. 2:14-16).

Matthew 16:5-12 ... 5 And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. 6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 7 They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "He said that because we did not bring any bread." 8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? 9 "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? 10 "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? 11 "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (NASB95)

Revelation 2:14-16 ... 14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. (NASB95)

Sailing to Cyprus, Barnabas and Paul encountered Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Paphos, a man of intelligence who gave ear to the word of God. However, Bar-Jesus/Elymas, a magician and Jewish false prophet, sought to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Pronouncing divine judgment upon this evil man, Paul struck him with blindness for a season. Afterwards, the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord. Once again, note that "the teaching of the Lord" was comprehensive, including not just who

Jesus was, but also what He taught (Acts 13:4-12), being synonymous with “the word of God” (vs. 5, 7), “the faith” (vs. 8), and “the straight ways of the Lord” (vs. 10).

*Acts 13:4-12 ... 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim **the word of God** in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. 6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear **the word of God**. 8 But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from **the faith**. 9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked **the straight ways of the Lord**? 11 “Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at **the teaching of the Lord**. (NASB95)*

Writing to Titus, Paul commanded servants to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.” Once again, a consideration of the context demands a comprehensive understanding of “the doctrine of God,” requiring not only a proper understanding of the person of God, but also the varied demands that He places upon His children (Titus 2:9-14).

Titus 2:9-14 ... 9 Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (NASB95)

Conclusion

In the aforementioned article, Mr. Farrell demonstrates a misunderstanding regarding the role of a bishop, and the authority of tradition. Roman Catholics affirm the general oversight of bishops, and appeal to the authority of human traditions. Holy Scripture limits the oversight of elders to the local congregation of which they are members. Furthermore, it denies the authority of human tradition, exalting the word of God as the sole basis of religious authority.

However, at least in principle, Mr. Farrell understands that deviation from Biblical teaching directly impacts Christian fellowship. Unity among believers is a noble goal, but it must be established upon a proper foundation. Let us, therefore, strive for Scriptural unity based upon truth, not a pseudo-unity that comes from setting aside the same (Psa. 133:1-3; Eph. 4:1-6).

Psalm 133:1-3 ... 1 A Song of Ascents, of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, Even Aaron's beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever. (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:1-6 ... 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (NASB95)