

## **ANGLICAN ARCANA: Why Do We Say “Amen”?**

The word *amen* is one of a small number of Hebrew words which have been imported unchanged into the liturgy of the Church, *propter sanctiorem* as St. Augustine expresses it, in virtue of an exceptionally sacred example. “So frequent was this Hebrew word in the mouth of Our Savior,” observes the Catechism of the Council of Trent, “that it pleased the Holy Ghost to have it perpetuated in the Church of God.” In point of fact St. Matthew attributes it to Jesus 28 times, and St. John in its doubled form 26. As regards the etymology, *Amen* is a derivative from the Hebrew verb *aman* “to strengthen” or “so be it; truly.” In the Holy Scripture it appears almost invariably as an adverb, and its primary use is to indicate that the speaker adopts for his own what has already been said by another.

—Adapted from the online Catholic Encyclopedia

Now, did you ever wonder why we Anglicans say “*ah-men*” when Baptists say “*ay-men*”? According to the not-so-authoritative Wikipedia, “The *ah-men* pronunciation is the one that is used in performances of classical music and in churches with more formalized rituals and liturgy. The *ay-men* pronunciation is associated with evangelical Christianity, and the pronunciation that is typically sung in gospel music.”

The exception to that rule, of course, is that of Roman Catholics in this country. When they translated the liturgy from Latin into English in the 1960s, they felt compelled to change from *ah-men* to *ay-men*, apparently. Not an informed choice, in my opinion.

We Anglicans hold the tradition dear, and so it remains *ah-men* for us. It’s what we’ve said for 450 years, identical to the Latin used before that, and closer to the Hebrew original. And “amen” to that! Ω

—Father Barrie