

WHAT ON EARTH IS THIS “ORDINARIATE”?

By Fr Keith Robinson

It is not at all to be wondered at, that people generally have no real idea as to what the *Ordinariate* is, or what it is about. They have neither heard its history, nor had its intended purpose explained to them. For reasons which will be obvious, the preparation of it had to be shrouded in secrecy, and then it all happened so quickly that there really wasn't time for an adequate explanation. Nor was it entirely clear who should, or even could explain it, apart from the Holy Father himself. There wasn't even a Pastoral Letter about it from the Bishops' Conference which, with hindsight, could have been a useful thing. Understanding depended almost entirely upon what you might, or might not have been able to pick up from the newspapers – which inevitably peddled their own sensationalist glosses! For example, one headline, “Vatican parks tanks on Rowan's Lawn”¹ will probably serve to indicate the level of media comprehension. Generally speaking, when the *Ordinariate* was announced, the Church of England was very grumpy about it² (though that was not true of the Archbishop of Canterbury personally), and the Catholic Church in England seemed completely bemused. It seemed not to know quite what to do, with the response varying greatly from diocese to diocese.

Yet the story of the *Ordinariate* is an amazing story. It is an example of Pope Benedict XVI's understanding of a very difficult situation and his imagination in addressing it. It also might even be one of Blessed John Henry Newman's miracles! Certainly at some point in the future historians will record the history of the *Ordinariate*, but meanwhile this is intended to be a sort of interim account. So I want to tell the Story, as it were, and then quite briefly say something about how it is currently working out in practice.

Actually, the Story of the *Ordinariate* is strictly speaking the conflation of two stories: a Catholic Story and an Anglican Story: stories of two Communion which had, in the 1980s especially, given every impression of wanting to move closer to each other. For those who follow Church affairs it is not too difficult

¹ The Times, 21 October 2009

² Evidenced by the tone of the hasty response of the General Synod's legal department; the Bishop of London's statement to his Diocesan Synod, and the Bishop of Salisbury's “explanation” to his diocese in Sarum Link. However, the Archbishop of Canterbury demonstrated a much more generous response.

to reconstruct the Catholic Story, although most Catholics are probably too preoccupied with more immediate matters to have actually had the time to do that. At least there has been a consistent, and traceable “reaching out” towards the separated brethren, including Anglicans, since the Second Vatican Council. But almost nothing is yet known about the Anglican Story – by anyone, including (indeed especially perhaps) by Anglicans themselves. That is at least partly because it is not a convenient story for them to hear, let alone tell, and some of the sources for it are not so easily accessible.

THE CATHOLIC STORY

Let’s begin, then, with the Catholic Story. Of course it goes right back to the time when the English Church was *separated off* from the rest of Christendom, by the repudiation of the Papacy by King Henry VIII. It must have been a terrible time for the Catholic Church – the nations of Europe, one by one, were breaking away, not always for precisely the same reasons (not all over a divorce), and usually with widely differing results. (The Reformation in Germany, for example, took a very different form from that in England.) But I think that from the time of the excommunication of Queen Elizabeth I by Pius V in 1570 right down to Leo XIII’s bull *Apostolicae Curae* of 1896, which declared Anglican Orders to be “absolutely null and utterly void”, there was something of an attitude of blame between Catholics and Protestants. Each side blamed the other for the divisions of the Church of Christ, and this culture of blame at times reached (as everybody knows) levels of hysteria, profound mistrust, phobic suspicion and even intense hatred, which must be blots on Christian history. Both sides persecuted each other, as well as engaging in polemic from which, today, we would recoil. There was also a degree of intransigence, and I think probably genuine fear: each side was a threat to the other. This is, I suppose, what one might call the Wound of the Reformation, and it runs very deep.

That is not at all to say that all Catholics had hostile attitudes to Protestants, or *vice versa*. St Francis de Sales, even in the early seventeenth century took a conciliatory line towards the Calvinists of Geneva where he was the Bishop, engaging in debate with them and seeking to win them back by clear argument and friendship. But it may be less well known that Cardinal Mercier, who was Archbishop of Malines in Belgium in the first quarter of the last century,

engaged in a very significant series of Conversations with leading members of the Church of England (these are known as the Malines Conversations and they took place between 1921 and 1925)³ which it was hoped might lead to some reconciliation between Rome and Canterbury. These Conversations were in fact cut short by the Cardinal's death in 1926. Had we time, we could examine other semi-official communications between the two sides. But the sad, fatal handicap of Anglicanism was then, and is now, always the same. On almost any issue you can get enthusiastic agreement between some; but you can never achieve endorsement by the whole. What some truly do believe and aspire to, others do not believe and are set in the very opposite direction. The Church which in its final form is much more the creation of Elizabeth I than of her father, is in fact too broad for consensus. *That is its tragedy, because it can only operate by consensus.*⁴ That is the ecumenical *Achilles heel* of Anglicanism. It has been the bugbear also of the more recent ARCIC Conversations (about which more later), and it is played out very publicly and very painfully on the floor of the General Synod two or three times every year. It makes the Church of England almost too slippery a fish to handle, ecumenically speaking⁵.

So really, so far as the *Ordinariate* is concerned, the real turning point in Catholic attitudes (at the very highest levels, and in the most official sense) finds its best expression in *Lumen Gentium*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church which proceeded from the Second Vatican Council, and was published on the 21 November 1964. You may recall how, having clearly defined the One Holy Catholic Church of Christ as “the Catholic Church in communion with the successor of Peter”, it then goes on to say, “Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards

³ Bernard Barlow, *A Brother Knocking at the Door*, Canterbury Press 1996.

⁴ The commitment to “synodical government” is actually quite recent, 1969. It seems to be an idea derived from conciliarism, but now reduced to a parliamentary style pseudo democracy which, with a total absence of a Petrine role or magisterium and an uncertain doctrine of episcopacy, leaves the church a complete hostage to fortune.

⁵ Anglican ecumenical “successes” of which the Porvoo Agreement might be regarded as an example, are scarcely based on points of theological principle, but were often encouraged as steps toward the validation of liberal theological ideas. The pressure for women clergy has undoubtedly been a considerable driver in the development of relations with both Lutherans and Methodists, just as it has been a negative factor in relations with Rome and the Orthodox. Pressure from Methodism on this issue is well exemplified by Ian Jackson's contribution to Monica Furlong's book, *Act of Synod – Act of Folly*, SCM 1998, p 101f. More officially perhaps, see also *Living God's Covenant*, second interim report of the Joint Implementation Commission under the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England, para 8. (2007).

Catholic unity". Of course there have been other important ecumenical documents like *Unitatis redintegratio* and *Ut unum sint* as well, but *Lumen Gentium* is, really I think, the fertile ecumenical ground if you like, out of which a seed like the *Ordinariate* could very naturally grow.

It was as a very direct result of this absolutely positive ecumenical attitude that Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury together set up a joint theological Commission in 1966 (that is, just two years on from *Lumen Gentium*) in which theologians from both sides were to work together to try to get behind the great dividing issues of the Reformation period. How was it that the Church had once agreed, but had then disagreed over these issues? The *Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission* (ARCIC for short) began by tackling three historic areas of controversy: the questions surrounding Eucharistic belief, understanding of the Church's Ministry, and Authority in the Church (including the role of Peter). When the first commission made its final report on these issues in 1982 it was found that there was in fact a surprising level of agreement on all these fundamental matters – including the role of the Bishop of Rome in any united Church. The published Report actually said: "We believe that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome can be affirmed as part of God's design for the universal *koinonia* in terms which are compatible with both our traditions." And "we agree that a universal primacy will be needed in a reunited Church and should appropriately be the primacy of the Bishop of Rome" &c⁶. The General Synod officially endorsed this Report in 1986, as did the ten-yearly Lambeth Conference of all Anglican bishops at its 1988 session⁷. True, more work needed to be done, but the stage seemed set for some really historic reconciliation of ministries. 1982 was also the year of Blessed John Paul II's historic visit to Britain, and Christians in Britain really were, I believe, on an ecumenical high.

But it was not to be! It must have seemed incomprehensible to Catholics – as it certainly was to Anglo-catholics – that having so publicly agreed these important documents, the Church of England, not to mention the Anglican Communion, seemed to immediately forget about them altogether, and to

⁶ Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission The Final Report, p 81 f, CTS/SPCK 1982

⁷ It is true that the Executive Committee of the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion issued an "Open Letter" in 1988, expressing "reservations and anxieties", but that does not alter the official endorsements

behave (as she continues to behave today) as though these agreements had never existed. I can tell you that it is today a fact that many members of the General Synod couldn't tell you anything at all about the ARCIC agreements. (They see themselves as having much more important, or at any rate, immediate matters in hand.)

So I think that Rome was left slightly jaw-dropped by all this⁸, and although things remained reasonably polite between the two communities, so far as the Church of England and Rome were concerned, ecumenism was on hold, or as some said, went into the deep freeze! There, for the most part, with a few remarkable exceptions, it has remained.

That, in a nut-shell is how I would describe the Catholic Story. But how was it from the Anglican side? And, in a sense, from the inside of the Anglican side?

THE ANGLICAN STORY

Well, again, we probably need to go back to the reign of Elizabeth I. Although not a deeply religious woman, the National Church, for political reasons, was extremely important to her. To bring about what later became known as “the Elizabethan Settlement”, she determined that in doctrine and practice her National Church should be as wide and as broad as possible. Ideally it should be able to contain all her subjects, and it would be a very obvious way to control their thinking and their behaviour, not least in relation to the monarchy itself. We should say these days, I suppose, that she wanted it to be as “inclusive” as possible. But of course, this could never include those who continued to believe in the Pope. Nor could it include the more extreme Protestants (the Puritans) who didn't believe in a variety of things like formal liturgy at all or infant Baptism and so forth. So she exercised a stick and carrot regime. There were rewards in plenty for those who conformed. And, by passing Acts of Uniformity⁹ and other legislation she deliberately made life all but impossible for any who could not conscientiously conform to the

⁸ Others also thought this: eg Henry Chadwick quoted in Humphrey Carpenter's biography, Robert Runcie the Reluctant Archbishop, 1996, page 241.

⁹ There were altogether five Acts of Uniformity, though not all belonging to Elizabeth's reign, plus the Act of Supremacy of 1559. Their scope was extended by further repressive legislation, especially in the later seventeenth century.

Established Religion. The penalties were very severe, both for the recusants, like St Margaret Clitherow, for example, and also for the Puritans. Both were more or less banished from public life.

And yet there may always have been some who outwardly conformed to the Church of England, yet who were profoundly uncomfortable with the schism from the Universal Church, and who longed and prayed for reconciliation. Some of this sensitivity surfaced during the reign of Charles I, with his Archbishop William Laud, both of whom were beheaded, and today are regarded as martyrs. And this was also one underlying reason for the Commonwealth, when, under Oliver Cromwell, the Church of England was abolished altogether. It was too Popish, or at least too prelatical! You will also know that Charles II converted to Catholicism on his deathbed (although he is not necessarily a very good example of a converting Anglican!)

Such people had a sense that Anglicanism was, to an extent, provisional, even an accident of history; that it was incomplete in its separation; that reconciliation with the See of Peter was both a logical and a desirable aim. But this “catholic awareness”, if I may put it like that, became much more intense with the Oxford Movement and the so-called Catholic Revival in the Church of England in the nineteenth century. Let me explain what this was. It was in part provoked by heavy-handed treatment of the Irish Church by the British Government.

ERASTIANISM

Whenever the secular government tries to control the church, we have a word for it – *Erastianism* (after the Swiss Protestant theologian Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), who developed an ecclesiology which taught that it was right that the Church should be under the direction of the godly State). A classic example of *Erastianism* would be the way in which Henry VIII completely controlled the Church after he had wrested it out of the hands of the Papacy¹⁰. Now it is very important for us to recognise that there has been a surprising and perhaps unexpected resurgence of *Erastianism* in our own time in England, as various

¹⁰ Also defended by Richard Hooker in his Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity of 1594.

politicians threaten government legislation over the head of the General Synod¹¹. It is also important to understand that the threat of control by Parliament, *which is in law the ultimate arbiter of doctrine for the Church of England*¹², and the way in which this has recently become so apparent, has been another grave discomfort – indeed anomaly - within the Church of England which the creation of the *Ordinariate* sought to deliver us from.

The Oxford Movement is generally reckoned to have begun with the preaching of a very influential sermon on the 14 July 1833 before the University of Oxford¹³. The preacher, the Reverend John Keble (Professor of Poetry at Oxford), criticised government intervention in the affairs of the Church, and called the Church of England back to what he saw as its authentic roots in the Catholic Church of the ages. In fact of course, this was largely a challenge as to where authority lay in the Church. Now in recent times Professor Aemon Duffy has sought to show that at the time of the Reformation, the Church of England saw itself as breaking deliberately and decisively from the Medieval Church, and realigning itself with the early fathers¹⁴. But Keble and other leaders of the Oxford Movement believed that there had really been no substantial break at the Reformation. Only the Papacy had been removed. Apart from that, everything ought to have continued as it had been before. It fitted well into the Romantic mood of Victorian England to rediscover that the Church of England was really none other than the Medieval church reformed; it had just forgotten that in the meanwhile. Much scholarly research was carried out, and serious attempts were made to demonstrate continuity with the medieval church. It really was the same Church. New, that is Victorian, parish churches were built as idealised copies of medieval churches, even down to minute particulars. The ceremonial and outward appearance of the Liturgy was consciously adapted to English medieval patterns, though not without considerable controversy. Many books were written on the subject. The

¹¹ A shocking instance of this is the debate in the House of Commons on the 21 November 2012, following the General Synod vote against the Ordination of Women Bishops on the previous day. Members of Parliament took it for granted that they had the right to control the Church; the question seems to have been whether to intervene with legislation immediately, or to “allow the Church time to sort itself out.” The latter policy prevailed, but it was clear that it was only regarded as a temporary expedient, and perhaps also an act of magnanimity.

¹² This was made clear beyond all doubt by the case of *Williamson v Regina* of 1994, in which the High Court declared that “the doctrine of the Church of England” was whatever Parliament declared it to be.

¹³ When published, this sermon was entitled “National Apostacy”.

¹⁴ See, for example, George Herbert’s poem, *The British Church*.

Church of England confidently proclaimed itself to be the historic Catholic Church of this land, in absolute continuity with the Church of St Augustine¹⁵. Even Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop who crowned the present Queen (Archbishop from 1945-1961) famously claimed “We have no doctrine of our own, no orders of our own; we possess only the Catholic doctrine enshrined in the Catholic creeds and those creeds we hold with no addition or diminution. On this rock we stand.”¹⁶

In accordance with this new self-understanding there was developed the “Branch Theory” of Church history. This runs as follows: There is indeed only One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, as we all profess in the Creeds. It is like a single tree. It has one more or less continuous trunk until the year 1054, when there occurred the Great Schism, when Catholicism in the west, and Orthodoxy in the east became two great branches of the one tree. Then, in the sixteenth century, the catholic branch divided again and became Catholicism and Anglicanism, and so Anglicanism sees itself as the third branch of this single tree which is, taken altogether, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. This is what we were taught, and what we believed. It is taught still.

THE ANGLICAN DILEMMA

But there are major problems with this theory. First, it offers a highly privileged view of their own position to Anglicans themselves, without accounting for the rest of Protestantism. What about Lutheranism? Is that another branch or not? And what are all those countless denominations, the Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and others which have subsequently split off from Anglicanism? Are they part of this one Church or what is their ecclesiological

¹⁵ Philip North in *New Directions*, the Anglo-catholic periodical, April 2013: “We are guardians of the truth of the ecclesiological identity of the Church of England...If we believe that argument has indeed been lost, then we have no excuse for staying in the Church of England. Our position is a nonsense unless we are engaged with the debate and making the case for the Catholic identity of the Church of England.”

Whether, and in what sense the Church of England could still be regarded as an authentic part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church continues therefore to be a very live issue, though perhaps only for Anglicans. But it may be a significant question for the future of the Ordinariate. There is, of course, a totally different understanding of the meaning of “Tradition” in the two communions, which colours perceptions of dependent matters. However, the ultimate authority of the Crown in Parliament must surely be, to all except Anglicans, the most obvious and absolutely fundamental case against catholicity, regardless of anything that particular individual Anglicans might believe. The Catholic Church on the other hand insists that catholicity must include being “in communion with the successor of Peter”.

¹⁶ This was said by Fisher during the course of an address he gave in Westminster Central Hall on 31 January 1951.

status? If all of these are part of the Catholic Church, then clearly the very word Catholic has been redefined; if they are not, then what is the limit of catholicity, and how is that to be decided?

Further, it is a model of the Church which leads to complacency. The historic divisions, although perhaps a pity in some ways, have in fact brought great diversity to the one Church. Consequently we should all be affirmed in our differences, and whilst unity is of course a Biblical idea, if we all derive our sap from the same source, there are no problems, fundamentally, in remaining just as we are! Indeed, there is much richness to be risked by altering the situation. You can actually feel this complacency and self-justification.

Another problem with the Branch Theory is that it manifestly has *not* maintained One Church, one Faith, one Lord, and as time goes on, this becomes increasingly apparent – not least to those outside the Church altogether. There has been a perceptible movement away from Catholic doctrine in recent years, not least in the doctrine of God. Ecclesiologies, of course, are numerous. Another difficulty is that it is almost impossible to imagine how the separate branches could ever become united again into one trunk, and so organic unity becomes almost a logical impossibility, the effect of which is, again, to confirm and justify the comfortableness of the *status quo*. Even early on, some, including Newman and Manning realised this, and did the only thing they could do, which was to convert. More recently Archbishop Robert Runcie propounded the same theory but using a different metaphor. I think he was responding to a Papal comment about the Church being a ship in which the faithful sail across the sea of life. He said he preferred to think of a “flotilla of ships”¹⁷, which of course again justifies the *status quo*, and everybody can simply go sailing on in their own sweet way! Nothing really needs to change. So ecumenism is evacuated of any sense of urgency. On the whole, ecumenism tends rather to be somewhat troublesome.

It has to be said very clearly that the Branch Theory is not what the Catholic Church teaches. Its significance in understanding the *Ordinariate* is that the Oxford Movement created within the Church of England a body of people, called Anglo-catholics, who wanted genuinely to be catholic, who indeed

¹⁷ This is a personal memory, the source of which I have been unable to trace.

believed more or less that they were catholics, who believed catholic doctrines, who tried to live catholic lives, who believed in and prayed for the Pope. The Oxford Movement sought to call the *whole* Church of England (back, as they saw it) to this way of thinking believing and living. It is, I have come to believe, a very seductive illusion when you are privileged to inhabit the historic shell of authentic Catholicism. But even Rowan Williams said to me once, when he was my tutor in Cambridge, “Keith, it’s never been easy to be a catholic in the Church of England.”¹⁸ Oh, how very, very true!

Nevertheless, as I have already said hopes were high in 1982, and some of us remained within the Church of England because we genuinely believed that the Anglo-catholic dream could be rekindled, and that we might even be able to play some small part in what I have called the reconciliation of Rome and Canterbury. Indeed, it was at the time an exciting and energising prospect. There was, so it seemed, a battle to be won.

A CHURCH IN CRISIS

But, as ever, it very quickly turned out that not all Anglicans by any means were thinking along those lines. In spite of synodical “agreements”, many were not even looking to Rome ecumenically at all. George Carey, when he was Archbishop had virtually no interest in pursuing that agenda, and it suddenly emerged that, almost unknown to anyone, the Church of England had come to agreement with various north European Lutheran Churches¹⁹ (some of which didn’t even claim to possess the apostolic succession). He encouraged closer relations with the Methodists. Of course this was all much easier; much less demanding. But it was unmistakably an ecumenical realignment in a Protestant as opposed to a Catholic direction. It was, at the highest levels, a rejection of the basic principles of the Oxford Movement. But other mischief was also afoot. At the same time other parts of the Church of England were apparently feeling a need to accommodate to certain pressures emanating from within contemporary secular society: in the area of Marriage discipline, for example. In the past two decades there has been a complete erosion of Marriage discipline in the Church of England, so that last year I found myself at a wedding in an Anglican parish church, where it transpired that the bride had

¹⁸ A very distinct memory from the year 1978, when at Westcott House, Cambridge.

¹⁹ The final text of the Porvoo Agreement was agreed in October 1992.

already been divorced twice. In other words, in practice the church now takes no different line from contemporary secular society on this issue. It is true that, at present, individual parish priests have a legal right to refuse to officiate at such weddings, but they stand in isolation, usually under considerable pressure, unsupported by their Church. Then there has been the successful infiltration of secular movements such as feminism and gay rights, and this quite novel imposition from parliamentary politicians that “the Church must get with the programme” (as David Cameron puts it)²⁰, or “be in step with society” (as Robert Key expresses it)²¹

You can perhaps begin to see how, not only is the Church of England being pulled in many different directions at once, like the proverbial sheep without a shepherd (which is precisely what it is of course), but also that the priority of a “return” to Catholicism *in any sense at all*, is not any part of the mindset of the majority of its members, and especially of its leadership. It will have only as much “catholicism” as it chooses to have, and only those aspects which it finds congenial²². As this became more and more apparent many of us came to the profoundly unsettling conclusion that it was no longer possible to live a catholic life, believe catholic doctrines, let alone witness to those things within the Church of England, as we had always tried to do. The Church of England as a body does not believe these things, and is not interested in their propagation. The conclusion would presently become a conviction. The game was up, and we found ourselves in a fairly profound spiritual crisis. Of course, others had been there before us. Hear how Newman, in his *Apologia pro Vita sua* assesses the situation shortly after his conversion: “unwilling as I am to give offence to religious Anglicans, I am bound to confess that I felt a great change in my view of the Church of England. I cannot tell how soon there came on me – but very soon – an extreme astonishment that I had ever imagined it to be a portion of the Catholic Church.” We had in certain very significant

²⁰ David Cameron during the House of Commons debate on women bishops, 21 November 2012.

²¹ J H Newman, *Apologia*, “Doubtless the National Church has hitherto been a serviceable breakwater against doctrinal errors ... How long this will last in the years now before us, it is impossible to say, for the Nation drags down its Church to its own level.” Of the fourteen Anglican bishops present at the House of Lords second reading of the so-called “Equal Marriage” Bill on the 4 June 2013, nine voted in favour of the so-called “wrecking amendment”, and five abstained: yet another blast from the trumpet with an uncertain sound. (I Corinthians 14, 8)

²² A currently congenial aspect of Catholicism in the Church of England appears to be expensive gold brocade and tall mitres. In matters of taste, it puts the English Catholic Church utterly to shame.

respects, been mistaken. And for myself, I would have to say that the further one moves from the Church of England, the more obvious a deception on this fundamental point it becomes.

THE SEARCH FOR SALVATION

There was a deepening sense of serious spiritual insecurity. And so, we appealed to Rome for help. Now when I say “we” of course, it wasn’t at all like that. I knew that my own Bishop, now Mgr Andrew Burnham²³, had gone to Rome with another bishop. We were simply asked to pray for their intention. We were not allowed to know anything about what they had said, or asked, who they had seen, or what sort of reply if any they had received. What none of us ever knew, until much later, was that an unknown but considerable number of other Anglican bishops from around the world had also been to Rome in recent times, for the same reasons, and also asking for help from the Holy Father. This included – we now understand – at least eight serving bishops of the Church of England itself!²⁴ So, unbeknown to any of us, Rome had been given the clear impression that if a solution could be found for England, it might also work in North America and Australia as well.

This explains why the apostolic constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, which sets up the *Ordinariate*, begins like this:

“In recent times the Holy Spirit has moved groups of Anglicans to petition *repeatedly and insistently* to be received into full Catholic communion individually as well as corporately. The Apostolic See has responded favourably to such petitions. Indeed, the Successor of Peter, mandated by the Lord Jesus to guarantee the unity of the episcopate and to preside over and safeguard the universal communion of all the Churches could not fail to make available the means necessary to bring their holy desire to realisation.”

So, whereas it was always possible for Anglicans and others to convert individually, as did for example Blessed John Henry Newman himself, the idea that they might come as groups with their own pastors was new, and

²³ Then the Bishop of Ebbsfleet.

²⁴ This information derives from a Lecture by Dr William Tighe entitled “The Genesis of *Anglicanorum Coetibus*” given to the Anglican Use Conference on the 19 July 2011. Its authority may be considered to rest on the fact that it has never been challenged either in general terms, or, more particularly, by any of those identified within it. See also Mgr Burnham’s account in the *Catholic Herald*, 12 July 2013.

apparently entirely the initiative of the Holy Father. Theoretically it would have been possible to come with their church buildings and all their other assets as well, as seems to be the case in America and Australia, but the Church of England immediately made it clear in no uncertain terms that any of its members contemplating the *Ordinariate* would take absolutely nothing with them in this country. With the Acts of Uniformity long since defunct, the denial of material support for its erring members was one of the few disincentives at its disposal²⁵. And, of course, that was right, because it is no secret that far more laity (and probably clergy too) would certainly have joined the *Ordinariate* if they could have remained in their parish churches.

Yet the fact that we have been able for the first time to come as groups certainly means that more have come than would have come on their own. It also means that existing church communities have been able to stay together. Indeed it has given them new strength. It is also a much more powerful witness to the world, than when an individual makes the journey alone. But the Holy Father had other thoughts in mind, which went way beyond anything we could have imagined or hoped for. They have to do with culture.

BRINGING ANGLICANISM INTO FULL COMMUNION

Given the Church of England's self-understanding as I have just described it, you can imagine that it never felt there was any need for any other "catholic" presence in England than itself. Underneath the pleasantries and politeness, that is still a very widespread attitude in fact. The Roman Catholic presence was therefore always slightly resented, in the sense that it was seen as a quite unnecessary or even irrelevant competition. That was especially the reaction to the reestablishment of the Catholic Hierarchy in 1850, but it still continues. (It is the attitude very plainly revealed in a number of David Stancliffe's public statements towards the end of his time as Bishop of Salisbury, especially his public reaction to *Anglicanorum Coetibus*.) It was very common for Catholicism in this country to be talked of as "the Italian Mission" in a rather derisory way. And here was indeed a problem, and it is a cultural problem, for the Catholic Church in this country often appears to be culturally Italian, or Irish, or even Polish or Indian. Its buildings tend to stand out as "un-English", that is to say as

²⁵ This greatly contrasts with the financial compensation offered to dependents leaving under the provisions of the Act of Synod in 1993.

“foreign” architecture. It very seldom looks British. The Catholic Church here still has a somewhat “alien” feel to outsiders in a way that it certainly doesn’t have in France or Spain or Italy, for example. All this was, of course quite deliberate. Westminster Cathedral was deliberately built in an alien Byzantine style (the like of which had never been seen in this country before) rather than a more indigenous gothic style. It was to give visible expression to the universality of the Church. (It is the same reason, interestingly, why certain Anglo-catholic churches in the early twentieth century were also built in Italianate or Byzantine styles.)

The Church of England, meanwhile, hung on to its assumed gothic buildings, absolutely catholic, and utterly indigenous or native as they are. And this has given the Church of England a certain cultural edge in this country over Catholicism. It also hung onto its wonderful renaissance music, its own liturgical language, and other quintessentially English cultural manifestations. The Church of England, quite apart from being established, is the natural expression of British Christianity in a way that Catholicism is not quite. Further, the Church of England can, at its best, be a very noble expression of Christianity. There is no doubt about that, and it is still the case. I think, for example, of the most recent royal wedding. Indeed it actually has been the public expression of the Christian Faith in this country for several hundred years, in a way that the Catholic Church – mainly because of outright persecution – has not been. It has been hugely creative in many ways. It has produced great Christian art, architecture, music, poetry, writing, spirituality, liturgy, pastoral practice, much of it of a very catholic character, but it belongs to the Church of England, not to the Catholic Church. It is Anglican Patrimony. Pope Benedict XVI, who has studied Anglicanism, and probably knows more about it than any of his predecessors, has seen a way by which this very considerable and noble heritage can be reclaimed by the Catholic Church in this land.

THE ORDINARIATE’S VOCATION

He has in effect asked us in the *Ordinariate* to bring all this with us into the Catholic Church, and in effect to help make British Catholicism more culturally British. He doesn’t ask us to deny anything of our Anglican past which is consistent with the Catholic Faith, not even our Anglican Orders (whatever

they may be). We are to bring it all with us into the Catholic Church. George Weigel, the American author of the biography of John Paul II, believes the *Ordinariate* will contribute these things to the Catholic Church: a rediscovery of beauty as a way to God, devotion to Sacred Scripture at the heart of prayer, the recovery of the arts of Biblical preaching, beautiful vernacular hymnody and liturgy, and an evangelical commitment to preach for the salvation of souls²⁶. That is how he sees the *Ordinariate's* special calling. And it is in this way, and this way alone, that we are different from Diocesan Catholics. The Holy Father has asked us to do this.

Now, from our point of view, I would have to say that this well exceeds all our hopes and expectations. It is a huge affirmation of our spiritual tradition and inheritance. In fact it is beyond all doubt the highest compliment that Rome has ever paid to the Church of England, though I fear the Church of England does not yet see it that way!

On the contrary, the Church of England has been quite irritable about the *Ordinariate*. Right at the outset it made it quite clear that, in spite of the large number of redundant and under-used church buildings it owns, we were most certainly not going to get our hands on any of them (notwithstanding the catholic origins of a good many of them!). Indeed we would leave with nothing. You will realise that so much of the best of Anglican patrimony is very much bound up with material assets: buildings, yes certainly, historic organs to accompany our great music, choirs to sing it, all cost money. A place like Salisbury Cathedral has a vast budget for liturgy and music, for example. In 2012 on Liturgy and Music alone it spent a mere £802,000! But we have had to start with nothing. We have had to leave everything behind. In many ways that has been good for us, but it does mean that we cannot yet, for example, produce the kind of liturgy that was put on for the Holy Father when he visited Westminster Abbey! We just haven't the resources.

So we have been more than grateful for not only the welcome we have received from almost all Catholics, but also for the presbyteries in which some of us live, for the use of church buildings and much else. Certainly, when my own group started up on Pentecost Sunday 2011 everything we used, from the

²⁶ Said in a lecture given to *Ordinariate* clergy at St Patrick's Soho on 20 June 2013

vestments, the missals, hymnals, the Eucharistic bread and wine – everything – was loaned or given by the Catholic parishes. Coming, as the Sarum Group did, from Salisbury’s best equipped church – even the Cathedral used to borrow things from us – to having nothing of our own was in its way a salutary lesson. Psychologically we came from being Salisbury’s oldest continuously worshipping community (Sarum St Martin long predated the present city of Salisbury, which was founded in 1220) to being its youngest worshipping community!

SO WHERE ARE WE NOW?

So where is the Ordinariate of our Lady of Walsingham today?

Well it officially began on the 1 January 2011, but the Groups did not set up until six months later. So we are still very young. There are now in existence some 57 *Ordinariate* Groups up and down the land, varying greatly in size and strength, from a few which are large enough to be self-supporting, to other at present small groups. Our Sarum Group, with a technical membership of 26 (but 36 at Mass last Sunday) seems to be about average in this respect. Numerically it is presently perilously small. The *Ordinariate* has brought into the English Catholic Church between eighty and ninety priests to date, varying in age, from fairly old to very young, but all of them able to function as priests. There is also currently one deacon, fourteen sisters and three seminarians (with others enquiring). But so far – and this is a considerable problem – there are fewer than 2,000 laity.

Now the reasons for this are not hard to understand. In the Church of England, the two things that were by a long way the most difficult and distressing to deal with, were engaging in the corrupt and capricious synodical system, and dealing with heretical bishops²⁷. Clergy, obviously, are obliged to do both. But the laity are not obliged to have anything to do with the synods, if they do not wish to, and they can easily avoid dealing with or even seeing bishops if they so choose! They love their wonderful medieval parish churches, to which they properly feel great loyalty, and provided the Eucharist is celebrated at the usual time every Sunday morning, with good music and incense, they can close their eyes to whatever is going on outside. (Membership of this church has

²⁷ Both, of course, are symptomatic of unresolved issues to do with authority.

probably always been accompanied by a free set of blinkers, so that no one is normally forced to see or hear what might be offensive.) It is all too easy to criticise this as an “ostrich” mentality, but for good or ill, that is bluntly why more laity did not come with us. Once the *Ordinariate* was known about there was also interference from outside of parishes, the determined aim of which was to prevent people from departing. They may come in time, we simply do not know. For obvious reasons the *Ordinariate* cannot consist of clergy alone. But the *Ordinariate’s* mission is not restricted. It is certainly not restricted to the reception of disaffected Anglicans. We are absolutely at one with the diocesan Catholics in seeking to bring the Faith to the lapsed, to those who have not yet fully heard or understood it, and to those to whom it is entirely strange and unknown, and we look forward to ever closer cooperation with them in this God-given task.

How the future will work out, only God knows. The Successor of Peter has asked us to do a particular thing, and we must do our utmost not to let him down. *Ordinariate* Catholics freely attend diocesan services. Diocesan Catholics are equally welcome to attend ours, and we are very grateful for their support. I am sure we can work closer and closer together, but we must not lose the very things we have been asked to bring with us: our “Patrimony”. It is astonishing to recall the words of Pope Paul VI which he uttered as long ago as 1970, prophetically I would say, of such a day as this. He said: “There will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church – this humble “servant of the servants of God” – is able to embrace her ever-beloved sister in the one authentic communion of the Family of Christ”.²⁸

Well, that has not occurred in quite the way in which it might have been expected or hoped to occur way back in 1970. But without doubt those prophetic words are fulfilled today in the *Ordinariate*. At the time of writing we still await our own Eucharistic liturgy²⁹, which is currently being worked on, but the Congregation for Divine Worship has already approved our Marriage and Funeral rites, our Calendar, Ordo, Offices, Litany, Psalter, Lectionary, special services for Advent and Christmas and much else, most of it contained within

²⁸ Pope Paul VI at the Beatification of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, 25 October 1970

²⁹ However the American “Book of Divine Worship” is also available for its Eucharistic liturgy

the *Customary of Our Lady of Walsingham*³⁰. And we are to use the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (Catholic Edition), a translation in the Authorised Version family of translations. This explains why, if diocesan catholics attend an *Ordinariate* Mass, the readings will be the same as in the Missal, but a different translation.

2011 was for us all an extremely traumatic year. We were obliged to leave everything behind, including some very dear friends with whom we had not actually fallen out, and in some cases breaking communion within our families, all the props for worship and everything that was familiar, and in many cases works contributed by the present generation of worshippers. It was emotionally a time such as I hope I never have to go through again. Several people have said to me that they found it was much more intense than a bereavement, and I know they are right. We were emotionally exhausted. There were also many complications, practical matters and pressures which could not have been apparent to onlookers. We still remain at present a small community, especially by Catholic standards, but we are now beginning to find our feet again. We perhaps take some comfort from the fact that our Lord began with eleven apostles! As always, we know that everything is in his hands and he has proved himself trustworthy: as the psalmist says in our translation of the Psalms by Miles Coverdale: “Thou hast turned my heaviness into joy: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness. Therefore shall every good man sing of thy praise without ceasing: O my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.”³¹

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

As I have been writing this, I have become more and more aware of the considerable and fundamental differences between the Catholic Story and the Anglican Story. The former represents a revised attitude to Christians outside the Roman Communion stemming from the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. From then on, it is a progressive development of a renewed appreciation of the urgency of Our Lord’s High Priestly prayer in John 17. It has been a continuous outworking of the implications of that great text. As I said at the beginning, it is a consistent pursuit of the New Testament imperative for

³⁰ *Customary of Our Lady of Walsingham*, Canterbury Press, 2012

³¹ Psalm 30, 12&13

unity deriving from the Lord himself. Sadly, the same cannot be said of the Anglican Story. On the contrary, it is a story of fits and starts, of changed directions, of blowing hot and cold, of agreements which, in the event, could not be lived up to; to be quite frank, a story of astonishing duplicity and no little confusion. It is also a story which involves much hurt. Although there have been key players, including many heroes, in this saga, the fault does not lie principally at the door of individuals. It is more, surely, a fault endemic in the Anglican system. After all, Methodists and Congregationalists have been just as frustrated by this as Roman Catholics and the Orthodox. As someone has said, Anglicanism appears to be much keener on the *idea* of living together than on marriage. But it is probably misleading to think of Anglicanism as a single ecclesial system. It has occurred to me that for some Anglicans, being a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is absolutely of the essence. As will be clear from the quotation from Father Philip North above, Anglo-catholics would not be able conscientiously to remain with it, if they were finally convinced that it was not part of the Catholic Church. Yet, for another part of the Anglican Church, it is just as important that it should be a church of the Reformation and quite different from the Catholic Church. For many, of course, in the middle, it is a matter of complete indifference. No wonder the outlooks and aspirations are so tremendously various.

A structural problem for Anglicanism is that, at its inception, it was deliberately conceived *not* to be an international organisation. It was intentionally, as a matter of principle, defined as being only a national church, relinquishing all mechanisms and notions of anything more than that. Therefore, although expansion into the Empire may have seemed inevitable for the Anglicans of those days, they were in fact stretching a system beyond the limitations imposed upon it by its founder. This is the fundamental cause of the so-called Communion's own internal incoherence, for which there appears to be no remedy.

But, of course, the real underlying fault upon which the whole Anglican edifice repeatedly shudders is the absence of authority. For too long we were beguiled with high-sounding notions such as "the principle of dispersed authority", or "synodically governed and episcopally led", which could mean almost anything or nothing. Indeed I can myself recall expounding dispersed

authority as a reasonable idea consistent with Scripture. But such phrases were probably pragmatically coined in the hope that they might explain a perceived phenomenon, rather than because they could be seriously believed in as objectively true, although of course there are elements of truth within them. In the end all such ideas were covers for a generally unpalatable truth, namely that any real authority (in England, but not elsewhere, where something like diocesan congregationalism often obtains) resides with the Crown in Parliament. Admittedly the Crown in Parliament generally is not much interested in religious matters at all, and has in recent times been at most a benign observer. But the Kraken clearly wakes, and shows itself ready to flex its muscles once again. Against this, the beliefs and values of individual Anglicans, no matter how devout, sincere or Biblical or Catholic, count for very little indeed.

Whatever individual Anglicans may happen to believe, or even identifiable groups may believe, they are still subject to exactly the same house of bishops, the same synods and ultimately the same Parliament as all the rest. It may be that some can continue to live (I will not say flourish) in a kind of defiance of that authority, increasingly in the hands of a totalitarian secular “liberalism”, and in an inevitable isolation. How this is to be construed as life in the Catholic Church is increasingly difficult to see. For us, it was a kind of Babylonian Captivity. Others realise that they cannot flourish, and perhaps were never really intended to, without the wholehearted support and life-blood of the Catholic Church: in short, without being in full communion, and actually *enjoying* the authority of the Successor of Peter. Yet this is what we have found. In the end, and no matter what the future may hold, the *Ordinariate* has been an experience of quite extraordinary liberation.

Father Keith Robinson

St Thomas Aquinas 2013

Revised Trinity IX 2013