

## ***Unity in diversity***

### **The promulgation of *Coetibus Anglicanorum* on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2009 poses a question to the European Federation of Roman Catholic Married Priests – a glimmer of hope or a retrograde step?**

1. The European Federation is a union of groupings of Roman Catholic married priests from Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Austria and the United Kingdom. Hence there is a variety of cultures and social contexts. There are also links with other Federations of Roman Catholic married priests. In no way can there be a unanimous point of view on every minute theological detail or, indeed, on all matters of praxis and strategy. The history of the movement evidences a long period of reflection, tensions and often passionately held differences. Out of that the following voice of unity emerges, much of which is at odds with the contents of *Coetibus Anglicanorum*. In addition to uniting support groups for Roman Catholic married priests and their families, when confronted with the ever growing crisis of the dearth of ‘male, celibate, clerical’ candidates for the office of priesthood, the federation speaks out strongly against the obligatory law of celibacy and, positively, focuses on the community base which should be the nursery for supplying candidates for priestly office. It wishes to shift the emphasis from a focus on one particular type of ministry to a re-examination of the plurality of baptism based ministries in the service of the people of God. On the principle that justice cannot be divided, their reflections on the Gospel principles of truth and justice have led them to take aboard all forms of discrimination both in society and especially internally in the church. Discrimination against the laity and, in particular, against women is to the fore.
2. It might be thought that Rome’s response to the petition of groups of Anglicans to be received “into full Catholic communion individually as well as corporately” and the setting up of “personal ordinariates” for those who wish to enter in a corporate manner, following the reception of other Anglican married priests over the past number of years, might suggest a glimmer of hope at least as a gradual move to change the obligatory law of celibacy. A close reading of this brief document *Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum coetibus* suggest rather that this is a retrograde step on so many fronts: the obligatory law of celibacy, ecumenical endeavours, the attempts to move to a more collegial, transparent and democratic exercise of pastoral office in the church.
3. The document has a simple structure: the occasion (par.1). ecclesiological principles (par 2-4) and the regulation of the pastoral ordinariates (a further three pages of the document, excluding footnotes). Granted the legal character of the document, that may be as expected, but, nonetheless, the emphasis is rather ominous.
4. Reaction to the document has been varied – ‘proselytising’, ‘unecumenical’, ‘welcoming’, ‘pastoral’. Since the invitation is a response to a petition it may very well be that a charge like proselytising is beside the point. However, what is not said is important also. It is never mentioned that the petitioners are from a traditional wing of the Anglican Church (if we may be allowed to use that language) who find themselves at odds with what might be termed the more liberalising tendencies in the Anglican Communion. Individuals or groups for that matter, making an option for change on positive grounds is one thing – moving over, not as a move towards, but as flight from is another matter. The opening words of the Constitution attributes that petition to the movement of the Holy Spirit: “In recent times the Holy Spirit has moved groups of Anglicans to petition repeatedly...” These words seem to jar with the Gospel of John 3:8: “The wind blows where it wills; you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born from the Spirit”. This play on the Greek word ‘pneuma’ (wind/spirit) at least raises the



question, ‘Could that same Spirit be animating those Anglican groups who are endeavouring to grow in dialogue, not only with their past tradition, but with their contemporary situation in a very different social and cultural context?’ Rome seems to be attributing to the voice of the Spirit what it actually wants to hear and one remembers the attempts to bring into unity similar ‘right wing’ groups in the Roman church, such as the Lefebvre group, Pius the X liturgical groups and others. What are the criteria for discernment? Again what is not said is interesting. In a document which amply cross references Vatican II no mention is made of the primacy of conscience. That might make us think of such groupings in the Roman Catholic Church as *The European Federation of Married Priests, We are Church* and many other networks, which have remained loyal members of the Church and are fighting their corner, pushing for dialogue and openness over against a very traditionalist church institution.

5. Before moving to the ecclesiological principles it is worth noting how language can be a great revealer or betrayer. The personal ordinariates are for those who are entering into full communion with the *Catholic Church*. The Anglicans would certainly already see themselves as catholic, as a branch of the universal Catholic Church – the root meaning of the word catholic being universal. An editorial in the *Tablet* of 14<sup>th</sup> November 2009 claims that the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith has failed to grasp what Anglo-Catholicism is all about: Its main aim was to reassert the Catholic credentials of the Church of England as the ‘ancient Catholic Church of these lands, identical to the medieval English Church’. What then is the goal of the invitation? The document’s insistence on Rome’s mandate to guarantee the unity of the episcopate and to preside over and safeguard the universal communion of all the churches and its characterising every division among the baptised as a wound would suggest that what they are offering is full communion with the *Roman Catholic Church*. In dealing with ecclesiological principles, to say that the single church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church governed by the successor of Peter and his bishops” seems lacking in a certain sense of history and is a curious way of thinking incarnationally. Certainly, the church, analogous to the mystery of the Word incarnate, as the document claims, is not only a spiritual invisible communion but also visible. However, the Word was incarnate, not in a generic essentialist human being, but in a 1<sup>st</sup> century male Jewish man. That incarnationist way of thinking, of dealing with the paradox of the transcendence and immanence of the divine, underpins much of our scriptures all the way from Genesis 1, the entrance of God into our space/time continuum in relationship with God’s creatures. That encourages us *not* to see that 1<sup>st</sup> century incarnation as a one off, unique event, important though that was. Much less should we see the subsistence of the universal church in one institution which pays lip service to the elements of truth found outside its borders. Just as internally the insights of Vatican II about collegiality and subsidiarity have been largely ignored and bishops and bishops conferences are treated as, and act as, in feudal service to Rome, thus ignoring the variety of social and cultural contexts into which spiritual realities must be incarnated, so these personal ordinariates are in danger of entering into fiefdom to the Roman Pontiff and curia. The lack of discussion, before the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution, with either the Anglican Communion or the appropriate local Catholic bishops bears this out. Once again we see Ultramontanism in conflict with Vatican II’s focus on collegiality. The response of the English bishops in obediently setting up a commission to manage what had already been decided without consultation says a lot. One letter writer to the *Tablet* concludes that “nothing less than a collective demonstration of Episcopal moral testosterone is required, but I will not be holding my breath”. According to Nicholas Lash (*Tablet* of 14<sup>th</sup> November 2009) a major structural innovation in Roman Catholicism has been introduced without consulting the bishops of the Catholic Church. This is major structural innovation and comparison with the so called ‘Uniate’ churches will not do. Each of these latter is primarily a church, with its



own identity, history and character. The proposed ‘ordinariates’, whatever that term is supposed to mean, are not churches but groups of disaffected members of the Anglican Communion.

6. There is also damage to ecumenical relationships. Why, for example, was all of this matter placed in the hands of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in which Joseph Ratzinger served for 23 years, and not handled by the Pontifical Commission for promoting Christian Unity? It looks very much like a pre-Vatican II approach to evangelisation, i.e. ‘Return to Rome’, rather than working to overcome theological differences, as was evidenced in the tireless work of the joint commissions which produced the ARCIC documents.
7. The regulations which are based on such unecumenical and undemocratic principles are not surprising. There are a great many unanswered questions in these scant regulations. The following are the trenchant points:
  - a. Each ordinariate is juridically comparable to a diocese, though without geographical boundaries, but what is the extent of such and how would it work? Though it is entrusted to the pastoral care of an ordinary appointed by the Roman Pontiff we are left wondering if this is the appropriate local bishop. All falls under the shadow of Rome. Their expression of faith is that of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. If such Anglicans had come over individually, as was possible, following the traditional route of the Rite of Christian Initiation a much less elaborate and simple formula of doctrinal assent was all that would have been required. Government is subjected to the *Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith* and other dicasteries of the Roman curia. A look at Rome’s history of parachuting in compliant ‘yes men’ bishops and its ignoring of Vatican II’s focus on collegiality suggests that little independence would remain.
  - b. Certainly such ordinariates can maintain their own liturgical traditions. For how long under such strict controls and in an institution where everything liturgical right down to having girls as altar servers has to be referred to Rome and where there is current unrest about the imposition of a new form of Eucharistic text in Latinised English?
  - c. The Constitution was published in English and Italian – the Latin text is not yet forthcoming. The discussion of the ‘potestas’ of the ordinariate (‘Power’ in the English translation) seems more concerned with authority than with power and that potestas is to be exercised in the name of the Roman Pontiff.
  - d. In spite of the Anglican tradition of a house of the laity as part of governance the only governing body mentioned is to consist of at least six priests. There is no mention of the laity and would that be possible if they are held to all the obligations of the Code of Canon law? In that code all lay councils are advisory only. Standard practice in most of the Church of England is that the laity has a deliberative voice and bishops are elected by clergy and laity.
  - e. “Those who ministered as Anglican deacons, priests or bishops may be accepted by the Ordinary as candidates for Holy Orders in the Catholic Church”. That is, they do not come over as ordained priests in their communities but only as candidates. Anglican orders are still being treated as invalid. Bishops who are married may be ordained as priests but, in spite of some peculiar honorary arrangements will not be able to function as bishops. Those who are married are subject to the norms established by Pope Paul VI. The Ordinary, presumably the appointed pastoral ordinary, will admit only celibate men to the order of presbyter and married priests will be admitted on a case by case basis according to norms established by the Holy See. That does not bode well when one considers the history of discrimination against the exercise of their ministry by married priests in the Uniate Churches when they are outside their own territories. One writer refers to it as ‘clericalised version’ of Anglicanism. Whereas the ‘clergy family’ was an important part of the Anglican



patrimony the aim seems to be to produce a celibate clergy within an Anglican form Catholicism.

8. The simple answer to the original question in the title of this reflection would seem to be in the negative. There is little of hope in the document or in the way in which it was launched which would raise our expectations about ecumenism, about the abolition of the obligatory law of celibacy, about the cessation of discrimination, especially against women, or about the moves to a more decentralised, democratic and responsible exercise of the pastoral ministry in the church of Rome. In addition, a systems approach to change in any institution demands that one thinks through the intended and unintended consequences of that change on the institution in all its parts. Is it too cynical to think that Rome is using a systems approach and sees clearly the effects of the entry of such large numbers of disaffected traditionalists from the Anglican Communion into what are in reality dioceses without geographical boundaries? Rome is well aware that there are many voices within its own borders which are in favour of women priests, and even bishops, and who are not at all happy with Rome's stance on the question of homosexuality. Is Rome drafting in support for its own entrenched positions?

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### **Additional Note**

#### **When would such groups move and how many?**

- I. The 2010 General Synod of the Anglican Church accepted the proposal that eventually will see the creation of women bishops. This outlaws a gender discrimination that would be illegal outside a religious institution.
- II. A compromise was proposed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to try and keep within the Anglican Communion the coalition of conservatives, evangelicals and Anglo Catholics who felt that female leadership in the church is incompatible with their beliefs. The proposal was to create a special class of bishops to look after parishes which did not wish to accept the authority of female bishops. This was deemed to undermine the authority of female bishops and create a discriminatory two tier system. The proposal was narrowly rejected. In fact, there were 216 votes in favour of the amendment, 191 against and 9 abstentions. However, the proposal had to be accepted by all three houses of the Synod. The house of bishops and the house of laity accepted the amendment but the house of clergy rejected it by a margin of five votes.
- III. Are female bishops now guaranteed? What happens next? The proposed draft goes back to the dioceses for discussion before returning to the general synod in 2012 for final approval, and then to Parliament for the law change required. The difficulty is that all three houses have to vote in favour by a majority of two thirds. If not, it will be thrown out. This autumn there will be elections which could change the make up of the 484 seat synod. Coupled with the other contentious issue of 'gay clergy', it would seem that nothing is yet certain and, anyway 2014 would be the earliest date for the creation of female bishops.
- IV. How many would come over if the proposal is finally accepted? Some would certainly Stay and fight their corner. Estimates of how many would move to Rome vary from 'very few' to 'thousands'. It is a question of wait and see.
- V. The above system of consultation and voting , of three houses each with a deliberative voice contrasts sharply with Rome's creation of personal ordinariates with no consultation whatsoever.

