

ANGLICANS AND CHRISTIAN UNITY

The rush of enthusiasm that followed Vatican II's recognition that elements of the Church might be found outside the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church¹, and its particular singling out of the Anglican Communion as one in which the Roman Catholic Church recognized elements of itself², seemed to many to herald imminent full visible, sacramental, ecclesial unity. For a number of reasons, many to do with developments within worldwide Anglicanism, some to do with pronouncements from Rome, progress has slowed. Or, to view it in a more positive light, dialogue has become more thoughtful, realistic, mature.

I don't intend to give here a narrative of our ecumenical engagement, or to comment on whether or not we are heading in the right direction. Our discussion focused, rather, on Anglican patrimony, and I want to suggest that, whatever the means by which we reach our goal, Anglican patrimony is an important element of our ecumenical engagement that is both an encouragement, and a challenge, to our path to unity.

As far as I am aware, the phrase 'Anglican Patrimony' was first coined by a Roman Catholic, no less a person than Pope Paul VI, at his homily for the canonization of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales in 1970. He said on that occasion that he looked forward to a future unity between Roman Catholics and Anglicans that would not seek 'to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church'. Despite the arguments about what constitutes Anglican patrimony, Rome, for all its cultural and institutional hegemony, has always been aware of something particularly 'Anglican', something that Anglicanism contributes distinctively to the Christian narrative. The respect with which successive Archbishops of Canterbury have been received in Rome, the evident delight of Pope Benedict at Evensong in Westminster Abbey, even the refashioning of the Sistine Choir with reference to the English choral tradition, are marks of deep respect for a rich and fruitful Anglican patrimony.

Bishop Hine has spoken of Christians of all traditions 'contributing their riches' to the fullness of the church, echoing Pope John Paul II who described ecumenical activity as an 'exchange of gifts'. There is no doubt that, through ecumenical dialogues and daily contact, Roman Catholicism has received riches from the treasure of Anglican patrimony. A notable example is Scripture. Even if Catholics never quite ignored the scriptures as much as is often claimed, there has been a re-discovering and re-positioning of the importance of the Word of God; not only in terms of theology, but in the way that Scripture has become a touchstone of religious life, a thread running through scholarship, devotional life, and homilies. Anglicanism has helped us become a 'People of the Book' wherein, as Jeremy Taylor explained, we find 'instruction, institution, comfort, reproof, a treasure of all excellences.'³ Moreover, our dialogue has introduced Roman Catholicism to different ways of doing theology, a method, a tone of engagement, an appeal to Antiquity. It is notable that the recent phase of ARCIC explicitly grounded its discussion in the ancient common and apostolic tradition.

¹ Lumen Gentium, 8.

² Unitatis Redintegratio, 13.

³ J. Taylor: *Dissuasive from Popery*, LACT XI, 188,

Anglican/Roman Catholic dialogue, and the course of its discussions, has been influenced by names such as Richard Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, Michael Ramsey, Henry Chadwick, or Rowan Williams; and its tone of gentle, scholarly debate owes something to what John Cosin called ‘civility and urbanity of language’ in theological dialogue.⁴

The exchange of gifts was given formal expression in the establishment of the Ordinariate in 2009. I believe that one of its great potentials is to articulate elements of Anglican Patrimony within the Roman Catholic tradition. In the first place, the Ordinariate can assist in the task of familiarization - the process of unlearning those caricatures and stereotypes that bedevil ecumenical progress. When Archbishop Rowan met Pope Benedict in Rome at *San Gregorio* in 2012, it was suggested by Vatican authorities that he wait in a corridor while the Pope prayed before the Blessed Sacrament. Not a few Cardinalatial jaws hit the floor when Archbishop Rowan asked whether he too could pray before the Blessed Sacrament. As Pope John Paul noted:

Christians cannot underestimate the burden of long-standing misgivings inherited from the past, and of mutual misunderstandings and prejudices. Complacency, indifference, and insufficient knowledge of one another often make this situation worse.⁵

Particularly in this country, presuppositions about each other’s history, motivations, and beliefs can be deeply embedded; Pope John Paul insightfully designated England a ‘special ecumenical territory’. The Ordinariate has an important mission here. A growing familiarity with Anglican traditions of thought, liturgy, spirituality, can help Roman Catholics to reposition Anglicanism in their ecclesial universe, to recognize indeed that what we hold in common is far greater than what separates.

A ‘gifting’ or expressing of Anglican patrimony within English Roman Catholicism serves another purpose – to make clearer to Roman Catholics in this country, especially, the richness of their *own* spiritual heritage. English Roman Catholics have, by and large, drawn their influences from continental Catholicism. It is surely in Anglicanism that the rich mystical tradition of medieval England is preserved, that the cadences and imagery of the Sarum Rite echo; that a religious sensibility particular to these islands is evident. One of the most interesting elements of the Ordinariate has been its Office Book, the *Customary of Our Lady of Walsingham*, wherein for the first time, prayers and readings are available to Roman Catholic worshipers from outside their own tradition in an approved liturgical setting. Texts from Lancelot Andrewes, Thomas Traherne, or John Keble introduce a new readership to the freshness and vigour of the some of the greatest theological minds this country has produced, and fall more easily on the ear than St Maximus of Turin, Thuribius of Mogrovejo, or even, on occasion, St Augustine!

It is easy to be romantic and precious about this. Moreover, Roman Catholicism is vigorously universal, and English Catholicism today boasts diverse cultural strands which enrich and strengthen it. But Anglicanism has preserved something of the rich and distinctive flavour of

⁴ J. Cosin: *On the Validity of the Order of Priesthood*, LACT IV, 267.

⁵ Pope John Paul II: *Ut Unum Sint*, 2.

Catholicism that was molded in this land throughout a millennium, and which will enrich our national treasury of spirituality. I would say, further, that Anglican patrimony can be of assistance to Anglicans themselves in ecumenical reception. The existence of a strong theology of the Real Presence, devotion to Mary, recognition of universal authority, within historic Anglicanism itself can often be news to Anglicans themselves. Rightly, Cardinal Kasper exhorted Anglican Bishops at the 2008 Lambeth Conference retrieve the strength of their own heritage – mentioning specifically the 17th century Divines. Herein, Anglicans will find formulations congenial to the Anglican soul, which express in non-Roman, and more palatable, terms much that can be of real advantage in Ecumenical dialogue.

However, patrimony also presents an ecumenical challenge. In its governance, the Ordinariate provides for a form of synodical authority, albeit in limited fashion.⁶ This seems to contrast strongly with Roman Catholic centralism, and might be seen as no more than a nod to an historical Anglican tradition. Pope Francis, however, has brought to the fore the issue of synods and synodality and acknowledged that the Roman Catholic church has received this from its ecumenical partners. The Pope, speaking of his ‘commitment to build a Synodal Church to which all are called’, underlines the ecumenical implications of this, saying that ‘in the Church’s life, the principle of synodality and the service of the one who presides ... will make a significant contribution to the progress of relations between our Churches’. Significantly, Pope Francis referred back to the famous invitation of Pope John Paul to ecumenical partners to help re-envision the Papacy. ‘In a synodal Church (he said) greater light can be shed on the exercise of the Petrine primacy. The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time — as Successor of Peter — to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches.’⁷

But there are caveats: as Pope Francis himself makes clear, the Pope cannot not become simply one among many. He is called to lead and to preside in charity. Secondly, there are limits to synodality which relate to the very different understandings of authority in our two traditions. And here’s the rub. Within an Anglican heritage which emphasizes the right of a local church to reform itself – such was the basis of the reformation – relatively few items can be insisted upon; other elements may be treated as *adiaphora*, of lesser importance. This way of thinking (which is surely part of an Anglican Patrimony of theological method) is foreign to Roman Catholicism, where the notion of Communion is urged with a rigour that Anglicans may find frustrating, and where elements that many Anglicans would not consider central to the Gospel message are insisted upon – an example being the Marian Dogmas.

Rome is suspicious of Anglican ‘comprehensiveness’, which it sees as a challenge to coherence. It is very well to recognize differences in biblical interpretation, but where these are simply left as features of diversity of the church, there is a danger of institutionalizing schism. Anglican patrimony surely includes its impressive ability to find a formula for the most seemingly intractable of issues. The Church of England, formed by a Queen who did not want to make windows into men’s souls, consolidated in the golden age of English prose, has

⁶ Complementary Norms for the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum coetibus*: 12,2.

⁷ Pope Francis: *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops*, October 2015.

a way with words. But there is a point where gracious magnanimity and breadth of opinion conspire together to exclude integrity, where acceptance of another point of view demonstrates not only a determination to live together with opposing views, but also a willful blindness to the consequences of that determination. Within the relaxed atmosphere of broad Anglican ecclesiology, there is space for distinctive interpretations of modes of worship and authority. But disobedience is part of the Anglican patrimony that Roman Catholics feel we cannot accept.

A connected element concerns what Bishop John calls ‘all round’ ecumenism, and its relationship to coherence. The 1888 Lambeth Conference, he reminds us, cautioned the ‘consequences for existing relationships’ of new, local, ecumenical agreements. Yet the reality of local ecumenical overtures strikes a discordant note to Roman Catholic ears. The discussion in General Synod earlier this year about moves to closer union with Methodists might cast doubt upon agreements we had reached with Anglicans on the nature of episcopacy and apostolic succession. Similarly, the 1999 Concordat of Agreement between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and even the Porvoo agreement, seem to undermine the conclusions of ARCIC’s Final Report and Clarifications, affirming the need for ordination to take place within unbroken episcopal succession.⁸ For Anglicans, these may be ‘bearable anomalies’, but Roman Catholics are concerned that these issues are simply not thought through.⁹

The question of Patrimony can seem abstract, and there have already been too many books and articles discussing what it is. Rome, I think, originally saw it in liturgical terms, but there are signs that its vision is enlarging to embrace other elements. To liturgy we must at least add synodality, and a readiness for open and critical engagement. But however Patrimony is defined, it is not an issue merely for pedants and liturgical archeologists. Roman Catholics need to look again at Anglican heritage, particularly in the realms of spirituality, theology and methodology, and recognize a heritage that not only will bring a vibrant diversity to its own tradition, but will draw us closer together.

⁸ ARCIC: *Clarifications of certain aspects of the Agreed Statements on Eucharist and Ministry*. September 1993

⁹ IARCCUM: *Growing together in Unity and Mission*, 98: ‘Wherever Anglicans and Roman Catholics take steps to deepen our relationship with one another in life and mission, we should be sensitive to our other ecumenical partnerships, acting in ways consistent with agreements we have already entered into’.