



The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Pastoral Letter – April 2010

Is RITA right?

FOLLOWING the wonderful Day of Prayer on the Chair of Peter on 22nd February, priests and parishes and people, up and down the country, are considering what the future direction should be for Anglo-catholics. Hardly a day goes by without me being asked by someone for comment. As I write, I am arranging a number of meetings with clergy and lay people to see quite where we are getting to. Meanwhile, in the back of our minds – and not always the back! – are the Pope's offer of an Ordinariate (the very framework which we were asking the Church of England for, and which they have said is impossible), and the forthcoming vote in General Synod in July. It will be the July Synod of 2010, it seems, right at the end of the synodical quinquennium, that decides whether or not to accept the recommendations of the legislative committee, recommendations which (we are already told) will not make proper provision for Anglo-catholics.

Anglo-catholics, for a generation at least, have talked about the priority being reunion with Rome and the Holy See. Faced with an offer from the Pope for a way forward into re-union – indeed the only way forward that will be possible for the foreseeable future – I think we have to consider that route on its own merits. It can't be a 'Plan B' or an emergency exit. It is an invitation into full communion with Peter, who, according to Catholic teaching, is the Vicar of Christ. It is RITA ('Rome is the answer'): 'Plan A' and the front door, for those who want it and understand its importance. And yet there will be plenty of Anglo-catholics who don't want it, preferring their own congregational independence, and some who, on principle, simply do not accept the central leadership role of Peter and his successor the Pope, at least as it is presently exercised. From this it follows that the July vote, however crucial it seems to us, in itself solves nothing. Whatever the result of the General Synod debate, the Holy Father's offer deserves to be considered in its own right. Whatever the result of the debate, those who cannot accept the ministry of Peter should not accept the Pope's offer. Amidst this, it is hard to see anything but a time of division, a 'parting of friends', though, thankfully, no one seems to be heading off to form or join anything new, or smaller: there are enough sects already.

I think the questions every Anglo-catholic need to ask are (1) 'is our understanding of the Church, her Faith, her Orders, and her Sacraments possible within the Church of England?' and (2) is it possible (however unlikely it may seem) that the whole of the Church of England will embrace that understanding of the Church, her Faith, her Orders, and her Sacraments? If the answer to either question is 'no', then the Church of England is not part of the Catholic Church as we understand it to be and we Anglo-catholics ought to do all we can to become 'Anglican Catholics', that is, sign up one by one, but in our natural groupings, for the emerging Ordinariate. Those are the issues I am presently thinking through myself, and shall continue to think through as I celebrate the paschal mysteries of baptism and confirmation and the Petertide gift of ordination.

May God bless you as you celebrate the new life of Easter.

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet
Bishop's House, Dry Sandford, Abingdon, OXON OX13 6JP
Tel: +44 (0) 1865 390746
www.ebbsfleet.org.uk