

**Canon John Townroe's Report to the St Boniface Council**  
**Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2008**

St Boniface Lodge has continued to be the centre for our various activities – it is a headquarters for the management during the conference and retreat for old students, and for the accommodation of visiting speakers. It is used all the year round for meetings, and is a vantage point for watching over the property of the Trust. It is invaluable as the centre for my ministry in caring for many different kinds of people, young and old, men and women, lay and ordained. I am as ever grateful to this Council for providing me with such support.

Our relationship with Warminster School is cordial. I am now officially known as 'School Patron'. It is possible to play some part in school life through contacts round and about with the teaching staff and maintenance staff.

I was very touched when the Headmaster, Martin Priestley, arranged a supper party for me in January to mark my 60 years in this place.

You will remember that several years ago we discussed the matter of 'Mission-Shaped Church'. We resolved to promote the cause in any way we could. I can report good news from both the projects we have helped with grants. In Manchester, Ben Edson keeps going with the development of his informal Community of Seekers called 'Sanctus'. He will be able to meet their needs even better after his forthcoming Ordination, sharing his time between his title-parish and the 'Sanctus' group under the Bishop's supervision. In Telford New Town, Mark Berry is the pioneering leader of the Telford Missional Community, known as 'Safe Space'. They are, he says, "beginning to explore ways to link together our own spiritual walk with God, the spiritual history of our town, the beauty of the creation we live in, and those we meet who desire to explore their own spirituality, who seek God but cannot connect with the Church".

I am wondering whether the time is coming for us to take stock of our investment in this direction – has it proved worthwhile or not? Should we follow it up or not, when we again have sufficient funds?

I suggest that a first step might be for us to write to the leaders in Manchester and Telford, and ask them if they would be kind enough to let us have some quite brief, interim assessment of the progress and worthwhileness of their projects, so far as they can judge. Then we might be in a better position to decide whether or not to back these experiments at some future date.

I turn next to some other matters to report.

St Boniface Lodge has in safe-keeping in the chapel upstairs an icon from the Eastern Orthodox Church – I believe it was given to St Boniface Missionary College in the 1930's at a time when there were many visitors from Old Catholic Churches in Holland and Germany, from Lutheran Churches in Finland and Latvia and from the Orthodox Churches in Romania, Bulgaria and Russia. The icon is probably Romanian of no great market value, but valuable as a token of some historic links made in this place, and most of all as a simple, strong symbol of Christ in the eyes of the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

It was this Orthodox tradition which I felt myself to be in touch with again, when I was asked, soon after our last meeting, to write a review for an international journal of a truly remarkable book, steeped in Orthodox thought. It happens to have a bearing on the crisis in the Anglican Communion, which I would like to come to in a moment. But first a word about the book. Its title is 'Ages of the Spiritual Life', published in 2002 in New York by St

Vladimir's Seminary Press. The author, Paul Eudokimov, was a Russian Orthodox layman born in St Petersburg in 1901, the son of a lieutenant-colonel who was assassinated in 1905 by his own men. Paul had begun theological studies at the Kiev Academy when the Revolution forced him and his family to flee from the Red Army. They escaped from the Crimea through Constantinople to find refuge with many exiled Russians in Paris. The book came later, written in French and twice translated into English. It is a layman's work, for by Eastern Orthodox custom both men and women are trained to be theological teachers and writers. In this case, it is the fruit of the extraordinary life of a theologian who had been a refugee, a night-shift worker in the Citroen car factory, a cleaner of railway carriages, and a member of the French Resistance in World War 2.

This book became for me, after our last meeting, a kind of back-drop against which could be seen our Anglican position as it is at the moment. It expresses so much that is worth fighting for in the Anglican Communion, particularly in the role of laity, in the cherishing of Scripture as supreme authority, and in maintaining unity in diversity. Like us, the Orthodox are a family of churches each self-governing in their internal affairs. They are held together more strongly than many Anglicans seem to be at the moment by the sense of belonging to one another, despite differences, in the one organism of the Body of Christ.

"The pilgrim journey", says the book "is made by those who belong to one another and to God in the common life of the Body of Christ. We travel in company".

Which brings me to the Anglican Communion : are we all going to "travel in company" or not?

I think there has been a change in the situation since our meeting a year ago. Last year, there appeared to be a serious threat of schism in the Anglican Communion, schism as when you take a pair of scissors and cut, say, a piece of cardboard into two unequal parts. The break is clear-cut. It looked a year ago as if the Southern Cone in America and parts of West and East Africa might break away, and form their own church, though perhaps calling it Anglican. This would have meant the kind of schism that took place in 1054, between the Eastern and Western Churches, after prolonged and bitter disputes.

But now, in 2008, it looks as if a different kind of breaking may happen, something more like the shattering of a car windscreen hit by a stone, when the glass is broken into a multitude of small pieces. I believe this is the nature of the change that is taking place. We are hearing of a multitude of different positions being adopted, each one distancing itself in varying degrees from the main body of the Anglican Communion, from Lambeth and the Lambeth Conference, and from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

I thought I had heard the ultimate absurdity of such distancing when I read somewhere of an Anglican rebel who declared that he would be willing to accept the Archbishop of Canterbury as the chairman of a meeting, but would refuse to receive Holy Communion from his hands.

If it is true that we are no longer facing a clear-cut schism, what are we facing? I do not know of any technical, ecclesiastical term for it. All I know is that it is a muddle! We face the prospect of living in a muddle, before the Lambeth Conference and, quite possibly, after it.

What then? All muddles call for patience. It takes time to sort them out – time and a steady nerve if things for a while get even more muddled than they are already. It has been said that to be an Anglican, you need to keep a steady nerve – and in Christian language, a steady nerve really means walking by faith. Patience, then, is needed, and also more

respect, because Anglicans are already sorely tried in maintaining respect for those fellow-Anglicans with whom they profoundly disagree.

How fortunate we are that we have an Archbishop who, while under wicked attack himself, sets an example of both patience and respect! His leadership, his type of leadership, can be seen in his words to the General Synod: "I respect the consciences of those who say they do not feel able to attend the Lambeth Conference because there will be present those who, in their view, acted against the disciplinary and doctrinal consensus of the Communion..... I regret this decision..... but it simply reminds us that even the most 'successful' Lambeth Conference leaves us with work still to be done in rebuilding relationships – Lambeth can't be the end of the story".

We can see there in action both patience and respect. If something good comes out of our muddle, it should at least be that we learn better what it really means to be an Anglican. There are some signs that this is happening. For instance, a group of parishes in the Oxford Diocese is studying in Lent the essentials of the Anglican Way (Scripture, the Creeds, the Sacraments, the Episcopate) as summarised in the Lambeth Quadrilateral.

Much more serious study will be required if order is to be brought out of muddle. This means real work, real mental work. "I will not cease from mental fight" says William Blake in "Jerusalem". I hope very much, therefore, that St Boniface Trust will carry on with the work agreed upon last year, to offer support where we can, and to promote such serious study not only among specialists, but by people at all levels.

I would like to end with something cheerful. It happened two weeks ago. A bishop from another part of England was talking to me about these present Anglican troubles. He finished by saying "I am more certain than ever about one thing, and that is that I have never been more grateful than I am now that I belong to the Anglican Communion". This was from a man who has been involved for years in international and ecumenical relationships. So I asked him, Why? Why so grateful to belong? "Because", he replied, "we are at least dealing openly and honestly with issues of our time, such as human sexuality, authority and freedom, the authority of Scripture, the laity and their ministry, women bishops, and the right exercise of authority in the Church of God".

I hope you find this, as I did, both cheerful and cheering. I too am more than ever thankful that I have been placed in the Anglican way, and that I belong to a Church which seeks – despite the pain and shame of division – to pursue honesty, gentleness and freedom.