

John Townroe's Report to St Boniface Council
Friday, 4th March 2011

The business of St Boniface Trust flows in and out of St Boniface Lodge. Old students and a range of other people come and go with various needs. I am grateful as ever for the way this Council underpins my ministry. I can report this year an unexpected extension of the ministry of the Lodge. It has come about like this. I need nowadays the help of carers because of my age and infirmities. So there has been set up a rota of seven carers who come in every morning and evening to look after the house and myself. They live locally, four of them are retired nurses, and they bring with them more than their own good service. They bring their pastoral needs, situations and crises, not only their own, but also increasingly the ups and downs of their families. This means that quite a new range of people walk into the Lodge with joys and sorrows, and with the need to talk. For one of them it has meant starting on a course of preparation for Confirmation in the Lodge. This is what I mean by the unexpected extension of the Lodge's ministry.

In addition, these carers and their husbands can now join in the celebration of the Holy Communion which takes place on a weekday from time to time in the house chapel, with the Rector's approval. I am grateful to David Hayes who presides and who knows already some of the carers through contacts in the town.

But there is more. The organisation of the care-team and its supervisor is Sister Carol of the Community of the Holy Name, and I am greatly indebted to her for it. She has been given permission by her community to spend a portion of her time here to oversee the arrangements and the running of the house. It happens that another part of her work lies in being spiritual director, sometimes to people at a considerable distance. Warminster has such good rail and road links that it is proving to be a convenient location for people to reach. So there are now seven extra people, 4 men and 3 women, coming regularly for whom a room in the Lodge for consultation can be provided. It is helpful for them, too, to have Ivy House Retreat Centre next door where they can stay for a night or two, as I have found in my work. They benefit noticeably from having time there for some rest and quiet and reflection.

These are all happy developments – I do hope so much that St Boniface Lodge will continue to be used as an instrument in some way, in the hands of St Boniface Trust, for the ministry of the Christian Gospel, whether I am here or not.

The publication of *The Warminster Venture* and its aftermath occupied a great deal of my time last year. The book was very well received – “a resounding success”, said Bishop Ted Luscombe. David Wilding, its compiler, and David Prior, who saw it through to a high standard of production, have been warmly praised for it. I had over 150 letters about it, all of them enthusiastic. Some old students wrote touchingly to say that the book had renewed the fire of their original vocation to ministry and priesthood.

I turn now to the setting up of the Anglican Ordinariate, a major event in the past year which for good or ill affects us all in one way or another. What are we to make of it? One thing is certain: it has caused yet more divisions, not least inside the Roman Catholic Church. For example, a Roman Catholic priest in Bath, has written an article in *The Tablet* (Jan 29th 2011) saying “it is a move that has already done damage to the good relations between our churches”. Reactions to the move vary between two extremes: at one extreme is the Pope himself who says it is “a prophetic gesture that can contribute positively to the developing relations between Anglicans and Catholics”, and says it is to be for a mutual exchange of gifts... bringing with it “aspects of Anglican spiritual patrimony” with the “ultimate goal being unity”. On his visit last year he said in Westminster Abbey that “what we share in Christ is greater than what continues to divide us” and that we are on a “continuing common journey”

where “all parties including Catholicism yet have distance to travel, to grow and to learn”. At the other extreme are those who can see nothing in the creation of the Anglican Ordinariate but an act of aggression, and evidence of another expedition into our waters of the Vatican fishing fleet.

In between the extremes there seem to be many on all sides who are at a loss to know what this thing called an ‘ordinariate’ really is. It is going to have its own special leadership and its own special liturgy, so is it a church within a church? Or is it a kind of annexe built alongside the main structure, what Peter Cornwell calls “a sort of semi-detached granny flat”? Can it really be “a workshop” as others have described it, for hammering out the shape of the “Coming Great Church”? For my part, I doubt it. I have tried very hard to see any good in it. – but in the end I see it as a serious mistake and misjudgement. If Anglicans feel in conscience that they must leave, I believe it would be far healthier for them to take the usual route to Rome and take the consequences.

The consequences must include accepting and submitting to the Papacy as it has become, with all its modern claims, and with the whole apparatus of the Papal system of government centred in the Vatican. I began to wonder during the Pope’s visit to Britain whether this nettle would ever be grasped amid all the warm expressions of Christian friendship. For the unity of his disciples for which Jesus prayed can never be reached by avoiding fundamental differences. But the moment I had been waiting for came in Westminster Abbey when the Archbishop of Canterbury gave his address standing next to the Pope. Glancing to his left at the Pope, and giving a little smile, the Archbishop said that Christians have different views as to how the Bishop of Rome should fulfil his ministry. This was said gently, courteously, but there was no mistaking its message. It signalled that there is a stumbling-block between us which cannot be ignored. It has persisted down the centuries. What exactly is it? I would say it is not just the Papal claims which reached a controversial peak in 1870 in the definition and declaration of Papal infallibility. It is also the way the Papal claims have led to an institution governed from the Vatican and its various departments, by which opposition or even dissent are repeatedly suppressed. It is an institution where fear keeps people silent, where priests are advised to keep their heads down, because if they don’t and if they (as it is called) “put their heads above the parapet”, they will suffer penalties and even lose their livelihoods. I know this is true because I have seen it at close quarters. The atmosphere inside such a power structure is contaminated. Clericalism is pervasive.

Somewhere here, then, as Anglicans see it, lies the stumbling-block. This is not new. In the 1620’s, another Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, was offered a Cardinal’s hat by Rome. He refused and said “My answer was that somewhat dwelt within me which could not suffer that till Rome were other than it is”. Yes: “somewhat dwelt within me” expresses the Anglican feeling. We feel in conscience that we must protest and stand against a distortion of the Gospel liberty of the People of God. We believe that there must be a better way to keep order in the household of God than this. However difficult, however untidy, however unruly the Anglican way may look, it seeks to hold together the common life in the Body of Christ in love, and freedom and mutual respect. The Anglican witness is costly, but there is a glory in it. How important it is for all of us to understand what being Anglican really means!

Is this all just a case of Christians differing over churchy business? No, it is about something far more than church politics. It is about the quest of the whole world to find the way to live together in peace on our planet, so that the rich diversity of peoples can develop into civilized order, without war, and without trying to keep order by coercion, repression and violence. Our painful quest for Christian Unity is part of the same thing. It is part of the Church’s world-mission. The church exists for the world, that one day the Kingdom *will* come on earth, where love and respect will reign.

Now I would like to tell you an extraordinary story, extraordinary, but true. It is about two theological students. The first was born in 1944 and entered KCC in 1963 where he did well and gained the AKC Diploma and the B.D. of the University. He came on to Warminster and was ordained in 1967 in the parish of All Saints, East Finchley, London. In 1972 he moved to St Alphege, Hendon, and in 1977 became Vicar of St Paul's, Tottenham. He made his mark and was appointed Area Dean of East Haringey in 1981. Some time later, he became unsettled and eventually became a Roman Catholic. Years later, Alan Hopes (for this was his name) was consecrated Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Westminster. Last year he was entrusted by the Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, with the task of overseeing the introduction of the Anglican Ordinariate.

The second theological student was born in 1942 and entered KCL in 1962. He gained the AKC Diploma, but not a B.D. He came on to Warminster and was ordained in 1966 to a curacy in Southgate, London, and in 1970 to Wembley Park, where he became Vicar until 1985. He then moved to Wood Green. Just like Alan Hopes, he became the Area Dean of Haringey. In 1996 he was consecrated Suffragan Bishop of Fulham – yes it is John Broadhurst who has just joined the Anglican Ordinariate. So we saw in January the extraordinary spectacle of Alan Hopes officially receiving his senior into the Roman Church, a Roman Catholic bishop receiving an Anglican bishop, one old King's man receiving another King's Warminster man – all in the name of the Pope!. No wonder their old college friends were amazed at the sight.

I am sad that Alan and John have left us. I am sorry that their training for Ordination evidently did not sufficiently ground them in the Anglican way. Did we take too much for granted? Did we fail to spell out by more explicit teaching what the Anglican vocation means? Perhaps. What I am sure of is that nowadays more attention needs to be paid to the understanding of Anglicanism as a distinctive witness. And I feel an urgency about it. For, as the present Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, has written: "It seems to me that Anglicanism self understanding is at a low ebb. We experience our share of a general cultural confusion and babel. Without some clarity, however, we shall not be able to contribute our best to the global Christian unity which is to come" (R. Chartres, Preface to 'Fathers and Anglicans' by Arthur Middleton).

Some clarity: that's what we need. Can we as the Trust do anything about it? We have tried and with some success. At our meeting on March 2nd 2007 we agreed to make enquiries, and our Chairman wrote to Bishop John Flack at the Anglican Centre in Rome and to Mrs Clare Amos, the Director of Theological Studies in the Anglican Communion. As a result, Mrs Amos came down and spoke to the local committee on September 7th 2007 about the work of 'TEAC' – Theological Education in the Anglican Communion. She asked for support for one of its projects, producing booklets on the Anglican Way. The committee agreed to give £4,000 that October and for the next 2 years. This was real progress. We have now completed this grant and the question arises, can we do any more? I hope so, because recent events have made the matter even more urgent.

I ask myself, would a direct approach to the Theological Colleges be likely to succeed? I doubt it. I can hear the Principals replying that they are struggling with a crowded syllabus. However I have another idea which I would like to put to the Council for discussion. How would it be if we offered a prize for the best essay on "Why I am an Anglican and believe I shall remain so", or some such title? The prize might be offered in all the Anglican Colleges. It might be called the St Boniface Essay Prize. The essay would be of, say, not more than 10,000 words. The prize money would need to be pitched high enough to attract plenty of attention – perhaps £500? Flyers would need to be circulated among the Colleges plentifully to advertise the prize with a covering letter to the Principals.

If the Council likes the idea, perhaps we could give it a trial run for one year. If it succeeded, we could consider extending it. As to the judging of the essays, I think we would need someone from outside – for example, the Bishop of London in view of what he has written; or our old student, Christopher Hill, Bishop of Guildford, who has been for years the Archbishop's advisor on ecumenical affairs; or a retired Bishop Mark Santer, who was Bishop of Birmingham, and also involved in ecumenical affairs. This is as far as I have got in thinking out the details, and I await your reactions.

To sum up, what I have to report today falls into 3 sections:-

1. The Ministry of the Lodge
2. The Anglican Ordinariate
3. A possible line of action