

Comment

Anglo-Saxon Attitudes

To those who believe that the Anglo-Saxon race as a whole has a providential mission, the Anglican Communion may well appear destined to play an important part in the interpretation and fulfilment of that mission. The ideal function of the Anglican Communion is to express and guide the spiritual aspirations and activities of the Anglo-Saxon race.

Dean Armitage Robinson

These words were spoken at the Pan-Anglican conference of 1908, and with a few minor changes they would be acceptable to many contemporary Anglicans. Phrases like 'Anglo-Saxon race' ring slightly less true today, but are easily replaced with references to the 'British people'. A close association undoubtedly still exists between those values which are thought to be quintessentially British and the national church. Indeed, it could be argued that the recent decision with regard to the ordination of women to the priesthood within the Church of England reflects that close association between Church and Society. Many of the arguments advanced in favour of this measure were influenced by parallel developments in the secular realm. Such a connection is unavoidable since, as Newman observed: 'any Branch or National Church is necessarily Erastian and cannot be otherwise, till the nature of man is other than it is'. Erastianism inevitably involves an aspiration to comprehensiveness. Comprehensiveness and the acceptance of pluriformity are not always compatible with doctrinal rigour. As a result of the recent vote on the ordination of women in the General Synod Roman Catholics and Anglicans now confront questions of considerable ecclesiological significance; questions which they are not entirely equipped to solve.

Anglicans now find themselves faced with a substantial minority of their English co-religionists who believe that the ordination of women falls outside the bounds of legitimate pluriformity. They find themselves in the position of those addressed so prophetically by Cardinal Newman in his *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*. Many feel that they can no longer have any trust in the Established Church or its sacraments and ordinances and that they must, reluctantly and with a heavy heart, abandon it. However, like those whom Newman addressed, they ask themselves "to whom shall we go?"

The Archbishop of Canterbury has asked all those who opposed the ordination of women to accept the Synod's decision as a legitimate exercise of authority. He has invited them to settle down and attempt to live together within the Church of England. For many of them the Church of England will never be the same again. For others the crisis goes deeper, they are confronted with the suspicion that it might never have been what they thought it was. Yet, should they leave it where would they find the undoubted Christian values and distinctive liturgical

and theological witness which has characterised so much of the best of Anglicanism? There few options on offer. Some do not make a great deal of sense and might make matters worse rather than better.

A scheme for what has been called 'alternative episcopal oversight' was already far advanced before the vote was taken in Synod. The terms of such an arrangement might include the possibility of individual parishes or federations of parishes banding together and being placed under the administration of a bishop whose orthodoxy was acceptable to his flock. There are possible parallels to such an arrangement within Catholic practice. We have various national chaplaincies, Eastern Catholic jurisdictions and a personal prelature. It is possible, according to these models, for more than one bishop to operate within the same territory; an arrangement which is frowned upon generally within Orthodoxy, but acceptable within Catholicism. However, such arrangements are based on the fact that the various bishops are in communion with each other and hold the same faith. The scheme of alternative oversight makes sense within a Catholic ecclesiological perspective only if the bishop who exercises the pastoral care accepts the orthodoxy of the ordination of women. Presumably, such an acceptance would make him unacceptable to those entrusted to his care. If, on the other hand, bishops exercising alternative oversight accepted the validity of women's orders then the original foundation for the arrangement would be undermined. The dispute would alter from being a disagreement over the substance of the faith to one of discipline. In this context it would be possible to see Anglicans who accepted the ordination of women and those who did not as worshipping in two separate rites, rather as some Catholic rites ordain married men and others do not. Whilst this may help to preserve comprehensiveness it does great ecclesiological violence to the integrity of a Church.

An alternative is for disenchanted Anglican clergy and laity to seek some form of corporate reconciliation with the Church of Rome, possibly with some accommodation made for their continuing Anglican identity. This is a solution proposed by Bishop Graham Leonard and others. It is not quite clear how far negotiations on this matter have proceeded. Although it would appear not quite as far as the press would have us believe. The ecumenical, ecclesiological and financial implications of such a move are considerable. The consequences would certainly affect the identity of English Catholicism which has traditionally located itself within the dissenting tradition. However, some space must surely be found for those who can embrace the fullness of Catholic life and faith. As Newman wrote:

...if you have by His grace been favoured in any measure with the supernatural gift of faith, then, my brethren, I think too well of you, I hope to much of you, to fancy you can be untrue to convictions so special and so commanding. No; you are under a destiny, the destiny of truth - truth is your master, not you the master of truth -you must go whither it leads.

AJW