

newdirections

February 2009
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serving Evangelicals and Catholics seeking to renew the Church in the historic faith

Nothing happening

Why the February Synod will tell us
nothing about anything important

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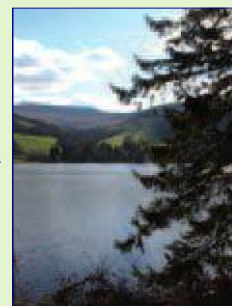
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The next issue of **newdirections**
is published on 6 March

Burdened with the impossible task of drafting a Code of Practice to enable the introduction of women bishops, the Manchester Group published its second collection of material at the end of December. It has offered General Synod and the rest of the Church of England an impressive set of papers.

It would be impossible not to be struck by the skill, thoroughness and imagination that was applied by the members of the group to the absurd and confused remit they had been landed with. If nothing else, it shows that there are still intelligent people able to offer serious theological thinking within our church, and this across the divide of churchmanship, and without their advocate of the orthodox position, Fr Jonathan Baker.

It is a travesty, surely, that so much listening, reflection, study and commitment should in the end be of so little use. As they themselves make clear, it is all but impossible for a Code to achieve the task imagined for it. As they make even clearer, more serious work on a more workable solution *could* have been done, had they been given a better and more appropriate remit from Synod.

What are we to conclude from this? What lessons can be learned from this second exercise in the impossible?

Firstly, it is clear that the Synod debate and motion on the morning of 11 February will be largely an irrelevance, and will change nothing. It is merely an unproductive requirement of the synodical process. Nothing should be expected of it, from either side of the debate.

Secondly, it follows that the real work will, therefore, have to follow this procedural and shadow motion, during the period Synod calls 'the revision stage'. This endless delay is unbecoming, and a clear indictment of the House of Bishops' inability to give proper leadership. Nevertheless, with no Lambeth Conference to distract them this year, it is imperative that they come to a common mind and make a decision and atone for their cowardice and indecision of 2008.

Theological work will have to be done; major revision will have to be realized; the wiser counsel of the Manchester Group will have to be listened to. If a Code is ineffectual, and unlikely to receive the necessary two-thirds majority at the end of this interminable process, something more serious and permanent will have to be put in its place.

Is it possible? Of course. As the Manchester Group has shown, serious work *can* be done, across the ideological divide. What is needed

is clear leadership.

Can we expect this from the Synod? Hardly. From the bishops? Unlikely. Which leaves the Archbishops. We pray for them.



Suppose a serving bishop were to write an article about homosexuals. And suppose that after a few general comments, in which he describes people who feel a sense of the injustice at the way gays and lesbians are treated by the Church as 'snotty, dotty and potty,' he goes on to describe the career of a notorious paedophile. He concludes by suggesting that those who stick up for gay rights are living in 'la la land.'

The result would be uproar, and the bishop would be forced to apologize for any implication that there is a path which links homosexual orientation, directly or indirectly, to child abuse.

An absurd scenario? No doubt. Which bishop could demonstrate such an astonishing lack of judgement as to allow such a piece to appear in the public domain, across his signature? But the Bishop of Buckingham, the Rt Revd Alan Wilson, has seen fit to do just this (see <www.bishopalan.blogspot.com>, entry dated 22 January 2009). No, not about homosexuality and paedophilia, of course: that would be too offensive. The issue is one which ranks – rightly – alongside child abuse as a particularly stomach-churning phenomenon: holocaust denial.

And the group who, by association, are linked with this most reprehensible of opinions and about whom the article begins? Traditional Anglo-Catholics, anxious to uphold the teaching of the Universal Church in matters of faith, order and morals.

Buckingham, who has form in this area (he has previously suggested that those opposed to the ordination of women are similar to the defenders of apartheid) has written a theologically slovenly piece. The Church of England does not adhere to the purely 'baptismal ecclesiology' which he champions.

Her own teaching documents (for example, *Bishops in Communion*), and the ecumenical agreements with partners of all shades to which she has signed up, all aspire to the goal of visible unity expressed in and through full Eucharistic communion. But this is neither here nor there.

What is truly unbecoming is that one of the Church of England's alleged chief pastors should be blind to the insensitivity of writing an article like this at a time like this. 'Trust us,' say the bishops. Really? **ND**



Nothing yet stirring

*Synod has not yet finalized the shape of legislation for women bishops and provision for those who object to it, and this will still be the case even after the February 2009 Synod, as **Paul Benfield** explains*

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I was speaking last autumn to a priest who told me that he 'would wait to see what Synod did in February' before deciding on his future. I consider that priest to be relatively well-informed about the affairs of the Church of England, and yet he was making the February 2009 Synod the basis on which his whole future life would be mapped out. I had to tell him that we shall, in all probability, be in exactly the same position after the February Synod as we were before it and that, consequently, such a major decision should not be made by him on the basis of what does or does not happen in London on the morning of Wednesday 11 February.

On that day Synod will give first consideration to the Draft Measure to allow women bishops. The standing orders of the General Synod clearly and unambiguously state the procedure to be followed. The motion to be considered will be 'That the Measure entitled the Draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure be considered for revision in committee.' No amendment to that motion will be in order. So the Synod will have a simple choice (unless some procedural motion to move to next business or adjourn is passed). It can reject the motion or approve it. If it rejects the motion then all consideration of the Measure will cease and it may not be considered again for at least eleven months. If the motion is carried then the Measure will automatically pass to the Revision Committee. That is all that can happen in February.

The same procedure will be followed for the associated Draft Amending Canon No. 30. The Synod will either send the draft canon to the Revision Committee or halt its consideration.

Do not be deceived by claims that Synod has confirmed its decision of July 2008 and approved the statutory code of practice as its favoured method of providing for those who cannot accept women bishops. Do not believe anyone who says that the shape of the legislation is now fixed and that all we can get is a code of practice. Do not believe anyone who tells you that Synod has decided that in future a priest must swear an oath of obedience to more than one bishop, both his diocesan and any other bishop set in authority over him. Synod cannot, in the February debate, alter the shape of the legislation or provision for those opposed at all and it cannot redraft the Amending Canon. Alterations come later at the Revision Stage.

The Revision Committee (which will be appointed shortly after the February Synod) will consist of both those in favour of the legislation and amending canon and those opposed to them. It will consist of those who think that the statutory code of practice is the right way forward and those who think that some other method should be found. Any member of Synod may make submissions to the Revision Committee containing proposals for amendment of the

Measure, including the addition of new clauses.

These proposals for amendment may include proposals for options which have been the subject of unsuccessful amendments earlier in the synodical process. So we can expect that there will be proposals for the three dioceses option and for the statutory transfer option considered in the Manchester Report. A covering note from the House of Bishops says that individual bishops will be able to lend their support to attempts to amend the draft legislation.

Similarly we can expect proposals concerning the Amending Canon, especially in relation to the novel concept of the requirement to make an oath of obedience to more than one bishop. It will be surprising if there are no proposals concerning Canon A4 which is being changed from a canon concerned with 'the form and manner of making, ordaining and consecrating bishops, priest and deacons' (as its title puts it) to one dealing with the recognition of male and female orders.

In addition to matters previously considered by Synod, new matters within the general purport of the legislation may be proposed. So we can expect proposals that the measure should not come into force until adequate financial provision for those clergy forced to resign has been enacted and come into force (the women priests legislation contained such a clause). We have always said that we did not want financial provision because we wanted to stay in the Church of England. But if there is a possibility that provision for those who cannot accept women bishops may be so inadequate, then we must seek to provide for those forced to resign as a result of the legislation.

The Revision Committee is expected to take at least a year to carry out its work and so in February 2010 or later the Measure and Amending Canon will return to Synod for revision in full Synod. Arguments made in the Revision Committee may be made again in full Synod. Amendments accepted by the Revision Committee may be reversed in full Synod and amendments rejected by the Revision Committee may be approved by the full Synod. So it is only after revision in full Synod that we shall know the shape of the legislation and provision for those opposed. It is at that stage that the Measure and Canon will be referred to the Diocesan Synods before finally returning to General Synod where it must achieve a two-thirds majority at final approval in all three houses of bishops, clergy and laity.

So to the priest to whom I spoke last autumn, and to all other clergy and laity, I say the time to be deciding your future in the Church of England is *not now*, but some years down the line. The February Synod will not determine anything except that the process of considering the legislation and canon to allow women bishops should continue or it should stop for the time being. Nothing more than that. **ND**

Whom to appease?

*There are three distinct groups who oppose the innovation of women bishops. **Anthony Saville** wonders which group the draft Code of Practice is intended to satisfy*

General Synod, with or without the guidance of the House of Bishops, will make the fateful decisions over the coming years concerning the introduction of women bishops to the Church of England. They are the actors; we are the spectators.

Perhaps not entirely. Both Synod members and bishops spend most of their lives in ordinary church circles: for most of the time they understand and experience this issue in a context very different to that of synodical papers, debates and motions. What is the general problem they are seeking to solve, of which the synodical process is but a symptom?

Women bishops are not the issue: this innovation, as we know, has already been accepted. The big question, which has occupied the mind of the church for some years now, is what to do with those who cannot in conscience accept this change to Church Order. Should any provision be made by the majority for the minority, and if so what sort of provision?

It does appear, now that the Manchester Group has devised a draft code of practice, that the bishops and Synod members are still not clear as to what sort of people make up this minority. There are, at the very least, three quite distinct groups.

First, there are the Catholics, who need sacramental assurance and a coherent ecclesiology; for them a Code of Practice clearly will not do, as the Manchester Group acknowledges. Second, there are the Evangelicals who need on biblical grounds a godly man as a bishop. Thirdly, there are the conservatives, who do not like change and innovation and cannot welcome a woman in the sanctuary, in virtually any role.

This last group, the conservatives, whom we might in more uncharitable moments wish to label as misogynist, will find that the Code satisfies all their needs at virtually no cost. It would allow them to avoid seeing a woman in their sanctuary, while in no way cutting them off from any other aspect of the life of the Church of England. Everything remains as it was, no theological questions have to be faced or answered; they simply don't have to encounter a female bishop in their own church.

The principal objection to the first group, the Catholics, is that they are such vile people. As everyone 'knows' it is Forward in Faith that has been the spanner in the works for the last two decades, and in simple terms, 'It's all our fault.' This visceral loathing, however, masks a more difficult truth, namely that the Catholics are at one and the same time both the best group to keep and the worst.

The presence of this group, as 'loyal Anglicans', is a constant reminder to the majority that, just possibly, they are wrong in what they are doing; and this by their own judgement, not ours. We remain an uncomfortable and accusing presence, and yet to get rid of us (by providing the mere worthless token of a code)

would be to turn away from the Church of England's historic self-understanding to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. If you throw out all the members of your church who hold to a Catholic ecclesiology, it would be very difficult, that is to say impossible, to maintain the historic claim to be Catholic.

You might say that the principal objection to the third group, the conservatives, is the same only more so. Surely misogynists are even more vile. Actually, no, they have a real usefulness. If you are claiming that the need for women bishops is a simple justice issue; if you are telling others that this final barrier to sexual equality must be removed, in the same manner that slavery was abolished or apartheid destroyed, then clearly it helps to have a few opponents who are manifestly reactionary.

If your enemies are not merely wrong but evil (though being English this may not be quite the word we should use), does this not suggest your cause is right and good? To satisfy the needs of Catholics would be to lay yourself open to the possibility that you are wrong; to satisfy the needs of misogynists may be a little too generous (though only for a decade or so) but it cleverly heightens the righteousness of your own position.

A Code, to satisfy those who do not like the idea of women bishops because they are women, is not, therefore, a concession wrung unwillingly from the majority. It is, rather, a clever and intentional procedure that underlines the worthiness of the cause. By defining the opposition, it provides an implicit and most useful approbation of the innovation.

The dream scenario for the liberal majority would be so to dress up the misogynist Code in Catholic clothing that the latter group could be tarred with sins of the former. A fantasy? I don't think so. We must acknowledge, to our shame, that there are too many misogynists hiding within our ranks (within FiF, for example) for this to be an impossible outcome.

What, then, of the second group, the Evangelicals? A Code, on the face of it, should satisfy them, being deliberately individual in application, and clearly to do with gender. Will it be enough? This is surely the question the bishops are asking.

To lose the Catholics would not be the end of the world, especially if they could be labelled conservative, reactionary and misogynist. But to lose the Evangelicals as well, that would be a disaster, if they took with them their young laity and their money. It may be (I speak as an outsider) that what they need most of all is structural separation from openly gay bishops, a CofE problem still in the future. What they are looking to see is whether the bishops can make provision for Catholics. If they won't for us, what hope will there be for them?

Misogynists are no allies of ours, but Evangelicals most probably will be. **ND**

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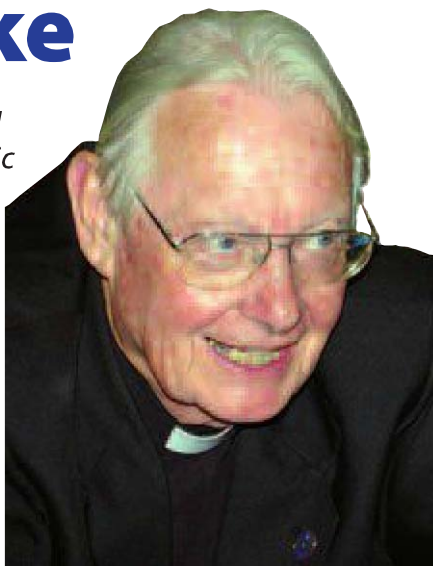
Clear rebuke

A gloriously straightforward episcopal letter from the other side of the Atlantic

On Friday, Jan. 23, 2009, the Rt Revd William C. Wantland, Assisting Bishop of Diocese of Fort Worth, received the following letter, dated January 15, from the Most Revd Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church:

In a letter to me of November 15, 2008, the Rt Rev. William Wantland stated that as a result of the Diocese of Fort Worth's recent attempt to realign with the Province of the Southern Cone, 'I am...now canonically affiliated with the Southern Cone and its Primate, The Most Rev. Gregory Venables.' Bishop Wantland then declared that 'I am no longer a member of the Episcopal Church.'

These statements make clear that Bishop Wantland has chosen to leave the Episcopal Church and that he no longer wishes to carry out the responsibilities of ordained ministry in this Church. Accordingly, I have, with the consent of my Council of Advice, chosen this day to accept Bishop Wantland's voluntary



renunciation of his Orders in the Episcopal Church and have removed and released him from our ordained ministry.

Bishop Wantland issued the following reply:

Dr Schori,

This will acknowledge electronic receipt on this date of a letter apparently not mailed to me, but dated January 15, 2009, purporting to 'accept' my letter to you dated November 15, 2008 as a Renunciation of my Orders.

As you must know, my letter

specifically declared that 'I am not resigning my Orders'. Nowhere do I renounce or resign my Orders. My letter to you in no way comports with the provisions of Canon III.12.7.

Further, I specifically requested status in the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church in conformity with Rule XXIV of the House of Bishops. This request has been totally ignored by you.

I can only conclude that either you (1) do not understand the plain and fairly simple language of either the Canons or my letter to you, or (2) have deliberately violated the Canons for your own purposes, and contrary to your obligation as a Christian not to bear false witness.

Further, as you acknowledge in your cover letter that I have transferred to another Province of the Anglican Communion, you therefore have absolutely no jurisdiction over me or my ministry, and your purported action of January 15, 2009, is simply null and void.

I would request a response, indicating whether you lack a basic understanding of the English language, or choose to engage in illegal activities. There is no other possible rational interpretation of your actions.

Faithfully,

The Rt Revd William C. Wantland **ND**

As a parish priest I have had my fair share of people who self-diagnose that the problem in their relationship (often marriage) is that they are 'falling out of love'. Sometimes this sense of 'something missing' in a relationship crops up in a very long-established relationship causing deep distress to all parties. There can be many causes for this self-perceived 'change of heart'. It can be related to physical fatigue or mental and emotional turmoil in other areas of life. In the case of someone who is aware of their spiritual life and actively seeks to live in the light of the Spirit as a Christian, other factors can come into play.

Seeking help to revive a 'cooling' relationship from the perspective of Christian spirituality can often provide direction. There is much wisdom to draw on. As C.S. Lewis pointed out, individuals always prefer the 'experience' of romantic love. The erotic has its power and place in the cementing of relationships, but if a relationship is based solely on the 'feel good factor' it will be bound to fail. The corollary of this is the well-documented 'falling away' of Christians who are dependent on Charismatic 'experience' in worship. God

Ghostly Counsel **Valentine blues**

Andy Hawes is Warden of Edenham Regional Retreat House

is not found in the thrill of the moment, although that moment might open up the consciousness to other possibilities and a new awareness of oneself and of others.

There are strong parallels to mystical experience and the erotic relationship. This is seen in the Song of Songs in the Old Testament and developed in the medieval mystical tradition by Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross and others. The romantic and the erotic are not excluded from Christian spirituality, but they will not feed the proverbial baby or put bread on the table. It is notable that New Testament teaching about marriage has nothing in it to excite the romantic. It is rather an encouragement to mutual service and sacrifice in which is to be

found peace and freedom. Our formative relationships in marriage, family and friendships are the frame on which a life of loving service and faithfulness in small things is stretched out to become a glorious image of God's love.

The love that is revealed in Christ and in which we partake by grace is not very interested in answering the question 'how do you feel?' It certainly mocks the assumption there 'should be something in this for me'. In Christian spirituality the exercise of faithfulness outdoes the search for happiness (whatever that is) every time. Often when relationships are saddened by a coldness of heart and deadened by routine, the way to renewal is a relearning of what love means. In our rather shallow materialist culture where pleasure has been substituted for joy, it is no wonder that we forget the Love who is God who showed his love for us while we were still enemies by dying for us.

Part of the power of the romantic is its emphasis on the object of love as 'perfect' and on the experience of the relationship as 'heavenly'. I simply remind people that we don't yet live in a heavenly place and that to look for perfection is a waste of time!

Democratic danger

James Wells finds much that is helpful in Pope Benedict's views on democratic synods in the context of the General Synod and its role and power within the Church of England

In *Our Times*, his recently published history of the UK since 1953, A.N. Wilson argues that Archbishop Michael Ramsey was the man who destroyed the Church of England. And Ramsey's chosen weapon of ecclesial destruction was the General Synod.

Pope Benedict XVI does not refer to the Church of England, let alone its synodical government, in his 1990 addresses, recently reprinted under the title *Called to Communion*. Nevertheless, his prophecy of what happens when a Church is democratically governed makes an uncanny fit with Wilson's analysis of the collapse of the Church of England.

The context for the then cardinal's remarks is the low status of the Church as an institution within Roman Catholicism. It is sobering to think this goes for a Church where some Anglicans think the grass grows greener, though they will probably comfort themselves with the thought that Rome is a Church which will continue to offer its sheep genuine green grass.

Nature of reform

It is also sobering to think that Benedict needed to give his brother bishops what he calls a 'primer of Catholic ecclesiology.' But it is a useful little primer which gets straight down to basics. One of these basics is that the Church should be holy if she is to give glory to God. Reform is needed if the Church is not holy, and this side of heaven the Church is never perfect. But for any reform to succeed, the Church needs to understand herself so she can approach reform in the right way. Benedict will go on to say that this reform will be both institutional – perhaps surprisingly he is no lover of Church bureaucracy and careerist committeemen – and individual – we must all become better Christians.

Before he gets to that good reform Benedict first targets 'futile reformers.' He characterizes these as people convinced that previous generations did not get it right or else that they were too fearful or unilluminated. By contrast the futile reformers think themselves both brave and understanding, even in the face of reactionaries and fundamentalists.

Fortified by this impenetrable self-confidence, the first step for the futile

reformer is to bring democracy to the Church. The futile reformer argues that from the Enlightenment democracy has been the way for humankind to organize itself politically to reflect its basic rights and freedoms. The paternalistic Church must be changed to catch up with this so that we are no longer passive receivers of the gift of Christian life but instead we should make church ourselves in ever more and new ways. In this way the Church will become 'ours' and through discussion and compromise and resolution we can bring about what can be asked of the people of today.

Party politics

But, asks Benedict, if our reforms replace hierarchical leadership with democratic self-determination – and which is more important in the Church

according to Benedict, democratic synods by their very nature create factions

of England, episcopal leadership or synodical government? – who has the right to make decisions? And what is the basis for making decisions? He replies to himself that in political democracies this is done by the system of representation. Individuals elect representatives for a fixed time who make decisions on their behalf, and whose main lines of policy are clearly defined by the party system.

That, of course, is what the Church of England's General Synod does. And it's hardly going too far to say that for Benedict this is anathema. He argues repeatedly that the import of party politics into the structures of the Church is contrary to the nature of Christian conversion because when we belong to a political party it is my party, but when we belong to the Church it is not my Church but the Church of Jesus Christ. A party by definition is a thing which divides mankind, but the Church is united in Jesus and her task is not to divide but to unite; not to crush opposition but to embrace all in love.

And Benedict's critique of democratic

synods continues. What, he asks, if the minority which must submit to the majority is a large minority? What guarantee is there that the representatives of the local churches are representative? How can the victorious majority deal with the fact that its decisions will have to be modified by the minority to ensure the system doesn't break down?

Opinion versus faith

Benedict's final theological critique raises the question that because everything men can make they can unmake, does it follow that democratic synods inevitably transform even those Churches which maintain traditional Catholic or Protestant teaching into liberal Protestantism? Benedict is surely right to argue that a 'church based on [reversible] human resolutions becomes a merely human church. It is reduced to the level of the makeable, the obvious, of opinion. Opinion replaces faith... 'I believe' never signifies beyond 'we opine'...the self-made church savours of the self which always has a bitter taste to the other self and just as soon reveals its petty insignificance.' Does any of this sound familiar? Has the public face of the Church of England become crass and dull, nasty and bitter? A number of commentators in the national press seemed to think so after last year's York Synod.

And this argument fits all too well the argument that General Synod was Michael Ramsey's death wish for the Church of England. Synod can repeal all past legislation, including Acts of Synod and Codes of Conduct. Surely it is symptomatic of such a set-up that *Watch* and its supporters have expressed surprise that anyone should think that the 1993 Act of Synod was never meant to last.

According to Benedict, democratic synods are a futile reform for a Church founded on Jesus Christ. They are unrepresentative. By their very nature they create factions, oppressed minorities and discontented majorities – anything but the one Body united in Christ the Head. And they make a faith which can be repealed. Still, it is an urgent question for the Church of England: can she prove Benedict wrong, or was she really done for by Michael Ramsey? **ND**

Being a blogging nerd

Ed Tomlinson encourages us to explore the world of blogs which are not just informative but which can also help to strengthen the links between traditionalist parishes

The confessional is calling. I can no longer deny that it is true! My brothers and sisters in Christ, I must come out of the closet and admit the startling truth: I am engaged in 'a new way of being church'. I, traditionalist Catholic bag that I am, find myself guilty of creating a fresh expression. And what is more, I love it!

The problem started at General Synod (don't they all?). I was so enraged at the hypocritical actions of those claiming to be liberal, so incensed at the dismal treatment of orthodox Christians, that I simply had to get things off my chest. And yet this posed a genuine dilemma, for I have long sworn to leave politics out of the pulpit. (I am a firm believer that Sunday Mass needs to offer people the Good News of Jesus Christ and not the rancid news of the Church of England!) How then to communicate my disgust? How to help others see the bigger picture of the scandalous piracy occurring in the Church of my baptism? The solution I discovered on the end of my fingertips!

Influenced by a certain Maltese cleric, and already hooked on *Massinformation*, I struck upon my solution. I could create a blog! Open a tiny corner of the internet where my opinions could be publicly aired... And so began an addictive and mesmerizing experience, one that would surprise me by its scope, effectiveness and appeal.

Diverse readership

My first surprise was that people actually read blogs! During the first six months of my daily rant, I have attracted no less than 20,000 hits. Furthermore, the type of visitor is incredibly broad. From exotic Episcopalians to atheistic friends, it seems everyone finds a reason to return. (It took me ages to realise that 'Fr Inlaw' who was leaving me comments is indeed my wife's daddy!) So there is the first triumph of blogs. They reach a diverse readership, ensuring the Catholic voice reaches ears (or eyes) it would otherwise miss.

My second surprise was that the blog is a welcome friend to the housebound. For the internet literally takes the church into the living room, allowing isolated

parishioners to keep abreast of parish news. I cannot overemphasize the pastoral good this can do. Perhaps it is best summarized by a comment left by a parishioner, Ken Boughton, on the blog itself:

May I say on behalf of those who were not able to attend St Barnabas church over the Christmass period how much pleasure the photographs and write ups shown on the 'Blog' helped us to be part of the celebration of the Feast.

The third pleasant surprise was that blogs encourage good practice. No sooner

the blogs promote one another, ensuring our unity as Catholics is visible for all to see

had one site alerted us to the existence of the 'Proclamation of Christ's birth' than it was being sung in churches throughout the land at Midnight Mass. This opportunity for sharing liturgy and theology can only enhance and encourage the Catholic movement, helping us ensure we are linked in prayer and practice.

And this leads to my final message of 'bloggy' joy! I am amazed and encouraged at how the Anglo-Catholic

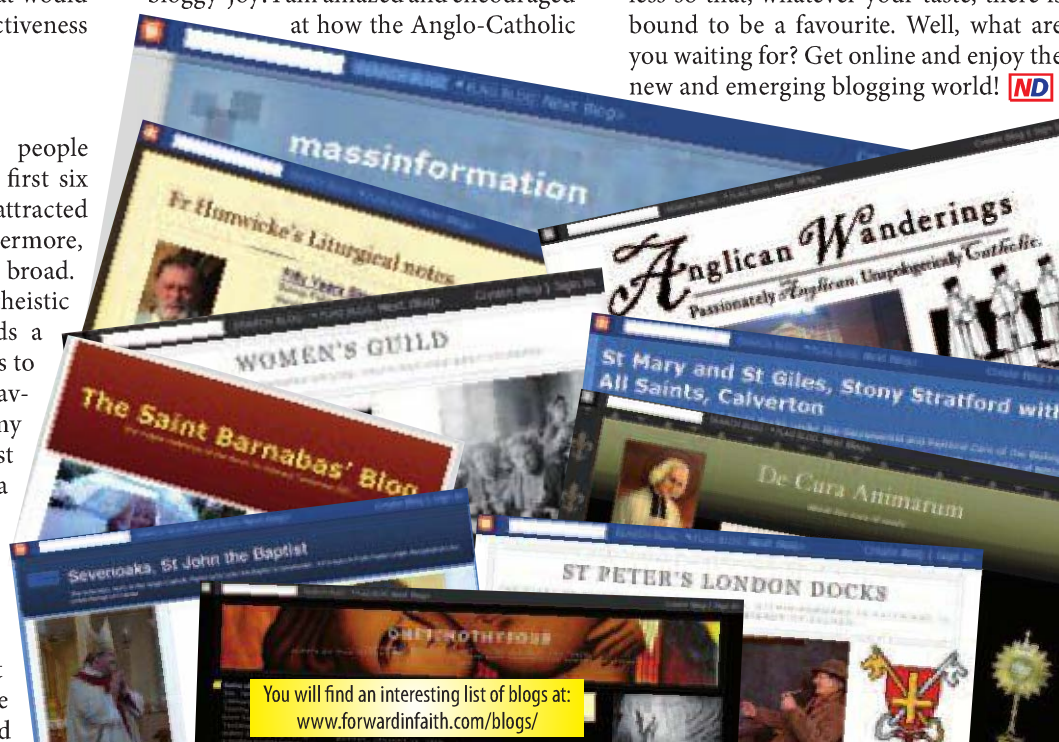
blogs *all* affirm and support one another. There is never a hint of competition or one-upmanship. Instead the blogs promote one another and speak with one voice, ensuring our unity as Catholics is visible for all to see.

A unified voice

This was most evident on the day the Manchester Group revealed its blueprint for a Code of Practice. Within hours each and every site proclaimed 'A code of practice will not do!' What a powerful and unified voice! A further cause for celebration. The blogs bring Anglo-Catholic parishes closer together, allowing us to develop and refine our theology and practice.

So there you have it! I will not hang my head in shame. In fact I shall hold it up proudly. A 'new expression' it may be, but unlike moronic inventions such as 'Café churches', this is an expression both fertile and effective. So why not join today? If not as an author, then as a reader.

You might then begin in Sunny Tunny with <www.sbarnabas.com/blog> or visit London Docks or take a trip to theological college or learn from the erudite Fr Hunwicke. Else there is St John's Sevenoaks, De Cura Animarum, Fr Pinnock, Anglican Wanderings, Fr Northing, the women's guild... The list seems endless so that, whatever your taste, there is bound to be a favourite. Well, what are you waiting for? Get online and enjoy the new and emerging blogging world! **ND**



A small sacrifice

Sarah Mowbray draws on her personal experience to explore the nature of the sacrifices made by the families and other supporters of those with a vocation to the priesthood

Vocation is something so wonderful to watch, to see how it grows and develops, to nurture and encourage, to walk alongside someone, to pray with them and for them. To see this in the context of a vocation to the priesthood is something different altogether.

James realised he had a vocation to the priesthood at the age of twelve, I met him when he was nineteen and he was ordained when he was twenty-four; now he is an incumbent in a thriving Catholic parish under the episcopal care of Bishop John. I have watched his vocation grow and develop, and taken much joy in seeing the boy I first met in a university bar turn into a man with such deep conviction and commitment to his faith and his calling to be a priest.

An army of supporters

To answer a call to the priesthood can be a sacrifice for some, having to leave a secure job, a home that has been made, to move away from all that is familiar. To acknowledge a vocation to the priesthood to family and friends for the first time can be terrifying, and some take longer than others to get their heads around the new status that this vocation will bring.

Behind every vocation to the priesthood is an army of supporters; wives, children, parents, extended family, friends, their parish family where they grew up. We stand in the wings and watch and pray.

For those with a vocation to the priesthood, it can mean a sacrifice. For their support network it can mean a double sacrifice, since the vocation is not theirs, and it takes a great deal of trust and belief to follow the vocation of someone else.

Giving up the familiar

We have met so many wonderful people who have given up so very much to follow a vocation. There were wives who had moved from one part of the country to the other. A lot of the wives I became friendly with in Mirfield had moved themselves, and their families, some with very young children, others with teenage children. They were so committed to following the vocation of their husbands that they happily and willingly took themselves from a stable and comfortable position to one of uncertainty and one which is slightly nomadic for a time.

It is one thing to follow a vocation as a spouse, but there were those who came as part of the package, the children. This was something I always admired with children of a man with a vocation. The children on the whole gladly followed, as their parents made a decision that would change their lives. They faced a future that would see them become vicarage children, and they would have a dad who wore a 'dog-collar'. They too had been moved from one part of the country to the other, from friends that they had made, and family that were near, and were taken to something that was often very alien and new,

and for some of them it was quite scary. How do you explain a vocation to the priesthood to a child, and explain why they had to move, and why it was so important? But most of the children we came into contact with took on board the changes in their lives with great maturity.

We had friends who had owned houses in their previous lives; most of our friends had to relinquish any arrangement with letting agents, because it was almost impossible to keep an eye on things, or they had to sell their homes to subsidize their student grant.

As for our sacrifice – well, I don't really see it that way when I think of it. We married in the summer between James' first and

second year, we were blessed with arrival of our first born whilst James was a Curate, and our new arrival has yet to turn twelve months. We started our married life in Mirfield and hadn't known anything different before. Our first marital home was student residence and our children came after.

Grace and Ria have only ever known James as a priest, and as nothing else. So we got away with a lot. Although I miss Wales, I go back there frequently enough to replenish the soul, and if James had a different profession I would have moved with him, whatever he would have done.

I don't think there is anyone who has been ordained who hasn't sacrificed something to follow the path to which God has called them. Most vocations call for some small sacrifice. So how are those who are in the Anglo-Catholic wing of the church any different to anyone else who has been ordained?

Uncertain future

Because now I, along with many others, stand in the wings and watch and pray as the people we love do something that once seemed unthinkable, to turn their backs on

the Church that they love so dearly, and the vocation that is at the core of their being. Why? Because earlier this year Synod voted to make the way clear for women to join the episcopate.

A code of practice is not enough and our only hope is that in February Synod will see fit to offer something better. Something is needed that will enable James and those like him to remain within the church and uphold their integrity. A code of practice may mean segregation and ultimately may lead to the demise or even the departure of the Anglo-Catholic wing of the CofE. Something needs to be put in place to secure the future of these priests who are willing to again sacrifice so much.

My hope in writing is to remind those of you out there, those of you with influence who can make a difference, that yes, around 1,500 men signed their name to the petition that made a request for the CofE and Synod to think hard about the future. And behind those men are wives, children, parents and other supporters who are waiting with bated breath, hoping and praying that the sacrifice that they have made has not been in vain. **ND**

it takes a great deal of trust and belief to follow the vocation of someone else



Bishops v government

George Austin looks at the relationship between politics and the Church of England in the light of some bishops' recent criticisms of the Labour government's economic policy

It is perhaps only fair that I should begin this article with a terrible confession, one which will perhaps shock or even appal some readers. The awful truth is that I have supported Labour for fifty years and for most of that time even as a paid-up member. There, I've said it: 'I am a member of the Labour Party.' And I say that not as an alcoholic admits to his addiction, for I have no wish to change. To be entirely accurate I have to admit that, during part of the 1980s and the ascendancy of the Loony Left, I joined the Social Democrats but inevitably left when they were annexed by the Liberals.

That is not to say I have not admired some Tories – even Margaret Thatcher, Norman Tebbit and Michael Howard – though I could never have voted for them. But they did have leadership qualities and their policies were not akin to those of their current successors: 'If Brown does it, we will do the opposite' or 'If someone steps on a butterfly in Tokyo, it is the fault of Gordon Brown.' Chaos theory indeed.

Faith and politics

To be political should not invite the criticism that one is 'bringing religion into politics' because if one's Christian faith is worthwhile and not something one escapes to on a Sunday, it has to impinge upon and influence every corner of one's existence. At the same time it should not create a church which is the 'Tory Party at prayer' or the 'Militant Left at prayer'. Sadly the Church of England deserved both descriptions at various times during the twentieth century.

The attack on the government by five bishops which appeared in the High Tory *Sunday Telegraph* on 28 December could give the impression that the Church – or at least an episcopal part of it – was once again aspiring to be the Tory Party at prayer. This would, I think, be a mistake.

Although the headline 'Bishops deliver a damning verdict on Britain under Labour rule' suggested that this was a deliberate, concerted and political move on their part, the report admitted that the bishops had been interviewed independently. It was maybe a little naïve of them not to realize that more would be made of it than they had imagined, especially when the *Telegraph* report went on to

suggest that 'the bishops' common criticisms reflect the deepening rift between the Government and the Church on social and moral issues.' On some issues, yes; on others, no – and so it should be.

These are anyway precisely the areas where the Church is obliged to raise concerns as part of its Christian vocation, and one would hope for the same whatever party was in power. But the comments by the five bishops were far more political than this.

the Bishop of Manchester accused the government of being 'morally corrupt'

Strong criticism

The Bishop of Manchester accused the government of acting 'scandalously' and of being 'morally corrupt' by encouraging people to get further into debt by adopting a lifestyle 'of believing they can always get what they want'. The Bishop of Hulme accused the government of not 'telling people who are already deep in debt to stop over-extending themselves, but instead...urging us to spend more', which he said is both 'morally suspect and morally feeble'.

But what of people encouraged to take out mortgages of 90% or more, who now inevitably find themselves with negative equity? It did not take a mathematical genius to recognize that the housing market had boomed so far that it must eventually bust, as it has done now with the world-wide financial crisis.

If any government tried to prevent this it would have brought condemnation upon itself, with accusations of 'nanny state' interference. Where were the bishops then? Was there ever any criticism about these quite 'immoral' and 'scandalous' offers? How many people are now in danger of losing their homes by repossession because of them?

The plethora of television adverts beguiling people to take out loans seems now thankfully to have ceased. 'Don't worry if you have had debt problems in the past, county court orders against you or whatever – we will loan you what you

ask for!' 'Let us consolidate all your debts into one so that you pay less interest – and in fact you may have enough over to enjoy that expensive holiday you have always wanted.'

Perhaps the most naïve, and politically suspect, comment came from the Bishop of Durham who claimed that Labour had made many promises 'but most of them have vanished into thin air', claiming that 'when a bank or big car company goes bankrupt, it gets bailed out, but no one seems to be bailing out the ordinary people who are losing their jobs and seeing their savings diminished.' In reality savings would after all be diminished a good deal more if the banks were not helped out of their difficulties and many more jobs lost if a car company collapsed.

Shared responsibility

A more balanced but still slightly unfair criticism came from the Bishop of Winchester, who claimed that 'the Government hasn't done anything like enough to help those less well off, particularly in terms of tax redistribution. There also has been the disaster of the 10p tax. It is imperative that this Government help the poorer people and hold the hard-hit communities in its sights, but it seems to have its eye on re-election instead.'

Astonishingly the *Telegraph* report produced a fierce and damning response on the BBC's *Today* programme from the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, who suggested that the bishops were playing a 'blame game.' Instead of blaming the government for materialism and social problems, the cardinal said that responsibility should be shared more widely.

'Ordinary people and churchmen also bear some of the blame,' he said. 'If we are going to accuse people of immorality it is much further than the Government, it is the whole country. Obviously, governments have a particular responsibility but so have the people, so have the cities, so have the communities.' When asked whether he agreed with Bishop McCulloch that the Labour government had been 'beguiled by money', the cardinal responded, 'I do not think that is the whole truth at all.'

Of course it is not – but David Cameron must be rubbing his hands with glee. **ND**

devotional

Interdependence

Gareth Jones

The human body is composed of billions of individual cells. Because these cells work together, I am what I am. Behind these bald facts is the wonder that composed of cells, as I am, that I work at all. Billions of cells all going about their respective business in an apparently uncontrolled and random fashion do so, for most of the time, in complete harmony. The randomness of cells is apparent only but is really controlled by chemical messengers we call hormones, and by individual cells 'talking' to each other. Truly, 'we are fearfully and wonderfully made' [Ps. 134.19].

In nature some organisms we count as primitive actually enjoy a level of sophisticated cellular 'togetherness' that makes our own look like an early version. For example, if I break down a sponge (and sponges are primitive) into its component cells, and then I suspend the cells in solution, the cells will find their way back to each other to reassemble themselves as a sponge. Sponge cells have the urge, as all cells do, to continue 'to be', no matter what.

Christian being

Christians are called to find their 'being' in Christ through his Body, the Church. We are 'the Body of Christ, and severally members of each other' [1 Cor. 12.27]. Like cells in a human body we are each a unit, complete in itself, yet without use or purpose alone. We are not able, truly, to exist without each other. Christ constantly calls the Church into

being through the work of the Holy Spirit in order that we may grow 'to mature manhood, the measure of the stature of Christ' [Eph. 4.13].

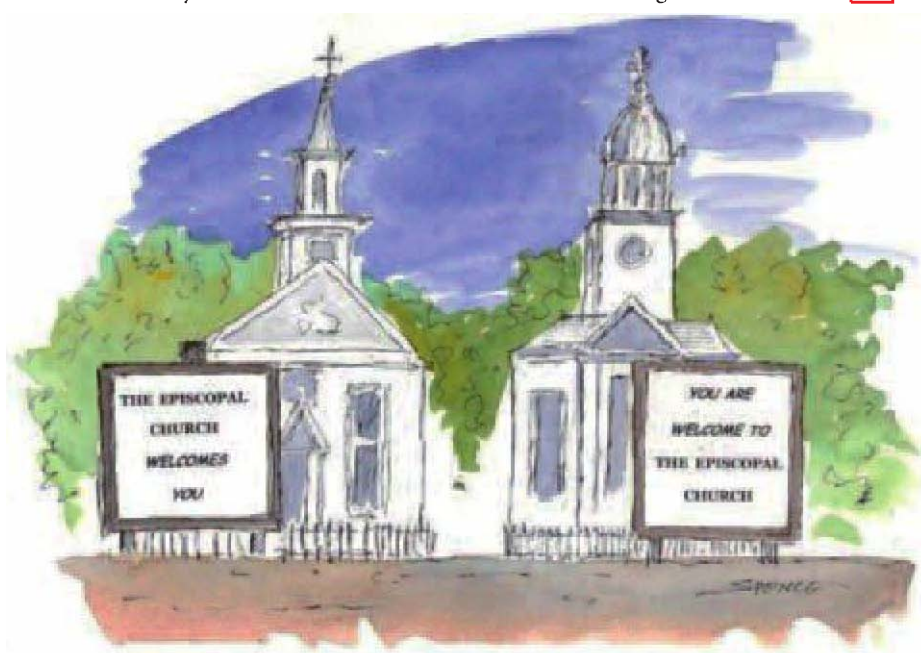
It may be the case that, in the physical sense, as individuals we are complete. Yet we can only become what we are truly called to be, by God the Holy Trinity, by being in communion with him and each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. As the human body is what it is because the cells from which it is composed work together, so it is for the Church when we, its constituent parts, work in harmony.

Call to communion

It may be true that, in our local situation in the Church of England, we may sometimes feel like my sponge, as though someone has smashed us to pieces and we have become a disparate group of individual cells. Yet such is the imperative to be in communion with Christ and each other that we must devote more rather than less time to the achievement of this goal, no matter what.

We are called to practise, at all times and in all places, as far as in us lies, the virtues by which men and women are drawn to each other in communion. We are to become 'connected' in order that the Church may grow and flourish. I speak of the virtues of 'cooperation', doing things together; 'interdependence', the need for each other; and finally 'loving openness', to allow others into our lives and hearts.

These virtues do not come without risk, principally the risk of rejection. Yet it is only when we are prepared to take the risk that we stand any chance of fulfilling in ourselves, corporately and individually, that inspirational statement of St Athanasius that 'God was made man so that man might become God.' **ND**



Latin's revival

Iwish we could go back fifty years,' said the RC priest on the *Today* programme. Not another recruit for the Society of St Pius X, but the Vatican's Latin translator mourning the declining use of Latin in papal speeches. 'Not only has Latin clarity, but it makes speeches more concise.' Surely this is the thinking behind the old-style Anglican Ordinal's requirement that clergy be found 'learned in the Latin tongue'.

However, the tide may be turning. It is possible that the government will include Latin in the language element of the new Diploma courses. Where New Labour leads can New CofE be far behind?

The return of Latinity, allied to brevity, would lead to three-fold rejoicing if accompanied by the scrapping of the *Codex de Moribus* and the birth of *Provincia Tertia*.

Even if joy was not made complete by the General Synod following the Code into oblivion, the shortening of its proceedings, if all members spoke Latin, would free up enough cash to write off the deficit from Rowan's Roundabout, aka the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

Cantuar himself would also gain. As a Bard, he is fluent in Welsh, a language which mutates the spelling of words in certain situations, producing forms, which, at first sight, appear completely different from the original. If the ABC is unconsciously mutating whilst ruminating, this may explain why some find him difficult to follow – and Rupert Shortt needs to write two books explaining what Rowan is really saying. Latin could be the Archbishop's *deus ex machina*. He would no longer give 'an uncertain sound' but become the trumpet to rally the CofE. Fair play, Latin was good enough for another Celt, Gildas, living in equally unsettling times.

Simon Heans' liberal colleague [ND January] attacked FiF champions for indulging in 'one long whinge'.

As the Vulgate has it, '*Totum spiritum suum profert stultus: sapiens differt et reservat in posterum*' [Prov. 29.11].

FiF speakers and writers whingeing? Never! However, occasionally banging on too long? With more debates ahead, perhaps the liberal had a *verb. sap.* after all?

Alan Edwards

Bible and Qur'an

There are great differences between Islamic and Christian understandings of the prophets
Patrick Henry Reardon is a Senior Editor of *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*

Those impressed by the similarities between Islam and the Christian faith often mention the reverence for the prophets shared in these two religions. This is a striking similarity, I suppose. Many of the biblical prophets are also named in the Qur'an, and with no diminished sense of their dignity. That resemblance holds true, however, only by way of a material comparison. If the Bible and the Qur'an are examined in their formal and theological understandings of the prophets, one discerns a deep divide between the two sources. In Islamic theology the biblical prophets are largely separated from their context in biblical history. I do not mean that the Qur'an denies the historicity of their revelation. It is more the case that the historical settings of the prophets are largely ignored; they do not serve as the context for understanding prophetic teaching.

Platonic interpretation

According to Qur'anic thought, each of the prophets was given to grasp some segment or aspect of the total and unified message of Islam. Those prophets were charged with speaking limited parts of the fullness of revelation given finally in the Qur'an itself. The prophetic message is unified, not by reference to the unity of Israel's history – and certainly not by reference to its fulfilment in Christ – but through the plenary revelation granted through Muhammad. Understood in this way, each of the prophets represents some aspect of man's approach to God. They were religious 'types', as it were. Indeed, certain scholars of the Qur'an, some of them taking their lead from Plato, elaborated typologies of the prophetic thought and experience. Arguably the best of these efforts was that of Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240), who elaborated his theory of the prophets in *The Bezels of Wisdom*. This author, whom his contemporaries surnamed

Ibn Aflatun ('Son of Plato'), wrote on the theme of Wisdom in twenty-seven of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, most of them biblical. In these *bezels*, or 'seals', he discovered some special aspect of Wisdom manifested in each of these prophets. Thus, he meditated on the Wisdom of destiny in Ezra, the Wisdom of intimacy in Elijah, the Wisdom of holiness in Enoch, and so forth. According to Ibn al-Arabi, the Wisdom was revealed to each of these prophets according to his particular ability to receive it. The merits of this engaging theory are obvious. When Ibn al-Arabi wrote the *Bezels* toward the end of his life, it was arguably the best and most attractive Platonic reading of the biblical material since Philo, more than a millennium earlier.

The unity of history

I cannot help but wonder, nonetheless, what Isaiah might say on finding his message wrenched from its historical context and subsumed into a large panorama of eternal and universal religious truth. In fact, Isaiah need not worry, because he is not found in the *Bezels*; Ibn al-Arabi mentioned neither him nor most of Israel's other 'literary' prophets. The reason for this omission is simple: Ibn al-Arabi was not really interested in the teaching of the prophets. He used them, rather, only as symbols of his own religious teaching. This work of Ibn al-Arabi is justly revered among proponents of the Perennial Philosophy – those persuaded that man's ongoing search for God is essentially identical at all times, though manifested differently in different historical and cultural settings.

This Islamic approach is very different to that of the Bible. In our Holy Scriptures, the prophets are neither religious theorists nor partial symbols of eternal truth. They addressed the circumstances of their own times, convinced that God was revealing himself in the fabric of those times. The unity among the prophets is founded on the unity of that history. **ND**

Sacred vision

When Guido Reni reached Rome in late 1601 the art world was dominated by the gritty realism of Caravaggio, who had startled the whole city with religious paintings which used models taken directly from the low life of Rome (in which the artist himself moved). His Magdalens were Roman street girls, his Evangelists were local tradesmen and his Baptists were local boys who were no better than they should be.

The new painter on the block – the boy from Bologna – was everything (and aspired to be everything) which Caravaggio was not. He was elegant in appearance and style. Where Caravaggio had a reputation for untidiness, drunkenness and violence, Guido was fastidious and studiously polite. Said his Bolognese biographer Malvasia, he was possessed of a melting feminine beauty and a sweet nature. Above all, he was ambitious. He aspired to Caravaggio's pre-eminence and the David was his manifesto and his challenge.

David is Guido Reni – an idealised portrait in



an elegant, almost foppish pose, a provocative feather stuck in his redundant hat. The head of Goliath is a portrait of the unkempt Caravaggio. David leans on a fragment of a Tuscan Doric column, here a symbol for the classical tradition of taste and decorum in which Guido himself stood. The severed head is placed on a rough-hewn stone block, emblematic of the coarse naturalism of Caravaggio's style. The sling hangs almost casually from David's hand. The sword, back in its scabbard, is at his feet. It has been an easy victory.

Is there just a suggestion that the giant has been vanquished by his own fatal penchant for youth and beauty? However that may be, Caravaggio carried this image with him. Six years later, at the end of his turbulent life, in his own David and Goliath, the street urchin victor holds in his hand the artist's severed head. A religious image has become code language for something entirely different.

Mark Stevens

GAFCON and division

The Rt Revd Paul Hewett SSC reports on the discussions at GAFCON and the ongoing importance of the women's ordination issue, and emphasizes the need for a study of this subject to be undertaken

Archbishop Peter Akinola called the Global Anglican Futures Conference 'a godly instrument to reshape, reform, renew and reclaim a true Anglican Biblical orthodox Christianity that is firmly anchored in historic faith and ancient formularies...' The new Primates' Council would open up enough structure, like a giant umbrella, under which we can be enthusiastic about what we have in common, and then go on in due course to deal with secondary issues, the largest of which some consider to be the ordination of women.

Others would hint at a deeper significance for women's ordination, as when Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali referred to the patristic consensus of the undivided Church as our foundation as Anglicans, and now, the basis for dialogue with Rome and Orthodoxy. And others would suggest that women's ordination is a first order issue, as when Bishop John Rodgers noted 'the serious degree of impaired communion...around this matter', and the need for a proper study such as the one conducted by the Anglican Mission in America.

Showing respect

And so at GAFCON there was a considerable majority that would understand Holy Orders in terms of Scripture and Tradition, and a sizeable minority that began ordaining women during the last 32 years, with no prolonged scriptural and theological reflection on the matter. The former would say that our crisis began in earnest in 1976 in Minneapolis. What happened then was like Jeremiah smashing the 'potter's earthen bottle' [Jer. 19]. Jerusalem, and God's people, were broken right then and there, when the pot hit the ground, not in 576 BC when the Babylonians sacked the city. The minority at GAFCON cite 2003 in New Hampshire as the breaking point. But even in their ranks one could hear a probing question about where the cancer began. Must we not take care to get all the cancer? What if there is more than appears on the surface?

Until we lift the lid all the way on this, GAFCON has enjoined two integrities, during a period of reception. Here is one place to see the hand of God. The two integrities are showing respect and for-

bearance to a remarkable degree, on this, and all the issues that need to be resolved. Dignity and restraint prevail. The minority need not fear that they will be treated as many in the majority so often were, in 32 years of persecution. The majority will be Christian gentlemen, and the minority will find their feet 'set in a large room' [Ps. 31.9]. Anglicans in North America were given a green light to create a province with two

the two integrities cannot go on forever; a period of reception must come to an end

integrities, with the same safeguards for the orthodox that a third province would require in the Church of England: assured integrity of our holy orders, our own synods, our own theological education and our own ecumenical relations.

Crisis

But it is recognized that, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' [Amos 3.3]. We recall the tragic consequences of the American Constitutional Congress of 1787 not mustering enough political courage to deal with slavery at that time. Honour requires a study of the women's ordination issue, because a study was promised in the US some years ago, and those elsewhere who have yet to do a study should not delay. (i) We owe it to our Lord to get this right. (ii) The presenting issues (divorce, abortion, family life, ordination of women and homosexuality) are interrelated. One thing leads to another, eventually, if we do not sort the whole lot out now. (iii) The Holy Spirit is powerfully at work to reveal the unity of the Body. We cannot sustain a claim to be Catholic if we have a form of ministry at variance with the vast majority of Christians. (iv) God will increasingly use the onslaught of Islam to judge and correct us until we get it right.

The crisis of Western culture is the meltdown of gracious, kenotic patriarchy, of Christian manliness. G.K. Chesterton predicted, over 80 years ago, that by the end of the twentieth century, the

most radical thing in the world would be Christian fatherhood. The whole of Scripture is about the redemption of patriarchy, modelled in the self-emptying of the Son of God, who reveals the Father as the ultimate gracious Patriarch. Increasing numbers of women are seeing this and, like Sarah Mowbray [April 2008], are asking that the tables in the house of the Lord have men at their heads. Boys must have this if they are to be men-in-Christ. The crisis in masculinity and family life in the West will metastasize in Africa if we do not embrace the fullness of Catholic faith and order, which is what is ultimately radical in every culture.

These kinds of things were discussed quietly and behind the scenes at GAFCON. The question was asked whether women's ordination is becoming perceived as a failed system, and is now perhaps where communism was in the Soviet Union in 1985. And the point was made that when a study is done, it will include the view that holy orders is all one thing: the episcopate. The presbyterate and diaconate derive from the Apostles and their successors. And GAFCON has already indicated that only men can be bishops.

Women's roles

Behind the scenes it was also recognized that the 'majority' need to magnify what women can do scripturally in the Church, as teachers, catechists, deaconesses, Church Army workers, nuns and above all, as wives and mothers. Holy Scripture gives us a vibrant sense of the all-important role of the Christian wife and mother. The Church is always called to preach, teach and live this, to live what St Paul said in 2 Timothy 3.16. Those leading the way are the Africans, with their magnificent Mother's Unions.

GAFCON's stance on the ordination of women may remind one of the old adage, 'first light the wick, then trim it.' Get some fire started. Then make the necessary adjustments for the brightest flame. The task before us is staggering, as it was before Nehemiah and the Jews returning from exile. Nehemiah told them 'of the hand of my God which was good upon me...and they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work' [Neh. 2.18]. **ND**

Right on

The old adage, roughly translated, 'What you pray is what you believe' was stretched to the limit for a priest member of Forward in Faith recently, as he had to try and stand poker-faced, struggling internally with what was no doubt meant to be some form of *Celtic Worship*, but which seemed to him little more than puerile sentimentality coupled with theological balderdash (but which was, of course, rendered by the celebrant *meaningfully*):

*Let us commend our dear brother
to the mercy of God
our maker and redeemer.*

NAME,

*May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm on your face,
The rain fall softly on your fields;*

*Until we meet again may God hold you
in the palm of his hand. Amen*

**London, Milan, New York, Paris... and Exeter!**

30 DAYS was sorry not to have made it to last month's Christian Resources Exhibition in Exeter, particularly as it meant missing an ecclesiastical fashion show in which the models were to be real clergy-people. Apparently, £50 a head was on offer for the taxing cat walk assignment and the organisers were prepared to consider 'all denominations, shapes, sizes, ages and genders'. (All genders?)

Organiser Steve Goddard explained why the models had to have the grace of orders:

The idea is that these are effectively working clothes, so non-religious models would defeat the purpose of the event which is about clothes worn by 'real' clergy in church. Indeed, many clergy have vestments 'customised' to reflect their specific area of ministry, or commission stoles to reflect the area in which the church ministers. In Birmingham, for example, the cathedral commissioned a preaching stole featuring an abstract of Spaghetti Junction!

One of the designers taking part, Juliet Hemingray, was quoted as saying:

Women clergy have brought a fresh look to garments. They are not as

willing to put up with dirty, worn-out robes. I think this has rubbed off on male clergy.

30 DAYS knows for a fact that none of its members would put up for one moment with dirty, worn-out robes (sic) and the entire notion of our clergy being *rubbed off on* is one we prefer not to visit, but we are quite taken with the notion of vestments featuring the area in which the church ministers.

A bottle of Forward in Faith Champagne, then, for the most inappropriate or tasteless suggestion for new tat, giving both the church and its local 'abstract'. You know the sort of thing: St Martin, Brighton & Brighton Naturist Beach or, perhaps, St Michael, Inverness & bottles of finest Speyside Malt. Entries to <30Days@forwardinfaith.com> by 21st February.

**Reality check**

The first *Church Times* online poll of 2009 got right to the point:

Do you find the new draft Measure and Code reassuring and workable?

A total of 448 people responded, and the results were a great deal more reassuring than any Code of Practice: Yes: 11% – No: 87%.

(It would be interesting to know whether, amongst the four dozen optimists who voted 'yes', there was anyone who was *not* a member of the House of Bishops!)

**News from the Land of Snod**

Thanks to *The Daily Mail* for the story of 63 year old Canon James Tipp, until recently Rector of Snodland (in the diocese of Rochester) and the Revd Elaine Northern, 54, until recently Assistant Curate of Snodland (still in the diocese of Rochester).

Tipp's wife of 40 years, Veronica, first learned of his dalliance with his curate when he left her a note, telling that he was running away to start a new life with a (not much) younger model.

The ensuing disciplinary tribunal unsurprisingly barred Tipp from holding any ecclesiastical post for life and North-

ern from holding any post for 12 years. The couple have criticised the 'lack of forgiveness' in the Church, calling it 'a travesty of the Gospel and the Living Lord Jesus' – which, of course, their behaviour most certainly was not (if only in their fevered imaginations). They plan to marry (sic) as soon as their respective divorces come through.

**Compare and contrast**

A big pat on the head for the Revd James Milnes, Rector of St Mary, Nether Alderley in Cheshire, who took Granada TV to task in no uncertain terms for deciding to hide the solid brass cross that formed the centrepiece of the altar for fear that it would cause offence to viewers, during location filming of a wedding for *Coronation Street*.

And a big kick, not on the head, for the Revd Ewen Souter, Team Vicar at St John, Broadbridge Heath, Horsham who has removed a large crucifix from the outside of his church on the grounds that it was 'scaring young children'.

**Give and take**

Two Roman Catholic priests have been accused of stealing no less than \$800,000 (£577,000) from the collection plate of their church in Florida, in order to spend the money on property, holidays and gambling. Fr John Skehan, 81, pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing, but Fr Francis Guinan, 66, denies the charges. Apparently, auditors say that up to \$8m might have disappeared over a period of twenty years but, owing to the statute of limitations, the charges only relate to alleged thefts since 2001.

Fr Guinan is accused of using his share of the embezzled money to support a mistress and take her on expensive holidays. Authorities claim he had an intimate relationship with a former church book-keeper and spent much of the money on her. Well, you would, wouldn't you?

*Copy for 30 DAYS should reach FiF office
by the 10th day of the month:*

30days@forwardinfaith.com

The weeds of atheism

Francis Gardom discovers that the intellectual influence of atheism from the late seventeenth century to our own day has had its effect on the divisions that afflict even the faithful

Some books provide an eye-opening experience of Truth. For me, C.S. Lewis's *Right and Wrong with a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe* [included in *Mere Christianity*] was one such. In his book, Lewis convinced me that belief in God is tenable on rational grounds, and not, as many suppose, just experiential ones. Hence, the truth (or falsehood) of the Faith depends, not primarily on our feelings with all their vagaries, but on the more reliable ground of Reason.

Just recently another book affected my outlook similarly; namely, Alister McGrath's *The Twilight of Atheism* [Random House, 2004], subtitled *The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*. The author is Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford.

History of atheism

Individual atheists there have always been. But McGrath attributes to philosophers like Locke, Hume and Spinoza the Atheism which emerged during the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Enlightenment as a serious, though tentative, *system* of belief. Thence he traces its more robust blossoming in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under Feuerbach and Nietzsche in Germany, and Voltaire in France, to its Golden Age under Freud, Marx and others in the early twentieth century. Finally he charts, *via* modernism and post-modernism, Atheism's degeneration into a belief – whose default *credo* begins 'I feel', rather than 'I believe'.

McGrath was formerly a committed Atheist (with a capital 'A' – one whose atheism informs his entire outlook). His book provides both a devastating critique of Atheism itself, and a stage-by-stage history of its growth and decline. This is the Inside Story of someone who has turned from a reasoned, crusading hostility towards the Christian Faith to its equally wholehearted acceptance.

The Enlightenment

The seventeenth century produced thinkers for whom everything could be understood and made useful to humankind by using pure Reason. Some such Rationalists found a place for a deity in their beliefs, but a deity who, once having created the Universe, withdrew from any

further participation in its affairs. This belief was called 'Deism' and, by many accounts, was the faith of the majority of contemporary Church of England bishops and clergy. It was seen as the 'Sensible Man's Creed'. Scholars like Paley recast the Christian narrative in a deist form to make it acceptable to the intelligentsia of the day.

Such a god might command man's admiration or obedience because his Law was, naturally, the epitome of pure reason! But he was emphatically not a god who gets involved with the everyday affairs of mankind. He leaves such matters to be dealt with by mankind exercising his ever-increasing understanding

General Synod assumed that it was competent to modify the beliefs of the undivided Church

and knowledge of Natural Science.

But this dogma (and no other term adequately describes it) which says that 'Reason/Science trumps all' equally conspired to persuade other thinkers of the day that Religion, so far from being a harmless recreation which its *aficionados* might be allowed to practise if they wish, was in fact the supreme impediment to that seamless progress-to-perfection which the Enlightenment offered. So Religion, for such thinkers, needed to be not merely discredited, but eliminated.

The French and Russian Revolutions, of 1789 and 1917 respectively, put this into practice in a wholesale manner proportionate with the strength of their conviction. Ironically, some of the most ardent supporters of the movement to curb the powers of the Church were Christians who themselves subsequently became its victims.

Modernism

McGrath carefully distinguishes his use of the word 'Atheism', referring to the full-blooded, carefully thought-out philosophy, which he formerly espoused, from today's popular reference to those who choose totally to ignore the question of God's existence.

In the early twentieth century, modernism came into its own. It became a powerful, self-confident and aggressive world-view. It insisted that the world could be fully understood, and its evils eventually conquered, scientifically. This belief necessitated another dogma, namely a Uniformity of belief to which everyone should (and ultimately would) willingly subscribe.

From our contemporary viewpoint, such optimism seems breathtaking. Remember, however, that the devastations of two World Wars acted as a powerful incentive to believers as well as doubters, to welcome anything that suggested a viable way forward. Hitler and National Socialism were welcomed on such a let's-try-anything basis.

Since modernists were sufficiently wise to know that destroying religious belief would be impossible, counterproductive or contrary to their own principles, they had to devise a different strategy. This was to show that Christians and modernist beliefs had been, give or take a few details, what everyone had really believed in all along. In difficult cases where beliefs conflicted, it would only be a matter of persuading Christians to modify their beliefs, or find a compromise which satisfied both sides. Anglicans, with their years of experience in this latter skill, proved agreeably willing collaborators.

Perpetual change

Throughout the Sixties and Seventies, the certitudes of Christianity were questioned and modified. When General Synod assumed that it was competent to modify not only the practice but the beliefs of the undivided Church, the process became easier still.

The outcome did not please Christians because, contrary to what they had been led to expect, it failed to fill their churches with eager converts; nor did it satisfy the modernists because not only did churchgoers tire of the ceaseless innovations to which they were subjected, but the innovations themselves often proved worse than the things they had been supposed to cure. Exasperated, the modernists warned them that they were only postponing the triumph of modernism. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are not only