



Visionary Gleamings: the Ordinariate and the New Evangelization **Fr Aidan Nichols O. P.**

It is told of a tired and over-wrought reviewer that he began his account of some contribution to the literature of the world, 'this book fills a much needed gap'. I am inclined to say the same about the Ordinariate. Its existence exposes a gap in the evangelical resources of the Catholic Church in England and, no doubt, elsewhere on the island of Britain. And it does so in a way we very much need.

What do I have in mind? In *The Realm*, a small book I produced a few years ago on the conversion of England, I spoke about the desirability of a Church that was at once indigenous and yet cosmopolitan, composed up to a point of natives and beyond that point of those who came from elsewhere. My argument ran like this. A Church that is to be evangelical must have native members, or it will not enjoy spontaneous sympathy with its environment, and the intimate understanding such sympathy brings. But such a Church must also have those who come from elsewhere, whether that be first generation incomers or those who perpetuate inter-generationally an allegiance to a culture that is somewhere else.. It must have this latter kind of member in order to be maximally effective since often enough they will have a more focused view, with a sharper critical cutting edge to it. No doubt that is a mixed metaphor though anyone who has had a cataract operation can testify that incision and improved focus sometimes go together!

In *The Realm* there was one thing I didn't say about this native-cum-cosmopolitan recipe for evangelizing, and there was also one thing I said only implicitly, and both of them are relevant to the much-needed gap I would like the Ordinariate not only to expose but also, subsequently, to fill.. The *thing I didn't say at all* was this: the recipe depends on the numbers and commitment of native diocesan Catholics holding up, just as it turns likewise on the continuance of an immigrant flow from certain crucial parts of the world, or at least the successful transmission of the faith to the children and grandchildren of those incomers who are already here. But it is not only in the Catholic parishes of central London that the native population, by which I mean, more or less, the Anglo-Irish, is gradually disappearing, leaving the stage to Christians from, especially, those countries in Asia and Africa where the Catholic faith has flourished in the last fifty years. I say 'not only in central London' because in the course of my (admittedly limited) travels round the country, and in the hospitality we sometimes provide in our priory for the secular clergy, I have noticed how, from the North to the Midlands, parish priests sometimes tell one their congregations are now chiefly, say, Indian or, perhaps, Sri Lankan. That was what I didn't say in *The Realm* because I wasn't so conscious of this development at the time of writing. But project that picture nation-wide insofar as the facts will bear it out (I am not suggesting it is replicated everywhere), and you begin to see the space of the 'much needed gap' opening up.

The *thing I said only implicitly* in *The Realm* was that for the evangelizing purposes involved in the conversion of England I envisaged an alliance of Catholics in Roman communion with Anglo-Catholics, whose story I recounted in the chapter that followed my discussion of the optimal evangelical recipe. In that further chapter, in another (though related) context I was considering the elements in historic English identity, such as monarchy, Parliament, and law, which are inexplicable without the mediaeval, and even pre-mediaeval, Catholic heritage of what I called, with a deliberate archaism, 'Albion'. One of those elements which crops up time and again in Albion is, I suggested, the tendency of the Church of England, despite its Reformation origins, somehow never quite to be able to put behind it its Catholic past. Hence the sporadic, not continuous, and never definitive yet always unmistakable, resurgence of something of a Catholic ethos in the Church by law established, an ethos expressed in worship, in literature, in theology. Why did I hope to see a future alliance of Anglo-Catholics with Roman Catholics in the work of converting England? It was because, even if English Catholicism were far more homogeneously English in ethnic and, more importantly, cultural make-up than it is, the one thing it cannot do is *represent its own missing centuries*: the centuries from the accession of Elizabeth I onwards when it was marginalized, either by being persecuted or by being despised. And those centuries, from the Elizabethan Renaissance onwards, whether we like it or not, whether we think it salutary or otherwise, are more defining of our national identity in this island than the centuries that preceded them *so far as the popular perception is concerned*. 'Protestant Island': that title of a study of our post-mediaeval story by the historian Sir Arthur Bryant, in his day a widely read and celebrated middle-brow author, says it all [Arthur Bryant, *Protestant Island*, London, 1966].

Into the picture, thus quickly sketched, there now steps the Ordinariate and it reveals the gap I mentioned: namely, the credibility gap from which the Catholic Church in England suffers, with at the present time its somewhat volatile demography as well as its permanent and inherent inability to represent the post-Reformation centuries. The Ordinariate reveals this gap rather painfully, a cradle Catholic might think, but also very usefully: usefully, that is, if the Catholic Church is to make progress in the conversion of England by presenting herself as the natural form of the spirituality of our country, historically considered. And not only does the Ordinariate reveal that gap by its contrast with the diocesan Church (a negative service, if you like), the Ordinariate also helps to fill the gap (a very positive service). It corresponds to the description that careless reviewer would have written had his hand managed to follow his brain. To 'fill a gap we have here a much-needed book', or in the case under-discussion, a *much-needed Ordinariate*.

That is the crux of my argument. I now want to develop, though, some auxiliary points which are pertinent to this basic thesis, and help to make it more concrete, and also to propose at least one practical suggestion concerning the Ordinariate and the 'new evangelization'.

The so-called *Lineamenta* or 'Broad Outline' provided by the Roman Curia as a 'working instrument' for the Synod of Bishops held in autumn 2012 distinguishes between (a) 'pastoral care', which it says is directed primarily to the practicing faithful, (b) 'specific missionary activity', which it says is directed primarily to non-Christians, and (c) the 'new evangelization' which it says is directed primarily to post-Christians. Such 'post-

Christians' come in three varieties. First, there are those who were christened and at one time believed and practiced the faith but have since fallen away in what the *Lineamenta* terms 'silent apostasy'. Secondly, there are those who may be christened but have never really had the Gospel preached to them, and are accordingly baptized pagans. And thirdly, there are those who come from historically Christian families which have abandoned contact with Church life at some point over the past generations. It follows from my account of the 'much needed gap' that there is an especial affinity between the Ordinariate and this new evangelization activity so defined. The Ordinariate comes from a background, in the post-Reformation National Church, where mission to a nominally Christian indigenous population is what its *members are likely already to think evangelism is all about* and at which, granted the quality of their rooting in the culture, they will very probably (other things being equal) be best.

Admittedly, some of the silent apostates or the baptized pagans, or individuals from once Christian families that you, as members of the Ordinariate, will meet or have dealings with are going to be Roman Catholics or at least of Roman Catholic provenance, rather than nominal Anglicans or members of formerly Church of England families. But even here, I think, the Ordinariate has an advantage. In this context the advantage lies in the fact that the members of the Ordinariate, whether priests or lay people and with only a few atypical exceptions, haven't experienced the ecclesial infighting which has characterized the Catholic Church in England since the Second Vatican Council. You have of course experienced an ecclesial infighting of your own (and how!). But so far as disaffected and disaffiliated Roman Catholics are concerned you have the privilege of non-involvement in the post-Conciliar crisis and accordingly, the ability, if only you will make use of it, to think outside the box.

Let me give you one small example. Readers of *The Tablet* would like to see an element of lay governance operating in the Catholic dioceses. Readers of *The Catholic Herald* would shut their ears in horror at the prospect. But an Anglo-Catholic gentleman who is now in communion with the Holy See suggested to me that if the Catholic bishops in England do not have obvious regular means for listening to a larger range of the committed laity than their own bureaucrats and 'professional Catholics' such as those in the media, something like a synod with a house of laity in the Catholic Church in England would be perfectly compatible with continuing orthodoxy if – a very important 'if' – all lay members of such a synod were required to declare their conscientious allegiance to all the Church teaches and their fealty to the Church's hierarchical constitution by making exactly the same profession of faith and taking precisely the same accompanying oath of fidelity as, since the pontificate of John Paul II, the Catholic Church has asked of her office-holders though not of her faithful at large. That is a proposal we may or may not, on balance, want to support, but we might agree that it is the sort of imaginative suggestion liable to arise from those who are, happily, strangers to the ideological polarization of the recent Roman Catholic Church.

In setting out my basic thesis of the much needed gap I suggested that in your participation in the New Evangelization you will want to draw on the capacity of the post-Reformation Church of England to represent the long narrative of our culture. This also repays a little more reflection. In a radio interview on 4 November 2012, the philosopher Roger Scruton explained he had left the Methodism of his childhood for the Church of England because he valued the way the latter, as he put it, 'keeps vigil over our

patrimony' [compare his newly released book, *Our Church. A Personal History of the Church of England* (Saltash, 2012)]. This is a task which, within the Catholic Church, falls to you, when what we are speaking of is the patrimonial heritage of those Christian centuries after the Reformation to which the Recusant community could only be a marginal contributor.

As we know, awareness of our patrimony, the millennium and a half of Albion's existence, and not only in its Christian aspect, is under threat today, owing to various factors in our culture: the 'neophilia', or love of the new, which arose in the 1960s and produced in the Blair years such shallow mutations as 'New Britannia' and 'Cool Britannia'; the emphasis of the educational system and its curricula on immediate relevance; or again and this time, more than nationally, there is the phenomenon termed 'globalization', a trend beyond the ability of politicians or the inhabitants of any one country to control, but which, as the *Lineamenta* notes, tends of its nature to weaken traditions and institutions of whatever kind. And in the Christian aspect of the heritage, there is to be faced more especially, the inroads of our greatest enemy, secularism.

The occlusion of memory which is, I think, most especially relevant to your case, concerns the great figures of the Anglo-Catholic movement, or more widely the High Church movement in Anglicanism, together with their achievements: pastoral, educational, liturgical, literary, and the rest. My proposal here is that the Ordinariate look into the possibility of publishing, in collaboration with the Catholic Truth Society, attractively produced and reasonably priced pamphlets to keep alive not just their memory but its inspirational force, and not its inspirational force in general, but the specific way in which inspiration can be drawn from them *in the new situation of your full communion with the Catholic Church*. Here you already have a start in the series 'Anglican Luminaries' written for your on-line magazine, *Ordinariate Portal*, though a text of pamphlet length would of course need to be fuller and also to give more focused attention to the question of this or that luminary's contribution to the *Catholica*, the Church around Peter, and not simply to the National Church, the Church around Williams or Welby.

This brings me to another aspect of the concept of the New Evangelization, which this time concerns not so much the distinct audience the New Evangelization has chiefly (though not exclusively) in view but, rather, the methods with which it intends to engage that audience. We are asked to become adept at using the instruments of modernity so as to insinuate a vision of reality which undercuts modernity. The Internet will spring to mind as the obvious example. This means developing websites that are not only informative and interesting, but visually powerful and thus attractive to visit.

I would like to invoke here the name of T. S. Eliot. Eliot has every right to be called an Anglo-Catholic luminary [see Barry Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion.'* *T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge, 2011)], and undercutting modernity by ultra-modern means is exactly what Eliot was doing: not of course with the Internet but with his poetry. Here is what a writer in *The Times Literary Supplement* had to say prompted by the publication of Eliot's correspondence from the later 1920s. 'His sense of the inadequacy of Romantic attitudes to the self and of modern psychology to make sense of the world, and of how liberating an immersion in traditional and pre-individualistic cultures could be for him as both poet and confused individual, is at the root of all his art and thought. In the early

years it led to a powerfully ironic and apocalyptic voice; now, he finds it leading towards a vision of a possible reinvention of pre-Renaissance culture, one which is bound up with his recognition of the inadequacy of those attitudes in which he had been brought up and an embracing of Anglo-Catholicism' [Gabriel Josipovici, reviewing Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (eds.), *The Letters of T. S. Eliot. III, 1926-1927* (Yale, 2012), in *Times Literary Supplement* 5718, 2 November, 2012, p. 4]. And what Eliot embraced for himself, he proposed by his poetry to others, using all the techniques of literary Modernism so as to displace modernity, the characteristically modern mind-set, and to replace it with the mind of the Great Church instead.

The Anglo-Catholicism Eliot embraced included certain features which the Ordinariate needs now to hold onto, and this not least because they will assist you in your own evangelizing vocation. The most obvious in our highly visual, post-Gutenberg, culture, is your liturgical sense – particularly insofar as it entails going to God along what Pope Benedict calls the *via pulchritudinis*, the 'way of beauty'. The *Lineamenta* for the recent Synod returns more than once to this question which, as its authors point out, is more than a matter of aesthetics. Liturgically, it has to do with the Paschal Mystery and the eschatological orientation of the Liturgy to the Kingdom, for these are inseparable from the glory of God (in the Cross and Resurrection) and the beauty of God (in the final vision of God). But more widely, outside the Liturgy too, the way of beauty is pertinent to all communion with God, the Super-essential Beauty. And that is not surprising because the Liturgy trains us in how to pray outside any specially sacred space, and how to have a Godward orientation in all things. The drafters of the *Lineamenta* find this a special emphasis of the Eastern Catholic Churches but that, I presume, is because the Ordinariates were not drawn to their attention. But you cannot easily follow the way of beauty in functionalist diocesan parish churches as erected from the 1940s onwards, which is why it is important, in due time, for you to find, perhaps with a more emollient Church of England establishment, another solution to your present shortage of suitable buildings.

A further strength you have as former Anglo-Catholics struck me, when (once again) reading the Synod of Bishops' document. One major cause not only of lapsation but also of the failure of Catholics to be missionary, that document suggests, is what it terms, laconically enough, 'lack of training'. There has not been the doctrinal formation needed if people are going to be able to represent the faith, in a manner that is apologetically well-grounded, and also, even more importantly for the conversion of others, spiritually persuasive. The laity, like the clergy, must know their stuff, and not merely know stuff but, as this text reiterates time and again, know the Father's Gospel living as his Son: the Gospel of God, incarnate as Jesus Christ our Lord, and entering our own lives through the Holy Spirit. You have had to be well-formed in the faith so as to maintain an authentically Catholic outlook in a Church that also has Liberal and Evangelical parties, both of them in recent times, more potent, in different respects, than your own. You could not afford to coast along in the *laissez-faire* manner in which many Roman Catholics somehow survive on rather minimal catechesis. So far as the full dimensions of the faith are concerned you have all been exposed in your reception process to the key documents, the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its later summary the *Compendium*, long before these have entered the consciousness of most diocesan Catholics in this country. The working document of the Synod says that the Church –

meaning here the members of the Church – must herself be evangelized before she can evangelize, and here you have a head start.

In comparison with the *Catechism* and the *Compendium* the *Lineamenta* goes out of its way from the very outset to emphasise the primacy of a Christ-centred ongoing conversion, which it presents as to a Trinitarian Gospel, the Son coming from the Father in the power of the Spirit to take us to God, and in that way to be for us the cause of our joy. That makes it all the more surprising to see how little stress is laid there on the mystery of the Cross along with our justification, as distinct from the public teaching of the Redeemer and his Resurrection, and our consequent transformation. In *The Panther and the Hind* I wrote that an Anglican church united to Rome but not absorbed should include not only the distinctively Catholic teachings of the Tractarians and a natural or wisdom theology such as the Cambridge Platonists espoused but also the emphasis of the Evangelicals on the Atonement, and in fact the Tractarians and the Evangelicals are not wholly to be separated out when we bear in mind the Evangelical roots of some of the Oxford Fathers. Here too you need to be ‘keeping vigil’ over the patrimony, and making your contribution to a plenary version of the faith. One could hardly say that the preaching of the last two Popes has downplayed the mystery of the Cross, but like Homer even Curial officials can nod. I mention this as a reminder to you to keep steadily in view that wider Anglicanism in whose treasury lie other recuperable elements, over and above those we most readily associate with the Catholic Revival.

Finally, prepare for a long haul, bearing in mind that you have, however, two beacons. The first is your Sisters, whose life as monastics, and here I am quoting the late Donald Allchin, ‘is a witness to the presence of God, who, while he is within all things – actively sustaining his world in being, making himself known in his creative words and energies, ever coming when men least expect him, is yet at the same time beyond all things, transcendent, making darkness his secret place, in his essence wholly beyond the understanding of man’ [A. M. Allchin, *The Theology of the Religious Life. An Anglican Approach* (Oxford, 1971), p. 12].

The other is the village of shrines, or, to be more precisely, the Lady who has chosen to be found there in a special way and after whom your Ordinariate is named. In his elegy ‘The Loss of the Eurydice’, Gerard Manley Hopkins takes Walsingham and its pilgrims to symbolize a spiritual happiness now lost because, tragically, England belongs with ‘Unchrist, all rolled in ruin’, no longer a land dedicated ‘to his grace and truth’. There was a time, laments Hopkins, when ‘... a starlight-wender of ours would say/ The marvellous Milk was Walsingham Way /And one – but let be, let be: /More, more than was will yet be.’ [cited Gary Waller, *Walsingham and the English Imagination* (Farnham, 2011), p. 156].