

The Society in Chichester Diocese - St Paul, Brighton 23 January 2016

Spiritual and Pastoral Care

Over the past couple of decades there have been times when it may have been very tempting as a Catholic Christian within the Church of England to feel at best embattled and at worst despairing. Both feelings are understandable but neither should be given into if we are to be true to our vocation. The Catholic movement within the Church of England was always intended to be just that - a movement (not a party or an inward looking group, or one strand among others from which you may take your pick) but a movement, stemming from a vocation - to so live and act as to embody and remind the whole Church of England what the Church is everywhere called to be - the One Holy Catholic Church of Christ.

It was this understanding and conviction that underlay the work and writings and ministry of those who nearly 200 years ago fostered that catholic renewal in the Church of England - and continued to do so through the Oxford movement, and that great flourishing of Catholic Societies that led to those great Anglo-Catholic Congresses of the early 20th century - so full of confidence, missionary zeal and Gospel joy. If ever these things are needed again in the Church of England it is now, and the Society, I believe, has real potential to be a wonderful vehicle by which these things may become real among us now.

But if it is to do so it is worth remembering some of the things that shaped the vision and agenda, and drove forward those great pioneers of 200 and 100 years ago. These were well summed up in a powerful address given by Kenneth Kirk at the Centenary Congress of 1933, in which he listed five truths which he believed the Catholic Movement had revived or recovered for the Church of England for the greater good of all.

The first was the truth of the Church's sacramental character- the very core of its being is not an institution, an organisation, or another human society, but a sacramental community - the outward and visible sign of the working in human life of God's grace - with faithful celebration of and devotion to the particular sacramental actions - of baptism and Eucharist, confirmation, ordination and marriage, reconciliation and unction, divinely instituted means of grace - at its very heart.

The second was the truth of the social mission of the Church. One of the great contributions of the Oxford movement was the fostering of pastoral work, particularly among the very poor, with the fostering of lay vocation, with the support of prayer and training, to deliver this - and from which many of the revived religious communities, for men and for women, in due course sprung. There has been no renewal of the church without a revival of the Religious Life.

Third was the truth of personal holiness. If there was one thing of which the poetic vision of Joh Keble, the burning zeal of John Henry Newman and the grave earnestness of Edward Pusey, were unanimous - it was in this conviction that no one was incapable of sanctity - holiness; and that the Church which is not calling every man and woman to enter into this their true inheritance is a Church which is betraying one of its most sacred tasks.

And it was this conviction that led to the growth and flourishing of those things that at one time would have been seen as the almost taken for granted hall marks of Catholic life in the Church of England, but now perhaps much in need of rediscovery and refreshment once again. These included: the revival of sacramental confession and frequent communion; the normality of a rule of life which encompassed self-examination and self-discipline, an emphasis upon prayer, intercession and meditation; the importance of catechesis - instruction in the faith and formation of the Lay Apostolate, the living out of the Gospel in daily life - often achieved through guilds and societies; and then the organisation of missions, retreats, and quiet days; novenas of prayer and prayer before the sacrament, as normal features of parish life.

The fourth element was what Kirk called the truth of the pastoral authority of the church - by which he meant the church's responsibility to lead God's children in the ways of truth and righteousness, to form consciences enlightened by the Gospel. In other words not merely to say *This is what the Church teaches* but to help people explore and understand the implications of that teaching for the complexities of moral and social issues which the ordinary people of God encounter in their daily lives.

Finally there was the truth of the Church's spiritual independence. The Church is, of course, to serve the nation and its communities, to be engaged with its communities and their life, but it is always to be aware of itself as part of something bigger than, and beyond, the nation and the state. She has, and must embody, in her own life a spiritual authority which for the good of the world, the state, the nation, must sometime challenge and confront the secular values of the day, and for it to be able to do this at all, it needs to help its members to rediscover the truth of their corporate unity, their belonging to one another as fellow members of the body of Christ. This was about *'the right of the Church to live her own life, to proclaim her own truths, to guide her own members - and a church which does not assert this in season and out of season is a Church which carries the seeds of death within itself.* There is here a strong challenge to that individualised faith and personal religion that is always so attractive, and so prevalent in our day, and yet has so little to challenge the destructive individualism and selfishness of our contemporary world.

So, if these are the great truths of Catholic Christianity, then what might we - as a Society - do to refresh them and give them a greater reality in the life of not just our own parishes, but the life of the whole Church of England today? Particularly in the area that I have been asked to look at with you - Spiritual and Pastoral Care.

What I haven't got at present is a programme to present to you. Today, as I understand it, is about listening to you, to what you have to say about your own real needs for growth in these areas, and how we might then best respond to them. What will be helpful for clergy, what for laity, and what for both together? What might best be offered through, say, a single event or course, for the Society across the whole Diocese (as today) or more regionally in different parts of the Diocese? Where might some personal consultancy or advice be more helpful - to a particular parish or its priest? But let me though just suggest a few areas which might be worth considering. What about e.g. :

- A school of prayer - reminding people of the rich variety which can aid us in our intercession and devotion - an opportunity to look again at e.g. meditation; contemplative prayer; praying the offices; Taize; the use of icons; praying the rosary and so on, with opportunities to taste, to dip the toe into one or two areas which might not be so familiar, to then be built on at greater depth, and may be more locally, as a follow on;
- A workshop on Sacramental confession and the ministry of reconciliation - for priests who may feel the need of some encouragement and re-formation themselves in this area; for laity who may like to explore its place within the discipline of a rule of life;
- Perhaps some training in pastoral care - a greatly neglected discipline in its own right, and quite distinct from for example, counselling or social care. It encompasses such diverse areas as marriage preparation, bereavement a follow up and care, support for baptism and family life; the visiting of the sick, the house-bound and the elderly. The two Dioceses in which I was privileged to serve as Bishop were both richly blessed with schemes for training and supporting lay people in this ministry - in Chester they were Lay Pastors, in Exeter - Parish Pastoral Assistants, the model has to be right for each particular situation. Maybe there is a role for the Society for pioneering such ministry in parishes here - I am well aware of how much in my own local parish there is such a need.

- Related to this what about the place of the ministry of healing and deliverance in the life of our parishes. Is there any help that we may need here?
- Historically in the life of the Church it has been the Deacon who had had a very particularly ministry in the support of the Lay Apostolate, in leading and facilitating pastoral ministry and community outreach, and in fostering the life of prayer. Are the Deacons who are members of the Society getting the support and encouragement for this ministry that they in turn need? Is there more to be done? Would a regular meeting of the Deacons with one of the bishops be valuable to that end?
- Is there any demand for a workshop or guidance notes on for example: using a spiritual director; the place of small groups for prayer and teaching in parish life? Planning a quiet day or novena or prayer?
- Or what about a Retreat or Quiet Day for the Society itself?
- And then, it might be worth talking together about how we offer one another mutual support, perhaps through the use of the Newsletter. Bishop Peter has very helpfully looked at the Presentments from Society parishes to the Bishop's Visitation, and quite a number of these quite specifically raised this question about how we might share knowledge and experience of, for example, how useful courses or books have been e.g. 'Follow me', 'Pilgrim', how skills in faith-sharing were developed; and so on.

Finally, let me go back to Kenneth Kirk's five truths and add one more of my own - which is that at its best the Catholic Movement within the Church of England has not been focused only on itself, but on both the renewal of the wider Church of England, and also working for the healing of those splits and divisions within the Catholic church as a whole, working and praying always for that unity of his body for which our Lord prayed.

This for me, raises a further question that it would be good to explore. Whilst the kind of workshops, programmes that we might engage in might be organised by the Society, might some at least be not just for the Society, but open to others as well, offered to those beyond the Society's membership who may wish to benefit from these things as well - and doing this as part of our vocation to truly manifest the One Holy Catholic Apostolic People of God?