

# Catholics seek to embrace mission, if not jargon

Can they take part in Reform and Renewal without diluting the tradition? *Madeleine Davies* investigates

JUST over a year ago, the Bishop of Burnley, the Rt Revd Philip North, delivered the first Sheffield Mission Lecture on Catholic evangelism. He did not pull his punches.

"In the contemporary Church of England we need to face up to the sad fact that the phrase 'Anglo-Catholic' is usually synonymous with weak, declining, and un-engaged," he warned. The same tradition that had in its bloodstream the Oxford Movement — church-planting, the renewal of parish life, a call to "magnify your office" — now had a reputation for "not joining in". For at least 20 years, Catholic parishes had "rarely been at the forefront of the Church's evangelistic life".

Since the launch of the Archbishops' Renewal and Reform (R&R) programme, some have queried the extent to which it has been embraced by church people outside the Evangelical tradition. The National Mission and Evangelism Adviser, Dr Rachel Jordan-Wolf, has admitted that more work is needed to engage Anglicans who are not from an Evangelical background (News, 28 October). Commenting on church-planting last month, the Archdeacon of Brighton and Lewes, the Ven. Martin Lloyd Williams, said that the diocese was "struggling to find resources within



ST GEORGE'S IN-THE-EAST

Lanterns: pupils at St Paul's C of E Primary School sang the music for the eucharist at the launch of Choir Church, the first church plant of St George-in-the-East, in January. They made lanterns for the feast of Candlemas

the Catholic tradition". There was a need for "rediscovering ways for the eucharist to be missional".

Some Anglo-Catholics agree that a disconnect exists.

"There's a lot of resistance to anything conceived as 'management speak' on the Catholic wing of the Church," Fergus Butler-Gallie, an ordinand at Westcott House, says. "There's also a general mistrust, ironically, of Church-wide drives for things. . . They profoundly dislike the idea that a bishop or new movement or push in a certain direction can or could be more effective than what they're doing now. They view the efficacy of the eucharist as paramount, and so are naturally touchy about any attempts to infringe on it or suggest that it might not 'work'."

Suggesting that the eucharist can

be "more missional" is likely to be a "red flag", he warns, given that it is "the ultimate missional act . . . the way we mark God coming into the world".

But he is keen to see Anglo-Catholics give R&R "the benefit of the doubt", in return for a recognition by the programme's architects that "there isn't just one model," and reassurance that parish ministry isn't threatened by the programme.

"It isn't a silver bullet, but it offers something constructive rather than just talk, and, if it is really going to renew the C of E, then Catholic voices have to engage with it in a mature manner," he says.

For Bishop North, there is "no doubt that some Catholics struggle to find their place" in the R&R agenda. "Some find the language difficult and hear within it a great deal of Evangelical jargon," he says. "The language of 'leadership' strikes many as unbiblical, compared with words such as vocation, service, or priesthood. The term 'discipleship' doesn't mean a great deal to people who would rather speak of growth in holiness or Christian formation. Many worry about a creeping managerialism or a tendency to centralism, which has always been a threat to fringe movements within the Church."

In his 2015 lecture, Bishop North admitted that he had not understood a single word of a recent presentation on Fresh Expressions: "They think we can't be bothered, whereas in fact we don't understand."

What is needed, he thinks, is a fresh confidence in a distinctively Catholic understanding of evangelism: "We feel second-rate because we are trying to imitate the methods and approaches and language of others. . . As Catholics, we won't rediscover our evangelistic soul until we understand that difference and take pride in it, rather than taking pride in our own tradition."

He is critical of attempts to "play down and ignore" the "vast differences" in the ways different traditions understand and practise evangelism.

"As Catholics, the way we understand what we're doing when we evangelise is profoundly different from what Evangelicals understand themselves to be doing," he said in his lecture. "When we evangelise, what we're trying to do is to bring people to Jesus in the eucharist."

Today, he sees signs of a new

confidence. Last year, 20 young clergy running growing churches met in York to discuss the future of Anglo-Catholicism. Growth was then a major item on the agenda of last year's Forward in Faith Assembly, and a consultation to inform a "strategy for growth intended to inspire and motivate Catholic parishes" is currently under way. This consultation lists six priorities that overlap significantly with those of R&R, including making young disciples and "being intentional in evangelism".

What must be retained, Bishop North says, is the primacy of the Sacrament: "To deny people the eucharist, to argue that a couple of clapping songs and a badge-making workshop represent the fullness of Christian life, is patronising and insulting."

Dr Jem Bloomfield, Assistant Professor of Literature at the University of Nottingham, who worships at St John the Baptist, Beeston, was among several respondents who emphasised the missional potential of the eucharist.

"From outside, religion can look like a matter of believing a bunch of — questionable — stuff, and then doing the things you believe in," he says. "I think that seems a deeply unimpressive prospect for those who don't already agree with the beliefs or the principles involved. The eucharist provides an opportunity for people who aren't ready to 'buy in' to the existence of God, or the idea of Creation, or whatever they find difficult, to experience the wonder and profundity of Christian faith. They can sit with the mystery of it, and feel near to a numinous presence, without feeling that someone's telling them what to believe."

"The eucharist is called the mass precisely because it's missional," Dr Philip Murray, another Westcott ordinand, says. "At the eucharist, the people of God are re-formed in God's likeness, as the Body of Christ, both through the reading and preaching of scripture, and through the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood. After this reforming they are sent out, back into the world, to live lives of Christ-likeness. And it is through this that others will be drawn to Christ and his Church: that true mission can take place."

Missional initiatives that "seek to undermine and discount the eucharist, the parish, and the fullness of the Church's sacramental life" should be questioned, he thinks. Anglo-

Catholics should offer a counter-narrative that "takes the Church's concern for mission seriously, while on the other hand seeks to reinvigorate those structures and traditions the Church has historically used to bring people to Christ".

Succeeding Bishop North in the Sheffield Lectures last year was the Vicar of Holy Trinity, Ettingshall, the Revd Damian Feeney, who has planted three churches around the celebration of the sacraments, including one in a supermarket. He questions whether the perception that the eucharist is an "obstacle to be overcome" may be linked to the fact that it has a "gradual" effect, in a Church in which numerical growth has been held up as the benchmark.

While confident that there is a central commitment to the involvement of all traditions in R&R — his own post has benefited from the Church Commissioners' funding — he senses that one model seems to attract more attention than others. This is the model of the "transplanted congregation", which causes concerns for Anglo-Catholics, he thinks, because it "encourages loose network affiliation rather than the more intimate links which you find in the traditional diocesan family".

At a local level are "stories of small communities doing wonderful things, with great love, and growing in a sustainable way. They don't get headlines, but they are happening and they are good and glorious, and

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they deserve us to shine a light on them." One such church has relaunched an evening eucharist in a community centre on a housing estate, and is now seeing a "remarkable influx of young people".

As a mission adviser to Catholic parishes in the diocese of Lichfield, and member of the leadership team of Leading Your Church into Growth, he is aware of "many parishes" that are adopting church-growth principles.

Among the young ordinands reflecting on mission is his daughter, Rebecca Feeney, an ordinand at St Stephen's House, Oxford.

"If we want God to be returned to the centre of public consciousness, the most important thing is to get outside, be active in the community, and serve in the places where it is needed, to reclaim the place of the church in the community," she observes. This includes being alongside those in pain.

"The Incarnation means we don't have to deny the pain and suffering of every day life, which can't just be prayed away," she says. "Just as Jesus did, we are called to suffer with those we are among, and demonstrate that while we might not be able to explain suffering, there is still hope and joy to be found in the midst of it."

Before training, she worked for a year-and-a-half as Bishop North's pastoral assistant, when he was Team Rector of the parish of Old St Pancras. She believes that conversation and joint-working between traditionalists and Anglo-Catholics who accept the ministry of women has been happening for some time.

"It was the most incredible and affirming experience," she says of her time in St Pancras. "The unity Jesus prayed for his church was made a practical reality in the work I was able to do with my colleagues. There is much more that brings us together than divides us, and we are beholden to ensure we are not stumbling blocks for one another." While she agrees that a "language barrier" sometimes operates across traditions, she is confident that there are "a lot of things to learn from one another".

The Vicar of St Mary's, Willesden, the Revd Christopher Phillips, rejects the premise that a disconnection exists between Anglo-Catholics and the national push for evangelism.

"The Archbishops have been very clear in their invitation to the whole Church to use a variety of methods, and that all of these are equally valid," he says. "I think it's really important that all of us use our distinctive charisms and offer them as part of the whole. There is no point complaining and grumbling; we have to get on with engaging in God's mission, and as Anglo-

Catholics, we have a particular way of doing that which has worked for generations."

The Archbishops' Pentecost prayer initiative, Thy Kingdom Come, used the Catholic tradition of a novena, he pointed out. He had responded to the invitation to participate by holding an hour of prayer before the Sacrament, which was "very popular".

The Revd Dr Hannah Cleugh, Chaplain of University College, Durham, believes that "there's a lot that the Anglo-Catholic tradition can offer, and benefit from the agenda," and points to the fact that traditional forms of worship can be areas of growth, "as the increase in cathedral attendance over recent years indicates".

In the diocese of Chichester, there is a commitment to "apostolic partnerships". The Bishop of Chichester, Dr Martin Warner, is conscious that church-planting can be associated with a "take-over".

"I suspect that we are not alone in having a number of parishes where the congregation has become tired and demoralised," he says. "An apostolic partnership works with them to revitalise their life and mission. This will include new patterns of worship and outreach, but it will also honour the inheritance of an existing congregation and find ways to revitalise what they value."

Such partnerships will go beyond town centres or suburbs, he says. The diocese will look at rural areas, outer estates, and parishes that "represent the essentially liturgical and sacramental tradition that is commonplace in Chichester diocese".

There are two sides to the partnership, he explains. "One is equipping those who offer to partner with a parish; it is about providing skills and theological intelligence to understand a tradition that might be unfamiliar."

"The second is acknowledging that many Anglo-Catholic priests are excellent at being priests in ways that are intrinsically evangelistic — through the celebration of the eucharist and in the occasional offices. However, they might not have the charism of being an evangelist, a charism that is often found in lay people and works to complement what priests do. We are looking at how to develop that sort of partnership as an element of our apostolic life and have been grateful for a significant grant from the Strategic Development Fund for doing so."

When it comes to finding priests to plant, Fr Feeney, who was vice-president of St Stephen's House until 2015, is confident about the pipeline.

"There is a generation of clergy coming through who will make an enormous difference in the way that we think about mission," he says.

"They are very high-calibre indeed." His advice, having planted within two months of his priesting, is to "Just do it", but as a team comprising people from the community.

"It's the best thing you ever do," he says. "They were the most wonderful godly, joyful Christians I have ever met."

The priests who take up the call will have impressive antecedents, says Canon Angus Ritchie, Honorary Priest-in-Charge of St George-in-the-East with St Paul, in London.

"The history of Anglo-Catholicism shows that we have been strongest when we have been imaginative and creative: growing and planting churches, founding communities of prayer and reaching out beyond the church's walls to challenge injustice and care for those in greatest need", he says.

New congregations and communities of prayer and engagement with movements such as Citizens UK are all signs of a growing engagement with R&R, he suggests.

"Where this is happening, it is exciting to see that it is a deepening, not a dilution, of the Catholic tradition, with the eucharist being at the heart of our worship and the inspiration for our outreach."



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ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, BEESTON



Evening light: left: St John the Baptist, Beeston, where Dr Bloomfield worships; above: Fr Chris Phillips, at St Mary's, Willesden, presented copies of Luke's Gospel to some of those baptised over the past year, at the Candlemas celebration in January