

## **Further Reflections : Where are we and where are we going ?**

Some weeks ago I shared with you my concern about what appeared to be a dissonance between the message we hear from our local church about the direction we are going in and the words we hear from our Holy Father Francis. Since then there has been a meeting of the priests of Edinburgh city with Archbishop Cushley. Both before and since that meeting I have spend a great deal of time reflecting on where we are as a church at a global, at National and Diocesan level and at parish and cluster level.

It is my hope that the following reflection will in some way help to clarify what I feel is at the root of the disturbance experienced by many people at this time.

It is my belief that everyone who holds a view on the situation of the church in our archdiocese has integrity and sincerely believes that their position is right, just and reflects the truth. It seems therefore all the more urgent that we try to examine what the differing views are, how we arrived at where we find ourselves and how we move forward in the quest to further the Kingdom.

A couple of weeks ago I attended a meeting of the priests of the Edinburgh Deanery. Archbishop Cushley was there and there was a full attendance with only two apologies. It was for me a disappointing meeting so I am sitting down now to try to examine what happened and why.

The Agenda had three main items:

- Questions to the Archbishop regarding Pastoral Planning
- Questions to the Archbishop regarding structure of St Giles' Deanery
- Election of a Dean

The structure of the Agenda made me feel uneasy and it wasn't until we were finished that it percolated through to me what was causing the unease.

The meeting began with the Archbishop leading us in prayer with the Hail Mary. He then invited comment from the priests on the matter of pastoral planning. The archbishop listened to the comments, jotting down notes. When everyone had raised their questions he then gave a response.

This pattern was followed for the first two items. It was only later I realised that this was not a dialogue far less a discussion. It was simply stating a series of questions and after they had all been fielded, the Archbishop gave the answers. This format does not allow interchange of views. It is strictly question and answer. It presumes that all the wisdom is in the person answering the questions. It is pyramidal governance such as many theologians since the Second Vatican Council have rejected and indeed from which Our Holy Father Francis seems to have distanced himself.

On reflection this is exactly what is happening with the written submissions from lay people on the matter. Most people who have written have had at best an acknowledgement of receipt but there has been no engagement with the opinion offered. This is why it so important that people circulate and publish their thoughts so that the received wisdom of the faithful is available to access.

This approach may well be how Vatican Diplomats are trained in the Academy. Perhaps the programme taught there is: don't engage with the correspondent; simply record it and deal with it impersonally. It is fair to say that when you have been through the Academy and have spent twenty years in the Church's diplomatic service it would be difficult to change approach. Thus prayers and encouragement for the archbishop in the magnitude of the challenges he faces is vital. Our Archbishop was carefully chosen by Our Holy Father and we know that they had a lengthy conversation about the appointment. It was always going to be a difficult task to shift from Diplomatic mode to become a pastoral bishop. Our Holy Father highlighted the role of the diocesan bishop in EG par 31:

*“The bishop must always foster this missionary communion in his diocesan church following the ideal of the first Christian communities, in which the believers were of one heart and one soul (Act 4.32)*

- *To do so, he will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant.*
- *At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence.*
- *And yet at other times he will have to walk after them helping those who lag behind and - above all - allowing the flock to strike out on new paths.*

*In his mission of fostering a dynamic, open and missionary communion, he will have to encourage and develop the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law and other forms of pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear. Yet the principal aim of these participatory processes should not be ecclesiastical organisation but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone”*

In an Address to the Nuncios gathered in Rome from all over the world on 21st June 2013 our Holy Father spoke of three key areas of the Nuncios' lives.

1. Quoting from the autobiography of Pope St John XXIII he said that *“He increasingly understood that, for effectiveness of action, he had to continually prune the vineyard of his life from that which was merely useless foliage and go straight to the essentials, which is Christ and his Gospel, otherwise there was the risk of ridiculing a holy mission (Journal of a Soul, Cinisello Balsamo 2000, pp.. 513-514). These are strong but true words: giving in to worldly spirit exposes us Pastors to ridicule, perhaps we may be applauded by some, but those same people who seem to approve of us, then criticise us behind our backs.”*

2. He then pointed out that their calling as Nuncios was different from diocesan bishops in that they did not have direct care of a particular flock. He said, *“We are pastors! And that we must not ever forget that !*

*Dear Papal Representatives, be the presence of Christ, be a priestly presence, as Pastors. Of course, you will not teach a particular portion of the People of God entrusted to you, you will not guide a local church, but you are Pastors who serve the Church, with the role to encourage, to be ministers of communion, and also with the not always easy task of reprimanding. Always do everything with deep love! Even in relations with the Civil Authorities and your Colleagues you are Pastors: always seek the good, the good of all, the good of the Church and of every person."*

3. Pope Francis concluded by offering the Nuncios clear guidelines about the qualities they should look for in prospective Bishops.

*"I would like to conclude by saying just one word about one of the important points of your service as Papal Representatives, at least for the vast majority: collaboration in providing bishops. You know the famous expression that indicates a fundamental criterion in choosing who should govern:*

*si sanctus est oret pro nobis, si doctus est doceat nos, si prudens est regat nos - if holy let him pray for us, if learned teach us, if prudent govern us.*

*In the delicate task of carrying out inquiries for episcopal appointments be careful that the candidates are pastors close to the people, fathers and brothers, that they are gentle, patient and merciful; animated by inner poverty, the freedom of the Lord and also by outward simplicity and austerity of life, that they do not have the psychology of "Princes".*

*Be careful that they are not ambitious, that they do not seek the episcopate - volentes nolimus - and that they are married to a Church without being in constant search of another. That they are able to "watch over" the flock that will be entrusted to them, take care to keep it united, vigilant of the dangers that threaten it, but above all that they are able to "watch over" the flock, to keep watch, imbue hope, that they have sun and light in their hearts, to lovingly and patiently support the plans which God brings about in His people. Let us think of the figure of St. Joseph, who watches over Mary and Jesus, of his care for the family that God entrusted to him, and the watchful gaze with which he guides it in avoiding dangers. For this reason Pastors must know how to be ahead of the herd to point the way, in the midst of the flock to keep it united, behind the flock to prevent someone being left behind, so that the same flock, so to speak, has the sense of smell to find its way."*

I'm sure our archbishop is as well aware of the challenges he faces as I am but I want to share with you that among the issues I raised at the meeting was the lack of any vision statement in the pronouncements and Pastoral Letters of the Archbishop but rather there were a series of position statements. The Archbishop noted my comment but did not respond until everyone else had spoken. He then said he disagreed, saying that there was a vision in "*We have found the Messiah*" and that it was his vision, though others may not share it. The format of the meeting did not allow the matter to be pursued for clarification. This I felt was a loss to us all.

Henry spoke well about the comparative provision of priest to people here with Latin America and how vibrant the church there is with so few priests

The matter of differing Ecclesiologies was raised, in particular the various perceptions held of Eucharist and priesthood. I said that one of the most quoted lines from Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Vatican II document on the Liturgy, is that the Liturgy is both the source and summit of all worship. (Par 10) This sets the ground for a vision of Eucharist as the pinnacle of all church life and activity. And I have no quibble with that at all. However in the same Document it states very clearly that Jesus Christ is present in four ways in the Liturgy : 1. in the person of the Minister. 2. in the Eucharistic species. 3 in the Holy Scriptures. 4. in the faithful assembled. (par 7)

The documentation we have from our Archbishop clearly highlights the importance of two elements of those presences of Christ, the Eucharistic species and the person of the priest. You will struggle to find an explicit mention of the importance of the Word of God in all this. In contrast, experience in the growing and vibrant Churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia shows how crucial the Word of God is in forming and sustaining the faith of communities. We in the northern hemisphere are on a reverse journey compared to the growing churches. They are emerging to create Christian communities with regular and frequent communion. We seem to be going the other way. Perhaps what we need is not a policy of importing priests from these countries but rather to get them to show us how to survive, grow and thrive without necessarily having frequent Eucharist.

The most fruitful areas of my Ministry have been when I engaged with the Word of God with a group and after reflection tried to apply the scripture to our lives. Wonderful things happen when we allow the Lord to interact with our inner being and share that with other people. It works. So why do many feel so diffident about engaging with the Word ?

It occurs to me that at the time of the Reformation when the Christian Church was split, by and large what happened was that the reformers took the Word and we took the Eucharist. As time went by we all did what people do when they are trying to prove their point: they polarised. Isn't that why the Bible was a closed book for so many of us until the latter part of the last century ? We put so much energy and imagination into Eucharistic devotion and we neglected the Word.

It's perhaps not without significance that we are slow to move from the presence of Jesus in the tabernacle and in the priest to his presence in the Word and other people. When the Lord is in the Tabernacle he is tamed: under our control. We can have a great relationship with the Lord in the Tabernacle - - but **we** make the ground rules. We are in control. When confronted by the Lord of the Scriptures and Jesus in our neighbour, we lose control. This Jesus has the upper hand. He makes demands of us. He challenges us. He makes life uncomfortable.

Our Holy Father has this to say about The Word in E G par 22

*"God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk 4:26-29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that*

*surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.”*

Our archbishop has so much to offer. I share my views with you in response to his request for dialogue. To look at issues from different perspectives and with different paradigms is something we all need. I hope that you and I together can listen to the Word of God and thus listen to God in one another.

The third item on the Agenda was The Election of a Dean.

At the last Deanery meeting the Archbishop had sent the vice dean with instructions to have an election of a Dean since Michael Regan had resigned on health grounds. The Vice Dean said that the Archbishop wanted this done *quam primum* and that he would appoint whoever we elected. The ground changed somewhat at the meeting last month. The archbishop said first of all that he was disinclined to increase the number of Deaneries in the City as had been proposed at the previous meeting. He went on to make it clear that we were not having an election: that it was his right and responsibility to appoint a Dean. However he would be happy to be advised. He then turned to the Vice Dean and asked that since he was doing the job would he not be happy to accept the appointment. This was extremely embarrassing for the vice dean who had declined to be nominated at the meeting last month on the grounds of age. The Vice Dean then asked were there any counter proposals but it would have been a slap in the face to him for someone else to be proposed. In the end he accepted the appointment. A further proposal was made that there be three vice deans. The archbishop asked a couple of people if they would be prepared to act as vice dean and he got his three. In my experience there has never been an election of persons to be nominated for consideration to be appointed Dean other than by secret ballot. You might feel this sort of issue is not for you and I but I feel we should all be involved in thinking of the best way to do things.

So where does all this leave us ? Not an easy question.

Our local church is in a bit of a mess. Some of that is down to poor governance over the past fifty years. Some of it, however, could be down to the dramatic change in direction made in the last eighteen months. That change of direction may be right or wrong or a mixture of both but we perhaps need to work more at building and communicating vision itself and the policy statements which would allow us all to be part of what is happening. And some of it is down to us, people and priests and religious who have just gone along with things and have not been effective in implementing the teaching of Vatican 11. We have failed to affirm, educate and commission our Lay faithful to exercise their priesthood in collaboration with our ordained ministerial priests and Bishop.

My own view is that what we need is our archbishop to be enabled to be someone who can journey with us; someone who can lead from the front, the middle and rear. A commander who comes down from his tank and is on the ground in touch with his people; a leader who knows how to listen so that he will be able to inspire and give confidence. The archbishop may be doing this but he needs the structures of modern communication and media, and I don't mean only Twitter and Facebook, to keep us informed, engage in dialogue with us and help us all journey with him.

I have heard people - priests, religious and lay people - express a variety of views on the Archbishop. All of them wish him well. Many of them express sympathy for him being given this appointment out of the blue. Some question whether his strategy in determining the way forward is sound. Here a number of examples of things I've heard;

*"We have a man, a good man, a bright and intelligent man who has an undoubted love for the Church.*

*He has been sent from Rome but in some ways, e.g. dress code, he hasn't left Rome.*

*What steps has he taken to discover who and where we are ?  
Whom has he consulted ?*

*I don't understand his reluctance to dialogue.*

*Plans to "visit and consult" cluster groups must include dialogue.  
(I will listen to their questions and I will have some questions for them.)  
This process may gather and dispense opinion -- but it is not dialogue.*

*No forum for genuine dialogue with priests far less people*

*The Pyramidal model of governance does not sit comfortably with Vatican 11 or Pope Francis' vision*

*Asked about NITFT, he said he had had no input into it. It is not **his** vision.  
But it **is** the vision of this local church that he is called to serve.*

*No doubting his skills, intelligence, charm and knowledge.  
He has undoubted experience from many places; But as a diplomat and linguist.  
An architect sent to do a job that needs a plumber*

*No doubt he would make an excellent pastoral bishop  
but he needs to have the proper set of skills.*

*Feel sorry for him. He didn't ask to be sent here.  
His whole future seemed to be in the world of diplomacy."*

Those are some of the views expressed to me but I am sure there are many others that would complement or contradict these.

We must remember that the Archbishop did not ask to be sent to us. He was quite taken aback to be asked to take on this appointment with all its challenges. We all need to find ways to offer him real support and companionship on the journey.

Things have changed a lot in the past quarter of a century. The cleric-centred vision of

church left these shores around the same time as the Archbishop left for the Pontifical Academy. That makes it hard for him coming back to a world that has changed. Here, too there has been a resurgence of late of many strengths but perhaps also a tendency towards the narrow clerical vision of ecclesiology with the arrival of the Faith Movement. The latest Faith Movement promotional video of a year ago has the same title as the Archdiocesan Vocations programme material: "Come and See" ? Is there a danger in taking material from a different context and using it in a world where so many have walked out of the church. They need fresh wine, fresh skins rather than going back to old ways and approaches.

The Archbishop needs to be aware of the danger of being identified with any one approach, movement or even cult. He can only do that with a broad base of input. He is called to serve the people of this archdiocese.

Only **they** are able to equip him with the true pastoral skills he needs for his mission. Only they are able to translate his power into authority. It must come from the bottom to the top and not the other way around.

The challenge for us is to reach him and take part in the dialogue he wishes in regard to **his** vision and **that** of our Holy Father Francis. They appear at times to be divergent so we need his help and leadership to bring them together. But we ourselves need to have the courage to speak up even if we get lots of things wrong.....

Yes, we can pray, but there has to be more. So it's over to you..... especially those of you who do not share our old clerical ways of thinking and doing things..... We need so much to share our experience and our vision with one another if decline is to be reversed and the Kingdom come to fruition.....

Mike Fallon 5<sup>th</sup> June 2015