
**“REFLECTING” ON THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
AS THE C OF E AFFIRMS AN EVER-WIDENING SPECTRUM OF “LIFESTYLES,” WHERE WILL
TRADITION-MINDED ANGLICANS TURN?**

August 3, 2017 Joanna Bogle



St. Paul's Cathedral in London (photo via Wikipedia)

Britain's Secretary of State for Education, Miss Justine Greening, has told the Church of England it should “keep up” with modern attitudes and accept same-sex marriage. The Prime Minister, herself the daughter of an Anglican vicar, has urged the C of E to “reflect” on this matter, with the hint that such reflection should result in accepting the idea.

The C of E's General Synod has voted to “affirm” people who decide that they are “transgender” and has asked the Anglican bishops to discuss a liturgy to celebrate such a transition. The vote was passed by a massive majority—284 votes to 78—and was accompanied by speeches emphasizing that people who proclaim themselves to be lesbians or homosexuals should not regard their condition as being in any way disordered. The Synod also voted to ask for a ban on forms of ministry offering healing or therapy for people who with same-sex attraction.

The official Anglican position seems now to be one of strong opposition to the mere suggestion that we are created as male and female. To hold to the facts of human biology will be declared morally culpable, by the Synod of the Church of England. The Synod affirms that it is possible, and worthy of celebration, to announce a transition from one sex to another, and that opposition to this opinion is not acceptable. One exultant Synod member exclaimed: "Synod has changed—we have turned a corner."

When these issues come up in conversation with Anglican friends I find that they have three ways of responding:

- Deep gloom. "It's terrible. But what can one do?" This is often accompanied by a quiet drifting away from regular church attendance.
- A feeling that the Synod votes do not bind anyone; what matters is the local parish. "Our church here is great and it's a community where I feel I belong." This sometimes morphs into a general acceptance of what the Synod has decided anyway: "I used to be against gay marriage but I'm not really sure now..."
- A more rare response: some talk of a clear split within the C of E, of seeking oversight from some alternative missionary bishop from a network of Evangelical Anglicans, or some other similar arrangement.

What about the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, through which Anglicans can come into full communion with the Catholic Church while retaining their liturgical, musical, and spiritual traditions and heritage? Reactions to this idea again are again threefold.

- A vaguely despairing sigh, and, "Oh...yes...I daresay I might end up doing that." But they mostly don't.
- "But I'm Anglican. Our family has never been Roman Catholic." (Not strictly true, if you think about it, but understandable—1535 is a longish way back.)
- A more rare response: a disagreement with some specific teachings of the Catholic Church such as Our Lady, confession, etc.

In general, the spiritual state of Britain feels bleak. Suicide is now the biggest killer among young men. Substantial numbers of young people have grown up with no experience of living with two married parents. There is much talk of the rising tide of violence among small children—the numbers expelled from school for attacking teachers or fellow pupils are now significant. "Sexting"—sending sexually explicit photographs—is now a recognized teenage activity. And the government is committed to trying to force forms of "relationship education," including the promotion of homosexual activity, to children in all schools.

It seems all too likely that the Church of England will bend to pressure and allow same-sex "weddings" in Anglican churches. From allowing such ceremonies it will be a short move to marginalize any clergy that will not allow them. There may be theoretical freedom to disagree with the new line, but in practice conformity will be the rule.

There are various independent Evangelical Christian groups that still stand with the Christian understanding of marriage. But essentially, in putting the message in the public sphere, the Catholic Church will now be a lone voice.

Catholics in Britain have a sort of collective folk-memory of persecution: hiding-places for priests in ancient manor houses, families proud of their recusant history, old customs that never really died out, place-names and pub-signs rich in Catholic imagery.

Since the canonization of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales by Pope—now Blessed—Paul VI in 1970, the names of the martyrs have become better known than ever before: there are churches and schools named after them, and new generations have become familiar with their stories. An ordinariate church in Devon is dedicated to Our Lady of Walsingham and St. Cuthbert Mayne—the latter a local priest who suffered for the Faith after many years of ministering secretly. A new school in Richmond-upon-Thames is dedicated to St. Richard Reynolds, the heroic Bridgettine priest from Syon Abbey. I recently visited a school dedicated to the martyr St. John Payne in Chelmsford. There are two modern churches dedicated to St. Anne Line in Essex.

Papal visits in recent decades established Catholicism in the public mind as part of modern Britain. Our schools are over-subscribed, and our churches are usually the most active in any given area. The arrival of large numbers of young Polish people has boosted Catholic numbers. There is an ordinariness about Catholicism that has seeped into people's consciousness. Old-style anti-Catholicism—the “No Popery!” cry of the 18th and 19th centuries, and so on—is dead.

But the future holds new and grim possibilities: the Secretary of State's bullying tone and the Prime Minister's pompous nagging send out a sinister message. They want everyone to toe the line on same-sex unions. The Catholic Church can't and won't. Dare we hope that they will leave us alone?