

T175paper

SURVEY OF MARRIED EX – ANGLICAN PRIESTS by M.M. Winter

The total number of married former Anglicans (subsequently designated as MFA's) who have been incardinated into the 22 dioceses of England and Wales is 120. The method by which I arrived at that number is as follows.

At the outset I wrote to the 22 diocesan bishops informing them that I was undertaking this research on behalf of The Movement for Married Clergy, and asked them if they knew of any other similar survey. None of them knew of any such research, nor did they object to mine, with just one exception. After that I presumed on good will wrote to the diocesan curias requesting the number, and names of their MFA's . I also contacted priests of my acquaintance who had worked for many years in their dioceses. These two sources gave me information of the situation in 12 dioceses, which I designated as the exact dioceses, and in fact that group comprised the most populous of the 22 dioceses, disclosing the existence of 75 MFA's .The remaining ten dioceses were silent. However all is not lost. The exact dioceses comprised in total 2014 priests. This means that for every one MFA there are 28.8 secular priests. The silent dioceses comprised 1286 priests, so applying the above ratio backwards, as one might say, it discloses the presence of 44.6 MFA's in the silent dioceses. Adding the sub-totals together, indicates 119.6 MFA's nationwide. I consulted a Cambridge mathematician, who approved the method, but suggested that I include plus or minus 20 to allow for imprecisions.

The first and most important result of the survey is that the MFA's and their wives have been overwhelmingly welcomed by Catholic laity, as you can see from the percentages. 95.2% of laity welcomed the priests, and 90.3% welcomed their wives. This disposes of the untested lament that "The simple faithful would not be happy with married priests". The diocesan clergy were also warmly welcoming of the newcomers, though not quite so enthusiastically as the laity, as can be seen from the figures. 87% of the priests were welcoming of the MFA's, and 9.7 % were cautious. As to their wives 73.2% were welcoming, 21% were cautious. A number of the priests had never met the wives.

The Epistle to Timothy declares that a presbyter should be the husband of one wife, but not a neophyte "Lest he should become puffed up" (I Tim. 3:6) . As for the married former Anglicans, the vast majority spent a number of years as a layman. For obvious reasons the newcomers were not passed from vicarage to presbytery straight away. The replies about who thought of it, do not add up to 100% . Some of the respondents left that question blank. Perhaps they had forgotten. The average period was 2.7 years. The largest cohort (8 priests) waited exactly 2 years.

This raises an interesting question. For more than 100 years the Beda College has provided a four year course for late vocations, among whom there were always a number of unmarried former Anglican priests. In addition to studying Catholic theology, Canon Law etc, they rubbed shoulders with the cradle Catholics, and by a sort of spiritual osmosis, they acquired familiarity with the culture and collective psychology of the English Catholic community. Are the present group being hurried through, and if so why? I will defer the answer to that question, because it is connected with the requirement for further studies in Catholic theology prior to ordination. Only one priest stated that he had done no further studies. The rest

pursued various courses for an average of 2.15 years. Not all fitted into tidy classifications. Several received private tuition in various forms.

The severely practical question arises: where does a MFA and his family live during that period of at least 2 years, and where does the financial support come from? At this point I must digress. The salaries of Anglican priests vary from £20,000 to £28,000, but that is not the whole story. The vicarage provides a home for which they do not pay rent or mortgage. There is a generous pension scheme which will generate nearly £400 for every year worked in the clergy. Other expenses like telephone, car, etc are catered for. It has been calculated that the whole package is roughly equivalent to an income of £80,000 pa. A married clergy does not come cheaply. How does this impinge on the Catholic system? Two or three priests live in one presbytery. It is not a happy arrangement, but it is comparatively cheap. A married priest requires a separate house. To cut a long story short: are the MFAs being hurried through to save the expense. A precise answer cannot be given, but several Catholic dioceses at present are desperately short of money.

A further question leads into the opaque subject of how, and how much the Catholic clergy are paid, while on active work and when retired. The percentages attached to the subsidiary questions on that matter do not add up to the full picture. It is a somewhat delicate matter, and many took the option of not answering the question. However two factors warrant careful note. 29% stated that they received a full C of E pension, which I think displays magnanimity. Secondly, although the matter is too complex to discuss here fully, the payment and pensions of Catholic clergy are in a shambolic situation. 39% of the sample replied that their income was the traditional Catholic practice of Mass stipends, stole fees, Christmas and Easter Offerings. It all goes back to mediaeval canon law when the parish was an independent financial unit, legally safeguarded from interference by the bishop. That concept was embraced by the Code of Canon Law, first promulgated in 1918, and remained unaffected by Vatican II as can be seen in the revised edition of 1983. At the first meeting of the National Conference of Priests in 1969 at Wood Hall in Yorkshire there was an almost unanimous support that there should be a systematic policy for salaries and pensions of secular priests. At present only a minority of dioceses have implemented it.

The consequences of this confused situation are displayed in the replies to the specific questions. What proportion of your pension devolves to your widow? 34% replied "Don't know". And the tenure of the widow in the presbytery, if her husband dies while in office: 2% stated that the diocese would provide accommodation. But a far larger proportion, 31% replied "Don't Know", or words to that effect. Clearly these vital matters have not been given any serious attention.

Conclusion: Although it was not asked in the survey, one very important deduction emerges. The experiences of this small pilot group have demonstrated what many had suspected, namely that the RC community simply does not have enough money to replicate the Anglican system for employment and remuneration of married priests. supported financially by their own salaries or pensions and living in their own houses.