

DR CYPRIAN BLAMIRE

District Organiser for Central England, East Anglia and South Wales.

In the past year I have visited many parishes where the priest is a convert cleric. I have been moved to see the great work these men are doing and way they have settled into their new roles. One who has been ordained for many years told me 'we couldn't have done it without the St Barnabas Society'; a beautiful testimony to the importance of our work. The Society of course has no position over the Catholic ordination of convert clerics, which is purely a matter for our bishops, but we are always very pleased to encounter individuals progressing to the priesthood and doing well in that role. This brings out the plight of those for whom the door is closed to ordination all the more starkly. I have known ministers be received into the Church, apparently settle down as Catholics, but then be so shocked at being turned down for ordination that they have returned to their denomination. Theoretically this makes no sense at all: either the Catholic Church is the Mother Church, the one true Church, the natural home for all who want to follow Christ, or she is not. What difference does it make to that whether I am ordained a Catholic priest or not? Logically, it cannot affect the issue. But the fact that some react in this way speaks volumes about how we function as human beings. If a person seeks ordination in a denomination, it is generally because he or she sees that as a response to a call of God to ministry. Confronted with the challenge of the Catholic Church, the natural reaction is: 'It was God who called me to ministry in the first place, so how can He be calling me to sacrifice that ministry in order to become a Catholic?' In talking to those ministers who are contemplating being received into the Church, I have to confirm that they will have to offer up their ministry to God, because

GLYN ROBERTS

District Organiser for North East England.

I think that everyone might agree that the Catholic Church needs to use all the talents it has in order to meet the challenge of a church with a shortage of manpower in the area of pastoral ministry. Priests can no longer *do it all* but talented and committed lay people often have the skills needed, so that the problem of *too many jobs and not enough priests to do them* could easily be solved. The problem for The St Barnabas Society is really the opposite in that those whom it tries to help form a corpus which could be said to represent the phrase *too many skills and talents and not enough jobs* (that is jobs within the Church). Shelf stacking at supermarkets could be an answer for ex-clergy but it is too often the prelude to potentially fruitful lives drifting into pointlessness and being swallowed by the swamp of the secular world. Bearing a visible witness to the Church's work must surely be what most convert clerics desire, at least that is the way I felt and still do. We have a real problem here and I suspect it is not

WILLIAM JOHNSTONE

District Organiser for London and Southern England

"Catholicism is a disaster that can happen even in the best of families". So Oscar Wilde is reported to have said, some time before his death bed conversion to the Church. Behind the legendary wit of this comment lies a truth that is deeply embedded in the English psyche. The Catholic convert has often been regarded with unease and suspicion. Our English history is so complicated, in terms of its religious affiliation through the centuries, that strong reactions towards someone's deliberate path to Rome are never slow in coming forward. But if Catholic conversion is seen by some as a disaster, it is a disaster that appears to be extremely widespread. One of the most striking features of my visits to various parishes around southern England, are the number of people who can readily identify with the concept of conversion. More often than not

JONATHAN BROWN

District Organiser for North West England and North Wales.

What's in a word? Well, when that word is "Appeal", the first thing that comes to mind is money, closely followed by a weak joke about trying to be appealing. But, when it comes to The St Barnabas Society, is money really the only thing we want to come to mind when we talk about Appeals? Certainly, from a District Organiser's point of view, there are too many times when, upon asking a priest if I might be able to come to his parish to talk about our work, the response is either that the parish cannot afford it, or that it wouldn't be worth our while going all that way for a small collection. If we only went into parishes for the money, then there would be little point in responding. But, for me, questions about the amount of money raised cannot detract from the other benefits that my visiting a parish can bring. For the Society, this means awareness and, as importantly, prayer. The most frequent comment parishioners make is that they have never heard of us, and we need them to know about us if we are to work

there can be no guarantees of ordination to the Catholic priesthood. On the human level it seems crazy – has God changed his mind? – but it is in such apparently contradictory and confusing situations that we enter into the mystery of God and of his will for us. Think of Abraham's readiness to offer up Isaac in sacrifice. How crazy was that? For me it was this moment of surrender of my ministry that took me into the sea of faith, in which I have been swimming ever since as a Catholic. Up to that point I had *talked* a great deal about faith, only now when I was doing something humanly crazy in response to God did I begin to learn how to *live* it. But I have much sympathy with those for whom the step is just too demanding. I have been much helped by a saying of St John of the Cross, that faith is about holding out your hand in the dark and hanging on to the hand of God. I can't make much sense of anything that has happened in my life since I became a Catholic, but it doesn't matter, because what we really need is not to *understand* but to *love*. I am in contact with ministers hesitating on the brink of the Church and I long to be able to convey this to them, but it is difficult. For all of us, our sense of what we should be doing or where we should be in life may come into conflict with what our faith requires of us. My great hero is St Thomas More; I often reflect on the immensity of his sacrifice, a man who had the world at his feet – but he gave it all up for the sake of witnessing to the fundamental importance of England's relationship to the Holy Father. At the Feast day of St Gregory the Great, I am reminded of how much of our Christian inheritance in this country we owe to the missionary St Augustine of Canterbury – and who sent him to us? A pope, St Gregory the Great. Our faith came to us from Rome, why do so many harden their hearts against Rome? Part of the answer is that in the face of the call to surrender the thing that is most prized, logic often goes out of the window. Only grace can conquer this.

just one that affects ex-Anglican, ex-Methodist, ex-Orthodox or other exes but also a large corpus of cradle Catholic people who drift away from the Church because they have never been asked to do anything more stretching than reaching to put their money in the plate. Far from setting challenges to its people, both old and young, there is much evidence that often in the parishes there is not even a requirement to join in the words of the Mass, to kneel as a mark of reverence to God or even to pray. Thank God that some parishes are beginning to use lay administrators, catechists etc, but there aren't that many! No wonder converts often find themselves with not much of a part to play! When people take that momentous leap of changing direction in their lives by placing themselves in the hands of the Catholic Church, they are offering themselves for service. We at The St Barnabas Society need to work to make everyone in the Catholic Church aware of this fact. And more than that, we need to pray ardently for the Church to use both us, and those we want to help.

someone will approach me with their own conversion story. Many of them have embraced the Church after years of unbelief and even hostility towards Catholicism.

Meeting these people is a humbling experience. Often they have taken this path with considerable personal cost. But what is evident from our conversations, is that there is deep human need to discover and embrace the truth about our existence. Quite often the most unlikely characters are captured by this truth, and their stories become a real inspiration to those around them.

As long as there are people searching for fulfilment in their lives, there will be people knocking on the doors of the Catholic Church. It is Christ himself who calls them, and those who hear this call are invited to leave behind all that is familiar for a new life in Him. It may be disturbing and even distasteful to some, but it will continue to happen – even in the best of families.

effectively. The half dozen or so potential beneficiaries I have met at the back of churches bear testimony to the lack of and need for this awareness. And then there is the prayer, without which we could not work, and for which our beneficiaries are so grateful. The benefits of a visit to a parish are not only for the Society, though. The second most frequent comment I hear is not simply a bland remark about having enjoyed the talk, but rather gratitude for the inspirational example of the convert clergy and religious about whom I speak. The encouragement people receive when they hear the sacrifices people are willing to make to become Catholic, the conviction that the faith they love is really this important, and the powerful testimony of the home we find as we gather together around the altar of Christ: this is the purpose of an Appeal. We offer far more than we ask. Yes, it is good to raise money, but how much better to help people to understand what it is about being Catholic that brings such joy to convert clergy and religious, and through that understanding wanting to join us in welcoming home to the Catholic church all those whom God calls to give up so much to follow him.

Protestant or Catholic – Does It Really Matter?

By Dr Cyprian Blamires

As I go around the parishes week by week speaking about the work of the Society, I quite often sense a certain indifference to the subject of my talks, particularly among the younger generation of listeners. After all, what does it matter where people go to church, we are all Christians, aren't we? All this stuff between Protestant and Catholics is old hat, isn't it?

The truth is that our topic as Organisers and as a Society, while being inspiring for some, is potentially uncomfortable for many, seemingly out of date in the modern world of ecumenical activities, shared churches, interfaith commissions, and so forth. Sometimes Catholic parish priests who are heavily involved in such activities may be reluctant to host a visit from a St Barnabas Society speaker for that very reason.

I have one very blunt answer to those who raise this objection to our work. It is to explain that on the day I was received into the Catholic Church, I found myself in a new universe. The creed to which I had adhered for many years before that day – in common with almost every Christian I knew - was a severely truncated version of Catholicism. In essence, what the Reformation did to the Catholic faith was to pare it right down. The Reformers thought of this as cutting out the dead wood or reducing the rolls of fat on the body or stripping the hull of the boat of its encrustations. Whatever the metaphor, the practical result for a typical Protestant believer like me was that I was deprived of all the following: Our Lady; Holy Mass; the rosary; Lourdes, Fatima, and all the Marian shrines; priestly confession; authoritative moral guidance as to the rights and wrongs of abortion, divorce, and contraception; schools in which the teaching of the faith was central; the Holy Father and the Magisterium; the saints (apart from a very limited number); intercession for the departed; First Communion. In making this bald statement of fact, I am not attacking Protestants, since they generally consider all those things I have mentioned to be arbitrary and unjustified additions or encrustations on the pure original deposit of 'the faith once delivered to the saints'.

It is true that individual Protestants may choose to employ prayer beads or to adopt views similar to those of the Church on abortion, divorce, or contraception, for example; but I speak here not of what individuals may or may not believe or practise, but of what I know to be true of the general run of Protestants. From the Catholic viewpoint, they have, in the interests of 'purifying' the faith, eliminated a substantial number of beliefs and practices that we hold to be hugely important in the living out of our faith: not least of course that obedience to the Pope and the Magisterium of the Church which is the bedrock of our lives. From the Catholic viewpoint these beliefs and practices shunned by Protestants are actually treasures and riches of our religion, and if we downplay the idea of conversion or even actually discourage it, then we are guilty of a kind of robbery – failing to share with others the wealth freely given to us by God on the basis that we become channels to the world of his grace.

As a Protestant cleric studying the question of the Catholic Church in the late 1970s, I became acutely aware of the spiritual impoverishment we had incurred through the elimination of so much of the traditional Catholic faith, without as far as I could see making any gains. It was this that led me to ask the fundamental question: 'Why am I outside the Mother Church?' At the same time, I could not help noticing that a number of my fellow-Anglicans happily assumed that they could live as Catholics in the Church of England. Of course it was possible to assent inwardly to all those beliefs and practices listed above – even down to accepting (albeit more or less privately) the headship of the pope - and remain in the Church of England, and a small minority of my fellow-clergy did this. But in adopting this approach they were patently not reflecting the mind of the Church of England, which had repeatedly made her Protestant credentials abundantly clear. I had consistently founded my own gospel teaching on the basis of looking to expound the revealed truth of God and not simply rehearsing my personal opinions, so the question of failing to reflect the true mind of my church was of fundamental importance. It seemed abundantly clear that if the Church of England had wanted to remain Catholic, it would never have allowed itself to be sundered from the Holy See.

And then there remained the clear mind of the worldwide Catholic Church. The Catholics of Continental Europe – of France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Belgium, Bavaria, etc. had maintained a consistent position with regard to the Church or England. All the modern archiepiscopal visits to Rome and ARCIC discussions could not hide the fact that the Catholic Church welcomed converts into the fold and restricted communion to her own members. For the Catholic Church, believing was about belonging. To enjoy the graces and gifts handed down by Christ to the Apostles and by them to their successors, you had to take out membership. The Mother Church was like the electricity grid: the Holy Spirit was the electricity. With electricity, connection is all, connection is what brings you the power. The sockets were the sacraments. Huff and puff as we might in the Church of England with our argument that continuity had been maintained from the English medieval Church despite the breach with Rome (which we thought of as an administrative issue), the fact was that Rome was patently the centre of unity, something confirmed by the consistent witness of the Catholics of the rest of Europe and the wider world: they had made the Catholic position clear through a succession of papal spokesmen. For that was what the popes were: mouthpieces for the mind of the Church, and according to the Scriptures, the mind of the Church was the mind of God. Peter was indeed the rock and the foundation, and it was we who had the explaining to do.

DISTRICT ORGANISERS

Dr Cyprian Blamires is Organiser for the dioceses of Birmingham, Cardiff, Brentwood, Clifton, East Anglia, Menevia and Northampton, The Mount, 130 Burnmill Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 7JG Tel: 01858 468224 cpblamires@aol.com

Glyn Roberts is Organiser for the dioceses of Hallam, Hexham & Newcastle, Leeds, Middlesbrough and Nottingham. 97 Handsworth Crescent, Sheffield, S9 4BQ Tel: 0114 2434931 glyn@glynward.wanadoo.co.uk

William Johnstone is Organiser for the dioceses of Westminster, Southwark, Arundel & Brighton, Plymouth and Portsmouth. 4 Bloomfield Terrace, Westerham, Kent, TN16 1DA Tel: 01959 564229 wjohnstone@kent2.co.uk

Jonathan Brown is Organiser for the dioceses of Liverpool, Lancaster, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. 66 Chester Road, Anfield, Liverpool, L6 4DZ Tel: 0151 260 1186 Mob: 0798 334 2006 j.a.brown@bigfoot.com

There and Back Again by Fr Dwight Longenecker



Fr Dwight after his first Mass, with his family and Dr Cyprian Blamires.

In 1995, when my wife and two children left the ministry of the Church of England to be received into full communion of the Catholic Church we had no idea where God would lead us, and what he wanted us to do. I had a sense of calling to the Catholic priesthood, but wanted to test this for a time living and working as a Catholic layman.

After being received into the Church at Quarr Abbey we moved to Lancashire where I began work as script editor with a small video production company. The company soon went out of business and I was left unemployed. It was then that Cyprian Blamires heard of me and got in touch. Keith Jarrett, former secretary of The St Barnabas Society, like Cyprian and myself, had come from an Evangelical Protestant background and had been schooled for Anglican ministry at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. So when I travelled to the Society's headquarters in Wolvercote to meet Keith there was an instant rapport.

A job opening as one of the Society's organizers had come up, so we moved from Lancashire to Wiltshire. During this time I continued to pursue the possibility of ordination to the Catholic priesthood in England. It was not to be. For various reasons, the Catholic bishops did not reject me for ordination, but neither did they take any action to move me forward to serve as a

priest. I worked for seven years with The St Barnabas Society, we were blessed with two more children and I also developed a ministry writing and speaking on Catholic matters in the UK and my native United States.

It was during one of my visits home that I met the Bishop of Charleston in South Carolina and he encouraged me to consider being ordained in his diocese. It was to be another three years before a suitable job opened up. I was reading an American Catholic newspaper in England when I spotted a Catholic high school in my hometown of Greenville advertising for a chaplain. I emailed the headmaster saying, "I hope you have a creative search committee because I would like to apply for the chaplain's post, but I am not a Catholic priest, I'm married and I live in England."

St Joseph's Catholic School is one school in the United States with a very creative and positive approach. After interview they were very enthusiastic about my application and worked with the Bishop so that I could complete my studies, forward my paperwork to Rome to be processed to pave the way for my ordination. In 2006, after a three month trial period as lay chaplain at the school, I returned to England to pack up, put our house on the market and move our family to the USA.

The St Barnabas Society was extremely supportive and generous in our exciting transition to South Carolina. The board listened to our needs, helped with practical details, provided moving expenses and helped with our air fares.

By July the paperwork came back from Rome in record time, and in November I was ordained deacon, and a few weeks later, in December 2006 I was ordained priest. It was a joy to have Marcus Grodi of *The Coming Home Network* and my old friend Cyprian Blamires present to read the Scriptures at the ordination service. All of this happened just a few hundred yards down the road from a little Anglican Church in Greenville South Carolina where I had been baptized about thirty years before.

Three of our children attend the school where I serve as chaplain, so we go to school together each day. St Joseph's Catholic School has 550 students. It is an independently owned and operated Catholic school with full approval of the diocese. I also serve as weekend assistant and co ordinator of RCIA at St Mary's - a large downtown parish in Greenville.

Alison is getting used to life in the American suburbs, and the children are happily involved in excellent Catholic schools and are busy with a range of extra activities. A special joy is for two of my sons to serve Mass for me on a weekly basis.

We continue to keep up to date on the news of The St Barnabas Society, and remain grateful for the happy years we worked with the Society, and for the generous help the Society has been able to give, thanks to the generosity of so many benefactors over the years.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are a priest...

Contact our local District Organiser to arrange an appeal in the parish or to talk about the Society's work.

Let the Secretary know of any convert clergy who have been received into the Church.

Whoever you are...

Pass this Newsletter on to others.

Pray for the Society and its work, those whom it helps and those thinking of coming into the Church.

Send the Society a donation at the address on page one or remember it in your will.

ST BARNABAS SOCIETY NEWS 2009

In co-operation with the Catholic bishops, to provide support and assistance to those former clergy and religious of other denominations and their dependants who have come into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church, until such time as they have been integrated into the Catholic community and have re-established themselves.

The Secretary Writes...

Ronald Knox was received into the Catholic Church in 1917 and in the next year he wrote "A Spiritual Aeneid" to tell his story. He recounts how, when he had come to have the greatest doubts about the Church of England, he happened to meet the Jesuit Fr Charlie Martindale and took the opportunity of asking his advice. Ought he now to become a Catholic?

As remembered by RAK, Fr Martindale's reply was "Of course, you couldn't be received like that". RAK was stunned, it was not at all what he had expected. As he put it later "I had come to imagine the Church of Rome demanded no more as a test of membership than a decent doubt about Anglicanism. It seemed that more was needed.... She demanded positive faith, not a mere dissatisfaction with misbelief". He spent two years working through this before he was received.

Some of those who are seriously thinking of seeking reception into the Catholic Church are at the point where Ronald Knox was when he spoke to Fr Martindale. They feel that they can no longer remain in their present Church. They may have slowly lost confidence in that Church, or confidence may have been destroyed overnight by some decision or act of that Church.

However, their reasons are negative reasons about their present Churches, rather than positive reasons about the Catholic Church and if they "go over to Rome" at that point, simply as a reaction to a loss of faith in their previous Church, they may well be disappointed. The Church of Rome was not created as a refuge for those who cannot remain in their present Churches! Those who seek to come into the full communion of the Catholic Church must do so

for positive reasons about the Catholic Church and not negative reasons about the Churches to which they previously belonged.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter, Dr Cyprian Blamires writes about the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. Those who are sure that they are already Catholics in other Churches should remember that, in their present Churches, Catholic beliefs and practices are simply one of several possible tolerated options. In the Catholic Church they are part of the very nature of the Church.

The valid reason for seeking the full communion of the Catholic Church is simply that it is the Catholic Church. Those who come for this reason find that there is vastly more in the Church than they had ever imagined and they are able to value their previous Churches and be grateful for what they learnt there.

So far this year, three convert clerics whom the Society has helped have been ordained priest: Bernard Garratt (Birmingham), Cecil Rogerson (Birmingham) and James Neal (Westminster). Three more, Kevin Moule (Westminster), John Serjeant (Hallam) and Dominic Cosslett (Birmingham) are due to be ordained before the end of 2008 and a further two during 2009: Michael Smith (Menevia) and William Nicol (Westminster). There are another five men in seminaries.

It is always a special joy for the Society to help someone towards ordination to the priesthood. However, it is important to bear in mind that The St Barnabas Society exists to help all former ministers, clergy and religious who have been received into the Catholic Church and are in need, as well as their dependents.

For every convert cleric or religious who approaches the Society, the Board of the Society makes an individual assessment of the help that they need. Thanks to the generosity of the Society's supporters, for which we are most grateful, this decision can be made simply on the basis of the needs of the beneficiary and the Society is not constrained by a lack of funds when deciding on grants.

Decisions on grants and other matters are made by the Board of the Society which meets nine times a year. In May 2008 Major David Flood KSG retired as Chairman of the Society after thirteen years. The Society owes him a great deal for his generosity with his time and energy. He carried an important part of the work of the Society while Keith Jarrett, the previous Secretary was seriously ill and was a great support to me, especially while I was learning the job eight years ago.



The Secretary with on his right Jonathan Elms and on his left Major David Flood.

David Flood has also led and encouraged the development of the pastoral role of the Society in general and of the District Organisers in particular. Very rightly, this is now one of the Society's main roles. Convert clerics often feel isolated and find that those around them do not understand their experiences and their feelings. They need the support of those who have travelled the same road.

Jonathan Elms, who has been a member of the Board, that is, one of the Trustees, since 2001 has taken over as Chairman. On behalf of all those involved with the Society I would like to thank both David Flood and Jonathan Elms.

Fr Robin Sanders



Icon from original by Sr Petra Clare, Benedictine Skete, Beaulieu, IV4 7LT

THE ST BARNABAS SOCIETY PRAYER

Father in heaven, we thank you for the life and work of your servant St Barnabas.

Through his intercession may all who work for the St Barnabas Society be strengthened to follow his example of joyful encouragement.

Help them to extend a warm and generous welcome to those who have left home and livelihood to be united with Christ's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN

THE ST BARNABAS SOCIETY

President: Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor Secretary: Fr Robin Sanders

4 First Turn, Wolvercote, Oxford, OX2 8AH. Tel 01865 513377 Fax 01865 516542

Website www.stbarnabassociety.org.uk Email: secretary@stbarnabassociety.org.uk

Registered with the Charity Commission No 1009910. A company limited by guarantee. Registered in England No. 2645233