

PLANTING AND WATERING

St. Michael, Cornhill

Wednesday March 22nd 2017

Eucharist for the Anniversary of the Anglican Centre in Rome

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Just one week ago, at exactly this time I was presiding at the funeral requiem of Canon Wilfrid Browning. Wilfrid was Director of Ordinands and a Canon of Christ Church, Oxford when I was ordained into that diocese. Wilfrid's childhood was in London and there is still extant a photograph of him at the age of seven or eight as boatboy, just around the corner from here at St. Magnus the Martyr, serving at their non-communicating High Mass. He later became a scholar and teacher amongst other things.

But I begin with him because as secretary of the Bulletin Internationale Ecumenique, founded by Louis Bouyer, he drafted out and sent a letter to one Gianbattista Montini, then Cardinal Archbishop of Milan to see if a group of four Church of England clergymen might visit for a week or ten days in his diocese. The letter drafted perfectly by Wilfrid in Latin elicited a warm reply from the Cardinal – this time in Italian – encouraging the visit to go ahead. The leader of the group was to have been John Moorman, then Bishop of Ripon and later the leader of the Anglican representatives to the Second Vatican Council. Gianbattista Montini, of course went on to become Pope Paul VI.

So, the Cardinal's experience of meeting and working with this group, ultimately led by Father Robert Gage-Brown (the vicar of Woodstock) as John Moorman was ill; it was the Cardinal's experience of this plus his time in England visiting cathedrals in the 1930s uniquely amongst Popes, meant he understood Anglicans. So, in a way, Wilfrid was the prompter of all that followed – the Malta Report, ARCIC, and the Anglican Centre. From this tiny seed look what has sprouted forth! Wilfrid was indeed a quiet, scholarly and under-rated hero.

Much has sprouted forth. As you will have seen in your service booklet, Archbishop Michael Ramsey asked percipiently of the Centre: 'What will be its future?' He sets out its future functions. But could he have imagined quite what has followed. The last six months alone have seen remarkable development.

At the Golden Jubilee celebrations, in San Gregorio al Caelo, the place from which Gregory the Great sent Augustine, Pope and Archbishop commissioned twenty pairs of bishops in joint mission; the Pope gave the Archbishop a pastoral staff, a replica of that of Pope Gregory the Great. In recent weeks, the Pope has taken part in a service in the Church of England church of All Saints in the Via Babuino at which the Director of the Centre took a key part. Last week, Evensong was sung in the basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican by David Moxon, the Anglican Centre's Director.

These last few months have seen exponential leaps forward. Archbishop Michael Ramsey must have been chuckling and moving his eyebrows as only he could in his place in the heavens. Those concerns which Paul warns against in our epistle – am I for Paul, for Apollos or whoever, have been swept aside. As we give thanks today for the crucial work of the Centre we honour so many. Pope Paul who will surely be seen by historians as the greatest pontiff of the twentieth century; Michael Ramsey, that scholarly and holy archbishop; David Moxon and all his predecessors as Director of the Centre – and quietly, understatedly, scholarly young Wilfrid Browning. The seed he sowed has indeed flourished. God's temple, at the heart of both our

readings, now has a heart beating with two resonant ventricles – Roman Catholic and Anglican – what a cause for jubilee and jubilation.

Amen

Readings

1. Cor. 3. 4-17.

Matthew. 21. 12-16.