

Monsignor Leo Cushley says Cardinal Keith O'Brien should not return to Scotland



The new Catholic archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh has said he does not believe his disgraced predecessor should return to Scotland.

Monsignor Leo Cushley will formally replace Cardinal Keith O'Brien in the role on Saturday.

Mgr Cushley also said he did not believe an independent investigation into Cardinal O'Brien was necessary.

The cardinal stood down following allegations by three priests and a former priest of improper sexual contact in the 1980s.

I think it would probably be wiser and more helpful for the future of the Church here if he were not to be back in the country”

The Vatican announced in May that, with the Pope's approval, Cardinal O'Brien - Britain's most senior Roman Catholic cleric - would leave Scotland "for the purpose of spiritual renewal, prayer and penance". His current location is not known.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme, Mgr Cushley conceded it was "not impossible" that the cardinal would one day return.

But he made it clear he did not believe that possibility was likely or desirable.

The 52-year-old cleric said: "He is a free man in a free country so he can come back if we wants. But the Holy See will be the ones to ask him to do whatever it is they intend.

"We all have our own opinions about that and what would be best for him, what would be best for those affected his actions, what would be better for the local Church.

"What can I say? I think it's not impossible for Cardinal O'Brien to come back to Scotland, of course it's not impossible, but personally speaking I think it's somewhat unlikely that he would return to Scotland.

Cardinal O'Brien was told to leave Scotland by the Vatican following his resignation

"There would be a number of reasons for that, and looking around myself I think it would probably be wiser and more helpful for the future of the Church here if he were not to be back in the country."

Mgr Cushley rejected the suggestion that an apostolic visitation - investigators sent from Rome by the Pope - was necessary to restore the confidence of Roman Catholics in Scotland in the wake of the scandal.

He told presenter Edward Stourton: "Steps have already been taken in Rome by the congregations responsible for this, and you can see the result - Cardinal O'Brien is no longer on the Scottish landscape, as it were.

"It is up to them do the investigating that they see fit. Nevertheless, that does not exonerate me to the extent that I need to find out personally what has happened, who has been affected.

"I don't think an apostolic visitation is required at all. From what I understand, I think the Holy See already has enough of the story to work on, and to talk of an independent inquiry into the actions of this man when we are not talking about anything that is criminal seems a little bit exaggerated to me.

"I'm not convinced that is what is required. I think what I intend to do is to work very hard and very patiently to establish for my own sake what has taken place, and then to see what can be done.

"But you can be assured I will leave no stone unturned in my efforts."

Reconciliation and forgiveness

The archbishop-elect's episcopal ordination will take place in St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh on 21 September.

Looking at the scale of the task facing him once he has formally taken up his new role, Mgr Cushley denied that the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland was in crisis.

He added: "I think the fundamentals are very solid, very sound, but I can't deny there are important

issues that I'm going to have to deal with.

"Certainly I think people feel let down, that is undeniable. We are talking about one or two individuals here. We are not talking about 600,000 Catholics. This is an issue about one or two people and certainly it has had its effect and I'm going to have to pick up some pieces as a result of that.

"We are talking about a shepherd and if you strike the shepherd the sheep are often scattered, as we see in the Bible.

"Nevertheless, the message remains the same, the message of reconciliation and forgiveness remain the same."

The new archbishop was born in Airdrie, North Lanarkshire, and became a priest almost 30 years ago.

He served initially in the Motherwell diocese before moving to Rome, where he served in the Vatican's diplomatic service and English language section.

Mgr Cushley, who speaks Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese, has been a close collaborator of both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, and has been regularly involved in the visits of heads of state and other important guests to the Holy See.

BBC Radio 4