

Ministers-at-Work

The Journal for Christians in
secular ministry

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To help ourselves and others to celebrate the presence of God and the holiness of life in our work, and to see and tell the Christian story there.

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The views expressed in articles are those of the author, unless stated otherwise.

Editorial

During the past two decades the language of individual responsibility has become part of everyday life. Increasing stress has been laid – by many voices, including Governments and employers – on the individual and the personal. Individual Savings Accounts, Personal Equity Plans, Individual Learning Accounts, Personal Pension Plans. Gone are the days when someone could leave school and work for a single employer until they retired.

The labour market, as Sue Johnson’s article ably demonstrates, demands ever more flexibility in skills, mobility and adaptability. The modern worker is expected to develop, nurture and deploy their own skill portfolio, and take with them their personalized pension, savings and benefits package. “Cradle to grave” care – whether by the company or by social, Government provision is dead, except as a “safety net”. The difference between the two largest political parties seems to be over the size of the mesh, rather than the size of the net.

For many of course this is no radical change. Particularly among higher earners and the self-employed personal provision has long been the norm. What is new is the extension of this principle to a far greater proportion of the population. Permanent employees have given way to self-employed contractors or fixed term contracts (this has even reached the Civil Service!). There has been a wholesale transfer of risk from the corporate to the individual.

In principle this may not sound a bad thing. Is not one of the key themes of the Gospel responsibility for our own actions: our sin, our repentance, our accepting Christ, our being forgiven?

In practice many of those newly exposed to risk have not been equipped for the change. Older workers in particular are often seen as a poor investment of new work and life skills. Despite the best efforts of the variety of training agencies, the question remains of how we as a society relate to those who cannot or will not acquire the skills now being demanded. Is a new under-class being created of the disaffected, “too old”, the “unreliable”?

Two other Gospel characteristics are conspicuous by their rarity: grace and the concept of the body of Christ.

Charity has an honoured place in British society. In the last four years it has been made easier to give in a tax-effective manner, charitable foundations continue to abound, BBC “Children in Need” and “Red Nose Day” ride a tidal wave of good feeling towards those in need - or some of them anyway. Which is a point: “needy” is so often unconsciously prefixed with “deserving”. Charities dealing in unpopular causes – the rehabilitation of offenders, for example – often do not receive as generously as those seen to meet the needs of the “deserving”. But the point of grace is that “deserving” does not come into the equation: as soon as it does, grace is absent.

Then what of the corporate? If there is one lesson that MSEs have learned through experience it is that organizations do not work effectively unless they are “knit together at every joint”. A test of any successful organization is the way in which its members relate to each other, with each component team and individual valued as a vital part of the whole. In the same way a measure of a healthy and effective society is the way it treats all its members. For a blueprint of how an effective organization should be, just re-read Paul’s first letter to the Co-

rinthian Christians – at one go, bearing in mind that the Corinthians had NOT got it right!

As I write, our trades union is balloting members on a new pension package, introducing the principles of the personal pension to existing civil servants (new ones have gone into a similar system for several years). My colleagues ask me what it means and how it will affect them. I don't have the technical answers; I don't know how it will affect me either. After a re-organisation every year from 1995 many are bewildered, demoralized. Morale is the lowest I can recall. It is now we most need to support and value each other; the task of ministry to promote this. Our God has accepted us unconditionally; seeking to do likewise can at least start to change the organization, the society, we move in.

There are a number of other thought-provoking articles this month: Jim Francis on being made redundant (a phrase heavy with meaning), an intriguing exchange begun by two of our brethren from across the pond in the USA, and a report on the Pentecost meeting of International Worker Priests (that one prompted an alternative Editorial, about social analysis, but you're stuck with this one!). Also included are the findings of the Reader Survey. I hope you have as much fun digesting it all as I had editing it!

Rob Fox

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"Ministers-at-Work" Reader Survey

Many thanks to all who responded to the Reader Survey enclosed with the April edition of "Ministers-at-Work". A good range of responses was received. I summarise here the

findings and draw a few tentative conclusions. Whilst there was a wide range of responses to individual questions there are some clear patterns, providing useful information about how the Journal can serve its readership more effectively.

Responses were entirely from “individual” readers. A few of these are also church officers, but responses from “institutional” recipients were conspicuous by their absence. From the respondents, it was also clear that the Journal tends to be read by the individual only, not circulated for others to read.

Regarding the contents of the Journal, the most RELEVANT items are perceived to be Feature Articles and the Editorial. The most INTERESTING items: MSE Stories and Feature Articles. Relatively, International items and Book Reviews are seen to be the least relevant. Least interesting: these two and CHRISM events. Accessibility may be a factor with International items and CHRISM events, but Book Reviews was a surprise. Would anyone like to comment on this? Does it reflect the relatively scant literature about MSE?

The comments threw up some very interesting contributions. The format is generally well liked (the increase in font size seems popular). Three particularly helpful points I pick out are the use of headings, including contributors names in the Contents, and linking the Journal more closely with the website. For those who expressed concern on the costs of production (which did not include the Treasurer!), total distribution costs are nearly as much as production costs so we do quite well. I will see about more graphics though.

Over half of respondents mentioned MSE stories: more, more from lay MSEs, greater theological reflection. Some of the comments were quite specific:

- greater focus on the ministry rather than the minister,
- MSEs who have been called to direct action in the workplace,
- greater reflection in MSE stories.

Also much mentioned was theological reflection. There is a clear call for more quality theology in articles, longer if they need to be, and more theological reflection. There is also an identifiable interest on linking MSE to current social and political issues and events. Other suggestions include information about MSE support groups, summaries of CHRISM Committee discussions, news of how the Churches are approaching MSE and a broader denominational input

Some of these issues are already being tackled at Editorial level. For example, contributions have been invited from a number of figures, some of whom will be familiar names to most readers. The comments in particular are useful in guiding contributors on what readers would find most useful.

For MSE stories, and theological reflection on the ministry, there is of course an excellent resource at our disposal: you the reader! The best stories, and the most perceptive theological reflection, generally comes from the practitioners themselves, so I expect a steady flow of high quality articles from late August onwards!

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How can CHRISM most effectively support you?

The Committee of CHRISM is constantly seeking to ensure that the organization is in tune with the needs and views of the members. We need to know what we are getting right, what could be improved - and how, and what else CHRISM might do to support its members and of course MSEs generally.

We therefore pose the question: "How can CHRISM most effectively help you as a Christian ministering in secular employment?" Here are some suggestions to start the thought process:

- organize conferences at local, regional and national level on developing MSE;
- make a contribution to formal training for ministry;
- publish a high-powered journal majoring on the theology and practice of MSE;
- give help and support on issues of licensing;
- promote and support local members groups;
- act as advocate for MSE and individual MSEs;
- compile and maintain a database of MSE resources;
- promote MSE with the Churches.

What else might we do? Are there any things we should not do? Please let us know what you think, and help us to best support you.

Please send responses to:

Rob Fox,

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or by e-mail to: chrism@foxesbridge.freeserve.co.uk

Facing Unemployment

Jim Francis

Having been for many years in what I thought was a secure job as a university lecturer, it came as something of a severe shock to be made unemployed. The speed and scale of the announcement were somewhat traumatic. The University of Sunderland is in a severe financial crisis. Small subjects (Religious Studies, Philosophy, Modern Foreign Languages) have been targeted as uneconomic and the management took the decision that from October 2001 these subjects would no longer recruit. Between the announcement and making a personal decision whether to stay on (to be re-trained for goodness knows what) or to leave, one had just five weeks. In the end staying on was not an option. I had no wish to seek re-training, so better to leave.

Let it be said straight away that whilst the Bishop (of Durham) and many others expressed their own shock at what was happening across the University, and voiced much support and sympathy for me, the offer of a living in the church has not been made. I am rather glad of that. Stipendiary ministry is not the refuge of the unemployed. Some colleagues at work have been rather surprised that I would not be offered a stipendiary post somewhere. Several have said "well, Jim, not to worry, you have your back-up". But they were surprised when I said that the ecclesiastical cavalry were not going to come to the rescue of my personally besieged wagon train. So I am contemplating being a minister in (secular) unemployment - a sort of "MSuE".

Meantime I am, I suppose, in a situation of bereavement. Oddly enough what bothers me most at the moment is not the

future but the present. I find it hard to contemplate that the institution is carrying on as normal, and that soon in a matter of weeks, I shall not be part of it. Colleagues in the subjects being closed down are scattering in all directions. I shall miss them. But others whom I have come to know, not least office staff and ancillary staff will still be there. Routine will go on much as usual, but I will not be around to be part of it.

For one thing these circumstances forced upon me have certainly led me to contemplate the difference between endings and conclusions. Coming to retirement is a conclusion, something to be planned and prepared for, but redundancy is an ending, a cutting off, a cutting short. Nevertheless this is not a time of helplessness. Whatever else, it is best not to fall prey to the victim syndrome. In one sense one is powerless, nothing can change the economic climate of the institution so as to wind the clock back and pretend we can all be put in "the recovery position". I am sure the institution will recover. Indeed (whilst I grit my teeth at a sense of injustice) I hope it will. But there is personal work to be done, reflections of the spirit as it were, so that I can learn (as indeed I hope am doing) more about myself and about my vocation in ministry.

For myself the imagery of sowing is more consolatory at the moment than that of building. One inevitably asks "what am I leaving behind, what have I accomplished?" An answer I cannot avoid is that it seems so little, and even nothing at all. But who can tell? Perhaps it is not for me to say. As with so much else of MSE, it is (as it has always been) ministry of the moment. The images of sowing (agriculture) and of building (construction) both contribute to the world of learning and are part of Scripture e.g. sowing the seeds of Wisdom, and building a house of Wisdom. It may be that a stipendiary minister

would find as much meaning in building imagery as in sowing. But as I leave the University, especially in light of the very obvious dismantling of my subject, it is sowing which remains more enduring, of how I might have influenced students to see the faith of the New Testament a little more clearly even as they with their reflections and passing glimpses of life-stories have certainly influenced me.

I have also found it interesting to reflect upon others' modeling of God in terms of conversations, which I have had amongst those who hold a faith. I thank all who have shown me kindness in such encouragements, though I have kept to myself my own contemplations.

I have been giving a lot of thought of late to the idea of Providence. There have been exhortations to "look to the future, something will come up, it always does" but I find that difficult to accept. I long ago abandoned the idea of a boss-God who can manage creation in that sort of way. How can I distinguish between a God who can arrange a new possibility from a God who could have arranged redundancy? And if a management model will not work I have even less time for an educational model which would ask "what is God saying to me in this situation?"

We can learn through circumstances but that is not to say that circumstances of themselves need teach us anything. As I reflect upon it, personally speaking, I would say that God is as surprised as I am at my predicament. If belief in Incarnation means anything it means that God is also at the receiving end of life's dilemmas. So I am less inclined to believe in a strong God and more in a weak God. Notice I do not say a feeble God, but a weak God such as Paul discerned in the

paradox of wisdom and foolishness, strength and weakness in 1 Cor. 1.26ff. and 2 Cor. 4.7ff. Importantly, and encouragingly, Paul came by these insights not only through the overt work of church mission so to speak but through the experience of his secular employment as a tentmaker. I cannot give thanks enough that Paul discerned truth like this in the knock-about world of daily work.

The weakness of God as a perspective on Providence seems to me to offer consolation and encouragement, of a God who is in genuine dialogue with the consequences of human action, rather than the manipulator of events, and a God whose salvation thereby is the ever-springing realisation and hope of healing in the midst of circumstances.

As Providence would have it, I am much encouraged by Dorrie Johnson's article in the last edition of "Ministers-at-Work". She reflects with eloquence and insight on a leave-taking of MSE. But in truth what she says, at least as it seems to me, is that Ministry in Secular Employment is not at heart only about how ministry is exercised in daily working life. Rather MSE is (actually) a way of life. It is a perspective on life. MSE is not simply the outcome of our vocation but is what has always nurtured our vocation. Whether working, retired or unemployed, MSE is a way of being that goes on forever shaping one's outlook and understanding. It is not just about the roles we play in life but the way we have our being. Would that the Church at large could see that, though the fact that I am not being offered a stipend is, paradoxically, cause for hope in this direction.

Meantime the Job Centre beckons. I shall not say at interview (at least straight away) that I am a clergyperson. That would raise an eyebrow or two. Whoever heard of an unemployed cleric?

MSE Job descriptions

Do you have a job description as an MSE? Does your Church (diocese, district, region) have a standard set of terms and conditions for MSEs? If so CHRISM would like to know. We are compiling a database of example job descriptions that can then be used to make recommendations on good practice to individual MSEs and to Churches. Confidentiality will be strictly observed so that names are not given out to others.

Copies can be sent to:

Rob Fox,

at 36 Norman Road, Stalybridge, Cheshire, SK15 1LY,

or by e-mail to: chrism@foxesbridge.freeserve.co.uk

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Prayers for the stressed – 1

Lord, grant me the serenity to accept

the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can -

And the wisdom to hide the bodies of those I had to kill today
because they got on my nerves.

Also help me to be careful of the toes I step on today as they
may be connected to the feet I have to kiss tomorrow.

The Changing Nature of Work – Opportunity or Threat

Susan Johnson

Chief Executive, Northern Business Forum.

The following was originally the text of a presentation by Sue to the 1999 CHRISM Conference. Its content is particularly pertinent to many of the issues raised by other contributions to this edition; hence it is included as a thought-provoking and perceptive analysis.

Change

Change is another word for growth, another synonym for learning. We all do it and enjoy it if we choose to. It is the changes in the way our life is organised that will make the biggest difference to the way we all live.

At this point in our society's evolution, change is discontinuous and not part of a pattern

15 years ago I started work with IBM and at that time they produced an outline of my future career. This was quite an irony given that this company had brought about and would bring about more change by the nature of its business than many other organisations. But the future would be mapped - this would be my career path, this would be the likely future job titles, these would be the qualifications and training courses I would take along the way. 15 years ago I thought that life would be this long continuous, hopefully upward, slope. How wrong I was and how wrong IBM was. That company saw the future as largely predictable, to be planned for and managed. Today they are much less certain. The PC

revolution and the introduction of open systems technology caught them napping and almost brought one of the world's great giants to its feet - almost inconceivable even to the great management gurus of the time such as Tom Peters.

What causes unease it that it is not just that the pace of change has speeded up for example the speed of travel from the horse to the car to the plane to the rocket. Change is discontinuous not incremental. It is when the gradual upward slope suddenly goes off the chart and is less predictable and less manageable that our comfort zones are really challenged.

When change is discontinuous in this way we need to completely re-think the way we learn things. Learning becomes a voyage of exploration and questioning and experimenting.

There are problems and opportunities associated with this discontinuous change and therefore with the issues of security of work in this changing world. Technology and economic reality are two of the potential triggers for discontinuity.

Technology

Information technology links the processing power of a computer with microwaves, satellites, fibre optic cables, and the list goes on. Biotechnology is the completely new industry that has grown out of the interpretation of DNA. It is only now becoming evident in the industrial world and in everyday life with new types of crops, genetic fingerprinting and all the possibilities of bio-engineering.

These are just some of the emerging technologies I lifted

from a recent copy of the New Scientist.

Rio – a \$200 audio-cassette that uses microchip technology to download 1 hour of music from the Internet – eliminating the need for tapes, CDs, etc.

Fakespace – the next generation of Virtual Reality devices – a pair of glasses which allows two or more individuals to experience the same virtual environment. Surgeons are using this to re-construct faces from the inside of the head.

Coufals data crystal – uses holographic memory to store gigabytes of data and has a transfer rate of 125 megabytes per second. Enough power to download the entire works of Shakespeare in less than 1.5 seconds

Kodak – a system which allows you to view your photos taken with a digital camera, on your laptop, select the photos you want printed and at what size, upload them to Kodak's web site using internet technologies, and the prints are received with 3 days anywhere in the world.

Media convergence – using the same terminal device for on-demand television, as a PC, a fax machine, and a telephone with a viewer to see the caller

These technologies and others could change parts of our lives and other people's lives in a dramatic fashion

Whether these developments are for good or ill must be our choice. Technology itself is neutral. We can use it to enrich our lives or to let our lives lose all meaning. What we can't do is pretend that they will go away.

Economic reality

Countries and regions live or die according to their comparative advantage. Comparative advantage means that there is something for which others will pay a price, be it oil and minerals, cheap labour, golden sun or brains. For the UK and for the North East increasingly it has to be brains.

Clever people making clever things or providing clever services add value, sometimes lots of value to minimal amounts of raw material. Their sales allow the import of things we can't produce or make - that's the way prosperity advances.

Many more clever people are needed. Organisations making or doing clever things spend much of their time handling information in all sorts of forms. This is what is commonly referred to as the knowledge economy. These organisations handle facts, figures, words, pictures, ideas, arguments, conferences, papers - the list goes on. These clever organisations do not work the way organisations used to work. They have different shapes, different working habits, different age profiles, different centres of authority.

An information society and a knowledge economy transforms social customs. An information society makes it easier for more women to do satisfying jobs. Technology has turned child bearing into a positive decision for most women. Women can support themselves and can in theory support a family on their own. For the first time in 1996 more women had babies between the ages of 30 and 35 than those aged 20 to 25. What was in former times technologically and economically impossible and therefore socially unacceptable becomes both possible and acceptable.

These emerging industries have not been sex typed because they require a different set of skills - skills that are not the sole domain of the male population. Industries that required brawn and muscle 20 years ago have virtually disappeared from the UK and regional landscape. The new industries require much softer, tactile skills, skills that women can also provide.

Numbers

Demographics is a boring word for a mesmerising subject. Numbers of people, numbers working, numbers dying, numbers growing up - these all explain why the world of work will not continue as it has done.

Number One

Charles Handy in his book “Age of Unreason” posited that by the beginning of the 21st Century less than half of the workforce in the industrialised world would be in proper full time jobs in organisations. Those full-timers will be in the minority. The others will not necessarily be unemployed: more will be self-employed, many will be part timers or temporary workers, either through choice or because that is all that is on offer. And then there is the huge reserve army of women whose talents and energies are not totally absorbed by their families.

And why will this be the case? Because organisations will be structuring themselves differently to cope with the changes in technology and the economic realities. Outsourcing or contracting out is becoming the norm as organisations recognise that focusing their activities on the core - on what they do best - their competitive advantage, with the support of outside agencies, contractors and part time help, is what will ensure their survival. ‘Just in time’ manufacturing strategies are the

antithesis of having slack resources, making for stock, spare capacity etc.

Number Two

McKinsey has estimated that 70% of all jobs in Europe in the year 2000 would require cerebral skills rather than manual skills. This is a complete reversal of the world of work 50 years ago. Now I know that it is not possible to be precise about these things. Is there a clear-cut distinction between a job requiring brain skills and a manual job? A HGV driver has to know about mechanics, load bearing and distribution, hazardous chemicals etc. But with the growth of the knowledge economy it is difficult to dispute the degree of brain-power now demanded.

What is more controversial and alarming is that McKinsey estimates that one half of these brain jobs will require the equivalent of a higher education or a professional qualification to be done adequately. If true this means that some 35% of an age group should be entering higher education or its equivalent if the workforce is going to be adequately skilled. The current percentage in Britain is 18% and in the North East of England it is 16%. Only Japan, US and Taiwan have university populations of approximately the right size.

Number Three

By the year 2000 there will be almost one quarter fewer young people leaving school than in 1985. This may seem like an end to youth unemployment but what it actually does is put more pressure on the smaller number to acquire the necessary brain skills needed by the organisations of today and the future. In North East England 25% of our young people leave school with no qualifications, and what is more con-

cerning: we have almost 20% leaving school and not becoming active in the economy at all. These teenagers are not more innately stupid or less able to learn than their counterparts in other European regions. They are the inheritors of a tradition and culture that held that education and learning was for the few. This is one of the major challenges that this region faces in the coming years - bringing about a culture shift.

There is an opportunity here though for those who want to enter or re-enter late in the world of work; particularly for women. The squeeze on the qualified young will encourage employers to turn to other sources of skill.

Number Four

In 1995 there were less than 9 million people over 65 in the UK. By 2030 there will be 50% more - almost 14 million. By 2021 41% of the population will be over 50. It is happening because in richer countries it is becoming harder to die. This begs the question - what will they live on, what will they do, who will care for them. Will tax rates be punitive for those in work to support this ageing population? Will the state find some way of recognising the work that this generation will be doing in the voluntary, caring, sectors? And will organisations find a way of using the energies of this (hopefully healthier) older population?

Number Five

15 years ago I could expect to contribute 100,000 hours of work in my lifetime. 47 hours a week for 47 weeks for 47 years - 100,000 hours give or take a few. The length of a job life for my 8-year-old son will be somewhat different. Again according to Handy the most he can expect to work is 45 hours for 45 weeks for 25 years - more part time work, entering the

job market later as he stays on longer in higher education, more possibility of earlier retirement. The net result will be a full time job totalling 50,000 hours. Work will not stop after 50 - it will just be a different kind of job.

The numbers will not work out precisely and they are not the result of policy decisions or governments - they are an instinctive response to a changing environment.

The main features of this changing environment are:

A move away from labour intensive manufacturing - 40 years ago half of workers in the industrialised world were involved in making or helping to make things. In 2015 it will be down to 10%. The demise of mass manufacturing has led to the end of the large employer.

A move to knowledge based organisations. Organisations that receive their added value from the knowledge and creativity they put in rather than the muscle power. The result is not a requirement for different people but different organisations - they are smaller, flatter, younger.

A move towards service. Affluent societies breed dependency. On others to fix the roof, dig the garden, do the cleaning, do the cooking. Like knowledge-based organisations we contract out things we are not good at. Hence breed a raft of services.

Skills

In this new world of work skills will be our currency. The regional economy is diversifying. Traditional industries rep-

represent a declining proportion of the employment base. Areas of future job opportunities will be in the professional, technical, knowledge based industries. There are insufficient people with the right skills, qualifications and experience to meet demand in these industries across the region. 40% of firms in the North East of England region are having recruitment difficulties according to a report produced by the TECs. 20% identified skills gaps within their existing workforce.

What are the implications for skill identification, development and skill acquisition? Whose responsibility is it? What does it mean for the individual

Certainly we have identified that there will not be a job for life. Many of us will be employed in smaller organisations where the paternalistic employer approach is no longer evident. There is a shifting responsibility for keeping skills up to date towards the individual.

And what are these skills?

Willingness to work and an understanding of the culture of work

Creativity and problem solving

Flexibility

Communication

Willingness to acquire and update skills - lifelong learning

Aptitude towards technology

And underpinned by numeracy and literacy

And employers will need to articulate these skills more clearly, be more dynamic in the way they plan their skill requirements and will need to understand the transferability of skills

Lets think laterally about this changing nature of work.

Lets change the language - stop talking employees and employment and talk about activity - some of which is paid for. The word unemployment would then cease to be useful. Put everyone on welfare - everyone gets an initial social dividend and it is repaid progressively as you earn.

Distribute the 2000 hours of work in a year in the way that suits the individual and the organisation better - why 40 hours over 5 days?

Change the reward structures - reward dentists for the number of healthy mouths rather than the number of fillings. Reward educators for the skill acquisition rather than the number of qualifications

Replace the national curriculum with an individual curriculum. *[Editor's note: the new emphasis in UK adult learning is the Individual Learning Account, a portfolio approach. So why not for our youngsters?].*

Why not subordinates appraising bosses?

Threats

These changes can have positive and negative impacts and these are just some of the negatives. The challenge is to choose how we use these technologies and emerging social patterns to our advantage rather than to our detriment.

To pick on some of them. BSE and genetically altered foods are only the beginning of the effects of disrupting the food chain. If the whole world reached the standard of living of

western societies we would need 7 planets to provide the necessary resources. And we only have to experience the chaos caused by a power cut to realise the dependence we now have on technology.

Questions:

Have our education and training systems the capacity to meet the needs of this new world of work?

Do individuals recognise their responsibility to develop their own employability?

Does the infrastructure support the needs of the old world rather than the new and how can this be more responsive and give just in time support?

How creative can we be in reducing the threats of this new world?

Editor's postscript:

Over to you. How does Sue's analysis relate to the organisation you work in and your place in it? What ministry challenges and opportunities do changes in the organisation throw up? How do you and your colleagues at work experience, respond to and manage change and its effects? Where is our God in change?

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**International Meeting of Worker Priests,
Strasbourg 2nd to 4th June 2001.**

Peter King

A joyous meeting at the Palais des Fetes of some 450 priests, brothers and sisters to reflect together upon our calling and to share and proclaim in the rich diversity of our ages, experience and ministry the unity of the Spirit at Pentecost.

The theme of the opening address was both challenging and uncompromising:

“ The worker priest expresses a way of making the Gospel incarnate in the world, in the real life of each day, by participating in the life of men and women who work or have no work, who are rich in human values, but who are crucified daily by being exploited, used and ‘thrown on the rubbish heap.’ The worker priest also has a “Ministry” on behalf of each person to build up the body of Christ in which each one has his or her place, role and fulfilment; a ministry which, through work, is a witness; a ministry which is expressed in the commitment undertaken with other workers; a ministry which is exercised through solidarity, justice and fraternity, in struggling for the dignity of each person, in being at the service of the excluded and marginalized, in searching to improve an existence which is sub-human; a ministry which is lived in fidelity with a people to whom we belong; a ministry which tries to be aware and to live the passage of a people in becoming the People of God.”

Many countries were represented. France [343], Germany [21], Belgium [21], Spain and Portugal [12], Italy [28], Chile, Canada, Korea, Algeria, Colombia and South America, Sri

Lanka, Japan, Slovakia and UK [5]. UK: Barbara Terlau, Margaret Joachim, Phil Aspinall, Peter King and John Sherrington “flying the flag”.

On the Saturday afternoon 8 countries presented papers on aspects of the ministry. “The precariousness of work” and “living in Community” were the contributions of the British group. Other papers included “working conditions are changing-not our fundamental beliefs” and “searching for the centre at the margin.”

The presentations highlighted issues and themes for consideration in group sessions and in presentations in the course of the weekend. Such themes included:

- the struggle to live together and to travel the same road;
- globalisation and the labyrinth of new technology and information;
- the changing patterns of work and living in response to the economic imperative;
- the growth of the climate and condition of the individual and the loss of group solidarity;
- the need to ensure that working becomes the place of human creativity and the best means of expressing the possibility of each;
- constructing the future by living out what one believes.

Sunday opened with thirteen workshops each exploring aspects of various themes. “Work and exclusion”, “Globalisation and alternatives”, “Rediscovering God in Secularisation”; “Church, Laity and Ministries”, “Migrants and Refugees”. Each group was asked to sum up the essence of their deliberations in prayers, offerings and graces to be presented as part of

the celebration of the mass at Pentecost.

The Bishop of Strasbourg presided at the mass, where all gathered around a very large table in the centre of the hall. Songs and chants, words and images provided a rich and moving celebration of the Holy Spirit.

After a very lively lunch the national groups met together to prepare a further presentation for Monday. The British group, together with Zita Izdinska of the Slovak Republic and a seminarian from Sri Lanka sat on the steps of the Law Courts to deliberate. There were no crowds breathing in our words of wisdom but rather some very curious onlookers who thought that we were staging a “sit in.” It is dangerous to be “too holy”. A boat trip around the City and a splendid buffet with lots of wine restored the balance! Alsace wine is to be recommended.

On the Monday morning the deliberations of each national group were presented. The English-speaking group expressed the need to move away from the stereotyped analysis and towards a new critical analysis of the institutions and reservoirs of power. There is a need to hear the younger voices of those who work in new business and industrial contexts. We need to have the courage to look for God in new and unexpected places. The future must be opened to the disadvantaged. Secularisation demands from us to be more faithful than ever. It requires a big effort to build a new language to talk about what really matters and about God.

Many papers were presented, which will provide much to consider and reflect upon.

The tone of the meeting was not studious and sombre but rather a release of energy and excitement; a mixture of faith and political action; a belief that what we do does make a difference. Many of the French priests found themselves outside the formal institution of the Church in 1954, when the Pope found their influence to be dangerously radical and withdrew his support for the Worker Priest movement. Aged and long in retirement, the spirit of courage, independence and of mission shone in the faces of the “old guard”. The youthfulness of others there ensured that the baton would never be dropped but would be carried on. The Priest worker is an enigma; a counterweight to the institution; an explorer of new and difficult paths; a prophet; a friend and fellow worker. Who do ‘they’ say that I am?

I was struck by the volume and quality of the books on sale, dealing with the life of the faithful in the realm of work. A number of worker-priests are putting pen to paper in recounting their experiences in working out their faith. There is still much to share and more to learn. It was a refreshing experience to share stories and thoughts in such an atmosphere of friendship, tolerance and adventure. My French also began to improve!

Postscript

The Pretres Ouvrieres now have a website. If your French is good enough, you can keep up to date:

[HTTP://members.aol.com/pretreouv/](http://members.aol.com/pretreouv/)
”Merci de vos reactions.”

New Books on Worker Priests

The bookstall at Strasbourg had several new books on the history and future of the Worker Priest Movement. I have included a short selection for those of you who feel your French is up to it .

Bernard Gardey

La foi hors les murs

Karthala, 2001

Paul Angelade

* *Pretre-ouvrier forgeron*

Karthala, 2001

Rene Poterie & Louis Jeuselin

* *Pretres-Ouvriers: 50 ans d'Histoire et de combats*

L'Harmattan, 2001

Jean Desalily

Pretre-ouvrier, Mission de Paris 1946-54

L'Harmattan, 1997

Jean Olhagaray

Ce mur, il faut l'abatre

Atlantica 1999

Jean-Marie Huret

La question perdue

Desclee de Brouwer 1998

These can all be obtained from:

M Arnaud Malledant,

La Route du Livre,

14 bis, rue de la Republique,

77170 Servon,

France.

Peter King or I have copies of those marked with an asterisk.

Phil Aspinall

Out of England

Charles Ayers, former moderator of Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers (USA).

This article appeared in APT's newsletter, "Tent Talk", and that of NASSAM, its Episcopalian equivalent. It is reproduced by kind permission. Charles is a farmer/pastor in Kansas.

The regular presence of Phil Aspinall and his representation of CHRISM at our APT/NASSAM meetings has been enriching for me and I have regularly been enticed by the invitation to attend Chrism convocations. The problem has generally been timing, as their annual fall gathering is right in the middle of our wheat planting. In June 2000 CHRISM planned a weekend retreat in conjunction with the European Worker Priest Assembly in London. It provided an excuse to figure out how to make a trip to see a portion of the UK, to connect with agricultural issues there, and to attend the CHRISM/Worker Priest gathering.

A powerful opportunity was discovered in the process of planning and enjoying the trip. Joan and I were graciously and warmly welcomed in the homes of numerous CHRISM members who knew of my agricultural interests. It was absolutely marvellous to be passed from one new friend to the next. The commonality of our shared journeys, blending secular endeavor with ecclesiastical labor, enthusiasm for ministry, discovered frustration with institution experienced, hunger for new experience of justice in the context of grace; we were only strangers for a brief moment. The power of the opportunity was in discovering the network and the provision in travel with like-minded people across the country.

The lasting impression of our journey is more of similarity than difference. My head tends to grasp global and relational dynamics first and details more slowly. The differences are in the details. In agriculture we are encouraged here in the US to view UK producers as our adversary and competition. The competition is fostered at the national and corporate level, not in the barns or behind the plow. The American and UK independent producer suffer under the same triune anxieties:

1. national policy,
2. corporate inroads and manipulations,
3. environmental extremism dictating practice.

The details reside in history of land ownership, government process, access to technology, shifting social norms, fiscal infrastructure. I am guessing the experience would be similar should one visit Japan, Germany, Brazil, Australia etc. We would be better served if we could recognize our commonality rather than claim adversarial position. Community is no longer just down the road or across the street.

The energy and enthusiasm of the CHRISM gathering was not unlike APT. It is clearly a supportive and informative dynamic. The diversity of secular employment perhaps reflected greater proximity to urban centers. The topic for our meeting solicited conversation, concern and frustration about the church structure and the need for transitional experience as the future becomes today. The authority, influence and anxiety generated by the Anglican Church were interesting to see. Theology shaped by secular labor seems to be something we all easily claim, how to theologize about our call or ministry and find reconciliation with the institution seemed to be a shared angst. It is a challenge to be attentive to those we seek

to serve and be comfortable in that wilderness rather than worry about those we view a powered with endorsement.

The European Worker Priests are one step further out than our claiming. The focused outreach to the dispossessed and the moderation of their lives is a powerful witness. The communal integrity could be unsettling to our more capitalistic sensitivities. These are remarkable folks. It was a Pentecost weekend and a multiplicity of languages was prevalent as well as a pervasive sense of the spirit. Our limited ability to communicate (lacking French) did not dampen the celebration and the joyful effort to connect.

The transition from CHRISM to Worker Priest gathering was to share in Evensong in St. Paul's Cathedral. The St. John's Boys Choir of New York sang the service, ironically. All the way to London to hear New York!! Then again there was something most appropriate about the sound reverberating around the historic walls and domes, time past and new connections so present. Each of us from our operate spaces finding ourselves brought close joining hands and hearts to claim a shared and common future. It was a good trip!!

* * * * *

Christians at Work has a new National Director, Brian Allenby. Brian has been a Pastor in Newcastle-on-Tyne for the last 10 years. We wish him every blessing in his new post.

* * * * *

MSE and its relationship to
“primary ministry in the church”

CHRISM was copied in on the following exchange between two prominent Tentmakers (the moniker of US MSE brethren). Getting the right title for this item was not easy: after all, the church is the root of the ministry we participate in.

The issue discussed - how far should self-supporting ministers be seen as primarily there to provide ministry in local churches – is one faced here too. It is probably true to say that most NSMs, OLMs, Readers, Lay Preachers and so on see ministry in terms of activity in the local church. The churches themselves appear to either tacitly endorse or actively promote this view. Much of what follows will sound uncannily familiar to British ears.

*The opening remarks come from **John Hasenjaeger**, Moderator of the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers.*

Now for something that I'm really frosted about. Some of the PC (USA) folks may get Presbyterian Outlook; if you don't, of whatever denomination, try going to www.pres-outlook.com, and look up the article by Gustav Niebuhr in the 7.May.01 issue [v.183 no.17], "Three Ways to Solve the Pastor Shortage." What are his 3 ways?

1. Emphasize Commissioning. Look at what kind of message Niebuhr would have us give young people about vocation -- absolutely hostile to TM [Tentmaker], dual role careers of *any* kind - I hope no one takes his ad-

vice on this one.

2. Raise salaries! Well, I wouldn't object, if I were getting the salary, I suppose. But how would Niebuhr deal with the real shortfall of \$\$ already? Yoking, salary equalization, pairing with large church-- but not a whiff of TM; and when he talks about "commissioning," he certainly doesn't mean commissioning *lay pastors*!
3. Having Fun!!! Now, I'm all for this; and I think TM is part of the key to having fun in ministry and not burning out. But Niebuhr's key to "having fun" is to establish the monarchical pastorate, *heightening* the professional status and power of pastors to "set the agenda" for the congregations they serve!?!?!?

He finally reveals the heart of his thought at the end when he admits, "This is risky and on the surface [sic] very un-Presbyterian." As if that's not outrageous enough, he goes on to claim, "But it defines the parity of the ministry in a new way. Church members have their primary ministry in the world; pastors have their primary ministry in the church." He thinks that would make the ministry "fun"; as a TM, I can't imagine anything less fun, or more destructive for the ministry of the church in the 21st century. I think it's the way of death, for the church.

O.k., so why don't I say what I *really* think? So what do *y'all* think???

David Damon, Editor of NASSAM's newsletter, takes up the theme.

John: you uncorked a good one.

Looked up the cited site, couldn't find the Niebuhr article but found much more. The paper from the great plains people to the GA specifying an encyclopaedia of ills within the church could have been written for all denominations. Lots of grief. I see a loss of faith in tradition plus a loss of faith in authority and a general dumbing down - i.e. school, church, music, theatre, museums and others.

Tentmakers seem to come in one of three varieties.

1. Extra-institutional people, who are trying to cultivate significance to the institution, making their extra state legitimate.
2. Extra-institutional people who are trying to make the institution and its message significant because reality got lost some place, some how.
3. Lastly there are tentmakers who appear to believe both message and institution are off the mark - at the best confused, at the worst irrelevant, if not plain wrong.

Three stories come to mind.

First is the one about the little boy who came in from the playground and asked his mother where he came from. After a suitable detailed and lengthy explanation of the birds and bees the boy broke in with exasperation, "Jimmy says he is from Cincinnati, where am I from?" God is the answer but do we know the question? (That is my major contribution to theological thinking.)

The other two stories are the familiar ones of the Emperor's clothes and King Canute. It took a little boy to say "fraud, who are you kidding?" in the first and the King's effort to hold back the tide with his majesty obviously got him royally

soaked. The application of the stories to all that preceded is obvious - I think. It is the state in which we are found. We have misunderstood and find ourselves fraudulent, transparent and defeated.

The focus is not on the contents but on the can. Some of us are busy fussing with how to open the can (even the label) and still others aren't even sure about the contents and others aren't even sure either can or contents are needed.

Editor's postscript:

A question I am regularly asked is "What is the church for?" What the question means depends on who is asking, but it begs another: what does the church think it is for? MSE brings a unique perspective on the possible answers and makes a unique contribution to Christian ministry. Problem is: the churches as institutions don't always appreciate the unique.

The Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers hold their annual meeting in Houston, Texas, 26-28 October, jointly with NASSAM (National Association for the Self-Supporting Active Ministry). Details from Phil Aspinall.

* * * * *

"Christian Life and Work"...

... is the title of a new resource pack produced by Mark Green and the London Bible College. It is based on Mark's book "Thank God it's Monday" and also includes a two-hour video with six sessions for group work and accompanying notes. There are many pieces on the video from people in various kinds of work and how it relates to their Christian faith.

Further details can be obtained from London Bible College

or Christians at Work.

An appeal from India

The CHRISM website is attracting an increasing number of visitors. The following appeal resulted from one of these.

“Dear brother and sisters in Christ. Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am pastor Johnson Mathews from India. I have dedicated my life according to the call of our Lord.

*Pray for our ministers *Pray for the evangelisation of India. Communal organisations are attacking the missionaries in different parts of India and the government is doing nothing to stop it. * Sponsor a missionary (\$50 per month) *Sponsor a bible college student (\$40 a student per month). Contribute to buying a new Gospel van (\$15000). Sponsor an open-air meeting (\$50). Sponsor a bicycle for an evangelist (\$45 a cycle) Sponsor P.A system and musical instrument for the gospel team (\$2500). Sponsor a chapel for worship (\$6000).

When you discover the unique contribution that you can make to the advance of the kingdom, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, it can be truly life changing. Be a part of our ministry.

Rev. E. Johnson Mathews
P.O.Box.17, D. No.48-13-1A, Opp. Siddhartha Medical College, Vijayawada-520 008, Andhra Pradesh, India.”

* * * * *

**"How God Looks -
if you don't start in Church" ...**

... is the title of **Michael Ranken's** newly published book. A full review will appear in the next edition, but details are: ISBN 1-870652-32-0, £8.

Publisher: Cairns Publications, 47 Firth Park Avenue, Sheffield, S5 6HF; www.cottercairns.co.uk.

It was pleasure to see Michael at the CHRISM AGM and Conference, full of his trademark wit and wisdom!

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CHARTS of a New World
Making Global Connections with Local Experience

CHARTS of a New World is a programme to support those committed to development education in the local communities of Britain. Its focus is on how to effectively engage local communities in the global agenda. Charts is about developing the most effective ways to engage locally with global issues. The Programme has a particular interest in the use of the arts and culture.

Globalisation is bringing many issues home as well as seeming to take many things out of our hands. Are the issues in the South that different from those in so-called developed world? Crumbling local economies, trade miles, refugees, migration, global warming, debt, social exclusion, cultural diversity, racism, world wide marketing, support for indigenous cultures, unsustainable development and poverty - the list that links us

is probably endless.

Mapping the issues and making the links is vital - but finding the ways to bring about change is the real task. How do we work effectively amidst our local economies, societies and neighbourhoods to bring about the transformations the planet requires?

“Ministers-at-Work” readers can find out more from:
Charts, c/o 11 Birch Grove, Rusholme, Manchester M14 5JX
Phone +44 (0)161 224 4985
FAX +44 (0)161 224 9533

* * * * *

Ship of Fools

For a different take on the world from a Christian perspective pay a visit to www.ship-of-fools.com. A recent feature was a competition for the best text message version of The Lord’s Prayer (for the uninitiated, its for sending on a mobile ‘phone). Entries had to reduce the number of characters in traditional form by over half to get down to the message capacity. The winner, and other entries, can be viewed on: <http://ship-of-fools.com/Features/RFather.html>

My personal favourites begin:
God@heaven.org, *and*
r pa in evan, respect.

Ship-of-Fools will also be attempting a worship first at the Greenbelt Festival (Cheltenham Racecourse, August 24 – 27): a service by cell phone! Micro-liturgies will be broad-

cast to mobile 'phones at the festival.

2001 CHRISM AGM and Conference

At the AGM Margaret Joachim handed over to Sue Gibbons as Presiding Moderator. Margaret's lively and humorous style has been much appreciated! Hugh Lee came to the end of his three-year stint, which handily ties in with his recent election to C of E General Synod. Hugh's contribution to CHRISM is inestimable. Elected as Committee members were Geoff Jaques, Peter King and – a welcome return – Stan Frost.

Keith Holt's lucid exposition of the finances demonstrated once again how fortunate we are to have such an able Treasurer. Oh yes, Rob Fox was re-elected as Editor of "Ministers-at-Work", so you will have to suffer my humour a while longer!

A full report of the Conference will appear in the next edition, but here are a couple of taster quotes:

"In the beginning was the logo",

"Only CHRISM recognizes the importance of where ministry is practiced" (and that was not from a Committee member!).

The topic was the use of language to communicate faith and the Gospel in the workplace. The speaker, Bill Beaver, was entertaining, enlightening - and enthralled by the positive contributions made in discussion groups.

CHRISM Paper 5 was launched: **MSEs and Retirement**. Stemming from the 2000 Conference, Keith Holt, and others, have produced a well-balanced and thoughtful document.

Copies go out with this edition of “Ministers-at-Work”.

Peacemaking for Churches

November 2-4, 2001.

An introductory workshop for all who seek to resolve conflict in a church context. A practical workshop that will include teaching and discussion as well as the opportunity to learn and practice the basic skills of mediation.

Tutor: Rev'd Geoff Jaques

12 places. At Rydal Hall, Ambleside, Cumbria (residential).

Further details, including costs and bookings, contact the Warden,

Tel: +44(0)15394 32050, Fax: +44(0) 15394 34887

E-mail: Bookings@rydalahall.org

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* * * * *

CHRISM Reflective weekend

9 – 11 November, 2001

at Sutton Courtenay,

near Didcot, Oxfordshire

Booking form and details with this edition,

CHRISM

CHRistians In Secular Ministry

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*Our faith imposes on us a right and a duty to throw ourselves
into the things of the earth*

Teilhard de Chardin