

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.

CHRISM is the National Association of CHRistians In Secular Ministry

for **all** Christians who see their secular employment as their primary Christian ministry, and for those who support that vision.

To further this aim, CHRISM publishes a quarterly journal, releases occasional papers and organises an annual retreat. Conferences are held regularly and worldwide links pursued.

CHRISM welcomes members, both lay and ordained, from all Christian denominations, encourages them to be active within their own faith communities and to champion ministry in and through secular employment. If you would like confidential support as an MSE, please contact any member of the Committee (see inside rear cover).

Further information may be obtained from the Secretary or other members of the Committee.

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EDITORIAL

This quarter's Ministers at Work is an edition of three halves:

The Shape of MSE
CHRISM News
Book Reviews

As a warm-up the letters pick up the thread of communication (Paul Smedley) and purpose (Jim Cummins). Following this in the first half we have contributions from Nicholas von Benzon, Rob Fox and Eric Knowles. Each raises issues about the shape of MSE.

In the second half we have some important CHRISM news from our Secretary (Margaret Joachim) and Phil Aspinall about our coming summer conference. There is a danger that CHRISM will not be quorate for our AGM thus bringing into question all the events and activities – let alone our very existence. David Simon brings this section to a close by Reflecting with Esther on the CHRISM Reflection weekend in February.

Our final quarter presents book reviews from Phil Aspinall and Rob Fox.

You may guess that at the time of writing, I have just watched the final day of the Six Nations and apart from my confusion of Time-Ins, Time-Outs and carrying on playing even when Times-Up, I did get carried away. It's good to see groups of men (in this case) who commit time together in pursuing a common cause, make sacrifices to achieve their aims and then celebrate or commiserate over the result.

I've been a member of CHRISM now for 12 years and have seen many come and go as well as many stay. The last AGM and this year's AGM are important gauges to the on-going ministry of CHRISM. We had a development review one year and were asked for suggestions in which I suggested we do nothing for a year and see if anyone notices.

The next edition will be my last as Editor and I am going to report to the AGM on the thoughts of readers about the Journal, communication methods and any other issues you would like to raise through this medium.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Happy reading!

Peter Johnson

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Peter

By chance, I have received the journal this week and opened it in on a Saturday when I have a few moments. You are wondering if any readers are interested in engaging with this discussion.

I think engagement is difficult when people are busy (as in the readership?) but even more so when it is a print publication. We have some success in my work area in getting online discussion going - and I know that some (parish) clergy engage with things like Facebook also in bouncing ideas on things like the Sunday sermon. The key to those mechanisms is that they ask for much shorter bit-sized contribution - rather than a full article, which is what we see in the journal.

I therefore think that Alan Wearmouth has a very good point in what he writes. If there were a group (3-5 people) looking to get going some regular e-news ... supporting an annual journal (yearbook) then I would be willing to help.

Paul Smedley

Dear Peter

Recently I found myself reading a 'Life of J.A.T.Robinson' (by Eric James). I thought this quote might be worth a corner in the Journal some time.

"The pervasive influence of Christianity is not promised to the strength of a self-contained Ecclesiastical organisation, but to leaven and salt mixed and dissolved in the lump of the world's life. Movements and groupings there must be, clusters of action and sanctity and thinking, and these must be structured if they are to penetrate effectively. But basically the attractive power of love and hope, integrity and justice - and these are the signs of the Kingdom at work - do not depend on institutional orthodoxies and establishments. Ours is an age in which these things have ceased to carry their own authentication."

The characters featured, Eric James, Mervyn Stockwood, and John Robinson and others were all active in Cambridge when I spent 3 years at Westcott House pre-ordination and then came 'Honest to God'. All very old hat now, I suppose, but inspiring stuff at the time.

Best wishes as ever,
Jim Cummins

THE SHAPE OF MSE

WHY MEMPLOYMENT IS IMPORTANT

Mike Rayner (journal no. 118) is right to remind us that Christian ministry is about the whole of life. It should never be otherwise, although there is a sad tendency for ministry to become preoccupied with the survival of the church. Nevertheless, I want to make a plea for Christ to stay true to its roots as an organisation which is concerned with paid work. That was certainly the hope of those of us who were involved in its formation in the 1980's.

My understanding of Christian theology is that God calls us to share responsibility for creation. However much we may value the work of volunteers, the way of life we enjoy today is largely the consequence of centuries of endeavour motivated in greater part by the need for material gain or the desire for power. Human work seems to be an integral part of God's creation.

When I offered myself for ordination thirty years ago, it was with a sense of being called to live Christian Ministry in the midst of that uncomfortable world of paid work. A place where for good or ill human beings engage with God in the process of creation. It is now over 26 years since I was ordained. Fourteen of those spent as

an MSE and twelve as a parish priest. If nothing else the twelve years I spent in parish ministry taught me how far removed the Church is from the commercial world.

Now back making my living in the world where profits are earned and losses suffered, I am reminded of the need for Christians

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

For me that mission statement is as appropriate now as it was when Michael Ranken proposed it to our conference at Rydal Hall in 1992, even though I have at times found it too difficult to live the ideal it expresses, and have sought shelter in “churchy” things.

For me, Chrism is a small light that keeps the vision of work place ministry glowing. For nearly thirty years the journal has provided a network for ministers to support each other as they explore Christian faith in the places where they work, where they may “see” God around them, “celebrate” his presence, and sometimes “tell” the Christian story. My hope is that this will remain Chrism’s primary mission.

A postscript about paper:

I receive a lot of newsletters by email. Most remain largely unread. If I am sufficiently interested, I will print them off and stuff them in my brief case in the hope of finding a moment to read them before depositing the paper in the recycling bin (postage but not much paper saved). On the other hand, the little magazine that arrives through the post sits around. At leisurely moments I pick it up and enjoy reading it. Sometimes I turn back to it months later. Eventually I tidy it up and place it on a shelf with others similar, some of which have quaint cartoons drawn by Harry Hill from the days when it first began.

Nicholas von Benzon

2025 AND THE FUTURE OF MSE

The Church of England is increasingly exercised by the reducing number of stipendiary clergy. You may have heard about what is often known as the '2025 agenda'; this article is about it, and what it means for MSEs.

As the Church of England is more a federation than a single entity, how each diocese is addressing the agenda, and the urgency with which they are acting, varies considerably, so while for some of us the issues here have been looming larger, for others they may not yet be on the radar. For those outside the C of E, much of what follows will be familiar; do join in the debate this article will no doubt set running.

In a nutshell, by 2025 a combination of retirements and the rising age of ordinands – meaning the period between ordination and retirement is much less – will result in there being an average of one parish-licensed stipendiary clergy person to three congregations. The number of congregations is a little greater than the number of church buildings as some meet in schools, halls, cafes, and a widening range of venues. By 2025 there will be roughly two Self-Supporting Ministers (of varying descriptions, but I'll refer to all as SSMs here) licensed to parishes for each stipendiary, and about two and a half Readers. (Half a Reader – an interesting concept). This does of course assume that vocations to SSM and Reader ministry hold up. In Manchester Diocese, for example, this means an average of one new SSM and one new Reader, per Deanery, each year.

A common response to this projection, from all quarters, is that SSM ministry should be encouraged in order to fill the gaps left by diminishing numbers of stipendiary clergy. This is not only simplistic, it just doesn't add up. As those of us now on *Common Tenure* know, Dioceses have discovered the novel idea that they may be able to quantify the time licensed ministers have available. For stipendiary clergy this is a comparatively simple sum: 8.5 hours (gross) a day, for 5 days a week, with 6 weeks leave (4 Sundays) a year. (A sixth day a week is meant to be spent in study, the seventh being the day off). Many colleagues would laugh at this, and many others object that as ministry is 24/7 it can't be quantified. But if a stipendiary colleague is maintaining a reasonable work / life balance, this is what *should* be used and useable.

For SSMs the picture is much less simple, and some Dioceses have strange ideas about how leave and working time apply to us. For some, for example those retired from work, the working agreement may be for a number of days each week, including Sundays. Again each 'day' should be based on 8.5 hours, including an hour for breaks. For others the agreement may be for a number of hours each week *on average*. However expressed, or constrained by work, community and

family commitments, it is still possible – and reasonable – for a Diocese to calculate how much time it can expect from its SSMs, and Readers. It should by now be obvious, if implicit, that two SSMs do not equal one stipendiary.

So what might, should, a Diocese do? My proposal is: work differently.

A growing trend within the C of E is working collegially, sometimes called the ‘minster model’ (though please don’t assume that all minsters work like this). The model operates on the principle of pooling available resources, sometimes at deanery level, sometimes by grouping congregations. The Bishop of Manchester is clear (and, for what it’s worth, I agree) that merging congregations should not be part of this; they are organic and have an identity of their own which, if subsumed into a larger congregation, is often lost.

Two (fictional) examples may help to show how this can work. St. Trinian’s is a parish of six congregations, formed a few years ago by combining four smaller parishes. The congregations cover a range of churchmanship, from catholic to evangelical. In 2025 the ministry complement is as follows: two stipendiary clergy, Beryl and Denis; Charles, a retired accountant and SSM, who has

committed to two days a week plus Sundays in the parish, in addition to his voluntary work with the charity Taxaid; Shirley, a full-time Maths teacher and SSM, who gives an average of 6 hours a week plus 3 Sunday mornings a month; Susan, a doctor's receptionist and Reader, who gives 10 hours a week and Sundays. Between them they can cover Sunday and midweek services, bringing in others at holiday times. They have built up lay ministry effectively, so Neil, an Accredited Lay Minister, organises young peoples' work across the parish, and each congregation has an effective pastoral team. The worshippers gain from seeing and hearing different voices; the congregations are growing in numbers and understanding of what faith means; churches that were rivals a few years before now see each other as partners in the Gospel.

Whatstandwell deanery (the village exists, in Derbyshire) is made up of 12 parishes. In 2020 it took the decision to work collegially, as a deanery. Five years later it has a complement of 5 stipendiary clergy, 4 are each licensed to 3 parishes, while the Area Dean, as team leader, is licensed to the Deanery. They also employ a full-time Deanery Administrator, who deals with all admin. affairs for the Deanery, and many for the parishes. There are 7 SSMs, 5 licensed to

particular parishes (including a 'house for duty' colleague), and 2 to the Deanery. One of these, Deborah, is learning professional and plans all aspects of adult learning within the deanery; another, Steve, is company director specialising in business recovery – he uses his people skills by acting as mentor for the team ministers. There are also 9 Readers, between them bringing skills such as organising pastoral teams, editing, fund-raising, scheduling, story-telling, teaching others listening skills

Both the models can work. To do so there need to be changes, not least attitudinal. The age of the omni-competent vicar has long gone (if it ever existed), but too many still cling on to that mirage. Another obstacle is the notion that the stipendiary clergy person is more skilled in ministry than the SSM or Reader. Stipendiary clergy themselves can be the most deluded here. Somehow three years in a theological college is 'worth' more than three years on a 'part-time' training course. As for skills and competencies honed in years of hard graft in the workplace, what relevance have they to the work of ministry? There is a hurdle to be gotten over here, but doing so is a must.

Training for ministers, stipendiary, SSMs and Readers, needs to change, including Continuing

Ministerial Education, to equip us to work in and as a team, able to fulfil different roles flexibly. Further, there is no reason why 'leadership' roles should be undertaken by stipendiary clergy. Rather each role should go to the person with the appropriate skills, competencies and time. There is no reason in principle why an SSM should not be an Area Dean (I know of two), and no reason why an SSM with the necessary skill set should not be mentor to stipendiary colleagues.

Another ingredient currently missing is knowledge of the skills and competencies SSMs and Readers bring to parochial ministry. By the end of 2012 dioceses should have a good idea of how much time their licensed ministers have to give, but how many have any idea what skill sets these same people bring? If these are not known they cannot be effectively used.

Finally, a clear vision of what the models above are for is essential. If that vision is to maintain the status quo, that is a recipe for decline. Keeping services going for the sake of it; keeping unsuitable (and often costly) buildings open for sentimental reasons; maintaining outdated hierarchies because of tradition. None of these are part of a vision I want to share in. Equipping one another for the mission of building the Kingdom of God is. If what we do in church on

Sunday does not make a real difference to how we live as the people of God, then it is worthless.

MSEs' contribution to the 2025 agenda is in energising that vision. We 'do' ministry where we are on Monday, and have the skills to see, tell, show and walk alongside others as we go out together. We already face both ways, and have much to give, if we are allowed to give it.

Rob Fox

INITIAL MINISTRY EDUCATION

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to a new CHRISM paper, with the same title, that is available on the website. If you do not have internet access but would like a copy, please contact me (details on the inside cover of the Journal).

MSEs will have noticed that training for ordained ministry in the Church of England has undergone a number of significant changes in recent years. Indeed some of us are experiencing them at first hand. Other denominations have also experienced, often very similar, changes, so the contents have wide relevance. Even where training is but a distant memory, the evidence of the learning outcomes set out for IME 4-7 is likely to become a feature of ministerial reviews under 'Common Tenure', so affecting even us old-timers.

IME 4-7 is the current expression of what some of

us affectionately remember as Post-Ordination (or 'Potty') training. I have delved into it following a number of requests from MSEs in IME 4-7. My credentials for doing so, apart from being an MSE who cares passionately for other MSEs, is that, having 25 years' experience of and an NVQ4 in Learning and Development, Manchester Diocese asked me to be one of the first group of mentors for curates in IME 4-7. The Self-Supporting Ministers and one stipendiary curate for whom I'm mentor are among the guinea pigs for the new framework, and I've drawn on their experiences to help inform the paper.

The paper uses information from the Manchester Diocesan version of the IME Handbook. As this follows the Ministry Division edition with only additional notes on practical arrangements within the diocese, it should not vary from what is used elsewhere. Where commentary is added I have tried to make this clear. While detail in the delivery of IME 4-7 varies between Dioceses the framework is common, and the comments should be relevant across the country.

The Hind Report (*Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church*, CHP 2003) defined initial training and learning for ministry as the whole period from starting at the training institution to the end of the

curacy. The years following ordination are seen as an integral part of training. Initial training for ministry cannot be considered complete, therefore, until the whole training period including the curacy has been completed. The whole period of 'initial ministry education', spread typically over 7 years, is now referred to as IME 1-7.

Training implies an intention and purpose – that curates are prepared for the challenges of mission and ministry in a rapidly changing world. Traditionally (and still today) much time and care was invested in the selection of suitable candidates for ministry, and in assessment of their training prior to ordination. Once entrusted to an experienced priest 'in the parish', it was widely assumed that formation, and such extra 'training' as was needed, would happen as naturally and inevitably as the seed growing in the soil (Mark 4:26).

However, if training is for a purpose, it must be possible to define that purpose - however tentatively - and there must be a fair means of assessing whether the purpose has been adequately fulfilled or whether more needs to be done. Consequently Ministry Division has set out a number of learning outcomes, describing each and giving guidance on how they may be evidenced.

The result is more structured approach to learning. Whilst the new approach to IME 4-7 has only been in place since the 2010 ordinations, it is possible to identify areas of concern. One of the first features picked out for criticism was the provision for two 'levels'. All curates, stipendiary or otherwise, must work towards assessment at the end of IME 4-7, at the appropriate level. This may be either:

General level - what is expected of all ministers at the end of their initial training period, or

Enhanced - what is expected of a curate moving to an incumbent-level post.

The 'enhanced' level reflects the greater leadership responsibility and the ability to supervise others which is typical of an incumbent-level post. Whilst there is some reference to working as a team under 'Leadership and Collaboration', a greater emphasis on team working would be more appropriate to the roles incumbents will be expected to fulfil in the next ten years or so. Some have also seen in this a watering down of standards. My own view is that it is a pragmatic approach to a changing landscape; SSMs have the opportunity to demonstrate 'enhanced' level competencies. It would help if the guidelines made

it clear that these can be demonstrated with examples outside the local church.

Another concern is the over-emphasis, especially in the way the guidelines are read, on the parish. Ministry Division would do the Church of England a great service by publishing guidelines showing how non-parish examples can demonstrate that the learning outcomes are being met. For example, demonstrating effective leadership need not be solely “within the Church”, and whilst it is important for curates to learn about official records and requirements (marriage, baptism), they may have many years of experience of data protection (referred to under “Ministry”) through their work. Self-Supporting Ministers bring a wealth of expertise and experience with them: it should be recognised and used effectively.

The guidelines also highlight a weakness in the Church of England’s approach to licensing. One curate I know of is a long-standing member of a hospital chaplaincy team, but on ordination had to be licensed to a parish church as there is no legal provision for a curate to ‘serve their title’ other than in a parish.

The framework and guidelines for IME 4-7 are not without fault. However the whole approach is a

significant step change in the way post-ordination is seen by the Church of England, and incorporates good professional practice. This is a work in progress, but one to be supported and refined. Many MSEs have significant expertise in learning and development that the Church could and should be using. If you have such expertise, and the time to use it for your diocese, I recommend contacting your training officer. Most will welcome you with open arms.

Rob Fox

THE 'UNEMPLOYED' MSE

While I was at work I regarded the “product” as part of my ministry. The product could be a service being provided to a customer or it could be something that was actually built. My customer could be internal within the organisation or they could be external to the company that employed me. What I produced was my participation in God’s ongoing act of creation.

“May the time come when men.....shall be unable to give themselves to any one of their tasks without illuminating it with the clear vision that their work – however elementary it may be - is

received and put to good use by a Centre of the universe.” Teilhard de Chardin “Le Millieu Divin”

I therefore placed whatever I produced on the altar as part of my offering to God. Teilhard de Chardin’s meditation “The Mass on the World” was the result of him being without bread, or wine or altar: “I will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world.” I saw myself in a similar situation in my working life.

There had been other aspects of my ministry at work such as the incarnational one of being a sacred presence and of contributing to the coming of the Kingdom through dealing with issues. But then came retirement and with it the question “What do I lay on the altar now that I no longer go to work?” This question became more and more important as time passed and I struggled to find an answer.

I have been a Squadron Chaplain in the Air Training Corps for 25 years and after I retired I took on the Wing Chaplaincy and now am a Regional Chaplain. I knew that in some way the answer for me lay in the work I was doing with the ATC but I was not able to work out “why?” I offer a few thoughts on the conclusions I have reached

so far. I stress that this is what I deem to work for me but the approach might be of interest to others who are troubled by the same question as a result of no longer being in paid employment. The “why?” lies in the nature of the ministry of an MSE. In a section of society that is not readily aware of the presence of God my ministry lies in:

being a sacred presence;
being a bridge;
contributing towards the establishment
of the Kingdom;
uplifting the vision of humanity towards
that which God wants us to be.

I lay upon the altar my work within the ATC and my share in:

influencing the lives of
the next generation;
helping to shape
the nature of the Chaplaincy.

So my “product” now is in the form of a “service” and my “customers” are the Air Training Corps, the RAF and society in general. I know it all sounds very obvious and basic but I am a rather slow learner.

Eric Knowles

CHRISM NEWS

THE CHRISM AGM IS IMPORTANT!

LAST YEAR, THE CHRISM AGM WAS NOT QUORATE. PLEASE PUT THE DATE BELOW IN YOUR DIARY AND MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ATTEND TO ENSURE YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE RUNNING OF YOUR ORGANISATION.

The **CHRISM AGM for 2012** will be held at 9pm on Saturday July 14th 2012 at:

The Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre,
1046 Bristol Road,
Birmingham
B29 6LJ.

It will include reports from the officers, the accounts, and the election of a Moderator, Secretary, Journal Editor and three committee members.

If any member wishes to submit a motion for consideration at the AGM, please would they send details to the Secretary (details on the back cover) no later than 7th June 2012.

CHRISM SUMMER CONFERENCE

MINISTRY OUTSIDE THE WALLS

This year's CHRISM Summer Conference is going to be held over the weekend of 13th—15th July 2012 at:

The Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre,
1046 Bristol Road,
Birmingham
B29 6LJ

We hope you will be able to come and join in, as we explore where we find the Kingdom is among us – at work, rest and play. This is an opportunity to share our various experiences of Ministry and the Kingdom, wherever you have found it.

We plan to kick off on Friday evening with a representative from the Birmingham-based charity the Saltley Trust introducing us to their work and in particular their recent project on theological education and training for ministry in work. As the weekend unfolds we hope to share our experiences and explore various resources for developing MSE.

On Saturday we plan to bring together a panel of people to talk about their experiences and current projects, including MSEs such as a solicitor who

works in innovative and prophetic social mission through her work, a officer of YMCA Birmingham who has a key role in working with young people (for example, in housing and spiritual development) and an MSE who works in manufacturing and retail.

We plan to involve other people engaged at the interface of work-focussed ministry, with representatives from the West Midlands Industrial Mission and Birmingham City Centre ChaplaincyPlus exploring the value of ministry in work and the way Christians can have an impact on the organisations in which they work.

Here are some suggested themes to whet your appetite and get you thinking:

'Ownership': what's your 'ownership' relationship to your workplace (wealth, process, relationships, role)? What biblical insights are there into each of these forms of ownership? What would shining a gospel light into them do to change the way things are?

'Waste' – what are our attitudes to people who aren't very good at what they do (for whatever reason)? What is the bible's attitude to those same people? To what extent is waste caused by dysfunction about process, procedure and relationships (maybe even our impact on those

around us) and what does a biblical response to those things look like? Again, what does shining a gospel light into the places where we 'waste' people do to change their experience of work – what would a kingdom vision of those encounters look like?

'Radical or conformist' – If you enabled your employer/business to do what it set out to do would you be conforming to its current practices or challenging them? What does being a radical in/from the work place really look like? In what sense was Jesus radical and to what extent does that apply to our places of work? To what extent do we need to conform to be truly radical? What does shining a gospel light into these contexts change?

We shall also arrange the customary selection of visits for the Saturday afternoon, offering the possibilities of Birmingham International Airport, the National Exhibition Centre, the 15-year long redevelopment of the former Austin Rover site in Longbridge, Jaguar cars, the city centre, and, if you really feel the urge, Cadbury World.

Contacts have been made with many churches in the West Midlands and so we are hoping for a wide mix of people and a broad ecumenical

spread. The Woodbrooke Centre is itself involved in developing MSE and in March held a conference on living out our values **in the secular workplace – encouraging us to let our lives speak and grappling with how we stay faithful to our integrity in the workplace. How do we relate to the use of power amongst colleagues who don't always value what we value?**

The Woodbrooke Quaker Adult Study Centre is set in the leafy suburb of Bournville, based in the former home of George Cadbury, of chocolate fame. It's easy to reach by train, car and even not far from one of Birmingham's famous canals.

Birmingham has much to offer, with more canals than Venice, art, sculpture and a chocolate factory ! So why not make this part of a longer break and bring your partner along too ? Accommodation is in single-bedded en-suite bedrooms at the International Mission Centre just 5 minutes away from Woodbrooke.

The total cost for the weekend, from Friday dinner to Sunday lunch will be £180 for CHRISM members (£190 non-members). Day visitors are also welcome, and we would be pleased to give you more information on day rates, if you ask.

Please tell your work colleagues, fellow MSEs, and anyone who would like to explore their call to Ministry in Secular Employment, about this conference and encourage them to attend.

For more information, or to register for the weekend, please contact Sue Cossey at sue.cossey@yahoo.co.uk. Or please make use of the flyer enclosed with this Journal. We hope very much to see you in Birmingham in July.

MSE ELECTED PRESIDENT

No, not wishful thinking about the forthcoming election in the USA: since 18 March the President of Germany has been Joachim Gauck, a Lutheran Pastor.

Following the resignation, in some disgrace, of his predecessor, Gauck was elected by cross-party consensus, which, given his track record, is not that surprising. Brought up in East Germany, during the Revolutions of 1989 he was a co-founder of the New Forum opposition movement, which contributed to the downfall of the Soviet-backed dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED).

In elected People's Chamber for the Alliance 90. Following the reunification of Germany, he was elected by the Bundestag as the first Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives, serving from 1990 to 2000. As Federal Commissioner, he earned recognition as a "Stasi hunter" and "tireless pro-democracy advocate," exposing the crimes of the former communist political police.

In his youth, Gauck refused to join the Communist Party, which meant he couldn't pursue his wish to become a journalist. Instead he entered a seminary, one of the few places he could study philosophy, and after ordination served as a pastor in Mecklenburg. Since 1989 his energies have been devoted first to the downfall of the Communist government in the East, then to the reconstruction of Germany following reunification.

He has also written extensively about Communism and the dangers of totalitarianism, and was a founder signatory (in 2008) of the Prague Declaration on Conscience and Communism. On the occasion of his 70th birthday in 2010, Gauck was praised by Chancellor Angela Merkel as a "true teacher of democracy" and a "tireless advocate of freedom, democracy and justice". May the day come when similar plaudits are given to an MSE here!

REFLECTING WITH ESTHER: THE 2012 CHRISM REFLECTION WEEKEND

The Past

The 2012 CHRISM Reflective Weekend at The Briery in Ilkley took the form of a 48 hour extended Bible Study of the Book of Esther. In looking at MSE past, present and future, Esther was cited as one of the earliest accounts of the activities of a minister at work.

The Present

The discussions emerging from reflecting on the experiences of those present in the light of the ancient story may be summarised under three headings: God, Power and Myth.

God

Within the book of Esther there is no mention of God, though there is the impression of the presence of an undercurrent of intentionality underlying the sequential development of the events described. This chimed well with the experiences of those who find their ministries in places other than overtly Christian communities (e.g. at work rather than in church) because the use of the God word can sometimes present more of a barrier to being heard than an assistance. Furthermore it was noted that the presence of God

was often elusive, emerging subtly in the implicit longing for fulfilment common to all humans – a desire for the Kingdom, however envisaged. To point to that kingdom and that presence is a part of the call of the minister at work

Power

Within the book of Esther power is not named, but is clearly evident in the course of the action and the behaviour of the actors. Yet power is elusive. Those who feel powerless may readily offer a critique of the exercise of power, yet identifying its locus is difficult – nearly everyone feels that power lies elsewhere. Those who minister need to do so with competence as a witness to the Gospel message they proclaim. Authority in these spheres of competence is usually accorded by those around, leading to the ability to influence some outcomes of some situations. This may be seen an attribute of power – a power which needs to be exercised with care. For those who demonstrate competence in their sphere of work and in their faith, the authority accorded to them in one sphere may lead to a call to bring their competence from one area into the other: for example colleagues in a work-place may ask an authorised Christian minister to assist them in personal and work matters concerning ethics, rites of passage or spirituality, while a Christian

congregation might ask a qualified professional to assist in administrative or technical matters. To recognise that power belongs only to God, but that there is often an opportunity to influence situations towards the values of the kingdom is a part of the call of the minister at work.

Myth

The book of Esther presents itself as history, yet it may be recognised a mythology – conveying truth through story. Different sets of stories convey the values and truths of different organisations. One mythological framework expresses meaning in the Christian community, while another might do so in another, so called, ‘secular’ environment (such as a working environment). The mythological language used in each place gives understanding and through proclaiming communal values exercises influence over the conduct and outcome of social intercourse (e.g. meetings). The language of different institutions may not speak across the boundaries. The minister at work has to operate in the mythological language of two or more institutions, and is in a good position to both to offer an interpretation and a translation. By demythologising and remythologising, the minister at work is in a position to explain the institutions to one another, and so to make clearer the kingdom values – those already present and those

worth pursuing – in ways that may be understood. This task of translation is a part of the call of the minister at work.

The Future

The weekend finished with a celebration of communion – an acted parable proclaiming that we do not undertake this ministry alone: despite geographical and other separation we are supported by one another and by God as we are sent out to proclaim the good news. The readings – from Acts 17 giving an account of Paul’s speech on the Areopagus informing the Athenians of their unknown God, and from Matthew 6 about God’s provision and the lack of a need for anxiety [not the section on being able to serve 2 masters!] - encouraged the confident identification and proclamation of the (often) hidden truth of the presence of the kingdom.

The reflections identified that the task of the minister at work is, using the particular resources available in the particular situation at the particular time, to discern what God is already doing, to point to it, and, encouraging others, to join in.

David S Simon

DIARY DATES

Saturday, 21 April, 9.30 - 17.00

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham
(where the CHRISM summer conference is)

Quakers and Business Group: "Facing the Future",
looking at the use of social media.

Details at <http://www.qandb.org>

Monday, 23 April, 18.30 - 21.30,

Solvay Ltd., Baronet Road, Warrington.

LICC, ICF and other groups: "Telling it like it is".

Workshops and speakers on faith in the workplace.

Free.

Details from victoria.day@chester.anglican.org

Wednesday, 25 April, 18.30 - 21.15

Hymans, One London Wall, EC2Y 5EA.

Christian Association of Business Executives (CABE),

London network: "Can Christians invest financially
with a clear conscience?"

Speaker: James Featherby, chair of the C of E
Ethical Investment Advisory Group. Free.

Details at <http://www.cabe-online.org/events.php>



God Talk - 24 May, Leicester

What language can or should we use to talk about God in our present age? How is our language of God affected by rural or urban poverty, conflict, changing societies and social structures? Church Urban Fund is supporting the event and our Chairman, Canon Paul Hackwood, is one of the speakers on the day.

Find out more online at www.cuf.org.uk

Transformational Business Network

TBN National Conference, May 2012

Our London conference is set for the 25th of May so book the date in your diary now. The conference will be held at the **Congress Centre** and we are putting together an exciting programme for the day. Confirmed speakers already include Vivina Berla, European Director for Srona Asset Management, and Howard Taylor, Vice President of Nike Foundation.

Full details at www.tbnetwork.org

BOOK REVIEWS

ENGAGING MISSION

The lasting value of Industrial Mission for today

The work of Industrial Mission complements and sits alongside the Minister in Secular Employment. Many CHRISM members are also members of the Industrial Mission Association and work with or have taken placements during training with industrial chaplains.

Peter Cope and **Mike West** are Anglican priests whose ministries have been almost entirely in Industrial Mission in different parts of Britain. They have both led teams of chaplains. Peter completed his Ph.D. in Christian Social Ethics in 1991 and for many years Mike organised the national induction course for new chaplains.

Industrial Mission was the largest single outreach programme of the churches in the second half of the twentieth century. Industrial chaplains went into workplaces and engaged in conversations about whatever was important to workers. The book describes the theology and methods they developed, theologies which stress that God is active in the world and might be experienced without complex religious language.

Twenty-first century churches have much to learn from the insights of this contextualised and incarnational mission as they seek to respond to the Kingdom of God in the world.

Published by Grosvenor House Press in 2011.
£9.99 from Amazon, Waterstones and other good bookshops.

Or please contact Phil Aspinall who has some copies for sale.



Phil Aspinall

WORKING

Books about faith and work usually fall into two broad groups. Some are learned tomes, heavy on theology and light on application to the 'real world'. In others the author revels in telling us a story which, while often entertaining, is short on reflection and, ultimately, understanding of how faith and work inter-relate. Darby Kathleen Ray has produced a 'Goldilocks' of a book; it is just right - as good an introduction to and overview of faith and work as you'll find. If it has one flaw, this lies in the US spellings.

Part of a series on applied faith, the general foreword sets the context clearly: "Christian faith does not flee from the everyday but embeds itself in daily, ordinary routines." Everyday practices are considered as sites for theological reflection in relatively short books intended to be practical and accessible; this one certainly succeeds. The various authors are drawn from the ecumenical "Workgroup in Constructive Theology". Ray is a college lecturer in Jackson, Mississippi, amongst other things teaching a semester-long course on "The meaning of work". It includes a period in which the students experience living on minimum wage, to see if they can learn to make ends meet.

The structure is simple but effective. The introduction sets out what the book will do and the approach taken. Chapter One is a portrait of work and workers; Two looks at insights from scripture; Three covers the main strands in Christian tradition; and Four makes proposals as to how Christians might interpret the insights and navigate the world of work, through faith.

"Would you work if you didn't have to?" is a question posed to students on the course above. As well as the implicit question of whether we work to live or live to work, it opens up discussion of the scope of work and its impact on our daily lives. Through work, whether paid or not, our lives are endowed with structure, routine and purpose. As the author points out, our usual social opener is "What do you do?" We tend to identify ourselves, and one another, by our work and its accompanying status. Work is "a world-structuring, meaning-making enterprise." The United Nations declaration of human rights ranks work among the most basic rights, and emphasises dignity in work.

The discussion in Chapter One is well-structured and informative, noting that self-affirmation found in work is not dependent on the nature of the work itself, but how it is approached. There is an

effective example about the pride garbage scavengers in San Francisco take in being part of the re-cycling industry. Where pride is taken in working well, what the work is matters little. Work also enables consumption, and there is an illuminating exploration of how the two interact. A key point made is that social positioning is increasingly determined not by job status, but ability - or otherwise - "to keep up with normative buying practices." Conspicuous consumption is taking over from work status as a key determinant of social worth.

Work itself is changing, becoming less "embodied" (done physically), more mobile, controlled mechanistically (for example by computer programme) and increasingly knowledge based. How does our faith relate to these changes?

Curiously but rightly, the chapter on Biblical insights begins with Greek philosophy, summarising the approaches of Plato and Aristotle. Plato favoured the division of labour and saw work as a social endeavour, a vital ingredient in social justice. Aristotle went further, seeing physical work as morally suspect, a means to an end but not an end in itself. Generally the Greek view saw work as a burden or curse, the highest form of work

being philosophy - mind over body, setting up a dualism that persists in modern Western attitudes to work.

The Hebrew scriptures generally have a more optimistic view of work, tending to see it from the point of view of the worker. God is a worker, a master craftsman who takes pleasure in the product of His work. For the writer(s) of Genesis, the work of creation is not *ex nihilo*, rather a crafting of that which already is. Work is an expression of divine and human work and community, sharing in the creativity of work, but also advised of the importance of rest (sabbath).

In Christian scripture, God is described in active terms, work as a gift or blessing. There are particularly thought-provoking discussions around two well-known passages relating to work. The first, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, centres on how we might see *un*employment, while the second, Jesus, Mary and Martha, with the apparent disparaging of work, takes a valid view of what Jesus says that I've not seen before. For Paul, work is the key to independence; he always affirms it, especially 'embodied' work. James points out that work enables us to provide for the weak. Both condemn the exploitation of workers.

So on to Christian tradition. Ray sensibly selects 3 moments for extended consideration, the Protestant Reformation, the 19th century Social Gospel movement, and Catholic social teachings. The analysis of the first is particularly strong, clearly setting out how and why Luther departed from mediaeval tradition (which tended to follow the Greek dualism) and the core of his teaching, then showing how Calvin both developed this and introduced original thought. The relationship between the teaching of each on faith and on work is succinctly but clearly set out; their legacies are easy to see as a result. A consequence that particularly stands out for me is Luther's view that our work is our vocation - if we use it to serve our neighbour.

The Social Gospel movement is also dealt with effectively, for both ideas and impact. Whilst treated as a US movement, the parallels with Christian Socialism in the UK are not difficult to spot and many of the lessons learned drawn out are equally valid elsewhere. The contribution of the two key players, Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, both Congregational ministers, is explained clearly, as is the impact of their ideas. Gladden's greatest contribution was to re-align his church with the workers, rather than the ruling classes. Rauschenbusch went further,

advocating Christian Socialism (differentiating it clearly from Marxist Socialism, itself growing in influence) as a means of transforming a world in which sin was institutional as much as individual into something resembling the Kingdom of God. Both these sections are excellent introductions to understanding two seminal periods in Christian thought and practice about faith and work.

The section on Catholic social is, while informative, a tad disappointing. Much space is taken up in discussing the contents of two Papal encyclicals on work (in 1891 and 1981), and while the message of each was clear there could have been more discussion of the consequences. However there is an illuminating discussion of the Mondragon co-operative movement, in Spain: its organisation and impact on the work and workers.

The final chapter is titled "Toward a sacramental theology of work", a trifle over-ambitious perhaps, but nonetheless thoughtful. The first point Ray makes is that work is a gift, part of the 'abundant life' that Jesus promised, where, in God's economy, the 'goods' of creation, which includes work, are freely accessible to all. She looks successively at work seen as subsistence, selfhood and service, noting how each is vital in a rounded

understanding of work and its purpose. This is also applied - for example in the proposal that where the private sector cannot provide full employment, the government should do so, at wages "just below market value so as not to undercut market forces." Now there's a debate!

I enjoyed reading this book immensely. It is well written by an effective communicator who has an excellent grasp of the subject matter. As an introduction to looking at work theologically it works very well. Other books in the series address clothing, dreaming, parenting, travelling, eating and drinking, and shopping. Ray herself has written or edited books on A Christian Ethic of Ingenuity and Ecology, Economy and God. If they are half as accessible as this one, I shall be reading more of them soon.

Darby Kathleen Ray, *Compass: Christian Exploration of Daily Living*, Augsburg Fortress 2011; paperback: £9.89
kindle: £7.78 (both Amazon);
187 pages.

Rob Fox

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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