

Ministers-at-Work

*The Journal for Christians in secular
ministry*

*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

CHRistians In Secular Ministry

Number 132

April 2015

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

Chardin

Teilhard de

ISSN 1460-8693

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Editorial

Rob Fox

Call me a grumpy old Northerner but I'm one of those who think *The Guardian* lost much of it's radical edge when editorial moved from Manchester to London, creating a monochrome national press, based in London, and with a view of the nation skewed accordingly. Unlike the strong regional voices found in national newspapers in, for example, Germany, Italy and the USA.

Occasionally though we hear echoes of *The Manchester Guardian*, as was the case in an editorial on Good Friday. It followed an interview with David Cameron by *Premier Christianity* magazine and it's associated radio station, in which the PM shared his opinion that the key "values of Easter and the Christian religion [are] compassion, forgiveness, kindness, hard work and responsibility."

Now forgiveness I can understand, but, as *The Guardian* rightly pointed, compassion and kindness were trampled underfoot at Easter, and Jesus certainly did not teach that we could be saved through hard work and responsibility; work does not make us free. Socially desirable as each of these virtues is, the key message of Easter – and, goodness, it's fantastic to have a national newspaper not only get it but proclaim it, is that we are saved through the undeserved grace that God extends to us. As the editorial elaborates:

"What Christianity brought into the world wasn't compassion, kindness, decency, hard work, or any of the other respectable virtues, real and necessary though they are. It was the extraordinary idea that people have worth in themselves, regardless of their usefulness to others, regardless even of their moral qualities. That is what is meant by the Christian talk of being saved by grace rather than works, and by the Christian assertion that God loves everyone, the malformed, the poor, the disabled and even the foreigner.

"The idea that humans are valuable just for being human is, many would say, absurd. We assert it in the face of all the facts of history, and arguably even of biology. This idea entered the world with Christianity, and scandalised both Romans and Greeks, but it is now

the common currency of western humanism, and of human rights. It underpinned the building of the welfare state, and its maintenance over the years by millions of people of all faiths and none.”

I keep coming back to a core value, that what defines us, above everything else, is that we are each loved by God. If how we live and act is built on this, how can we then say, to borrow from George Orwell, that some are more equal, or deserving, than others?

Wrong-headed though David Cameron’s understanding of Christianity is, at least he does claim to have some kind of faith, which is more than can be said of the other main party leaders. One of the areas I’ll be researching in the run-up to the elections is whether our local candidates have a faith and how they relate it to their politics.

As Margaret Joachim rightly reminded us at the Reflective Weekend, most would-be politicians go into it because they want to make a difference, to help do what will help others. Some make real sacrifices: even though an MP is hardly poorly paid, many could earn a great deal more by not entering Parliament. As well as asking candidates questions, we do well to pray for them too, and empathise with those who are trying their hardest with only the merest chance of being elected. According to an on-line seat predictor, Labour has a greater than 99% chance of winning the constituency I live in. To the other 4 candidates: good on you for giving us other voices. Shame we don’t have a voting system where everyone’s vote counts though.

Putting aside the soapbox and turning to this edition, the main item is a summary of the Reflective Weekend, including a reflection by Stan Frost. There are also reviews of the Theology of Work Project and Shared Ministry Network, and the regular features on Events and Resources. This is going to be a busy year, and in the next edition we’re planning reports on the May conference on Self-Supporting Ministry in the Church of England and the European Worker Priest Pentecost gathering.

If you would like to contribute an article or review, I can always find space!

Rob Fox

'Send us out in the power of your Spirit'
CHRISM Reflective weekend, 20-22 February

Rob Fox

Shepherd's Dene Retreat House, Riding Mill, Northumberland, was a welcome discovery for the many of us who had never been before. Built in the opening decade of the 20th Century as a weekend home for a leading engineer with Armstrong's, it was given to the Diocese of Newcastle just after WW2 and now serves as the Retreat House for Newcastle and Durham Dioceses. It was just the right size for the 21 of us who gathered, with lovely views, wholesome food, and welcome tranquillity.



Photo courtesy of Bill Dodge

I find myself in the unusual position of having led the weekend and journal editor. I'll let others reflect on it and (try to) confine myself to the content, which looked at how MSEs might be prophets. We played free and easy with the structure, so how the following emerged in practice is not necessarily in accordance with the

structure of my notes, but I'm conscious of writing firstly for the benefit of those who weren't there.

The underpinning question throughout the weekend was: how are we a prophet where we are and in what we do? This is a question I've kept coming back to for several years. The response – and I think that is a more meaningful term than reply – is never the same; it changes as we, our context and our understanding changes. By way of background it may help if I mentioned some writers whom I've found particularly challenging and thoughtful, and on whom I've drawn for concepts and frames of reference.

There is suggested further reading at the end, covering the likes of Stanley Hauerwas, Jurgen Moltmann, Richard Niebuhr, Miroslav Volf and others. If you are familiar with them then it may help in journeying through the following.

In the course of the weekend, we explored the role of the prophet and the marks of the prophet: meeting God, the message, going out, speaking truth to power, and returning to God.

The role of the prophet

In our first session, on Friday evening, we took stock of where we are as MSEs – listening to each other's stories of what we do, where we do it, how we do it, and how we encounter God there. The context in which we operate as MSEs is a key definer of how we minister and are a prophet. So firstly, what do we mean by prophet, and prophecy?

The Old Testament is a fruitful place to begin. Here we find a plethora of prophets – named and not, prolific and brief. Conventionally they are divided into four types: mystics (cf. 2 Kings 2:22-23), court prophets (1 Samuel 22.5), war prophets (Judges 4:4-9), and cultic prophets (2 Kings 4:18-25). There are also 'false prophets', of which more below. Prophets do however share a number of marks.

Firstly, they are called by God. Often this call is a clear moment in time and a defining experience – see Samuel (1 Samuel 3), Amos (7:10-15), Isaiah (ch.6) and Jeremiah (1:4-10). It may be for a specific purpose (such as Amos or Jonah) or for a life of service (Samuel, Elisha and Ezekiel). In each case though the context they are called in and to is a key part of the charge they are given.

Secondly, they speak for another (God), not on their own behalf. Indeed one of the marks of the 'false prophet' is that they either speak for themselves or voice the words the hearer wants to hear. The power of what is spoken comes from the status of the one who speaks, God, not the prophet – see the responses of Samuel and Isaiah to the call. The word itself has power, arising from the authority of the originator. So while the word of the King was powerful, the word of God was more so.

I've long found the concept of the Herald helpful in understanding the relationship of the prophet to God, not least in Shakespeare's Henry V, at Agincourt. Here the French Herald conveys messages to and from Henry. As the French king's representative he is treated as if he were an extension of the king – the Herald's presence was the same as the King's presence, and the words he spoke were the King's.

The Herald also brought his own character, mode of expression, and, within the scope of his commission as Herald, discretion to the role. He mediated and interpreted the words and wishes of the King. In the same way prophets mediate and interpret God's word. They are not mere mouthpieces, but the message they speak takes on their character without losing any of the power derived from the authority of God.

Conversely, a prophet is also expected to speak to God on behalf of the people – see Exodus 32:11-14 or Jeremiah 15:1. It is a two-way representation.

There are some other, less conventional, observations about prophets to add. Most of the Old Testament prophets were insiders, speaking from within to people whom they knew well. Some were

court prophets (Nathan, Micaiah), some were probably priests (being from priestly families – Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah). In other words – God generally calls insiders to convey His message, *because* they are insiders and already have access to those for whom the message is intended.

MSEs too are generally insiders, speaking to those with whom we work – persons and organisations. On occasion this can result in tensions between MSEs and Chaplains, however I don't see a simple division here. Where a prophet was a court prophet, they were being retained as a Chaplain, and many Chaplains today are embedded in an organisation just as completely as, for example, a nurse, hospital porter or prison warder, alongside whom they work. Some MSEs also have a formal – usually unpaid - chaplaincy role where they work. Conversely, there are swathes of workplaces where Chaplains are absent (I've never worked in one), but MSEs may be present. Those whom God calls, God calls; who are we to try to define the way God works?

There were also occasions in the Old Testament when God called an outsider to speak for Him; Amos and Jonah are obvious examples. Familiarity can bring its own baggage, so it may be that the outsider has the independence to see, speak and be heard more clearly. There are times when only a Chaplain will do.

Turning to the New Testament we again find a mix of insiders (such as Simeon) and outsiders (John the Baptist). Again there are more of the former than the latter; what has changed is what they are insiders of. Where we read of post-Resurrection prophets they are insiders of the early Church (cf. Lydia, Acts 16:15; Philip's daughters, Acts 21:9). Paul is in the unusual position of being both. He was an insider when, as was his custom, he visited the local synagogue as first port of call in a new town. He was an outsider when he spoke to and in places that did not share the heritage of Judaism, such as the Areopagus. MSEs are generally insiders, but in more than one context: the place where they work and the church in which they are rooted. And we can be prophet to both.

Finally, and importantly, in both Old and New Testaments, prophecy is also marked out as the work of the Spirit, God's executive arm (cf. Job 33:4; Isaiah 40:7; Romans 12:4-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). If we are to be prophets for God, it is by the Spirit that God calls and empowers.

Encountering God

As mentioned above, a key characteristic or mark of a prophet is their encounter with and calling by God. On occasion this may be a dramatic 'moment', indelibly imprinted in the memory and experience of the called. On others it may be a voice quietly calling in the night, followed by a long period of waiting and learning. How God chooses, God chooses.

The yardstick of Biblical prophecy is that to be authentic it must arise out of the covenant relationship between God and His people. The message was always rooted in and calling back to that relationship. Thus when Hosea uses the image of harlotry to illustrate how the people have gone off after false Gods he is using a powerful image of broken human relationships; there can be no mistaking what the message is.

Thus the *personal* calling of the prophet is firmly located within the context of the *corporate* relationship of God with His people. A prophet was, is, never a freelance from either (look at what happened to Jonah when he tried to be!) The two are an essential part of being a prophet. Without God's call and our ongoing encounter the message is not God's; without the rootedness in God's people, the message has no context. Put another way, the Church, gathered and dispersed, is characterised by these two elements, the individual and the corporate. One without the other is incomplete.

This begs the question of whether our faith is mystical and personal in nature, or active and prophetic. (On a personal note, I've been wrestling with this one for years. I still don't pretend to have a complete answer, but as I suspect we all know, we learn much from such wrestling).

Taking this a step further, and to adapt a concept from Miroslav Volf, if our faith remains focussed on the experience of the ascent to God, the encounter, then it can be said to have malfunctioned. It becomes like the servant given a single talent who buried it pending his master's return, or that priceless painting hidden away in a vault for the owner to view when the mood takes him. In this sense, mystical religion, focussing on the experience of the individual, can be little more than a 'feel-good' fix. The encounter with God, as part of the ongoing relationship, is vital in character forming, but if not accompanied by a return from God to live out His message of love and redemption then religion has become our servant, our private possession. Faith that remains private is no faith at all. (*All responses to that are welcome!*)

How therefore does God meet us? (Note 'how' and not 'where'). And how do we respond?

Going out from God's presence

In the return from encountering God we face the world, live in it, interact with it, and act upon what we have learned in the encounter. While the encounter is transformational, for the encounter to have lasting meaning the return must be creative, and as we act, prophetic. For faith to be prophetic, ordinary believers must participate in the encounter *and* the return. In this sense if we Churches fail to equip our members to live out their faith in the world, we fail. An important role for MSEs is in reminding the churches of this and being a resource in the equipping.

Faith has malfunctioned if it fails to use the encounter with God as a basis for active living. This can happen, for example, when we surrender concern for and love of others to impersonal systems. Such systems are agencies in the truest sense. They deliver on the macro level more effectively and efficiently than we can acting as individuals, but if we simply 'fire and forget' we do forget – that we still have amoral responsibility for what the systems do in our name, on our behalf. The structures and systems may be essential to effective delivery, but if we surrender concern for what and how this promotes the differentiation of life into 'personal' (including religious) and 'public' spheres. Readers may recall the recent furore

concerning the Bishops' open letter on and comments by the Archbishop of Canterbury about social morality – the response that the Bishops should stick to 'saving souls' and not 'interfere' in secular matters. Linking Bishops and the prophetic may seem a tautology to some, but in this (and many other cases) we can clearly discern the prophetic voice.

Faced with such differentiation, and the resistance of so many spheres of current life to the claims of faith, it is not surprising that many Christians choose the paths of least resistance and give in. It is easier to just accommodate, fit in and accept the boundaries set out for us than to rock the boat. Some, however, refuse to play by these rules and – to use the word that caused consternation to some on the weekend – seek to subvert and transform their workplaces, communities and networks from within, living out their faith by example. They seek to create more just rules of engagement, sometimes creating alternative institutions to show there is another way, and often working within systems and institutions to transform them. They become known as people of faith, not just by what they do in their 'private lives' (such as going to Church), but by how they live in the places where they work and how they influence the firm, department, club, community. They are the prophetic voice.

Faith does its proper work when it sets us on a journey, guides us along the way, gives meaning to every step we take. When we embrace faith, God embraces us. For faith not to be idle, all our work – from doctors to dustbin-men – needs to be part of God's story.

The message

The contexts were different, but there is a notable consistency in the core message that Old Testament prophets conveyed:

- reminding the people of what God has done for them and inviting a response;
- warning of the consequences inherent in not returning to God (turning from God carries its own judgement);
- encouraging the people in times of suffering;
- offering God's forgiveness for sin;
- assuring the people God's covenant promises still stand; and

- pointing to a time when God will intervene decisively through his Messiah, anointed one.

The message was also primarily for its own day, its own context. It was always rooted in real life, real time. Yes it looked back – to God’s promises and faithfulness – and forward to God’s redemption, but it was always for the here and now. We too are rooted in a real life, real time context. The message God calls us to give is for here and now.

All prophecy has a central focus and message: God’s redemptive love and purpose, active now as it has been and will be.

Speaking truth to power

While on occasion the prophet is called upon to bless an undertaking, we more often see the prophet calling it into question. Sometimes we too have to question what is being undertaken. Similarly, it is not always right to play by the rules – sometimes the rules imposed on us are part of the problem and need to be changed.

A key part of the prophetic message is deliverance (cf. Isaiah 51:6-8), and work is often at the heart of this. The Exodus was in large part deliverance from bad work. Work has much power over us: it rules the timetable of our lives so that all else must fit around it, it provides the income by which we live.

Work is also a large part of our identity; how often do we ask a new acquaintance, ‘What do you do?’ Who we are – to ourselves and to others - is shaped by the kind of work we do and the kind of worker we are. Thus how we feel about ourselves is closely linked to how we feel about our work. If we find it drudgery, if we feel we have failed, it affects our morale and self-image. Yet God does not love us because we succeed, and loves us no less if we fail. God’s love always trumps our sense of dignity. Part of the work of the prophet is to remind us that we are more, much more, than the identity assigned to us by our work; we are first and foremost loved by God, and this is what defines us. And not just us, but it is equally true of all those around us – at work, at home, in the communities to which we belong.

Does faith inform how we work? A faith that makes a real difference is a faith that shapes how we understand the world around us and guides what we do in it. For example, we sometimes consider what sort of work is morally permissible, for us and others. A properly functioning faith points us beyond this to consider what is morally excellent. From considering where the line is and how close we dare go to it, to what the most excellent looks like. A few years ago Nike asked us to 'Just do it'; however faith calls us to reflect on what we do as well as how we do it (see for example Ecclesiastes). It leads us to think about work as more than simply putting bread on the table of the worker, but the wider meaning of work for those who are affected by it (the stakeholders).

This raises, for example, the question of using income from taxes on the income and expenditure of those who work for the benefit of those who do not / cannot. Some political-economic approaches see taxes as essentially unfair as they are not directly linked to individuals' use of the services which they fund, preferring, for example, access charging. Should, for example the taxes of those without children help fund children's education? Such approaches transfer risk from the corporate to the individual, so that those who can afford services access them, those who can't go without.

In this sense work is essential to human flourishing, individual and corporate. Modern industrial / technical societies are marked by an increasing emphasis on the individual over the corporate (more on this below). A recurring point in Biblical prophecy is that this is the opposite of what God wishes. See, for example, Samuel's warning to the people when they asked for a King to rule over them (1 Samuel 8), or Paul's reprimand to the Christians of Corinth when they fail to discern their corporate identity (1 Cor. 12-27).

Generally people act out of what they see as best for them and theirs, not necessarily out of selfishness, but simply not considering the bigger picture. We seldom do good for the sake of it, rather if we see some gain for ourselves. It makes sense for people to do good for the sake of it only if the world is set up in such a way that you don't have to act out of self interest in order to be ultimately happy, when people see that the reasons for doing good are more compelling than those not to. The role of the prophet is to point out

that only God can be the source of such a world, by changing hearts and minds.

Hope is essential to human flourishing; without a hope, or vision, the people perish. It is the expectation of good things that do not come as a matter of course. It is qualitatively different from optimism. Optimism has its roots in the present, what is known. What we are optimistic for in the future is latent in the present – that interest rates will rise (or fall), that property prices will increase, that unemployment will fall. Hope is the expectation of things that are as yet unseen: barren Sarah, expecting a child, Jesus' resurrection. The good that seemed impossible, that optimism could not see, becomes real (cf. Romans 4:17).

The norm in our society is to see human flourishing in terms of personal satisfaction. Anything that claims to contribute to human flourishing is defined and judged by whether it is experientially satisfying. One reason why faith is so often discounted is that it is seen as not being so. Faith often responds by trying to be experiential, playing to the rules and expectations imposed on it. The churches have still not come to terms with the anthropocentric shift that started in the 18th century, when the Augustinian model, that human beings only truly flourish when they centre their lives on God, loving God and neighbour, began to lose ground to a view of universal beneficence – the individual in relation to others. The latter part of the 20th century saw a further shift, towards an individualism in which the individual seen is relation to themselves alone.

The consequence for the churches is that they have been increasingly marginalised, and are uncertain of how to relate to the world as it is today. Some have responded by appealing to past authority, some by adopting the views of human flourishing dominant around them, others have retreated into being a 'remnant'. Yet there is a historical model for being God's people while on the margin, for being prophetic to a dominant culture and world view that, to begin with, hardly notices the odd-balls on the margin. It is the early church.

Miroslav Volf posits three ways of living as Christians today that he considers inadequate, and proposes a better way. Borrowing in part

from sociologist Max Weber, he suggests that there are four features of modern societies that provide a framework for Christian communities to understand how they can promote human flourishing and the common good.

Firstly - voluntarism. People are born into a church but voluntarily join a sect, so behave more like a sect! Make active choices rather than grant passive assent.

Difference – value our differences, what makes us distinct, rather be subsumed into what surrounds us. Maintaining the boundaries is important, as it is the boundaries that show how and why we are different.

Pluralism – recognise the many and overlapping worlds that we inhabit, actual and virtual, and their sub-cultures. Simply making the Christian message intelligible to the modern world is no longer adequate. To communicate effectively with people who inhabit different conceptual worlds from us, we need to be more nuanced and complex. It is not that they speak differently, they think differently too.

Relative self-sufficiency – our society is characterised by functional differentiation, sub-systems that specialise in performing particular functions. And these are self-sufficient and self-perpetuating, making them resistant to influence from outside values. The most powerful of these sub-systems are business and the media, economic and communication. If we are to influence these sub-systems we need to learn how to. One example of not grasping this was, arguably, the debate in the UK over Sunday trading. Faith groups largely focussed on outright opposition, and the perceived effects of compelling workers to work on the Sabbath. Faith response in some other European countries successfully sought to limit trading until after 12 noon, thus limiting the impact on worshippers' ability to attend Sunday morning services.

The traditional Christian responses to modernity have been characterised by the following.

The liberal response: accommodate, or be increasingly irrelevant. The drawback is, as Hauerwas and Willimon put it: "Alas, in leaning over to speak to the modern world, we had fallen in. We had lost the theological resources to resist, lost the resources even to see that there was something worth resisting."

Post-liberal: instead of reading the Gospel so as to conform with culture, re-describe the world with help from the Biblical story. However by inhabiting that story too closely, Christians are in danger of cutting themselves off from a meaningful dialogue with modern culture. To have that conversation, there must be at least some common cultural ground; we must be able to understand each other. We must also be open to listening and learning, not just interpreting the world from our own perspective.

Separatist: retreat from the world. What do we understand by being in the world but not of it? We could agree with Bonhoeffer, that we are strangers, only passing through, or with Woody Guthrie, that we ain't got no home in this world any more. However if Christian communities are sealed from the world around them they will have their own truth and moral norms, remaining external to the dominant culture. Where here is the ability to influence, to be prophetic? How can we communicate God's message?

The better way Volf proposes is internal difference. He notes that individuals do make a difference, however small, to the culture around them. We personalise it, rather than simply conform to it. Culture is not something external to us, with a life of its own, but the space in which we live and move. By personalising culture we subvert it, from within, and when we are conscious of this we can personalise it from our faith resources. For example, Roman Catholicism is often seen as a monolith with strong centralised control. But it looks very different in Peru, the Philippines, Poland and Burundi as it has taken on aspects of the local everyday culture.

Christian identity within a culture is of course complex, and there are seldom easy solutions to the dilemmas that arise at the points of friction. We may have to reject some aspects (such as slavery, Galatians 3:26-28), but the best place to transform is usually from within, the work of the insider. Remembering too that sometimes

the best way is to stand outside; the end of apartheid was not hastened by the countries who thought engagement with the white government was better but by those countries that realised non-engagement and outright opposition was best.

By maintaining an internal difference but positively engaging with culture, Christians can be engaged in the world with their whole being. Christian engagement concerns all dimensions of culture: how the person (the self) is understood, social relations, and people's mutual rights and obligations. A key challenge in our modern, pluralistic, world is to help people grow out of concern only for what is immediate to them to look and live outwards. And faith is the underpinning of achieving this. Christianity can learn here from Islam, where faith is not seen as an 'add-on', but is integrated into and underpins all of life.

An important point here is that authentic faith is never coercive when it does this. It is a certain sign of inauthenticity, of the false prophet, when coercion is present. Just as God's love is not coercive but an invitation to be loved, so the outworking of our faith must never seek to impose itself on others, but, like Paul, to convince by our actions and words (cf. Acts 17:22-end). When we speak, it should be "with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15-16), not imposing on the hearer, nor requiring something in return. The message imparted in a sense floats free with the receiver. If they choose to integrate it into their life, and ask our help to do so well and good, but what they do is up to them.

Coming back to work specifically, there are four ways in which our relationship with and to God links to work. Firstly, he is our employer, looking back to the command in Genesis 2 to have dominion over the world and to shape it. Human destructiveness of the world stems from forgetting from whom we have the authority. Then, work achieves God's purposes in the world. Work creates wealth and the wherewithal to live. There is enough food to go around, enough resources to enable all to live in reasonable comfort. Yet wealth is seen as 'mine' not 'ours', and concentrated in the hands of the few. Thirdly, in our work we cooperate with God, who works through us, in our decisions and actions. Lastly, the value of what is good, true and beautiful in our work is blessed, preserved, by God,

so it is not lost. We will be followed by our works (cf. Revelation 14:13).

How are we prophets in our places of work? How and when do we speak truth to power?

Returning to God

A key mark of the prophet is returning to God after having gone out, to 'touch base' and affirm the relationship. Elijah, in the cave, arguing with God. Jesus withdrawing to pray regularly; not forgetting the Transfiguration. Peter, agonising with God over whether the Gospel is also for Gentiles. It is in the re-encounter that we begin to understand what we have learned. Thus the ascent into God's presence, the going out, and the return to God becomes a repeated cycle. It is in this cycle that we learn whom it is in which we trust, have faith, and his faith in us.

The Gospel focus is more on the character of Jesus' life and death than his words and deeds; these are used to illustrate that character. And the character is born of Jesus' relationship with the Father.

How do we return to God's presence, bringing before him the results of the talents employed in His service? How do we bring before Him the joys and concerns we have encountered? How is our character formed and nurtured by our relationship with God?

Further reading

Miroslav Volf:

- *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011.
- *Against the Tide: Love in a Time of Petty Dreams and Persisting Enmities*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Malcolm Grundy:

- *Unholy Conspiracy: The Separation of Church and Industry: Faith and Work*. Canterbury Press, 1992.

Richard Higginson:

- *Faith, Hope and the Global Economy*. IVP, 2012.

Jurgen Moltmann:

- *Ethics of Hope*, Fortress, Minneapolis, 2012.

Richard Niebuhr:

- *Christ and Culture*. First published 1951; Torchbooks edition 2002.

Stanley Hauerwas:

- *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy and Postmodernity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000.
- *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame, 1991.
- *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, (with William H Willimon), Abingdon Press, 1989 & 2014.

See also: Miroslav Volf, "Values of a Public Faith", at <https://www.facebook.com/notes/miroslav-volf/values-of-a-public-faith-a-contribution-to-a-conversation-by-miroslav-volf/441054065941882>

Are MSEs Prophet-able?

Stan Frost

The reflective weekend at the Shepherd's Dean in Northumberland was designed to enable us to recognise prophecy as part of our ministerial function. We began by sharing experiences and then going on to recognise where and how we saw God at work. There were various stories shared which reflected the diversity of the work that we do and emphasised the need for constant vigilance to recognise this God which to some of us is often elusive.

If we are serious about Prophecy we need to have messages to share - how do we know that they come from God? Sometimes there are written instructions - or terms of a contract which just need re-iterating so that those who receive the message are encouraged to do the right thing. Or faced with choices how do we encourage those who might be puzzled, to work out things for themselves - or consider alternatives. Without being pedantic, the prophet can ask questions like 'Have you tried it this way?' or 'What would happen if you chose this rather than that?'

We were privileged to be led through the discussions by Rob Fox who has worked for some years as a member of HMRC. He shared typical everyday situations where he deals with staff who have to decide on whether tax is being avoided or evaded. This led to some contention as to whether he was being coercive or subversive, generating a tortured discussion on the difference between the two approaches and illustrated to us something of the risks we take in our efforts to be prophetically helpful. Circumstances can backfire and the messenger risks being ignored or in some cases might be shot! Thankfully we all survived and came away with at least an insight into the method and consequences of prophesy.

Some of us who took advantage of the optional trip to Hadrian's Wall and Vindolanda also gained insights on the Roman occupation of Northumberland and the challenges they faced in bringing change to the bleak locality and the first century peasants they would have had to subjugate into heavy manual work quarrying and shifting stones for furthering the Roman Empire. If the February weather we shared was typical then the Vindolanda residents would have experienced some bleak winters whilst being persuaded that a better life was possible if they did as they were told. Archaeological digging continues and no doubt the story of 1st Century life and times in Northumbria will expand as time goes on.



I said you'd regret not packing the thermals ...

You can keep in touch with news from Vindolanda at the Trusts website: <http://www.vindolanda.com/>, including the kind donation from specialist toilet seat manufacturers Tosca & Willoughby towards the conservation of a Roman loo seat!

The changing patterns of ministry

Profile of Charles Sutton, Bishops' Adviser for Self-Supporting Ministry, Bristol Diocese.

An Organisational Psychologist, Charles was licensed to All Saints Clifton in 2012 as Assistant Priest in a self-supporting capacity, and became increasingly intrigued as to how self-supporting ministers fit into the life of the Church, especially as we are rapidly becoming such a huge part of the way the Church works. In the Diocese of Bristol, self-supporting ministers (SSMs) and ordained licensed ministers (OLMs) make up around half the clergy. He also finds it fascinating to hear how other SSMs live out their calling, at work and in the parish, and also how they engage with the Church of England, which is still structured around a stipendiary framework. This interest led him to being appointed Bishops' Adviser.

Charles sees this role as enabling a cultural shift from a point at which we categorise clergy as being either paid or unpaid to a place where we have a sense of *One Ministry*, where we see many clergy gifts and different patterns of fulfilment.

He has led on a piece of research to explore the experience of being an SSM or OLM in the Diocese of Bristol. There was a great response to this and it's helped to build a good picture of what's happening locally. What is also exciting is that the survey is now being used by other dioceses and the results are turning out to be broadly similar.

This work provides a useful foundation on which to shape further work around a changing pattern of ministry. Bristol has published a summary report of the research, which represents a sort of snapshot in time. It has some great insights and some pointers to how we can move forward. The report is available for download at:

http://www.bristol.anglican.org/news/2014/One_Ministry_print_version.pdf

Charles has found the response of the Diocese in deciding this was an area we needed to spend time exploring really positive. The topic is being taken seriously, giving the SSM and OLM population a meaningful voice, recognising the richness of gifts contributed by both stipendiary and self-supporting ministers that support the Church in its mission.

The Diocese is already gaining a good reputation, nationally, for the support and development provided to stipendiary clergy. What it needs to work on is how replicate this for self-supporting ministers. Having been both stipendiary and self-supporting, Charles would also like the Diocese and Church to be better at preparing ministers for changing roles, where the parish does not necessarily sit at the heart of what they do, and so transitions between roles become normalised.

Going forwards, Charles would very much like to see an easier exchange between stipendiary and self-supporting roles, as well as increased encouragement into this form of ministry and, indeed, some of the more senior clerical roles being applied for and obtained by self-supporting ministers.

Charles identifies two factors important to him as a priest in secular employment. One, at a personal level, is that people are at the centre of what he does. Most people today see their work as the primary source for their sense of value or purpose and a key part of their identity. Part of his work as a consultant is to enable people to find meaning, value and purpose in what they do, and enable a more positive experience of work.

The other factor is 'opportunity' or the 'unexpected'. He was recently at a client dinner when one of the directors, completely out-of-the-blue, asked him about being a priest. This led to a long and serious discussion on the meaning and place of Mass and our human engagement with God. Who would have believed it!

Theology of Work Project

Review by Rob Fox

Since 2007, the US-based Theology of Work (TOW) Project has undertaken a comprehensive survey and exposition of every passage in the Bible that relates to work. The work was completed in 2014 and the resources are available at <http://www.theologyofwork.org>

As there is so much information on the website, navigation is key. The best starting point is probably "About the Project", which gives a summary of what it is and what it can offer. The main content sections are: CALLING, ETHICS, EXCELLENCE and WORKPLACE. Slightly confusingly, there is a separate section on Resources, shown just below the above headings, with easy to use search filters. The confusion comes as clicking on each of the four above headings brings up the front page of each but *below* the Resources search options, and hardly visible without scrolling down the page.

Having found one's way into each of the four sections, we find articles on Biblical passages relating to that topic. For example, Calling (or Vocation) has articles on 1 Samuel 9-16, the Task of Choosing a King, and Romans 16, a Community of Leaders. In Workplaces, the focus is on the work situation, for example Working in a Bank or Unaffordability of Borrowing by the Poor. Whilst the development phase of TOW is now complete it is clearly designed to be dynamic, growing and responding to new developments. A question for June's CHRISM Committee is therefore: should we offer access to the CHRISM bank of articles and papers to TOW, and if so how?

The Chief Executive, William Messenger, reckons that if the average church member is asked how many passages relate to work, they'd probably say 40-50. MSEs would probably go considerably higher than this, but even I was surprised at 859! No, I'm not doubting the figure, and looking at the resources, this seems to be a very useful toolbox. It ought to be too, having garnered contributions from 138 contributors, from 23 countries, representing 100 or so organisations covering the spectrum of the main Christian churches.

There is an on-line Bible commentary, plus a series of Bible studies adapted from it, suitable for use in churches, workplace groups and other small groups.

Some of the 'takes' on familiar passages are novel and engaging. Take Ruth as an example. TOW points out, rightly, that Boaz was a businessman treading the fine line between making a profit and fulfilling his social duties to an immigrant widow, her mother, and other vulnerable members of the community. By no means far removed from the choices and considerations facing businesses now: do we shut down that depot or supermarket? What will be the impacts on our workforce and the local community? Do we care? (As an aside, in my long career in tax I've encountered many businesses, large and small. In my experience those who run them generally really do care about the impacts their decisions have on others, and are hurt when the decisions hurt others).

Song of Songs is not a work we usually associate with work, but as TOW observes, what the couple are doing as they recite love poems to each other is setting up a small business, a vineyard, as a way of strengthening their love. Work as an act of love – not a new idea, but one we often overlook.

Go and explore. Well worth it.

Shared Ministry Network

Formerly called the Local Ministry Network, Shared Ministry is a national network aimed at supporting churches in mission and outreach, and in supporting church members to do ministry where they are. The website (<http://www.shared-ministry.net/>) is still partly under construction but it is still worth saving as a favourite and re-visiting as it expands.

Chris Edmondson, Bishop of Bolton and CHRISM supporter, is a leading light, and chaired the 2014 Conference, in Manchester. Running from 13th – 15th November in Manchester, the event brought together almost 60 participants from England, Wales and

Ireland – lay and ordained, diocesan and parish – to reflect on the theme “Holey, Wholly, Holy – ministering locally”.

Starting with ‘Holey’, Joanna Cox, C of E National Adviser for Adult Education and Lay Development, suggested that “discontent is the beginning of change”. Highlighting recent national studies on lay ministry, she drew attention to the report ‘From Anecdote to Evidence’. Attendees were challenged to consider what was being done in parishes and dioceses to change culture, move away from clericalism and “intentionally develop the whole people of God” as signs that everyone’s ministry was welcomed.

Well-known speaker, author, and recently-elected Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire, Revd Canon Dr Alan Billings, suggested that church leaders should watch for “the signs of the times”, look ‘Wholly’ at the sweep of social and economic change since the 1940s, and identify the issues and opportunities this presented the Church today. He drew attention to the increasingly complex relationship between Belongers, Attenders and Believers: it was no longer possible to assume those who attended church were believers, not that those who didn’t attend weren’t. The church must be willing to immerse itself in the wider community.

Finally, helped by Christopher Edmondson, Bishop of Bolton, the Conference reflected on creating a holy community. Using a pun on his title, he said that being a disciple for life, was not “a ‘bolt-on’ but the holistic integration of the whole of life”. He highlighted the power of story to transform, the need to affirm people where they are on their unique ‘front-lines’, and the challenge of creating a community that fosters and sustains whole-life discipleship.

Additional sessions provided opportunities to draw ideas from different models and strategies, including Mission Areas in Wales, Mutual Ministry in N. Michigan, i-Church, a joined-up vocations policy from Manchester, and an exciting collaborative ministry parish from North Manchester.

Details of the 2015 Conference can be found below.

Events

Redeeming Capitalism: Business, Wealth and the Common God

Saturday 25 July – Saturday 1 August, at Rewley House, Oxford. Organised by Transforming Business, and considering how capitalism actually works, especially in the light of the recent financial crisis. A week long summer school, taught by Dr Ken Barnes, of the Entrepreneurial Leadership Initiative.

Details from oussa@conted.ox.ac.uk

CABE events

Weds 3 September

Christian Women in Leadership, led by Nola Leach, CARE

More details in July future edition.

Details of breakfast and lunchtime meetings in London can be found at <http://www.cabe-online.org/events/>

CABE also publishes a number of useful articles and other resources, at <http://www.cabe-online.org/resources/>

Third North West SSM Regional Conference will be held from Friday evening 25th September 2015 to late afternoon on Saturday 26th at Luther King House, Manchester. The conference theme is 'Communicating the Gospel'. Two speakers booked:

- Bishop Cyril Ashton (formerly Blackburn Diocesan Training Officer and now Hon. Asst. Bishop there), and
- the Revd Richard Coles, probably best known formerly as half of the pop duo The Communards, and now as presenter of Radio 4's 'Saturday Live' and Vicar of Finedon, in Northants.

Conference fee (£95 for the overnight, including all meals; £40 for the Saturday only, including lunch); booking through your diocesan SSM Officer.

Shared Ministry Network – 2015 conference: ‘God’s Call – Our Response: Making Mission-Shaped Shared Ministry Work’

Formerly the Local Ministry Network, the name has recently been changed as above. The website is well worth visiting:
<http://www.shared-ministry.net/>

Lunchtime Thursday 19th to lunchtime Saturday 21st November, at Britannia Country Hotel, Manchester. Full Board for £185.
Contact: Revd Dr Colin McCarty, 1 Seymour Close, Newmarket, CB8 8EL. test_and_eval@btinternet.com

Christians at Work Annual Conference 2015, Saturday, 26th September 2015, at Rugby Evangelical Church, Railway Terrace, Rugby. ***ME, WORK & GRACE – Do I radiate something of Christ at work?***

Speakers: Charles Hipsley (Director LICC WORK FORUM), Trevor Payne (Transform Work UK). Cost: £25 - £20 if you book before 1st July 2015.

Christian Vision for Men Scotland is holding a day conference on Workplace Integrity, with Mark Greene (LICC) as Keynote Speaker, tackling the topics 'Does Work Matter to God?' and 'The Folly of the Sacred/Secular Divide'.

Seminars on the day:

- Transforming structures - ***Stuart Weir, CARE for Scotland National Director***
- Sexual purity in the workplace - ***Stephen McGuire, CVM Scotland Director***
- How to grow an effective Christian workplace group - ***Ros Turner, Transform Work UK***
- Praying into your workplace - ***Mission Scotland***

Date: Saturday 19 September 2015

Time: 10am - 4pm

Cost: £7 (excl. lunch)

Location: Letham St Mark's Church of Scotland, Rannoch Road, Letham, Perth PH1 2HH

2015 CHRISM Conference - 24-26 July

At High Leigh, Hoddesden, Hertfordshire
(<http://www.cct.org.uk/high-leigh/>)

The ABC of MSE: Assuring – Blessing – Celebrating! *Guest speaker - Richard Collins, DDO, Durham*

High Leigh is the large and well-known Christian Conference Centre on the outskirts of Hoddesden. We will explore what it is to be an MSE. How we assure people we work with. How God is in our work, blessing it. How we celebrate the presence of God in our workplace and the human community there.

Cost, from dinner on Friday evening to lunch on Sunday, inclusive:
£170 (members); **£180** (non-members) – day rates on application.

Further details and bookings: **Phil Aspinall** (details on inside cover).

Save the date – 2016 CHRISM Reflective Weekend

26th to 28th February, at Abbey House Retreat House, Glastonbury.

Details in a future edition, but see the House's website at:
<http://abbeyhouse.org/>

CHRISM Annual General Meeting 2015

The CHRISM AGM will take place at 8pm on Saturday 25th July, at High Leigh Conference Centre, Lord Street, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of 2014 AGM

3. Matters arising
4. Presiding Moderator's report
5. Secretary's report
6. Membership report
7. Financial report
8. Subscriptions for 2016
9. Election of officers and committee: Incoming Moderator, Journal Editor, 3 Committee Members
10. CHRISM nominee to CHRISSET
11. Date of next AGM
12. Incoming Moderator's remarks

Any motions for discussion should be sent to the secretary, Margaret Joachim (margaret.joachim@london.anglican.org) a minimum of four weeks in advance of the meeting.

Apologies should, if possible, reach the secretary 48 hours before the meeting starts.

Nominations are required for the positions of Incoming Moderator, Journal Editor and three Committee Members, and should reach the secretary 48 hours before the meeting starts.

If you are willing to volunteer as Treasurer of Christians in Secular Employment Trust (CHRISSET) and CHRISM the secretary would also like to hear from you. This is not an elected position but you would become a CHRISSET Trustee.

Margaret Joachim, Hon Secretary

Resources

ICF (Industrial Christian Fellowship) has published a number of short but useful articles on Faith and Work that are free to use for Churches, at <http://www.icf-online.org/icffaw.php>

Workplace Matters

... is an ecumenical partnership, under a Trust chaired by Alan Smith, Bishop of St Alban's, and Alistair Burt, guest speaker at the 1999 CHRISM Conference (we're not allowed to call him an MP since Parliament was dissolved!)

WM is concerned principally with workplace chaplaincy and also offers a consultancy service "that assesses and improves workplace culture and performance."

There is a useful selection of resources on the website (www.workplacematters.org.uk/), see under 'Centre of Excellence'.

The Workplace Ministry is US based with it's website at www.theworkplaceministry.org/ The Resources section is worth visiting, though section on the legal position of faith in the workplace is of course not relevant on this side of the pond.

It isn't often that a cathedral runs a long-term programme on **Workplace Ministry**. An exception is **St. Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur** (www.stmaryscathedral.org.my/workplaceministry).

The aim of the programme is "to get Christians together to remember the gospel and the bearing it should have on our lives as workers. At our events we take time to think and talk about what the Bible says about workers and work. We hope our events will serve to encourage and equip you to serve Christ in your own workplace." The rationale and underpinning theology are simply but clearly set out and the Resources section includes talks (including to listen to), newsletters and book reviews.

Think tank **Theos** has recently published ***A Very Modern Ministry: Chaplaincy in the UK***, a report by Ben Ryan, available to download from ...

<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Modern%20Ministry%20Combined.pdf>

The report presents the findings of a study into chaplaincy by Theos in partnership with the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies. It examines the scope and impact of chaplaincy in the UK, in its various guises, suggesting ways of better measuring the impact and focussing chaplaincy work. It suggests two primary contentions: that today in the UK chaplains are everywhere (but what that means varies enormously between fields and roles), and that their impact, while often extremely significant, needs to be considered in a broader sense than it often has been. ('Everywhere' is explained in the section on 'Scope' as in a wide range of settings; how many work places and workers ever have contact with a chaplain doesn't seem to be addressed).

Numbers of chaplains are to some extent speculative. It is noted that a report on Chaplaincy in 2014 noted there were 1,415 "reported chaplains known to the Church of England." However this appears to relate to those paid as such, and known gaps in the records lead the authors of that report to suggest the true figure of Church of England chaplains alone may be around 10 times this. The Theos report does not offer more definitive figures but notes that many chaplains are so as a subsidiary to a more formal position, for example chaplaincies to Sea Scouts, a local football club or a rest home. Even taking this into account the suggested, speculative, figure seems very high.

The detailed data comes heavily from those covered by the 9 geographic or sector chaplaincy organisations and the author has done considerable empirical research and data gathering. As you'd expect, there are also plenty of stories and anecdotes, especially in the section on impact. This section looks at four main areas, three of which are also informative from an MSE perspective as to how we can establish a measure of effectiveness; the areas are:

- evidence of where a chaplain or chaplaincy has caused a change in organisational practice;
- evidence of a change in atmosphere or sense of community;

- the impact on service users; and
- the evidence of increased organisational support or buy-in.

As well as being a fine piece of research into chaplaincy, overall there is plenty in here to help inform MSE too. And occasions to smile – such as at the tool used in some NHS Trusts - Chaplaincy Electronic Encounter Record System (or CHEERS). I'll drink to that. Perhaps Theos would like to follow up this report with a similar one into MSE?

St. Peter's Saltley Trust's latest project is titled '***What helps disciples grow?*** It is an 18 month piece of research into what helps/hinders growth in Christian discipleship. To read more, contribute ideas or get involved visit the project blog - [Watching the Flocks](#) – where there is a 4 minute video explaining further - or email Project Researcher Simon Foster (simon@saltleytrust.org.uk).

CPAS Resource Sheet 9, Ministers in Secular Employment, has been re-vamped and now includes references to and information from CHRISM. It can be downloaded from: <http://www.cpas.org.uk/>

The ***Black Country Urban Industrial Mission*** (BCUIM) has a resources section on the website with some unusual items, including a Theology of Zero Hours Contracts: <http://www.bcuim.co.uk/resources/>

Work Place Chaplaincy Scotland (<http://www.wpcscotland.co.uk/>) offers chaplaincy services and support north of the Border. No 'Resources' section as such, but interesting articles and reports in 'News'.

Princeton University sponsors a ***Faith and Work Initiative*** (<http://www.princeton.edu/faithandwork/index.xml>), "to generate intellectual frameworks and practical resources for the issues and opportunities surrounding faith and work." Output to date is largely *God at Work*, David Miller, on the history and promise of the Faith and Work movement.

Business Matters Edinburgh continues to work in and with the thriving business community in the city, providing CPD opportunities as well as Christian witness. The talks archive is particularly useful (<http://www.businessmattersedinburgh.com/>).

And finally: Holmes and Watson go camping

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson decided to go on a camping trip in the Yorkshire Dales. One night, after sharing a good meal and a bottle of fine wine at the local hostelry, they retired to their tent for the night.

At about 3am, Holmes nudged Watson and asked, "Watson, look up into the sky and tell me what you see?"

Watson replied, "I see millions of stars."

Holmes asked, "And, what does that tell you?"

Watson replied, "Astronomically, it tells me there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, it tells me that Saturn is in Leo. Theologically, it tells me that God is great and we are small and insignificant. Horologically, it tells me that it's about 3am. Meteorologically, it tells me that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. What does it tell you, Holmes?"

After a pause, Holmes replied, "Watson, someone has stolen our tent."

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 below).

**Further information may be obtained from the Secretary or the Journal
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.txt, .rtf, or .doc format) should be sent to:**

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