

Study Leave: Westcott House September 29 - November 7 2016

When I left Clergy Conference I felt it was a race to get back to the West Coast ahead of the Southerlies which were sweeping up South Island bringing the first winter snow and bad weather. The racing storm clouds already seethed and boiled around the peaks of both mountain ranges. Road works, traffic and sporadic rain slowed me down and only emphasised the sense of isolation. That is the nature of the West Coast- isolation.

Perhaps typically I set off on Sabbatical having decided on too wide a brief. Years ago when I started pottery classes I wanted to make a whole dining service! Later that evening I settled for some pinch-pots!

My plan, such as it was, included rest and thinking. Six weeks in an Anglican Theological College was a flight back to the rhythm of the day in community, Cambridge offered a real presence of the English Reformation, it sounded too good to be true.

I settled into Westcott House, Cambridge on the Feast of St Michael and all Angels, the day the ordinands arrived for the new academic year. Orientation kept them all busy settling in and I could slip in under the radar and familiarise myself with the library, the laundry and the keys! It is a Victorian, Arts and Crafts brick building, and has been added to and adapted for a very different modern community. My window looked out onto a more recent garden surrounded by married student accommodation, garden furniture, swings and wash-lines.



The sounds of children playing, gardening equipment being put away or washing being hung up contrasted with the quiet orderly pace of the old quad, to the croquet, discreet gardening and a network of pathways to rooms to chapel or dining room or library - all supported by the rhythm of the day. Men and women move from the one to the other slowly internalising the elusive process of formation. Different worship styles, singing Latin, and regular garden duty eases the obvious anxiety about academic performance or liturgical performance and the change of lifestyle. Older ordinands spoke readily about their concerns and the difficulties they had with teenage children living at home with a spouse. Not a few of them struggled having left significant work and careers and roles of considerable responsibility for an uncertain future.



So what was I there for? To rest and think. A reality check came with discovery that the libraries of Cambridge did not yield the hoped for treasure trove of material to help me consider the two parishes in Westland and South Westland. With the assistance of the librarian we trawled Theological College libraries to discover only a handful of booklets published in largely rural dioceses in the North and in the West. There was A New Workbook on Rural Evangelism (1994) and more on shared ministry and co-operative ventures with other denominations. What we understand as LSM, and specifically the progress into the 'next generation' was hardly ever mentioned. Ironically the Kinder Library and SPCK then became my go to resource.

However one cannot spend time in a library without finding inspiring material. The shelves of recent publications spoke of the urgency for the church hold in tension tradition and change. Apart from the Mixed Economy a term promoted by Archbishop Rowan Williams, writers are bringing a broadbased analysis to the situation. As an example, Ann Morisy, a theologian and community worker in London, in a chapter in The Future of the Parish System uses the words 're-enchant' when writing about the needs of addressing peoples' faith world view. She posits it is not just a matter of religious education but 'to foster the idea of the possibilities of God' that is essential. I found this subtle shift very exciting. Using the more recent disciplines of psychology and sociology, men and women trained as theologians seem to be able to get under problems and bring some light to old views.

The reality is the ordinary English Anglican is considerably, no, very much better informed about Christianity, the Bible and the church than we are. This provides a foundation for further education and training. Commissioned Lay Ministry, (undated) Carlisle in Wales encourages their teams to commit to a four year collaborative style of training to prepare parishioners to take up roles in a team of clergy and laity who together will minister in a congregation. This booklet was realistic about the challenges facing any team-

the risk of delegation by clergy or 'gatekeepers', the tensions around roles and assumed authority and power. It also mentioned the advantages and richness of developing and growing together, of coping with a wide geographical area and of recognising hitherto untapped skills and talents on the way to the whole church becoming a ministering church.

Simply living in a community and observing the rhythm of the day was restorative. Meal and common room conversations, idly basking in the generous late Summer sunshine and watching some fiendish croquet challenges, or helping the cooks pick apples for cobbler.

Ordinands were curious, wanted to know how I know Chris their Principal; how was I keeping myself busy.

Keep myself busy I did, the illuminated manuscripts exhibition at the FitzWilliam Museum, the 400 BCE Greek plays by Sophocles and Aristophanes, Ely Cathedral for Mass of All Saints, the Feast of St Luke Mass at Kings College Chapel. The busyness of the town, terrifying cyclists and incomprehensible snippets of conversations overheard along the streets. My big find was the Church of St Edward, King and Martyr. At first I never knew of its significance as the 'Cradle of the



Reformation'. St Edwards proved a convenient place to worship, and I was drawn in by the friendly Wednesday and Friday morning Mass attendees. As I got to know it better and after going to an evening talk on stone lettering I began to pay attention to the literature left out for students, tourists and visitors, I appreciated this unique ministry as a Royal Peculiar to the hugely diverse population that wandered through the doors.

Of course the centre of Cambridge is almost casually Tudor and as the weeks went by and leaves turned to golden and fell in clattering drifts, new vistas of previously hidden buildings and towers appeared. Suddenly the splendour of Jesus College on the other side of Jesus Lane from Westcott House was fully revealed.

Then it was bonfire night and time to move South on my way home.

Somewhere I had picked up on the trend to develop congregations as places of conversation—about Jesus, ourselves, our communal narrative. Why not our own narrative too? At Kings College Chapel, seated right up near the altar and the huge Rubens' Adoration of the Magi at an evening Mass on the Feast of St Luke; I heard the plangent notes of the soloist lift and rise through the incense into the darkness above, and filter through the stone lattice in a fleeting conversation with the Tudor stonemasons.



Or near that austere pulpit where Latimer, Cranmer and others risked their very lives, I wondered if I am as vigilant about my immortal soul as the Reformers were? I reflected long on the matters of justice we risked all for in South Africa. However the fact remained, the prospect of risking being burned to death casts a more challenging light on the privilege of freedom of religion, and liturgy today.



The beautiful interior of All Saints in Jesus Lane, the wonderful magenta, rose, old gold, dull teal blue of William Morris flocked wall paper, in a cornucopia of

Victorian exuberance is a superb example of the British Arts and Crafts movement. I loved picking out the gilded angels among the rafters which are only visible in certain light in the early morning or late afternoon. Preaching to the College one evening I was aware of their eternal chorus of holy, holy, holy in the gilded gloom above me.



And so South, away from the foreign familiarity that England is to those of us born under the Southern Cross. A knowing but not belonging. Leaving behind rekindled relationships. My late sister's family now three generations and roles changed. I feel so fortunate to have had this opportunity.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

TS Elliott, Four Quartets : Little Gidding

To go back to the beginning and try to know the place for the first time, had I found what I hoped would be there? Well yes, and no. So what did I expect? The sublime experience of living in a theological college in Cambridge? Yes, and much more. A line by line workbook on how to proceed into the next phase of LSM? A way to charm back-sliding Anglicans from their busy lives to join us in the pews? A pro-forma block busting mission to gather up unknown enquirers from the community at large? No, I never found these.

What I did come away with is a renewed commitment to education and a restyled congregational relationship with our Bishop. Somehow the isolation needs to be overcome.
To return to the English Reformation and a contemporary nursery rhyme..

Old Mother Hubbard went to her cupboard
to fetch her poor dog a bone.
When she got there, the cupboard was bare
and so the poor dog had none.

Widely it is believed to be about Cardinal Wolsey's failed mission to Rome to secure divorce for Henry VIII from Catherine of Aragon so he could marry Anne Boleyn and legitimate the child (hopefully a boy) she was carrying.

Today in the church it may offer a different cautionary tale. If the church cupboard is bare the poor dog will go— to the neighbour, or the gym, or the cafe for al fresco breakfast.

How are we to be church?



Steph Robinson's report to Clergy Conference kept coming back to me as I drove home. Seemingly no great heyday of attendance in spite of what we think, a steady decline in numbers and the real failure of the 'attraction model'.

A line in Bishop Frensdorff's poem A Dream, may offer a way forward, he dreams of 'A church that does not have all the answers, But asks the right questions'. The other phrase that keeps coming back to me from the seventies was the futurist Alvin Toffler warning that we beware 'driving into the future only looking into the rear view mirror!'

Attachments

Something of a reading list

Bishop Frensdorff's poem The Dream

Five Marks of Mission in the Rural Church

Vivien Harber

Hokitika Trinity Sunday 2017