

Is this what you were meaning?

A Council of the Islands of Britain and Ireland

Summarised from an article by Richard Kearney, Simon Partridge and Robin Wilson entitled 'Nordic illuminations' in the magazine Fortnight (Feb '95) monitored for the Institute by Julian Watson. See also the article on page 129 of Social Innovations (Institute for Social Inventions, 1993) calling for an independent Northern Ireland within a loose commonwealth of the islands of Britain and Ireland.

In the wake of the paramilitary ceasefire in Northern Ireland, the new government in the republic of Ireland and the £231 million European Union commitment to the peace process, it is timely to consider strategic options for the region.

A model worthy of attention is an inter-parliamentary and inter-ministerial Council of the Islands of Britain and Ireland. This could evolve from four sources into a substantial trans-insular framework:

- the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Conference,
- the British-Irish Inter-parliamentary Body,
- the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, and
- the proposed all-party talks at Stormont.

Indeed, in Europe there is already a suggestive model, highlighted by the recent entry of Sweden and Finland into the EU. The Nordic Council, comprising five nations and three autonomous regions, has been operating as a parliamentary and ministerial body since 1952. It has effectively buried the territorial disputes which used to be endemic in the Scandinavian peninsula.

Thanks to the co-operative work of the council, this former conflict zone has been transformed into a highly successful network of trans-national communities. Of particular relevance has been the establishment of Europe's first two 'demilitarised' zones - the Spitsbergen and the Aland Islands, the latter once bitterly contested between Sweden and Finland.

If an analogous council could be developed on these islands, might there not be a pressing case for declaring Northern Ireland Europe's third such zone - possibly to be followed by other intractable trouble spots, like Gibraltar and Cyprus? A neutral region in a new Irish-British political dispensation.

Removal of all weaponry from Northern Ireland should assuage one of the most vexed concerns of the two communities - security. But it would necessitate movement beyond the increasingly obsolete ideology of exclusive, indivisible national sovereignty. A major root of the conflict, now widely acknowledged, is the irreconcilable clash between two mutually exclusive claims for sovereignty over one territory. Absolutist sovereignty claims will have to be transcended if a lasting settlement is to be secured.

In this sense, neither a United Kingdom nor a united Ireland is workable in the long term. Hence the timeliness of the Downing Street Declaration's implied intention to amend articles 2 and 3 of the republic's constitution and the Government of Ireland Act of 1920. The logical solution is for both governments to agree effectively to supersede their respective claims to unitary sovereignty, and to work towards a council embracing the 'totality of relations', in the resonant phrase which initiated the British-Irish rapprochement in 1980. This would be facilitated by appropriate devolved governance operating under the principle of 'subsidiarity'.

That is, Northern Ireland could take its place alongside Scotland, Wales and a suitably devolved Irish republic and England. Each unit would function with the appropriate degree of autonomy, with the council providing a co-ordinating and mediating role where necessary - for example, in managing fishery and pollution in the Irish Sea, a British-Irish electricity and gas connector, or inter-regional trade, tourism and cultural exchanges. (It is worth noting that there are now probably as many people of Irish extraction living in Britain as there are in Ireland.)

What is asked for is not a unilateral surrender, but rather a shifting, of power - primarily *downwards* a subsidiarity indicates) to regions and localities, but in some cases *upwards* to the trans-national council.

**CHURCH
OF THE ISLES**

A prophetic blueprint for renewal

Ray Simpson

linked to the work book

Note for Churches outside the British and Irish Isles

Although this book largely focusses on the emerging church in the British and Irish Isles, it has an application for the church in many other lands.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to my many friends who are pioneering new ways of being church ; and to two Advisors who have helped me in preparing this book, and whose contributions to the emerging church are invaluable, Ian Bradley and John Finney.

Ian Bradley's tutoring of young potential leaders, introducing them to the experience of the early churches of the British Isles and to pioneers of mission will shortly bear fruit in a prophetic book *Celtic Models for the Modern Church*. John Finney's books *Understanding Leadership*, *How People Find Faith*, and *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Models* each help us to understand how to become The People's Church.

I am grateful to John Sumner, leader of Glastonbury's Quest Community, for sharing with me so much of his fresh thinking, born in the crucible of the church on the edges, and for extracts from his writings quoted in this book.

Some material in the Work Book first appeared in various incarnations of his *The Spiritual Renewal of a Neighbourhood*. This was first published by The Diocese of Norwich Training Team as a course workbook. The Church Army published it in revised form as a workbook plus a handbook for course leaders. These are now out of print.

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Chapter 1

The Dream

I am a visitor returning to the land I last saw back in Millennium Two. I decide to explore its high streets. The same pavement advertisements that were fashionable then are still there ('Aromatherapy' here, 'Hypnotism' there) but now intriguing new ones appear alongside them. 'Sister Diane's Listening Hours - book an appointment'; 'Find your calling sessions with Brother Ted'. Brother Ted informed me that nowadays churches use a blend of technology and their own unique insights to offer temperament, aptitude and vocational guidance on most high streets. This wasn't obvious to me at first, for most of the churches are cafes. Next to a small town vegetable market I notice this placard: 'Meditation sessions every weekday at midday and 6.0 pm with the brothers of Watersprings Community Church'

Technology has transformed every shop and facility I enter; everything seems digitalised. This includes churches, for they have brought to life God's Hand in their history through their digital education areas; but it seems churches are the only places left where people have the space to find their true selves. I met an inner city fellowship of contemplatives. They kept several churches as places where anyone could paint or pray with ikons. 'Churches will soon be the only environments where people are not drugged', one of them said. 'Many will plug their brains into computer gaming environments all day. Churches will be the only spaces where people can breathe freely, think their own thoughts, and be truly free'

His colleague conversed about the change in people's concept of time. 'Scientists say that the concept of past, present and future, is out of date. They speak about an eternal Now. But they don't know how to connect this discovery to ordinary life', he confided in me. When I queried who *would* know how to, he put a list of church addresses into my hand.

As I visited these, I realised that a phenomenon is taking place. It started with Black Pentecostals, but now it marks both new and old churches. Someone breaks bread and pours out wine during their main celebrations. Bells are rung, or there is a music extravaganza or dancing, or in some churches a pregnant silence. They call it *anamnesis*, meaning that at that moment everyone is back at the Cross on which Jesus Christ was put to death in the first Christian century, is plugged in to the pouring out of Christ's presence now, and is foretasting their celebrations with him in the future. This is exciting and for real; nobody who experiences this needs drugs.

The Shopping Centre Christian Village

I come to a town with a huge indoor shopping complex. It has various 'villages', each with its distinctive style. Sandwiched between the Mediterranean and the Chinese villages is the Christian village. This has shops for whole food, fair trade produce, third world clothes, local crafts and food grown organically on the church's allotments. There is a free creche facility for shoppers, and a busking area where various local music groups perform. A large open plan cafe leads into various rooms. One room has ikons and is for anyone who wishes to stay in silence. Another has a fountain and pool. Here anyone can bring their baby, a new acquisition or even an aged relative to be blessed. I observed that the person on duty was dressed in a white two piece tunic with a large cross hanging around his neck. He had eye contact with those who came. He seemed to draw out of them things they really wanted to pray about. The white tunicked man used the desk intercom to ring someone in another part of the building. He had evidently booked his visitor in to their counselling service. On another door was this notice: 'Christian Village Enquiries'. I entered. A stylishly dressed, late forties woman with died auburn hair led me up an escalator to a large auditorium. It had a stage, and the latest in spotlights and musical apparatus. 'We hold our worship sessions here in the evenings' she informed me, 'and on week days we have our body-soul aerobics.' The escalator to the third floor led us to six flats. Here the church's full-time staff live.

'How can you afford all this? I asked the auburn lady. 'Its like this', she explained. 'In ancient times tribal rulers donated their best sites to Christian communities because they knew that, although they had no possessions, they brought blessing to their locality. Today, multi national companies who own shopping centres have the same idea. They know that people do not live by shopping alone. Some of them give prime space to a Christian network with a good track record in holistic service.'

Although I was deeply impressed with this Christian Village, I feared lest the Christians had put all their eggs in one basket. Would other shopping villages be left without any spiritual resources. So it was a relief, in a shopping village a hundred miles north, to experience shades of The Call of the Minaret: The screens in each shop flashed 'Prayer' for five minutes before the tills opened and before midday and twilight. I followed the direction of the arrows on the screens. A handful of people were kneeling on prayer stools, dressed in tunics of sackcloth with cantilevered edging. One of them gave each new arrival a card containing the worship pattern for the day. There was some singing, reading, plenty of silence, and prayer for local needs. One of the seven read out prayer requests which shoppers had put in an illuminated container during the day. At the close of the five minutes the leader invited everyone to leave or to stay in silence for as long they wished. That was all. There were no ancillary projects. No catches. No charges, just a bowl for donations.

I lingered until the last person in cantilevered sackcloth was about to leave. I plied her with questions. 'Who are you? How did this come about? What do you live on?' 'Churches Together put the idea to the local shops', she told me, 'and invited volunteers. Following appraisal seven of us were commissioned. Two of them have taken early retirement, one is in a gap year between university courses, two have part time jobs, and two are living on the donations we receive.' I discovered that they don't come on Sundays. 'We go to our own churches', she explained, 'and keep Sunday special.'

The Down Town Loaves and Fishes Church

A dreary drive took me to a seedy town. Groups of junkies huddled in doorways. I loitered in a cafe until closing time. As I left I shivered, for I noticed that shops all along the street were boarded up. A distant sound of music drew near. It was a cavalcade, brightly lit, full of bright faced people each wearing an apron on which was blazoned loaves and fishes. 'Come on board', they said to bystanders; those who did so were offered broth from a heated urn and delicious-smelling home made bread.

A hand shook mine and a voice said 'Hello, I'm Guy, the leader of The Loaves and Fishes' 'What's that?' I asked him. 'We are one of the projects of the Highway Christian Fellowship' Guy explained. We fell into deep conversation. As dark drew near Guy asked if I'd like to stay the night with them. 'We live in the neck-end of this town. It was gutted after civil riots five years ago, and we moved into some redundant buildings. With volunteers from around the country, plus grants and donations, we've transformed this place. Twenty six of us live here now.' I learned that about two hundred join their worship on Sundays, and about fifty each evening.'

Guy was quite a thinker. 'The world is divided into two groups, those who can use technology and have money, and those who can't. These become anti social addicts, often violent. The greatest threat to our society is civil war between these two groups. But nobody wants to know. The 'have-nots' are allowed to degenerate in ghetto areas that the 'haves' never visit. The only agency that reverses this drain is the church. Our church here is full of technocrats who love Jesus and people. The result is that some of these no-hopers now share in our communal life; they have been motivated, and some are moving into the world of technology themselves.'

The Spiritual Nursery for a Region

This visit made me think further about the ghastly gap between the ghettos and the technos. So when I heard about a region newly named Mid Ambria, and its famed Mid Ambria Nursery, I knew I had to go there. The nursery filled a large valley, and consisted of a complex of buildings surrounded by dairy, tree, and fish farms and a forest of wind powered generators.

It turned out, however, to be a nursery of human beings, not plants. There were about a hundred long term members; these had made life promises. About fifteen hundred were in training or were testing out the possibility of making life promises. Several thousand people who lived or worked in the area joined regularly in some of their activities, and fifty six thousand Mid Ambria citizens were enrolled as Friends.

Sharon was one of the Nursery's seven chaplains to regional police forces. She accompanied young police cadets in training and seasoned police on their beats, sometimes by day, sometimes by night. The Nursery maintained a twenty four hour Emergency line so that any member of the Force who wanted confidential counsel could just ring. The Nursery folk offered something no other agency could offer - police officers even

felt able to cry or be prayed for. There were all sorts of other chaplains, too: There were chaplains to colleges and sports teams, shopping and leisure centres, factories and social services. Some of the most able members of the Nursery were chaplains to sink housing estates. These were known as Motivators.

Over time, some of the groups served by these chaplains forged links with the Nursery. certain of them had their own quarters, or adopted a section of the farm. Individuals who required motivational training or who were recovering from stress stayed at the Nursery for up to several months. The Nursery was self supporting. Many of the region's agencies made a financial contribution to it. Yet its pioneer outreach work was done free of charge. Recruits to the Nursery came from all styles of churches, and each was encouraged to develop a distinctive talent, though this was based on a common discipline.

Ethnic churches and rainbow celebrations

Although Mid Ambria was being revitalised by its Nursery, I could not help wondering about regions whose ethnic groups were too divergent to bond with any one Nursery. So, as the cold and dark of Christmas approached I visited the most ethnically mixed metropolis in the country, and found myself entering a building bustling with Bangladeshis. Words from the Koran were read; everyone's shoes were piled in rows at the entrance. All were prostrate, facing east, for prayers. The story of Christ being born of a virgin was being read. A family was dressed as Mary and Joseph and the baby. 'Are you Christians or Moslems?' I asked a man as he finished his prayers. 'A Moslem means someone who obeys God so we are happy to be called Moslems' he told me, 'but we have accepted Christ as our Lord. About 140 of us have our names on the list for baptism, but we wait until our whole family group is ready to be baptised.'

As I explored this metropolis I found buildings where Chinese, Sikhs, Jews, Afros and many other ethnic groups had Christian worship in their own culture. 'How is it,' I asked a Sikh Christian, 'that your churches have the feel of the East more than of the Christian West?' 'Many seekers of spirituality went East to find a spirituality, and dismissed Christianity as a Western religion', he beamed at me, 'but Jesus was not Western; Christianity is an Eastern religion. Our churches think of Jesus standing between East and West with his arms embracing each.'

In n

another church I asked someone: 'Each congregation is so different; how do you keep good relations between them?' 'Through The Rainbow Retreat', she told me, 'when the elders of each congregation gather together. And through the Midsummer Rainbow Festival which is for everyone'.

NOTE TO EDITOR - DELETE THE FOLLOWING IF IT IS TOO UN MEMORABLE

The Real English Company

I returned in summer for the Rainbow Festival and struck up a conversation with a wise elder who had been born in Trinidad. 'The newer ethnic groups know how to celebrate together', Siri told me, and now that so many of them are Christians they do it even better'. 'But what about the original English?' I ask. 'England is full of people who don't want to be English any more' Siri thought. 'The young try to be American, or anything rather than to be themselves. There is a crisis of identity.' 'So is Englishness gone for ever?' I ask. 'Not on your life' Siri told me. 'It is most important that it finds a living, modern expression, otherwise the young English people will destroy their country. You must visit the Real English Company. One of their pubs is near here, and its my favourite.'

Following a visit to the Real English Pub I found opportunity to drive to The Real English Company's headquarters in the West of England. The Company consisted of several hundred people. Most had enrolled for just one year; but some had enrolled for life. 'Life' meant one generation, since they figured that each adult could reckon on having three 'lives' in a 120 year life span.

If I had to choose one word to describe these folk it would be 'real', as in 'real ale', or 'real oak'. They were laid back, cheerful, in touch with themselves and their roots in their land. It soon became clear that they loved

God a lot. The Company was sponsored jointly by The Church of England and the burgeoning Green Churches network. Their buildings consisted of a former minster church which had become redundant, combined with an eco village of adaptable units which could easily change their shape and use. I learned that the Company owned a chain of Real English Pubs. These served Real Ale and Real English Worship of both the minster and the folk variety. Many of their life members hosted these pubs, as a family or as groups of singles. These pubs thrived in areas which had long ago lost their old form of church.

The Company's Summer Academy drew people from far and wide, including those from deprived areas who came through a bursary scheme. I joined an introductory class who were discussing what it means to be English. Words and phrases like these were bandied about: Shakespeare, fish and chips, cricket, roast beef, strawberries and cream, football hooligans, bulldogs, Agatha Christie, pubs, minster churches, Ascot, Wimbledon, St George and merrie England, green hills, rose gardens, country churchyards.

Weren't most of these passe? I asked the course tutor, Alf Greenwood. 'They are surface images' Alf agreed, 'but our course unearths the lasting treasure that is buried in our gene pool but which has been overlaid with junk.' 'I know how novices are inducted into Franciscan or Benedictine spirituality', I rejoined, 'but how do you induct people into English spirituality?' Alf explained that the generation that spanned the Beatles and Princess Di had learned to speak what was in their hearts, rather than keep the stiff upper lip of the old southern English. But the post modern generation was only touch with surface wants and inchoate yearnings. The Company used the speak-from-the-heart- approach, but helped students to unearth deeper and lasting aspirations.

Alf gave me a fascinating overview of the course: Aidan, the apostle of the English... Caedmon, the first English pop singer learning to celebrate God in creation.... The Saxon sense of homely hospitality, friendship between men and women,.... Alfred the Great King, and the qualities of magnanimity and bridge building. The English church as a bridge between Catholic and Protestant was traced from Alfred, through Queen Elizabeth 1 to modern times.... The sturdy yeoman qualities and the ability to keep steady when all around is in turmoil the English mystics... The Puritans, the hard work ethic and the entrepreneurial spirit....The Glastonbury legends and the pursuit of valour in Blake's 'green and pleasant land'.

Through the Company the Green churches folk music revival, the Church of England's minster style music and the Glastonbury tradition had come together. It was quite normal to see classic music scholars combining folk, Byrd, and much else at the keyboard. I was told that often their pub churches would put out this notice: 'Any one who wishes to prepare music for worship on Sunday please bring your instrument at such a time'

The Glastonbury Pop Festival, England's biggest, was now sponsored by The Company, which was in negotiation with the trustees of Glastonbury Abbey to sponsor an All England Festival every St Georgia Day. In fact, it had hopes of re-locating its headquarters to the extensive Abbey site, developing self catering accommodation for a hundred guests, and opening up the grounds to become a People's Peace Park, where wedding and other party picnics could be booked. At the centre would be the Chapel of Ceaseless Celebration, where music groups from around England would maintain a daily rota, celebrating God and the simple joys of creation. They hoped to establish a holistic healing centre under the oversight of The Trinity, a Creative Arts Centre, and a Body-Soul centre of Christian Prayer.

I came away wondering whether at last, after centuries, an Arthur-like leader might rise up who would help everyone to be truly English.

The Celtic Experiments

Wales and Scotland never had the identity problem from which the English suffered. It was a delight to immerse myself in the Welsh churches Alternative Eisteddford. I was thrilled to spend three days at the All Scotland Christ Fest, and to discover the prayer movement which had swept through the mainline churches, producing all sorts of unexpected after effects. There I met the young overseer of a scheme in which Catholic and Presbyterian churches jointly invested in pre-manufactured prayer chalets and training facilities at ancient holy sites.

END OF DELETABLE MATERIAL

The energising Christian communities I had encountered were all in central places. A concern was growing in me for outlying places throughout Britain and Ireland where many of the old churches had closed. The central Christian communities did service a large hinterland through their internet outreach, but there were many people in neglected areas who never experienced Christian community.

I decided to do a survey. The old Church of England diocesan system still existed on paper, though most bishops now lived in one of the inter church faith communities. These, with their sophisticated computers, housed the archives of all the historic churches. I went to the archivist at one of these, and found a reference to a Bishop who, at the time many parishes and all the archdeaconries in his diocese had been dissolved, had agreed to create an experimental parish in a Celtic style. A priest named Kevin, who had a family of five and innumerable pets, had asked the Bishop if he could pioneer such an experiment in a suitable place.

The Bishop had offered him St Hild's on the Marsh, a sprawling, tumble down Vicarage, which adjoined an old parish church and some glebe land. Two seventy year olds in the tiny local hamlet acted as nominal church wardens, another lady did the flowers, and a local farmer cut the churchyard grass once a year. A couple in The Old Stables occasionally wandered round the building and said a prayer. The wealthy patron of the parish, who had kept the building in good repair, had recently died. There was no one else.

Kevin secured agreement that in future the patron would be the Community of the Saints, of which he was a member. If he became ill or had to move on, the community nature of the experiment was thus safeguarded. Second, St Hild's parish status would be annulled, so that it would be free from anachronistic regulations. There would be no salary, though the Diocese would provide a starter grant which would keep the family afloat for one year. The upkeep of the church building and Vicarage would be the responsibility of The Community of The Saints.

Kevin began twice daily family prayers, Friday was open house and a spare place was always laid at the meal table. Soon others joined the family. Emails in response to his web site asking about joining kept arriving. That's how the large garden evolved into a caravan and organic farm park.

Evidently well over half the second millennium Dioceses had been amalgamated in a spirit of doom and gloom, but in the process, sometimes almost by accident, new experiments had taken off.

Open churches with robots and hermits

I learned of another experiment that was keeping churches alive in the wastelands. At the turn of the millennium there had been a short-lived Open Churches scheme supported by an impresario. This idea re-surfaced when someone had the idea of robots who could keep church buildings open and secure throughout the day, and hermit flats which could be pre-cast to fit in to an existing church building and installed in a day. They advertised for hermits who would live in these, keep daily prayer alive, and host the premises as week-end retreat centres.

According to the archivist, St Hild's experiment had so impressed one bishop that he asked, before his Diocese was subsumed in a larger one, whether his could become an experimental diocese. From what I can gather, the sub Diocese was so transformed that all the church streams have come together and there is now talk of subsuming the larger area into the smaller!

I felt some one beckon me to leave the archives and to walk out into the open air.

I saw a breathtaking rainbow. It seemed to cover all of Britain and Ireland, and to touch the whole world. with its sheen. A great crowd of people of every age and background was encircled by the rainbow. Out of the crowd stepped an old English friend. 'Something has happened to me' said George. 'I must tell you about it. A love has grown in me for the Irish people so great that it dwarfs everything else in my life. An Anglo-Irish bond is being forged, a fellowship so great that even the Troubles pale into insignificance in its presence.'

As he spoke the rainbow became so bright and high that it overarched both Ireland and Britain and even the continent beyond. And I heard a symphony of sons sung by an uprising of the holy and risen ones of the twice holy Isles. There, on the hill, a multitude joined my friend; not only Irish, but Celtic and Saxon, Roman and Norman, Jewish and New Commonwealth, and many more besides. There were infants too, and this crowd was dressed in the styles of every race under the sun. And they sang 'We are the rainbow church of the Isles, and we shall reign with our God for ever,'

A bell rings. My dream comes to an end, but somehow, I know that this dream will be fulfilled. For words from the Revelation spoken by an angels encircled by a great rainbow, as recorded most surely in the final book of Scripture, confirmed in me that this dream was in truth but a glimpse of the future that is more real; than anything yet known my my life in this world.

2. The Dying

Death: the final cessation of vital functions in an organism.
Oxford English Reference Dictionary

Death can come by a thousand cuts. The shelf life of Millennium Two forms of church is nearing its end. Anachronistic practices and mind sets have accumulated which make these alien to a majority of the population.

Although the gates of hell shall never prevail against the essence of the universal church (Matthew 16:18), any particular form of that church can most certainly die. In his travel book *From the Holy Mountain* William Dalrymple observes many churches that have survived since the early centuries which are at this moment becoming relics.

The statistics of decline in Europe are well-known and remorseless. According to the *World Christian Encyclopaedia* 53,000 attenders are leaving the church in Europe and North America every week. (i) Various more local surveys conducted since 1982 indicate that if anything the decline is increasing (ii) The 1990 European Values Study showed that some 71% claimed to believe in God, 68% in the soul, 54% defined themselves as religious people. Active members of churches are 14.4% of the population - regular churchgoing is under half that figure. Church of Scotland statistics published in the mid 1990's indicated that if the decline in membership continued, there would be no members left by the year 2024. The church is losing 18,000 members a year.

Many people think the Church of England is proceeding to die. Her obituary has already been written - mostly by people who have left the Church of England to join other churches. (iii) The obituary goes something like this:

Requiem for the Church of England 1535 - 2005

After Henry 8th split from Rome, and some 300 people each side of the Protestant-Roman divide were executed for their beliefs, reaction followed counter-reaction. Political expediency eventually ruled the day and the great Anglican Compromise was put in place. This, however, was held together by the money, conventions and bureaucracy of the Establishment. It never had homogeneity. There was an evangelical wing, a Catholic wing and a Liberal wing, each of which waxed and waned.. In recent centuries the church became hostage to half believing, culturally elitist liberal bishops and lost the true marks of the holy, apostolic, catholic church. Bishops and clergy could disbelieve almost anything and remain in place, morals became privatised, an churchmanship became polarised. It was possible to meet two church of England vicars who appeared to have nothing in common in their beliefs, dress, practices, or morals. Increasingly the Church of England behaved like a sect, making decisions independently of the universal church. Because of the half believing and Establishment mentality which was endemic in its Diocesan structures, it lost the hearts and minds of the English people. As we moved into an age where people looked for integrity, coherence, community, mystery - it could offer none of these things. The Bishops of the 1990's spent their energy planning how to decline efficiently, but numbers declined further, clergy became stressed out, and the church fragmented so much that Roman Catholics, New churches and Muslims replaced it as the three largest religious groups in England. Finally it was beached, and formal disestablishment was merely a delayed epitaph.

There is nothing like execution to concentrate the mind. Before the funeral actually took place, an Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. George Carey) for the first time in history publicly faced the fact that a church can face extinction within one generation.

R.I. P: What the Retreating Church needs to discard.

The retreating church needs to discard attitudes and practices that have crept in which were not of God, and which have put up barriers between the church and the people. Prejudices, cloaked in the garb of doctrine, which may have helped people in previous cultures to understand the Faith, took the place of love and lack the suppleness that characterises living truth.

On the Holy Island of Lindisfarne pilgrim groups of former churchgoers have asked me to dialogue with them. My friend John Sumner dialogues at Glastonbury with similar groups of former churchgoers. From such encounters we can draw up a list such as this:

Twenty Things That Make Good People Angry with the Church

- Lack of humanity
- Lack of integrity
- Lack of spiritual depth
- Lack of a generous spirit
- Lack of tolerance of people who differ from them
- Lack of forgiveness
- Lack of imagination
- Lack of awareness
- Misuse of power
- Engendering of false guilt
- Mistreatment of the earth
- Belittling of sexuality
- Neglect of key life moments
- Non- inclusive leadership
- Misrepresentation of the nature of salvation
- Misrepresentation of the nature of sin
- Misrepresentation of heaven, hell and the other world
- Wordy, preachy church services
- Pressurised mission approaches
- Abuse of power

John Sumner writes:

Fasten Your seat belts.

We are seen to lack integrity. No, not the accusations of the sensational press, not the intolerance that expects clergy and Church to be perfect each twenty-four hours, not the guilt and hate that delights to see priests fall. No, that hurts but I don't mean any of that.

We stand accused of dishonesty in several ways:
Dishonesty in our reading of the Bible
Dishonesty in talking about God
Dishonesty in our assessment of others
Dishonesty in our assessment of wealth and power

Post modern people distrust big claims that do not connect with one's own story. They reject judgmental words about others that do not connect with one's own vulnerability. They despise talk about love of neighbour by people and churches who do not connect with the poor.

R.I.P. to God in the Box

Organisms begin to die when they no longer respond to their environment. Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford has written about God Outside the Box. Churches have become boxed in. The framework (the world view) in which they are set has changed out of recognition in the last thirty years. Some sociologists relate the emergence of 'new plausibility structures' to processes of religious change. P.L. Berger refers to the arrival on the world stage of new perspectives, elements and questions with regard to reality, existence and life itself, to which old religious explanations and structures no longer correspond (iv) The dying church relates to the old framework. The emerging church relates to the new.

We are entering a new age.
The European civilisation which we have known for the past two thousand years
is giving way to a global civilisation.
Bede Griffiths

A paradigm is the mental framework into which we fit everything we know. In most aspects of life - scientific, social, cultural, economic, ecological, psychological, and religious - we no longer understand our world as did our forbears even until recently. The world and its institutions are going through the biggest shift for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years.

This has profound implications for churches. All the second millennium church streams have tell-tale signs of a mind-set which is becoming obsolete. This vast paradigm shift means that the form church has taken in the west for centuries now needs fundamental reappraisal.

R.I.P to a patriarchal church

There is the possibility that religions, in the form that we know them,
belong to the age of Patriarchy (c 8000BC to 2000 CE).
Diarmuid O'Murchu (v)

Our culture is engaged in a tremendous reappraisal of the intuitive, of the feminine, of everything affecting or concerning subjectivity...
Every indication exists that we are witnessing the emergence
of one of the key archetypes of humanity's collective unconscious:
the anima, in all of its multiple manifestations.

A like event occurs only once every several thousand years.
And when it occurs, the axis of history suffers a universal shock,
as men and women once more produce a new self-interpretation
and redefine their interpersonal[relations.

Leonardo Boff (vi)

The feminisation of society means that feelings have now won proper public respect alongside rationality. Sign, symbol, and intuition are now seen to be essential to explain the whole dimension of reality. These need to be embraced, though negative aspects of feminisation such as gender confusion, crisis in masculinity and denial of motherhood. also need to be addressed.

An article by Francis Fukuyama in The Financial Times was headed The Death of Hierarchy. He argues that the flow of information is changing authoritarian forms of organisation in the workplace. They are being replaced by flat or networked organisations where shared values are the key. (vii) The patriarchal, top-down, or one-shape fits all type of church has had its day.

R.I.P to a monochrome church

Culturally accepted norms of a generation ago are now questioned. Some of these changes, especially as they affect a church context, have been expressed like this:

From	To
Monologue	Interaction
Cerebral	Visual
Consumerism	Simplicity
Explanation	Experience
Status	Service
Activism	Mysticism
Linear Thinking	Bit Thinking
Believing	Belonging
Argument	Story
Reductionism	Holism
Standardisation	Personal choice
External authority	Inner conviction

R.I.P to a non ecological church

The western world is into a deep cultural pathology
as we enter the terminal phase of the Cenozoic period
Thomas Berry (viii)

Thomas Berry, the Roman Catholic Passionist priest, creationist and research director, calls for a massive shift from an anthropocentric to a biocentric view, if the planet is to survive as

we know it. In recent decades a wide range of groups have emerged - conservationists, single issue campaigners and those into deep ecology - .who realise this truth.

R.I.P to a fragmented church

The second millennium forms of church are not only anachronistic, they are also fragmented. Few Christians under forty want their identity to be tied to a protest movement that occurred over four hundred years ago, that is, to be labelled either Catholic or Protestant. We are living at the end of the era in which the Catholic/Protestant divide at the Reformation was the dominating framework of the western church. Christians are sensing that the Reformation represented not only a split in doctrine and organisation, but also a split in the western 'Christian' psyche. Now that the false splits between organisation and mysticism, between the whole and the parts, are beginning to heal in the corporate psyche, the churches have to catch up.

R.I.P to dehumanising tendencies

Second millennium churches neglected the biblical Wisdom tradition in Christianity, which values the feminine in God and in people. Towers, tasks and tirades became their landmarks. From the churches the people gained a vague impression that God was like a mean boss who tries to find out what people are doing in order to tell them not to.

Church people have been conditioned for centuries to disguise their innermost being. This point is tellingly made in Ronald Ferguson's biography of the Scottish Presbyterian minister George McLeod, who, he says 'was keeping strict controls on access to his innermost core, where the puritan carefully policed the passionate. The language of one's innermost feelings was not in the McLeod family lexicon ... he had the McLeod reputation of omni-competence to protect and uphold.' (ix) After a break down George had a transforming experience, which enabled him thereafter to model a Christianity which helped people to become more fully human.

R.I.P to Misuse of power

In his speech accepting the honour of a Union Medal from the Union Theological Seminary, New York, George McLeod said: 'The love of power has ruled the world, temporal and ecclesiastical, since the beginning of time. The Roman Empire was created by the love of power. The Roman Church got preeminence through the love of power. The love of power invaded John Knox in his desire to recover power for the new church' (at the Reformation in Scotland). 'Now science has given new meaning to power with nuclear weapons. Thus power has jettisoned morality. So this is indeed the Church's hour. Only one force is sufficient for our day. It is the power of love.'

C.J. Jung correctly diagnosed the future Nazi threat in Germany, because he understood that in that country's Collective Unconscious Christianity was a religion that had been imposed, and was therefore only on the surface. As a result paganism, which had been repressed rather than redeemed, was poised to make a come back in destructive new form. .
(x)

If we are to avoid the tragedy of an imposed, unnatural form of Christianity being replaced by a natural but unredeemed paganism we need to understand the context of our times

Gardens of Love

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
So I turned to the garden of love
That so many sweet flowers bore,

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in a black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys & desires.

William Blake

R.I.P to defensive church leaders

Why are so many churches defensive rather than loving?

John Sumner writes of his experience of the training of leaders in his church and still:

Unable to love myself, my capacity to love others is reduced. I have protective barriers between me and real human people. Videos, schemes, dress, housing, categorised ways of thinking. Plans of Salvation. Committee-made prayers.

And because of my low self-confidence, I cannot see how to utilise the thoughts, the questions, the explorations, and the expertise of others who do not fit my trained schemes and thought-forms. We may have head teachers, speech tutors, senior managers, electronic technicians in our church, but I am so busy, so caught up in meeting ingrained expectations, that I cannot learn how to use them. We may have original thinkers, deep questioners, far-seeing spirits in our circle, but unless I can fit them in to my system of concepts they had better be left unattended.

This negative experience was not universal amongst Theological Colleges. But I do believe it was widespread.

R.I.P. to Belittling of other religions

I love all religions. I am in love with my own.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

E. Stanley Jones, the missionary to India, once asked Mahatma Gandhi: 'How can we make the Christian faith more native to India, so that it is no longer something "foreign" which is associated with foreign governments and seen as foreign religious practice, but it becomes part of life in India and a faith that makes a powerful contribution to building up this country?'. Gandhi replied: 'Firstly, I would suggest that all Christians - missionaries and others - must start living more like Christ. Secondly, practise your faith without blurring it or watering it down. Thirdly, put special emphasis on love because it is the central point of Christian faith and therefore the decisive motivating force. Fourthly, study non-Christian religions with great sympathy, so that you can appeal to people of other faiths more effectively.'

R.I.P. to denial

It is possible that what has already happened to traditional religious communities is now happening to churches. If so, we do well to heed what Gerald Arbuckle wrote in 1988:

Many religious congregations today are in chaos. They are not sure about the meaning, contemporary relevance or mission of religious life and, on the practical level, they find it difficult to cope with often rapidly declining numbers, few or no vocations, and the rising average age of membership.

Some congregations acknowledge that they are in chaos and are seriously concerned about wanting to do something about it. Others struggle to deny it, thinking it is just like a bad dream and very soon it will all disappear and "things will be normal once more". Other congregations, perhaps because they are still receiving vocations, eg in Third World countries, think they are not in chaos. They may in fact be in deep chaos, because they complacently refuse to search for the inner meaning of religious life and how it must respond with apostolic vitality to the pastoral needs of people today. They cannot at some point in the future escape the consequences of their prolonged denial.
(xi)

We have to face up to the sea change that is taking place. This is affecting even the largest charismatic churches. The leader of one such church says 'I can see it is dying underneath.'

Denominational leaders are saying that their present structures have only 10 to 20 years to survive. Then comes collapse. Will a phoenix rise from the ashes?

NOTES CHAPTER TWO THE DYING

(i) Barrett, David B.(Ed) World Christian Encyclopaedia:A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World AD 1900-2000 (Oxford University Press, Nairobi 1982).

(ii) See, for example, Grace Davie, in Religion in Britain since 1945:Believing without Belonging (1994).

- (iii) See, for example, The Disintegration of the Church of England in chapter 43 of Orthodox Christianity and the English Tradition by Fr. Andrew Phillips (ISBN 1-898281-00-9 Published by the Anglo-Orthodox Trust).
- (iv) P.L.Berger The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (New York 1969)
- (v) Diarmuid O'Murchu Quantum Theology (Crossroad New York 1997)
- (vi) Boff, Leonardo The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions (Collins 1989)
- (vii) Francis Fukuyama Weekend, Financial Times, June 12/13 1999.
- (viii) Berry, Thomas CP with Thomas Clarke SJ Befriending the Earth (Twenty Third Publications, Mystic, Connecticut.)
- (ix) Ronald Ferguson George McLeod: Founder of the Iona Community page 108 (William Collins 1990)
- (x) Frank McLynn Carl Gustav Jung (St Martin's Press New York 1997)

3. The Longing

Two days after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, the clergy of Bath and Wells Anglican Diocese were gathered with their bishop, Jim Thompson. He told them:

The overwhelming sea of flowers and faces has told us of a yearning and an aching in the people of our lands. The people out there are not quite where we had thought them to be. It was the very complexities of Diana's make-up, her low points and her vulnerabilities, which evoked the sheer size of response. She was not coming from an emotionally privileged position. If she could do it, we could do it: the world wanted it.

The people are not in the place we thought. And the churches are not heading where we like to think. The human being needs selfless and sensitive love, and the Christian commandment is to love. Though we may revise our liturgies, though we may devise schemes for the unemployed, though we may have study groups and Alpha Groups and sound biblical scholarship, and have not love, we are doing nothing.

Diana had to accept that she could not be the official queen through formal means, but she became Queen of hearts. The world's mourning of her death marked a turning from hierarchy to the power of the heart. The church has to accept that it cannot influence people through status or formal powers, it has to become Queen of hearts.

Can the church change to fresh models? I believe it can for these reasons:

A new generation of God-centred leaders is rising up

Change has been prophesied

A wave of fresh thinking is filtering through.

Sorrow for past failings is bearing fruit.

Realignments of Christian forces are gathering pace.

There is a precedent for such change.

A new generation of leaders

I shall never forget listening to some prophetic church leaders at a packed London meeting. The gist of what I remember is this: 'The First World War destroyed a whole generation of leaders. In the period since then the church has had a dearth of both able and God-inspired leaders. Seventy years has now passed. The ancient people of Israel had to spend 70 years in exile in Babylon, but after this period they returned and began to fulfil God's plans again. Britain's churches have been in a kind of Babylon. That period is ending. There are now many many humble leaders who desire God's will; God is equipping them to do great things...'

Young Christians are coming out of the wood work in order get training, some in established church centres, others in new frameworks.

Change is being prophesied.

The poorly educated Welsh preacher Smith Wigglesworth, who raised several people from apparent death, said this in 1947:

During the next few decades there will be two distinct moves of the Holy Spirit across the church in Great Britain. The first move will affect every church that is open to receive it and will be characterised by a restoration of the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The second move of the Holy Spirit will result in people leaving historic churches and planting new churches...

When the new church phase is on the wane, there will be evidenced in the churches something that has not been seen before; a coming together of those with an emphasis on the Word and those with an emphasis on the Spirit. When the Word and the Spirit come together, there will be the biggest movement of the Holy Spirit that the nation, and indeed the world, has ever seen. It will mark the beginning of a revival that will eclipse anything that has been witnessed within these shores, even the Wesleyan and the Welsh revivals of former years. The outpouring of God's Spirit will flow from the UK to the mainland of Europe, and from there will begin a missionary move to the ends of the earth.

We are now entering one of the greatest watershed periods in human history.

Creation itself is charged with the electricity of these times and is beginning to groan and travail for what is about to come...

In preparation for this greatest of events the church is about to go through a metamorphosis.

She is going to change from a worm into a butterfly.

A caterpillar is confined to the earth, and its path must conform to the contour of the earth.

Likewise, for nearly two thousand years the church has often conformed more to the ways of the world than to the ways of the Spirit.

Soon the church will go through a change so dramatic that she will seem to emerge as an entirely different creature. It will be like another birth....

Rick Joyner (i)

A wave of fresh thinking

There has been a glut of books about the demise and the reformation of the church. Being Human: Being Church by Robert Warren has challenged churches to turn into missionary congregations and into laboratories for becoming more fully human beings. (ii) Brave New Church by that brave vicar of St. Andrew's Chorley Wood diagnoses our society as a slave to various addictions. The church, too, has been addicted, he argues, but it is beginning to break free and become the agency, par excellence, which sets the people free from their addictions. (iii)

In New Tasks for a Renewed Church (iv) Tom Wright urges Christians to find the focal points of the emerging new paganism, and to find ways of honouring Jesus as Lord within these contexts. He calls for Christian 'shrines' to be established in various areas: . By coming alongside those in pain as a result of war; by proclaiming in liturgy and deeds that the powers of Mammon shall be brought low and the needy shall be lifted up; by celebrating sexuality as the glory of a relationship of integrity; by cherishing the earth; by developing forgiving and respectful friendships with people of other faiths within which witness becomes authentic; by

restoring the Eucharist and a sacramental approach to the centre of church life; by rescuing from eastern monopoly the mystical and contemplative traditions of prayer; and by restoring holism to intellectual endeavour.

In Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West Michael Riddell gives examples of churches in his native New Zealand which are pioneering new ways of being church, from Parallel Universe to Spine. (v)

Repentance for the church's past sins

As the second millennium drew to a close some churches tried to identify significant wrong actions in the second millennium that lived on in distorted patterns, to say sorry and to put right what could be put right. They followed the example of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Old Testament .

If Christianity is to be a force for healing the world in the third millennium, the image of the Cross as a Sword, by which people of other faiths are forced to convert against their will must be expunged, and it must become again, as it was at the beginning, an image of unconditional love. Pope Jean Paul 11 called on his church to make penance for their mistreatment of Jews .

For millions of Muslims and Jews, the Cross symbolises the sword. So it is a wonderful thing that Christians from various backgrounds have made Reconciliation Walks along the route Crusaders took through Muslim lands to pray, to say sorry, to make friends. Mothers and children ran over to these walkers with tears and embraced them. A whole new set of dynamics was coming into play. If Christianity is experienced as a movement of unconditional love, who knows how far the healing of fragmentation may go in the Muslim and Christian worlds?

Churches in Australia took part in a 'National Sorry Day', in which schools and organisations throughout the land said sorry to the aboriginal people for the raping of their land and culture by the European invaders.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu was an historic example of this corporate healing process. The Anglican Church in Japan, at its synod in 1996, formally confessed its sin in having supported their country's colonial war of oppression in World War 2. It says its first synod after the war 'should have deeply repented for not having fulfilled their prophetic role. They should also have made a sincere apology to their neighbours whom Japan had invaded and ruled, and should have sought a truly reconciled relationship with them...'

As pilgrims from Roman, Anglican, Reformed and New Church traditions gathered at Lindisfarne in 1997 during their journey from Rome to Iona, a confession in the following vein was made:

We confess with shame
the loss in the church of integrity, humility and patience
the crushing of spontaneity
the caging of the wild Spirit

the breaking off of relationships
the bruising of the crushed reeds
the arrogance of the intellect
the pride of empire-building

We accept our share of responsibility for these sins,
and seek to shed them on behalf of ourselves and our churches.
Lord, have mercy upon us and forgive us.

Realignments are taking place

A man walked into my cottage: 'Can I talk to someone about how to make my faith more real. I feel that it must mean more than just going to church on a Sunday. I have talents to offer the church, but where I live nobody wants to know.' Andrew turned out to be skilled in I.T. and communication. The business world took him seriously and paid him well. The church, which could have had his services free, had no use for him. Why? Because the church tried to fit people into its narrow framework of Sunday liturgy; it did not facilitate God's gifts in its members and let these become an expression of its life and witness. Andrew's story can be repeated countless times.

I said to Andrew: 'If you were a member of a political party, and your local branch was dominated by fuddy duddies, would you leave that party or link up with the live regional or national networks of that party? Think of the church in a similar way. I will try to help you find the right network'. That began an adventure for Andrew. That part of his story, too, can be repeated increasingly. It is possible to move out of narrow straitjackets into creative networks which are part of the wider Body of Christ.

There is a precedent for radical and successful change in our own history

Some church leaders (including Anglo Catholic, New Church, Orthodox and Roman Catholic) still insist that theirs is the only 'true' model of church. There are many more who recognise that external church patterns are becoming obsolete, but who doubt whether a newfangled model of church can bear the weight that will be put upon it and still remain authentic. By rediscovering our hidden but deepest roots, new church is able to grow up within as well as alongside the old church.

To find out about that, read the next chapter.

NOTES CHAPTER THREE THE LONGING

- (i) Rick Joyner, The Morning Star Prophetic Bulletin September 1999 (Morning Star Publications P.O. Box 19409 Charlotte, NC 28219-9409)
- (ii) Robert Warren Being Human: Being Church (Marshall Pickering 1995)
- (iii) Mark Stibbe Brave New Church
- (iv) Tom Wright New Tasks for a Renewed Church (Hodder & Stoughton 1992)

(v) Michael Riddell Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post Christian West (SPCK 1998)

Changing World: Changing Church by Michael Monagh (Monarch Books 2001).

4. The Birthright

'We are coming to the end of the parish phase of church', said Bishop Ian Harland, 'it has happened before.'

People who realise that the second millennium form of church has no future nevertheless fear lest it should be replaced by new fangled forms of church which are not deeply rooted.

Saint Patrick introduced the top-down diocesan system into fifth century Ireland, for that was all he knew from his training in the urban centres of the continent. Yet within a hundred years the focus had changed from the bishop to the monastery, which was led by a man or a woman. Bishops continued their sacramental duties, but they were under the authority of the Abbott, who looked after the organisation. The pattern of church organisation followed the natural pattern of the people groups.

One ruling family after another embraced the Faith and gave prime parts of their estates to be used as a monastery, which became the hub of the tribal life. These early monasteries had no barriers, apart from a ditch for practical reasons. There was constant movement in and out by children, women, labourers. There were no imposing buildings.

These monastery churches were multi functional resource centres. They served as prayer base, drop-in centre, library, school, health centre, psychiatric care centre. They were totally open to outsiders. To them visitors brought the news of the world. They related to the neighbourhood as guardians of local culture, affirming it whether it was vibrant or dying, though confronting certain bad practices such as wizardry.

Even within the monasteries there were all sorts of options. There were clergy, lay monks and nuns with life vows, others with temporary vows, and some who lived at home. Some were married.

The major Celtic monasteries were not built, as were the eastern ones, as an escape from the world. They were built on the main highways of sea and river and near large settlements; they were organised in order to penetrate the pagan world and to extend the church.

The monasteries provided a God-given framework of prayer, work and rest, reflecting the rhythms of the natural and the Christian year. They were the main centres of hospitality. Some monasteries fed a thousand hungry people a day; and all Celtic Christians were taught to 'open their heart to Christ in the stranger'. They also introduced written education to Ireland and became centres of learning.

Some became learning centres. Others multiplied praise groups and offered 'perennial praise.'

The early monastic churches marvelously modelled hospitality. St. Benedict's Rule (no.53) states that 'all guests are to be welcomed as Christ'. The 8th century Rule of St. Ailbe suggested that hospitality should consist of 'a clean house, a big fire, a good wash and a comfortable bed.' Some Celtic churches, such as Columba's monastery at Durrow, fed a thousand visitors a day.

At Bangor over 3,000 monks devoted themselves to the singing of Perennial Praise. Their praise book, the Bangor Antiphony, which is preserved in the Ambrosian library, Milan,

says 'Let the many keep awake in community on a third of the nights in the year in order to read aloud from the Book and to expound judgment and to sing blessings all together.'

The monastic churches in Ireland and in Saxon Britain were a source of soul friendships. Bede says those outside the monasteries flocked to Aidan, Cuthbert, Hilda. So also they did to David of Wales.

Columba went into exile from the security of his beloved home land and founded the Iona monastery on Scotland's western shore. True, this was a strategic place, but it was also on the edge. From the extremity of Iona Aidan brought a Mission to English barbarians, and established his church base on borderland between isle and mainland at Lindisfarne. The many daughter churches he planted throughout the large kingdom of Northumbria, though inland, kept alive that same borderland spirit. Thus Cuthbert and Eata transferred from one Lindisfarne daughter church at Melrose to another at Ripon, were edged out when the Romanising prelate Wilfred took control, and having no worldly handles, returned to Melrose. Bede wrote of those Lindisfarne servants of Christ: 'None of them would accept lands or possessions to build monasteries, unless compelled to by the secular authorities.'

Why did people throng to the early Celtic communities, in Britain as much as in Ireland?

The whole life of the monk, his service to guests, his work, his prayer, silence, rest, relations with his brothers were offered as a liturgy to the Holy Trinity. The physical pattern of the monastery bore witness to this reality. From the church and its holy altar all things proceeded, and to them all things returned. The huts, the refectory, the guest room, everything revolved around the hub which was the place of worship. Worship repeated each day and night, yet, for those who entered into it from the heart, it was not static. It was a single motion towards God; it had an inner dynamic which reflected God's rhythms and by which the soul moved upwards towards God, and raised all creation.

Monasteries in Britain were not other worldly. Animals and children would wander around. By the time of Anglo Saxon England's heyday monasteries were the nearest thing to a town. The people lived ordinary lives, but came to worship on Sundays.

Later, this fell away. Pride of power and possessions, that ugly sore that hid under the veneer of religion, strutted across the church. The continual repentance of the heart, the daily immersion in Christ's Eucharistic self giving, the sharing of goods in common became a distant memory.

Hermitage churches

Hermits went to the edges of rocks or lakes, and churches sprang up around them. Kevin, the tall skin-wearing hermit of Glendalough, chose to live in a sunless cave fifty feet above a lake inhabited by a wild creature; it was as if he needed to reach to the extremity of life in order to find the all-sufficiency of God. Around Kevin's cave grew up the seven churches of a monastic city.

A Breton Life of St Gildas tells how his sister and two of his brothers established a Skete in a remote place. Each had their own dwelling and their own place of prayer, some distance apart. Each brother took it in turns to spend much of the day with his sister, sharing in the

regular hours of prayer, Holy Communion, a meal, and no doubt in work or vigils. Each of the three returned to their own place before sunset and kept vigil in their own place of prayer. Evidently all sorts of people were drawn to them, for the author of *The Life* says they became famous for their constant miracles. No constant miracles without people! (i)

The Hermitage, or Skete, was an alternative model to the central monastic church, and became widespread in Britain and in Ireland. The original intention was not to establish a hub church in an accessible place, but to find a quiet place away from busy places in which to serve God in an undisturbed rhythm of prayer and work. The by product was that by a mysterious chemistry people who were tuned in to this life of deep peace were drawn to these places. They made their own dwellings in the same area, adopted a similar life style, and shared in Holy Communion and meals on certain festival days. As years passed these became pilgrim centres and a form of church which met the need of many of the quiet types.

The Celtic church was culture friendly

None of the Celtic Christians who won over the indigenous population were martyred. This was not because they feared or favoured, but because they harnessed all that was Gospel-friendly in their culture to Christ.

'In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2.3). Celtic Christians incorporated wisdom from the Druids who had the wisdom of nature. The Celtic missionaries said God had given people two books, the book of Scripture and the book of creation. The Druids had a deep intuition. There is an Irish story that on the day of Christ's crucifixion King Conchubar noticed the eclipse of the sun and asked the Druid Bucrath the cause of this sign. 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is now being crucified by the Jews' replied the Druid. Christians recognised that the intuition of their best forbears was in tune with Christ even before they had been taught about him. The 6th century Welsh bard Taliesin declared: 'Christ, the Word from the beginning, was from the beginning our teacher there never was a time when the Druids of Britain held not its doctrines.' As a baptised boy Columba was taught by a Druid; as an adult he supported measures to strengthen the institution of the bards, yet he tried to lead both Druids and their pupils to Christ. 'Christ is my druid' he told them. Later it was the Irish monks who first wrote down the pre-Christian folk stories which continued traditional wisdom.

The Irish were led to transfer their veneration from the High King of Ireland to the High King of Heaven; from the sun to the Sun of suns. On standing stones in Ireland Christians placed an arrow to lead the passer by from the sun disc which pagans had engraved on one side, to the disc of Christ transcending the sun which Christians had engraved on the other side. Christ is placed in the centre of the sun circle on most old Christian Celtic crosses.

Celtic believers Christianised the pagan seasons. The pagan blessing of the lustral waters on January 6 became the Epiphany which commemorated Jesus' immersion in the waters. Candles were held to the throat for healing on the first day of the Celtic Spring, and this became St. Brigid's Day. Christians continued the Druids use of ashes as a sign of purification. The veil between earth and heaven was at its thinnest on Samhain, the first day of winter's dark: Christians filled it with the splendour of All Saints Day.

The early church assimilated the Greek wisdom. Celtic Christians incorporated wisdom from the Druids. Our church has to assimilate the wisdom of the best neo pagans of today.

We, who for the first time since those days live in a predominantly pagan population, do well to learn from the Celtic Christians, who in effect said to their pagan contemporaries: 'Come with your festivals that celebrate the elements, and we will transform them into festivals for the Lord of the elements. Come with your long flowing hairstyles - when we become Christian monks we will keep these hairstyles because they give glory to God. Come with your clans and natural networks of association, and we will plant Christian communities of prayer that go with the grain of these networks. Come with your excitement about the After world, but let us see how the risen Son of God throws light upon it. Come with your hunger for worship and the world of the Spirit, and we will explain how idols have no place now, because the God of gods has revealed himself to us...'

Their leaders

The leaders of monastic churches were the natural leaders of the people. They were usually members of extended ruling families who made a life commitment to Christ. There were exceptions. Ciaran was the son of a carpenter, but his physical and spiritual stature was so exceptional that Columba thought the whole of Ireland would follow him. He founded the monastic church at Clonmacnoise which flourished for a thousand years.

Women leaders were given equality of regard in the church. The leaders of the early large monasteries for both women and men were invariably women. The manner in which male church leaders addressed their female counterparts in the Celtic period is that of brother to sister.

The Celtic Mission 'restored movemental mission in Europe'

George Hunter

The Saxon Minster Model

The Anglo Saxons continued the monastic churches, and many of them had the feel of a family. An information board at Brecon Cathedral, Wales, describes how, before the Normans took over, the cathedral was a mother community to a network of smaller churches. These were known as a clas, meaning that they were part of one family.

The Saxon monasteries, however, were increasingly regulated by bishops with a territorial responsibility - and people with inspirations for fresh monastic churches could not follow the patterns of the people so easily as before. The scholar monk Bede recommended that Bishop Ecbert should put down monasteries that did not toe the line with his diocese. This was a contrast to the bishops in the Celtic Mission who place themselves under the authority of an abbot and who did not have the power to veto monastic developments.

A focus for the multiplying churches in Saxon Britain was the minster. This was a large church building that was both a multi resource centre and a community of clergy and other helpers who serviced the outlying churches. It was, of course, tied in to the national church's chain of command, and it perhaps became too clericalised over time; but it is a model which is being looked to again. (ii)

It was the Normans (1066 and All That) who finally obliterated the sense of the inclusive, grass roots family in the church. The tone of church leaders after the Norman Conquest was quite different. Much of the post Norman Ancrene Wisse (Guide for Anchoresses), for example, is written so that women shall know their place in a masculine hierarchy and society. (iii)

The modern rediscovery of Celtic style churches

In his book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity can reach the West...* Again, George Hunter 111 of Asbury Theological Seminary USA argues that the Reformed churches, as well as the Roman Catholic churches of the USA, have continued the 'Roman paradigm' with dire results. He thinks that most leaders of America's churches are in denial, and continue to assume that control from headquarters, and the culturally European paradigm, are best for churches everywhere. He believes that if western church leaders 'are willing to learn from a once-great Movement outside of the Roman paradigm, then Christianity can become contagious once more across North America and Europe in the twenty first century.' (iv)

Ordinary people are often more apt to pick this up than are their church leaders.

We never knew this existed, but it's what we've always thought.

We've always felt there is something more.

We've been so oppressed by the Roman ways of the church.

Its the natural way to live for people in this land.

Joe O Siorain, leader of a pilgrim group

This desire to recover a Celtic style of church is spreading across the world. I receive many letters and emails that indicate this. 'Having found this Celtic way of life I realise that is what I've always believed, but this has put it into words for me. I never knew it existed. Why didn't the church tell me?' wrote one person, 'Can you tell me of any church that follows this way?'

In USA Tom Sine, the author and Christian Futures Consultant, aims to develop a Celtic style community led by three couples, where students can gain an experience of living in a rhythm of prayer, work, study and relationship. A church leader from Austin, Texas identifies a similar need. In order to 'detoxify' people from 'the disease for degrees' which treats people as if they are not valid unless they accumulate paper certificates, she seeks Celtic style centres where people learn in a holistic, unpressured way through experience, prayer, relationship, intuition, as well as from books.

From Australia, church planter Brad Bessell writes:

Under our South Australian desert is the great artesian basin filled with millions of litres of water. The same could be said about the soul of this nation. It seems that church here looks for its nourishment from the seasonal rains that blow in from other countries. It comes and it goes and the land (church) is dry again. I believe that the Celtic Spirituality is not a seasonal rain or trend but something that is deeply buried under the Australian soul like our artesian waters under the desert. It is in the blood of the Scottish, Irish, Welsh, English convicts and immigrants. It just needs to be tapped. I believe that the role of Celtic Spirituality in this nation is to bring healing and

reconciliation between the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal. In fact, I believe that had Celtic monks come to Australia instead of convicts etc then the Aboriginal people would have had a spiritual experience similar to that of the ancient Celtic Christian. I also believe the role of the Celtic renewal in this nation is to encourage the Church to embrace a faith that is more gentle and incarnational than the colonial one that we have inherited from our English forebears and less 'salesman' like than the recent American models that we seem to have embraced.

Clergy come to Lindisfarne in search of this new way. They arrive as aparatchiks, rushing from pillar to post. They yearn to become people who are tuned in. Some establish a daily pattern of stillness and prayer. Others already have this, but it has become an insulation from the rest of the day, rather than a way of being fully present to God and to others, throughout the day.

The well known conference speaker David Pawson issued a cassette entitled 'de-Greecing the church', in which he complains about the pagan influence of neo Platonism on the early church via Augustine of Hippo. After listening to this, a Cambridge scientist wrote: 'His complaints exactly echo your own complaints about what happened to the Celtic church following Augustine of Canterbury. The dynamism of Celtic Christianity is therefore precisely that of what is called "the early Church" (i.e. in Mediterranean lands).'

Lessons we can draw from these early models

We cannot, of course, recreate the organisation of the early Celtic church, nor should we. But it is possible to learn from them. It was Archbishop Michael Ramsay, quoting Arnold Toynbee, that great historian of the rise and fall of civilisations, who distinguished between historical movements based on archaism, and those based on transfiguration. As we grasp something of the mind-set and dynamic of the Church in Celtic lands, we can move forward in a way that transforms.

The nature of Celtic style churches today

How much of what is meant by 'Celtic style church' today actually correlates with what existed in the church of the 5-10th centuries is a matter of debate. Documents are fragmentary, much is not certain, and in any case opportunities then were more limited. This does not invalidate the use of the term 'Celtic' as a symbol for today. For symbols accrue energies, and some key features of the early church in Celtic lands have become symbols which now bear their own life.

What do people mean by a Celtic style church? I often say that Celtic style churches have the three R's: rhythm with God, roots in the land, rapport with the people. There is growing consensus that Celtic style churches weave together biblical, charismatic, and catholic strands.

Are they for cities? Yes, for Celtic style churches make connections between their surroundings and God, and are fully attentive to whoever and wherever they are. Wherever there can be a rainbow overhead, there a Celtic style church can be.

The following collection of attributes is drawn from all sorts of workshops and conversations.

CELTIC STYLE CONGREGATIONS ARE

+

In God
Holistic
Communal
Grassroots
Hospitable
Endogyneous
Non sectarian
Culture friendly
Creation friendly
Creative and poetic
Deep but not overlaid
At home with the body
Concerned for the poor
Single minded in mission
Disciplined yet spontaneous
Rhythmic in prayer and work
Adaptable to their environment
Genuine towards other churches
Heartfelt and natural in worship
Simple and uncluttered in life-style
Familiar with the world of the Spirit
In continuity with the original church
Incarnational without being parochial
At peace with neighbours and animals

THEY ARE FREE FROM

clutter and artificiality
legalism and clericalism
wordy, stereotyped worship
hidden or defensive agendas
triumphalist or competitive attitudes

Roots for renewal

A person who is secure in their roots is free to explore the future. So is a church.

The Old Testament church had roots in the land and in the saving acts of God in its people. First millennium churches had roots in their Jewish parentage and in the apostles of their own lands.

An endogen is a plant in which new wood is developed in the interior of the stem: an endogyneous church grows within the life of the people of its land. The last time the churches of Britain and Ireland were truly endogyneous was the period of the Celtic Mission.

We have already observed how Millennium 2 churches became disconnected from the grass roots patterns of the people, from the communal memory and from the earth itself. Millennium 3 churches will reconnect with these.

Jung helps us understand the collective unconscious of peoples. For example, he understood Germany as a country of two levels. The surface level was Christian, but since Christianity had originally been forced upon it at the point of a sword, this was thin. The lower level was the pagan gods, which, taking vengeance after Germany was humiliated at the Treaty of Versailles would now break the bonds of its underground prison and take over, wreaking terrible havoc.

Hitler plugged into the collective unconscious of 78 millions Germans. The merging church has to plug into the collective unconscious, not to repress its basic instincts, but to transform them.

NOTES

CHAPT

ER FOUR THE BIRTHRIGHT

(i) The Life of Gildas, was probably written by a monk at the monastery of Rhuys, Brittany in the 9th century. See Two Lives of Gildas translated by Hugh Williams (Llanerch 1990)

(ii) Paul Cavill Anglo-Saxon Christianity (Fount 1999) explores this, though rather uncritically.

(iii) See Christine Fell, Women in Anglo Saxon England and the Impact of 1066 British Museum

Publications 1984

(iv) George Hunter The Celtic Way of Evangelism (Abingdon Press USA 1999)

5. Features of the emerging church

Listening and Journeying

The church of the Old Testament was a people on the move, who listened to God for direction. Although the desert travel phase ended, they habitually sang songs of ascent on the way up to the temple. Their temptation, like ours, was to get stuck, but prophets constantly urged them to walk humbly with their God. The members of the New Testament church were first called followers of The Way (Acts 9:2). Indeed, Church tradition recognises the importance of journey. In some places the Rite of Initiation into the Roman Catholic Church is popularly known as 'The Journey'.

In the new way of being church, programmes and buildings are provisional; they flow out of Spirit-led initiatives, and when that tide ebbs they are beached. Thus there is space to hear God for the new thing God wants to do.

Churches that live this way are not afraid to cross new frontiers. Sometimes this means asking God to show them an opportunity they are meant to take or a need they are meant to respond to.

The British composer John Tavener, who was converted to the Orthodox Faith in 1976, says that the churches of the west will be unable to recover their mission until they recover humility, which he feels the churches of the East have not lost in the same way. One way the Western churches can recover this humility is to recover the idea of pilgrimage as a way of mission as well as of life. Celtic Christians went into exile from the safety and power zones of their home church in order to walk with nothing but Jesus in their hearts. Because they were so vulnerable, so mobile and so full of Jesus many of the pagans they befriended became Christians. John Finney, in his book *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission* (x) concludes that more people became Christian this way than through organised missions. The church historian David Edwards asserts that 'Europe was changed by these pilgrims for the love of God.'

This trait of the emerging church can synchronise with post modern culture. In an abbreviated version of his *The Ties That Bind Us* Matthew D'Ancona wrote in *The Times Magazine* of May 18 1996 about a study on Swindon, which has no population stability or focus. D'Ancona concludes: 'In ways mundane and intriguing, the people of Swindon are learning to live with modernity which one of them described as "the vagabond way". In their unhistoric acts are lessons for us all, gathered on this uncertain vagabond pilgrimage to the Britain of the future.'

One church leader tells me that his congregation has two types of people: position people, who know what their position is and are against receiving from any one who does not hold it; boom and bust people, who have an experience of the Spirit, then take time out when it goes wrong. He wants to bring a third sort into being: the person on a journey who receives from God and mentors others.

In his book *Life After God* Douglas Copeland quotes young people who ask questions such as How can I fly?, How can I have friends? How can I enjoy Christians without the pain of

church?. Copeland's suggestion is: Have Safari Tours round the homes of Christians. (x) Copeland, Douglas Life After God (Simon & Schuster Ltd 1995).

I have been told of churches in USA who take youngsters away climbing, walking etc. They are each given a staff, newly cut. As they walk they talk freely about their childhood, ... they are free to ask questions about their sexuality, money, anything. They are encouraged to talk about what they have found difficult as infants, juniors, at home, with parents, peers, schools. Each time they become aware of important to their journey they mark it on their staff. Evenings they will talk about these. And pray. Before they leave they will throw their staff on to a fire to be burned. In this way they marked that they are leaving their childhood. They make a commitment to Christ.

A church in Birmingham set up a Voice of the People Trust. The Rev Dr. Laurie Green, Principal of the Aston Clergy Training Course, wrote of this:

The 'Voice of the People' ... comes from a deeply felt Christian concern that since all of us are made in God's image, then we should all be listened to... 'The Voice' tries to act as a vehicle for working class values and working class culture to be expressed... The powers that be will learn a lot from listening to the Cry of the City just as in the Bible, time and again, it was the cry of the people at the bottom of the pile that was the voice that God listened to and upon which God acted.

Many residents perceive the local church as a privatised concern for a minority. They do not feel the church is in solidarity with their good, even though non-religious, aspirations. Businesses and political parties conducted listening exercises in order to respond more effectively to the people they were trying to reach, so is there any good reason why we churches should not listen?

Raymond Fung, Evangelism Secretary of the World Council of Churches, was urging churches to draw up an agenda with people of good will in the neighbourhood. He called this an Isaiah Agenda, because passages such as Isaiah 65. 20-23 provide examples of agendas of justice and peace which require partnership with the population. (x) Raymond Fung, How a Local Congregation Evangelises and Grows, World Council of Churches.

Our leaders explored how we might harness the following modern equivalent of Isaiah's agenda to the population of Bowthorpe:

- * Every child cherished from conception
- * Every old person living and dying in dignity
- * Every person having a place of their own and fruitful work
- * Joy and safety in the streets
- * Trust between age- and ethnic- groups
- * Harmony with the environment and God.

When a church truly listens to the cries of the people and to the cries of its God it becomes, in the words of Dr. Philip Potter, a former President of the World Council of Churches, the prophetic conscience of society.

A daily rhythm of prayer, work, and re-creation

To my mind, tradition is a God-given awareness of natural rhythms
and of a fundamental harmony.
Prince Charles

Tragically, the worship of most churches consists of packaged words that do not so much as say hello to the sun's dawning, the rain's falling, or the day's dying. Or else the worship spills out of the surfeited psyches of dominant members who are too surfeited to notice the rhythms of their own bodies, let alone of the days or the years. Yet it is possible to create a sense of daily rhythm which touches and inspires a wider number, even amongst the most mobile populations, and which connects them with the ebb and flow of deeper realities.

The Bible sets the entire story of God's saving work for humanity within the setting of a universe of rhythm. The Bible tells how God chooses a people and teaches them ways of reflecting that rhythm in their society: through one day in seven and one year in seven rest, the rhythm of prayer that reflects, the sun rising, the sun at its midday height, and the sun setting. The New Testament presents Jesus the model for human beings, living a rhythm of total self-giving to the people and total withdrawal to a solitary place. The Saviour arranged for his most significant actions to coincide with the rhythm of the religious seasons.

In emerging churches the corporate worship follows the rhythm of the natural seasons and of the church year, and observes seasons of fasting or spiritual warfare, of lamentation for the sins and hurts of society, and of joy and celebration of creation. The word rhythm comes from a Greek word (rhythmos) whose root meaning is flow.

Physicists are discovering that our universe has an underlying pattern; nature is full of symmetry. Rhythm is indivisible. There is a rhythm of the seasons of the year, and a rhythm of the seasons of life. There is a rhythm between masculine and feminine. The emerging churches seek to flow in these rhythms.

A well known church leader told a 'New Wine' gathering that his church would have a holiday period in July and August because that is the natural thing to do. Then it would have more energy to develop programmes in the new autumn season.

Many things in life can be harnessed to rhythm. West Indian bands harness modern technology to serve their rhythmic music. Cassian's Institutes, Section 2 reveals that in monastic worship a cantor would sing 10 verses of a psalm while everyone else listened. This was followed by silent prayer and a collect. There were four cantors who took turns to sing the psalms.

The first council of the New Testament churches saw these as a restoration of King David's set-up, and a making good the gaps in it (Acts 15:16). This without doubt included the restoration of daily worship.

If this daily offering of total worship does not again become the centre of our life,
our world will not be able to be transfigured or united.

It will be incapable of surpassing its divisions, its imbalance, its emptiness
and death, in spite of all human-centred plans to improve it.

Archimandrite George Capsanis of Mount Athos.

In the first millennium the daily prayer together in the larger, hub churches was normal, and these were called 'Peoples Services'. However, they degenerated. Monastic churches developed long, wordy services which suited celibate monks but which put off the general population.. Daily worship in central churches became clericalised, form became more important than fellowship, ritual more important than relationship. A counter church culture developed which encouraged prayers from pulpits or in groups, but not corporate daily prayer.

In the third millennium, we have to make good the gaps, integrating the creativity and spontaneity of occasional prayer gatherings, with the first millennium's rhythm of corporate daily prayer. This is beginning to happen, in churches of all shapes and sizes. Some use Anglican or Roman Catholic liturgies. Others use simpler, more flexible patterns. Daily prayer patterns from contemporary communities such as Aidan and Hilda, Iona, Northumbria and Taize are increasingly being adopted.

St. Patrick's Church, in down-town Hove, Sussex had a large Victorian building which was nearly redundant. The Bishop of Chichester invited four monks from the Community of the Servants of the Will of God to buy a nearby three storey terraced. They transferred three of their daily services of worship into the church. The monks gave homeless and hungry people hospitality, according to their Rule, but since they had too little space to meet the need., the rear of the church building was converted into a Shelter for the homeless and meals were provided following the midday and evening services. Pews were removed and icons put in their place. Soon not only the poor attended daily prayer, but suited business people came out of the woodwork too.

In the light of the link between their monastic house and St. Patrick's the Abbot of the Community, Father Gregory, wrote Living for the Kingdom; a Rule for the Parish Community which integrates all aspects of church life into the Lord's Supper. There is a weekly rhythm of daily prayer together, a common meal on Thursday, fasting and prayer round the Cross on Friday, and regular blessings in homes.

The fundamental need of our society is to have men and women
who together create communities of welcome
Jean Vanier

Hospitality

Lack of hospitality has been the constant charge of God against his people. Many churches welcome newcomers at the door on Sunday, but these are not welcomed into the other rooms, as it were, during the week. Twentieth century churches tended to welcome people as believers: emerging churches welcome them as neighbours.

In a people's church there is a welcome throughout the week, a place to be alone, to pray, to share a meal, to be listened to. There are displays and facilities which children, old people, business people, deaf people can relate to.

I have often asked church leaders if they know anywhere which does this today. They have told me of Sikh temples which do this, but not of a Christian church. Nevertheless, a growing

number of churches do sponsor lunch clubs, refreshments or cafes. Many of these are not, however, part of a whole experience. In a monastic style church, lunch guests do not have to leave when the lunch club closes, they can stay to pray, wander, study or talk to people who are always there, in the atmosphere of a spiritual home.

The early British churches hosted the main social events in their area. All who lived and worked in the vicinity of the monastic church would be welcomed to the large barn with a blazing fire when an instrument, would be passed round. Each could take a turn to sing or play. The modern equivalent to this is the Karaoke. Generally, pubs host these rather than churches. Emerging churches will host karaokes, barbecues and firework evenings.

I shall never forget touring Poland in the 1980's. Despite the fact that it was then behind the Iron Curtain, large numbers of young Catholics from other countries traversed the land with rucksacks on their backs, and slept on the floors of church halls, where they also used the kitchen and wash facilities. This contrasts with Britain where the youth hostel movement is divorced from the church. People's churches have hostels .

Hospitality is not only about accommodation, it is also about creating emotional space. People now go to retreat houses who have ceased to go to churches. The reason, according to Paddy Lane of the National Retreat Association, is that Retreat Houses provide them with a welcoming, safe context where that which is of God in them can be drawn out; whereas churches put upon them sermons, hymnbooks, noise and churchy agendas. Monastic style churches provide both physical and emotional space.

Hospitality is a sign that a community is alive, that it is not afraid, that it has something valuable to share. To welcome anyone is always a risk; an over busy community which opens its doors can become a burned out community. There is a time for a community, as for an individual, to be alone, to deepen its identity and its intimacy with God; but there is also a time to open wide the doors.

Hospitality is a way of way of life that is due for a comeback. It is the smile that greets friend and stranger. It is the warm embrace, and the welcome of each person as a gift from God.

Human and healing

God made us human beings, not human doings.
Robert Warren

In the film Dances with Wolves the Native American Chief Kicking Bear says to a US Army Chief 'Of all the trails in life there is one that matters more than all the others. It is the trail of the true human being.' How many of our churches are on that trail?

'What does it mean to be fully human?' Here are some answers I have received to this question:.

to be real
to make good relationships
to be a good lover
to be sensual, understanding, and beautiful inside

to be in touch with your feelings
to flow in your potential
to have masculine-feminine balance
to be healthy in mind and body
to be free
to live and die well
to appreciate good food, friends, and things
to appreciate the wonder of life
being alive with all your senses
to be deep but full of fun.

An Indian elder (Oriah Medicine Dreamer) put it this way: 'I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dream, for the adventure of being alive.... I want to know if you have touched the centre of your own sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become shrivelled and closed by fear of further pain! I want to know if you can sit down with pain, mine or your own, without moving to hide or fade it, or fix it. I want to know if you can be with JOY, mine or your own,; if you can dance with wildness or let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes. I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself; if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul. I want to know if you can see beauty even when it is not pretty everyday; and if you can source your life on the edge of the lake and shout to the silver of the full moon YES!!!!'

How can churches become places that enable us to become more fully human?

First, by grasping the biblical rationale for this. The reason a church should seek to be fully human is that our humanness is what reflects God's likeness in us. The glory of God is seen in a human life - its sensuality, intellect, relationships, work, creativity, and worship lived to the full. To be fully human is to tie in with our original intention. To be redeemed is to be redeemed into all that we are meant to be; to be like Jesus, who is the most complete human being.

By creating humans in the divine image, God endowed us with an innate capacity to distinguish between good and evil. We can distinguish between good and evil by following an inner law that arouses the emotions appropriate to each: shame, fear, guilt are signs we are making wrong choices. Joy, resolution and confidence are signs we are making right choices. It is this innate capacity to distinguish between good and evil which we inherit from Adam. It is not Adam's sexual acts, but his example in making wrong choices, which turns us from good to evil.

Third, by revitalising the concept of Mother Church. There is an old Hebridean saying 'There is a mother's heart in the heart of God'. For the last decade of his life the Scotsman William Sharpe (1855-1905) wrote under the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod, perhaps thus reconnecting with his more feminine self. In his book Iona, published in 1910 he recalls this old Celtic prophecy:

The Holy Spirit shall come again ... All will be aware
of the descending of the Divine Womanhood upon the human heart

as a universal spirit descending upon waiting souls.

Prophecy needs to be tested, and not all that comes from Macleod's pen passes that test, but perhaps this prophecy does.

Robert Warren, the Church of England's Evangelism Officer, has reminded many congregations that 'churches should become the places, par excellence, where the general public can find out how to live fully human lives'. A lady told me 'I don't want to go to a church that will judge me, but to one that will understand me.' She will find a home in churches that reflect the mother heart of God.

A former Elim pastor named Mark was reading Robert Warren's book *Being Human: Being Church*. He was now minister of a small independent fellowship. 'How do we become a fully human church?' he asked.

We broke this huge challenge into four areas: 1) Clear thinking about what it means from God's point of view (theology). 2) Dismantling frameworks which inhibit this. 3) Developing a lifestyle which expresses it. 4) Dealing with pitfalls which undermine it.

As Mark and I began discussing how a church can become human he kept interjecting 'But our members would not go along with that'. For example, they might assume that the way to move into God's presence is 1980's style celebration; so to have a time of worship in which there was no such singing, or prophecy would be unthinkable. A stylised frame had replaced being real together before God. So first, his church had to dismantle a particular style which members associated with being fully Spirit-filled. Or they might plan a social occasion to which the public were invited, but because members felt driven to corner each non-Christian and ask them to receive Jesus, the relish of the occasion and the spontaneity of friendship was lost. It became unnatural, and the guests never came again. So the stylised framework of evangelism had to be dismantled. His members had to be taught that Jesus built a relationship with people before he asked them to follow him.

Mark believes that a church of people who are becoming fully human connects with people at many places and levels, whereas old style approaches disconnect them. Thus his church hosts a harvest service that honours local businesses and education centres.

Households

We have taken the major events of the home like birth, marriage and death,
and have anaesthetised them by placing them in church.

Archdeacon Martin Wallace

At first sight no two things have less in common than home life in biblical times and home life today. A Jewish or Celtic home was a long established, extended household around which the basic things of life revolved. A modern family has been described as a temporary arrangement of beds around a fridge and a micro oven; the important things happen

elsewhere. Yet there is a golden thread that links the two: as the sparrow yearns to build a nest so does the human being

Jewish and Celtic models of the church in the home can spur modern Christians to exchange from artificial churchy duties for that of enjoying God together in their homes.

The Christianity of the Celts was a spirituality of the hearth before it was a spirituality of the church. Every household chore became a liturgy, because they practised ritually being present to God in each thing that they did. Thus familiar prayers for lighting the fire, dressing, cleaning, cooking, eating, welcoming visitors, retiring to bed became second nature. Births, marriages, deaths, anniversaries, homecomings were all celebrated in the home.

Contemporary household rituals are being well used. (x) See, for example, volume three of The Celtic Book of Common Prayer. In some circles it is becoming fashionable to create prayer corners in homes. A work, study, eating or bed room may nowadays merge into an area of ikons, candles, prayer cards, Bible or tokens of creation that evoke adoration.

I believe many churches should release people from churchy duties which they are not really called to, and establish these three practices:

1. A weekly meal in households. During these each person is present to those who wish to tell of their 'journey' that week. A candle is lit, and prayer is offered. Friends who have no such household are invited to join them. A spare place is laid for Christ in the guise of the stranger or the unseen guest. This may take the form of the Jewish Shabat meal on Friday evenings, which Christians increasingly use. (*) For example The Northumbria Community See Celtic Night Prayer (HarperCollins 1997)

2. A yearly blessing of the home with a celebration. Some people do this on St. Brigid's Day, February 1, and combine it with the custom of placing a Brigid Cross made of rushes in the home and extending this to store rooms, outhouses, caravans, boats which have been disused during the season of dark. Congregations which have adopted the cell model have a head start, but it is important that every member's home, where permission is given, is visited and blessed once a year.

Soul friends ...

Mystical and connected to the Unseen World

I am deeply convinced that great renewal will develop
wherever communities enter regularly into solitude.

Time for silence, individual study, personal prayer and meditation
must be seen to be as important to all the members of the community
as working together, playing together and worshipping together.

Without solitude we can not experience each other as different manifestations
of a love that transcends us all.

Henri Nouwen

'The biggest problem with evangelical Christianity' an evangelical pastor told me, 'is that they have to know all the answers. It robs them of so much.' Emerging churches foster windows of the soul, that is, the ability to read the signs of God's life in our everyday and inner worlds. This is spiritual literacy, heart knowledge, a way of awareness and seeing. (x) Brussat, Frederic and Mary Ann, *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life* (Simon and Schuster 1998) provides a stimulating anthology on this theme. '

In his letter to the church of Laodicia (Revelation 2) John urges the value of purity (white) and of inner seeing - churches need people whose eyes are washed in continual contemplation. Things that prevent this way of seeing in congregations are a world view that dismisses the mystical and personal experience as worthless.

The deep need in the human soul for divine contemplation has long been repressed, but is now making itself felt. There is a mushrooming of prayer corners, prayer cells and poustinias in houses, gardens and monasteries.

How do church members who discover they are called to contemplative prayer stay in their church if it has no place for it? The vision of a cradle-in-the-making needs to be shared with their churches. Cradles are different from organisations.

The greatest challenge to the church in the third millennium
is to relate in a Christ-centred way to the Unseen World,
which people on the Alternative scene are far more at home with
than than are Christians.

James Turnbull

Many of the most spiritual people believe in, visualise or encounter spiritual beings. Every heresy is the revenge of a suppressed truth. The goddess movement may be seen in this light. Protestantism has said that the things of heaven are unknowable. Second millennium churches tended to ignore the biblical model of the Divine Assembly. The earliest name the Christian Bible ascribes to God is El Elyon, meaning the Divine Source of all beings and things. According to the Bible El Elyon has many offspring (Psalm Job) The offspring of El were still active in New Testament days; for example Gabri-El (Strength of El), Micha-El (Likeness El). At Jesus' birth the angels praised El. and Jesus is described as the Son of El, (Immanu-El, Matthew 5:2)

The Bible also names God : as The Most High. This makes us aware that there is a hierarchy of beings, at the summit of which is the Most High. Another biblical name for God is The Lord of Hosts. There were a host of beings, earthly and heavenly which constituted this host.

There are polarities within God: male and female(Genesis 1:27) light and darkness (Isaiah 45:7); Yahweh is both a warrior and a mother (Isaiah 42:13,14))

Ezekiel saw a vision of Yahweh in the form of four living creatures representing the four fixed signs of Taurus, Aquarius, Leo and Scorpio. Both models reappear in the last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse of St. John, in the seven spirits of El Elyon and the four living creatures surrounding the throne of the Lamb (i.e. Christ Rev.4:5) No aspect of creation is left out of the Divine Assembly. The cosmos was a unified organism, a macrocosm which is reflected in

each individual who is a microcosm. There were planetary deities. Using a system that united the seven known planets of the day with the characteristics of the zodiacal signs the Sumerians had worked out the general patterns involved in each individual life. That need not detract from the freedom that is the birthright of each human being, and which Christ came to give back to us. To this day the motto of genuine astrology remains 'The stars dispose but they do not determine.'

If gods and goddesses are seen for what they are, symbolic representations of created powers and energies, the raw material of cosmic life in all its diverse aspects, then they need to be valued in the light of their motivation. Often, in the Old Testament, prophets called believers to renounce false or evil gods; this was because they were in opposition to The Most High. In other passages God's spokesperson calls on them to bow down to The Most High, but not to disappear. The Greek version of Deuteronomy 32:43 bears this out:

Rejoice with him, O heavens
Bow down to him sons of God (i.e. Elohim, sons of El)
Rejoice with his people, nations
Confirm him, all you angels of God.

Relationship and soul friends

'See how these Christians love one another' was a common saying in the first few centuries of the church. Since those times, those who wish to become members of the church have been required to accept a creed which states what they are to believe, but they have not been required to accept the Beatitudes (the beautiful attitudes commended by Jesus Matthew 5: 1-12) which state how they are to relate. The emerging church puts the Beatitudes on a level with the creeds.

If the loving church is to replace the judgmental church, cells within the Body of Christ will have to learn new conditioned reflexes. Members of churches who visit Lindisfarne often ask 'How do we bring this about?' They want to serve Jesus, but do not want to do this in churches which are dominated by committees, clerics and conventions. I advise them to exercise faith. That is, to act as if relationship is primary in every conversation, committee and circumstance.

One church encourages any member who had upset another to take them a love gift the following day.

Equality of regard has become an accepted principle in our society. It was, for example, a building block of the 1998 Northern Ireland Good Friday Agreement. The emerging church has to be a community where this principle is practised.

At the heart of the doctrine of God is a communion of loving selves. In a book entitled *Trinity for Atheists* Italian theologian Bruno Forte describes the Trinity as 'a communion of flowing relationships'. We can only find our true identity as persons by reflecting this communion. As Charles Williams observed: it is as important to learn how we live from each other as how we are to live for each other.

In St. Aidan's ancient kingdom of Northumbria there are still people, like him, who model church as friendship. When Rev. Catherine Hooper, who had parishes in the Gateshead

area, was killed in a car crash in 1999 a neighbour told The Daily Telegraph: 'It took her ages to walk to church because she was stopped by so many people along the way who wanted to talk to her. Before she came here very few people came to the church, but afterwards it was always packed, especially with young people.' (x) The Daily Telegraph May 29 1999

People friendly

True evangelism always happens from within the culture.
To adopt a new faith does not imply adopting a new culture
Martin Wallace.

The Christian faith never exists except as 'translated' into culture
David Bosch

(x) Bosch, David J Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll
New York Orbis Books 1991)

In the 1990's John Finney conducted research for the United Bible Societies in Britain on How People Find Faith. He summarised the findings in four words: 'Belonging comes before believing'. In USA George Hunter's research led him to a similar conclusion: More and more of the converts he questioned had felt that they were included and wanted in the church before they believed. (x) Hunter, George, The Celtic Way of Evangelism page 54 (Abingdon Press USA 1999)

Second millennium churches often thought it was necessary to crush all pre-and non-Christian spirituality for the sake of Jesus. It is true that if the church surrenders its soul to the spirit of the age it will have nothing to give, but it is equally true that if it fails to enter the soul of the people it will fail to give what it has. The Christian community has to be distinct from culture and yet immersed in it, as Jesus showed us.

Jesus was able to become one with the people in all things except sin because he remained one with his divine That enabled him to lose earthly power, and became king of human hearts.

His critics, the pharisees, had big evangelistic campaigns, but failed to turn round the hearts of the people. They imposed their culture, whereas Jesus stroked the people's culture. He took prime time to involve himself in their typical social gatherings (for example a wedding at Cana John 2), religious gatherings (at synagogues) and occupations (for example, fishing). He gave himself to the poor, and did not put extra burdens upon them. He went to the most popular event of the year (Pentecost Festival Holiday), and illustrated his message with the most universally valued commodity - water. When Jesus made water taste like good wine (John 2) the need being met was a neighbourhood celebration whose swing was threatened - an extended family whose good name for hospitality was in the balance.

Some churches hedge round the Christian message as something 'unregenerate' people cannot understand. Jesus believed in freedom of information for all people. He held talkathons in large open air auditoriums (e.g. Matthew 5-7).

In order to baptise our culture we have to see it from the inside as does God . What is of God in it? How God is present in it? (x) Shorter, Aylward Evangelisation and Culture Chapman £18.99

Emerging churches face the people. When someone took pot shots at one her convents convents in a new York slum area Mother Teresa quietly went into the back yard, a tiny square of rubble and clothes lines, with an old, peeling statue of Mary, which faced the sisters while they worked in the kitchen. Mother Teresa stood there for a few minutes and then said. 'Turn the statue around. Let her face the people'. The sisters were never shot at again.(x) The Plough October 1997.

This story is a parable for each church to apply in its own way. One church in a large Leeds housing estate begun to face the people when its Bingo club, which was losing members, asked the vicar if she would come and bless it. She offered to extend the blessing into a service. They were so thrilled with this that they asked if they could have a regular service. This became known as the Bingo church.

Emerging churches 'target the chiefs'. The first evangelists in the British Isles had to persuade local rulers to open doors to them before any mission could begin. Post modern society is becoming tribal again and the church must learn to relate to people groups. A Bishop advised a new young priest to 'target the tribal chiefs' in his local housing estate. The police had lost control there, and a local mafia, who cruised the estate in expensive cars financed from drugs, took charge. They had a code which meant they 'looked after' the local community. When the Vicarage was twice vandalised the new minister informed the local newspaper that they cared about the local community and were too poor to own the church house they lived in. On reading this the leader of the 'mafia' befriended the vicar, and promised to protect him and provide for the community. The 'mafia' provided a superb community fireworks display with cans of beer a-plenty. The debilitating cycle of dependency which marked other estates where the council ran everything was being broken; a community was being empowered in certain ways.

Emerging churches start from where local residents are. They follow the principle Do not try to teach anyone anything until you have learnt something from them. If we start where people are we will find that most people, even though they are unchurched, have a bank of spiritual experience upon which we may draw. God can and does speak to human beings because they are human beings, not because they are Christians. The Bible records many examples of this, none of which denies the necessity for witness.

The Alister Hardy Research Unit has discovered that nearly two thirds of the British population admit to having religious experiences, but that for a number of reasons people rarely talk about them. This includes children. Researchers such as David Hay (x) Hay, D. Religious Experience Today Mowbray (Cassell 1990), and Rebecca Nye conclude that for all children, not just those who have been taught religious beliefs, spirituality is an essential aspect of life. (x) Nye and Hay Investigating Children's Spirituality: How Do You Start Without a Starting Point? British Journal of Education 18:3. They uncover three categories of spiritual sensitivity in children which they call awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing. These make possible the exploration of spirituality in a broader context than the traditionally recognised languages. Their findings suggest that children's' natural 'relational consciousness' has been distorted or repressed by false constructs of Christianity. 'Value

blockage' in Christian culture has been caused by factors which include the adoption of the Imperial mode by the church, which became an instrument of control; the assimilation by the church of dualistic Greek ideas; and the abdication by 17th century theologians for defending spiritual awareness as a valid source of knowledge. (x) Nye, David, page 152).

My friend Liz Cannon, whose paper Children's Spirituality - An Unexpected Store. contributed to this research asks: 'Could it be that our secular culture is crushing the spirituality which is natural to children? Is it that at some level they discern that to be accepted in the secular culture of today, they have to let go of something which is very much part of them and integral to their life and wellbeing? And this crushing of children's natural integrated spirituality ...even contributes to certain children's behaviour problems?' Retreating churches feared open exploration of spirituality, they exercised power by telling children what they 'ought' to hear rather than discovering God 'from whom every family on earth takes its name' (Ephesians 3:15).

Mike Pilavachi is an Anglican who has started the Soul Survivor church near Watford. He likens the traditional Anglican church, which he says he loves, to a high class French restaurant whose cuisine and menu is entirely French. He likens churches such as Soul Survivor to McDonalds - cheap, cheerful and accessible - where most of the population feel more at home. The church grew out of Mike's passion for 'just doing church without the religious stuff'. When he is challenged about colluding with anti Christian culture he answers: 'There are aspects of all cultures that are unChristian.... the question is, can cultures be redeemed? Jesus was part of his culture and was counter cultural to some aspects of it.' (x) Interview in Celebrate, Friday December 3 1999.

Earth friendly

Christ's work is the ultimate reconciliation of all living creatures.
Karl Barth (commentary on Colossians 1)

'My church teaches me to be reconciled with God and with people, but it does not teach me to be reconciled to the earth' Catherine informed me. That could be said of most second millennium churches.

Many people seek a spirituality which is natural, and they feel violated if the church puts on unnatural airs, or neglects the earth.

Conservative twentieth century churches rebuked those who claimed to find God in a garden. 'That is nature religion. It needs no Saviour', they said. The result was that people like William Hague, Britain's 1990's Conservative leader, declared that they went to church one Sunday a month, walked in the countryside the other Sundays, and gained more benefit from the latter.

Our pre-Christian forbears instinctively understood that the marriage of the human population with the fertile soil is necessary to the well-being of both. (x) In the early myths of the Celts the god of the tribe mates with the goddess of the earth. (x) Sjoestedt, Marie-Louise, Gods and Heroes of the Celts (Berkeley, Turtle Island Foundation, 1982). In the light of Christian revelation and modern science, that instinct can be seen as at heart sound. The early

church, secure in its Jewish roots, understood this. God named the first man Earth (Adamah). Mr. Earth's first act was to name, and thereby bless, each of earth's creatures.(Genesis 2.7). In other words, the human being contains within themselves the whole earth. Jesus Christ, who St. Paul names 'the second Adam' (1 Corinthians 15.47)) comes from heaven, yet contains within his humanity the whole evolving earth story, and its groaning in anticipation of its coming total fulfilment (Romans 8. 19-23)

Several centuries passed. Augustine taught that creation was an act of God's power. Celtic Christians saw that creation was an act of God's love. (Newbiggin). Maximum the Confessor (d. 662) taught that the Creator-Logos has implanted in each created thing a characteristic 'thought' which is God's presence in and intention for it; this is its inner essence which makes it distinctively itself and at the same time draws it towards God. By virtue of this indwelling logos each created thing is not just an object but a personal word addressed to us by the Creator. Thus the second Person of the Trinity acts as an all-embracing and unifying cosmic Presence.

The Celtic churches understood Christ, and therefore his Body, the church, as 'the bough' of creation. This way of seeing the creation drained away when bureaucratic ways came to dominate the minds and machinery of the church..

The emerging church grasps this cosmic fullness of Jesus. It opens its doors to the whole earth community. The hundreds of thousands of people who, following the 'word' God has put within them to cherish the earth, but not knowing the story or the home of this 'word', will at last realise that creation is safe with Christians, and they will come home.

Earth, as a result of human action, is experiencing a monumental change. God is speaking to us through this. Our generation has been chosen by God to respond to the most momentous period of change in the billions of years of earth's history. The chemistry, bio-systems, geology and ozone layer are changing more radically than ever they have, and life systems are being extinguished at an unparalleled rate.

So how can churches respond?

1. A university professor invited students for regular gatherings at his home. They discussed how to get or keep the sparkle, the spirit, in life. A consensus emerged: the three as to three things that would most help them to fulfil their aspirations: Get into the outdoors, cut out over consumption, and forgive people. Emerging churches will get into the outdoors, cut out over consumption, and practise forgiveness.

2. Modern man has destroyed wild natural places. The Chelsea Flower show never had a place for the wild. But in the 1980's it included a wild life garden. Now Chelsea gardens are full of wild life. It is an urban movement. Emerging churches will create connections with wild places.

They will reclaim and guard sacred spaces. Some will have organically farmed land. Parish churches will extend churchyards to include surrounding land. Churches can bridge this gap in cities as well as in countryside. One urban church provides a shed in a beautifully kept allotment for its members to keep and use. The Church of England has a Living Churchyard campaign to preserve rare and wild flowers. (x) See Members of a church in Ilford are

shareholders in the church grounds. Churches have a unique opportunity to facilitate the surge in folk crafts.

3. Emerging churches bridge the gap between natural and artificial religion by blessing the earth and animals, making creation theme prayer corners, holding services at solstices and Easter sunrise, and by prayer walks.

4. Emerging churches green the church.. This may mean using energy saving, non polluting materials and wholesome foods. (x) The Evangelical Alliance has promoted a Creation Audit among member churches.' (x) Chris Seaton... It may mean that it furnishes its rooms with wooden rather than plastic chairs. Certain emerging churches may invest in a prototype eco car which advertises both the ecology and the church. Some will give a proportion of their money to ecology projects.

5. Emerging churches try to improve the ecology of their area. Some of their members will build up eco consciousness in local schools, support local ecology groups or the Agenda 21 Process initiated by the Rio Earth Summit of 1994..

Creative arts

The emerging church walks hand in hand with the creative arts, because human creativity is a reflection of the Creator, though it must always cater for non artistic people who value order more than experiment. The churches that have survived best provide a predictable framework which includes treasured, unchanging words and creeds, but they use these as a springboard for creativity, not as a straitjacket.

When Kim Erickson Haire worked as a waitress in various American cities, she became aware of a large group of people who were quite different from the people she met in churches. She calls these 'the fluid people'. Fluid people, she observes, congregate at the vegetarian restaurant during Sunday lunch, while 'the Christians are institutionalised, singing words which originate on the surface of a page, skim the surface of their hearts, and echo off the surface of church walls.' She continues:

Fluid people are liquid; they are poured into life and moving with the tide of the cosmos They pour their spirits into art. Their souls feel somehow connected to the movement of the earth, and they search for meaning through colour, movement and harmony.

Maybe the nerves somehow transfer differently to the brain, for this person actually feels colour; he flows with the shades, the depth and the richness; he becomes a part of its movement without form. She sees music, not as notes on a page, but as sounds which form movement in mirrors of light in her imagination, and if she is a praying person, she prays a dance to her God. He hears a rhythm that needs no music, it is the music of the earth, the strum of the wind, the gasp of the waves, the pulses of nature. She tastes the pain, the bitterness in the depth of a heart, or the sweetness which waits eagerly in the soul. He smells hope like expectant snow,

clean and fresh; hope ready to burst through the cold greyness with brilliant crystals reflecting the true light of heaven...'

Kim Haire concludes that most fluid people are consumed with the spiritual world, but few relate to Christ. She believes that the icon can be a powerful tool for discipling the fluid person. The icon, she writes 'has an intrigue which arouses the imagination and stimulates the senses of a person... it does not bend to the theatrical; it does not flaunt a gaudy Jesus on black velvet... The ikon reaches mysteriously from the cosmic realm into the human realm... To a believer, this truth is Christ - to the unbeliever it is a mystery, a mystery calling, urging, drawing the lost to seek and enter the kingdom of God.'

(x) Notes supplied by John Smith from his seminary in USA

It is important that churches do not let the arts they use be divorced from the ever fresh wells of creativity. In the stillness of dawn, fresh springs come to light.

The retreating church's neglect of the poetry in people created a vacuum which, here and there, other groups have tried to fill. For example, Ian McMilln has been employed as poet-in-residence of both Barnsley Football Club and Northern Spirit train company in West Yorkshire (X The Times July 15 1999) Peter Sanson, the poet hired by Marks and Spencer to bring out 'the creative side' of its 57,000 employees believes that everyone has a poet inside them. (x) The Week 13 Dec 1997

Poets were birth of the birthright of the biblical church.

The true poet is really a prophet. His gaze looks on things that others miss.
It is no accident that in the original manuscripts,
the words of the Old Testament prophets were written in poetic form.
Denny Gunnerson

The Welsh poet and archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams describes the work of the poet as 'interpreting and harmonising the flow of the world's life in such a way that the shifts and changes of the world ...can be unveiled as transfiguration, epiphanies of God's life.' (x) Rowan Williams Ffydd ac Argyfwng Cenedl (Faith and the Crisis of a Nation) Vol. 2 John Penri Press 1982, Swansea.

Emerging churches weave poetry into their worship, and the larger ones appoint bards.

Poetry leaves some people cold, and churches should be places where non poetic people feel at home. These often respond to the good telling of a story. My journalist friend Clive Price met a member of a church in Denver, Colorado, which was founded by Indians. Clive told him what went on at a typical church meeting in Britain. 'Oh, we don't do anything like that' the church member replied, 'when we gather together we spend the time telling stories'. (x) Indian Bible Church, 595 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209 USA

The retreating church either idolised or rejected signs and symbols. The emerging church, reflecting Christ's ministry, which overflowed with living symbols, celebrates the glory of God in painting and poetry, colour and sound, movement and music, symbol and drama. It brings colour back into the streets; it uses oil, water, fire, the earth and all its fruits. It seeks to rekindle a Christian imagination.

Roger Ellis of Revelation Church is giving himself to a church which is, in his words, emerging from the culture, not insulting it. He and Chris Seaton describe in their book *The New Celts* how God is leading them to establish culture friendly cafe churches for young people, and to use creative arts in worship:

We have encouraged artists to come and draw what they feel is happening as the church worships together. We have also had sculptors and even potters working to one side of the meeting. Sometimes, in the process of the worship the artists are encouraged to interpret what it is they are portraying. At other times the work is left to stand in its own right and people are invited to go and view it at the end and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to them.' (x) Ellis, Roger and Seaton, Chris *New Celts* (Kingsway 1998).

In his book, *Which Way for the Church?*, (x) Frost, Rob *Which Way for the Church?*, (Kingsway Publications, 1996) the Rev Dr Rob Frost foresees a vital role for the arts in the Church of the new Millennium:

"Music will take greater prominence and will become integral to the prayer experience. Prayer through music will be commonplace, be it sung Evensong, jazz mass, folk celebration or classic meditation.

"The new churches will rediscover art, from the iconography of the East to the statues of Rome, and they will develop their own contemporary spirituality through it. Frequently changing displays, pictures, posters and banners will become a growing inspiration for prayer as the churches learn how to use the visual arts as a means and not an end ...

"In the new church drama will be seen as a prime means of effective communication. Actor Nigel Forte wrote 'Prophetic theatre is theatre which clarifies the word of God at a particular time; Evangelistic theatre is that which clarifies the Gospel in particular; Didactic theatre - in this context - clarifies the teaching of the Bible, and Entertaining theatre is based on the nature of human kind and creation...'

"The arts will not change or cheapen the gospel, nor will they replace preaching; they will complement it. The language of film, music, drama, poetry and dance will be the vernacular of the new generation, and the church will learn how to speak it, and speak it fluently."

Unity and justice

During the second millennium three great strands of Christianity became separated: the catholic strand of community around the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; the Protestant strand of personal conversion around the Bible; and the Orthodox (and in a sense the Pentecostal) strand of worship around an experience of the Holy Spirit. It was laid upon me that God wanted to weave these three strands together again, and that we were to let him weave them together in us as he willed.

Jesus said to his apostles 'Whoever listens to you, listens to me'. The apostles were not always right, but they had been selected; they had responded, they spent time with Jesus. So we have to make an act of unity with the original apostles. I journeyed to the tombs in Rome in order to make an act of unity with Peter (a symbol of the Roman Catholic churches); with Paul (a symbol of Protestant churches, since he rebuked Peter for wrong behaviour); and I have subsequently made an act of unity with John (a symbol of the churches in Eastern and Celtic lands).

In his auto-biographical book *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966) Thomas Merton wrote: 'If I can unite in myself the thought and devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and the Latin Fathers, the Russian with the Spanish Mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christians ... If we want to bring together what is divided we cannot do so by imposing one division upon another or absorbing one tradition into another. We must contain all the divided worlds in ourselves and transcend them in Christ'. In some deep and mysterious way, God was speaking also to me along these lines.

We have to make an act of unity with those God has placed in oversight in the churches today. There is disagreement as to how these leaders are meant to be appointed, but we all need to see that God has provided for our unity by giving us leaders. We should honour in the Lord all those who have been placed in oversight over churches which follow the orthodox Christian Faith. This need not mean blind obedience - which in our plural society could not be the custom. But neither does it mean everyone does what is right in their own eyes. It means each of us should listen carefully, weigh thoughtfully, and communicate respectfully to other overseers.

Then we have to make an act of unity with God's Word in the Bible. Although Christians may have different understandings of the Bible, every Christian is required to approach it with deep humility, hungry to be fed, as a lover eagerly poring over a love letter from their beloved.

We have to make an act of unity with Jesus in Holy Communion. This sacrament means just that, Christians communing together with their Lord, visibly. Every time we receive the bread and wine we should make ourselves one with the whole Body of Christ on earth and in heaven, certain sections of the world church ban baptised members of other churches from receiving the bread and wine. This is on the grounds that they have broken away from the one church, and have therefore broken the biblical conditions for receiving Communion. Those who are excluded should adopt the attitude of the foreign woman who begged Jesus to give her some food, even if only the scraps left for the dog. Don't stay away, beg for scraps, which can take various forms according to local inspirations. Many churches, however, have an Open Table - it is open to all the beggars of the world who are hungry to be fed by Jesus. These Open Tables become powerful signs and experiences of unity, and emerging churches will have the spirit of The Open Table.

7. The Challenge to the main church streams

All the church streams face fundamental challenges. This chapter explores how they are facing up to them.

Five tasks for the Church of England

1. To move from the Diocesan to a modern monastic system
2. To engender a homogeneous body of believers .
3. To turn the 'Comprehensive Church' into the 'The Church of Hospitality'
4. To develop worship that is a vehicle for the people's best aspirations.
5. To release a new generation of leaders from the old straitjackets.

The main thrust of central church planning in the last decade of the century was how to decline efficiently. Attempts were made to prop up the old system. Parishes were amalgamated and empty vicarages were filled with non-stipendiary ministers. Yet some Diocesan leaders have begun to recognise that a historic change is taking place.

The second task of engendering homogeneity is formidable. Many young as well as old clergy think of themselves as 'evangelicals' 'Reform', 'Catholics', 'Forward in Faith', 'liberals', 'post evangelicals' or 'charismatics' first, as Anglicans second, and as members of the Christian church third. It is the disease that Paul warned against: 'When some of you say "I belong to Paul's group" and others say "I belong to Apollos' group" don't you realise you are behaving like non-Christians?' (1 Corinthians 3:4).

The Church of England has talked much about its role as a 'Comprehensive' church. This led many to believe that it stood for anything or nothing. Yet within this concept is a God-given seed, deep in the soul of the nation, that now needs to be planted out in the sunlit top soil. This seed is Hospitality. Hospitality can bind all sections of the church in a common vision. It means welcoming all people as they are, until they feel able to bring the needs they feel to the church and to its God. It means not putting upon them alien requirements, but providing welcoming space and affirming presence in which they may journey.

Anglicans have a reputation for cultural aloofness and elitism. They despise other ways, which lack aesthetic excellence according to their cultural pre-conceptions, such as the happy clappy Pentecostal worship, or the ethnic bands. These others find Anglican ways introverted, lukewarm, incomprehensible and inhospitable.. To encourage the life of God in those of different cultures to ourselves, to release them and give the opportunity -that is hospitality. To make space for groups, so that they find and embrace the true and eternal love. That is what it means to be a comprehensive church.

The way the Church of England handled the funeral of Princess Diana gave us a glimpse of how it might tackle the fourth task, of expanding its worship until it becomes a vehicle of the people's aspirations. A Vicar of a community based church in an urban priority area told me he could not use the Church of England's prescribed forms of worship; they were a joke at

local level. He could use the Iona Community's Wild Goose worship resources, because of their lack of wordiness, their down to earth imagery, and the worth they give to people.

The fifth task, to release a new generation of leaders at every level is being tackled only patchily. Recently management criteria have been applied in the selection of ordinands. It was certainly long overdue that clergy be trained in management skills. But it is possible to be a good leader or a good pastor without being a good manager, and managers are being ordained who have skin deep spirituality.

The Church of England threw out abuses at the Reformation, but kept bishops, even though medieval bishops abused their powers. This did not lead to wholesale prelatry because the church also kept 'the parson's freehold'. This meant that a patron (who might be a local landowner, or an organisation founded to maintain certain beliefs) could appoint a vicar or rector to a parish who would then have a legal right to that post, and the house that went with the post, until they resigned or retired. A bishop could not sack the parson except for gross misconduct or heresy.

It had patent faults. But what has replaced it? The sausage machine. The present system prevents lame ducks from being forever given a sine cure, but it also prevents saints, prophets or ordinary good Christians who are called to be pastors offering unconditional love. For you don't move on after a temporary contract expires if you really love people. Many priests are now required to move after a term fixed by those outside the local church. That is why leadership increasingly goes to ordained people who lead a work or a community without being on a Diocesan pay roll - they can be spiritual mothers or fathers and offer organic leadership and unconditional love.

Much better to replace this with a compulsory review with the Bishop every seven years or so.

Whenever I see a bishop in dispute with a parish
it is because the parish wants to grow
but bishops are planning for long term decline.
A senior churchman

The most telling leadership in the Church of England has come from people such as the leaders of New Wine movement, the Alpha Courses, are examples of how it is possible for this kind of leadership to work today.

A word about the Anglican (Episcopal) Communion

2.5 million French speaking Africans in the Congo are Anglicans, yet their church was founded by fellow African missionaries, and songs freshly composed by members are used every time they worship. The Anglican Communion has mushroomed across the five continents. In its early days, the consensus was that it should see itself as provisional, and aim to merge with a reformed catholic church. That view is no longer dominant. It models a form of church in which each Province is autonomous, but the bishops are bound together in a common bonds of belief, worship and history'

If this Communion is meant by God to be one of the major continuing strands in the cord which is being re-woven, then it must surely change its name from Anglican to Episcopal Communion. Why? A stream of Christ's church which claims to be world-wide and contiguous with the original church is foolish to define itself in terms of an ethnic group (Angles), even if a particular ethnic group played a significant part in shaping its structures. The Scottish Episcopal Church rightly claims that it is no hybrid of the Church of England, and the USA Episcopal Church disliked, and eschewed the colonial overtones of the title 'Anglican'. If the Anglican Communion views itself as a parallel, in the West, to the Orthodox Church in the East, it might well start to parallel the Orthodox style of terminology. Thus we would have the English Episcopal Church, the Papua New Guinea Episcopal Church, and the Japanese Episcopal Church, each in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Just as Byzantium became a second Rome in the first millennium, there might be a new Canterbury before the end of the third millennium, situated in Africa or Asia. The Archbishop of this Canterbury, like the Patriarchs of the Orthodox Church, will by then be in communion with the Bishop of Rome.

The nationalist challenge for the Orthodox

The composer John Tavener, whose Song for Athene touched so many people at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales in September 1997, was brought up in the Presbyterian church but converted to Orthodoxy when he was 30. Ruth Gledhill of The Times interviewed him after his return from the funeral of an old Orthodox woman. 'It was so tender, so personal, everyone standing around the open coffin with candles, with no pomp, no ceremony' he told her. He could understand why so many were turning to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam. 'There is an enormous humility there which does not seem to be present in the Western church.' he told Gledhill. 'I can only see a future for Christianity if the whole world becomes Orthodox'.
(x) The Times September 13 1997

In the 1980's two thousand USA evangelicals were welcomed into the Orthodox Church, among them Peter Gilchrist, a leader of Campus Crusade. They described Orthodoxy as 'America's Best Kept Secret'. The following decade both evangelical and catholic minded members of The Church of England joined Orthodox churches. In 1999 Ruth Gledhill wrote an article in the London Times headed Goodbye Happy Clappers - Orthodox Christianity may pose a serious challenge to the mainstream churches.'

One American, an evangelical missionary in Rumania named David Hudson, wrote of his entry into Orthodoxy: 'Finally we got out of the stormy seas of pluralistic, idiosyncratic and eclectic Christianity and into the ark of the historic, original, continuing life of the Church.' (x) Quoted in ...Again Vol 21 No.2 April-June 1999 published by Conciliar Press, a department of the USA Antiochan Orthodox Christian Archdiocese. The Americans made Scripture memorisation, the Eucharist, familiar corporate prayers and silence their diet and met together daily at 6.0 am. The Lord had spoken to them through the words of the prophet Jeremiah: 'Ask for the ancient paths, where the good road lies; walk in it and find rest for your souls' (Jeremiah 6:16). Michael Harper, a former curate at All Souls, Langham Place under John Stott, and the founder of the umbrella movement for Britain's early charismatic renewal, The Fountain Trust, is perhaps the most well known of the British converts. Why had he converted? He told me that, although the Orthodox church had its own problems, it had avoided the split psyche which traumatised Reformed churches, and the Papalism which

overlay the Roman Catholic church. It maintained an organic continuity with the original New Testament church.

A journal *Orthodox England* was launched in 1997 edited by Fr. Andrew Phillips. Priests in the Church of England formed a movement named *Journey Towards Orthodoxy*. Many of these, especially those who used to be part of the Anglo-Catholic movement, were looking for something to which they could belong. They, especially the 'J' personality types, needed clear identity, ethos, features, and psycho-dynamics. They abhorred vagueness. They were ready to eschew legalism and formalism, but not for nothing. They wanted to be certain there was a kernel that was non negotiable. A

That is why the Orthodox tradition appealed to them. The kernel is inviolate, God-breathed, living tradition.-The existence of this kernel frees them from the need to build an elaborate superstructure of rules and regulations. What is the kernel? The apostles, the Beatitudes, the Trinity, the Prayer, The early church councils and Fathers. n attractive feature of the ordained ex Anglicans who become Orthodox is that they tend to set up centres of prayer in sheds! Stephen Weston, of Sutton, Norfolk designed and built his plywood construction; its formal name is St Fursey's Chapel, but its nickname is Stephen's Byzantine Shed!

The Orthodox throughout the world venerate the saints of the first seven centuries, and regard the church in Celtic lands in that period as the Orthodox church. The glory of the Orthodox Church is its continuity, which its liturgies enshrine. It claims to be the only true church. However, it has no chance of becoming the people's church in western lands unless it faces up to at least two challenges.

The first challenge is that many Eastern Orthodox Churches have become so culture-friendly that they are little more than the religious arm of nationalism, failing to combat dreadful atrocities in some lands, deep animosities towards fellow Orthodox and non-Orthodox in many other lands. On the day in 1917 which ushered in 70 years of Communist tyranny in Russia, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church was in conclave. Its agenda? The colour of vestments. They missed the revolution.

The second challenge is to Orthodox churches in the West: Why be independent of the other churches of the West? Reject, certainly, that in them which has become distorted or overlaid, but have you made an act of solidarity with all within them that is of God?

A third challenge is that the Orthodox liturgy and church culture, which adherents claim to be original and essentially unalterable, does not, in fact, derive from the New Testament so much as from the time when the Roman Emperor Constantine made the church the official religion of the Empire. God and the saints are cast in the imperial image. So when Orthodox churches are founded in countries far removed in time and mentality, they are in fact alienating rather than saving institutions. This is accentuated in the West by the fact that each Orthodox church has to place itself under the jurisdiction of an eastern patriarch. Did Orthodoxy stop doing theology creatively after the first seven Councils of the Church? Can they extricate themselves from the imperial stream in which they were then swimming?

The Celtic Orthodox Church has tried to address this. It sees itself as the Orthodox Church in Celtic lands (mainly Britain and France) and believes that its style and liturgy should therefore be indigenous. For this reason, although its bishop is in the apostolic succession and has

been consecrated by a Syrian Orthodox patriarch, it will not place itself under the jurisdiction of a patriarch from the east. In their liturgy, unlike Eastern Orthodoxy, they allow people to see through the screen to the inner sanctuary in order to emphasise that the church is open to all and is not just for a select few priests. The heartbeat of the Celtic Orthodox Church is the monastery at St. Dol, Brittany. Here six monks have lived holy lives for twenty years. In that time they have never purchased food; they rely for their food on what the people place in large baskets at each Sunday liturgy. These monks seek to build loving relationships with Catholics and others; and they reach out to young people, teaching them and accompanying their convoys of aid to stricken areas of Europe.

(X) Anglican-Orthodox Pilgrimage Franklin Billerbeck (Ed) (Conciliar Press P.O.Box 76 Ben Lomond CA 9505-0076 1993)

The Roman Catholic Church

Even before the Second Vatican Council far seeing Catholic theologians such as Nicholas Lash recognised that during the second millennium false forms of Roman Catholic consciousness had developed, such as the tendency to describe the church as she now is in language that is more properly reserved for the Church as she should be. Theo Westow points out (x) Westow, Theo Introducing Contemporary Catholicism (SCM Press Ltd 1967) that though Christ promised the gates of hell would never destroy the church, he never promised he would overrule perversion of its members. So the institution, as well as individuals, can go wrong, as it did, says Westow, at the times of the great Orthodox Schism, the Crusades, the Reformation, and when it neglected the poor. He suggests that the Curia, which embodies wrong tendencies of the second millennium 'was in no sense instituted by Christ, has no theological foundation, has no theological authority.' Theo Westow, writing during good John 23rd's papacy, saw that two ways were open to his church: to stifle the corporate examination of conscience that John had begun, or to pursue it until Roman Catholicism is stripped of everything except Christ. To do this 'will mean that gradually we return to that "pilgrimage of the People of God", homeless, without security, creating the active presence of Christ in this world of brothers.... It means that we recognise that we have rested long enough at the roadside, but that like the Jews on their journey through the desert, we must get up again and move.'

Westow foresaw that there had to be either repentance or judgment. In fact, there is both. The steep decline in membership and the crisis in the supply and well-being of priests is now chronic in the West, but there are also fresh approaches and new experiments in community.

A young leader of a vibrant new Roman Catholic community hopes to transplant similar communities near to ancient places of prayer. His family belong to the slender line of English people who refused to retract their obedience to the Pope at the time of England's break with Rome, even at the cost of having to worship in secret. I have one problem' he told me, 'I do not feel English and most people don't treat Roman Catholics as truly English. Whatever I may think of the Anglican church, it has kept the Faith and spread it to the English people, whereas my church has a "minority mind-set"'.

People who feel like this can make one of three responses. They can join the Church of England, remain Catholics with the defensive mind-set of a minority, or they can rekindle

roots that are common to both the Church of England and the English Roman Catholic Church.

The late Basil Hume, Cardinal Archbishop of England and Wales at the end of millennium 2, broadcast his love of the Celtic saints, and modelled the life of a monk bishop. Roman Catholics in this tradition give to the Pope what belongs to his office as a successor to an apostle, but not what belongs to the local expression of the universal church.

Father Paul Dudziak of Maryland, USA is adopting this model, even though he thinks that as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church he starts from a disadvantaged position. He says of his church: 'Those who identify with the Reformation reject it as corrupt; those who identify with the Enlightenment reject it as ignorant; those who identify with Freudianism or Feminism reject it as oppressive. People in the West who are looking for spirituality turn East, because Western spirituality is inaccessible.' The challenge to his church, he believes, is to open the 'locked storehouse of western spirituality'.

New churches

In the 1970's and 80's the New Churches were in front of the pack. They crossed fresh frontiers and took risks for God. Some of them had somewhat fallen back by the turn of the millennium, and were stuck in the mould of twenty years before. Sometimes they seemed less vulnerable, less open to the fresh horizons of the Spirit.

Ichthus Churches maintained their original simplicity. They have refused, for example, to buy into buildings, and their pastors live most sparingly. They sustain relationships of trust with other sections of Christ's church, and they faithfully seek to model Jesus' life in their corporate life. Nevertheless in the 1990's things that were lacking in this model came to the surface. The driving force of Ichthus was mission. Members and pastors were giving, giving, giving, but they were not receiving renewal in body-mind-spirit either as individuals or as a community. They were not signs of the wholeness of God's kingdom. Members fell away, pastors became discouraged, congregations hived off.

Roger Forster, the founder, recognised that some things were not right. He shared his conviction that Ichthus had become too management dominated, and needed to rediscover its roots.

Des Figueredo is an Ichthus leader who pastors the Endlesham Fellowship in Balham, South London comes from a Goan catholic background. A love for the people in his fellowship grew in him, and he felt God was calling him to be a father in God to his flock. This had implications. It meant, for example, that he himself had to say 'no' to some outside mission projects in order not to destroy the organic inner life of the local Body of Christ. Des' sense of call also had other implications. Surely the local congregation is meant to be a community, not just a casual collection of transitory units? Could it be that the heart of the 'congregation' is more than the Sunday worship, the pastor and an office? Could those things revolve around a daily rhythm of prayer, and resource activities at the hub place?

The Pioneer network of churches has sorted out certain crucial elements that make up true church: for example, community that is based on covenant (voluntary commitment to mutual

relationship) rather than contract (which smacks of control). As new congregations are spawned and grow, the overall leaders are following a call to relinquish leadership of a congregation, and become mentors to those who take up that mantle. A former pagan eco warrior who is now a member of a Pioneer church feels, however, that there are other equally important elements that have yet to be embraced such as rhythm, roots in wider Christianity, and connectedness to the land.

New churches that have adopted Celtic style features have been criticised for bolting on something to a framework which fundamentally remains unchanged. Critics believe that the foundations need to become holistic, earth friendly and catholic. One new church leader was heard to say 'There is no room in our package for hermits'. Yet God has ways of getting dedicated Christians to make room.

A member of Rock Community Church, Dunbarton believes that people get attracted to community churches today as once they did to Celtic hermitages. 'Yet the use of liturgy in the Celtic style renewal frightens me. I came out of liturgical churches because they need to learn how to help people flow in the spirit', he told me.

Members there meet in a school on Sundays. In their experience modern people can't all meet at one set time for corporate prayer, so they trust people to gather in groups when and where they feel. 'We've stopped being a hustle and bustle church...'

One question leaders of the new churches need to answer is: How do we recognise who is a true leader unless there is an external accreditation beyond their own community? Vineyard churches, reflecting their name, grew fast and naturally towards the end of last century. Their openness to the Holy Spirit, people and other churches, their creativity in worship and integrity in relationships, and their freedom from obsolete churchy culture, has proved to be a great blessing. John Wimber, their founder, who came out of the Jesus Movement of the 1970's, died in 1997. Vineyard churches now have to address some crucial issues.

The first is: how do they relate at the deepest, organic level, to the universal body of Christ? The response to this issue of two North American Vineyard churches was to become part of the Orthodox Church. A Vineyard pastor known to be has transferred to a church within the apostolic succession because he came to believe that the sacraments and the ordained ministry were deeply connected with the continuity of Christ's church down the ages.

A second issue for Vineyard churches is how not to fossilise. Already some of them seem to be in a time warp of the previous generation, in worship and house style no longer relating to the culture around them that has changed. Not every Vineyard pastor who has taken the risk of reaching across a new frontier has been supported.

Pentecostal Churches

A number of Pentecostal pastors have contacted us to explore how their churches can leave the old century behind and move on. I shall summarise their insights in the following imaginary introductory leaflet to One Way Pentecostal Church:

Welcome to One Way Pentecostal Church. We are the only church in this town that has the full Gospel. Everyone here is baptised in the Spirit and speaks in tongues - which is the mark of every true believer.

Our worship is free from tradition and liturgy. Everyone speaks and praises God from their hearts - in tongues or in English - as the Spirit moves them.

We do not dress up in morbid clothes, and we praise God at all times - even at funerals.

Here, even our funerals are different. When we sent off our twenty three year old musician David who was killed in a car crash, we clapped and danced and raised our hands in praise. For we knew that what was in the coffin was nothing, David was resurrected with Christ in heaven and that was what we were celebrating. With Christ, we do not need to grieve. Praise the Lord!

We believe that if any one has faith they will be healed of sickness and their problems will disappear.

After the pastor discovered Celtic Renewal everything changed without anything having to be announced. He discovered the need to welcome God in tears as well as in tongues; in silence as well as in celebration. He realised that although they had glorified the Holy Spirit, we had ignored and therefore belittled the human spirit, which, because it is made in God's image, needs to be taken seriously.

Now he raises these challenges for his church: Do we have times for silence, for beauty, for sorrow? Do we recognise that we are vulnerable. Before we never could relate to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: can we now? Can we recognise other Christians as true brothers and sisters with whom we can share heart to heart, without writing them off as second rate? Do we realise that the whole is greater than the parts?

Free Churches

Although the various Free Churches disagree about baptism, and about the degree of independence the local congregation should have, they share in common certain beliefs that came out of the 16th century Reformation in Europe. These renounced the idea of a Christendom kept together by the pope or by bishops in council, and espoused the idea of congregations whose authority lay in their members having a direct line to Christ through the Bible.

However, having transferred power from popes to church meetings, many ministers find that power has gone to the heads of church meetings quite as much as it ever did to the popes. 'I hardly know a Baptist minister in our region who has not had a breakdown' one minister told me. Ministers are hired and fired by congregations, often on the basis of how many uncoordinated or selfish expectations they meet. So a major challenge is how preaching houses run by threatened ministers can be turned into trustful communities.

With the demise of the individualistic Enlightenment mind-set, the seeds of which also formed the context in which the Reformation took place, Free Church Christians have to face up to certain issues for the first time. For example:

Our connectedness with the web of life in church and creation as a whole.

Our continuity with the church that preceded our foundation.

Our identity, if it is no longer defined by those we are against.

Our cultural conditioning. The Bible tells of incarnation in a particular culture. How are we meant to be incarnate in today's culture?

The Church of Scotland

The Presbyterian church is the most left brained organisation in the world.

This was the conclusion of a Presbyterian minister who, realising in mid life that he and his church were at a crossroads, had pilgrimaged to Ireland's ancient Celtic sites in search of inspiration. The agenda for people like him is how the Presbyterian church can become as much right as left brained, a church in which intuition and human warmth, creative arts and contemplative prayer are offered to a post modern generation that is more likely to find God, and to be sustained, through these avenues.

That prescient, if maverick, Church of Scotland divine, George McLeod, argued as long ago as the 1930's that with the collapse of the Puritan ideal, Presbyterianism needed to work out a new framework. His biographer observes he was arguing 'that in order to go forward the Church must first go backwards, to ransack the drawers of its own past and find garments which would fit for today and tomorrow. From the Celtic Church he drew a sense of the totality of all life infused by the Spirit, from the Roman Catholic Church a sense of universality, from the Reformers the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers' McLeod's vivid experience of Orthodox Worship on Easter Day in Jerusalem was also a key. 'The combination of action, mystery and theatre had completely overwhelmed this inheritor of the Govan Scoto-Catholic tradition.' McLeod felt that post Calvin Calvinism had taken the mystery out of the Faith. The kirk had forgotten that its Reformation mentor, John Knox, stood for daily church services, frequent communion, and liturgical prayers; starved of symbols in their churches, Scots had turned to Freemasonry for ritual.(x) George McLeod: Founder of the Iona Community Ferguson, Ronald (William Collins 1990)

The restoration of Iona's monastic living quarters by unemployed Glaswegians, working with young ministers in training, and the formation of the Iona Community created a vehicle which God has used to bring something of this transformation into being. Yet, at the turn of the millennium, it was obvious that the Church of Scotland as a whole had managed to accommodate the Iona Community with some pride, yet, apart from the use of its songs, had not allowed it to change its old frame of reference.

In the view of McLeod's biographer, Ronald Ferguson, the 1950's was the last era in which the kirk engaged with the central realities of Scottish political, social and cultural life on anything like an equal footing.

Could it be that certain items on McLeod's agenda need need now to be taken fully on board? The use of theatre in every locality, the restoration of daily worship, groups living among the

poorest, developing a partnership of trust with other branches of the universal church. Although McLeod passionately defended the strengths of Calvin and Scottish Presbyterianism, he came to realise that 'its range of illumination was limited'. (p 264) The need now is to learn to honour spiritual leaders of other churches without being dominated by them.

Myth busters are needed in the Church of Scotland, for the Reformation has become an end road rather than a launching pad. 'The Reformation did away with one pope and replaced it with many', was one minister's wry comment on the presbyteries of today. Presbyteries are too big. In their origin they were supportive cells, not legal courts, and they need to become so again.

Congregations are strong institutions, and when the child like faith of the founding Christians has been lost, they are often controlled by human wills which are unwilling to let God take over.

The of fear of charismatic gifts needs to be overcome. A few congregations, inspired by charismatic renewal, have been able restore 'Body ministry'. Newhills Church, in Aberdeen Presbytery has practised 'Body Ministry' for many years, and members use the gifts of the Spirit in their everyday service of God. The healing ministry has resurfaced in not a few churches. A workmanlike understanding of spiritual gifts needs now to unfold more widely.

The ghost of monasticism has to be exorcised. The church has assumed that monasticism depends upon celibacy, that celibacy is unbiblical, and therefore not in the Reformed tradition, and in any case Church of Scotland ministers have their rights to family houses. This approach eschews an option. Voluntary celibacy is, of course, biblical, and needs to be treated as an honoured option once again; but the communities that are needed will consist of married as well as of single people.

'The trouble is', a leading Church of Scotland minister confides, 'the church is in denial'. The pew is out of touch with the clergy. Many clergy feel 'whatever it is we're supposed to be doing we're not doing it', and spend their life bowed down by false guilt.

'I don't believe that you have to become twee, nice, docile Benedictine or English to be a Christian' a Scot told me. He continued: 'I believe Jesus must have been rugged and well built and a working man. He was in touch with his gut and could express it. So we Scots show we are Christians by "Rising up in the power of God" prayers; by being wild and manly and being in touch with the warrior in us; by being courageous and able to stand alone and reach out.' The challenge is to set free again the manly spirit underneath the church paralysis

In 1999 The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland asked Peter Neilson to head up a commission to advise on the shape of the church from 2001.

The church is fear bound. It fears losing control, it fears charismatic movements, and it fears post modern cultures which flow past it. It needs the courage to look at the whole picture; to diagnose the actual spiritual condition of Scotland, the strengths and weaknesses of the church, and points where deep repentance and change are needed. 'Go to the place of your greatest fear and it will become the place of your greatest strength.' St. Cuthbert's has begun to pattern this. Peter Neilson has had to face some of the fears. That may be a parable for

the whole church. Churches who face their fear to meet their neighbourhood will find that becomes the place of strength.

Scotland could demonstrate what a God-controlled nation can do in the world

The challenge to all church leaders

Good leaders grow people, bad leaders stunt them.
Good leaders serve their followers, bad leaders enslave them.
Sir Adrian Cadbury, former head of Cadbury Schweppes

Many local church leaders are dispirited .

They are dispirited by the mind set of their congregations. Post modern churchgoers, one minister told me 'think they'll come to church when it suits them, but they expect it to be there for them. The minister is reduced to a supermarket check-out . The consumer mentality is killing both discipleship and the pastors. This mentality is an evil but few churchgoers recognise it as such. In the church it cannot be true that the customer is king: Jesus is King and we are to be the body that serves Him.'

Ministers in mainstream churches are dispirited by the system and its leaders. Take one example - a curate pioneers a new work in a school or housing estate. Although the mother church is without its vicar, the Bishop pulls out the curate because his standard three years is up. That fledgling and needy flock is left without a shepherd That crassness is typical of shibboleths and straitjackets which grind fine local church leaders into the ground. Many suffer burnout, resign, or lose heart..

How can they become inspired? They confuse loving people with meeting their expectations. When this confusion is aligned to a low self image it leads to disaster. Because they are not secure in their own identity in the God, these leaders become hostage to what is not of God in their people. In a study of effective leadership Des Dearlove poses the question why someone like Richard Branson, who failed school exams, can make a better leader than someone with a top university degree. His answer is that Branson's emotional intelligence, which Dearlove calls his 'people radar', is more keenly developed.

A new minister came to his church with an exciting agenda for change and development which he believed was from God. Various members opposed this or that item. His instinctive reaction was to regard them as enemies, and his flow of love towards them dried up. The members intuited that their minister did not love them for themselves, but only if they were fodder for his plans. The minister realised this. He decided that, instead of laying 'his stuff' on to his congregation, he would love them for themselves, and help to draw out what was of God in 'their stuff'. It was not long before the members realised that this was 'a new deal', and started to love him. That congregation is now a community.

This insight into leadership is validated by the American psychologist Daniel Goleman. In his ground breaking book Emotional Intelligence he concludes that emotional rather than rational intelligence marks out the true leader. He claims that 'the very architecture of the brain gives feelings priority over thought.' Emerging church leaders know this.

The true servant leader is strong, not weak. A wise woman told me: 'What has departed from our culture is leaders who are strong, real. I am looking for leadership which is earthy, masculine, motherly and has a deep love which is reliable. An awful lot of godliness is up in the air. If you lean on it it falls flat. Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. '

The Celtic church leaders had the physical courage to go out in front and vanquish monsters and evils. They did not play safe. They did not hide behind paper. Their humanity did not get squeezed out by the weight of top heavy committees. Their vulnerability did not get covered over because they operated in the safety zones of boards or old boy networks.

Never trust a leader who walks without a limp.
John Wimber

The Abbot must so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak have nothing to run from
St Benedict

After St Cuthbert recovered from the plague he walked with a limp for the rest of his life. He was a strong leader, but I suspect this limp endeared him to the people. The ability not to hide weakness is a mark of Christ-like leadership.

When large numbers joined the church in the first millennium it became a large organisation. It then required money from members to pay for clergy who did the most significant jobs. This marginalised the lay people.. Soon the clergy became acclimatised to comfort and to the corridors and assumptions of power. They had no idea what it felt like to be homeless and powerless. All church leaders are prone to confuse their own ego with the will of God, and to impose the agenda of their own ego in the guise of religion.

Vulnerability is a voluntary relinquishment of the power to automatically protect oneself from being wounded.

This diagnosis of the retreating church is easy. But what to do about it? How can a large Body of Christ serve the masses and yet remain personal and sensitive to changing needs? In the Celtic model leadership was often given to those who renounced personal property and who were accountable another. Thus bishops were under the authority of a male or female leader of a monastery. In the emerging church people are led by those who have a Rule of Life which involves renunciation of power.

The early Celtic churches at their best managed to do two apparently opposite things. On the one hand they released Christians would wander off for the love of God, or work out their individual calling with the help of a soul friend. A bishop was given discretion to evangelise in any way that he felt was appropriate. He was a flying bishop, released from the burdens of church management, to move in mission wherever the Spirit led. On the other hand, the Celtic churches fostered communities and a sense of belonging. The Abbot was a true father of a large family, a focus of unity, a sign of life-long stability to the many people who lived nearby.

In the emerging church the pastor sees her /his role as releasing people into being fully human. Celtic style bishops or translocal church leaders come alongside congregations and bless what God is blessing. Anglican bishops still retain a faint residue of this way of operating; they spend year in mid-term visiting the people in and out of their churches, delegating, postponing or overlooking other duties, though sadly this is little more than a gesture; and leaders of local congregations tend to be out of touch with the population at large.

Mark Green, Vice Principal of London Bible College conducted research on public perceptions of preachers. What did he find people were looking for? 'Basically for spiritual wisdom to deal with the pressures and relationships of day to day life. What emerged most forcefully was the perception that that the preacher was out of touch with people's lives. The advice section of the questionnaire was full of comments like: "Visit factories, nursing homes, schools. Go talk to the Labour Exchange. Read The Sun."' (x) Idea Nov/Dec 1998. A fuller account of this research was published in Anvil, Volume 14, No 4, 1997.

Leaders in the emerging church are not afraid to use their intuition. They understand the soul of any venture. The soul of a venture is revealed in a crisis when facades are stripped away. Leaders define it; followers identify with it; the leader helps them to bond with it. (x) this is explored in Joyner, Rick, Leadership, Management and the Five Essentials for Success (Morning Star Publications, 1600 Lancaster Highway, Charlotte, NC 28277 2062 USA 1995) Leaders in the retreating church postponed the painful decisions which were necessary to turn things round, for fear of the short term pain and controversy. Emerging church leaders grasp the nettle first of all, and then enjoy the fruits of peace and blessing. dealt with the heart of the matter Leaders in the retreating church majored on minors; leaders in the emerging church major on major.

In the imperial model of the church leaders can be imposed by a hierarchy who are unknown, lack rapport with their people, and can therefore achieve little. The leaders of the Celtic Christian communities were the natural leaders of that people. This created problems when their heirs were less godly than those they led, but the system that replaced it of clergy being outsiders appointed by authorities that seemed alien was not the answer. Bishops in the early church such as Martin of Tours, and Cuthbert of Lindisfarne were elected by the people. Popular technology now makes it possible for every church member in, say, a Diocese, to vote for a candidate who they think should be considered. In today's Celtic Orthodox Church a candidate for Bishop is proposed and elected; he comes from the community. The introduction of local ordained ministers by other churches is a step in the right direction, but the system for assessing who should be ordained is class-ridden and myopic. In industry people are appointed according to their proven skills; the church still appoints people who pass paper exams but who lack rapport with people and leadership skills, and bypass many fine potential leaders who are neither called nor prepared to collude with a training system that is a travesty of true leadership.

19. Leaders can find God-given authority

I was not born into a family of leaders, nor was I bred in a public school that prides itself on leadership training. I missed compulsory conscription into the Armed Forces by three months, and the squashed child inside me did not know how to make effective relationships across the board in an adult world. My Church of England theological college provided me with no training in management, interfacing with the statutory agencies or in how to handle

inner primal material. Yet God had called me to be the founding minister in a significant housing development. I knew I could not abdicate my responsibility.

I recalled the words of an Iranian MP who was a guest when I was a curate in London: 'You are responsible for the spiritual welfare of all the people in this place.' Was I? I recalled the words of a former English rugby player: 'You can grow in manhood by emulating Abraham, who talked through with God every decision he needed to take, and took it.' I made it my job to get training in missing skills at my own expense.

My natural style is to be inclusive, to be a monarch-maker rather than a monarch; to get a big vision, and facilitate others so that a thousand flowers bloom which are given coherence by the shared vision. This style does not appeal to those who define targets and exclude those who come outside them; nor does it appeal to those who want a directive leadership - any other style is considered weak.

I wanted to include house church Christians as well as those from traditional churches, and in order to get them on board I promised that there would be no Anglican take-over. From the first few Christians who joined us, we elected a group who conferred and made decisions. Unfortunately this group comprised incompatible people - echoes of fundamentalist Ian Paisley, Mother Teresa, half-believing Don Cupitt, and charismatic David Watson.

There seem to be as many models of leadership as there are churches. Many church denominations began over disagreement about the form or style of their parent church government. At Bowthorpe a surface *modus vivendi* was agreed. I would minister to members of each of the churches within their own terms. Since I was a Church of England incumbent I could not be sacked by the congregation as could a Baptist minister, but I made clear that I would not stay if it was the settled conviction of the congregation that I should move on. Members of the Church of England might honour me as a priest within the apostolic succession to whom they could make sacramental confession of sins, but, since Jesus told us all to aim for the lowest places, it seemed edifying to be treated by Free Church members as in no way special. The surface *modus vivendi* was not the problem.

The apostle Paul wrote to his ordained protegee Timothy: 'Let no one despise your youth... Convince, rebuke, exhort... fulfil your ministry' (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:2,5). I was determined not to impose what people perceived to be an anachronistic Church of England model on everyone; if I had, many Bowthorpe Christians would have joined a separate house church. I adopted the leadership style which draws out everyone's insights and proceeds by trial and error. This frustrated both insecure members who were used to mono-track churches, and strong personalities who could not get their way. The embryo congregation lacked coherence and direction, and I had to take a month's leave on account of stress. During this month I came to terms with the fact that God had actually called me as founding minister, and that I needed to accept his gift of inner authority, which was quite different to being authoritarian. On my return a beady eighty year old looked me in the eye: 'Leadership is not a few people scrabbling about in the mud' he told me.

We developed a leadership team of about six, which in time included both a full-time Anglican and a full-time Baptist minister, and a team of those who coordinated ministries such as children, youth, the elderly, administration, pastoral care, social matters, money, buildings, healing.

But there is much more to leadership than the framework in which it is exercised. The best leaders create a culture where people realise it is OK for leaders to make mistakes, and to learn from them without having to be attacked by those they lead. To do this they need to welcome one hundred per cent feed-back, which is a contemporary form of living in the light. I did not fully understand this principle, and I cringed if I received criticism in a public meeting rather than in private. I now realise that people should be able to tell a leader what he is doing wrong.

I felt God wanted me to be a spiritual father, in organic relationship to the local people. But the church machine, reflecting certain business practice says 'keep moving them'.

Leaders must be concept oriented to be successful; managers must be detail oriented. Almost every significant enterprise has been founded by a leader. Nevertheless, every enterprise that lives past its founder is taken over by a manager. Bowthorpe needed a manager.

8. The Experiments

'The vision is great, but where is it happening' asked a young Christian strategist. 'Maybe none of these new style faith communities have been fully born yet', I replied, 'but I have no doubt there are many embryos waiting to be born.' Monastic churches such as Taize, in France; transformed parishes such as Medugorge, in Croatia, and avant guard projects such as those Mike Riddell features in his book *Threshold of the Future* could be cited as examples. In this chapter I mention just three, the first two briefly, and the third, a more extended account of the church I served as it's first minister.

Antioch Church, Wales

The sky line of the bustling South Wales town of Llanelli boasts plenty of church spires. Coming down to earth in its shopping centre you would not immediately notice an ordinary complex of buildings. Here there is a charity shop which the low paid frequent with pushchairs, and a hairdressing salon. Young people can skate board outside, and enjoy a cyber cafe inside. Ex drug addicts who have recently discovered their creativity display their paintings and other artifacts in another room. One room is locked: a recording studio where local groups can rehearse and record. A larger auditorium can be used for most things, from aerobics to Sunday worship. There are kids rooms and offices and a play area and so on. This is Antioch Church, a seven day a week faith community that is a spiritual and social hub for the town. All sorts of people find a home there, even would-be monks. A Salvation Army Christian told them he wish to experiment in being a hermit, so he has a caravan not too far away, but values the church as his supportive umbrella. Does it address ecological issues? A former pagan earth warrior who lived entirely on natural sources in Tepee Valley is now a member of this church. He told me: 'When I became a Christian the Holy Spirit made me even closer to the earth than I was before.'

Church of the Saviour, Washington

The Church of the Saviour in Washington D.C. was founded by Gordon Crosby after World War 11. Gordon learned the practice of silence at a Pennsylvania retreat centre which was influenced by George McCleod, founder of the Iona Community. Gordon's vision was to create an Iona-type of base in the USA, mobilising theological students to build it. The disciplines that Nelson taught included accountability to others for daily prayer and Scripture reflection. (i) Notes from Vicky Curtiss cpcamesvc@aol.com

Gordon Crosby started out as a Baptist, but sought close relationship with all Christian denominations. Each would-be member of The Church of the Saviour undergoes six courses in the School of Christian Living, and then prepares a statement of what Christ means to them, the practical disciplines (e.g. tithing) they will keep, the un-Christlike areas of their life they require help with, and what they do or feel called to do. They then make a covenant with the members of the church, which all renew annually. Thus they have embraced a common Christian lifestyle which they call 'integrity in membership'

Each new member joins one of several groups on the basis of their aptitude. Each group is responsible for an area of life such as teaching, retreats, the library, ecology. Each member prays daily for the church to be guided into its next steps, and undertakes not to leave the church for any reason other than a call from God; in that event the whole church sends them out with their blessing.

This community of Christians is the hub: the homes are places of nurture. From the hub radiates various works of Christ in the arts, the unemployed, the unchurched.

The Dayspring is their Retreat Centre in the countryside. Here the land is cultivated, Christian festivals are creatively celebrated, and spiritually hungry people are nurtured. There is an Arts Centre, which certain members are responsible for. Other members commit to the coffee shop, which provides Christian hospitality in the market place. Others run work projects in depressed areas. Some choose to join the Rockside House congregation. This may mean they live in and serve an unchurched suburb. Other members staff The Remedial Centre where people with health and emotional problems come. Finally, there is Sarah's Circle. The church bought a row of tenements for old people to live in. In the basement are stimulating activities that bring life to old people whom others had written off, reminiscent of the new life God gave Abraham's wife Sarah long after she was thought to be of child bearing age.

Weardale

Seven former Church of England parishes in rural Weardale, instead of declining with nothing to aim for, are trying to create what they call a Minster Model which restores daily prayer and hospitality. Part of one church building has been transformed into a meeting centre for young people with a refreshment facility. A stables block which was once a rectory has been turned into a workshop, a chapel and a sleeping deck for visitors. Several church members in the farming areas have created homes of hospitality and have linked up with two retreat and spirituality centres so that they can share information leaflets and offer to the wider church a series of houses where tired church workers can come into the hills and have quiet. Two of the hosts have trained as pastoral assistants. They see the presence of farm animals as part of a process of personal healing that goes hand in hand with the healing of and through creation.

A group of lay and ordained ministers has been formed, led by Philip Greenhalgh. His hobby is basket weaving, which he teaches at Stanhope, the largest of the churches. On his day off he weaves in Durham Cathedral.

Bowthorpe - a divine accident?

In the 1970's Bowthorpe, a collection of fields around some farm and church ruins on the western outskirts of Norwich, became three linked urban 'villages' which met together at those ruins, which now encompass shopping, health, church, youth, craft and police centres. These form the hub of the well designed mix of council and private housing which make up the three villages.

In the village hall in January 1978 Anglican, Free and Roman Catholic Church leaders commissioned me, with the Christian Brethren, House Church, Pentecostals, Quakers and Salvation Army extending the right hand of fellowship, to establish one family of Christians who would carry out Christ's will for the neighbourhood. 'I suppose there has never been a service in this country which has been so well represented in the licensing of a minister as this one' enthused the Bishop.

We, the first Christians of Bowthorpe, took this mandate as God-given. Some of those who had given the mandate, who had not thought through the implications, assumed that the old parallel-track denominationalism would take precedence over the organic growth of 'one

family of Christians'. Indeed, such a freedom to be organic would not have been permitted there before or afterwards. 'Bowthorpe', David Edwards, then Dean of Norwich and the Church of England's most perceptive historian is reported to have said, 'is a divine accident'.

So 'The Christian Church in Bowthorpe' became a laboratory. These are some of the discoveries we made.

The first was about weaving together Christianity's separated strands. The church decided that the Lord's people should gather round the Lord's table on the Lord's day as an expression of our being one community; that Bible study, personal conversion and witness to Christ were necessary for all who became members; and that as a church we would invite and use the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit.

Protestants were becoming sacramental. Peter Groom, one of our preachers, put it like this: 'Some believe that Christ is on the table, all of us believe that He is at the table.' Isn't that sufficient basis for all to receive the Lord in this way? Moreover, when Protestants discovered that God could heal physical bodies at Holy Communion, it became no big deal to believe God's Spirit could transform matter, including bread and wine.

Since we had espoused the Pentecostal gifts we invited Pentecostals to look upon us as the Pentecostal Church for the area. The Orthodox were not formally linked to the church, since they barely had a presence in the city when we began. However, the presence of ikons in our prayer room and the Orthodox customs of kissing the Cross became a regular option at our Friday night Prayer round the Cross.

There were also weavings to do with the procedures of our sponsoring denominations. There were sacramental weavings. The leaders of Norfolk churches had opposing views on baptism, and failed to give us any united guidance. We were the only Christian community in Norfolk which had to grasp this nettle. We hammered out a baptism policy, agreed by our Sponsoring Body, which took into account the historic report of the world's churches Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.: We fully recognise the baptism of each person who has accepted Jesus as Lord and who has either been baptised and confirmed, or baptised as a believer. On the one hand there would be no indiscriminate infant baptism, and on the other hand those who had been baptised as infants would not be rebaptised. Christians were encouraged to renew their baptism, and this could include sprinkling or immersion in water.

A large baptistery was placed in the middle of the new Worship Centre. Baptisms by immersion of new, unbaptised Christians were thrilling occasions which drew in fresh people, uplifted the congregation, and accorded with the teaching, if not the practice, of all sponsoring denominations.. We produced a people-friendly Service of Blessing and Dedication of Infants which gave parents virtually everything they wanted, including godparents, christening gowns, a naming ceremony, a celebration and a certificate.

A Churches Evaluation Report on Bowthorpe stated in 1993: 'The initiation practices at Bowthorpe have, in our judgment an integrity, as an interim solution... which deserve understanding and acceptance. We recommend ... the (national) Churches to provide services that enable candidates to re-appropriate their baptism and that this process includes evidence from Bowthorpe....'

God gave me a love for the distinctive, God-given charism of each of the church streams, and I felt I was to make these part of my own life. These charisms had become bolted on to the rigid and rusting scaffolding of the denomination concerned, but now God was calling us to prize the charism free so that it could run its course freely. The charism was to be like yeast in the dough of the whole Christian church. Methodism's special gifts to the whole church seemed to me to be John Wesley's Scriptural holiness, passion for mission, and the opportunity to make decisions democratically. Liberty of conscience was a Baptist charism. The ability to gather around the Word of God freed from institutional baggage and to respond flexibly was a URC charism. The charism of the Roman Catholic Church is obedience, obedience to Jesus in the ministers and sacraments of His Body, who safeguard its unity and focus community. Cherishing that which is of God in each person, and listening to that which is of God in oneself were Quaker charisms. Being the church that provides hospitality for all these traditions and for all the people of this land was a Church of England charism. These charisms, of course, were hidden by much other stuff, but I felt they were the charisms as God might see them. They were to be embraced and lived until they were organic.

Sometimes our interweavings could be fun. One day Vera, a member of the Religious Society of Friends, who were one of our six sponsoring denominations, informed me in no uncertain terms that she was NOT prepared to be called a miserable sinner (a term used in the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer). My reply so amused her that she spread it around Norfolk's Quaker Meetings: 'You may not be miserable but you are a sinner all right!' We tried, as do Quakers, to relate to 'that which is of God in each person'.

Any person called to found God's work in a new area must lay down their life for its people. 'A shepherd lays his life down for the sheep' said Jesus (John: 10). I recognised that my love must be unconditional; I had to be a sign of faithfulness to a rootless population.

Jesus said 'You cannot serve two masters', but many of my ordained colleagues were being pulled in contrary directions. This was the result of imaging their ministry as a career, or of their spouse pursuing a career unrelated to their own calling, or of sending their children, for the sake of their future careers, to schools unconnected with their area. Although I had the advantage of being celibate, I knew only too well how many things, even within a person, can pull them in contrary directions. I knew only too well how an entire ministry can be dictated by fear of other people or of failure, by ambition or ego needs, by dependency or by causes which, however good, had become divorced from God.

So God had to break me and have me. Two years on, after staring defeat in the face, I let go of everything, including my dreams, until nothing but the gift of God's call remained at the core of my being.

Among our sponsoring denominations Baptists and United Reformed churches cherished this concept of the shepherds being in covenant with their flocks. The Church of England, which used to, was bent on marginalising 'the parson's freehold' so it could move clergy around like pawns on a managerial chess board. The Methodists waived their policy of circulating ministers, and I was free to be a spiritual parent to the people of Bowthorpe.

After three years we formalised some foundations: Decisions would be made in submission to the written Word of God, interpreted by the Holy Spirit, in the belief that Jesus Christ would speak to us and guide us if we seek Him; we would have an open door policy to all the residents, welcome as members all who made a commitment to Christ, meet in groups, build one another up in love, develop every member ministry, relate to each of the three villages, encourage the use of spiritual gifts.

The model of church that burned in founding members was that of the early Jerusalem Christians who met daily for prayer, shared food in their homes with generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. 'Acts 2:44-47. I had read somewhere that 'community is a place where the connections felt in the heart make themselves known in bonds between people.' I felt certain that what the Church needed, more than new institutions or programmes, was to create Christian community. Not to become a 'Community Church' on the basis of attraction to like-minded Christians who neglected to relate in an equally Christian way to fellow Christians where they lived. That kind of church often failed to renew the neighbourhood where it worshipped. Our church was meant to be to the neighbourhood, what the heart is to the body.

Nevertheless it is a humanly impossible leap from our individualistic churches and society to the Christian community life that is needed to turn a neighbourhood Godwards. I had to accept that this is possible only if a range of factors are in place, and only if a deep work of God takes place.(x)

At first we each brought our different masks and sets of jargon, which made our gatherings uncomfortable; but as we accepted one another, warts and all, we grew in unity in diversity, which is true community.

Our aim was that church programmes were inspired by members, members were not steamrolled into a church blueprint.

We sought a core of church members called to be available through the week within a common framework of prayer and service. A number of people bought a house in obedience to God, even against their own inclination, in order to become available in this way. Some lived very simply rather than take a full-time salary, others took retirement. A few committed themselves to daily public prayer together. One became a Voluntary Church Assistant at our local Church Middle School. Others took responsibility for parents, toddlers and creche facilities or for pastoral care of the neighbourhood and the church.

We developed a commonly accepted life-style. This included ways of dealing with disagreements: Do not criticise an individual in front of others; forgive others, even if you disagree with them; deal with a fault in someone by talking it through face to face, always seeking the spiritual progress of the other person.

We also emulated this item in the Rule of the Taizé Community: 'Express in a few words what you feel conforms most closely to God's plan, without imagining that you can impose it.'

We waited on God for a vision. We knew that we were to build one family of Christians for one neighbourhood, and that this family was called to create an environment of love where the hurting people would find healing. We included all the members in the process of

deepening, enlarging and updating the vision. Eventually the entire church drew up a vision statement entitled Christ for the Community: The Community for Christ.

As we searched for the right headline phrase we thought of our early call to love the people of the neighbourhood and our later call to locate our physical presence where the three villages met. The phrase 'A Heart for Bowthorpe' emerged. We produced a logo depicting the three villages with a heart in their middle. Inside the heart two hands were clasped in friendship around a Cross. This logo was reproduced on a banner which hangs in the Worship Centre, and graces the cover of the neighbourhood magazine which goes to every home each month.

In early days we opened a shop unit each day in the first village of Clover Hill and named it 'The Open Door'. The secret of its success was that someone lived over the shop. The church was seen to be a home in the midst of the people. We realised this when a screaming young woman sought sanctuary one night before Christmas. As we locked the door behind her she told us her boy friend was chasing her with a knife and would kill her. But before their quarrel began he had also told her 'If ever you're in real trouble you can always go to the Open Door.'

We used the village hall for our Sunday worship, and at first rejected the idea of a building just for church activities, but we came to realise that both a congregation and the whole neighbourhood need a spiritual home. We were led to establish a Worship and Work area around the church- and farm- ruins at the centre of the three villages. Robin Manley Williams opted for a three day week in the Civil Service in order to voluntarily oversee the building of a new Worship Centre. Certain church members established Bowthorpe Community Trust, which renovated the two farm cottages next to the Worship Centre for the use of members committed to this vision. Barbara Fox, a Franciscan Tertiary lived in one, and the Tomlinson family in the other. The Trust purchased and renovated old harness rooms nearby and made them into wood workshops for people with learning difficulties, and a craft shop where local folk could sell their crafts and find a listening ear. Peter Tomlinson became the manager.

Denominational leaders became patrons and Michael Handley, Archdeacon of Norwich, concluded that 'this project is so hair brained it might just be of the Holy Spirit' and became chair of trustees.

Barbara had a vision.

Barbara Fox was a new resident who, after joining the church, re-discovered a childhood longing to become a nun, become a Franciscan tertiary, sold her new house, and become warden of the small retreat cottage next to the Worship Centre. As a contemplative deeply committed to the place she became a sign of God's faithfulness to a rootless generation. Others 'just moved' to Bowthorpe, but, once there, also became signs by making themselves fully present to the neighbourhood for the sake of Christ.

We persuaded the Diocese to build Church House, where I lived, opposite the cottages. My sister Sally used the top floor; Raffaele Zuppardi, a former Verona Brother and separated from his wife with his two children staying at week-ends, helped; it gain a community spirit. For a time six people meet fortnightly to explore whether they were called to adopt a common Rule of Life. Since some of these were Roman Catholics I sought the advice of Alan

Clark, Roman Catholic Bishop of East Anglia. He was in favour of a Rule of Life shared by Christians of different church traditions, so long as it required each to be loyal to their own church. As it turned out, God moved most of the six on.

In order to make the Worship Centre a spiritual home to the neighbourhood we made sure the design was welcoming, the chairs were comfortable, and that there were refreshment, creche, nappy changing, disabled, office and children's facilities. It became quite well used and was open every though not all day. Activities revolved around daily, Taize style morning and evening prayer. We sometimes had shared lunches or days together.

Although we felt it left much to be desired, I was encouraged when a member told us on his return from Medugorge: 'It was like walking into a warm womb, and I feel like that about our church, too.'

We tried, in unobtrusive ways, to build listening into the fabric of our life together. I routinely listened to the whispers of the Holy Spirit and wrote. We had times of silent listening in our meetings and worship. On fifth Sundays we shared in Quaker meetings, when nothing was spoken unless it was thought to be a prompting of God. Periodically we held a vigil when anyone could write on an acetate anything they felt God was saying to the church. Occasionally a member would offer a prophetic word which the leadership weighed and conveyed to the church. A lunch time prayer group listened to God on behalf of the church and neighbourhood. Sometimes they would sense pain in a particular part of Bowthorpe, and would pray at that place. They 'picked up' the pain of one street where crime and violence was taking over, and prayer-walked it. Days later a street resident was arrested; it was revealed he had been the local drugs ring leader with a mafia-like influence. Life improved for that street.

The idea of the whole church discovering God's marching orders by listening to the neighbourhood's pains and aspirations was new to evangelical members, who wondered how God could speak to people who did not worship him. We were a long way from the whole church owning this approach, but we took a hesitant step or two towards becoming a church that listens to the people. These commitments were included in the Vision Statement that the church eventually adopted: 'We cherish that which is of God in each person. We value everyone because God wants to be Father to them. We listen attentively.'

If we believed that the church in a neighbourhood is like a heart in a body, how could the church (the heart) bring renewal to the body (the neighbourhood)? We realised it could not do this if it was detached from the arteries of the body, which were the formal and informal neighbourhood networks. Yet how could we avoid the opposite danger of getting on to a treadmill of neighbourhood activities which would eventually leave both us and the neighbourhood exhausted? A visiting preacher gave us a key: Osmosis. Osmosis is a biological process which echoes the process of human friendship. As local Christians draw in human life from the friends they make in the natural course of events (neighbours, shopping, schools, groups, pubs, sports, etc) so their friends in turn imbibe their life, which is permeated by Christ. Christ in the believer filters out impurities that would otherwise be imbibed.

A residents magazine was started, and soon church people were asked to run it, which they have done ever since.

Healing Centre

Soon after I arrived I invited the Clover Hill doctors to lunch. Our resources were meagre compared to theirs, but we told them of a church member who could offer some counselling and of a group who met weekly to intercede for the sick. The doctors offered a room in their surgery, free of charge, for the counselling; and they asked us to keep a record of answers to our prayers for the sick, and to let them know the results. This we did, and it built up our faith. They also suggested we keep a Book of Remembrance in which could be recorded the names of loved ones who had died. On the anniversary of a bereavement, people often went to the doctor, feeling depressed. At their suggestion, we visited the bereaved at this time.

We accepted John Wimber's challenge in the 1980's that churches should expect God to heal at normal services. We drew up guidelines and commissioned a healing ministry team and offered laying on of hands after every service.

A large Health Centre was built across the car park by the Worship Centre. We developed team work with this, and health visitors recommended people to our parenting skills courses.

We wanted the church to be relevant to social needs, and to be seen as a resource by poor and professional residents alike, and by agencies such as schools and Social Services. We appointed a Voluntary Church Assistant at our Voluntary Aided Church Middle School, and were involved in other local schools. Church members started or sustained playgroups, monthly services in each of the five Sheltered Housing Centres and in a Nursing Home. Some of our members turned a village hall into a classy Saturday Night Dive for young people which they named Twisters. The same people purchased a large derelict barn from the City Council with the aim of turning it into a Leisure and Community Centre. The barn had to be razed, but in its place are plans for a community peace garden.

Cherish animals and earth

We were praying for someone who was hurting. He and I sat each side of a sofa with Lucy the dog between us. He went limp as we invited the Holy Spirit to rest upon him. We had not anticipated, however, that our prayer would have the same effect on Lucy. She went so limp, she fell on to the floor and lay there out to the world. God was teaching us that ordinary churches are to bless animals.

And the earth. A new resident knocked on my door. 'I stopped going to churches because they do not honour the earth' Judith explained. 'I tried New Age and American Indian communities who do honour the earth, but I left them because they do not honour Christ. I am looking for a church that honours both Christ and the earth.' 'Come and help us', I told Judith, who began to care for the plants around the church ruin.

Although we had no churchyard, we created a garden of remembrance where ashes are scattered.

Shortly afterwards we held our first annual Blessing of the Earth service. Afterwards a new member, Gary, who had gained sensitivity through suffering, said: 'Something has changed. Now the earth of Bowthorpe can breathe freely again after all these years'.

At the second such service, in a dell, we were joined by some gypsy children. They helped to fasten a banner in the ground, proclaiming 'Bowthorpe, the Community for Christ.' It was a symbolic offering back of the land to God, in partnership with those whose families had lived there long before the houses were built.

Roots matter

David Parker, The Vineyard Churches' prophetic leader from North America, was giving a talk at a Day of Renewal in Bowthorpe. He used a phrase of London Underground announcers, 'Mind the gap', as his theme for talks around the country. He would urge his hearers to mind the gap between the church and the people, between the Bible and their behaviour and so on. As he spoke at Bowthorpe he suddenly looked at a glass seat we had placed in an alcove of this modern Worship Centre, beneath which the foundations of an ancient Saxon church could be seen. 'I have never said this before in my talks', David said, 'but I feel very strongly the Lord has drawn to my attention the following point: mind the gap between your ancient roots and the present.'

We decided to research and produce an illustrated booklet on Bowthorpe's ancient and modern history to help people 'mind the gap'. (x) Ray Simpson Bowthorpe, A Community's Beginnings (Open Door Publications 1982) Available at £1.50 plus p & P from The Hobby Horse, Bowthorpe Hall Road, Bowthorpe, Norwich NR1 9AA.

Housing estates need saints

Many Bowthorpe members were not into saints. However, during a sabbatical pilgrimage to the wooden cell of Switzerland's national saint, the farmer Nicholas of Flue, one of those rare and unmistakable commands from God came to me. I must turn a ruined blacksmith's forge on the site scheduled to become a vicarage into a rustic prayer cell. It must be dedicated to a nearby Norfolk saint, who was also a layman and a farm worker, as well as a healer, namely St. Walstan.

Jeremy Dearling offered to make a sculpture of St. Walstan which would also tell the inspiring story of Walstan to passers by, and was sponsored by local industries. This was a private venture of mine, and misunderstandings had to be talked through. The Bishop of Lynn, David Bentley, dedicated the cell to God during The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 'for the transformation of the collective unconscious life of the neighbourhood.'

Then Rabbi Lionel Blue, who was making a TV series on holy places of East Anglia heard about the cell and insisted on bringing his weary film crew over. 'Jews aren't supposed to believe in saints' he told me before he sat, lost in thought, before Walstan. Suddenly he spoke, as if making an announcement to the world: 'Walstan is the answer to the yuppie. Every housing estate needs a saint'. The film crew went home, but Lionel's words live on.

Eldred Willey, a church member and a journalist for The Tablet, wrote an article about God's healing presence coming into the broken lives of people in the workshops next to St.

Walstan. This was happening, he thought, because St. Walstan had been invited back into the area. Another resident pictured the farm-worker Walstan as being allowed by God to 'dig the soil of the hearts of the people of Bowthorpe', creating a God-consciousness in the neighbourhood. When two teenagers, who were widely known as lovable rogues, were killed riding a stolen motorbike, a whole generation of local young people were affected. It was to the Prayer Cell that many of them came, to grieve, to sit, to think, to pray, to place a flower or a note. With succeeding generations care was needed to prevent the cell being used as a hideout for crime. To maintain its accessibility to all and sundry was a calculated risk, but one worth the taking. Children, shoppers, trolley-men from the local supermarket, dog-walkers and others not directly connected with the church felt at ease enough to be still within its rough walls.

Angels

I had prepared for my new ministry at Bowthorpe by listening to a cassette course for pastors by Jack Hayford, Pastor of The Pentecostal Church on the Way, at Los Angeles. When his ministry began there the church was quite small and rather dingy. Believing that the Lord is 'enthroned on the praises of his people' (Psalm 22:3) Jack and his pastoral team met in their church on Saturday nights to pray for the Sunday services. On one such night he felt they were being told to station themselves at the four corners of the sanctuary, and to extend their hands as though lifting up a canopy of praise. A sense of God's presence enveloped them. On repeating this another Saturday the building filled with a smoke-like golden aura; it seemed to them like the 'Shekinah glory' that long before had filled Israel's temple. Next day, though nothing was outwardly different from previous weeks, the congregation doubled. As the pastors reflected on this, they concluded that there were four angelic beings stationed at the same locations as the four pastors. 'The angelic beings had not taken their stations at our address', one of them commented, 'rather, our commitment to worship had aligned us with God's address.' (x) Hayford, Jack The Church On the Way (Zondervan 19)

The fact that a Pentecostal Church had learned to align its worship with the eternal worship of heaven brought a flicker of hope that this might be possible in a place such as Bowthorpe. Some Saturdays one of our worship team or myself walked the Worship Centre with uplifted hands forming a canopy of praise; later our Associate Minister did the same.

When a faith sharing team from St. Andrew's Church, Chorley Wood, visited us, their leader, David Pytches, commented that the building had been released and was free for praise. One of our older members, Joyce, told me she heard monks singing during our worship time. Afterwards I discovered that the site of our modern Worship Centre had once been a monastery Chantry.

Churches, like cities and individuals, either go forward or they go backward. Teenage vandalism threatened to turn the 'dream village' of Bowthorpe into a nightmare. Yuppies, including church members, moved out. Many who stayed had too low an image of themselves and Bowthorpe to halt a downward spiral. In such a situation, how should a church carry out Jesus' injunction to overcome evil with good? We sought a God-given strategy with good people who wanted to turn the situation round. Head teachers, police, youth workers, voluntary organisations, health and church workers met together. The

approach was three-pronged: To raise residents' self image, to make personal contact with the vandals, and to get the whole church praying.

History is littered with churches which began as a movement and ended as a monument. A regular visitor to Bowthorpe told me that most churches he returned to after a period away had not changed, they seemed stuck in a time warp. He felt that we were a living organism; and noticed there were little adaptations, creative responses to fresh insights, people, circumstances, or seasons.

The Church is Christ's Body. Christ walked with God every day of his life. So must the church. In order for churches to be God's journeying people they must listen to their dreams.

I had a dream. It was so powerful that it came back day after day. The whole of Bowthorpe turned out for a funeral. It was the funeral of a person named 'Mr. Bowthorpe'. The crowds went in procession down to the crematorium. And I, Ray Simpson, led the procession.

Eighteen years before God had told me to lay down my life for Bowthorpe. Now he was telling me I had to die to Bowthorpe, else it would become an idol. God was moving me on.

I knew that Bowthorpe was a half way house towards the church that is meant to emerge in Britain and that it needed ordained leaders with fresh energies and skills.

9. Villages of God - cells, congregations and monasteries.

We have explored the spirituality of the emerging church. What about its shape? The second millennium church was based on order, and feared letting its members 'go with the flow'. Chaos theory in science reveals, however, a creative interaction between fluid particles, which become life-enhancing. The emerging church seeks flexible frameworks which enable all people to move and grow and flow with God's Spirit within the natural patterns around them.

The signs of potential in the emerging church seems to lie in two poles, the small house unit and the hub. Middle sized congregations which are just trying to 'keep something going' are in steep decline, and need to adapt or die.

So let us look at the small, the middle sized and the hub churches.

Cells and groups

A growth point in the world church is the upsurge in cell churches. Evidence from Canada suggests, however, that these do better in new situations than they do when grafted on to

long established congregations. Nevertheless, certain congregations in most church of the main streams are developing cells as their way forward.

This is, for them, a rediscovery of the central role that the relationally based small group is meant to have within the Church. These are not the traditional home groups, but real Christian mini communities who put God at the centre of who they are and what they do. Pioneers such as Ralph Neighbour, Bill Beckham and certain Korean church leaders offer various expressions of cell church.

Cells provide for more intimate sharing, study, prayer and friendship than a Sunday congregation can provide for. They enable certain tasks to be accomplished in mission or community care, and they provide for the pastoral needs of each member. They can restore a sense of 'ownership' to the members of the church.

There are, however, limits to what cells can achieve. Sometimes a cell is presented as being comparable to a family, but an arbitrary allocation of Christian brothers and sisters cannot do justice to their deepest needs, bonds, and inner journeys. The aim of cells is to add to their numbers and form new cells, but they thereby lose continuity. Many Christians are too stressed or wounded to cope with such artificial change. A family does not jettison members when it grows, and it has times for all the family to be together or to be remembered. Cells can alienate families if children are excluded, and older people if children are included.

Some people find the cell too small a unit to allow them to cope with an over demanding member. Some cell leaders never bargained for the demands which deplete their reservoir of energy or skill.

Cells fail to meet the need of the general public for a visible contact point for the local church. Local Authorities, schools, media, other churches, funeral directors, wedding couples, social services, police, newly arrived local residents, travellers, people in crisis, seekers after spirituality do not know where to look if cells are the only expression of church. Free ranging souls do not wish to be constrained by such units. If they have no other focus to relate to they will lose their church connection.

These qualifications apply also to traditional home groups, and to the increasing number of cross-church, ad hoc groups which are not grounded in any one church.

To handle this challenge successfully cell members need to relate to a wider framework which gives them more space, choice, stability, cross-weaving, coherence, and support.

Where can this sustained framework be found?

Middle sized congregations

Not, as a rule, in the middle sized congregation. In many urban and sparsely populated rural areas the middle sized church structure has come to the end of its shelf life. The Church Survey of 1999 predicted that half of these churches would close. To operate as the church for the area, having to supply all the things a church is expected to provide, takes more money, time, organisation, talent, motivation and numbers than these congregations have,

or can be expected to have. Buildings that are too expensive or cumbersome to sustain bleed the life out of the dwindling few who try to maintain them.

Denominations still try to prop up these nonviable institutions. The Church of England, for example, amalgamates existing parish structures, and puts non-stipendiary ministers into empty vicarages, not to generate new forms of life, but to perpetuate the old. The subsidised paid clergy who are asked to manage these expanded bureaucratic shells say they have an untenable job. Many suffer stress or resign, but they are often not listened to. This is manifestly not the way ahead.

Post modern Christians, who in other areas of life are free to follow multiple choices, are made to feel guilty because they do not wish to be tied to the organisation of such a church. These Christians increasingly realise that God does not mean them to waste their lives propping up what is wrong. They are voting with their feet and their pocket.

The eyes and noses and ears in the Body of Christ now know that if there is to be a People's Church, Christians must adopt, not only a new spirituality, but also organic structures that reflect and sustain this. They are no longer willing to collude with structures weighted to preserve what is untenable. They know that those obsolete church structures that are more of a drain than a resource must be allowed to die. So unviable middle sized churches need to stop trying to be what they are not and to become what they are meant to be. They need to discern the nature of their context and their calling. What are the options?

Many middle sized churches must close.

Many small to middle sized congregations have little future as they are. Their remaining members need to find a specific but limited role in their locality. The few Christians who worship in such churches have a role to play as a Christian presence in that area which relates to a hub in the wider church. They need to discern what shape that Christian presence should take. A house fellowship? A monthly family service in a school, or community centre? Alternative worship in a dance hall? A spirituality course? A children's club or school?

Some middle sized churches should be recycled.

One church might become a group of homes which warm their village through their hospitality. Another might meet in a church building of ancient foundation, and keep daily corporate prayer going on a rota basis. Another might develop creative arts and workshops. Under-used church buildings sited in natural gathering places can be recycled as multi resource centres. St. Paul's at The Crossing, Walsall, was looking redundancy in the face, yet was sited in the middle of the town centre. It sold the ground level of its site to eight shop owners; on the second level the church has a cafe, a drop in centre and a chapel; on the third level is the worship centre which is used by many groups on week-days. There is public daily prayer in the chapel, which is much used by shoppers for private prayer. Certain rural church buildings can become local retreat centres, and a small rota can maintain daily prayer. One Norfolk church advertised for a hermit.

Some middle sized congregations are viable as they are.

They have life and leadership, few 'artificial' overheads, and they fit their locality. New Life Church, in Alnwick, Northumberland has only about fifty members, but it has a committed all-age congregation, few overheads (it meets in a school), a viable catchment area (Alnwick

is a market town) and a big vision. Their vision is to buy the old Corn Exchange and make it a hub for the life of the town, trusting other Christians and people of good will to play their part.

The Church of England is at its best in market towns, and in certain smaller areas parish churches are restoring the practice of daily worship and building annexes which offer everyday facilities.

Some middle sized churches can become neighbourhood churches.

St Barnabas, Inham Nook, Nottingham is close to the pub, shops, clinic, and school in a housing estate with serious social problems. Unlike the early monastic churches, the church does not own these other facilities, but its members animate them. The pub is the social arm of the church, the fish and chip the supplier of food for its gatherings. Church members are the heart and soul of the pub, and bring new-made friends over to the church. On a visit there I met Simon, a young ex drug addict who had horribly slashed his face and feet. He found the church people so friendly in the pub that he accepted Jesus into his life that day. Many folk on the estate were out of work, heavy smokers, or on medication. These habitually go both to the doctor and to the church. Medicine, care, and prayer are not in separate compartments, they are part of a whole. Thus members receive prayer for healing and find help, they attend the clinic, and they return and find someone will care for them. Pete, who could not get paid employment, was a volunteer carer for a mother with lung cancer. He brought her to church and she asked me to pray for strength for that week. St. Barnabas knows that it is no good just turning a church into a hive of activities. Every day begins with simple, Celtic-style prayer.

St. Patrick's Church, in down-town Hove, Sussex had a large Victorian building which was nearly redundant. The Bishop of Chichester invited four monks from the Community of the Servants of the Will of God to buy a nearby three storey terraced. They transferred three of their daily services of worship into the church. The monks gave homeless and hungry people hospitality, according to their Rule, but they had too little room to meet the need. So the rear of the church building was converted into a Shelter for the homeless and meals were provided following the midday and evening services. Pews were removed and icons put in their place. Soon not only the poor attended daily prayer, but business people in suits came out of the woodwork too. Father Gregory, Abbott of the community of the Servants of the Will of God, believes that the mediaeval monasteries went wrong when they lost the link between the monastery and the neighbourhood and failed to pass on the principles of Christian community life to the church at large. In the light of the link between their monastic house and St. Patrick's he wrote *Living for the Kingdom; a Rule for the Parish Community* which integrates all aspects of church life into the daily pattern of dying and rising with Christ.

The church in the village of Stanton-by-Dale, Derbyshire, turned two redundant schools into a new independent church school and a church centre.; a redundant air-raid shelter into a post office /shop run by a charitable trust; and a disused Methodist Chapel into a visitors and conference centre.

There cannot be one monochrome blueprint, for each situation is different. There will be and should be diversity, but one thing seems clear. If the ex middle sized congregations who have become Christian presences or recycled centres are to survive and flourish, they need

to be part of something bigger. They need to be like a spoke in a wheel. They need to relate to a hub.

Hub churches

There is a groundswell of Christians who put their energies into groups or networks rather than into congregations. The UK Christian Directory expands yearly to accommodate the entries of ever more networks. While church attendance declines, Christian initiatives increase. But how can they avoid being like the over individualistic people in Moses' day, when everyone 'did what was right in their own eyes'? Other Christians follow a more individual path which keeps them on the move, uninvolved in the day-to-day life of a church. Like spokes in a wheel, they long for a hub to which they can relate. So also do many small churches. They don't respond to being slotted in to some bureaucratic arrangement; they need an organic relationship with a spiritual home. As more middle sized churches close, the remaining groups of Christians will want to make links with hubs.

So large numbers of Christian groups, networks, small churches, as well as mobile Christians outside them, cannot flourish unless there are also centres of stability, prayer, resource and hospitality to which they may relate.

We need more than celebration networks.

In the 1980's the concept developed of cell - congregation- celebration. The celebration was the occasional coming together of congregations, and was probably arranged by the headquarters of the umbrella network. This was not holistic. Congregations felt used. A hub church enables celebrations, but it is much more than that.

We need more than umbrella churches.

In the same period certain large, lively churches planted and nurtured new churches, and offered resources to them. Struggling, or merely small congregations began to relate to them as umbrella churches. Churches such as Holy Trinity Brompton, St. Andrew's Chorley Wood, or St. Thomas' Crookes, Sheffield provide training days, faith sharing teams, courses and consultancies. For these things they should be blessed. A hub church is, indeed, a resourcing umbrella church, but it is even more than that. If umbrella churches are to become holistic hubs they need to address how to provide an experience of lived community, unprogrammed space, daily corporate rhythm, and guest accommodation. Faith communities of other religions are ahead of the game.

We need more than multi resource centres

We have noted how some middle sized congregations have turned their buildings into multi resource centres. Some large churches have done the same. Kingsway Centre, near Liverpool is open every day and provides a cafe, children's facilities, counselling, prayer and much else, staffed by members of the Kingsway church. Such places are a blessing. A hub church is a multi resource centre, but it is more than that. For its members do not live private lives away from their church centre. A hub church is organic.

Calls for 'monastery churches'

Just as the inescapable need for holistic hub churches stares us in the face a fresh generation is questing after a new monasticism. Is a modern, people-friendly form of monastic church coming to birth?

The subject of the new monasticism requires a book in itself. Here it suffices to point out that many unchurched people are interested in spirituality with integrity but will not buy into churches whose primary dynamic is to preserve or extend the institution. They will buy into a pattern that engenders trust, rhythm and hospitality - and this is a monastic pattern that is increasingly being called for.

The German evangelical church martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote, in a prophetic letter to his brother Karl in January 1935:

The restoration of the Church must surely come from a new kind of monasticism, which will have only one thing in common with the old, a life lived without compromise according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Jesus. I believe the time has come to gather people together for this.' (iii)

While he was pastoring German speaking Christians in London during Hitler's regime the Confessing Church invited Bonhoeffer to establish an underground seminary for the Confessing Church at Finkenwalde. On receiving this invitation Bonhoeffer asked Bishop Bell to advise him of monasteries he could visit in England. One of these, Mirfield, impressed him with its emphasis on the regular daily offices of prayer, and the frequent repetition of the psalms. At Finkenwalde he trained four sets of ordinands in the context of a praying community.

Despite his aristocratic limitations Bonhoeffer introduced a significant new dynamic into the Protestant Church. Academic study had been divorced from devotion since it had been taken out of the monasteries and put into largely secular universities. At Finkenwalde the lectio divina was restored. Students allowed God to speak directly to them as they spent time each day in silent reflection on a Bible passage. Bonhoeffer also restored the practice of confession to a senior colleague, and thus also a sense of discipline and accountability.

During this period he wrote three books: Discipleship, Life Together and Spiritual Care. These yield clues to what he envisaged. He believed that you do not make community, you enter into what is already given.

Because of his execution in a prison cell shortly before the end of World War Two we shall never know how he would have developed a new monasticism had he survived. Sadly, the German Church did not take hold of what he had conceived. In Scotland, however, George McLeod had been developing the Iona Community during those same war years. Bonhoeffer's Life Together became standard reading there.

A generation after Bonhoeffer the evangelical leader John Stott called for 'the re-monking' of the church. In this decade Eugene Petersen has called on Protestant church leaders to be radical, and to make a calculated plan to replace their 'ego lust to be god' with a corporate pattern that makes space for God. He writes:

Historically the most conspicuous corporate construction that does this is the monastery...The genius of the monastery is its comprehensiveness; all the hours of the day are defined by prayer; all the activity of the monks is understood as prayer...This external comprehensiveness penetrates community and soul.' He quotes Oxford historian Herbert Butterfield, who wrote 'Sometimes I wonder at dead of night whether, during the next fifty years, Protestantism may not be at a disadvantage because a few

centuries ago, it decided to get rid of monks.' Petersen calls for 'an open monastery', and concludes: 'What is critical is an imagination large enough to contain all of life, all worship and work in prayer set in a structure adequate to the actual conditions in which it is lived out.' (iv)

The new monasticism transcends both the Protestant and Roman Catholic monastic frameworks which have dominated the Western Church since the Reformation. It is a discernment of shared rhythms; it is a recovery of normality. Some of the churches arising out of the 16th century Protestant/Catholic schism have been dogmatically separatist. They have seen themselves as the centre of reform and have tended to look down on others. Monasticism, in contrast, is grounded in a humility that has no false or grandiose illusions. It has a deep connectedness which derives from a recognition that there is only one holy, catholic, orthodox, apostolic church.

Post modern Christians who seek a new monasticism are wary of structures that are imposed from the centre; they do not want to be trapped in a new legalism. They don't believe they should be shut off from ordinary people. They see themselves as on a journey, and can't pre-judge what they will be doing at a later stage of the journey. They want to be free to follow each prompting of the Spirit, to be single or to marry.

Planting people-friendly monastic churches that are born out of such a dynamic, and which do not have to be squeezed into a 'one shape fits all' church structure, may be the only way to win them. For monasteries, whether old or new, are usually freed from the diocesan system so that they can develop under God according to their own prophetic charisms. This is recognised, in one way or another, in the regulations of the historic diocesan churches. (i)

It is interesting that St. Thomas Crookes Church, Sheffield is putting before the church authorities a proposal for a monastic order which can plant monastic style mission churches in just such a framework, freed from parish and diocesan regulations.

The Cappadocian and other fathers of the Eastern Church did not treat fourth century monasticism as a special form of Christian life, but as an actualisation of what in principle was a life demanded of all Christians. (ii) The Celtic monastic churches were not regarded as a special form of church, they were the norm, for everybody could belong to them.

Eldred Willey, in his book *Prayers of New Communities* (DLT 2001) introduces over twenty modern communities in the UK.

Brad Bessell, the founder of The Anamchara Community near Adelaide, is a young married person. He says 'I know I am called to be a monk but I also have a heart for church planting'. He sees his home base, which he hopes will have enough land for others to live there, as the rural monastery, based on a daily rhythm of prayer and work. The Sunday church will be in the city, the mission outreach of the monastery. The Community of Aidan and Hilda's Way of Life is the basis of the church's life.

Sketes

The Hermitage, or Skete, was an alternative model to the central monastic church and is a user friendly model for today. This began in the 4th century in a part of the Egyptian desert

named Skete. Self supporting hermits in their own dwellings related to others who were drawn to that area through a common Rule of life, Sunday worship, and a shared meal. Some of them became elders or soul friends, shared their home with a disciple, or mentored younger people who came to live nearby.

Skete style hermitages became widespread in Britain and Ireland. Joceline's Life of Kentigern states of his monks in Wales that 'after the fusion of the Primitive Church under the apostles and their successors ... they dwelt alone, as did St Kentigern himself, in single cottages from the time when they had become mature in age and doctrine.' (iv)

As years passed these Sketes sometimes became pilgrim centres and settlements - a new form of church. These words in a commentary on Psalm 133 throw light on the essence of the Sketes:

With God it is the common behaviour rather than a common location that joins brothers (sisters) in a single dwelling, and the fullness of peace cannot be maintained where there is a difference of wills. (v)

I myself have been drawn to the Skete model, and member of the Community of Aidan and Hilda on Holy Island have drawn up 'house rules' though we do not live in the same house.

New household churches

In the New Testament churches are sometimes called households. There were household monastic churches in succeeding centuries, such as that led by Macrina, sister of Bishop Basil of Caesarea. Household churches are surfacing again .

Andrew and Jane Fitz-Gibbon explored with Celtic minded friends in the UK, and then with anabaptist friends in USA, what a new monasticism might be in a contemporary culture. In the late 1990's they established their own home based community church at Ithaca, New York State. This has about twenty five members, including children, and two small linked communities. About fifteen attend weekly Theology School

Although they came from a charismatic and free-spirited background, their study of monasticism led them to two conclusions. First, small communities need spiritual parents. Second, small communities have to be deeply connected to the whole church. These two convictions led the Fitz-Gibbons to become Abbott and Abbess (a husband and wife leadership team) and to be ordained by a bishop within the apostolic succession. In 2001 their community and ministries were chartered as a jurisdiction under the archbishop of the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches.

The Breakwater Community, Geelong, Australia is a thirty year old suburban monastery with a rich ecumenical spirituality based on the contemplative monastic approach and the need to address personal and corporate evil. It includes married and single people, its worship has strong Orthodox elements, and its buildings are owned by the Baptists.

Monastic villages

In the USA two million people belong to mega churches. These, though clothed in a much different culture, contain certain elements of the Celtic monastic city. The mega church has

food halls, sporting leagues, day care and learning groups as well as a variety of worship patterns. 'I am not the pastor of a church, I am the mayor of a city' observed the leader of one mega church (xii) The mega churches lack, however, the spirituality of the monastic tradition, and they do not pray in the rhythms of creation. 'They have a limited shelf life' a TV commentator observed, 'because, like supermarkets, they have to follow the demographic curves.'

In Bergen, Norway, the 2,400 member Pentecostal church also has certain elements of the monastic village. It has schools for children and adults and is starting its own bank. Every day over a hundred people gather for an hour's prayer meeting before going to work. But without cars this would disintegrate. Nobody lives there. It is not a spiritual home. Its members are living off a society which is dysfunctional, they are not creating an alternative economy.

In the gene pool of The Isles, however, is the memory of monastic villages spawning the first schools, hospitals, universities, libraries, and even great towns. Many Celtic monastic churches had a real economy which was viable, rooted in the neighbourhood and seen to benefit local people. It is, I believe, possible for us to reconnect with these roots and develop monastic villages on a smaller, more organic scale.

Pilgrim centres such as Iona, Lindisfarne and Taize have elements of 'the monastic village' and draw many seekers. However, unlike the early monastic villages, whose various components grew out of the common wellspring of God's love, these places already have indigenous sub communities, such as fishing, farming and tourism, with their own dynamics; the 'godly village' approach must be to respect these as they are, not to duplicate them, though holding out the possibility of voluntary transformation.

Many cathedral closes were once a monastic village. Some of these lend themselves to becoming so again. Yet in a book about cathedrals boldly entitled 'Flagships of the Spirit', in which various writers outlined uses for cathedrals, none had a plan for a cathedral to become a monastery. In one cathedral city three entities are within a stone's throw of each other: the cathedral, the Diocesan office, and the retreat house. Yet they neither pray, plan, nor share their lives together. They are three competing businesses. Visitors are denied an experience of holistic, hospitable Christianity. The absence of community in cathedral closes means that many tourists receive stones instead of bread.

Some cathedral closes lend themselves to becoming communities. The houses the Dean and Chapter rent out could be allocated to people who wish to follow a Rule of that Cathedral Community. Poor people who do not get married because they cannot afford the cost of a typical wedding could be invited to have picnic receptions in the cloisters. Even those which lack housing availability can do something, as has Bradford. Its Cathedral Centre is not a shop which sells postcards, but a Drop-in which offers food and friendship to the most needy.

A typical emerging monastic village might have more than one style of worship area, a cafe, an arts centre, workshops, guest accommodation, study and sports facilities, shops, play groups, play area, a theatre or meeting hall, counselling and medical care, huts or poustinias for private study and contemplation, schools, family support, activities for the elderly, meditation rooms, organic fields or farm, peace garden and cyber facilities, all revolving

around a daily rhythm of prayer, and a place of silence serviced by resident members who embrace common values and disciplines.

NOTES CHAPTER 9 VILLAGES OF GOD

(i) For example, The Advisory Council on the Relations of Bishops and Religious Communities in the Church of England states in A Directory of the Religious Life (1980): 'Religious communities are independent associations expressing by their life and work a prophetic role which complements, and sometimes challenges, the life of the church as a whole. They therefore need freedom from external control. Their status as independent bodies gives them complete and autonomous control of both their property and their internal government, in fulfilment of their spiritual vision. Yet the Church requires what both clergy and laity ask for: standards or norms by which religious communities can be guaranteed and recognised as in good standing.'

(ii) Greer, R.A. Broken Lights and Mended Lives (Pennsylvania State University Press 1986)

(iv) Petersen, Eugene The Belly of the Fish (Eerdmans/Gracewing)

(iv) Jocelyn The Life of St Kentigern in Two Celtic Saints (Llanerch 1989)

(v) Quoted in John Cassian's Sixteenth Conference on Friendship.

10. Rise Up the Rainbow Church of the Isles

Islands are God's strategy for continents
Conrad Hunte

At the turn of this millennium Britain's devolved Parliaments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales joined the Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands and The Isle of Man in a Council of the Isles. (i) Europe already had such a fruitful model. The Nordic Council, comprising five nations and three autonomous regions, has been operating since 1952. It has effectively buried the territorial disputes which used to be endemic in the Scandinavian peninsula. Thanks to the co-operative work of the council, this former conflict zone has been transformed into a highly successful network of trans-national communities. Of particular relevance has been the establishment of Europe's first two 'demilitarised' zones - the Spitsbergen and the Aland Islands, the latter once bitterly contested between Sweden and Finland.

Could Northern Ireland become Europe's third such zone - possibly to be followed by other intractable trouble spots, like Gibraltar and Cyprus? A neutral region in a new Irish-British political dispensation?

A major root of the conflict is the two mutually exclusive claims for sovereignty over one territory. In this sense, neither a United Kingdom nor a united Ireland is workable in the long term. Hence the timeliness of the two Governments renouncing their claims to unitary sovereignty, and agreeing to work towards a 'totality of relations'. Each unit would function with the appropriate degree of autonomy, with the council providing a co-ordinating and mediating role where necessary - for example, in managing fishery and pollution in the Irish Sea, a British-Irish electricity and gas connector, or inter-regional trade, tourism and cultural exchanges. It is worth noting that there are now probably as many people of Irish extraction living in Britain as there are in Ireland.

What is asked for is not a unilateral surrender, but rather a shifting, of power - primarily downwards (as subsidiarity indicates) to regions and localities, but in some cases upwards to the trans-national council.

This Council - and the concept behind it - is an acorn that can grow into an oak.

Whether it does or not may depend in part upon the churches of these lands. They have common roots and contain within themselves the power of possibility. The church is the sole of politics and the conscience of peoples. The vision of the church as a fellowship of faith communities engaged in healing their lands can connect with the populations in a way that the retreating church never did. Churches growing in this spirituality contain the power of healing, friendship and mission.

Common roots

Speculation runs rife as to the composition of the original inhabitants of these islands. We have proof of two races who each inhabited both Britain and Ireland at the time of the first century Roman Conquest. (ii) The earliest may be described as our aboriginals. They were the short, swarthy people who built the long barrows, and are variously named the Iberian or Mediterranean race. They survive in the Basques and North Africa. Despite repeated invasions this type still survives in parts of western Ireland and Britain. The second race is in stark contrast to the first. They are tall, fair haired people popularly called the Celts who belonged in speech to the Aryan family, which came originally from India through Europe's heartlands. The point is this: Both Britain and Ireland are multi ethnic not just as a result of recent waves of immigration, but in their origins.

A shared belief in a higher kingdom.

Historically, Ireland is comprised of the four kingdoms of Ulster, Connaught, Leinster and Munster (it was never unified except for a time under British rule). In myth, however, there is a fifth kingdom, variously named, which is on a higher, spiritual plain. We may name this Elysium.

In myth Britain's King Arthur tried to unite warring kingdoms. He gathered great and good leaders to a round table where they planned how to turn Britain into a land of respect, chivalry and noble ideals. They, too, envisaged a kingdom which operated on a higher plane. We may name this Avalon.

Myths have power to carry ideals which change us at the level of our collective unconscious. I like to envisage Arthur and Finn, of Ireland, meeting at a round table somewhere on the sea

The insight that two parties in an intractable dispute can meet in 'a third place' which is on a higher plain lay behind the Irish Peace Process which began in the 1990's....

Defining the islands - some interesting facts and figures

Attempts to define Britain are littered with confusion. These are examined in Norman Davies major history which, after other titles had to be rejected, he entitled *The Isles: A History*. (iii) Many histories of Britain confuse Britain with England, to the fury of Scots and Welsh, some of whom no longer want to be called British. Yet historically, Welsh and Scots were the Britons who survived when the English invaded; it was the English who did not want to be called Britons.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'Britain' as:

The proper name of the whole island containing England, Wales, and Scotland, with their dependencies; more fully called Great Britain...

The term 'British' can mean 'pertaining to the ancient Britons' or 'of, or belonging to, Great Britain, or its inhabitants.'

In a geographical sense the term 'British Isles' is still applied to Britain, Ireland and the smaller islands that skirt them, but in a political sense this is clearly not acceptable.

In the year 2000 Tony Blair's government thought corporate Britain needed to be re-branded, and the Home Secretary announced it was now 'Cool Britannia'. He announced it on April Fools Day, however, and if it was trailing a kite, it had to be withdrawn. For one thing, it excluded Northern Ireland unionists, who were part of 'The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'. So 'UK' became the Blair brand word.

Yet neither the Channel Isles nor The Isle of Man are part of Britain or the United Kingdom; they are, however, linked through the Crown, and through defence and other treaties.

The term 'the island of Ireland' refers to the whole of the geographical entity. 'The Republic of Ireland' (formerly 'The Irish Free State' and then 'Eire') refers to the southern part of that island which became independent of Britain in 1922.

Irish colonised parts of Britain before British colonised Ireland. The 6th century Irish were known as Scotti, and the Irish kingdom of Dal Riada colonised a part of western Scotland and gave it the same name. They also gave their name to Scotland. Although Scots who legally purchased land in Northern Ireland at the behest of the British Government were regarded by the existing Irish population as part of a colonialist agenda, they came from stock which had some Irish origins.

Citizens of the UK and of the Republic of Ireland can come and go and live as they please in each others' countries. A passport to one is a passport to the other.

Ireland is only fourteen miles from Britain at its nearest point, the Mull of Kintyre.

The Irish hatred of England has been caused by British misdeeds, not by instinctive hostility. If the English can truly make restitution and the Irish can truly release today's Britain from its condemnation, something instinctive will emerge. Instinctively, the British like the Irish, and the Irish are as big hearted as any people on earth.

English journalist Clive Price writes:

Whenever I pray for Irish people, fireworks happen! I can't explain it other than that it feels like I have connected to the two terminals of a battery - England and Ireland - and the power is switched on... There is a massive spiritual well under the surface of Ireland, and it's ready to burst out, all over the place... I believe God is installing an Anglo-Irish bond across our nations. It's a treaty of the heart ... and it can start with just some of us, building up friendships across the Irish sea.

Many Irish do not realise that their beloved St. Patrick was a Briton, and even fewer that Aidan, the apostle to the English, was Irish. Renewed links between Aidan's mission base of Lindisfarne, and Mayo and Innisboffin, which received Lindisfarne's refugees, can be a symbol of a new Irish/British church mission partnership, in which we delight to lay down our lives for one another, to love the universal church but to rise above the corroding ways of the 'machine'.

The Churches of the Isles are meant to meet, not so much in formal synods, as in fellowship, feasts and waitings upon God. This is a great hope. The old demarcations of denominations will become less rigid as fellowship grows between churches within these lands. Increasingly the churches of the third millennium will have national characteristics more than denominational. This way of being church was there from its beginning. In The Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation chapters 1 - 3) each church reflects a particular characteristic of its region (x) Steps of St Paul. Vatican Two documents distinguish between what belongs to the local and what belongs to the universal church.

This vision of a Church of the Isles can only ripen to its fullness if the churches rediscover the roots they have in common. Contrary to some expectations, a recovery of roots will also connect with the general population.

In a poll of thirty thousand who voted for the people and items which summed up Britishness for the last 1000 years, only two out of a top list of 100 had a religious connection. These were Glastonbury and Stonehenge. (x Daily Mail 13 September 1999) The organised church was not perceived as endogenous, but at least two ancient religious places were. A renewal of our Celtic roots may well speak to the unchurched population in a way that our standardised banalities do not.

The Celtic cross and other symbols can be hi-jacked, as is Britain's Union Flag, by racist groups, but the circle in the Celtic Cross can become a powerful sign that everyone is included.

This chapter has moved from a look at the church streams to a look at churches in the Celtic nations.

have a dream that there will be churches for all these people groups. All will be welcome to each church, but they will have distinctive expressions.

Isle of Man

In the fifth century a revolution took place in Man. Saints such as Patrick, Germanus and Maughold planted the Christian Faith there, and in the following two centuries Man was by blood and language closely linked with Ireland, which had then become a major seat of Latin learning in Europe. A remarkable number of Keeills, or chapels were built, and Man became known as 'the Holy Isle.' (Ellan Shyant). Its Parliament is independent.

The Channel Isles were evangelised by early saints such as Samson and were once dotted with hermitages. Guernsey was once known as The Holy Isle. They still retain elements of these praying communities. One the old French sisters decided to close their convent, Les Cotils, high above St Peter Port, Guernsey, people from local churches, conceiving a vision of it being 'a Galilee for Europe' managed to secure it. Local Christians staff its cafe, and the grounds now include a school and housing for the elderly. It sustains a daily pattern of prayer with or without guests.

Britain, and its 401 associated islands, is still a vibrant state. This dynamism surely owes something to a love of liberty, a history of trading, a respect for Christian values. At the moment its role in Europe and the world is under review, and internal tensions have come to the surface. Devolved Parliaments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales demand a re-fashioning of political structures and regional identities. Protestantism, such an essential feature of British identity since the Reformation, is losing its monopoly. The multi ethnic make up of most big cities challenges traditional culture. The prosperity of the Irish Republic within the European Union means it is a confident, equal partner with Britain and that the Roman Catholic Church is losing its monopoly.

The Empire gave Britain a purpose: to bring civilisation to the world. It now lacks a moral vision. Fighting for human rights is good, but this on its own lacks a sense of society. We have lost the sense of the Sacred and the holistic view of things that goes with that, also a sense of morality, even the idea of truth itself. There is a fragmentation of conscience. Government wants contradictory things at the same time - for example a neutral state and family values. Uncertain of their philosophies, political parties swing with popular opinion.

Freedom needs a moral framework for its own survival. We are losing the capacity to distinguish the essential from the trivial. With a rediscovery of the Divine Presence in the individual and society will come a true appraisal of ourselves and a sense of what God can do through us. Such knowledge could transform us. (x) Much of the above three paragraphs are inspired by an article by my friend Philip Boobyer.

Our future identity will depend upon discovering this vision of the Presence in all things; it will also depend upon how we choose to remember the past - being honest about the bad but also celebrating good aspects: Liberty without decadence, trade without exploitation, faith which brings care.

The church, if it lives out its divine intention, is the engine for this revolution. The church is the conscience of the nation, the source of its wisdom, the motivator of its people, the spiritual home which enables peoples of many ethnic backgrounds to relate as one family. For

churches comprise people who are brothers and sisters with stronger ties than those which divide along ethnic lines.

The British are a mongrel people - Roman, Saxon, Scandinavian, Norman, Jewish, Afro-Caribbean, Asian; but before all of these we are Celtic. . Christians in Celtic times united peoples from four hostile ethnic groups, the Gaels (mostly from Ireland) the Picts (mostly from Scotland), the Anglo-Saxons (mostly from England) and the ancient British (many from Wales). This offers hope to our multi ethnic society.

It is true that many, including Welsh and Scottish nationalists, do not like to be called British because they associate Britain with England. But historically the Britons were the people who lived here before the English (Anglo Saxons) invaded) The word Welsh means British. So in this sense the Welsh and Scots are British, whatever political shape their countries take.

I hope that gradually, following the lead of public figures such as the broadcaster Trevor Phillips, people will think of themselves as Afro Caribbean Britons, Asian Britons, English Britons, Irish Britons, Jewish Britons, Scottish Britons, or Welsh Britons. etc

The church is meant to be the backbone and the heart of the various limbs of Britain, Ireland and the smaller Isles. In the second millennium it was not recognisable as such. Could a brief look at these separate limbs yield any signs of common personhood?

Scotland

A current of civic renewal is running through Scotland since the opening of its new parliament. Its two largest churches, the Roman Catholic and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, are losing members, but the folk memory of Catholic versus Protestant is flourishing, as may be witnessed at Glasgow's two tribal football teams of Celtic and Rangers.

The Church of Scotland's vision of 'A Church Without Walls' (x) can enable networking across the traditional divides. Healing can come if the deep Presbyterian-Catholic divide in Scotland is looked at in terms of temperament as well as history. How much does this reflect a divide of masculine from feminine? A whole church needs a balance between the two.

A drug was converted through a Church of Scotland preaching service, but was found to be praying daily in a Catholic church. It was open during the day at a time that suited her, and there she could light a candle and just sit in prayer without words. There is no reason in theology, only in culture, why the Catholics could not preach conversion and why the Church of Scotland could not provide an open church with candles.

Inter church partnership is growing, but Church of Scotland minister Andrew Dick says 'We have to build the nests before we lay the eggs'. In his parish of Musselburgh, because the celebrations hosted by the churches together are growing, the means for regular prayer and planning are needed. A 'nest' may prove to be the most helpful way of evolving.

New churches, with their flexibility, may take the lead in establishing the Celtic style 'monasteries' or 'nests', that Scotland needs.

Wales

Wales is a small country of some three million souls, 20% of whom speak Welsh, mostly as their mother tongue. 12% are members of a Christian church: 150,000 are Roman Catholics, 100,000 are Church in Wales members, and the remaining churches make up the other 200,000 members.

Three facts stand out in this situation. First, the people of Wales know that their culture was formed when Christianity penetrated its life and being in the years 400 - 800 after Christ.

The dust of all the saints and martyrs
of the ages rest in your lap.
Gwenallt 1899-1968

Second, for most of its history Wales has been dominated by England, often in a way that has belittled its character and spirituality. The Act of Union between England and Wales in 1536 banned the use of Welsh. The British State replaced the Latin of the established Church's public worship, not with Welsh, but with English. This alienated the people, though some Welsh church people did translate the Bible and the Church's Prayer Book into Welsh. In the 17th century many new Nonconformist chapels and Anglican churches worshipped God in Welsh. Welsh became the language of religion and this 'saved its standards and provided an unbroken theme in the history of Wales down to our very day.' (x) J. Gwynfor Jones This Land and People p 18. In the 18th century, revival swept Wales. In 1920 the Church in Wales came into being, and lost its funding from the Church of England.

Third, the land is now littered with derelict chapels and churches which siren the steep decline in churchgoing.

There is widespread disillusionment within the churches with the church itself...
We are in danger of being imprisoned by a spirituality of decline.
Noel Davies, General Secretary Churches Together in Wales

Writers at the start of the century such as R. Williams Parry and T.H. Parry-Williams indicate that Gospel and culture were no longer inseparably intertwined. The National Eisteddford has kept alive the Welsh spirit, but precious little else has.

After years of decline where disunity and dogma have ruled, are there signs of new moves of God? In 1995 a leader in one of the new churches took back to Wales a powerful prophecy: Pay heed to your genetic code. Other prophet voices spoke of a rediscovery of the underground stream running through Wales (interpreted as the Revivals and the first stream of faith in Wales' 'age of the saints'); of a church of creativity, reaching the needy, yet a church also for the business and political community; a church finding favour with Social Services and the like, a church reaching out and resourcing Wales and the Nations. There was a sense that the Charismatic and House Church movements had largely achieved their aims, and now was the time for something new. Church members were encouraged to sense in their hearts the things that could only be seen dimly at the moment.

Speaking back in 1917 at The Convention of the Church in Wales the Lord Justice Bankes said: 'I see in my mind's eye a truly national Church, a Church that will adapt itself to the needs and requirements of all classes and to the ever changing conditions under which her

work must be done, a Church whose sympathy, whose toleration, whose enthusiasm will draw all people to her and enshrine herself permanently in the affections of the inhabitants of Wales.'

Wales' National Assembly, despite initial misgivings, has brought some increase in Welsh pride and possibility. There is an increasing thirst for unity in Wales.

The challenge of gospel and culture in Wales today is the challenge to recover catholicity, to recover wholeness.

Noel Davies

The retreating churches are putting up walls. The emerging churches are places of hospitality, retreat and healing. The healing centre at the newly restored ancient shrine of Pennant Melangell, the community and retreat house at Coleg y Groes, the multi-faceted United Reformed Church at Llanfair Penrhos, the provision of prayer rooms in the grounds of traditional faith communities are signs of these new shoots.

Christians in such places recognise that there is a deep sense of worthlessness in many Welsh people, but also that Jesus intends now to heal. Jesus message is still: 'I no longer call you servants; you are my friends if you do what I tell you'. These churches seek to connect, not with the church cultures that are obsolete but with the whole that has been lost, with the deeper current of God's Presence.

England

A survey into national identity published in 1999 (x) I? UK - Voices of our Times (Springpoint, 31 Corsica Street, London N5 1JT) found that the English are an insecure people who are increasingly reviled by their proud Celtic neighbours, and even by the Cornish and Northern populations within England. While devolved Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were emerging as confident nations, the English had an identity crisis. Fiona Gilmore, the managing director of Springpoint said the crisis of Englishness 'was a thread that ran throughout the 77 page report and that she was amazed by its strength'. (x) The Times February 1 1999)

Dominant symbols of the English, according to this survey, were lager louts, soccer hooligans, strawberries, and fish and chips. Jeremy Paxman, in his book *The English: A Portrait of a People* (Michael Joseph 1999) asked whether the old English, polite people with hot water bottles who dominated an Empire, any longer have a place? He recognised the English are in crisis. They cut themselves off from Europe in the 16th century, they lost an Empire in the 20th century, and, quoting the English church historian David Edwards, they 'have lost any sense of what religion is.'

In the light of the old adage 'If you stand for nothing you fall for anything' it is not surprising that English people have surfeited themselves with the surface pleasures of the global village. 'The new England is Buddhism, Aromatherapy, French wines and line dancing' concluded Darcus Howe, the former Black Panther, in his celebrated TV series *The White Tribe*. He could find nothing distinctively English.

Yet did he and others look in the right places? I believe there is something to be found which has been missed. Climate, land, history, enterprise, God in a country garden.... these may be part of it, but there is more.

'The Lion heart' is the magazine of a new church in Alnwick, Northumberland, where a member told me that God is doing a new thing. He is calling the roast beef people of England to love him with all their hearts and minds, in a way that is natural to them, and the church is the people doing that.

In this England, individuality flowers, because it is rooted in the green and solid earth, and the land itself is being healed. Oaks are a sign of this rootedness. Oaklings are springing up which will be the oaks of the future.

Entrepreneurs are in their element, and small, entrepreneurial churches are emerging, each with an individuality, a workshop here, a project there. Paxman felt that a new English nationalism is possible, less likely to be based on flags and anthems, than in the green of England. With strong spiritual roots, its marks are stability without froth, humour, the ability to hold together different things.

The Church of England can be part of this if its bishops move from regulation to relationship; and if its grass roots get on with entrepreneurial experiments, trusting that in due course bishops will bless rather exclude them.

The third millennium began with Churches Together in Britain holding a major act of worship, with a member of Britain's Royal Family present at each, in the capital cities of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Churches Together may do this century what the Celtic churches did in the seventh century, provide the uniting fellowship which bonds together Britain's unity in diversity. But that, great though it is, is not all.

Ireland

In Ireland, despite the pride and prejudice of centuries which makes this seem unlikely, there is a trend which indicates how an unforced coming together is possible. The renewal of Christian Celtic roots, which in the past Protestants thought belonged to 'the other side', is now beginning to be owned also by them. The Orange Lodge published a book on Patrick which enabled them to own him. Presbyterian and Methodist ministers have corresponded with me about how they can renew their Celtic roots, and how they can they face up to imperfect or incomplete elements in the Reformation.

The Irish Peace Process was accompanied by an unheralded but deep process of spiritual healing. At one gathering a prophetic picture was given of a man who raped a woman and had a bastard child. The bastard child was Ulster. An Ulster Protestant was moved to tearfully embrace a buxom Catholic from the South and call her 'Mama'.

A Roman Catholic from Ireland was present at The Roots for Renewal symposium which launched Community of Aidan and Hilda, at which modern liturgies in the Celtic style were used. (iv) 'These are what the church in Ireland needs' he told us. 'The naturalness of Irish spirituality has been overlaid by a liturgy which is unnatural. This way of worship allows people to be familiar with their own saints.'

Church of the Isles:

Models for Emerging Churches

The Work Book

(See separate attachment - 17, 000 words)