



ANGLICAN RENEWAL MINISTRIES WALES

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Jesus wept over Jerusalem.....

As you read this magazine I hope you will see that in one way or another the writers are urging you forward towards the Kingdom. Phil shows from Luke's Gospel that Jesus needed the Holy Spirit and constant refreshment gained through time spent alone with the Father. Paul Thompson actually asks the question, "Where do we go from here?" He examines the church over the last 250 years or so and then points us back to the vibrant, successful plan of Jesus described in Acts 2. Place alongside that the statement in Stuart Bell's article, A People of Vision, "He (i.e. Jesus) didn't only know where he wanted to go, but he also knew the means by which he was going to get there". He says clearly that we must take risks and move forward in response to hearing God's word. Mike Endicott (see his book Heaven's Dynamite) never ceases to remind us that the Church has the authority to heal the sick and we should be doing so, and Chris Webb in his address at our Spring meeting exhorts us to grow in Renewal. In addition we hope that you will come to Flames of Fire prepared to offer yourself, for the theme is Here I am, and allow the Holy Spirit to move you on towards the reality of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

As I put this magazine together I am thinking and praying that the Church simply becomes what God wants it to be, what Jesus intended. It should be the vehicle through which He reveals Himself to the world - for it is His body. But as we look at the churches in Britain we see a confused uninspiring muddle. We know that the world does not see Christ in us for in recent time Christianity has been criticised, by Moslems in particular, who are sure that Islam is more moral and more caring. So my heart cries for the Church, for the individual Western Christians who do not know the scriptures and live according to the world's pattern. I long for us to take holiness seriously and be filled with the fullness of God.

Prayer turns to intercession as we are called to stand in the gap, bringing the Church to Jesus and identifying with Him as He intercedes at the throne of God. No words are necessary but I have been led to meditate on a scripture and seek to understand it. Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem? Not only was it in bondage to a foreign power but the clerics of the day hardly began to understand his message of the Kingdom. They stuck with the rules and the traditions but with no real understanding of the first commandment.

In Luke 19:42 Jesus said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes....." They were about to reject the Prince of Peace.

Few in Jerusalem have ever known Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises that God would dwell with man, and in man if we are willing. But Jerusalem is God's city and his choice of an obedient man, Abram from Ur in the Chaldees, (Iraq) changed him to the righteous Abraham, father of Israel, the father of the Jews. As Christians we too are children of Abraham by faith (Gal.3:6-9) this gives us an interest in the holy land, but what sort of interest is it?



In Luke 21:24 Jesus prophesied over Jerusalem: “They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”.

The times of the Gentiles are running out. We as the Church have still much work to do if we are to carry out the Great Commission and take the GOOD NEWS to all nations, but we must take it with love especially to the Jews and Arabs. We must take notice of Romans 11 and see how much God loves the Jews and intends to graft them back into the olive tree. (I urge you to pray and meditate into these verses)

Jesus still weeps over Jerusalem but also over the Church. In recent times as I have prayed for the world situation, taking to God the pain that I feel, I hear only “TRUST ME”. This should bring me joy and indeed it does but it has not yet taken away the pain of intercession and the shame of British troops fighting. I am glad to live in a democracy and so accept the decision of Parliament, but go to God asking what His will is.

Brian and I read the Bible and pray together each morning, we always read a chapter from the Old Testament, a Psalm and a chapter of the New Testament. We do not have a planned scheme but work through various books in turn, but it is incredible how often there is a God ordained link between the passages. Currently we are reading Nahum, a prophecy concerning Nineveh (Iraq) and 1 Peter, instruction to the Church. This morning we were shaken because we read of the destruction of the city of Nineveh, it echoed the news we had heard of Baghdad. It was awesome and I prayed immediately that if it meant what I thought it did God would show us more in the other two readings. So Psalm 94 was read with expectation and awe, it speaks of God’s vengeance but the “Lord has become my stronghold” (v.22) This was followed by 1 Peter 5 and such a warning to the Church! An exhortation to church leaders to tend the flock “in the way that God would have you do it”, to be examples - and we must all humble ourselves. Our anxiety must be given over to the Lord but we must be disciplined and alert, resisting the devil by remaining steadfast in faith and remembering our fellow Christians throughout the world in their suffering. We must especially pray for the Christians of Iraq, Israel and the whole Arab world.

I believe that God has let this war happen and we must trust Him for what comes next, we may all have to suffer in this time of tribulation but I know that he is saying, “Trust Me” and I know too that He wants the whole of the Trinity to live within us, that is being filled with “the fullness of God”.(Eph.1:23; 3:19; 4:13). Are we are willing to be changed? That is real Renewal.

Mary Newsom



A Letter from our Chairman Phil Rees

Dear Friends,

This Lent, as usual, I began to read again the account of the beginning of Jesus' Ministry, this time from Luke's gospel. It has come home to me what an amazing new life Jesus began after the pronouncement of John, and his baptism. So I have been reading about it in Luke chapters 3 - 6. We can only speculate about the pain and the cost to Jesus in turning his back - so it seemed - on all the old life and suddenly appearing almost like a new person. His family resented the loss of their brother, "the carpenter of Nazareth, Joseph's son". What had come over him? The initial surprise, at his gracious words and authority, in the home synagogue at Nazareth, is soon replaced by the desire to kill him, though they have known him all their lives.

At once he adopts a new lifestyle with a new base at Capernaum, and he has evidently already chosen the fishermen disciples who are drawn to him, though they don't know it yet. In the next 3½ years, the story will be physically an exhausting one, from 40 days in the wilderness to constant journeys, and thousands of people demanding help, and little sleep, and constant hunger. With these challenges came the constant opposition of those with religious spirits and the sense that his friends just could not understand.

As we read these early summaries of Jesus beginning his great work for us, Luke really wants us to meet with two themes, and I will describe them by various quoted verses:

"The Holy Spirit descended upon him" (3:22)

"Full of the Holy Spirit" and was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness" (4:1)

"filled with the power of the Spirit" (4:14)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:18)

"Today this has been fulfilled" (4:21)

"with authority and power He commands" (4:36)

"The power of the Lord was with him to heal" (5:17)

Every thing in his life and ministry depends upon the anointing and filling of "the man for us" by God's Holy Spirit.

Then Luke tells us:

"at daybreak," (after a whole night of praying for people and healing them) "he departed and went into a deserted place" (4:42)

"He would withdraw to deserted places and pray" (5:16)

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“He went out to the mountain to pray and spent the night in prayer” (6:12)

If the flow of God’s anointing is to be constant, then Jesus needs to get into a quiet place with his Father.

We see the truth that the words do not carry power unless they are lit up and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. This is primary and bring everything to life.

As it was for our Lord Jesus, so it must be for us. As Christians we struggle to get our life in line with His. It takes grace and Him first, but then discipline and effort from us. We are determined to seek first the Holy Spirit so everything else is touched by Him and set free and lit up and empowered and led.

Phil



A PEOPLE OF VISION. By Stuart Bell

There's a building contractor working out of a tiny hamlet called Olmarch near Tregaron and on the side of his van it says, 'London, Paris, New York, Olmarch'. There's a man with vision. It is so typical of politicians, businessmen, lobby groups, and so untypical of the Christians church.

Helen Keller once said, "What could be worse than being born without sight? Being born with sight and no vision". Where is the vision of the churches in Wales? Where is their vision for themselves, and where is their vision for Wales? To have no expectations of progress, improvement, going places leaves a church just doing laps. Christmas is over, Lent comes and goes, then its Easter, after that comes Whitsun, then the summer, then it'll be Harvest, Remembrance Sunday and we're back to Christmas once again. We've done another lap. Is that all there is to our Christian life?

A statement which has shaken me and really made me think seriously in recent years is this, that the future is not a done deal. There are many individuals and organisations and commercial enterprises who are already planning to shape the future in their own interests. Why shouldn't Christians be doing something similar?

This sounds like just another bandwagon with the Christian church catching up with our secular society. But it isn't a matter of Christians catching up with the world, but rather of the world catching up with Christians.

Jesus had a vision statement concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God. "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand", (Matt. 4:17) was his motto. We know that he wasn't talking about territory but about his kingship expanding in the world one life at a time. He used a few concise words to convey the heart of what he was doing.

In addition to the vision statement he had a mission statement. He didn't only know where he wanted to go, but he also knew the means by which he was going to get there. In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus tells us of his mission to the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed and how he has come to declare to them the year of Lord's favour.

This vision and this mission was not the result of a meaningless disjointed leap from Old Testament to New Testament. It was a continuation and fulfilment of what had already been begun. Jesus' ministry was no grasshopper ministry jumping excitedly from one thing to another at the mercy of enthusiasms and pressures from dissidents. This was a divine and eternal vision, reaching out to rescue mankind and bring them home. It has been at heart of all the Lord has done from foundation of the world through the ministries of the prophets, priests and leaders, through the work of Bethlehem, Calvary and Pentecost. Our vision and mission statements must stand at centre of that flood of thinking and expression of the heart of God.

If we feel resistant to the idea of having vision statements we need to remember that we already have one. It may not be on paper in statements of intent or plans, special activities, or

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strategies and publications but it is already there in our hearts and dictates the way that we live our lives, and the way that we pray, and the way that we plan for the future.

Many dioceses in the Church in Wales have a strategy. It can be summed up in one word. 'Retreat'. The current wisdom of the church is that we need to pull back to strong centres and consolidate what remains. We have a 'Custer's-last-stand' mentality. The intention is that we will pass the flag from one dying member to the next and in that way we will keep the doors open for as long as possible.

But we make a great mistake if that is to be our vision for the future. I listened some years ago to the Chair of the Green Party being interviewed on the radio. At one stage the party was poised for major political advance. She was asked why things had gone wrong, and her answer was 'We didn't plan to succeed'. In the early days of the last century the Methodist Forward Movement in South Wales adopted the policy of consolidation after decades of enormous advance under the leadership of courageous pioneers. The result? They had passed their peak and never regained the initiative in the evangelistic task of winning the nation to Christ.

George Barna from the US comments that 'encouraging people to pledge themselves to survival is an admission of defeat. Calling people to hold the line is not a mission statement but a death warrant'. Margaret Thatcher said something similar, that 'retreat as a tactic may sometimes be necessary, but as a settled policy it eats at the soul'.

Another vision statement of the Church in Wales is that we must re-organise. It sounds like a good suggestion because it gives an air of movement whilst we stand still. Cardinal Newman described the church as an equestrian statue poised to leap forward, but when you came back years later it was still in the same position. The Roman centurion Gaius Petronius has a devastating comment which ought to put paid to all suggestions of re-organisation. He said, 'We trained hard but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be re-organised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by re-organising, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation'.

So if we are not to retreat and we are not to re-organise what are we to be doing, where should we be going? Anywhere so long as it is forward!

Let the leaders lead. God never gave a vision to a committee in the Bible. Usually he gave it to individuals and left them to cast that vision for others to follow. So it is no good putting it as item 8 on the PCC agenda. Vision is not the result of consensus, it should result in consensus, and it will come initially from the leaders of the church. Leaders are God's gift to church and are meant to lead. The Bible has got a high view of leadership. "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority". (Heb 13:17) It is a shame that many Christian leaders haven't got a high view of themselves. It has nothing to do with how gifted they are, but how Lord sees them. He has invested them with authority.



Let's take risks. This is surely the nature of faith. We believe that we have heard from God, then let's follow that leading all the way, even if the ride is a bit bumpy from time to time. There will always be blockers of any new initiative. That is guaranteed. We can't expect 100% support. There's going to be friction. Some years ago a human response to innovation was identified which is described as a Natural Distribution Curve. Every time a new idea is suggested then there will be 16% ready, 17% positive, 34% open, 17% negative, 16% resistant. When the early church which couldn't have been more vibrant and on-fire if it tried was faced with the choice of either building a solely Jewish church or of offering the Gospel to Gentiles there was friction. Some went with it immediately whilst others dragged their heels. The church didn't have a world vision but God did. So through spiritually hungry non-Jews, a vision from God, and a persuadable disciple the Christian faith reached the Gentiles, and us. Vision will always create tension, conflict, friction, debate, and opposition. 'But' says George Barna again, 'remaining stationary is tantamount to losing ground. Without risk no progress can be made'. We cannot afford to stay where we are or we'll lose the ground we already possess as well as fail to win the land we should be taking.

Where do we go from here? By Paul Thompson

In 1775 when the economist Matthew Boulton went into business with the scientist/engineer Isaac Watts and started to produce steam-powered engines, the world was in for one of the biggest changes in its history. The steam engine revolutionised our farmland economy and the industrial age began. People moved from the land to the new factories, small weaving families were put out of business by the large cotton and weaving mills. Large-scale mining became possible for coal, iron ore, tin etc. Transport began to speed up as trains appeared, the canals gave up horses for steam, and ships gave up sail. People's lives were transformed and many of the old skills were lost forever. The industrial revolution had begun and for the last 228 years we have been gleaning the benefits of industrial manufacturing, mass production and the age of science. It has been an age when the advances of science and technology have ruled all of our lives. An age which we can now call the modern age where the watchword might have been 'if you can prove it then I might believe' and when even the churches used the scientific techniques of argument and evidence to persuade people about the truth of the Gospel.

Today we are in the middle of a similar upheaval in our society. When I was at theological college in the late 70's, there was a computer at Leeds University. It took up a whole room and was, for it's day a very powerful machine. Within a few years powerful computers were being sold that would fit on your desk, and those of us who have recently bought computers have on our desks, machines that are even more powerful than the old computer at Leeds. Computers are replacing people in just the same way that the steam engine replaced people 250 years ago. Production lines are now computerised, whole accounting departments are run by one or two people with computers. Managing directors have replaced many of their secretarial staff with computers. The streets are littered with cameras watching our every move and monitored by computers. We have computerised cookers, washing machines, cars, dishwashers, and if the future is to be believed even fridges that order their own refills to be delivered to your door.

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Computers rule our lives so that for many of us it is difficult to see how we would manage without them.

In the world of religion and the search for spirituality the signs of this upheaval have been with us for some time. For example the ideas behind the New Age movement did not start in the 'Boomer' generation of the 'hippy' peace movement. They were simply adopted by them into the hippy culture. Many of the ideas had come from ancient eastern religions and had become popular in the west through organisations like the Theosophical Society of Madame Helena Blavatsky, the Human Potential movement of George Gurdjieff, and the Thelema Community of Aleister Crowley. Drawing on the myths of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islamic Sufi mysticism, and Zoroastrianism, as well as the western myths of the Knights Templar, Ritual Magick and more, these movements of the early 20th century attempted to find alternatives to the declining Christian tradition of the day. Here, astrology, drug-induced spirituality; alternative lifestyles and the like replaced what were seen as the outdated and useless values of Christendom. Even if people were inclined to return to the churches during the time of two world wars, it is nevertheless the case that these alternative philosophical and spiritual traditions were already emerging at the beginning of the 20th century as people became more and more disillusioned by and alienated from the Church.

Whichever way you look at it we are in a time of upheaval and change unprecedented since the beginning of the industrial revolution and when we are honest with ourselves we can sense it, even if we don't always recognise what it is. Some of the truths our parents took for granted seem to be harder and harder to defend. Even the idea of truth itself seems to be being challenged. Some have called it a technological revolution because of the obvious difference the computer makes to our lives. Some theologians refer to it as the second reformation because of the way that all of this is affecting the Churches. Clearly something is happening and the widening generation gap which seemed to start with the beginning of 'Rock & Roll' in the sixties is just one of many signs of that change. Something happened in the sixties.

The young people of the 40's and 50's, born from about 1925 – 1940 and largely brought up during the privations of the war that danced to the jazz of Glen Millar and later to the rock and roll of Buddy Holly, had largely the same values as their parents. They could see a world that needed to be rebuilt for a better future. The damage of the war was still being repaired. Goods were still largely in short supply. Industry and farming was being rebuilt. These were the 'builders' of a new world who saw the beginning of the United Nations, NATO, the Health service, and a period of prosperity that caused Macmillan in the sixties to say 'you've never had it so good'.

Then came my generation. We were the children of these 'builders' and to us the war and all it meant to our parents seemed like ancient history. We had all been born in that bulge of births after the war and were teenagers of the 60's & 70's. The press called us 'baby boomers'. Things were going well. There were plenty of goods in the shops, people had jobs and the institutions built by our parents we took for granted. The cloud on the horizon for us was that we didn't see the point of building for a better future. None of us were going to live that long! The Berlin Wall, the Cold War, the Cuba Crisis, the assassinations of John F Kennedy and

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Martin Luther King, the winter of discontent when all the lights went out, all persuaded us that the world was falling apart and that we would all probably die in a nuclear holocaust sometime soon. For some the best plan was to opt out of society altogether, or at least opt out of its values, and so the values of our parents were abandoned. This was the age of the drug culture, free sex, long hair, coloured spectacles, loud colours in our clothes and the hippy movement who proclaimed the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, now called the New Age.

This 'boomer' generation also saw signs of change in the churches. This was the age of the rise of the Charismatic movement with its emphasis on experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit and subsequently the start of the house church movement as individual charismatics began to break away from their churches and church leaders. Many of those house churches have become the 'new churches' of today with their large buildings and congregations that are millions of miles away from their origins. It was also the age of the deconstruction of doctrine marked by John Robinson's provocative book 'Honest to God' which questions some of the 'supernatural' assumptions of the Christian faith and by David Edwards' provocative statements on television as he told us that the resurrection was 'more than a conjuring trick with bones'.

Now, our children are the teenagers and young adults of today and their world is about as far removed from the world of our parents, as it is possible to get. This is the age of the computer, of instant food, of instant news, and instant pleasure. Information is the great industry of the day and the traditional industries of manufacturing are beginning to struggle. Machines now do thousands of jobs which just fifty years ago required a skilled workforce. The turn round in the British car industry is largely the result of a smaller workforce and a larger computer force. Free time and what to do with it is a major growth industry as young people with money in their pockets seek out the latest dance club, the latest computer game, the latest drink, the latest drug, and everybody wants to be young. We spend millions of pounds every year on exercise, cosmetics and applications to make us look and feel young in a world were you hardly ever hear that value questioned even in Christian circles.

The philosophers have begun to call this time of change we are in Post Modernism. What that means in practical terms is that we are in a time after modernism but we don't quite know yet what it will be like and it will take time to work out. One of the key markers of this change is that the processing of information due to the technology of computers has usurped the role of the machine. Our economies are now based on information rather than manufacturing. It is a sobering fact to know that the peak of manufacturing employment was reached in 1950. Since then the number of people employed in manufacturing has been in decline. Now it is no more than were employed in manufacturing in 1990. As a result many of the old certainties have begun to disappear and given the availability of all this information people have begun to build their own values, lives, beliefs, religions from all that is available and in a way that suits them best. Values and religious beliefs are acquired in just the same way that beans and potatoes are acquired at Tesco's. You have a look and keep looking until you find what you want. Then you mix all the ingredients you have acquired into your own unique and special recipe. The only values that become important are the ones you are comfortable with. In a state of change when



all these things are uncertain it is logical to choose your own. It may not be right but it is what's happening and one way or another we are all affected by the attitude.

In this New Age or Post Modern Age communication, information and experience is key. Now it is what you know or can find out and experience for yourself that is important. With the result that different people will work out different priorities with different bits of information according to what works for them. Scientific fact has become nothing more than theories still to be developed. Morals have become relative, Truth has ceased to be absolute in an era where the clarion cry is 'this is my truth now tell me yours. There is an almost complete rejection of doctrine and dogma in favour of religious experience and what works for me. Suddenly there is a huge awakening of interest in spirituality, and at the same time an almost universal rejection of the Church as having anything spiritual to say about anything. All fed by an ever-expanding Internet system that brings all the information you might ever need to your desk at the touch of a button

Meanwhile in many of our parish churches nothing has changed. Many still use liturgies, music, and forms of teaching; ways of doing church etc. that have no origin in any part of the 20th century. The result is ageing and largely declining congregations and a general feeling that the church is pretty well irrelevant in our society. Something like 7.5% of people in the UK claim an allegiance to one church or another, but in Wales that figure is cut in half and in the industrial heartland of Wales the figure is as low as 2%. The Christian Churches are just not scratching where the people are itching, yet we still believe that the timeless truths of the Gospel are effective for all. It's not so much that the message is not being proclaimed but that it is not being heard. Almost as if it was being proclaimed in a foreign language for all the sense it makes to many people. Rational argument and the presentation of the evidence of the resurrection do not seem to be enough any more and the reason is that these are the tools of a rationalist, scientific age that is over.

Of course the advantage of a rationalist worldview is that you always feel as if you are in control. As long as we can present the Gospel in rational ways by argument and evidence then you can control the agenda, even if the argument and evidence really is a foreign language to those who hear it. It's almost as if we have got the whole of the story back to front. In our rationalist view of what happens we bring people to faith in Christ by our argument and by the persuasiveness of our evidence. People accept the argument as true and so believe it. It is a model, which has stood us in good stead for some time, but it isn't the only, or even the best model, and it is useless in a post-modern environment. The model of Acts 2, on the other hand, is of 120 spirit filled people all speaking in tongues so that everyone who hears really does hear the Gospel. No matter what their language, intellectual ability, or cultural background, they hear the Gospel in their own language through the tongues of the disciples. In other words the Holy Spirit allows the hearers to experience the Gospel through the obedience of the evangelist. The whole work is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The clear implication here is that the disciples are not in control – God is – and that God chooses to act in a completely irrational way. It is God's agenda that is followed not the disciples'. There is no carefully worked out evangelistic programme, the disciples simply



respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit without question or argument. As a result, the growth of the early church is hardly less than spectacular. Here we see a church that is built not on intellectual understanding of the Gospel but on heart based relationships and responses. These relationships are worked out in the breaking of bread, the sharing of goods, the looking after the widow and corporate prayer. The intellectual working out only really becomes important when it is needed to refute error and then it is taken up in defence of what is happening in the hearts of the faithful. In other words the rationalist argument begins as a defence of the spiritual response to the Gospel. People respond with their hearts and then engage their heads. This is the complete reversal of where the church has been for about the last 250 years. We have expected converts to respond to the evidence for the Gospel and as a result have seen spiritual experience as a bonus. We have presented evidence and persuasion and have even argued that right belief and right doctrine are essential before you can belong to the Christian community. Yet in Acts chapter 2 there are 3000 new converts with hardly any teaching at all, responding to the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These are exactly the sorts of qualities that we need, in order to respond to what is happening around us in our society. As the world moves from modernism through post-modernism to whatever it is that's on the other side, we can be certain that spiritual issues and spiritual values will be sought after. People, especially young people, will respond only if they see that the churches offer a real spiritual alternative to the various spiritualities of the New Age. If we carry on using our rationalist tools we will fail. I believe that God has raised up the whole charismatic movement at this time specifically for this purpose, so that the church of God can speak in this new environment of spiritual things by the power of the Holy Spirit. In that sense there really is a second Reformation in progress, but we will have to wait and see how it turns out.

In practical terms we have no idea where the Church will go from here. Already it is clear that most of the existing models of church will not survive the change. Some of the casualties will include parish boundaries, denominational structures, and probably the whole ecumenical movement. Whilst the conservative evangelical, the liberal mainstream & traditional catholic are arguing points of doctrine the rest of the western world is not being addressed and are finding alternative spiritualities instead. What may survive are those congregations that are willing to ditch everything but the Gospel in order to lighten the load as they travel with the cultural change. Already it is possible to belong to virtual churches on the Internet without ever leaving your desk. Virtual prayer meetings are almost commonplace on the net. The cell church movement is appearing in all sorts of guises in many different styles of churches. Built as it is on relationships and mutual support it clearly speaks to the post-modern mindset. Alpha similarly works, not because of the teaching, which is good, but because of the meal and the small groups. Fellowship and support are key.

The Holy Spirit is guiding us towards ways of presenting the Gospel in this New Age, we have to decide whether we will go with him, freely, even irrationally into this future or whether we would prefer to stay where we are. If we do stay we will die. The church will not survive. If we take the risks, ditch the excess baggage, and allow the Holy Spirit to be in control then I believe that God will be able to speak directly to the hearts and minds of this rising generation.



A Wider View of RENEWAL An interactive address given by the Revd Chris Webb,

Renewal Officer for the Church in Wales, at the Spring Meeting of ARM (Wales) at Llanidloes Church Hall on 22nd March, 2003.

Chris started by explaining that when the Church in Wales appointed him Renewal Officer, they were not thinking simply of spiritual or charismatic renewal, with which we are familiar, but the renewal of church life generally. In his vision renewal must be broad and holistic, and his definition of renewal has various elements in it.

By way of illustration he started with the gospel passage Luke 4:16ff. Now the words that Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61 can be read in a spiritual way, so that the poor are the spiritually poor; the captives are captive to sin; the blind are blind to the gospel; and the oppressed are oppressed by sin or evil spirits. But that is not what Jesus meant! He meant the really poor, who had no money or possessions; and those in prison or held captive by socio-economic conditions. The blind really could not see, and the oppressed might be oppressed by spirits, but also by other people. Jesus had a vision for the renewal of all human life, like the new heavens and a new earth in Isaiah 65:17ff., or like John's vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21 - this was not a new church but a city that had no church or temple in it. Charismatic renewal has its place in a much wider view of renewal.

Renewal is an act of God's grace, outrageous grace, as we were singing earlier; so great that not even Paul could encompass it. This is illustrated by Christ's encounter with the criminals on the cross in Luke 23:39-43. One hurled abuse at him, but the other admitted his sin and said: "Jesus, remember me when you come to your throne." Jesus didn't ask him what he had done, or to pray a sinner's prayer, he granted him salvation there and then. So we see that God will love and save whoever and wherever he wants - there are no rules.

Then there was the story about the sinful woman who wet Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair (Luke 7:36ff.). In the eyes of the people of those times this was a scandalous thing to do. But Jesus' standards of morality were not those of the world. Remember the one who has been forgiven most, loves most, and renewal must be founded in this recognition of grace. We all have a part to play because Jesus said, "follow me". Paul has a lot to say about grace, but he also says, "you must run the race" - you can't just stand there and expect grace to fall on you. So our understanding must be holistic - rooted in grace, and this is costly, but not just because of the effort of getting rid of Hymns Ancient and Modern.

Renewal implies some sort of death, just as a seed dies before it germinates and springs into life as the new shoot. There were two trees in the Garden of Eden, one brings eternal life. The gospels have a tree of life for the renewal of Creation - this is the Cross, which is often referred to as a tree. If we are serious about joining God in renewal there will be a cost.

We were then instructed to write a one-line definition of renewal. Several efforts were forthcoming before we were told that it really is not possible to write a one line definition of

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renewal, because various aspects of renewal can be seen in Jesus and in us, and in the Church and the wider community.

Chris then went on to talk about prayer. He said he particularly disliked the line in the song: "Every prayer a powerful weapon, strongholds come, tumbling down....." Where is God in this prayer? It is not what prayer should be for the Church in Wales. There was a time when the Song of Songs was held to be about Jesus and his Church. Now it is a love song about a boy and a girl. But if there is one book in the Bible that tells you what prayer is about, then it is the Song of Songs – it says much more about prayer than that it is a powerful weapon. Jesus was rooted in prayer – the gospel writers kept mentioning this. His whole life was flooded with prayer. Why he even sent his disciples off in a boat across the Lake so that he could have time, alone, to pray.

Jesus called God Abba – Father. Jesus knew God could be the Father of the nation of Israel but his relationship was much closer. The words Our Father.... are the most remarkable bit in the Lord's Prayer. The renewal of our lives must be rooted in prayer. If the wicked judge at whose door the importunate widow kept knocking eventually gave in, how much more will not God give them who ask. So pray for good gifts from the Spirit, in secrecy; there is a hidden relationship available for each one of us.

Then speaking of preaching, he said the best advice he ever got came from the evangelist J. John, who said; Not many people come to church wanting to know what happened to the Girgashites! And everybody is different – but if you preach to broken hearts you will be relevant. Finally, remember YBH which means "Yes but how?" So preach about: "Do you pray enough?" YBH. There are so many ways you can go forward in prayer. It is good to be silent. Or like Brother Lawrence – practising the presence of God. Try using the rosary; begin by praying the Psalms. Have a place of prayer in your house, put a cross up. Secretly bless people, pray for them when with them. Paint, draw, sculpt.

Next we were instructed to write down: What is the best thing about your prayer life? And what one thing could you do to take your prayer life forward? Buddhists don't empty their minds when they pray – they count breaths. Very intense concentration is needed to listen to God. Try saying the Lord's Prayer and stopping at: "Thy will be done...."

Consider the expression: We must engage with the Word of God. What is the Word of God? Is it not a big book written by God; handed down on India paper; where all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for doctrinal arguments and names for cats etc.; words for hanging the preacher's thoughts on? No! In Luke 19 we have the story of Zacchaeus. He was a little runt who probably got picked on at school, nobody liked him. He climbed a tree to see what was happening and Jesus invited himself into his home. "O good", everybody thought, "Jesus is going to sort him and his family out". But Zacchaeus repents and Jesus says: "Salvation has come to this house." Now what sort of evangelisation was that? What was going on? It was an encounter with the Word of God. Jesus was that Word – an expression of God in human form.



YBH? Engage with the Word of God. Take one verse from the Bible and try to live it. For example bless your enemies; invite people you don't like. Eat with someone selling the Big Issue. Learn a bit of Scripture. And clergy: read the Gospel on your knees and stop being in charge. Photocopy a letter of Paul and send it to yourself. Put an open Bible on the table at mealtime and read from it.

We then went on to personal holiness and "Character and Role". We all have different roles where we change our behaviour, but our character remains constant. Jesus' time in the wilderness was a test of character, but he had prepared himself by being baptised in the Jordan and by the Holy Spirit; he had gone to take on the devil on his own ground.

We are often asked the question: "What would Jesus do?" Answer: He would be ready, like the athlete who had trained. YBH. Develop holy habits of life. Say instinctively: "We need to pray." Develop the habit of praying regularly. Practise giving. Serve other people in secret. Don't practise fasting to learn who is in charge, then feast. Practise silence.

Then we were asked to say what was the best thing about our knowledge of God's word; the best part of our character; what can we do to take a step forward with God? In your walk with God, keep short accounts – keep checking on yourself, reflect on the way you are living, look on the good as well as the bad side. If you keep reading the Bible God keeps giving you new insights.

We next considered our experience of renewal in the presence of others, and spiritual gifts in the Church. See 1 Corinthians 12:27 - 13:13 "You are the body of Christ "greatest of these is love". A recent questionnaire threw up the following information: 10% said I go to church. 10% said I have connections with the church. 40% said I have no connection with the church. 20% said I used to go to church and I would go back. 20% said I used to go to church and I wouldn't go back for love nor money, it was a terrible experience - could that happen to someone in your church?

The greatest and rarest spiritual gift is love; it is much more important than styles of worship, leadership or theology. It is more important to love than to be right. On the Emmaus road, Jesus met the disciples going the wrong way and with the wrong beliefs. But he went along with them anyway. How many came to Jesus and got turned away? Only the Pharisees. The cross defines what we mean by love. We need to learn to love as a community. Learn to love – get among the outcasts, the community beyond the Church. God is not confined to being among Christians; he is at work in Wales, in the community. The National Assembly is a sign of the confidence that was lacking. So vote, make it a spiritual occasion. Organise a demonstration because it is right. Get involved in the local community social life. Think: What is the best thing about your church; and what is the best thing about your community.

Consider Moses and the burning bush. What was it that made that place holy? It was the presence of God.



What is the difference between sacred and holy? Sacred refers to a place or people or ideas, whilst holy refers only to God Almighty. Now since Christ lives in you / us, wherever you walk is holy – God is present in and through us. We see his image in all people. God is present in the created world – see the parables which are all about seeds and fields etc. Jesus understood the connection between himself and the spiritual world and the natural world. When Jesus broke bread and offered wine to his disciples, it was at an ordinary meal. He asked them to remember him. All our life has been made holy. Jesus wasn't thinking of men in long robes fiddling about with wafers and so on.

When Paul writes: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed", it is as if creation is saying: Come on, God! So try to discern the holy ground in your own home and work – it is holy and spiritual whatever you do – do you recognise how spiritual and sacred it is? Management is something that God does. Do you care for others? If so then that is godly, an expression of the image of God. Manufacturing is expressing the image of God; so grow your own vegetables! Have a party because it is great to be alive. Go somewhere and seek the presence of God in that place; somewhere outdoors, even Cardiff!

Anyway, think about these two things: What is the best thing about your life at the moment. And what one creative thing could you do to discern the presence of God. Here is another activity you can do: write out on a piece of paper six ways in which God has been active in your life and six steps forward with God that you could take. After a month, write to Chris Webb and tell him the outcome. Chris is quite serious about this and would be delighted if any of you who read this take up his challenge. Go on – get renewed!

You can write to Chris at: Renewal Officer, 39 Cathedral Road, Cardiff. CF11 9XE.
Or email him at: RENEWAL.CMM@CHURCHINWALES.ORG.UK.

Brian Newsom

News from our Members Tu ôl i'r Wên / Behind The Smile by Sarah Roberts

Tu ôl i'r Wên / Behind The Smile is a registered charity set up by six of us here at St. Beuno's, Botwnnog to help children in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

I went on a "holiday to the sun" in the Gambia in 1997 and met several families who had fled there from Sierra Leone where there had been a civil war raging since 1991. Up till then I knew hardly anything about Sierra Leone except that it was a country rich in natural resources such

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as gold, diamonds, iron ore etc. Despite this though around 80% of the population live in absolute poverty. As a result of the civil war that lasted ten years - from 1991 to 2001 it has been left one of the poorest countries in the world and one of the worst countries to grow up in.

After that initial holiday I returned to the Gambia several times in the next couple of years, staying with refugee families from Sierra Leone and returned every time more determined to help the people left behind as I heard about the terrible conditions in that country. During the civil war around 8,000 children, both boys and girls had been abducted by rebel fighters and forcibly recruited as child soldiers. Other children had run away from their homes because their villages were destroyed, their parents had gone missing or were killed, and these children ended up on the streets of the capital, Freetown.

In 1999 I and Lisbeth James (wife of our vicar Peter James) met with a pastor and his wife who were visiting this country talking about their work rehabilitating children in Sierra Leone and it was as a result of that meeting that a committee of six of us came together and set up the charity. After much prayer we decided to concentrate on helping girls, known to this couple, among them ex-soldiers who had been forced to kill and maim (sometimes even members of their own families). Some had been sexually abused by the rebels and others had been forced into prostitution as their only means of survival. We promised to send £1000 a year to house as many girls as possible. Within a year we were able to send double that amount and the same thing happened again the following year. We were really amazed at people's response as our fund-raising activities began to raise awareness among our fellow church members as well as people from the surrounding villages. We also found that we ourselves were being blessed as we worked together!

By the year 2000 there were 29 girls of all ages being cared for in rented accommodation and by now we were eager to see for ourselves how we could continue to help. So in November that year Lisbeth and I went over and spent 10 days with the girls in their 3 bedroomed flat that they had christened "Ruth's Nest". Although conditions were very basic: no running water, no flushing toilet, no proper cooking facilities and most of the time no electricity for light we had a wonderful time with them. We will never forget the welcome they gave us, the nights when we all sang together and the mornings when we would wake up to the sound of them singing and praising God for the roof over their heads. We returned home very humble and determined to continue the work of raising enough funds for them to be housed in their own building with better facilities. Also the location needed to be nearer to the school, tailoring shop, clinic and other facilities run by Pastor Cole and his wife Yeaka where there are many others as well as these girls, were being educated and trained.

In May 2002 we were able to send £3000 for the building of this home and by October we were informed that the first phase was completed with 50 girls ready to move in.

At present we are waiting for Pastor Cole's visit to the U.K. this Spring with up to date news and then we hope to continue with the next phase. We thank God that along with the vision He's brought the provision to see it fulfilled; to give hope to the future mothers of Sierra Leone as their country gets back on its feet .

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Love is giving for the world's needs,
Love is sharing as the Spirit leads,
Love is caring when the world cries,
Love is compassion with Christlike eyes.