



ANGLICAN RENEWAL MINISTRIES WALES

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A Message from our Chairman Steve Waters

I was listening to a CD of praise music the other day when suddenly, one of the sentences sung by the singer hit me like a thunderbolt, the sentence was “Are you talking to the Father. do you share your deep concerns or are you singing hallelujahs while the man beside you burns”. I started to think about that sentence, and the more I thought about it the more I realised two things, firstly that the message of that sentence applied to me and secondly that it is pretty certain that I am not the only Christian that it applied to. I suddenly realised that there is a real danger that we Christians can if we are not careful become selfish, albeit inadvertently. We can so easily fall into the trap of making sure that we are right before God and that our problems and needs are dealt with that we forget that there are people out there who want to get right with God and have needs met who don't know how to, and that there are people who don't even know that they need to be right before God, what happens to them if we are so concerned with ourselves that we don't notice their plight?

In the last magazine I said that we need to be careful that we don't look to people that we consider to be better Christians than ourselves and judge ourselves by their standard, and whilst that is certainly true, we should also remember that just as we look up to certain people as an example of how Christians should be and seek their help and advice, there are people out there who look up to us as an example of how Christians should be and will turn to us for help and advice. The bottom line is that no matter where we are in our walk with God even if we are a relatively new Christian, there will always be someone who looks to us for help and advice, and there will always be people around us who have needs and problems to be addressed and who will suffer in silence and where will they be if we are so busy singing hallelujahs that we are not sharing with the Father our concerns about others and listening for his reply to us so that we can help.

Whilst it is right that we should bring our troubles and problems to God and ask his help. it is also a fact that we should not get hung up with our own plight and having our own problems solved to the detriment of all else. God has promised to look after us and supply all our needs, Jesus has told not to worry about what we wear or what we eat, and there are many recorded instances of people being healed and having needs met by God while they were looking after other people's welfare without them even having to ask such is God's goodness to us.

Going back to my item in the last magazine. I believe that all of us who are alive on this earth and who profess faith in Jesus have a place by the door. It is beholden on all of us make sure that we reach out and grab hands that are looking for the door and help them for it is in doing so that we prevent ourselves from singing hallelujahs while the man beside us burns.

God bless

Steve Waters

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Do we have a theology of Renewal? By Mary Newsom

This is one of the criticisms of Renewal that has surfaced in recent decades. It seems that now one has to look at everything through the eyes of theology in order to ask the right questions for our time. In 1995 Tom Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright wrote a book entitled *Charismatic Renewal – in search of a theology.*(SPCK) This book is a critical assessment of charismatic renewal by three people who have been involved in it, they come from very different styles of churchmanship. Each gives an account of their experience and seeks to put it on a sound theological standing in order to show its relevance to the whole church.

Before I bought this book, in about 2002, I was already familiar with Tom Smail as the author of *The Giving Gift* (1988, 1994 D.L.T), a very helpful book on the Holy Spirit, or rather the Trinity and the Holy Spirit's part in it. His approach is such that he acknowledges that we have questions to ask and answers to find. The primary questions are, who is the Holy Spirit and what is his role? Naturally these lead to other questions about the Trinity and we need to recognise that these facts have been important to the Christian Church throughout the centuries. It is the Holy Spirit that points us to the Father (Galatians 4:6) and also the Holy Spirit that causes us to recognise that Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). This work must come before we can be concerned with the charismatic gifts and all the joys of charismatic worship.

We are indeed blessed to have received such experience and we must allow that to be our starting point, to become more enlightened to the needs of the churches today. It is too easy to think that because we have the Spirit we have all the answers but we are as likely as any other Christian, in our enthusiasm, to try to do God's work for him. We must know and understand the scriptures relating to the Holy Spirit and to the Kingdom and allow the Spirit to direct us and lead us.

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:15-17 NIV)

When I first had an experience of the Holy Spirit taking over in my prayer and setting me on fire, I didn't know what was happening, I didn't know that ordinary Christians could experience such things. No one had taught me. I was already a committed Christian and thought I knew all that was expected about the Holy Spirit. Now I am not saying that I had the academic learning of theologians but simply that I understood all that the clergy in the various churches I had attended had chosen to preach about. I knew what the Bible says in those wonderful chapters like John 14 and Romans 8 but I had not seen it in practice. Conservative evangelicals would teach that charismatic gifts died out after the apostolic age and that we had the Word to guide us today.



Now we praise the Lord that the Spirit and the Word are coming together as the Charismatic Renewal becomes more mature. This is where we in A.R.M.(Wales) need to be so we must allow God the space in our hearts and minds that we might grow together in Christ and in love.

I have been thinking a lot recently about what we can do to serve the Church. Being involved with the magazine I naturally think of writing and for A.R.M.(Wales) to produce some simple literature for teaching on Renewal. ReSource (A.R.M. England) are once again producing material and I rejoice in that but I believe that there is also a need for Welsh material alongside the English. I am not thinking of translations but rather that we produce booklets covering the same material in both Welsh and English, so that it can be written in language suitable for the ordinary person.

Also as a part of my placement for reader training I have attended some confirmation classes for 10-11 year olds. Unfortunately there is only about ten weeks to equip these young people with what they need to know. I believe this to be fairly typical in rural churches with only a few seeking confirmation in a year. Although the clergy are putting a lot into the various courses, they cover the basics of Christianity in a way that is not going to be memorable to those who don't attend church regularly and who aren't going to get much teaching after the confirmation service. The fact that we must confirm them before we lose them to the senior school shows that we haven't got a God directed plan.

So what will these young people know about the Holy Spirit when they come before the Bishop? If I can say that I hadn't experienced his presence in the church in any real way, are we expecting it to be any different for today's candidates?

This is why I believe that we must be clear about our theology and see the need for understanding our faith in order to have a dialogue with the rest of the Church.

This issue reports on our current thinking in the Exec. so I hope that you will read it before the A.G.M. on 11th November and come with your ideas for the year ahead.

I am pleased to include an article from Linda Mary Edwards who is now at Pennant Melangell, this is another watering hole in Wales from which we could learn. I believe that Linda Mary is a long-time friend of many of you.

May He bless you all.

Mary Newsom



A Place of Pilgrimage - Pennant Melangell by Linda-Mary Edwards

On St Melangell's Feast day this year, we held a workshop entitled, "Exploring your creativity through paint and clay" Two Sculptors came to facilitate and ten people worked - or rather played - with silk paints, water colours and clay. At 3 o'clock we had our usual afternoon service in the Church and what follows is an extract from the sermon that day.

The prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-11) tells us that "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me". He feels spirited, high in energy and determined in purpose because God has given him His Spirit. The spirit of a person is what makes that person who they are, so when God gives someone His Spirit, they become more like God in their nature and character and in their actions. Isaiah goes on to describe the job God has given him, "To bring good news to the oppressed". But what does that mean? In order to bring good news to anyone, you have to seek them out first - find them or meet them and have some kind of meaningful contact with them. So part of Isaiah's mission would have been to find the people who are bowed down and crushed by their circumstances, whatever form their oppression takes. And that is why the St Melangell Centre, which is part of the ministry at Pennant Melangell, advertises free counselling for people with emotional or psychological difficulties, we welcome those who feel oppressed by depression, anxiety or phobias, loss and bereavement, and seek to be alongside them as they struggle to be free.

We see from Scripture that God's nature is to free people. In the book of Exodus, we see God showing concern for his people in slavery in Egypt:

'The Lord said: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering, so I have come to rescue them."

This is good news for the oppressed, and God follows through His promise in the Exodus of the people from their oppressors through the parted Red Sea. God is a freeing and liberating God, as the prophet makes clear "He sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners."

An elderly and holy priest said to me recently, "Pennant Melangell is a very liberating place." And I think he is right. It was originally a place where a young woman oppressed by the prospect of an arranged marriage, found liberation, freedom to be herself, to be who she was, under God. And this special, holy place still offers that freedom to all who come burdened by oppressive factors or experiences in their lives.

Another part of the prophet's mission is to proclaim the Lord's favour and to comfort those who mourn. In St Melangell's Church the Lord's favour is so obvious and almost tangible.

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Many visitors comment on the palpable sense of the presence of God. A bishop who celebrated the Eucharist here a few weeks ago, spoke of it as a remarkable place with a solid silence. In talking about it, we agreed it was not an empty or threatening silence but a full and benign silence - indicating the presence and the power and the favour of God.

It is also a place where those who mourn find comfort, perhaps because they feel enveloped in the marvellous blanket of God's presence and love. People experience here something bigger than themselves and their sorrows and find themselves being upheld in difficult times.

I like the phrase, "provide for those who mourn", we cannot magically remove people's pain and grief, either at the Church or at the Centre, but we can provide a space, and a welcome for those who need to mourn their losses. A space and a time for people to "just be" and to grieve and work through their thoughts and feelings.

St Melangell's Church is set in beautiful countryside with a charming legend telling us about the protection of a small creature, the hare. It can sound rather twee, as if it's all about niceness and sweetness and having tea and cakes in the garden and people can perhaps misunderstand what Pennant Melangell is all about. Pennant Melangell is a lovely peaceful place but it is also a power house of God's Spirit to drive us out as spirited people, to effect change in our unjust world. And if it is not that, then it is a bogus spirituality, which is nothing to do with the Gospel. That is why we need a community of people around St Melangell's Church who can be true to what the Church stands for, working to bring liberty to captives, getting alongside people who are poor or oppressed in whatever form that takes, and having meaningful contact with them. We need to demonstrate the good news of God's love and concern for them by actions not just by what we say.

God does draw people here for a variety of reasons — some don't even know why they've come, but they get here and they find something they need. Some come to see the ancient yew trees, or out of historical or archaeological interest, some are interested in Celtic Christianity or the wildlife, but for whatever reason they have come, God awaits them here.

Those of us who live and work here feel anointed by God's Spirit to convey, by our attitudes and actions, the love and concern of God for all who come. That's an exciting mission and we are delighted when others catch the vision and join us in attempting to fulfill it.

(Pennant Melangell is in St. Asaph Diocese, and the nearest village is Llangynog in the Llanfyllin deanery .

This article is reproduced from the Pennant Melangell magazine Inspire.

Rev'd Linda-Mary Edwards is the Guardian Priest. Offices are said three times daily. On Thursdays there is a Holy Communion at 12 noon with the laying on of hands. (Contact Tel. 01691 860408)

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Mountains and Valleys by Pam Worsey

My children, I would take you on the mountain-top with Me,
But remember, in the valley, I am just as near to thee
While you grope on through the darkness I am ever by your side,
There is ne'er a need in darkest hours, that My Love cannot provide.
While in the shaded valley, though so dark you cannot see,
Recall, 'tis of My leading, for your faith must tested be;
When on the sunlit pathway, faith is easy, cares are light,
But I'm teaching how to trust Me in the darkest hours of night.
'Tis the mountains round the valley that do cause the darkness drear
When you face the insurmountable, My Word still rings out clear;
That hill of pain or problem, o'er which you cannot climb or see,
By the word of faith WILL be removed, - My child believe, trust Me.
Then, as your faith grows stronger through the lessons of the vale,
The Mountain of Transfiguration I will help you scale,
As I led My first disciples up to heights ne'er dreamed before
You too shall see My Glory as you worship and adore.
In tenderness My children, I must shade this view of Me
Apart from special moments when I will exalted be
By drawing back the curtain to reveal a glimpse so bright,
Divine Majesty and Splendour bathed in the Eternal Light.
So let these words My dear ones, be a comfort and a cheer
When life's troubles and its problems cause your hearts to faint and fear
Try to praise Me through the darkness, for you know My way is best,
Let the storms rage all around you, while you dwell within My rest.

Pam Worsey

Dawkins' Delusion by Brian Newsom

The God Delusion, Richard Dawkins, Bantam Press, 2006.

Richard Dawkins is well known through his books and television programmes as an ardent advocate of atheism and, for a committed Christian, this book makes for unhappy reading. For example when we read that: The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal,

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genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. It hurts. Dawkins claims that he does not go out of his way to offend or hurt anybody; he simply thinks that religious faith should be subject to criticism just as much as any other issue, and not be protected by an abnormally thick wall of respect. He ignores the fact that this respect has been earned over centuries of good work that has been done by religious bodies in the fields of education, healthcare and spiritual welfare.

But spiritual does not figure in Dawkins' vocabulary. He has no conception that there might be a parallel, spiritual world that lies close to and sometimes breaks through into ours. As he says: anyone knowledgeable about psychology will never be convinced by any personal experience of God, like a vision or word of prophecy. Such phenomena are illusions or hallucinations arising from the complex working of our brains, so all the mystics right through history like the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross up to Thomas Merton were deluded. Then there is the phenomenon of the imaginary childhood friend such as Binker, immortalised by A.A.Milne in *Now we are Six*. Dawkins speculates that this could be retained in adulthood by the gradual postponement, over generations, of the moment in life when children gave up their binkers replacing them by a god. The trouble with this theory is that children still have them. One of our sons had a little elf that went with him everywhere.

But despite the ill-mannered, hectoring tone, there is much in the book with which one can agree. For example he condemns the violence visited upon humanity by military expeditions like the Crusades and the Conquistadors. Also the excesses of the parties involved in sectarian conflict in places like Ulster, Palestine, Iraq, Sudan and India, where the underlying causes may be political or economic, but religion provides the labels that identify the sides.

Dawkins builds his case by discussing Great scientists of our time who sound religious but who usually turn out not to be so when you examine their beliefs more deeply. This is certainly true of Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking; also the present Astronomer Royal and President of the Royal Society Martin Rees, and the obstetrician Robert Winston. These men may marvel at the wonders of the universe but they do not believe in the supernatural.

Dawkins identifies three, contemporary British scientists whom he describes as genuinely religious, meaning Christian, namely Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne and Russell Stannard. He left out R.J. Berry. He is a British geneticist, naturalist and Christian and was professor of genetics at University College London between 1974-2000. He was president of the Linnean Society, the British Ecological Society and the European Ecological Federation.

Berry has spoken out in favour of evolutionary or theistic creationism, which is not the sort of creationism that holds that the earth is only 6,000 years old, but that describes an approach to the biological world that accepts the scientific concepts of evolution while retaining the belief that the world is ultimately the result of divine creation. He also served as a lay member of the Church of England's General Synod and president of Christians in Science. In 1984 he was one of 14 signatories to a letter to *The Times* in which they stated:



We gladly accept the virgin birth, the Gospel miracles and the resurrection of Christ as historical.

All were professors of science in British universities, and six were fellows of the Royal Society. However Dawkins quotes the results of surveys of the religious beliefs of members of the Royal Society and of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences which show that the overwhelming majority are atheists.

Much has been made by Christian apologists for the theory that the universe is so complicated that it must have had a designer. Dawkins says that the appearance of design is not evidence for it, and a designer God cannot be used to explain organised complexity because any God capable of designing anything would have to be complex enough to demand the same kind of explanation in his own right.

That is, 'Who made God?'

For Dawkins, God is too improbable. No chance! The only tenable explanation of how we come to be where we are is evolution by natural selection which, he insists, is not a matter of chance. Except that it works via gene mutations, which are random events and therefore a matter of chance, most of which are deleterious. And this is followed by the random reshuffling of chromosomes, combined with the exchange of corresponding portions of chromosome pairs which sometimes, randomly, break and rejoin during the process of cell replication. So much for natural selection having nothing to do with chance.

Nevertheless it is the best, physical theory for explaining the process of development of the living world. It just doesn't begin to explain how life started, which is one reason why we need God.

Another line of attack used by Dawkins is to show that we cannot get our morality from religion, in particular, from Scripture. He goes on a ramble through the Old Testament picking out choice examples of immorality like Lot and his daughters, the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19, the dissembling of Abraham with his wife Sarah, and his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, although here God was testing Abraham.

Then there was Aaron and the golden calf, Moses and the slaughter of the Midianites, Joshua and the razing of Jericho. Today we would class these last two examples as ethnic cleansing; and that is what God wanted. But it is absurd to suggest that successive generations would take any of these examples as rôle models for their moral behaviour.

The New Testament fares little better in Dawkins' hands in the search for a moral code. He draws on sundry authorities who assert that the commandments love thy neighbour and do not kill referred specifically to Jews only. But it is clear from the parable of the good Samaritan that that is not what Jesus had in mind, for the Jewish priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side were condemned for their lack of love for the injured traveller. It was surely the Ten Commandments that instilled in us our love of justice and forbearance. The first four refer

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to our relationship with God. Next, according to Jesus the Sabbath was made for man, which translates into meaning no one should have to work seven days a week. Honouring one's parents was always seen as a duty in civilised communities. And if people did not commit murder or adultery, or steal or lie about their fellows, the world would be a much better place. Finally, coveting your neighbour's ox or donkey is always good for a cheap joke, but fancying your neighbour's wife or husband or partner has caused tremendous social and economic distress.

Too much of this book is taken up with Dawkins' pet hobby-horses. He has a way with words. He seizes on a phrase or word like consciousness-raiser or Zeitgeist and keeps bringing it up like a cow chewing the cud and rambling on about it in a tedious fashion that has little bearing on the subject of the existence of God. This book will leave a nasty taste in your mouth, but it will not discourage a committed Christian.

Brian Newsom.

OPEN for YOU - The Church, the Visitor and the Gospel by Paul Bond,

Canterbury Press Norwich 2006.

Paul Bond is a member of the A.R.M.(Wales) Executive Committee and has recently retired from parish ministry. He was involved with church tourism for many years as National Liaison Officer of the Churches Tourism Association, so he brings a wealth of experience to his subject.

People have mixed feelings about church buildings. Yes, many of them are outstanding examples of architectural beauty, and testaments to the Christian faith of communities over the centuries. But many are also financial burdens, ever needing repair and refurbishment to keep pace with the demands of modern life. Many are kept open and welcome visitors to come in and look around and admire the architecture and furnishings. But many are kept closed for fear of theft and vandalism.

This book aims to show church ministers and members of PCC's how to make their church building more accessible and appealing to visitors, and more importantly, how to do the same for the Christian faith. This should prick people's consciences, as very few churches attempt to explain what their building is for. This is a very practical book. You don't have to read it straight through at one go, the separate chapters stand alone and you can dip into it as suits your needs and inclination.

Paul recommends that you start with your own church. How welcoming is it? Is there a notice welcoming visitors, and if there is, is it repeated in other languages; in Welsh even? Is there

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any overt proclamation of the faith? It is important to remember that many visitors may have little or no knowledge of the Christian faith, and while you must never patronise them, you cannot take anything for granted either.

Practically every aspect of church management, apart from structural repair and maintenance, is covered. There are suggestions about how to make a tour around the building a spiritual journey, making the various features like the font, pulpit, altar etc. more meaningful; emphasising that it is not a museum but an arena for a living faith. There is advice on selling books and other goods and on providing free literature.

Churches should set aside a place dedicated to prayer, that is quiet and away from the general stream of traffic going round the church – with aids to prayer like cards and candles and pictures. It is also important to make provision for younger visitors, particularly pupils from local schools. This is one example of interaction with the local community that is a vital part of all church activity. And on this note there are practical examples from 18 different churches.

Then there is the churchyard. Many people are put off by having to walk through a cemetery and there are ideas to help make the churchyard at least less forbidding even if you can't make it welcoming. After this there are still more suggestions which make this book an invaluable guide for presenting your church to the world and making it hospitable, welcoming and sympathetic to every visitor.