

# Celebration LINK

July 2010

## Things old and new

*Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old (Matt. 13.52).*

I chose that introduction because I was reminded of it recently when my thoughts were preoccupied with getting a book published (see inside). It was a verse we talked about occasionally in the early days of community life.

Matthew, the most Jewish sounding of the gospel writers, was probably alluding in that verse to the spiritual treasures to be found in the Law as well as in the new teaching about the kingdom of God. For us, riding the crest of the wave of charismatic renewal, it was more about being able to recognise the treasure in our own spiritual traditions as well as in the developments of a fresh new movement in the church.

The past was not something to be discarded; it had more to teach us in many ways than the current movement of the Spirit. But it was a question of recognising treasure for what it is. Religious language and teaching easily become hackneyed and lose their power. We always need the help of the Spirit to renew old shibboleths and make them authentic in our current experience.

Today, the wheel has come full circle again. The things we talked about in our youth, the catch phrases and the teachings coming out of community

life, have themselves become old as life has slowly moved on. Like clothing or hair styles, songs and teachings can easily sound dated or at least familiar enough that they have lost their power to claim our attention.

Having been brought up in a religious background myself, I have always had a strong aversion to religious clichés. The word 'cliché' originally meant a die stamped in soft metal, so it has this sense of something unoriginal and robotically trotted out. As I was writing *Following the Spirit*, I worried whether that title would also be seen as a cliché. It is, after all, instantly recognisable to anyone who has ever followed the Community of Celebration, going back at least as far as 1970 when a film of that name was made about the Church of the Redeemer.

It was not the original title; I was pressured into it by the publisher who knows a lot more about selling books than I do. But it served to focus my attention on what the book was really all about. To write about the Community, I knew there were certain things I had to avoid if only for my own sense of satisfaction: nostalgia, romanticism, factual narrative with no assessment of meaning or significance. Community life has shaped my spiritual journey profoundly, so I needed to write about something that was (and still is) authentic for me.

That was easier said than done, given that individuals who lived in community may have had quite

divergent experiences and views about its significance for spiritual life. It may also sound strange, in view of my reflective style of writing, but for most of the time that I lived in community I never thought very deeply about it. It's harder than it looks to step outside something you are deeply involved in and to assess its broader meaning.

What made the difference was being licensed as an Anglican priest in a parish where I had to preach on a regular basis to a congregation which was neither charismatic nor had much experience of religious communities. Since I hate clichés, it was a real struggle to say something that was both authentic for me and yet still of some value to people whose lives and experiences were very different.

But it was worth it. Without such a process I might never have taken the time to consider what, in hindsight, I really thought about the Community, and without it I would not have written *Following the Spirit*. That does mean in some ways the book is my own personal take on things, though I don't think others will find it unrecognisable. The secondary title *Seeing Christian Faith Through Community Eyes* sums up what around 60% of the book is about.

Thus writing it was in a sense a cathartic experience as well as a chore. I was conscious that all the things I was writing about were now the 'things old' of Matthew's text, at least as far as my personal experience was concerned.



## Non-violent social change

The Community's annual conference in June was led by the Rev. Moni Mackintyre on the subject of non-violent social change. Part of the time was spent exploring the development of hu-

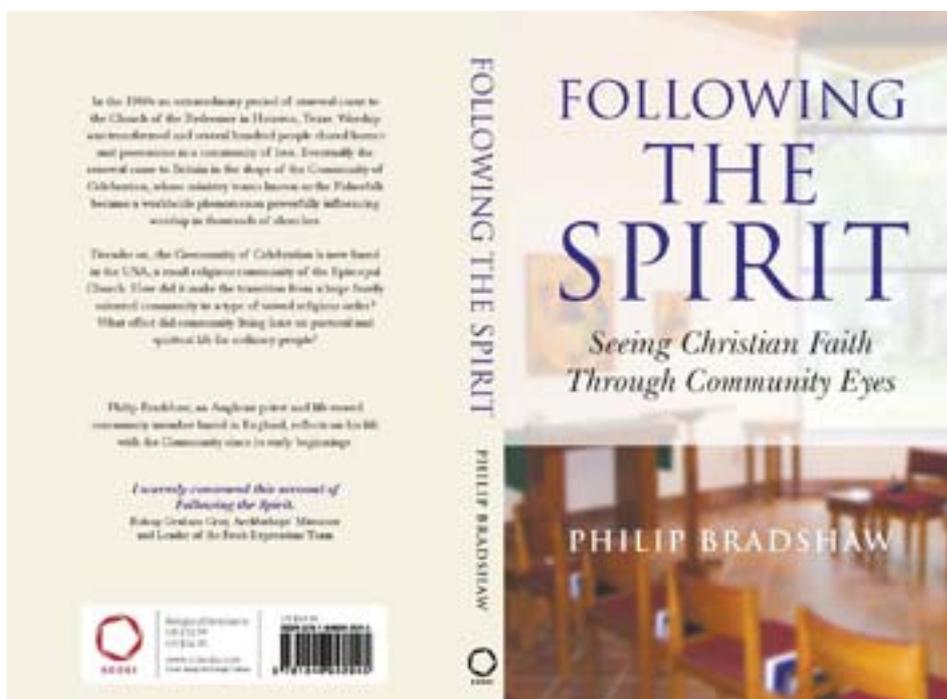
man thought from pre-modern times, through the modern era and into the post-modern period which began about 1960. This set the stage for understanding social change from a Christian perspective today.

Later we discussed practical examples through reflection on the lives of

people who acted as agents of social change in their own day.

Some of us took the opportunity to see a force for social change in Aliquippa in the shape of the cafe pioneered by John Stanley of the Church Army (key to photos overleaf) which now has a ministry to the poor of the town.

# Spread the word...



After a rather frustrating saga, Phil's book *Following the Spirit* has finally been published. Originally scheduled for 28th May, the long wait is the reason for a delay in sending out our normal Spring issue of the Link. Copies of the book are now available from CCCT.

The book tells in outline the story of how the Community of Celebration evolved into the 'religious order' style of community that it is today. It also tells a little of Phil's own spiritual journey that led him to join the Community together with his family.

The remainder of the book contains Phil's reflections on various aspects of community life, and on the way theological outlook has been shaped in certain ways by the community experience.

Fortunately, the book was published in the USA just in time for the summer conference, and we were able to sell quite a few copies. But publicity is expensive and takes a lot of resources unless you are very well known. We have to rely on our friends to publicise it by word of mouth, and we hope many of you will both buy it and recommend it.



## Spread the word (2)

The informal sharing group of past community members and friends, which we have reported on in recent Link letters, met again at Minster Abbey in May in order to plan a 'reunion' type of event to which all our old friends are invited.

Many of our readers will already have been notified of this in one way or another. The event is to be held at St Dunstan's Church, Dorchester Road, Upton, Poole, Dorset BH16 5JA on 25th September from 10.00am to 4.00pm. The day will include sharing, coffee, worship, simple free lunch, informal time and eucharist.

This is for anyone who feels strongly connected, not just old community members. If you would like to come, please email Jane Porter ([porter@davejanera.co.uk](mailto:porter@davejanera.co.uk)) asap so we can manage catering.



I was writing about yesteryear but trying to convey the spiritual impulse of those times that was still recognisably authentic and meaningful in spiritual life now. But what about the 'things new'? What were they?

If I was delivering a sermon today, for instance, would I say the same things that I might have said 20 years ago? To some extent I hope so, for all the things I have absorbed in a lifetime's spiritual journey are still an important part of spiritual life today. But I might not feature 'community' as prominently today as in the past in a different context.

My personal spiritual journey is inseparable in many ways from the Community's journey as a whole. Yet fundamentally the calling is not to live in community, however important that may be and however much one needs the call of God to do it. The calling is to know God, a task that sounds deceptively simple except that all the spiritual giants of the Christian faith say that relatively few of us ever achieve it.

'Knowing God' is a matter of lifting the heart to God in prayer, not so much according to a systematic method (though that is a proven way of praying) but as a way of life and a settled way of relating to God. It involves voluntary detachment from all created things, which has a great many dimensions to it, material, psychological and spiritual. In some sense this is the spiritual drive that leads people to spend a lifetime in community and indeed it is the foundation of it. As individuals we may not plumb its depths, but without this drive we are unlikely to stay the course. Even if we do, we are liable to end up as a shrivelled caricature of the spirit that led us to take the risk of community in the first place.

On this plane we are concerned not with promoting 'community' as an ideal

but with allowing God to do what he wills to do in the secret place of our souls. Community life can certainly help that process (it's easier to be 'detached', for instance, if you are all doing it together) but the real work is in the soul. The paradox is that although we have to make a deliberate effort to cooperate with God, nothing is likely to happen unless we are able to relax into God and allow him to do the work in his own time and at his own pace.

So although 'community' helps, it is also itself sustained and fuelled by this work of God. It is a work that one can recommend to anyone, whatever their state of life. The subject of Christian identity, for example, touched on in *Following the Spirit*, applies as much if you are living in ordinary parish life as it does to those living in community. Nowadays the 'things new' that we offer in parish ministry are more likely to be concerned with this foundational work in the soul than with offering 'community' perspectives on scripture.

For example, on Easter Day this year I felt impressed to preach on 'Alleluia, Christ is risen'. What struck me about that phrase was that it could easily be taken merely as a slogan affirming our favourite religious dogma; whereas a better way to think about it is to call it the song of alleluia in our hearts, which we carry with us daily into every part of life. In other words it is a spiritual way of relating, which seemed to me to be very much the same as the spirit of the early community days. Only the context is different today.

That particular nugget, then, is both an old truth and now a new one – provided one can still live by it authentically.

At a recent weekend retreat with the sharing group we have referred to in previous 'Link' newsletters, we talked about the 'threads of grace' that have led us from the common life we shared together years ago to the different

situations we find ourselves in today. For some the threads have kept us connected with the Community of Celebration, while for others they have led in other directions. But there is an abiding sense of common thread, linking many people to a similar origin, and this is what has inspired the invitation (see inside) to meet again in September.

The 'threads' are not of course just historical connections. They are spiritual threads, by which we recognise our relationship even if we are not personally acquainted. All of us have 'things old and new' to share from our treasure, which despite our different contexts will still be recognisable as part of the eternal spiritual truth that seduced us when we were young.

Such harking back sounds like nostalgia, and there is a risk of that, for we are all human and enjoy meeting up and reminiscing about old times. But there is also a desire to taste again that spiritual grace which is greater than each of us as individuals yet also palpable because it is held among us. Of course, we cannot load an agenda like that on to a single meeting. We are simply saying there is more to meeting than reunion. Meeting together on retreat, however, has been enough to demonstrate that the various threads of our lives can still be woven in ways that are fruitful and satisfying, making old spiritual truth new again.

'Authenticity' is a word that seems to have been important in the writing of this article. Whether writing a book or working in a parish, whether following our own track or meeting with others to share our lives, we need an authentic experience of God. To the spiritually sensitive it must often seem that the times we live in are times of immense spiritual poverty. Sharing treasures old and new helps to spread the wealth around a little.

**Phil Bradshaw**

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Key to photos on pp 2-3: P2, top row: Rev. Moni Mackintyre addressing the conference; gathering for the official photo; 2nd row: Betty Pulkingham, Dapne Grimes and Margaret Bradshaw; conference dining room; book table featuring Phil's book; 3rd row: ground floor interior of cafe; Captain John Stanley explaining the ministry; artwork exhibition; 4th row: exterior garden area; one of the upper rooms. P3: Cover of Phil's book; Jodi Page-Clark and Dave Porter leading worship at Minster Abbey; Val Humby, Sue King and Robert King in the discussion time.