

Contemplative Fire Post

May 2015 – no.1



Treasures Old and New: Exploring how the Spirit is moving in traditional and emerging communities

Three Companions - Ali Dorey, Elaine Wilkins and Philip Roderick - share reflections on this inspirational April gathering in Sneaton Castle, Whitby, hosted by the Sisters of the Order of the Holy Paraclete.

Philip writes:

'In the beginning was the conversation', as Erasmus translated John 1:1. The conference planning team outlined the hopes, prayers and thinking behind it: "At the heart of creation is the eternal conversation of the Trinity and the Spirit longs to draw us deeper into that conversation, both individually and as the Christian Community. Hopefully, as we spend time together in Whitby, we will know this work of the Spirit leading us into the heart of the Father through the gift and grace of the Son." Themes and rhythms guided the days: Finding the treasure in Jesus; Hearing the call of Jesus; Entering the passion alongside Jesus; Sharing the joy of Resurrection with Jesus.

120 people, with a delightful variety of attire and expressions of faith, gathered in Whitby, famous for goths, Bram Stoker's Dracula, Abbess Hilda and the seminal Synod of Whitby, 664 AD. Members of inherited and emergent religious communities were drawn together around the main focus: "shared conversation, encouraged and facilitated by input and insights." Some months ago, in a London meeting preparatory to the Whitby event, Archbishop Justin had said:

"the Church is in need of a wild burst of fresh and Spirit-filled religious communities, rooted in the traditions but

new and spontaneous – a re-imagination drawing on a rich history".

The Planning Team had highlighted that: "There can be little doubt that we are in very challenging times, both globally and locally, and the mission landscape we are now called to cross is very different from anything experienced in the past. Hopefully our time together will enable us to listen to each other, then to learn from each other, but, most importantly, to be drawn into the eternal conversation of the Trinity and to know more of the mission heart of the Father that we might respond afresh to his call."

A flavour of the Archbishop's sprightly presentation: "At the heart of what we have to do as the Church is – in incredibly diverse ways around the world – to be those who live out, who are the clear incarnation of the Kingdom, who enable people to recognise the Kingdom at work. We must be able to give lived and living examples; where, albeit like a light bulb on a poor connection that flickers and fails and yet sparks and illuminates, we can point and see more of what it is to follow Christ.

And that is why the Religious life is so essential. Its history is, to put it kindly, a patchwork of dramatic inspiration, of cycles of strength and weakness, of failures and of persecution, of sin and of saints – often in the same person, particularly with my predecessors."

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5544/spreading-joy-through-the-church-archbishop-justin-on-the-religious-life> - podcast of his talk.

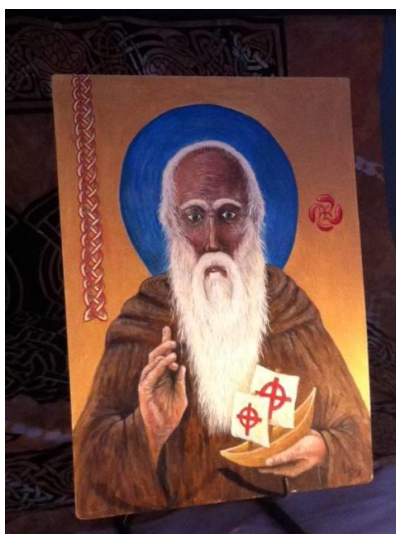
Elaine writes:

“I went to the Whitby conference with the expectation of it being a learning place and it was. It was a huge privilege to attend the daily meditations, which were put together by some of the members of the communities represented there. Throughout my time at the conference there was a combination of challenge, nurture and healing, brought about by real questions and honest moments. Questions such as: *what are the moorings in my faith, the insecurities and comfort zones, the things I cling to for safety? Where might Jesus be calling me or my community in a new and costly way?*

There were moments, too, of such beauty and creativity in liturgy, dance and fellowship. To sit in the chapel and watch the wonderful sight of young monks kneeling in prayer and the new monastic communities kneeling alongside, is something I will never forget.

I came away from Whitby feeling I had been part of one great moment of storytelling. Every meal, each group meeting, old and new community members were telling their story with such honesty and vulnerability.

What a joy, what an experience to build on!”



Icon of St Brendan, created by Safe Space new monastic community in Telford.

Ali's reflections:

“Walking away from encounters with the divine, you feel affirmed in your very self, encouraged that you are of infinite worth and that the journey of becoming as you were made to be is the most important journey of all. At the time we went on the *Treasures* conference, I was in a season of coming away from encounters with the Church, doubting my own worth, questioning whether the time I spent in contemplation was well spent, and suspecting that some of my colleagues would question the validity of about 90% of my diary. But I came away from *Treasures* feeling affirmed, encouraged that I and my journey are of infinite worth, and that there are others journeying in solidarity with all of us from such a broad range of monastic communities.

There was so much to learn. Seeing how the brothers and sisters from completely different religious communities greeted one another like long lost friends was a treat in itself, and to begin to be included in this was such a joy! The traditional religious communities were really curious about how we manage to support one another when we are dispersed, and they were genuinely concerned for us, recognising the cost of that. They were delighted to know of our existence, utterly unthreatened by us, and though some found it a challenge to open themselves up to us, all whom I encountered really did do that, as we did too. It was a very safe space. The quality of listening to one another was extraordinary, as you might expect among monastic communities, although one should never take anything for granted!

In one plenary, one of the nuns from our discussion group said she couldn't actually recall any of the ideas or thoughts we'd had in our group, but she had picked up very strong and real emotions: pain, grief, vulnerability, hope, love. It had never occurred to me before that it would be valid to feedback the emotions of a group like that. Since the conference, I have

found myself reflecting on how very sad and dehumanising it is that we have given so little value to emotions that I could possibly think in this way.

At the end of the conference, reporting back from one of the discussion groups, one nun said to the packed room, *“Well, clearly there’s no point in us traditional religious communities meeting up again without these new communities”*. She was so artless and uncontrived. I found myself crying at such an open and loving invitation from someone so traditionally dressed, representing the character of Christ in a way the Church so infrequently does. I was so moved I felt I needed to tell the whole room that this was such a welcome contrast from the kind of reception I myself, and other pioneers and pioneering communities I know, often get from the “traditional Church”. The nun sought me out in the next coffee break and said “sorry” to me and all of us, on behalf of the whole of the rest of the Church. Then she said, *“You need to sustain yourself with the thought that, like the Holy Spirit, you are sometimes a pain in the arse!”* We all fell about laughing and I took a photo of her smiling face and twinkly eyes, so the next time I feel ignored, rejected or misunderstood in any way by the Church, I will look at it and it will make me smile!

There is such treasure here and this is such a field! I am really looking forward to continuing to reflect on all of our experiences and share more of them with you all. It was great to be there with Philip and Elaine too. Such a rich time.”



The Hopeweavers' community invited us to prayerfully add to their weaving.

Companion Ali Dorey has been appointed Director of Training for Fresh Expressions

Ali currently serves in the Diocese of Sheffield as Mission Development Coordinator for North Sheffield Estates, working across eight parishes. She previously helped to establish and run the Church Army Pioneer Hub and has been leading mission-shaped ministry in Sheffield as part of the course team for four years.

Ali trained for ordained ministry at Cranmer Hall, Durham. Following ordination in 2007, she worked as a parish priest in Doncaster for four years before moving to her current role.

<http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/news/alidorey>

Our congratulations to Ali!



Rev Dr Cynthia Bourgeault:
“Contemplatives and Mystics as Prophets and Visionaries”
Tuesday 30 June (7-9 pm)

“Harnessing the Power of Love - Unveiling the New Breed of Trinity” (one day seminar)
Wednesday 1 July (10am-4 pm)

Westminster Cathedral Hall, London
SW1P 0QJ.

<http://www.silenceinthecity.org.uk/programme.html>