

CSCS NEWS

The newsletter of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality

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Editorial

If the last Newsletter seemed a little downbeat, that is certainly not the mood of the Committee following the joint conference with the Modern Churchpeople's Union and the Student Christian Movement in July. Around 120 people gathered at High Leigh Conference Centre to discuss aspects of sexuality in the context of justice both within the Church and within the world. Mike Dark's account of the conference below gives an excellent picture of the experience from the point of view of someone for whom this kind of conference was, in many ways, new. As a gay man he naturally stresses the elements which dealt with that issue, but also mentions the rewarding insights to be had on other matters too, notably from Adrian Thatcher on children and families – his thesis being that society today, in its attitude to sex and family life, gives little recognition to children's needs – and also from Martin Pendergast on the global fight against HIV/AIDS.

One of the most powerful moments of the conference, which should also be put on record here, was when the entertainer Amy Lane, well known as a lesbian, 'came out' in public as a lesbian Christian – with a priest partner. More moving still perhaps is the news that, since this experience, she has felt able to be with her partner in public at the Edinburgh Festival. But this was not the only coming out that occurred. One person whom I know well, a single priest in her 60s, admitted in her discussion group that, though heterosexual, she remained single because the idea of any sexual acts aroused personal disgust in her. This deep feeling has not prevented her from having friends, and blessing unions, of all sexual orientations. Her disclosure arose in the context of a discussion on the equally irrational feelings of some straight people towards gay sex. We who are sexually active, whatever our orientation, do well to remember how disgusting and/or ridiculous our activities can appear, and how many complex and irrational feelings the whole business of sex can arouse. We do well also to be thankful for those trust-filled encounters where such intimate feelings can be discussed.

It will be clear that, for many, the conference was a profoundly rewarding event in itself. The commitment of time and money was obviously not such as everyone could make, and it would have been even better had more than a mere dozen or so CSCS members been able to come; but we were well represented and contributed leadership to many of the group sessions. We have begun as a result to attract some new members. And we all came away on something of a high.

But what about the outcomes of the conference? And where next?

Of course we did not produce any startling new insights which would convince those Christians for whom various aspects of sexuality are problematic. Many of our speakers indeed are in regular dialogue with those of a more conservative persuasion, but none had a complete answer to the question 'How do you conduct a successful dialogue when the participants are arguing from quite different premises?' As Mike implies in his account, the most powerful change agents are people – friends – rather than intellectual arguments. More contacts exist across the various divides than perhaps some of us were aware of. If

participants in the conference went back into those contacts refreshed with a little new vision, the outcomes could be remarkable, and would on their own more than justify the conference.

But the those three days also helped to focus the issues for many who are ‘on our side’ but have never really addressed issues of sexuality. I was amazed to learn that this was the first MCU conference on any related theme for over half a century! For those who do not know the MCU, it is now a large network with over 700 members including some bishops; and whilst its influence is perhaps not strongly in the ascendant in the present state of the Church of England, it is still a force to be reckoned with. Moreover it has regional networks which are being rejuvenated after a period of relative inactivity. We hope to offer speakers to the meetings of some of those networks – and to invite local CSCS members along.

One interesting feature of the conference was what I call the Emily Dickinson factor:

Tell all the truth, but tell it slant;

Success in Circuit lies.....

The really fundamental issues of what human sexuality actually is, and how we understand it in the light of faith, were rarely addressed directly. It is the special mission of CSCS to keep those particular issues before the Church, because they constitute an important link between arguments about the nature and interpretation of Scripture, on the one hand, and debates about specific issues like homosexuality on the other. (Anglican ethicists of the past, such as William Temple, would have called this the area of ‘middle axioms.’) Writers as different as Jack Dominian and Jo Ind, both CSCS members, have contributed importantly to the debates here through their writings, though it is far from certain how widely their insights have been received in the wider Church.

In the event, the conference programme did not allow for a specific slot on such issues. Yet indirectly they were certainly addressed – particularly in the inspiring and challenging presentations by Trevor Dennis and Adrian Thatcher, and also in the equally inspiring worship designed and led by Colin Coward. We were reminded just how much there is in Scripture and tradition which is actually positive about sex, even if it is largely obscured by the more familiar cases of ‘Thou shalt not’.

It might have been good, however, with hindsight, to have had a little more about the insights of the natural and social sciences on human sexuality. To be sure, Adrian Thatcher gave us some thought-provoking points from the contemporary sociology of the family Yet a number of gaps still remained. And the conference was by no means unique in this. Gill Cooke and Alan Sheard, both members of CSCS as well as of MCU, have been doing some work on the declining attention to scientific evidence within church reports. At one time, as they pointed out at the conference, Anglican ethical studies were distinguished by the space which they gave to the scientific evidence and its possible impact on traditional church teaching. Alas, recent reports, notably on homosexuality, focus almost exclusively on Scripture and tradition, with only the smallest glance towards the scientific data. Surely this is an area on which we need to work much more. There are too many people – on both sides perhaps? – whose minds are made up and who do not wish to be confused with the facts. That is not the Anglican way, or the way of liberals in any denomination.

Perhaps our postmodern awareness of the social construction of science has led us to be too aware of the relative nature of scientific conclusions and hence wary of calling science in evidence at all – thus leaving the field free for the fundamentalists of all kinds. Maybe it is not just a new theology of sex that we need, or even a new theology of the authority of Scripture and tradition, but a new theology of knowledge as well?

That, perhaps, is more for the MCU to work on than for CSCS. But we hope that our fruitful collaboration on the conference will be just the start of our partnership in this area. We may expect to hear more from Gill and Alan in a future Newsletter.

We are now beginning to plan our own annual day conference and AGM on Saturday 10 February. At the time of writing neither the location nor the theme/speakers are finally decided, but it seems likely that it will be in Birmingham (though London is not yet ruled out). Apologies for the lack of detail – we will have more in our Winter newsletter – but put the date in your diary NOW!

Meanwhile we hope you will be interested in – and perhaps feel able to support – Henry Mayor’s initiative reported below. The whole question of sexuality in the African Churches, as all of us in the Anglican Communion know only too well, is at the heart of the worldwide debate, and those addressing it (often at great personal cost) deserve at least our prayers and possibly much more.

This edition concludes with two book reviews. We hope to have many more in future editions; there is a rich crop of current writing about faith and sexuality, and we look to our readers also to contribute from their reading.

We would also ask our readers to let us know what is happening locally in the so-called ‘listening exercise’ in which Anglican Dioceses are urged to enter into dialogue with gay and lesbian people. News has reached us of an innovative pack produced by the Diocese of Worcester to encourage such dialogue. If others know of good local initiatives, please contact us.

The agenda is huge and growing, and our resources – of people as well as money – are short. But it should be clear that CSCS – which means all of you who read this – is engaged in a great enterprise.

Last of all, just as we went to press we received notice of the death of Roy Parr, a longstanding member of CSCS as well as of LGCM and its Roman Catholic caucus, and a frequent (if sometimes anonymous) contributor to this Newsletter. Roy would surely want us to remember him by carrying on that great enterprise. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Anthony Woollard

My first MCU Conference

Mike Dark

I had never been to a MCU conference before and only one conference of CSCS, so I was not sure what to expect despite my deep interest in the conference theme of Human Sexuality. As a gay evangelical, I wondered how different the emphasis may be from my own. I needn’t have been concerned. A slogan in a nearby pub summed up my experience of the conference. ‘There are no strangers here, just friends we haven’t yet met’. I met many new friends at the conference and was very glad that I attended.

The conference was opened and chaired very capably by Prof. Elaine Graham. She spoke of the absence of absolutes concerning Human Sexuality which set the right tone at the start of

the conference. She chaired the conference admirably throughout and even dealt with a few critical remarks in a very firm yet gracious manner.

The first main speaker was Canon Trevor Dennis, vice-dean of Chester Cathedral. He opened his address by stating that he was not gay but he knew several people who were, including gay Christians, who had been refused communion because of their sexuality, and of a minister who was sacked because he was found out and thrown out. Trevor spoke about intimate same-sex friendships in the Bible, concentrating on David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi. He emphasised the importance of befriending the Bible and seeing affirmation within it. As an Evangelical, albeit a liberal one, this was music to my ears.

The other sessions dealt with subjects related to human sexuality: Marilyn McCord-Adams on the defence of the liberal church; Adrian Thatcher on the importance of children; and Martin Pendergast on HIV/AIDS. These addresses reminded me of how broad the subject of human sexuality is and about much more than the 'gay debate', vitally important as that is. This was brought home to me again by the wide range of questions put to the panel in the final session.

For me some of the most beneficial times were in the group sessions. During these sessions many personal stories were told of how different people had come to their convictions on human sexuality (especially homosexuality). For some it was because they were gay; for others they had close friends or relations that are gay. This strengthened my conviction that people's perceptions are changed by knowing gay people rather than discussing theoretical concepts in isolation. As a gay man, I felt affirmed by the sharing of stories, both by listening to others as well as having the opportunity to share mine.

What was my overall impression of the conference? Extremely positive as I received much to dwell on both from speakers and from private conversations with people I had never met before. I was affirmed both as a gay man and an evangelical in a 'liberal' conference. I was treated with much more respect by liberal Christians at the conference, than by many evangelicals that I know. It made me realise that the labels we use about ourselves and others are of a limited use. Would I go to another conference held by MCU or CSCS? Without any doubt – yes!

Kenyan Anglicans on Homosexuality; extracts from a journal

Henry Mayor

Introduction

The Anglican Communion is splitting over homosexuality. In Kenya, where I was born and brought up, the Anglican Church (**ACK**) is aligned with Anglicans elsewhere in the world who hold that the recent ordination as bishop of Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, and church blessings of same-sex unions, are un-Biblical, betrayals of Christianity. They are preparing to part company with Anglicans who disagree with them.

As one who completely accepts gay people within the church, I wanted to go to Kenya to keep discussion going on Homosexuality and Biblical Interpretation.

My original intention was to give seminars on Homosexuality and Biblical Interpretation to whoever in the **ACK** would come, but the Archbishop of Kenya, **Benjamin Nzimbi**, turned that down. So I decided to stay with Kenyans I already knew well, including Anglican bishops **Johannes Angela**, **Joseph Wasonga**, and **Francis Mwayi Abieru**, and discover through one-to-one conversations what Kenyan Anglicans thought on the subject. In order to brief me on

the state of the **ACK**, my brother-in-law introduced me to **John Chesworth**, a missionary at St. Paul's Theological College, Limuru, and that was where I began to meet the people whose names appear here.

Here are edited extracts from my journal about my trip. Mostly they record what happened; the personal reflections I added at the time are included in a different typeface. I have given some people pseudonyms which are in *Italics*.

In Kenya, February and March 2006

(I used the first week in Kenya for reading and reflection, before traveling to Limuru.)

9.2.06

Joseph Wasonga had sent me a letter commenting on my Homosexuality and Bible Interpretation project, saying: maybe it's appropriate for discussions with the bishops or theological colleges, next year perhaps, but with ordinary people it would just cause confusion

This depressed me at first, but now I think I might be able to arrange a theological discussion next year, involving other British Christians sympathetic to Kenya and not just me – or not even me.

11.2.06

Anna Bahati, a graduate teacher and Christian leader, recently spent time in Europe where she has learnt a lot more about homosexuality. She said:-

'I started by knowing that homosexuality was a disorder. Now I know it is far more complex than that.'

'Don't be afraid in what you are doing. Not everyone in the churches in Kenya thinks like **Archbishop Nzimbi**'

'People are wrong in saying that there is no such thing as African homosexuality. There have been men who lived with other men, especially in certain tribes such as the Kuria, Kamba and Kikuyu, even women who married other women, whose marriages were openly acknowledged in the community.'

13.2.06.

Dr. Joseph Galgalo, Head of Divinity at St. Paul's Limuru (1), sees the question of Biblical Authority as crucial. A Biblical Authority argument might go like this (not his own views, I think):-

'If I believe that the Bible is the literal word of God, then I must follow what it says about homosexuality; that means that if my fellow Christian doesn't follow that particular scriptural path then he has put himself outside the community of the faithful, and I must treat him as such – though that doesn't stop me loving him in Christ.'

He appeared thoroughly in favour of open debate, where people would say, 'I hear you, I respect your views, even though I disagree with them'. Limuru's teaching of theology is very open: he and most staff put across diverse views. They have students from a variety of denominations, and welcome a diversity of opinions. (Other Kenyan theological colleges are less open, and more strongly denominational).

‘Teaching Bible Interpretation can include interpreting the word of God in its cultural context: Leviticus for instance is not necessarily God’s word for all time.’

I asked him about **Joseph Wasonga’s** suggestion. Would such a discussion be possible at Limuru? He said the College management would have to agree it; I should ask **Dr. Mombo** (see below). For Anglican theological colleges, it would depend on the local bishop.

15.2.06

Against the common view that homosexual behaviour is a Western introduction, **John Chesworth** refers to the story of the Uganda Martyrs. The first Christian converts there included adolescent boys at the court of King Mutesa. They refused to be used as sexual objects by the king, and he had them put to death. This story makes it highly likely that homosexuality was known among the Baganda people before they knew about white culture.

Mutesa’s demands were unacceptable because it was an abuse of his power – far from consensual sex!

Suppose the objects of Mutesa’s attention had been adolescent girls? Suppose he had told the young men to accept bribes or to poison his enemies? Would these not have been equally unacceptable from a Christian point of view?

(I then moved to Nyanza province where I spent most of the remaining time.)

19.2.06

Johannes Angela asked me where I stood on homosexuality, and I told him.

His view:

- the Bible forbids homosexuality, so we have no choice but to treat it as sin;
- homosexuality is a lifestyle choice, not natural. (Romans 1. 26-27.)

I said Paul also uses ‘against nature’ to describe God’s actions in incorporating the Gentiles with his people (Romans 11.24).

People who find they have no choice but to be gay, experience gayness as their ‘natural state’.

I suspect whatever humans believe to be ‘natural’ doesn’t tie up with what is right in God’s eyes.

22.2.06

I have been listening this week to groups of people who are living with HIVAIDS. Physical problems abound; psychological ones centre on the stigma of HIVAIDS. Church groups, with minuscule resources, offer hope.

I wonder if I can talk about the experience of people living with HIVAIDS as a way of encouraging Christians to face embarrassing and contentious issues.

I think HIVAIDS has some genuine parallels with homosexuality: both require from Christians a re-thinking of traditional (including Biblical) attitudes.

It seems to me that HIVAIDS, rather than homosexuality, is the big sexual problem facing the Anglican Church of Kenya. To give hope, Christians have to learn a new openness about sex, and a way of looking at the Bible which emphasizes blessings on the outcast rather than curses on the disobedient.

1.3.06

I’ve begun to think **Joseph’s** suggestion is worth trying. A formal dialogue/discussion on homosexuality might take shape like this:

- a team of 3 from UK,
- one at least theologically qualified,
- one at least female.
- About 3 weeks in Kenya,
- engaging in formal pre-programmed discussions.
- Time for informal talks.

I have written to ask **Archbishop Nzimbi** if I can greet him in Nairobi. If so, I'll raise it with him, after sounding out the staff at Limuru.

5.3.06

Bishop **Francis Mwayi Abieru** explained his views as he took me to Kokise Anglican Theological College:

- people committed to Jesus must be very clear about what is sin, and resist it.
- The stories of the Flood and Sodom (Genesis 6 and 19) show God's attitude to human evil.

But he listened to me when I spoke about attitudes to sin in the Bible which contradicted one another (e.g. I John 1.8 and 3.9), and also listened to my experience of meeting, and eventually accepting, gay people in the church.

9.3.06

Start of a 5-day visit to Maseno School (boys' secondary), where my father had been Principal.....

Sunday 12.3.06

In my sermon to the boys I included the theme of stigma, exemplified by the woman with the 'issue of blood' (Luke 8.42). I said:-

'Most adolescent boys are fascinated to discover intimate things about women - but if you're not fascinated by girls, don't worry. God made us all different, and thank God for that.'

I hope some boy who feels he is gay would have picked up the signal and felt reassured.

13.3.06

Eating in a bar in Maseno, I was at a table with 2 retired professional men, Anglicans, from nearby Ematsi. Both remembered my father and were delighted to discover I was his son. One was about to settle in California, so I asked him about US Anglicans' liberal theology, and this led us on to the ordination of Gene Robinson. Both men strongly expressed the traditional ACK arguments that homosexuality is:-

- Un-African
- Unnatural
- Un-Biblical
- Not what the missionaries taught.

The whole discussion was without rancour, and on parting their final words were about the pleasure of reviving memories of my father.

What would my father have taught about homosexuality? Dad was a man of his time; few 1940s Englishmen talked about sex. But I think that on Biblical interpretation he was not a literalist. He recommended to me Peake's Commentary on the Bible, a product of liberal theologians.

He once wrote to me that he didn't believe in the Devil. Why? Because schoolboys who had done something wrong would say 'The Devil made me' - a way of avoiding responsibility. I suspect he wouldn't have demonized homosexuality.

15.3.06

Esther Mombo, Dean of Studies at St. Paul's Limuru, and a compiler of the Anglican Communion's Windsor Report on how to deal with the crisis over homosexuality (2), said:

- The ACK has no official position on homosexuality; it's **Archbishop Nzimbi's** personal position, it hasn't been debated in synod.
- What worries her are heterosexual sins. 'Let the church deal with rape, child abuse...'
- Missionaries preached against polygamy, demanding male converts put away all wives except their first; their original families didn't accept them back, and some turned to prostitution to survive; then the church condemned them.

On debating homosexuality with Limuru students, she saw no problem.

16.3.06

Archbishop Nzimbi gave me an hour of conversation, always friendly, with some laughter. He said the **ACK** was always willing to listen to other views on homosexuality (American pro-gay bishops and theologians had talked with him), but sticks firmly to scripture in opposing it. So would other Kenya church leaders, and Muslims.

I raised **Joseph's** suggestion, and we talked round the idea of me and one or more other people meeting the **ACK** Bishops within the next 12 months. We agreed it should be discussion not debate, listening not trying to score points.

When he gave me his arguments about homosexuality, I would respond, 'Yes, this is the sort of theme we need to discuss at the meeting.' – not attempting to respond with my own views.

He showed me with pride today's paper, featuring his public apology on behalf of the churches in Kenya for stigmatizing HIVAIDS.

If I wanted to be adversarial, I would love to quote that back on some future occasion word-for-word, except that I would replace 'HIVAIDS' with 'homosexuality'. But we would need a much more subtle and gentle approach to keep dialogue going and achieve mutual understanding.

18.3.06

In Nyanza, I saw **Francis** again, to get his reactions to my proposal to the **Archbishop**. To my surprise, he was enthusiastic, advising me to publicise it so as to ensure that the bishops came:-

'Call it, not just a conference, but 'A conference on the theological implications of homosexuality''.

I was to draft a letter to **Archbishop Nzimbi** as a record of our conversation and to suggest how the idea might develop, show it to **Francis** before sending it, and send a copy to **Joseph** and **Johannes**.

22.3.06

Johannes called at Kokise Theological College, with me; so I alerted **David Kodia**, the Principal, to my proposal. He was happy for us to come there on our next tour, but said, 'Don't expect to change anybody's mind!'

We also met Bishop James Ochiel of South Nyanza, so I told him about my proposal.

31.3.06

In Nairobi, sorting myself out for my return, I again greeted **Archbishop Nzimbi**, who had come for a bishops' meeting.

I was introduced to the Bishop of Taita-Taveta, and his young driver, an ordinand. At breakfast the young man asked me about the C of E and homosexuality. We discussed Biblical texts, the life of gay Christians, the idea the homosexuality is inborn, like left-handedness (That's an analogy worth developing!) and why St. Paul remained celibate.

Here was a listener who was attentive, informed and willing to learn. I asked him if he could suggest a discussion at his college, the next time he saw his Principal, and also tell his bishop what I was up to.

I also told Simon Oketch, Bishop of Maseno North, about my proposal.

I was just about to post my letter to **Joseph Wasonga** when he himself walked in! He read it quickly and said he was happy with it. He also suggested some financial contribution towards the Bishops' conference would be welcome: outlying bishops would think twice before paying the fare to Nairobi.

No one had told me beforehand about James Ochiel being at Kokise, or about the Bishops' meeting in Nairobi. These coincidences bear the mark of a divine plan for me to meet the bishops, so they not only know what I want to do, but have heard it from my own mouth.

Notes

(1) Dr. Galgalo has been for 5 years a member of the Anglican Communion's Doctrine Commission, working on what it means to be 'in communion'. The Commission has no mandate to discuss homosexuality, a fact which several of its members on both sides of the debate have objected to. He is also on the Anglican Communion's new Panel of Reference, set up to adjudicate cases referred to them where parties in Anglican churches have fallen out over the homosexuality issue. The aim, he said, is to mediate reconciliation for those willing to take it, but already some parties are beyond reconciliation.

(2) The Windsor Report was compiled by an international gathering of Anglican bishops and theologians in 2004-5. Dr. Mombo said her worst experience while working on the Windsor Report, was the contrast between 2 groups in USA – one a mixture of pro- and anti-gay, still willing to talk with each other; the other anti-gay, expressing hatred, anger and bitterness. She added: the Report asked for an apology from both sides, USA for consecrating Gene Robinson and the anti-gay groups for their hate. It didn't say the former was wrong; it did say it was wrong for African bishops to be operating in conservative US parishes.

Henry Mayor, a retired Anglican priest, is seeking support for his proposed visit and discussion – through prayer, funding and participation. Anyone interested in supporting him in any of these ways should contact him:

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BOOK REVIEWS

Feminist Christian Encounters, Angela Pears. Ashgate Publishing Ltd, pp 198. ISBN 0-7546-0990-1. Hardback £45.

I first met Angie Pears when I went to Oxford Brookes University for a day conference on women in Ministry. Clear, pleasant, lucid I enjoyed listening to her. I looked forward to reading her book with pleasure. It was hard going and I had to concentrate like mad but in the end I decided it was well worth it

She begins from the premise that 'since the 1960's the creative encountering of feminism has significantly influenced the shape of contemporary theological engagement. She sets out to give a brief summary of the breadth of Christian feminism, goes on to distinguish between feminisms that are compatible with Christianity and ones which think Christianity is not redeemable. She then moves away from this focus to one characterised by focus on method. She is led to investigate how apparently creative and constructive relationships are maintained between feminisms and Christian theology and tradition

In the 1890s women such as Mathilda Gage and Elizabeth Cady examined issues of Church, state and the Bible and helped to give rise to the feminist movement. The period 1960 to 1979 was the key phase in the development of feminist theologies

Theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Schlusser Fiorenza while fiercely critical of Christianity as legitimising sexism, racism, anti sexism and the environmental crisis still believed that it was redeemable.

Feminist theologians such as Mary Daly, and Daphne Hampson came to believe that it was beyond redemption, and others followed in their footsteps.

Leaving this behind Pears goes on to explore method and interpretation.

She makes a detailed study of the strategy of informed radical re interpretation which was developed by Carter Heyward and used by her to develop a theology of mutuality.

She moves on to consider Elizabeth Schlusser Fiorenza who worked on a pattern of remembering and valuing. She attempted to re discover a 'clear historical based relationship to the Christian tradition through feminist critique and re construction. She argues that feminist biblical interpretation must involve a series of hermeneutical tests and cannot just be based on choice and desire. She wanted women to be empowered to 'read the Bible against the grain' of its patriarchal rhetoric.

Even more challenging is the concept of 'indecent theology' put forward by Marcella Althaus Read who currently lectures in Edinburgh .She uses feminist informed insights and criteria to ' queer Christianity with specific liberation concerns'. She argues that traditional 'decent' theology has led to the oppression and exploitation of women and those whose sexuality is 'suspect', Even Latin American liberation theology, she claims, failed to remedy the deeper layers of oppression.

A number of feminist theologians expressed concerns about the fear of Christianity concerning sexual matters. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Schlusser Fiorenza were also both deeply concerned for those who were persecuted for their sexual make up. Marcella Althaus Read however

believes that sexual issues are at the basis of virtually all oppressions. Her work is of particular interest to members of CSCS.

A final chapter surveys the work of the theologians which Pears has described and attempts a final analysis of their work, methods and contributions.

It is all fascinating material and this is an important study. Unfortunately it will be inaccessible to many and difficult for the majority. One of the characteristics of early feminist theologies was to call for openness and clarity for women of many kinds. The obscurities of male theology were to be avoided. This book is as obscure as many books by men. It is stimulating for those of us who have had chance to read and to struggle. Maybe one day someone will handle the same material in a style that is accessible to all

Jean M Mayland

Prayed Out: God in Dark Places, John Michael Hanvey, Columba Press 119p. ISBN 1-85607-505-2. Paperback £6.99.

Everyone has a story to tell. *Prayed Out* is a story of a journey in the life of a man who responded to a call to train and serve as a Franciscan brother at the age of eighteen. He entered that calling and subsequently that to Priesthood with all the confidence of youth.

It is an honest story of sharing when that confidence of youth, and the striving to be the perfect priest, was challenged by a journey of living in a gay relationship which was to be for both participants ecstatic and tragic. A relationship of feeling complete one moment, incomplete and beyond redemption at the next.

It is an honest story of one who discovered his God again in the dark places of his humanity. Through art he has been reminded that his prayer as a young man was to enter the sufferings of Christ for the good of the world. It is his offering of a meditation on Rembrandt's powerful picture of the Prodigal Son that the author refers to as his autobiography.

From this place of being 'prayed out', of casting off excess baggage of the past, an unbinding process has come about through many people who have shown love and care.

Finding his place in creation and knowing that God not only loves him, but likes him just as he is, has been sometimes a harsh, but exciting experience. The reading of this personal story could open a journey that contains similar experiences.

Everyone has a story to tell. This story could be the encouragement for others to travel through darkness to offer the incredible possibilities of God's grace. The epilogue concludes, 'All things are new every day, and grace is everywhere; and even if we don't have the courage for this journey, the one who loves us will make it possible'.

Daphne Cook

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Please submit contributions by e-mail if possible. If e-mail is not available, contributions on disk are appreciated.