



Transformation in Practice: Sacramental Ministry as a Vehicle of Change

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**TRANSFORMATION IN PRACTICE:
SACRAMENTAL MINISTRY AS A VEHICLE
OF CHANGE**

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the
degree of Doctor of Practical Theology
in the Faculty of Humanities

2015

**MARY TRAVIS
SCHOOL OF ARTS, LANGUAGES AND
CULTURES**

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ABSTRACT

In response to the current crisis in liberal catholic Anglicanism, this thesis explores and affirms the continuing value and transformational potential of contemporary sacramental ministry exercised by priests in this tradition. Through the lens of vivid, 'electric moment' stories - moments in priestly ministry when the presence of God was understood by one or both of the participants to be palpable - seven priests reflect in research interviews on their practice and in dialogue with the researcher articulate what they think they are doing in ministry. Without the trappings of the organisational church, the ministry of these priests is held up for scrutiny and evaluated as a transformative practice. A thematic analysis of the interview material follows which demonstrates that the ministry of these priests conforms to, and is rooted in, the traditional pattern of sacramental ministry, but in a modern way. I call this 'sacramental improvisation', a form of ministry that can make God's action in the world intelligible to unchurched people today. According to my argument, this would depend upon the willingness of priests to be less reticent about speaking of God and then finding ways to do so that both retain the mystery, and at the same time make religious faith more accessible. The research process introduced priests to a reflexive way of thinking: a way to think outwards from experience, with freedom to think new thoughts. This was a creative process for priests and, in itself, transformational - it modelled a process of giving close attention, interpreting and working through. The thesis concludes that these methods could inspire new forms of support for clergy and theological education in the future and be especially beneficial to liberal catholic Anglican priests.

DECLARATION

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For my daughters, Daisy, Arabella, Betsy and Susanna and my
grand-daughters, Primrose and Violet

OVERVIEW OF THE PORTFOLIO

The papers contained in this portfolio are the result of my work over twenty years as a theologically trained Jungian Psychoanalyst with a special interest in working with Anglican clergy. The overall theme of the papers is *Supporting Clergy in Postmodern Ministry*.

When I joined the first cohort of the Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT) degree at Manchester University, the programme leader, Professor Elaine Graham, agreed to my bringing with me two of my own on-going research projects: it was understood that this work would make a substantial contribution to my degree.

As the DPT was a new and evolving programme, it had considerable flexibility and so it was agreed that instead of compiling a literature review, I would spend the first year continuing to work on an extended paper that would become the publishable article.

This paper, *Supporting Clergy in Post-Modern Ministry*, is an evaluation of a Balint-Style support group for clergy - a model I devised with a colleague and facilitated for clergy in the diocese of Bristol. My sense that such a group was timely was based on my individual work with clergy in psychotherapy and analysis. From this vantage point I had become more and more aware of the growing need amongst clergy for new resources to be made available to them to provide deep, focussed, individual care and attention and opportunities to reflect on their work and share their feelings about it. This paper was published as an article in the first edition of the Journal of Practical Theology (Volume 1.1 2008).

Following on from the Balint-Style group work, Peter and I used the model in other areas of training and support - for Bristol curates and for Church of England

pastoral advisors. We also ran training groups for leaders who wanted to facilitate Balint-Style groups in their own dioceses.

In 2006 I was commissioned by a Church of England diocesan bishop to undertake a funded, three year research project, working for the diocese one day a week. The project was entitled *Supporting Clergy in Post-Modern Ministry: Bridging the Gap between Provision and Need*. The aim of the project was to discover gaps in the provision of personal and professional support for clergy and to describe new forms of support that were developing across the Church of England in response to the ministerial challenges of late-modernity. I was invited to make recommendations at the end of the research project that could enable the commissioning diocese to deliver, in the bishop's words, 'world class support' for its clergy.

This was a wide-ranging and substantial piece of research for which I required professional supervision and I received this at Manchester University, from Professor Elaine Graham and Reverend Dr Chris Baker, as part of my doctoral work. We agreed that this report would eventually become the thesis component of my DPT portfolio. In the event, this did not turn out to be the case. Elaine and Chris left Manchester University and I interrupted for a year to complete the research study.

Although the Diocese that had commissioned the report went on to implement all my recommendations over time, there were sections in the report that were critical of some of its structures and practices. This made the reception of the report problematic for the diocese, and, as a result, difficult and confusing for me. The *Reflection on Practice* paper in the portfolio reflects on this complex 'critical incident' in order to find some sort of coherence of meaning in what was a painful experience.

When I returned to Manchester University, after my year's interruption, I was allocated Professor Peter Scott as my supervisor and together we decided to ask Dr Helen Cameron to be my second supervisor. At this time it became clear that the research report I had written for the Diocese would not meet Manchester University requirements for a thesis programme.

One of the things that had interested and concerned me during my research journey, and had also struck me in the consulting room, when working with clergy patients, was the despondence and lack of confidence amongst many liberal catholic Anglican priests: their sense of being marginalised and devalued in the current climate of the Church of England. From my own observation and my reading I had begun to realise with shock that this was a wider, much more serious problem: liberal catholic Anglicanism seemed to be a tradition in crisis.

A research idea began to evolve in my mind for a thesis that would explore the transformational potential of sacramental ministry and affirm the preciousness of the liberal catholic Anglican tradition – a tradition which has nourished my own Christian faith through the ministry of several dedicated priests. This would build upon work already undertaken for the portfolio

The research proposal for the thesis, *Transformation in Practice: Sacramental Ministry as a Vehicle of Personal Change* outlined the intention of the research: to excavate the current practice of sacramental ministry within the Anglican tradition and to articulate this model to show its value and importance. Sacramental ministry would be explored through the lens of 'electric moment' stories told by priests about their ministry and then reflected on with me.

The thesis retains the same title and intention as the research proposal, but its focus changed as the research journey progressed. Whereas the proposal focusses on the experience of the people in the stories, the thesis focusses on the

priests' own experience of these encounters, their reflections on their stories and what they think they are doing in ministry.

The portfolio has coherence: all the components, in different ways, relate to my work supporting clergy in their ministry. Also, in terms of contribution to practical theology, the papers in the portfolio all illustrate reflexive practice as a creative process that can open up both the tradition, and the ministry of its priests, to transformation.

PART A

TRANSFORMATION IN PRACTICE: SACRAMENTAL MNISTRY

AS A VEHICLE OF CHANGE

1. INTRODUCTION

The greatest challenge faced by liberal catholic Anglican priests today is one shared by all priests across the Church of England - the widespread indifference towards organised religion that has been growing over the last fifty years. As Alan Billings puts it, 'the inescapable message of the twentieth century was that the British people do not want to attend Church on a regular basis and there is no strategy of either evangelism or church restructuring that can make a significant difference to that' (Billings, 2004, p.11).

The Church of England's response to this situation has been to turn away from traditional patterns of sacramental ministry and turn instead towards functional, managerial models in an attempt to reverse the decline of the institutional church. The hope is that by borrowing management theory and strategic planning expertise from the business world, the institutional church will become more contemporary and dynamic, and therefore more relevant to late modern people. In a sense, living in a climate of 'post-traditional modernism' (Giddens, 1991, p. 5), the continuity of all institutions and traditions is precarious - the adaptations the Church of England is

currently making are intended to provide it with a stronger, more robust scaffolding to ensure its survival.

A report produced by a steering group chaired by Lord Green (September 2014) provides a recent example of the managerial turn in the Church of England. Lord Green was commissioned by Archbishop Justin Welby to construct a 'Talent Management' programme to select and train gifted, younger clergy, and also provide business school expertise for those already in senior posts with the aim of producing effective leaders for the present and future Church of England (<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2130591>). To complement this report, seven working groups were tasked to produce programmes that would 'Reform and Renew' key areas of church life (<https://www.churchofengland.org/reform-renewal>). In January 2015 these working groups made practical recommendations that amount to a radical shake-up the Church of England. The Church Times suggested that taken together, these reports add up to a 'major programme of renewal and reform' - 'the C of E's new reformation' (Church Times 16th January 2015).

This reformation, in which management theory takes precedence over theology, has been brewing in the Church of England for some time leading to a crisis within a crisis for the liberal catholic Anglican tradition. As well as facing the challenge shared by all church traditions - that of ministering to an indifferent post-religious culture - liberal catholic Anglican priests also face an additional crisis: that of finding their tradition marginalised and devalued within the Church of England itself.

Recognition of this crisis within a crisis, and its impact on liberal catholic Anglican priests is the starting point of my thesis. This recognition has emerged from a review of the literature, from my findings as a research consultant investigating clergy support across the Church of England, as a result of working as

a Jungian Analyst facilitating Balint-style groups for clergy, and through providing analysis for individual clergy over twenty years of practice. I have also kept abreast of the internal politics and controversies in the current Church of England through the media.

The concrete, prescriptive, business-inspired approach to ministry, exemplified by the Green Report and the Reform and Renew agenda, does not fit well with the symbolic, sacramental world-view of liberal catholic Anglicanism; an heroic, muscular approach goes against the grain of liberal values. In consequence liberal catholic Anglican priests increasingly feel they no longer fit, or indeed are welcome, within the work-place of the institutional Church.

In such circumstances it is easy for these priests to lose confidence in their deeply rooted, often hidden, sacramental and pastoral ministerial traditions because, in the view of the wider Church, their ministry is failing to meet its main criteria of value: Church growth and financial viability.

Many priests in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition with whom I had research conversations during my fieldwork, described the painful experience of finding themselves squeezed out by the institutional church, and their distress at finding the low-key, but 'distinctive and precious' features of the sacramental tradition they represent, in serious jeopardy. They sense that if those aspects of Anglican religious life are abandoned, 'it would quietly but quickly spell the final destruction of a central core of religious identity reaching back to, and indeed behind the reformation' (Coakley, 2008, p.6). Living with the awareness of being part of a tradition in decline, under the threat of its possible extinction, has resulted in a widespread loss of confidence amongst liberal catholic Anglican priests.

From my experience of working therapeutically with some of these priests, the reaction many have to this demoralising situation is often one of dismay and

depression, rather than of active engagement with the reality. Priests tend to retreat hurt into their loyal, aging and small, congregations, or else take early retirement or sickness as a way out. It is as if they do not know how to engage with the crisis in a way that opens up opportunities for creative change. Perhaps they do not really want change. The inherent reserve of the liberal catholic tradition and its sheer taken-for-granted-ness over centuries means that this tradition has never had to give an account of itself to itself - it just gets on with doing what it has always done.

This can become defensive withdrawal in an environment perceived as inhospitable and un-valuing. I often feel in the consulting room as if, just below the surface, these sad priests are actually very angry about the situation in which they find themselves, but the anger manifests as depression, physical illness or passive aggression, rather than the kind of aggression that can be harnessed into action for change.

The model of self-scrutiny that is true to its nature, and built into the heart of the liberal catholic Anglican tradition, is prayer. Persevering in the long established, continuous practice of being prayerfully open to interrogation by scripture and revelation could provide the tradition with prophetic insight and the seeds of renewal. However, there is much to suggest that feeling undermined, many liberal catholic Anglican priests have lost sight of the direction and meaning of their tradition, and lost heart in pursuing 'the disciplined long-haul life of prayer, of ongoing personal and often painful transformation' (Coakley, 2008, p.8). Coakley considers this loss of disciplined clerical prayer in a busy age as fatal, 'its absence is – quietly but corrosively devastating. In contrast its faithful presence can be nothing short of electric' (ibid, p.9-10).

For liberal catholic priests to ignore the fact that there is a serious crisis in their tradition is to collude with its extinction. If the tradition is to survive in some form, it must regain its self-belief, creativity and joy in order to reincarnate. It is

essential for priests to overcome their reticence and lack of confidence, engage with the world as they find it, join in and adapt the unique riches of their transformative sacramental tradition in ways that meet the world's needs. This is an identity crisis for a tradition that finds change very difficult. The question is whether it is possible for liberal catholic Anglicanism to find new ways to reshape its identity that are true to its essence. Can this tradition adapt?

Liberal catholic Anglican priests need to ask themselves the question: 'Who are we and what do we stand for?' The process of self-reflection called for is difficult and unfamiliar in a tradition that until relatively recently took for granted its position as the family religion of the nation: it has not needed to stand back and reflect on itself. In addition, as my research shows, the process of self-reflection is often an anathema to older priests in this tradition; they see it as unhelpful 'navel-gazing' that gets in the way of trusting God that things will work out according to his purposes, which are not for us to know.

A further challenge to the liberal catholic Anglican tradition, therefore, is its need to overcome resistance to modern methods of self-scrutiny if it is to discover and explore ways to adapt to the culture in which it seeks to minister.

The contemporary picture is not entirely gloomy - there are some signs of life in the tradition – particularly of intellectual life. For example, as my literature review shows, a small group of young scholar-priest apologists for liberal catholic Anglicanism have sprung up in the last few years. These recent imaginative, explorations of priestly ministry have often been influenced, and mentored in various ways, by the theology, ministry and leadership of Rowan Williams, especially during his time as Archbishop of Canterbury (see Wells (2011); Dormor (2003); Coakley (2008); Spufford (2012); Jenkins (2006)).

As a formidable public intellectual, Williams also demonstrates that liberal catholic Anglicanism can still provide a compelling, prophetic voice in the public square (Williams, 2012). In recent years organisations such as *Affirming Anglicanism*, formed in 1990; *Inclusive Church*, formed in 2003 and *Modern Church; Liberal Faith in a Changing World* (formed originally as The Churchmen's Union in 1898 'to advance liberal religious thought' and renamed in 2010), have articulated the liberal values and theology of the tradition through conferences and publications.

Liberal theological educators continue to provide a vigorous, influential, critical voice in the debate on the training and formation of priests at a time when training institutions, the forms in which these institutions deliver their curricula, and the contents of the curricula they deliver, are all under review. This is particularly so following the publication of *Resourcing Ministerial Education* in January 2015, one of the *Reform and Renew* reports. There is a fear that the approach to theological education advocated will result in it becoming narrower and more parochial and that 'a casualty will be the strong links built up over many years with university theology and religious studies departments, and that the public, intellectual engagement of the Church of England with pressing contemporary issues will suffer accordingly' (<http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/archives/006923.html>).

Almost twenty years ago liberal theological educators collectively made *The Liverpool Statement* 1997. This stated their position in a way that has remained unchanged, it is a theological vision for fruitful engagement between liberalism and contemporary culture: 'we need to demonstrate that our tradition has the resources to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the social, cultural and political problems of our age... and enter into creative dialogue with those perspectives which have been marginalised' (Jobling, 2000, p. x/xi).

These examples indicate a continuing intellectual, theological and political vigour in some of the thinking that informs liberal catholic Anglicanism, and my literature review provides further examples. However the focus of this thesis is on practice - the experience of priests at the coal face, engaged in day-to-day ministry with little conscious connection to the scholarship or imagination of those thinking deeply about the tradition, its applications and its continuance.

My research suggests that many of these priests are demoralised. They are unable to find the resilience and confidence to reflect on their practice and articulate what it is they hold dear about the sacramental tradition – a tradition on which, in a sense, they have staked their life: they have lost heart. There is a real danger, therefore, that unless this situation is somehow remedied or transformed, sacramental ministry will be squeezed out of public consciousness and be lost.

I hope this thesis will encourage liberal catholic Anglican priests to focus on the identity crisis facing their tradition and help them find within themselves resources to answer the question, ‘Who are we and what do we stand for?’ in new, insightful and articulate ways that affirm the uniqueness and preciousness of their tradition, meet the needs of those to whom they minister and help them to recover their early love.

1.1 The Purpose of the Research

In this thesis I excavate and enquire into the current practice of sacramental ministry within the liberal catholic Anglican tradition. By helping a small number of priests to think about their ministry, the thesis explores whether, and in what ways, sacramental ministry, as it is being lived out today, is transformational for the people whose lives it touches. I want to discover whether sacramental ministry, as exercised by the priests I interviewed, could be described as being a ‘vehicle of change’, and ‘transformational’ for those who receive it.

I hope to demonstrate the continuing ability of sacramental ministry to make a unique, valuable and important contribution to the mission of the church in a desacralized, disenchanting world that seems nevertheless, to be searching for a rediscovery of the spiritual in some form (see Woodhead 2012; Davie 1994).

The research process itself demonstrates the kind of reflexivity I invited the priest/interviewees to use when thinking about their practice.

The material into which the thesis enquires is difficult to capture directly, so this investigation is grounded in a set of experiences located within the ministry of seven priests in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition. The priests who volunteered to take part in the research were invited to tell me stories about 'electric moments' in their ministry.

It was heartening that the material they presented demonstrated that they instinctively understood that by 'electric moment' stories, I wanted them to tell me 'living' stories about 'charged' experiences in their ministry when God's presence had been palpable, and his action in people's lives, discernible. These priests had all told me at the outset they 'knew exactly' what I was talking about, and their choice of story proved that this was so.

One of the hopes I had for the research method was that the act of remembering these stories, narrating them to a sympathetic listener, and reflecting and thinking together about their dynamic, 'electric' quality would enable the priests to transpose their instinctual, insightful and intuitive ways of knowing into self-understanding – not to replace instinct, insight and intuition, but as an additional way of knowing that could claim some sort of objectivity.

I hoped that by standing back, and making their own practice an object of scrutiny, these priests would be able to connect with and, most importantly,

articulate, the dynamic pattern and transformational energy of traditional sacramental ministry, as discernible in their contemporary 'electric moment' stories. My hope was that this kind of meaning-making process might increase their confidence and in consequence re-invigorate their sacramental vocation.

The decision to investigate sacramental ministry through story was influenced by my own experience of the usefulness of the Balint-Style support group model (Travis, 2008). This model gets below the surface and helps priests reflect on practice initially presented to the group in the form of a compelling, personal story. Story-telling, in the Balint-Style group context proved to be an excellent way for group members to get to the heart of things. I thought the process of telling one's story to another might be equally helpful in a research setting - as a method of getting to the heart of sacramental ministry.

1.2 Background

I chose to research the way in which liberal catholic Anglican ministry can be transformational and argue for its unique value, partly out of gratitude to the priests whose ministry has challenged, nurtured and formed me, and who by their presence have shown me what it looks like to inhabit 'Christ's place' (Williams, 2005, p.164).

Moreover, I have worked for many years at the interface between theology and Jungian analysis as a clinician and academically and have offered analysis and psychotherapy to clergy in confusion or distress, both individually and in groups. In these contexts, I have seen transformation occur and people's lives change. It has been illuminating to be able to talk to clergy and help them think about their experiences using the language of both theology and psychology. Indeed, I have noticed how fruitful for people's inner lives this sort of cross-fertilization of language and meaning can be.

My personal and professional lives have, therefore, led to curiosity about the process of transformation and what kind of mediation or facilitation enables it to happen.

Practical Theology is a way of conducting this research because it is 'a prime place where contemporary experience and the resources of the religious tradition meet in a critical dialogue that is mutually and practically transforming' (Woodward, 2000, p. xii). The interdisciplinary and dialogic nature of practical theology fits with my experience of working both in the church and as a psychoanalyst. Practical Theology has a history of creative engagement with psychotherapy because these disciplines have a shared interest in interpreting the human condition.

Practical theology as a method perfectly reflected the meaning making process into which I invited my priest-story-tellers to enter, and gave me an anchor for my inquiry into what is essentially, 'spiritual' material, with all the attendant dangers of entering into this territory. At several levels, practical theology was an excellent fit.

Finally, I was drawn to the discipline of Practical Theology as the container for my research because I am interested in the real practices of the church. I undertook this doctorate in Practical Theology as a way of developing both my practice and my thinking: I hope it will open up further opportunities for me to work in the church.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

I will now review the literature to create a setting within which this inquiry into sacramental ministry today can be contextualised. The literature review consists of two sections:

Part 1 History of the liberal catholic Anglican tradition

Part 2 Priesthood in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition

2.1 The History of the Liberal Catholic Anglican Tradition

Although I look briefly at what Modern Church (*Future Directions*, 2012) calls 'classic Anglicanism', I am mainly concerned with the literature produced in recent times that traces the beginnings of a renewed liberal catholic Anglicanism that has been quietly flowering from within. This recent period of Anglican flowering coincides with the arch-episcopacy of Rowan Williams and is, in my view, substantially attributable to his influence as an exemplary Anglican; a man whom 'history will judge to have been a great archbishop of Canterbury' (Guardian Newspaper, 17.3.2012). As well as his scholarship, prophetic wisdom and high standing as a public intellectual, he is, above all, the exemplar of a particular kind of priestly presence that is reimagined and articulated in the recent literature, for example, Wells (2008), Jenkins (2006), Billings (2010), Dormor (2003), Shanks (2010) and Percy (2014). Its pattern is one of imaginative, intellectual and prayerful response to the world leading to action and finding new words about God to speak into the hearts and minds of modern people.

In his introduction to *The Anglican Understanding of the Church*, Paul Avis captures the leisurely quality of given-ness and daily-ness of the traditional Anglican Church in practice:

'Until recently, Anglicans of the Church of England...were able to take their Church for granted. Its pedigree went back long before the Reformation to the beginnings of Christianity in Britain and Ireland. It was the majority church, having baptised about half the population. It officiated at most funerals. It had its parish churches and clergy in every community. Its history was inextricably intertwined with the history of the nation. It was recognised by the state and connected to the crown. It had chaplains in schools, colleges, hospitals, prisons and the armed services. Its worship was woven into the very fabric of the community' (Avis, 2000, p. vii).

The special faculty, or natural disposition, of the Anglican Church - some would say it's genius, has been the way that its complex history, drawing on both catholic and reformed traditions, the various seams of vigorous intellectualism and profound spirituality of many of its leaders, has translated, not into dogma, but into pastoral and liturgical practices that have become, over centuries, naturally and creatively embedded into the culture at every level. The Book of Common Prayer is the poetic expression of this synthesis (Church of England, 1992 (1552)). To the extent that there has been no pressing need to articulate the faith, Anglicanism is a practical religion: people have just lived it; lived within its environment, often without too much reflection or knowledge about what they believe. As Henry McAdoo states in *The Spirit of Anglicanism*: 'There is a distinctively Anglican ethos, and that distinctiveness lies in method rather than in content, indeed there is no specifically Anglican corpus of doctrine' (McAdoo, 1965, p.1). Instead of doctrine, Anglicans have identified themselves with the 'historic Apostle's and Nicene creeds and with particular patterns of common prayer' (Wells, 2011, p.xv). These creeds and prayers, said together in the context of daily, weekly and yearly rhythms of worship, are part of a richly symbolic liturgy, with the Eucharist at its heart.

Affirming Catholicism was formed in 1990 as a 'movement of renewal and hope in the Anglican Communion'; it states in its *Guidelines* (2012, p. 4), 'although

our faith is grounded in history, our worship is not a nostalgic looking back to the events of the past: we celebrate the fact that in the Eucharist Christ is truly present to us now’.

The dynamism and immediacy of the Anglican faith, highlighted by *Affirming Anglicanism*, has often been obscured, perhaps in compensation for an absence of doctrine. Anglican scholarship has tended to concentrate on history, giving the mistaken impression that Anglicanism is about the past, rather than the present or the future, Sykes (1988), Locke (2009) and Macquarrie (1970).

Since the middle of the 20th century, when identity issues in the Anglican church first began to surface (Sykes, 1984), a lack of attention to the intelligibility of Anglicanism has left the Church somewhat speechless and formless in terms of self-understanding, rendering it unable to give a convincing account of itself to the community it serves. The old familiar Anglicanism, based on the assumption that most people vaguely think of themselves as Anglican and feel affection for their local vicar and parish church, no longer works in a postmodern world. For the majority of people, the church is an irrelevance and they do not really know what Christianity is all about.

In *Making God Possible* (2010) Alan Billings explores some of the recent cultural shifts that have contributed to this change of consciousness. Secularisation, diversity and consumerism have left people ‘indifferent rather than hostile towards religion...most people have no strong feeling about religion one way or the other...they have no feel for it: it is as if they are religiously tone deaf’ (Billings, 2010, p.18/19). Samuel Wells also reflects on this contemporary loss of religious sensibility and the consequent inability of religion to meet people’s needs. He writes, it is ‘surely part of the crisis of the Western Church that it finds it so hard to express what salvation specifically means today – and sometimes even what salvation

means eternally – in language that inherits the imagination of the New Testament’ (Wells, 2011, p.117). Many modern people do not know they need to be forgiven/healed/saved, and so the invitation of the gospel is unintelligible to them.

In Billings’ view, the ‘association of religion and the rhythm of daily life’ - already weakening during the second half of the 20th century, ‘is lost; and that is a very grave loss indeed because for many people, if not most, religion is about performance rather than belief’ (Billings, 2010, p.15). Rowan Williams also writes about this disconnect, ‘many of the ‘bridges’ between religious discourse and daily concerns seem to have disappeared; the territory of cultural reference in which religious literacy can be taken for granted has shrunk dramatically’ (Dormor, 2003, p. vii). Paul Avis picks up the same theme in his introduction to *The Anglican Understanding of the Church* when he suggests that Anglicans can no longer assume that people either inside or outside the Church know what they stand for; they are unclear about their message, their ministry and their values (Avis, 2000, p.ix).

There is general agreement between these scholars and priests that Anglicanism, although still the established Church of the nation, has become so domesticated and tame it cannot find the resources to critique society or ask disturbing questions. In consequence it has, unnoticed, been falling away into obscurity.

However, as well as articulating the problem, these writers are giving the Church a wake-up call, pointing to ways forward and challenging the Anglican Church to rise to the occasion with faith, vigour and imagination.

Samuel Wells, in his clear and articulate apology for Anglicanism, *What Anglicans Believe* (2008), puts the challenge to the church into perspective:

'Every generation faces the challenge of bringing the central events (of the Christian faith) face to face with the pressing issues of the day, and responding to these issues in ways that are faithful to the manner in which God has already been revealed. Indeed, one may go further and say in every generation, God gives the church opportunities to rediscover how abundant are the resources of the faith and how vibrant are the gifts of the Holy Spirit for meeting what otherwise seem daunting trials' (Wells, 2011, p. xiv).

This passage is characteristic of Wells' style; it is written by a devout 'insider' who, he says in the preface, is 'proud and grateful to be part of God's Church: forgiven, loved and free' (ibid, p. xi). Wells provides the reader with a 'straightforward overview of Christianity from within the Anglican and Episcopalian traditions' (ibid, p. xiii). As Dean of Duke University, he also brings a global perspective to the broad tradition of Anglicanism. He asks: what do Anglicans believe? On what grounds do they believe it and what forms of life emerge from this belief? Wells 'takes seriously the contours of the inherited faith' and he points up its coherence (ibid p xi). He gives an historical overview of what it means for us that the tradition is, at its core, both catholic and reformed.

Chapman (2012) and Avis (2000), also faithful insiders, give accounts of the origin, structure, ministry and values of Anglicanism from their own perspectives. Chapman asks whether there is such a thing as Anglican Theology and, as an historian and a priest responsible for the training of priests, he gives a richly informative account of the history of Anglicanism, yet with a sharp eye on the present. He is critical of attempts to fix Anglican identity and shows instead how it has evolved in a process that continues.

Paul Avis wrote *The Anglican Understanding of the Church* in 2000 when he was General Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity and this is an invaluable

guide to the 'structure, form, function, disposition and beliefs of the church'. He writes that although all Christians are part of the 'Church', the blessed company of all faithful people...we need to be able to say what the Church of Christ is and how that particular branch of it to which we belong is related to the whole' (Avis, 2000, p. 7). Avis is loathed to fix Anglican identity in a formula because 'our fundamental identity is that given in Christ; confessional identities are secondary and require continual conversion to Christ and the gospel' (ibid, p. 25).

The fluidity and inclusiveness of Anglicanism's constantly evolving identity has rendered it unwilling to make dogmatic statements about what communicants are signing up to.. Even the 39 articles, the nearest the Anglican Church gets to dogma, are open to interpretation. Historically, 'disagreements usually get resolved over time, but at any given time there remain disagreements and unanswered questions.... and a broad church can allow different opinions to be heard and debated' (Future Directions, 2012, p. 2). As Locke says in *The Church in Anglican Theology*, 'Anglicans lack the predisposition to put an end to disagreements through authoritative pronouncements: all decisions are provisional and open to further criticism and debate' (Locke, 2009, p. 115). Other churches 'have at their root, an idea, while Anglicanism has at its root a community and a conversation' (Countryman, 1999, p. 33).

In the light of this, we can see why the Church of England rejected the Anglican Covenant 2012 as a wrongheaded attempt to state core beliefs and contrive unity in a church that is essentially, broad, tolerant, inclusive and committed to 'maintaining diversity within unity' (Future Directions, 2012, p.1). However this is not an accurate description of the Anglican Church today, facing the possibility of bitter splits over gender and authority issues and without mechanisms in place to resolve disagreements about how to resolve disagreements: even the Lambeth Conference has only a consultative role. The Church's characteristically informal

and friendly way of reaching consensus through patient, open debate - going at the speed of the slowest – has been sorely tested, with the Church on the brink of schism in the face of power struggles between warring factions. It has seemed impossible for these factions to agree 'to suspend their sense of being exclusively in possession of the truth in order to achieve a peaceful coexistence (Shanks, 2008, p. viii).

Rowan Williams confronted this fact in a startling address to the Church in Wales, shortly after the atrocities of 9/11. He made a chilling comparison between the 'furious pain' and impotent rage that had erupted, after years of frustration, into terrorist acts of unimaginable violence, and the hate-filled brooding resentments arising in the church. Both come from frustration, he said,

'No-one treats me as human, as a conversation partner; so my anger grows to the point where I don't want conversation, but release at all costs, a terrible self-affirmation even if it destroys the other. We know it prosaically in our personal relations; we know it in the – by comparison – minor controversies of our churches' (Williams, 2001, p. 2).

Williams identified the biggest challenge facing the Anglican Church as that of finding a way to strengthen and maintain the church's core identity as a broad, inclusive church, able to withstand the looming threat of terrorism not only from without, but from within its own membership. In the absence of mutual empathy and good will, the struggle to conceive of 'a structured wholeness nuanced enough to contain what appear to be contradictories' (Shanks, 2008, p. xiii) was his task as Archbishop.

Heavily influenced by the philosophy of Gillian Rose, Williams tried to find a way forward for the Anglican Church based on her Theology of Mediation, a 'theology that refuses to accept that a disagreement can ever reach a point where

there is no benefit to be gained by further conversation....a refusal to accept that two seemingly irreconcilable positions are indeed irreconcilable '(ibid, p. vii). This involves rejecting what Rose calls, 'cheap innocence...the longing to be utterly sure of our rightness that leads people to reject compromise' (ibid, p. ix). Rose's philosophy provided Williams with a method that has clarity and philosophical precision as he has sought 'to try and open up honest conversation between and within divided worlds'(ibid p 8/9) in what Rose calls, 'the broken middle' (Rose, 1992).

The Anglican Church has been much concerned with its own politics over recent years; inward looking, preoccupied by sexual issues and, in consequence, seeming to many, an eccentric side show, irrelevant to people's real needs and concerns. The liberal catholic wing of the Anglican Church has been particularly slow to look outwards and find new ways of relating to today's world in comparison with the evangelical/charismatic wing, which has been growing in numbers (Billings, 2010, p. 97). From the beginning of the 21st century, the evangelicals have moved into action, experimenting with initiatives designed to 'embody and inculturate the gospel in the evolving contexts and cultures of our society' (Working group of Archbishop's Council, 2004, p xii). Nelstrop and Percy evaluate these initiatives, or Fresh Expressions of Church, in their response to the changing face of Church of England ecclesiology (2008). For further comment and examples of initiatives see Hunt (2004); Gaze (2006); Bayes (2006); Croft (2006).

In 2004 the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council published a controversial report, *Mission-Shaped Church*, subtitled, '*Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church*'. Compared to the beautifully written, well researched and measured reports usually produced by Church of England working groups, this document, although creative in its recommendations, appears hurriedly produced and intellectually thin. John Hull (2006) in a theological evaluation of the

report has reservations about its framework. Although he approves of the report's recommendations, and wants to encourage the Fresh Expressions initiatives, he seeks to place them within a theological context that is more adequate to the needs of the Church and Christian faith today. He raises important questions about some key concepts used in the report, such as kingdom, Church and gospel, suggesting that they are not distinguished consistently or acceptably. For a further, much more trenchant critique of the report, that challenges its intellectual robustness, see Davidson (2010).

One of the more controversial ideas put forward by Mission-Shaped Church is that the parish system, in operation since the middle ages, is no longer a given, but is open to negotiation. In its recommendations the report promotes network churches rather than traditional, geographically based churches:

'It is clear to us that the parochial system remains an essential and central part of the national Church's strategy to deliver incarnational mission. But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose. We need to recognise that a variety of integrated mission approaches is required. A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area' (ibid, p. xi).

Since the report was published, Fresh Expressions of Church, as an initiative, has gone from strength to strength, whilst the parish system has steadily declined. This trend has been exacerbated by the creation of multi-benefices that increasingly replace the traditional priest for every parish in an attempt to solve the church's financial and manpower problems. A review of the Church in Wales, published in July 2012 and chaired by Lord Harries, a liberal catholic bishop emeritus, considers the parish system no longer sustainable and recommends in its place the creation of 'ministry areas' that serve a much wider geographical area.

There seems to be an inconsistency in the report, however, perhaps revealing Harries' ambivalence about the radical heart surgery he is recommending. The report states:

'We recognise that the parish system has one very valuable feature which need not and should not be lost under the new pattern of area ministries. This is that everyone in the parish has the legal right to be married or buried in the Church and the parish priest will feel a responsibility to everyone living in it not just the congregation. Therefore, in due course it would be appropriate for the 25 or so congregations or parishes of the ministry area to be granted a major Rectorial Benefice to ensure the continuation of this sense of care for everyone in the area ...But this is to be seen as the end of a process in which all parishes are first suspended, and in which everyone is appointed as a member of a ministry team serving a Ministry Area' (Church in Wales, 2012, p. 8).

Harries seems to be saying that what Coakley calls 'the tradition of immediate local religious 'rootedness'' (Coakley, 2008, p.11): that is, the parish priest based in a holy place at the centre of the community, can be abandoned and then reintroduced at some-time in the future. There is no sense that this sort of rupture to the priest's sacramental role in the community - his/her withdrawal from those loved and served over time - could be irreparable.

At stressful times in Anglican history, like-minded scholars and priests have often argued their case for a particular position or change by publishing collections of essays. Two outstanding past examples are *Essays and Reviews* (Parker, 1860), a collection of essays by a group of Oxford Tractarians asserting the primacy of the catholic strand of the tradition over the protestant, and *Soundings*, published in 1962. This collection, edited by A.R.Vidler, heralded a sea change in religious consciousness at the beginning of the sixties when the sexual revolution,

consumerism, materialism, and relativism threw Anglicanism into crisis and ushered in decades of debate about how to keep the nation's Churches relevant and vital.

One of the Tractarians, Isaac Williams, wrote two tracts on the Theology of Reserve and the influence of these tracts continues to this day on liberal catholic Anglican thinking about reticence in matters of religion. It was Isaac Williams' view that 'the mysteries of the faith should not be made public without considering the state of the hearers...not revealing too much to those not spiritually ready to receive it... and showing a proper reverence in speaking of sacred matters' (Williams (Isaac), 1838). Reticence about speaking of God is consistent with the Jewish tradition that forbids the naming of God because this is an invasion of his mysterious holy ground and therefore almost blasphemous. Discretion and reserve, when talking about God, permeates the letters of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and also the poetry of W H Auden. Auden's reserve in matters of religion is illustrated with reference to both his life events and poetry in a lecture given by Richard Harries in 2008, 'Christianity and Literature: The Christian Reticence of W H Auden'.

It is striking that many young scholar priests today, who worship in the same liberal catholic tradition and share the same sort of upper middle class, highly educated background as Auden and Bonhoeffer, continue to find it difficult to 'speak out' in a direct, faith-filled way, despite exercising a ministry that is clearly spirit filled. Finding a language is something that the evangelicals/charismatics seem to be so much better at, but maybe in a way that Gillian Rose would describe as 'innocent'.

Recently, several collections of essays have brought fresh air into all areas of Anglican life and attempted to give shape to a beleaguered church.

Anglicanism: The Answer to Modernity (2003), edited by Duncan Dormor, presents the thoughts of eight young Cambridge University Deans who share a vision of a

robust, broad Anglicanism. As priests working with thoughtful and questioning young people they are obliged, as Rowan Williams says in his introduction, 'to engage more deeply than they would otherwise do with the major currents of modern assumptions about persons and values' and they are confident 'about the continuing ability of Anglicanism to engage with the hardest of contemporary issues' (Dormor, 2007, p. ix).

These essays explore the 'credibility, wisdom and coherence of Anglican answers to biblical, moral philosophical and social issues'; and the contributors 'believe that Anglicanism happens to provide the right type of answer to difficult questions faced by many people today ...this answer is not abstract, but embodied, contextual and personal – and it works' (Dormer 2003 p 7). These writers also assess the contribution of the church at various levels of national life.

The most memorable paper in this collection for me is Jo Bailey Wells' account of a funeral she conducted for a young student killed in a road traffic accident, and her funeral ministry to the shocked college community. Jo is not bringing God into this situation, instead she finds him there already. She reimagines her priestly role in response to questions asked by this grieving community, and she serves people by paying close attention to their engagement with the event.

Many of the stories about priestly ministry told in the recent literature I have looked at centre on the provision of the occasional offices. People still seek out the ministry of the Anglican Church at key moments in their lives, for baptism, marriage services and funerals because, as Andrew Shanks points out, 'no secular propaganda...can do what religious liturgy potentially does in cultivating and organising compassion....nor in cultivating and organising active international solidarity right down to the most local level of community' (Shanks, 2008, p. 169).

The occasional offices continue to be a 'resource for a majority in circumstances of stress, transition, loss and so on' (Dormor, 2003, p. viii). The Church of England, in the last ten years, has been much more imaginative and generous in offering occasional ministry, indeed it has become something of a mission field. Funeral and baptism liturgies have been reworked to make them more accessible, and there is more geographical flexibility in terms of choice of church for weddings. These initiatives have been supported centrally by research and publicity, and special projects, such as the one on marriage, demonstrate the church's more relaxed, imaginative hospitality to all-comers.

Unexpectedly, for a book about liturgy, *God's Transforming Work: Celebrating Ten Years of Common Worship* (2011), edited by Nicholas Papadopoulos, has an infectious exuberance. This is a collaborative volume in which distinguished liturgists consider the way in which Common Worship has emerged and developed over the ten years since its introduction. These contributors provide examples of their own creative and often exciting use of Common Worship's provision and discuss the importance of sacred music – 'God sings', and use of space – 'God's patterns'. In his introduction Rowan Williams identifies an 'opportunity and a challenge in what (he) believes, is a profoundly exciting dimension of our theology and our understanding of what it is to be a Christian. Because if any of this is along the right lines, then understanding our liturgy, is understanding our newness as Christians' (Papadopoulos, 2011, p.12).

This collection brings alive, in all sorts of surprising ways, the beauty and richness of the environment in which Anglicans worship and the way the liturgy captures both the mystery and the intimacy of the worshippers' relationship with God. The way forward here is not to strip the liturgy to make it more accessible to modern people, but to deepen imaginative experience of it.

The contributors to *Signs of Faith, Hope and Love* (1987) come to their subject from the same baseline as the essayists in *God's Transforming Love*, the idea that, 'through each and every sacramental experience, our lives change: in a real sense we are never the same again' (Colven, 1987, p. 7). The writers' intention is to help the reader 'understand better how this sanctifying power actually operates today' (ibid): how to read the signs. In his contribution Rowan Williams quotes Aquinas, 'what makes sacraments distinct is what they are for, the activity in which they are caught up, which is making human beings holy' (ibid, p. 32).

One theme emerging from this collection, especially in Christopher Colven's reflections on his ministry at Walsingham, is the power of the sacraments to break through to people. He writes that visitors to the shrine – as opposed to pilgrims - may not 'have a clue about the Christian faith' (ibid, p. 18). However, given 'a sympathetic ear', the need and desire for faith are clearly discernible, 'the very physicality of the shrine, its sacramentality, becomes the effective sign through which ordinary men and women, often with no Christian background, sense the existence of another dimension' (ibid, p. 18).

Colven is not arguing for a position where the sacraments speak for themselves, despite their derivation from the initiative of God independent of human receptivity. He says 'some form of comprehension is necessary if the sacramental encounter is to become effective...as animateur, or stage manager, it is part of the priest's responsibility to offer the rite in such a way that it speaks to those who are sharing it' (ibid, p. 18 & 21) and to bring it to life. This leads Colven to discuss the importance of exposition and ministry of the word and their intimate connection with the ministry of the sacrament. The word, spoken with authority and personal conviction into the everyday situation of the hearers can touch hearts and endure. Finally, Colven writes that 'the sacraments are there to reveal Christ, and if only we

create the right atmosphere for that revelation, it will take place in wonderful and unexpected ways' (ibid, p. 24).

Communicating in this sort of improvisational, interpretive way is not an easy task and Colven asks the crucial question... 'How does one open up the sign language of the liturgy to those who find it immediately unintelligible?' (ibid, p. 21).

This question leads on naturally to the literature on priesthood.

2.2 Priesthood in the Liberal Catholic Anglican Tradition

The role of the priest in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition is a sacramental one. Classic texts describe the priest as himself a sacrament, 'a token of Christ... a walking sacrament wherever he is open and awake to the presence of God and a channel through which God's grace is imparted' (Farrer, 1960, p.110).

Michael Hollis echoes this in 'Priest: Person of Prayer' in *Living Priesthood* (1997). He writes, 'for the priest God must be central to his whole being, God's will is the priest's touchstone: God's will is his driving force and inspiration through the gift of the Holy Spirit; his greatest desire is to be so one with God that it is God who lives and loves through him and so does the work' (Hollis, 1997, p.44).

Michael Ramsey summarises the role of the sacramental priest similarly, as one 'called to reflect the priesthood of Christ God and to serve the priesthood of the people of God and to be one of the means of grace whereby God enables the Church to be the Church' (Ramsey, 1988 (1972), p.111).

We have difficulty today with this model, based as it is on the classic disciplines of invisible parish priesthood, the commitment to prayer, place and the poor, because the religious literacy it assumes no longer exists, apart from within the ageing and dwindling congregations of the liberal catholic Anglican Church. Also, the geographical settled-ness the parish system could take for granted, and

was the locus for this kind of ministry, cannot be assumed any longer. Traditionally, the sacramental priest in his representative role as animateur of the liturgy, conveyed to people both the mystery and otherness of God, and also, through personal relationships developed in pastoral ministry, he represented the loving-kindness and intimacy of God to people known and loved over a long period of time. The priest ministered to this community at key transitional moments in their lives and, in consequence, held a special, and personally costly, role for the community - standing at the interface of earth and heaven, representing God to the people and the people to God through prayer and action, day after day, year after year, observing the rhythms set down in the book of common prayer.

How then is it possible to translate this sort of sacramental priesthood that seems to belong to a different age, in a way that connects with our secular society and brings the gospel to meet the needs and confusion of people who, although spiritually starving, are mostly indifferent to the Christian faith? Much of the literature on liberal catholic Anglican priesthood, produced in the last ten years, addresses the problem of how to make this connection.

Alan Billings, in his assessment of the task of ordained ministry present and future, *Making God Possible* (2010), gives an historically based overview of the Anglican Church today and of the different models of ministry within it. He makes suggestions 'for the way ordained ministry must reorder its priorities' if the church is to survive its current crisis of identity and remain viable' (Billings, 2010, p 9).

Billings discusses the cultural shifts that have accumulated over time and particularly challenge the church today, and the changes to the church's self-understanding and outreach these shifts have already necessitated. He goes on to ask the question: What are Clergy for? The answer he gives is 'the fundamental task of ordained ministry is to help make God possible' (ibid, p. 8). His book is a

projection of this answer. Billings describes how the principle models of ordained ministry in the Anglican Church attempt to undertake this task.

He looks at each model in turn, describing its origins and evolution, the model itself, the model in practice and at its strengths and weaknesses. This approach invites comparisons and contrast, but on the whole, Billings leaves this to his readers and then draws his own conclusions. He begins with a helpful account of the evolution of the classical 'parson' model of ministry providing a context within which to understand the different emphases of the evangelical and liberal catholic models.

George Herbert's *The Country Parson: His Character and Rule of Holy Life*, is Billings' starting point, the traditional parson as part of the established church and as such, a pastor to all within his parish boundaries. He knows his flock and is God's representative to them, ministering through liturgy and the word, undergirded by his own rhythm of daily prayer. Billings outlines the way these 'givens' have been changing, yet he still sees a continuing role for the clergy - as chaplains to both the nation and the community. This role, he thinks, will continue as long as the Anglican Church is inclusive and hospitable to those of other faiths and none, and can represent a plural, secular society. It is unclear how old boundaries and hostilities between different wings of the Anglican Church, and between different denominations and faiths, are to be overcome with good-will, having proved so intransigent in the past.

Billings considers this sort of inclusivity does not come easily to evangelicals who are committed to evangelising others, rather than sharing ministry in solidarity with them. However, as the only wing of the Anglican Church that is growing in numbers the willingness of evangelicals to take on this role of chaplain to the nation would be important.

In Billings' view, since the middle of the twentieth century evangelicals have experienced something of a revival, whilst the Anglo-Catholic movement has 'withered' (ibid, p. 77). Its clerical, hierarchical structure, its sense of itself as a divinely founded institution, and its secure position as the established church has meant that its priests have been slow to realise that continuing to interpret their priesthood as a matter of 'being', in the old way, means they are becoming more and more squeezed out.

Billings does not make sufficient distinction between the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church and the liberal catholic wing. Whilst it can be argued that the Anglo-Catholic wing of the church may be in 'terminal decline' (ibid, p.114), the liberal catholic wing has been able to relate to the modern world, take on board new theologies, and demonstrate an openness towards women priests and bishops and an inclusiveness towards homosexual people. The literature discussed below demonstrates a flowering rather than a withering of this tradition.

In his final section, Billings suggests what the ministry of the future needs to look like if it is to retain its relevance and place in the life and affection of the country. He thinks different traditions need to learn from each other's strengths, rather than being sharply divided and territorial. The Church, he believes, has an intellectual contribution to make to public debate and needs to help Christians respond to the intellectual challenges of the time. He also suggests a reformulation of the church's pastoral ministry as one of chaplaincy to the nation, offering ministry to all.

In 2004, three years into his tenure as Archbishop, Rowan Williams delivered a lecture on the occasion of the 150th anniversary lecture at Ripon College, Cuddesdon. In choosing the same title for the lecture as Michael Ramsey's classic 1977 text on priesthood, *The Christian Priest Today*, perhaps the

organisers of the event were indicating the continuity of priesthood, mirrored by the continuity of the life of the college - continuous and yet always in need of daily renewal. In this challenging lecture, Williams seeks to discover God's will for ordained ministry in the Church of England in our day. This is a poetic, devotional and highly intellectual account of sacramental ministry, delivered to a like-minded audience.

Priests, he says are those 'whose words connect the hearers with Christ, they make Christ contemporary with those who hear the good news (and) they witness to how Christ's offering takes up what is our own to make it a gift to God'. Priests need the 'skill and willingness for at least three things, the priest has to be a look out, an interpreter, and what is best called a weaver.' Williams amplifies these three characteristics in terms of what priestly formation involves. The kind of ministry he describes is subtle; a way of relating to the world by standing back and seeing what others can't see and by reading the signs of the times - the 'surface and the depths, but with no great interest in the shallows'. Preaching and ministering from this perspective is effective because it speaks into the unconscious currents in people's lives, the sources of their deep pain, bewilderment and also their joy, but that are unknown to them (Williams, 2005, 166-167).

Justin Lewis-Anthony, in his memorably named book, *If you meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him*, is an erudite priest in the same tradition as Williams. He takes the text of this lecture and makes it more accessible, using it as the springboard for his own, 'new conceptual framework for ministry' (Lewis-Anthony, 2009, p. 2). Lewis-Anthony takes a wide range of ideas from other theologians, priests and thinkers, for example, Bonhoeffer, Niebuhr, Hauerwas, and uses their work to amplify and elaborate Williams' condensed poetic language. Closely following Williams he suggests three roles that priests need to fulfil today, as weavers - nurturing and weaving communities into unity (ibid, p.124), as watchmen

– standing in the ‘high and liminal places so as to be able to see what is beyond’ (ibid, p. 107), and as witnesses – ‘to the One who has made our lives possible’ (ibid, p. 94).

Lewis-Anthony affirms the mystery of faith and sets out to recover a sense of the grandeur of the tradition so beautifully evoked by Rowan Williams; in addition he wants to outline a sustainable pattern of parochial ministry for today. He sees the integration of theology and practice as the recovery of an historic understanding of priestly ministry, yet renewed. Instead of the prescriptive, functionalist patterns of priesthood, favoured by many of the initiatives of emerging church, Lewis-Anthony recommends a Dominican rule of life, ‘not as a legal code...but an attitude, an orientation...more about being than doing’ (ibid, p. 153): becoming the person you are called to become. Lewis-Anthony discusses in detail the pattern of the Dominican rule, based on prayer, study, community and ministry, showing its application to the lives of priests today. He knowledgeably extrapolates from this discussion using a vast field of illustrations, analogies and examples, inter alia systems theory, psychology, leadership theory, current affairs, the media. The reader is left with a sense that this is a man who understands the times and what makes modern people tick. He makes exciting, original, lively connections peppered with a mischievous sense of humour.

The form of ministry he is advocating is in contrast to what he debunks as ‘herbertism’ – the reactive, rather frantic attempt to be all things to all men in all circumstances – that often passes for parish ministry and is based on the ministry of George Herbert. Lewis-Anthony makes short shrift of George Herbert, calling him ‘the representative lyricist of a mild and tepid church’ serving ‘a little Wiltshire suburb’ (p.15) for less than three years, in ‘a soft job’ (p. 32).

Another scholar priest, who understands his times, and explores how faith engages with the world in a rather different and less extroverted way, is Timothy Jenkins. A theme running through his collection of papers, *An Experiment in Providence* (2006) is that 'paying attention to the world is a particular Christian calling, one that is...close to the essence of Anglicanism' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). Jenkins sees the need for Christians to engage with the world in the situations they find themselves, but as part of the process rather than offering solutions.

In his view, the priest is sacramentally present by being alongside people, yet at the same time detached, listening and paying close attention to the undercurrents of the context in which he/she is called to serve. He writes that becoming a priest involves 're-learning the tradition and re-imagining the role one has been called to represent' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 1). In the modern world, 'it is less one's job to bring God into a place than to discern him in it, and less one's task to gather people together than to discover what they are up to, what moves them and what their desires are' (ibid, p.7). Jenkins reverses the idea of a busy, pro-active parish priest. He writes 'the discipline is in waiting and paying attention, and 'success' is not masterminding well attended events, but in finding oneself put to work in hitherto inaccessible places' (ibid, p.8). Jenkins is offering a situational, existential and contemplative understanding of priesthood and the papers collected here have an authority that comes out of his rigorous theological reflection on an extensive ministerial experience, as chaplain, dean, parish priest anthropologist and academic.

In Williams' 2004 lecture, the contemplative aspect of priestly presence in the modern world is held in tension with what he calls, 'the big picture'; to 'have a theology worth talking about'. Theology should proclaim the truth of 'the whole world renewed through Christ': the priest's central task is 'essentially to proclaim that

world renewed – in personal care, in public teaching, in sacramental action’
(Williams, 2005, p.172-173).

An emphasis on proclamation and preaching, and finding words about God to speak into the contemporary culture, is characteristic of Williams’ work and a departure from the traditional reticence of the liberal catholic tradition.

We find an example of this reticence in John Pritchard’s, *The Life and Work of a Priest* (2007). Although clearly a devoted, pastorally minded priest, Pritchard tells the reader that when faced with the bereaved family after a tragic death, ‘my own wordless confusion was all I had to contribute...what the priest offers in these dark situations is a silent witness to another presence...without saying anything, the priest is offering a source of present comfort and future hope’ (Pritchard, 2007, p. 60). It is interesting that in the silence he describes, so much was going on in Pritchard’s own mind: he shares with the reader his prayerful, biblical associations to the tragedy and clearly understands this as a sacramental encounter, but the implication is that the sacramental dimension speaks for itself: he himself offers no words about God. If, however, as suggested by Christopher Colven, ‘some form of comprehension is necessary, if the sacramental encounter is to become effective’ (Colven, 1987, p. 18), Pritchard’s reticence may have resulted in a lost opportunity for the bereaved to hear and respond at this time of personal crisis. One can only conclude that Pritchard does not say anything because he does not know what to say. The reticence in his pastoral ministry contrasts sharply with Pritchard’s forthrightness when recommending a model of ministry to the priests in his care; they should be multi-competent he tells them, able to fulfil at least sixteen roles including, multilingual interpreter, presiding genius, iconic presence and flower arranger.

Rowan Williams' ability as a poet, as well as a theologian means that he does find powerful words to utter to the modern world. He is able to link 'prayer and devotion with theological reflection and learning' in a lyrical way (Allchin, 1988, p. 318) that shows him to be part of an Anglican tradition of spirituality that goes back four centuries and has recently fallen out of mainstream Anglicanism. The tradition is usefully outlined in, 'Anglican Spirituality', Allchin's contribution to *The Study of Anglicanism* (Sykes, 1988). This tradition 'by its form as well as its content seems to speak of a particular perception of the link between grace and nature, faith and culture, divine and human, which has been characteristic of Anglican spirituality as a whole' (Allchin, 1988, p. 316). There is a deeply mystical element in this tradition; a sense of participation in the divine. 'Its search for wholeness and balance, its desire at once to spread itself outwards in concern for all human life, and at the same time to turn inwards to explore the heights and depths of the mystery of God's presence at the heart of human life' (ibid, p. 322).

The capacity of Williams to speak words about God into contemporary events in an original and piercing way is evident in *Writing in the Dust* (2002), his anguished response to 9/11 after finding himself caught up in the attack and narrowly missing death.

He was in Trinity Church, Wall Street, at the time, due to talk religious language with a group of New York clergy and spiritual directors, when they were 'interrupted' by this cataclysmic event. Williams writes about the chilling contrast between the florid 'religious language' of the perpetrators of the attack and the different kind of language that took over in the loving, last messages of those about to die. Williams suggests that their 'non-religious words are testimony to what religious language is supposed to be about – the triumph of pointless, gratuitous love, the affirming of faithfulness even when there is nothing to be done or salvaged' (Williams, 2002, p. 2).

Williams writes, 'God always has to be rediscovered. Which means God always has to be heard or seen where there aren't yet words for him. Saying something for the sake of another in the presence of death must be one place of rediscovery. Mustn't it?' (ibid, p. 5)

The dilemma for liberal catholic Anglican priests about whether, or how, to move away from their traditional reticence, and speak out about God in pastoral ministry, is an underlying theme running through a collection of essays compiled by the Littlemore Group. These essays are the fruits of a profound, prayerful and creative meeting of young scholar priests held in 2005 at Littlemore during which they tried to reimagine their own priesthood. They asked themselves the questions, who are we and what do we do? These questions were provoked by Rowan Williams' challenge to the church at his consecration, to 'recapture the imagination of the nation for the gospel' (Coakley, 2008, p. 1) and Williams was himself a participant at the event and contributor to the collection of essays.

These essays, by individual members of the Littlemore group, express a coherent, shared reflection on what priestly ministry can and should mean in today's culture. With the exceptions of Grace Davie and Andrew Shanks, whose contributions explore the rich, spiritual opportunities for witness open to a weakened established church that has lost both its status, and assumed ecclesiastical entitlement, the rest of the contributions tell moving stories about pastoral encounters. These stories work by showing us how each priest is living up to the height of his/her calling, rather than by offering us an articulate, worked out theology that comes out of their pastoral work and feeds back into it. The stories are more of an implicit invitation to readers to go and do likewise: we must discern God at work in the pastoral situation described and distil the theology for ourselves.

It is as if the demanding priestly role in these narratives can be enacted or performed, but not theologically articulated. Indeed it seems that Sarah Coakley affirms such reticence about speaking out when she suggests that 'there is a sense in which this representational function may rightly remain somewhat invisible or un-theorised' (ibid, p. 4).

Perhaps there is an opportunity missed here. As highly trained, gifted theologians, these writers are uniquely placed to move back from their stories and interpret them in terms of the bigger picture – from God's perspective –and connect the changed and healed lives of the people in the stories, including the priests themselves, with an understanding of ministry as theology. This reticence is consistent with liberal catholic Anglicanism, it may also be a reaction to the functional model of ministry, where priests are sometimes so quick to explain and give a formulation with such certainty, that it kills the mystery stone dead.

The liberal catholic Anglican tradition is reticent when it comes to speaking about the Holy Spirit directly in the belief that the experience of the liturgy is itself enough, in that it is 'an event in physical space that has the effect of moving you from one context or condition of heart and imagination to another...involving a transition...an event of change that transforms the self and its space' (Papadopoulos, 2011, p. 3).

It seems that although liberal catholic priests may still have difficulties in fully understanding and finding ways to talk about God in their role as interpreters of the tradition, there have been significant imaginative developments in recent years in terms of making the liturgy much more hospitable, welcoming and accessible. This is particularly so in connection with the occasional offices.

The literature review has provided a context within which to conduct the research journey and explore the practice of contemporary sacramental ministry as

exemplified by the 'electric moment' stories. Firstly, however, I need to clarify some of the key terms I shall be using in the thesis.

3. CLARIFYING TERMS

In this thesis I shall be using terms that are loaded with meaning - each could take up a whole chapter in itself. I have out of necessity, therefore, had to restrict myself to specific understandings of certain key terms and I clarify these below.

3.1 Unchurched

The research I have undertaken to explore 'electric moments' in ministry has been conducted within a secular culture where increasing numbers of people are described in the literature as 'unchurched'. It is necessary, therefore, to discuss the meaning of this term.

Throughout the thesis I use the term 'unchurched' in relation to those people who are beyond Christianity and all other religious traditions. Despite their disconnection from religious traditions, the unchurched are nevertheless included in the hospitality offered by the Anglican Church, through the parish system, to all people, in every community in the country on the basis of need rather than belief. That is the unchurched are included, if ever they so wish, in the wide embrace of what John Hadley calls, 'proper Christianity' (Hadley, 1989, p. xi).

In contrast, members of other spiritual traditions in the Church of England, for example, conservative evangelicals and charismatics, sometimes speak in a disparaging way of unchurched people, meaning those who do not conform to the exclusive membership conditions of their particular Church tradition and are, in consequence, 'outsiders'.

These conservative Christian traditions have thrived in recent years, bucking the overall trend of 'steep decline in conventional Christian observance and affiliation since the 1950's (Woodhead, 2012, p.72). They are tight knit, sometimes inward-looking communities, often with a sense of being set apart from, and pitted

against, 'the world'. They offer a clear conservative theology and morality and tend to be led by clergy who concentrate on what they see as 'the crucial tasks of ministry – building strong congregations of believing and committed Christians through a ministry of evangelism and teaching' (Billings, 2004, p.15). House Churches preach a similarly conservative message, but with an emphasis on charisma that gives them a dynamic appeal to those dissatisfied with traditional forms of Christianity and 'to some extent at least to the previously unchurched' (Woodhead, 2012, p.65).

These conservative traditions regard unchurched outsiders as those in need of salvation. Missionary activity is directed at saving their souls and bringing them into membership of the Church community.

Contemporary theological and sociological literature throw light on the changes in society since 1945 that have resulted in Christianity becoming 'a minority pursuit', with diminished status nationally, and an ever increasing number of people who are unchurched. (Woodhead, 2012, p. 57; Davie, 1994 and 2003).

The research of Linda Woodhead and her colleagues suggests that the desertion of the church by so many is not the result of 'any conscious rejection of Christianity, but more from a sense of boredom (and) gradual drift away from a habit of religion' (Woodhead, 2012, p.63). Billings wonders whether this 'indifference is leading to the religious equivalence of being musically tone deaf.' He asks whether unchurched people, indifferent to religion 'eventually become incapable of having anything like a religious or spiritual experience. Over time does indifference shut down some vital faculty so that reviving it becomes more difficult?' (Billings, 2004, p.17)

Along with Woodhead, Billings holds that despite the overall decline in Church Christianity, 'historical and institutional peculiarities' have ensured that

Christianity 'retains influence over the cultural life of Britain' (Woodhead, 2012, p.57). In consequence, he suggests that there are two forms of Christianity, 'Church Christianity', and 'cultural Christianity' which is non-credal and non-attending (ibid, p.15). In his view some people who are unchurched in the sense that they do not attend Church, continue to draw on their religious backgrounds and the legacy of the Christian church. 'Billings notes that what he is calling 'cultural Christianity' is described by sociologists variously as "believing without belonging' or 'vicarious religion' or 'differential religion". He claims that the residual attachment to Christianity of those who are unchurched in this sense, is more emotional and practical than intellectual, coming from a 'sacred heart rather than assent to any creed (ibid p18).

Although these unchurched, cultural Christians are disconnected from Church Christianity, at Christmas or Easter they might attend a service. Also, when facing life-changes, such as birth, marriage or death people often seek out the ministry of the church - perhaps unconsciously searching for the concrete grace the church offers at such times. It is, however, uncertain how sustainable in the long term this residual link between unchurched cultural Christians and the Church will prove to be, as the connection between them weakens and the lived tradition becomes more and more distanced in memory.

Robert Fuller in *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (2001) surveys and explores, from a Christian perspective, the status of unchurched people in the USA. His thinking throws light on the situation in the UK.

Fuller suggests that the unchurched fall into three categories

- 1.) Secular humanists – those indifferent to religion and who rely on reason and common sense in their dealings with the world.

2.) Those whose relationships with organised religion are ambiguous – Billings' 'cultural Christians' would fall into this category.

3.) Those unaffiliated with a church but who should be considered religious in some broad sense of the term. 'This large group is concerned with spiritual issues but chooses to pursue them outside the context of a formal religious organisation' (Fuller, 2001, p. 4).

For the unchurched people in Fuller's third category, religion or faith or spirituality can still provide them with live options, but not in ways that are anchored in organised religion. Members of this group often lead profoundly spiritual lives, but they do so in personal, private ways, or perhaps by choosing to follow some of the more exotic New Age practices available (Woodhead, 2012, p.156f: Fuller, 2001, p.75f).

These people are 'highly active seekers...for whom spiritual and metaphysical concerns are a driving force...' (Fuller, 2001, p. 4). They shun 'religiousness' which they associate with 'higher levels of church attendance and commitment to orthodox beliefs'. Spirituality, in contrast, 'they associate with higher levels of interest in mysticism, experimentation with unorthodox beliefs and practices' (ibid, p.6). Many of this group report experiencing negative feelings towards both clergy and churches. They find religious institutions stifling and some go as far as viewing 'organised religion as the enemy of authentic spirituality' (ibid, p.5).

3.2 Sacramental Ministry

The catechism included in the Book of Common Prayer defines a sacrament as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof' (Church of England, 1992 (1552), p.300). The catechism of the Catholic

Church speaks of the sacraments as 'efficacious' - they are effective ways in which 'divine life is dispensed to us' and they 'bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions'.

The classical Anglican tradition understands the priest him/herself to be a sacrament, a means of grace, and as such able to mediate the presence of God ('divine life') at moments of grace in ministry. At such moments the priest is 'a token of Christ...a walking sacrament wherever he is open and awake to the presence of God'. He is a channel through which God's grace is transmitted (Farrer, 1960, p.110).

Michael Hollis describes the sacramental priest as a person of prayer for whom 'God must be central to his whole being. God's will is the priest's touchstone; God's love is his driving force and inspiration through the gift of the Spirit; his greatest desire is to be so one with God that it is God who lives and loves through him and so does the work' (Hollis, 1977, p. 44).

Michael Ramsey summarises the sacramental priestly vocation as the call 'to reflect the priesthood of Christ and to serve the priesthood of the people of God, and to be one of the means of grace whereby God enables the Church to be the Church' (Ramsey, 1988(1972), p. 111).

Sacramental ministry, traditionally, is embedded in, and nourished by, the disciplines of public and private prayer, the liturgy and the daily offices and is also, as Rowan Williams points out in his paper, 'Religious Lives', 'a way of conducting a bodily life; it has to do with gesture, place, sound, habit' (Williams, 2012, p. 315).

An alternative rendering of sacramental ministry

My intention in this study is to give the category of sacramental ministry a spaciousness and hospitality towards some contemporary examples which might

not obviously conform to these traditional accounts. This is an understanding of sacramental ministry that lifts the grace-filled and transformational sacramental dynamic free of the intellectual and emotional constraints of traditional religious language, thus giving unchurched people the possibility of gaining access to 'divine life' by another route so they can receive and experience its saving power.

Both Rowan Williams (2012) and Patrick Woodhouse (2009) recognise this kind of sacramental dynamic at work, and bearing fruit, in the life of Etty Hillesum – a young Jewish woman caught up in the nightmare world of Amsterdam during the second world war. Williams in the introduction to Woodhouse's book describes Etty as an 'unequivocally contemporary witness', with 'a quintessentially modern mind and sensibility' (Woodhouse, 2009, p. ix). Although Rowan Williams points out that we need help in connecting Etty's 'passionate and idiosyncratic voice with the more familiar idioms of faith and practice' (ibid), he is in no doubt that hers is a religious life. Her extraordinary ministry to people in the transit camp of Westerbork clearly has the shape and dynamic of sacramental ministry. She describes the kind of connection she makes with others: 'it is really God who hearkens inside me: the most essential, and the deepest in me, hearkening unto the most essential and deepest in the other. God to God: loving attention to others is a clearing of the path toward You in them' (Williams, 2012, p.315).

3.3 Holy Spirit

Identifying the priests' stories as 'electric' was a way of drawing attention to the living presence of the Holy Spirit in these narratives.

'Spirit' is the word used from the earliest traditions behind the Old Testament to denote the invisible power of God often manifested in the wind, the breath of life and in the ecstatic power of charismatic leaders and prophets (Genesis 1:2; 16:7-11; Exodus 3:2-5; Judges 3:10; 6:11-16; 1 Samuel 16:13; Malachi 2:15).

The sense of continuity, rather than identity, between the creative energy of God, and man's own, inner vitality is found in all spirituality. Although someone can have a sense of being sustained and animated in their hidden depths by the power of God, the spiritual person is always conscious of dependence on God (Wakefield, 1983).

In *The Go-Between God* John V. Taylor writes, 'The Holy Spirit is that power that opens eyes that are closed, hearts that are unaware and minds that shrink from too much reality. ...All faith in God is basically a way of 'seeing the ordinary' in the light of certain moments of disclosure which have been the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Taylor, 1972, p. 20 & 21). It is a special way of seeing; one is struck by 'wonder awe and joy' (ibid, p. 12). These 'high voltage' moments of recognition and awareness change people's minds and hearts because the live spark that is generated opens them to 'signals of transcendence' (ibid, p. 2). A person's own separate spirit comes to life in conjunction with the spirit of another person or thing and the connecting mechanism that lies between is the Holy Spirit, 'it generates a certain quality of charged intensity which from time to time marks every man's relationship with the world around him' (ibid, p. 8).

The core of these experiences of encounter is 'the mutual recognition of seer and seen', each having first recognised the absolute otherness of the other. Taylor calls these moments 'annunciations' and calls to mind 'the enraptured gaze of the angel and the Virgin, and the dove – symbol of the Holy Spirit spinning, as it were, the thread of attention between them' (ibid, p10 &11). These experiences are a kind of falling in love. Taylor writes 'we are falling in love at every turn, with a fold in the road, the mist over the lake...a new thought' (ibid). Through these temporal realities, we glimpse God's transcendence because between the 'seer and the seen' the Holy Spirit is present.

The Holy Spirit is the 'invisible third party who stands between me and the other', and through his power of communication, 'makes us mutually aware. Supremely and primarily he opens my eyes to Christ. But he also opens my eyes to the brother in Christ, or the fellow man, or the point of need, or the heart-breaking brutality and the equally heart-breaking beauty of the world' (ibid, p. 19).

3.4 Electric Moments – Moments of Transformation

In asking priests for 'electric moment' stories, I was asking them to tell me stories about their ministry that shake the heart because of their god-bearing, and transformational, quality. In doing so I had in mind an analogy from my own professional background.

Electric moments of transformation in psychoanalysis

I think there are parallels between what happens at electric, transformational moments in sacramental ministry and what happen at electric moments during a successful analysis. The difference lies in how these moments are understood and interpreted and the language used to describe them.

Jung describes the process in alchemical terms: patient and analyst are co-joined in the alchemical vessel of the analysis with its special boundaries of time and space. Intense heat to the relationship is applied in the form of frequent analytic sessions that facilitate the patient going deeply into the truth of who he is, and why. If all goes well and the intensity builds up, something new and often astonishing occurs. At that moment, both analyst and patient are changed. Jung writes, 'the conflict between the opposites can strain our psyche to the breaking point...no solution can be seen. If all goes well, the solution, seemingly of its own accord, appears out of nature. Then and only then is it convincing' (Jung, 1985, p. 367).

The analyst midwifes the new-born insight or self-understanding by identifying it and interpreting it within a theoretical framework, together with knowledge of the patient's psyche and personal history. Thus the new understanding can be integrated into the patient's psyche and something changes. In a successful treatment, many such transformational moments occur, and as they accumulate, the personality develops and blossoms, a process Jung calls individuation, 'whereby a person becomes himself, whole, indivisible and distinct from other people or collective psychology' (Samuels, 1986, p.76).

The analyst desires the patient's personality to ripen in the crucible of the analytic relationship and for this to propel him or her into a more wholehearted, rich and fulfilling life in the external world. These ideas are developed at length in Casement (1985), Adler (1979) and Storr (1979).

Electric moments in ministry

The priest will interpret the 'electric moments' I am examining in this thesis in terms of a theological rather than a Jungian analytic world-view and will understand the transformation that can occur within the profound, intense sacramental relationship as spiritual, rather than psychological, using religious language to describe and mediate it.

A fruitful sacramental encounter, therefore, feels the same, but it is different, because the human flourishing it facilitates is expressed in terms of salvation and entry into the kingdom of God. The dynamics of the two processes feel virtually indistinguishable, but there is a key difference, as Paul Tillich discerns: 'depth psychology can liberate, but psychological therapy as such cannot 'save' the centre of the personality: it cannot cure or save in an absolute sense' (Tillich, 1980(1954), p.175).

Jung clearly saw a near identity between what happens in the two processes. He wrote that when this sort of transformation occurs in the consulting room, it 'is felt as 'grace'' (Jung, 1958, p. 367).

One thing seems clear: no matter what we call them - epiphanies, disclosure moments, annunciations, 'ahaa' moments, electric moments, transformational moments – these are moments of import. They 'shock' us - they feel 'charged' and 'high-voltage' - we feel in sudden and unexpected contact with something new and other than ourselves that seems to come from outside. Whether we experience these moments as God bearing, deepening our relationship with him, or as insight bearing, taking us more deeply into ourselves in a process of individuation, they open up for people the possibility of flourishing and seem to require a response and the kind of response we make changes things.

The quest for transformational spiritual experience

The quest for transformational spiritual experience outside of organised religion is not new and those who describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', are the heirs of a philosophical tradition of which William James is the greatest exponent in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. This is primarily a work of empirical psychology, but written in a lively, informal and sometimes humorous style. He observes and presents an enormous range of people's first-hand accounts of their religious experiences, all of which occurred outside the context of organised religion. His intention is to describe scientifically what he calls, 'religious feelings and religious impulses' (James, 1902, (1982), p. 3). Similar to some of the views expressed by spiritual, but not religious people, quoted above by Fuller, James saw religious institutions as compromisers of the religious impulse and therefore unable to mediate the spirit. In his view organised religion stifles the kind of private spiritual experiences he was tracing and tracking in his work. He wanted to produce 'a true

record of the inner experience of great-souled persons wrestling with the crises of their fate' (ibid, p.5).

In the opinion of a contemporary reviewer, 'James set forth religious phenomena in terms of those who experienced them, and thus helped present a mass of testimony to the power of religious belief upon the heart and life of man' (ibid, p. xvii). Although he had 'no living sense of commerce with God himself' James writes 'there is something in me which makes response when I hear utterances from that quarter made by others, I recognise the deeper voice' (ibid, p. xxiv).

Others have followed the path forged by James, but the spiritual tradition he is observing remains one with which theology and organised religion struggle. James Loder, himself a philosopher of religion and a psychologist, suggests that 'theology has not been able to supply understanding, comprehension, and an adequate language for what takes place in these convincing moments of transformation' (Loder, 1989. P.19). He sets out to explore the relationship between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. He writes that our modern era of spirituality requires new way of thinking – thinking that 'interprets transforming moments in their own right' (ibid, p. xi). From a devotional starting point, Loder sets out to offer his interpretation of these transforming moments by carefully developing an explanation based on transformational logic which he claims is the universal structure of convictional knowing.

However sympathetically both James and Loder are examining these transformational moments, they both do so from the outside, looking in and then they use the analytic methods of science and philosophy to interpret what is going on.

In contrast, my thesis gets up close to practice – the priest/participants who have experienced these 'electric' moments tell me their stories, together we reflect

on these moments of transformation in their own right, and then ponder on their meaning for the individual priest. This process takes place within the overarching context of the liberal catholic Anglican tradition, a world-view shared by participants and researcher.

4. EMBARKING ON THE RESEARCH

As I embark on the research journey, I shall first outline the aims of the research. I shall then discuss my approach and values as a researcher, because these clearly have had an impact on data gathering.

4.1 Aims of the Research

- To excavate and enquire into the current practice of sacramental ministry within the liberal catholic Anglican tradition through the lens of 'electric moment' stories about ministry told to me by priests.
- To articulate the sacramental model of ministry as it is practised today in order to explore its transformational potential and continuing value and importance for the mission of the church.
- To imagine the tradition forward by looking at the possible implications of my findings for future practice.

4.2 Approach and Values

In this thesis my overall approach to gathering and analysing the research material from interviewees has tended to be appreciative rather than critical. This is partly because, in a sense, I am an 'insider' who comes from the same liberal catholic Anglican tradition as my interviewees. However, at the same time, as a lay-person/researcher I am also an 'outsider', looking in on the clerical world. Conducting the research journey as a participant/observer and finding the balance between 'insider' and 'outsider', was sometimes difficult to achieve.

Also, I was using an interview model based in part on the intimate style of a psychoanalytic session and so an emphasis on the subjective was inevitably built into the methodology of my research.

Although I share many of the religious values of my interviewees, it should not be assumed this means we are all members of a kind of liberal catholic Anglican club who simply take for granted its implicit world-view. My literature review makes clear that the shared values of the tradition are mediated via practices and texts that are available to be tested and explored.

The liberal catholic Anglican tradition is a given part of the framework within which I conducted the research. Although it would have been an interesting project to give a critical account of the liberal catholic Anglican tradition, this is not what I set out to do. Within the framework of this tradition, as described in the literature review, I was interested in investigating a particular, key practice in contemporary ministry, describing it and then pushing it forward.

Inevitably my subjectivity, values and approach will have influenced the research process: total objectivity, even in quantitative research, is something of a myth. Perhaps I could have taken a more self-critical approach and tried to make these influences more explicit in order for the reader to be clearer about their potential impact on the research. However, I have tried to be as clear as possible about where I'm coming from, both personally and as a researcher, without distracting the reader too much from the main purpose of the research.

Once acknowledged subjectivity is no impediment to the conduct of 'proper research'. Indeed Hunt (2009) suggests that 'subjectivity and self-understanding are critical to well executed field-work'. He recommends the researcher utilises a 'synthesis of ethnographic methods which incorporate psychoanalytic tools of interpretation, such as transference and counter-transference' to facilitate affective ways of knowing (Clarke 2009 p3).

The psycho-social method of research that I use in this thesis is such a synthesis. The approach is 'something quite distinct more an attitude or position

towards the subject(s) of study rather than just another methodology.....psycho-social research can be seen as a cluster of methodologies which point to a distinct position, that of researching beneath the surface and beyond the purely discursive' (ibid p2). Psycho-social researchers take seriously the need to understand the 'role of the interviewer in the production and analysis of data....the unconscious inter-subjective dynamics' in the interview relationship, and the defences that exist in the research environment – both researcher and researched are all participants in the process (Holloway 2000 p24).

As a researcher I was engaged throughout the process in sustained self-reflection on my methods and practice, my emotional involvement in the research, and on the affective relationship between the research subjects and myself. This was achieved by journaling, in conversation with my supervisors and also by having a psychoanalytic lens through which to view what had gone on.

Clarke asks, 'what better discipline to deepen our understanding of reflexivity than psychoanalysis' (Clarke, 2009, p. 8). Certainly counter-transference provided a useful and subtle way of getting down to the truth. This is the idea that in an encounter with a patient (or research subject) the feelings engendered in the analyst actually belong to the patient. This enables a subjective approach to objectivity and as such provides a way of knowing when something is coming from the other and not from oneself. The results of such a process can be tested in supervision, or in a researcher peer group.

Using reflexivity in this way means there is an increase in the attention paid to researcher subjectivity in the research process, 'a focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am and how I feel affect the data collection and analysis' (Pillow 2003 p176). This means accepting and acknowledging that how knowledge is acquired, organised and interpreted is relevant to the claims the

researcher makes. 'Without this kind of self-scrutiny of the ethnographic and qualitative texts we produce as researchers, how can the researcher truly represent another? The question would always be, 'whose story is it – the researcher's or the researched?'" (ibid).

Illustration 1

In the light of the theoretical discussion above, I want to briefly illustrate how insufficient self-awareness of a blind-spot of my own may have adversely affected the outcome of one of my interviews. I turn to Vivienne's story (see 7.6).

As the reader will observe, Vivienne, unlike all the other interviewees, did not fully enter into the interview process and use it as a way to move on in her thinking in dialogue with me. In terms of her theological reticence, Vivienne was coming from a different place from me and I felt she was resistant, rather than receptive, to my interventions. Rapport was difficult to construct and conduct and my own way of thinking made it difficult for me in my encounter with difference in this interview. Vivienne would not engage with me up close in the interview and was distanced from both her own material and from the interview process: she had not read the research information sheet carefully nor had she re-read her story material in preparation for the interview.

In this interview with Vivienne my own values led me to step outside the role of disinterested researcher into that of interrogating colleague, I shifted to debate with her rather than explore the meanings she was giving to her story and in consequence, we reached a frustrating and disappointing impasse. I think it is clear that my approach led Vivienne to become uncomfortable and anxious and consequently a 'defended subject' (Holloway p4). In such a mind-set it is difficult for people to talk and think about things.

At the conclusion of the interview, I too felt anxious, fearing that I may have been aggressive in my questioning. After reflecting on the interview in my research journal, and discussing it with my supervisor, I came to the conclusion that although I had been somewhat dogged in my questioning, I had not been aggressive. A counter-transference interpretation of what had felt like my own aggressive feelings during the interview would be that these feelings belonged not to me, but to Vivienne: she had felt aggressive towards me.

In all the other interviews my approach led to openness – with Vivienne it was the opposite. I think now that by anxiously over-participating in the interview, I may have lost the perspective of observer and missed an opportunity to engage with Vivienne on her terms.

Illustration 2

Turning now to the analysis of the research material, I wonder whether unconscious subjective influences might have led me to be selective in what I attended to and what I didn't in the writing up. Was I perhaps led too much by what had interested me? For example, in terms of the transcripts - when I pulled out themes, could I have been blind to certain themes in the data because they didn't fit?

The overall aim of my research is to value a unique tradition currently side-lined in the managerial culture of the Church of England and it may be that I am inclined to over-identify with the plight of priests in this tradition. In some ways the side-lining of liberal catholic Anglican priests by the Church of England parallels the current side-lining of psychoanalysts in a quick-fix culture that favours brief and behavioural therapies over depth psychotherapy. This demoralising, painful state of affairs for psychoanalysts might make me over-sensitive to the predicament of liberal catholic Anglican priests: I need to be aware of this and draw back any unhelpful projections I might be inclined to make.

I realise that my desire to affirm and value priests in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition makes it difficult for me to be aware of their flaws. In addition, most of my interviewees exemplify the positive aspects of priesthood in this tradition - all but one were scholars and as such probably unrepresentative of the tradition as a whole. Concentrating on the beauty and vibrancy of the material they presented may have led me to skate over flaws that are inherent in the wider community of liberal catholic Anglican priests.

I do not draw attention to the less positive aspects of priesthood in this tradition, for example the elitist sense some priests have of representing a special tradition and the complacency that results from this belief. Their attitude is one of passivity - there is no need to do anything differently because given time people will see how special this tradition is and it will be reinstated in its old, privileged position as the family religion of the nation. I do not tease out what it is that often makes priests in this tradition self-isolating and hesitant, failing to see, or perhaps not wanting to see, the connections that could be made – a disinclination to get out there and join in and offer hospitality to those outside the fold.

My desire to value the tradition perhaps led me in some instances to take an uncritical approach to the data. There were openings in my two interviews with Roger, for example, where I could have drawn attention to his self-isolation, when he spoke of his tendency to draw back from the civic connections of cathedral ministry into its monastic rhythms, where he felt more at home.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Stories as a Basis for the Research Investigation

I decided to base my investigation into contemporary sacramental ministry on stories about 'electric moments' in their ministry told to me by seven priests in the setting of research interviews. We all understood that the term electric moment was a metaphor for moments in ministry when the presence of God the Holy Spirit was palpable: moments that were potentially transformational for people. The paradigmatic electric moment stories I sent to research participants ahead of their story-telling interview, were intended to confirm a common understanding of what was meant by an electric moment story (see below 5.2).

Basing my inquiry on stories seemed a good idea for several reasons. Firstly, I hoped the reticence about speaking directly of the things of God, so entrenched in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition, could be circumvented by asking priests to tell stories. Priests feel at home within the idiom of storytelling. They are immersed in the scriptures and the Old Testament narratives, and the parabolic teachings of Jesus are familiar to them as daily instruments of scrutiny in the light of which to interrogate their own lives. In addition, theological training formed them to transmit the faith on a weekly basis through sermons that are often most effective when constructed around stories.

Constructive narrative theology

Secondly, by inviting priests to tell me electric moment stories about their ministry, and then reflect on them, I was introducing them to a form of theological reflection influenced by Constructive Narrative Theology and defined by Graham as a method that:

'Employs the creative potential people have to construct meaningful stories out of the varied circumstances of their lives. Such stories may have coherent form, understandable plots, establish the identity of the author...yet the meaning of a story always exceeds its functionality therefore such narratives also emphasise the mysterious and indefinable aspects of human experience' (Graham, 2005, p.47).

The stories Jesus told, and the actions he performed, often seemed straightforward, but a deeper reading reveals them to be 'shocking and difficult to interpret'. There is a parabolic quality to his ministry that is always surprising and is 'often reflected in the stories that believers tell about their own encounters with God...The threads from these foundational traditions are woven with many other strands into new stories which are vivid and original. They testify through diversity and particularity to a God who is known through the stories we tell, as individuals or communities, about experiences that have become revelatory to us' (ibid).

I hoped that reflecting on their electric moment stories with me, in a dynamic, dialogic interview might reveal to the priests how God's presence is woven into their contemporary narratives. I wanted to help them project from the experiences they describe and find language to speak about what they think is going on and what they think they are doing in their ministry. I was entering into a meaning-making process with them to help access a deeper, less conscious layer of meaning that is difficult to reach directly, but can be explored through story or analogy or metaphor.

The status of stories

Felman and Laub (1992) describe stories that 'penetrate us like an actual life', such as the ones told to me by priests about their electric moments, as 'life-testimonies' and listening to them, and turning them into text, as an 'act of bearing witness'

(Felman, 1992, p. 2). Felman and Laub are using the language of legal trials, where truth is arrived at by the alignment of witnesses.

Considered in this light my research task could be seen as twofold, 'bearing witness' to the stories told to me, and then making judgments about how sacramental ministry works for people in our day by assessing what Felman and Laub call, 'the alignment between witnesses' (ibid). For the purpose of the thesis it would involve my noticing the themes that emerge across the stories: the alignment between the stories the priest-story-tellers told.

Furthermore, Felman and Laub contend that giving testimony 'is a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of another, in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues, they cannot take place in solitude, they are spoken to somebody' (Felman, 1992, p. 70).

There is a parallel here with psychoanalysis. A psychoanalyst, trained in a particular way to listen to a patient's story, or 'life-testimony', is in exactly the same relationship to the patient as the one who bears witness to the testimony of another, as outlined by Felman and Laub.

In addition, the analyst has subtle, intuitive tools - the counter-transference in particular - for accurately discovering the meanings that lie below the surface of consciousness, or below the surface of the 'life-testimony' (ibid, p. 16).

Psychoanalytic theory rests on the belief that exploring at this level can generate new insights, understanding and transformation.

Felman and Laub seem to be making a similar claim here for the process of giving, and bearing witness, to testimony: 'the event to which the testimony points and which it attempts to comprehend and grasp, is enigmatically at once historical

and clinical. Is the testimony therefore a simple medium of historical transmission, or is it, in obscure ways, the unsuspected medium of healing?' (ibid)

They are saying here that somehow, the process of giving testimony, and having it attentively listened to by an appointed witness and turning that testimony into text, where it stands on record and can be reflected upon, is a process which can be transformative, or 'healing'. I would go further and say that this healing also takes place because the dialogic nature of the process itself begets new truths that are emotionally liberating.

Dori Laub, himself a psychoanalyst, makes the point well:

'With all the obvious and perhaps irreconcilable differences between these two perspectives, I find the process that is set in motion by psychoanalytic practice and by the testimony to be essentially the same, both in the narrator and in myself as listener (analyst or interviewer). From the clinical perspective, we can try to understand what is happening in the testimonial interviews in the technical, metaphorically approximate terms of a 'brief treatment contract': a contract between two people, one of whom is going to engage in a narration...through the unfolding of her life account. Implicitly the listener says to the testifier, 'for this limited time, throughout the duration of the testimony, I'll be with you all the way, as much as I can. I want to go wherever you go, and I'll hold and protect you along this journey. Then, at the end of the journey, I shall leave you"' (Felman, 1992, p. 70).

Parallels between the research process and the psychoanalytic process

Felman and Laub's account is helpful because it elucidates the similarity I had noticed between my role as researcher listening to the stories of priests, and as psychoanalyst listening to the stories of my patients: the two roles felt the same and this had seemed an important thing to have noticed.

Following Felman and Laub, it seems that the psychoanalytic tools that provide a way of knowing what is going on in the patient's unconscious are equally valid when seeking to understand a layer of meaning in stories that cannot be approached directly – whether we are thinking of 'life testimonies' or 'electric moment' stories. Psychoanalysis is a way of knowing that can bear scrutiny. Being attended to and understood at this level, whether as patient or priest/story-teller, is in itself a transformative and healing experience.

5.2 Two Examples of Electric Moment Stories

As mentioned above, before conducting the research interviews with the priests who had volunteered to take part, and hearing their 'electric moment' stories, I sent them two examples of the kind of thing I meant by an electric moment story to ensure that, without being too directive, we had at the outset a basic understanding in common. These priests had already identified themselves as those who had experienced electric moments in their ministry, and had told me they 'knew exactly what I meant' by the term. They were right, as I was to discover. I was very encouraged by this because it indicated that the transformational kernel at the heart of their ministry was alive and well and recognisable to them, despite the widespread despondency of their tradition.

The two 'electric moment' stories I sent priests prior to interview are different from each other. Sarah's story has a denouement which is so extraordinary in its bizarre synchronicity that it gives the listener a 'shock': a sense that this is just such a weird coincidence it must be an act of God. Andrew's story is more about an accumulation of gentle, warming moments of insight gradually leading him into a new inner landscape - no high-voltage 'shock' here, more of an electric blanket on a medium setting. The denouement of Andrew's story is a homecoming.

Sarah's story

One summer, Sarah spends a great deal of her time as an Assistant Curate in the Parish of Littlemore, closely attending to the needs of Steve, a desperate man in his late forties.

Steve has serious, immovable depression and a life that is broken in many different ways. He is unemployed, and although he takes no part in the life of the church community, he hangs around the church building each day asking for help.

During this particular summer, Sarah decides, with her incumbent's blessing, to give Steve special time, space and attention in the hope that this might shift his unremitting despair. She agrees to talk with him for an hour, three times a week in a room provided in a nearby convent and things begin to improve for Steve.

One day, during their conversation, Sarah asks Steve if he can remember any time in his life when he was genuinely and completely happy. He answers immediately that he can. He once did a parachute jump for charity and in that moment, when he was pushed out of the aeroplane and took flight, leaning into the wind and feeling the parachute bearing him up, he had known the most glorious ecstasy of his life. It was unforgettable.

Shortly after sharing this memory with Sarah, Steve decides to come along to the main Sunday Mass. He arrives late, crashing in through the west door and stopping short at the sight of Sarah. Just at that moment she is singing the Sarsum Corda and she turns from the altar, as if towards him, with her hands raised.

I saw you there, he tells her, when they next meet. You were parachuting.

Abridged from Sarah Coakley's essay, 'Prayer, Place and the Poor', in
Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture.

Andrew's story

Andrew Motion writes that along with a million others in Britain, his faith is in the ambivalent middle and he describes this as a 'place where faith flickers off and on like a badly wired lamp'.

The history he gives of his connection with the church shows it to be interwoven with the comfortable conventions of middle England: a village church, a C of E primary school and a secondary school and Oxford college, both with religious foundations and a pattern of daily worship in chapel.

Due to personal circumstances, Motion dropped his faith thirty years ago and fell into a 'benign agnosticism' punctuated with spurts of orthodoxy at times of crisis, and so it continued until recently. He writes, 'then I met a priest, I read a book by him, went to hear him preach, and soon afterwards became his friend. Up to this point, sermons had generally been the low point of my churchgoing life. Suddenly I was listening to talks that were clever and funny and moving, and that made me think about things I hadn't thought about before. Or hadn't thought about for a long time, and then not in quite the same way..... I realised that while he drew me forward into new ways of thinking, he also reconnected me with things in my past. Specifically, he matched my much sharper sense of mortality with the feelings of settled-ness and connection which I had known as a child'.

Précis of an article by Andrew Motion, 'I've Seen the Light and it Flickers on and off', *The Times newspaper*, 18.12.2010.

Choosing suitable methods of research to enquire into the electric moment stories

The aims of my research, as previously stated were to enquire into the current practice of sacramental ministry through the lens of 'electric moment' stories told to me by priests, and to articulate this model and explore its transformational potential and continuing value and importance for the mission of the church.

Given these aims I needed to identify the methods of research most appropriate to achieve them. I was trying to explore something rather intangible and difficult to access because it is embedded in the routines of everyday practice. Therefore I needed to find methods appropriate to these challenges.

The qualitative research methods I used were:

- Free association interviews
- Eliciting stories,
- Offering opportunities for self-reflection,
- Drawing on my experience as a psychoanalyst
- Conducting a thematic analysis of the data

5.3 Constructing the Interview Model

Following on from Felman and Laub, and from my own observation that when conducting the pilot research interview I had felt exactly the same as when conducting an analytic session, I wondered whether the structure and techniques of the analytic method that facilitate personal transformation in analysis could be helpfully replicated in some way in my approach to the research interviews.

I decided to develop my research method by borrowing aspects of the analytic model in the setting up and design of my research interviews. I tried to recreate the intimacy and creative tension of the analytic container that is so conducive to relational intensity, as people share their precious personal stories. I also used adaptations of analytic techniques to 'interpret', and 'work through' the material contained in the stories, and the priests' reflections on them.

5.4 Transposing the Psychoanalytic Technique

During the dialogic research interview, just as in analysis, I made interpretations. That is, I elucidated meaning in the material over and above that given to it by the priest I was interviewing (Rycroft, 1968, p. 76). These interpretations come out of a place of intuitive knowing and their authentication lies in practice: do they generate new thoughts and fresh currents of dialogue, bringing more insights which in turn have a therapeutic effect?

This is exactly what happened in the research interview setting and meant that the data gathering and interpretation were conflated into a democratic process rather than my doing it afterwards. This method was exciting, dynamic and immediate: as researcher I was part of a co-operative process. The living quality of the method chimed in with my experience of the unpredictable, generative quality of conducting the interviews (Hoggett, 2010).

The analytic technique of 'working through' material was particularly fruitful in the reflective interviews. Working through is 'the process by which a patient in analysis discovers piecemeal over an extended period of time the full implications of some interpretation or insight' (ibid, p. 179). Obviously, the long process of working through that takes place in an analysis had to be adapted to fit the two-interview model of my research interviews. Nevertheless, it was a useful way to think about the process of priests telling their stories to another - often for the first time, and

therefore generative in itself - receiving and pondering a transcript of this story-telling interview, and then reflecting on, and thinking about, the transcript with the researcher in a second interview – which was a kind of working through.

New insights came out of this process, and their implications discussed. There was an emphasis on pointing up and furthering what had come to light or been learned: how could the new insights about their ministry, born out of the research process, be ploughed into the priests' future practice? This kind of generative thinking was enriching and transformative.

Conducting the research process, just as when conducting an analysis, I became personally engaged in an unpredictable process that had the potential to change me. In both cases I needed to keep in mind the dance between being identified with the material, and dis-identified, in order to undertake its analysis.

5.5 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes a data set in (rich) detail' (Braun, 2006, p. 79) and is a flexible way of thematising meanings. The researcher always plays an 'active role in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers' (ibid).

Braun and Clarke point out that it is important to acknowledge 'our own theoretical position and values in relation to qualitative research'. These writers do not subscribe to the 'naïve realist view of qualitative research, where the researcher can simply 'give voice to their participants' (ibid). I undertook the research journey as a person with the skills and professional expertise of a theologically trained psychoanalyst with very specific research aims in mind. I also belong to the same religious tradition as the priests I was researching, so I had an emotional connection

to the material and a vested interest in showing the importance and continuing relevance of the liberal catholic Anglican tradition for people today.

6. UNDERTAKING THE RESEARCH

6.1 Pilot Interview

Adjustments to the interview process

In advance of the research interviews, I conducted a pilot interview which resulted in two adjustments being made to the original research proposal (Part B).

In the original, the focus of the reflective part of the interview centred on examining how the priests had furthered the 'electric moments' featured in the stories at the time when they occurred. I wrote, 'I shall help them to explore and articulate what happened and whether and in what ways they feel the potential of the electric moment was realised. Did the priests feel that the transformational potential of the moment was awakened through the medium of their theologically attuned, prayerful, priestly presence? Did people's lives change?'

Although the story telling part of the pilot interview went ahead well, conducting the reflective part of the interview was not straight forward. I did not feel I was asking the right questions to get at what I wanted. Considering it afterwards with my supervisor, I realised I had set myself an enormously complex task: I needed to be clearer and simpler in terms of the reflective focus. I saw that my main focus should not primarily be on the stories the priests told me, but on the priest-story-tellers themselves and on the particular kind of generativity or otherwise of their sacramental ministry.

The transformational potential I was investigating was not so much in the lives of the characters involved in the electric moment stories, as in the lived experiences of the priests themselves, shown through the medium of their stories. I was interested in the meaning of the stories for them and the impact these stories had on the priests' understanding of their ministry.

This adjustment to the research process meant that the stories became grounded starting points out of which wider vistas of thought about their priesthood could open up for the priests during the reflective part of the interview: they themselves became the primary object of my inquiry.

The second adjustment I made was to offer two research interviews to each priest-story-teller, rather than one. I realised in discussion with my supervisor that one interview with each participant provided insufficient time and space to contain both the story and the reflection. This proved much better: I interviewed most of my subjects twice and, in one case, three times. Two did not want a second interview.

Parallel process

I also noticed during the pilot interview that the interview process itself was having an impact on the interviewee, he seemed to find telling his story liberating and was animated by the emphasis on self-awareness and reflection, and the way this generated new insights. It was as if through the liveliness of the dialogic exchange, something got enacted between us that made the interview an event in itself. I wondered if this might be so for other interviewees, and that the experience of the interview process itself might impact in some way on the ministry of the interviewees. Could there be a kind of parallel process operating here where the research interview was mimetic of the process that went on in the electric moment story?

The experience of doing the pilot interview resulted in insights that were significant in terms of refocussing exactly what I wanted to discover, generating new thoughts, and adjusting the interview process accordingly.

6.2 Psycho-social Narrative Research Method

Reflecting in my research journal on the pilot interview material, I began to realise that the qualitative research methods with which I was familiar were not designed to excavate the subtle layers of material that the interview process promised to reveal, both in terms of each case taken as a whole, and across all the cases. I needed to find an additional, rigorous and reliable way to investigate the data at this level that would do justice to its complexity, satisfy the requirement of objectivity, and simultaneously preserve the integrity and 'sacredness' of the stories entrusted to me.

A conversation with a psychoanalytic colleague, Paul Hoggett, who is also Director of the Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at the University of the West of England, proved serendipitous. I told him my dilemma about how to find a way to work with the wide-ranging, deep and complex data that was beginning to be generated in the research interviews.

My way of working dialogically with participants over more than one interview, and the fact that I had noticed how working in this way as a researcher felt much the same as working as an analyst, was enough for my colleague to suspect that I was intuitively working with what he terms 'a free association psycho social narrative research method'. As a psychoanalytic psychotherapist himself, Paul Hoggett has used this research method extensively and developed it with colleagues. The method is psychoanalytically inspired, but also 'congruent with the democratic values and experiences of those who were being researched. The validity of the psycho-social method to some extent hangs on the capacity of the researcher to share his or her thinking with the interviewees and involve them in a joint process of sense making' (Hoggett, 2010, p.173). Clarke and Hoggett (2009) describe the psycho-social approach as 'more an attitude, or position, towards the

subjects...that of researching beneath the surface and beyond the purely discursive. In other words, to consider the unconscious communications, dynamics and defences that exist in the research environment' (Clarke, 2009, p. 2). These ideas have been helpful and enriching in terms of giving a theoretical underpinning to the research method I was instinctively moving towards as a kind of synthesis of my professional skills and personal involvement with the material.

One of common factors that felt of significance to me, working as both analyst and researcher was that during the dialogic interview, just as in analysis, I was making interpretations. In both settings, when interpretations resonate with the inner experience of the other, they generate new thoughts and fresh currents of dialogue, bringing more insights which in turn have a therapeutic effect. This is exactly what happened in the research interviews, which meant that the data gathering and data interpretation were conflated into a democratic process, rather than me doing the interpretation afterwards.

This was one of the most exciting things about this method; its dynamic, co-operative, here-and-now-ness matched my experience of the unpredictable, generative quality of conducting the research interviews. I felt well qualified to work in this way. Some of the tools used in psychoanalysis to both make interpretations and maintain objectivity – transference, counter-transference and reflexivity, could also count as a rigorous, objective approach in the psycho-social research context. As Paul Hoggett comments about his own work,

'We felt that (a) distinction between analysis and production of data was untenable and flew in the face of all we knew about the co-produced nature of an interview. Researchers cannot but 'think into the encounter' and their thinking necessarily assumes the form of interpretations, a kind of 'thinking aloud' (Hoggett, 2010, p. 176).

The sophistication of this method circumvents the charge of naivety that can be levelled at research methods that 'give voice' to research subjects, trusting that they are 'telling it like it is', and the peer pressure to go along with this:

'Neither selves nor accounts are transparent...Treating people's own accounts as unproblematic flies in the face of what is known about people's less clear-cut, more confused and contradictory relationship to knowing and telling about themselves. In everyday formal dealings with each other, we do not take each other's accounts at face value, unless we are totally naïve; we question, disagree, bring in counter-examples, interrupt, notice hidden agendas. Research is only a more formalised and systematic way of knowing about people, but in the process it seems to have lost much of the subtlety and complexity that we use, often as a matter of course, in everyday knowing. We need to bring some of this everyday subtlety into the research process' (Holloway, 2000, p. 3).

6.3 The Research Journey

In order to find liberal catholic Anglican priests willing to tell me their stories, I started on home ground with people known to me. I invited priest colleagues on the doctor of practical theology degree, and others known to me through my work with clergy in Bristol, to share their stories in a research context.

Over several weeks, I asked the priests I met if they could remember, and would like to tell me stories about, 'electric moments' in their ministry; moments of grace, when God's presence had been palpable. Almost without exception, people said something like, 'I know exactly what you mean! I can immediately think of something!' It would not be an exaggeration to say that priests were clamouring to tell me their stories. I was interested by this, but not actually surprised. I have often noticed when treating clergy patients how deprived they seem to be of time and opportunity to think and talk deeply and reflectively about their own feelings and

experiences; they are so accustomed to being receptive to others. Given the space and holding that the analytic container offers for thinking about feelings and feeling ones thoughts, clergy are invariably wonderfully responsive patients.

I already knew all of my interviewees professionally and they were well disposed towards me and my research goal. They saw me as 'on their side'. Moreover, I tried to create a safe, holding environment by conducting each interview on the interviewee's own patch. I familiarised myself before the interview with each priest's work context by joining them and immersing myself in their ministry for half a day. This meant that I drew alongside my interviewees before conducting the interview, and after the interview I invited each one to share a meal with me as thanks for their co-operation, time and thought.

I was asking priests to share intimate, 'sacred' material with me, in trust that it would be respected, valued and not harmed in any way. In most cases their stories had not been previously shared.

From the group willing to take part in the research, I arranged seven one-hour interviews and four informal research conversations. An information sheet (Appendix 1) outlining the project and containing the two paradigmatic 'electric moment' stories was sent to participants in advance. The first interview was a pilot interview.

In free association interviews I invited the interviewees to tell me their 'electric moment' stories; I asked them 'what happened?' and then facilitated the unfolding of their story – some needed more facilitating than others. In the pilot interview, telling the story took up the whole hour, so there was not much time and space left to reflect together on what had been said, and the interview went considerably over the allotted time. The story-telling was a surprisingly emotional and draining experience for both the story-teller and for me. I think this was because

the material was so spiritually powerful, and the interviews had added intensity because they followed several hours' immersion together in the interviewee's ministerial setting.

As previously outlined, reflecting with my supervisor on the pilot led to the decision to interview each subject twice. The first interview involved the priest telling his/her story; I transcribed the interview, sent it to the interviewee and a second, more reflective and dialogic interview followed. In this interview we discussed what had occurred to us both when reading and pondering the transcript of the first interview. I was particularly interested in furthering the material in terms of theological reflection, helping priests to make connections between the stories they told and their own biographies and ministerial contexts.

The two priests who did not take up the offer of a second interview are both writers with highly developed story-telling skills. In his first interview, one of these priests was able to reflect, articulate and draw out meanings, whilst at the same time integrating these thoughts into his story-telling. However, having read their transcripts, both felt they had nothing further to add. I understood this but was disappointed because the material in both cases was exceptionally rich and I was keen to see how it might develop in a second dialogic interview after we had both digested the first interview material.

I endeavoured to keep the interviews well contained in accordance with my methodology, but from the outset I needed to improvise and respond individually to my interviewees; semi structured interviews became unstructured, two interviews became one, one interviewee had a third interview...It was as if the material just kept bursting out in unpredictable ways, overflowing the empirical method and continually demanding of me new responses and a reshaping of the container in order to do justice to my subjects and their material. On reflection I can see that it

could not have been otherwise: the material people were sharing with me was alive with the dynamic and capricious energy of the Holy Spirit that was animating their stories. This was exciting because it was exactly this renewing vital energy I was trying to capture in my research analysis.

Telling these stories proved to be powerful for us all. Priests wept as they remembered and recounted stories of grace-filled encounters that went back, twenty, thirty or even forty years - stories that in most cases had been previously untold. They were sharing grace-filled moments of great beauty that in the telling they realised, maybe for the first time, had been seminal to their ministry.

7. PORTRAITS OF THE PRIEST/STORY TELLERS AND THEIR STORIES

This section introduces the seven priests I interviewed. All names have been changed. My comments follow each portrait.

7.1 Mick

Mick is a single priest in his mid-fifties, a Canon with experience of working both as a university chaplain, where he nurtured the vocations of several future priests, and as a parish priest, serving an urban community. Mick is currently Bishop's adviser for Continuing Ministerial Education (CME) in a large diocese in the Midlands. He is a published poet, has written several creative, biblical commentaries and also edited anthologies of poetry that reflect the rhythms of the church year and are designed to be read alongside the lectionary.

I got to know Mick as a fellow student on the Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT) course, so we met for the research interview at his home as friends who have talked together before. Mick was one of the interviewees who declined a second interview. I think this was because he uses theological reflection so much in both his daily work, and his personal devotional life, that he is adept at weaving together narrative and reflection; indeed, his ability to do so made this an outstandingly rich interview.

Mick works with clergy both in groups and one to one: 'a lot of my role is to work with them at the core of what inspires and ignites their own vocational work'. However, personal conflict can arise for Mick, in his CME role, in terms of the time he wants to give to clergy formation, and the time he is required to spend supplying clergy with management training, 'how much time do you dare to give over to prayer and worship....rather than doing power-point presentations?.... I think perhaps in a kind of skills based culture, you know, people want to know your skills for the job,

whereas, I suppose, the roots of my vocation are sort of pre-rational, rooted in the sense of God's love of me'. He conceded that 'often people desperately need those kinds of management skills, but I'm always slightly hesitant about those solutions, because they seem to me one dimensional. But I'm not saying if only someone had the right kind of experience sacramentally, then their admin would automatically get better!'

Mick regrets that he is not working with his curates within a more explicitly sacramental structure, and he reflected that the absence of 'sacramental intimacy', which seems to go with the job, had been a personal sacrifice for him as a priest. 'Maybe that is one of the frustrations of the job for me, that all the actual sacramental interaction is done largely by the bishops, I do the pastoral and development work.'

Mick's electric moment story

'One of the most formative experiences for me as a disciple - and as a priest - happened early in my life, I wouldn't have been much more than three. I went to church with my grandmother, not to a service, but to clean the church. It was a large building, an historic church in a market town in the Welsh marshes, where my family comes from.

All the ladies were busy doing brass cleaning and dusting and hoovering and I was just allowed to kind of roam about, all by myself. Because it was a cleaning party, all the special boundaries of a great church like that, in terms of the chancel and the sanctuary, were all suddenly relaxed, and I was allowed to wander, not only into the chancel, but into the sanctuary beyond the brass communion rail.

I knew this was special...as you entered the sanctuary, you moved up the steps and into a carpeted area. Everything was more beautiful there, more colourful, more glorious, in a way, so I entered into that area. I wandered up feeling, as little

children do, the sense of being absolutely captivated, and a sense of wonder as I stood before the altar...just feeling an overwhelming sense of God's presence, of being held and being loved and of this sense of being regarded by God as a person. A quality of experience that, in some ways, I haven't had since. Just an absolute closeness...intensity, light, warmth and almost like a bending over or a bending towards....of a vast and grand person...towards me as a little one..... and I think there are lots of biblical resonances to this sort of experience, perhaps in particular, in the psalms.

It was a sense of being loved, but not in the same sense as by a parent or lover, it was almost of a great person, or great artist, or a great composer, actually leaning over and saying, 'that's very beautiful!' It was of somebody of great worth indicating worth in me. That sense of good-will transferred, or connected with, the whole role of my becoming a priest. It's very interesting it happened in the sanctuary! That's so Old Testament! And it blends with the New Testament, Zachariah, you know, having that experience in the sanctuary, but coming out speechless. I think there is a kind of speechlessness about it, because it's very hard to describe.....the intensity.'

Comment

Although most of the priest/interviewees alluded to electric moments in their own personal lives, when telling me stories of electric moments in their ministry to others, Mick was one of only two who focussed the interview primarily on their own electric moment. Mick's account of this momentous experience of God's presence in his life when just a child, and the language he uses to describe it, resonates with the calling out of some of the prophets, but others too in the classical tradition - St Augustine, John Bunyan, George Muller, for example. Indeed, Mick draws attention to the

biblical resonances himself: a great, grand, awe-inspiring God from 'out there' reveals himself and claims the allegiance of a life.

Mick talks here about an experience of God's presence he had 50 years ago, and his story reaches further back in time than any other of the electric moment stories I heard. At about the same time as the infant Mick had this experience, John Robinson published *Honest to God* (1963), a book that 'radically questioned the established religious frame' by suggesting, with Freud, that a 'god out there' may be a projection, and belief in this kind of old man in the sky might actually cut modern, questioning people off from encountering the gospel.

Robinson clearly hit a nerve in the contemporary culture: *Honest to God* went into six editions in the year it was published. Robinson brought to light the 'growing gulf between the traditional orthodox supernaturalism in which our faith has been framed and the categories which the 'lay' world...finds meaningful today' and he argued that 'the guardians of traditional orthodoxy (had) all but rendered impossible the true defence of the gospel' (Robinson, 1963, p. 8-9).

I am interested that Mick's fifty year old electric moment story speaks out of a memory that is so explicitly framed by the super-naturalist world view that was being questioned at that time within the radical wing of the church.

In his current CME role Mick is conflicted. His own sense of God's presence and his longing to share this in 'sacramental intimacy' with the clergy for whom he is responsible, is to some extent thwarted by the managerial demands of his 'job'. He is required to train, rather than form, these clergy- teaching them skills rather than working with what 'ignites their vocation' in the light of God's love. Mick's frustration at being unable to fully exercise his sacramental vocation in these circumstances, gives a picture of the current Church of England in microcosm. Mick clearly feels that faithfulness to his sacramental roots in his current training role is subversive

when he asks, 'how much time do you *dare* (my italics) give over to prayer and worship rather than doing power-point presentations?'

7.2 Derek

Derek is a married priest, aged sixty seven, with a grown-up family and supportive wife. He has been a priest in an inner-city parish for over twenty years following two substantial incumbencies. He maintains strong emotional links with his Cornish roots. He is a racing man: a day at the races, he says, 'replenishes him'.

Throughout his ministry, Derek has struggled to find and articulate his identity as a liberal catholic, Anglican priest. He trained at an evangelical theological college where he found the churchmanship a mismatch.

I am well-acquainted with Derek. We have worked together on several projects and he has been a long-time, enthusiastic member of a Balint-style support group that I facilitate for clergy in the Diocese of Bristol (Travis 2004). He was the only interviewee to request a third interview which took place.

Derek was at theological college before theological reflection became a component of training for the priesthood, and he found the reflective, research interview process built on his experience of the Balint-Style group, and enabled him to unlock layers of meaning in his electric moment story. It also provided him with a tool to think about his ministry and, most importantly, to continue to find language with which to voice his thoughts.

When we met for the first interview, Derek's electric moment story was still current: it told of a challenge to his church at its weakest point, and how meeting this challenge brought renewal, in an 'amazing' way, to both the church community and Derek's priesthood. Derek's dearest hope for twenty years has been for his inward-looking church congregation to break open in generous hospitality towards

the wider community. At last that seems to be happening before his eyes, and in a most unexpected way.

The joy and fulfilment this has brought to the lives of Derek and his wife has led them to postpone their intended retirement for another three years, until Derek turns seventy.

Derek's electric moment story

'I decided to tell you about a girl called Pippa. Pippa has given us at our church a very necessary sea-change. When she first came she was in recovery from being an alcoholic, she came to the local Alcoholics Anonymous in our church hall. She was probably only twenty seven or twenty eight years old, but she appeared to be forty five. She was in a very poor condition; very quiet, very badly cared for, and quite dirty in a way: someone who presented a string of insoluble needs, really. She never came much on Sundays, but she did come to our Wednesday morning communion, which has coffee after it: so she would come to that, and sit quietly and really she made very little impact or contribution, for want of a better word, at all. She would appear to get better, then disappear, slip back on the bottle and then reappear. It was a pattern that established itself over several years. There was never really the opportunity for very much dialogue at all, certainly not of any coherence, not because she was drunk, but just that was the way it was, you know.

'Respectable' people in the church expressed their concern when Pippa got friendly with Connie, an old lady in the congregation who she would sit with, and chat to, on a Wednesday morning after coffee – 'respectable' people worried that this wasn't good for Connie, although Connie never made any complaints.

Time went by, and we began a monthly healing service on Tuesday evenings - it's a very simple, straightforward Eucharist, with healing - the laying on of hands and anointing. It's very quiet and gentle, usually eight or nine people that

come. To one of these services, out of the blue, turned up Pippa! She just had a few words after the service and promptly disappeared and wasn't seen again. We heard no more of her until sometime in March or April last year, when somebody, a friend of hers, phoned up to say that Pippa had died. They knew she had contact with the church and they wondered if they could have a memorial service for her at our church.

Pippa was just found dead. She was thirty three. There didn't appear to be any complications, and it wasn't suicide – something just seems to have happened that she died. It was awful. Her family live somewhere in Somerset and the funeral took place down there. It was discovered that there was a son, who was somewhere in his teens.

No more than six of her friends were invited to attend the funeral, so could they have this memorial service? And could they arrange it themselves, but would I go and see them and just chat about some of the options that might be open to them? So I went to this amazing place, up a lane I didn't know existed, to a cottage that reeked of whacky baccy, with a gypsy caravan in the garden...all sorts of strange things, and in this bizarre setting, I talked to these people, who seemed like gypsies really, and were busy arranging a memorial service for their friend...in a church!

One way and another, we did actually devise a memorial service, and when I asked how many people there would be, I was told, 'it could be twenty, it could be a hundred and fifty, we have no idea!' And I kind of took it with a pinch of salt, really.

Well one or two of us at the church had a chat about it, and we decided, you know, to take this on-board seriously as a community. We made it known, and we discovered that among the people who came to the mid-week Eucharist, she was actually much more remembered and well thought of than we had given her credit

for, and there were people who were quite upset and so on. So we planned a memorial service that actually included a committal...I thought people would need it.

Time went on and they put a great deal of effort into the whole thing. I really began to feel - for the first time... and as you know, I have been at my church for a very long time! But I really began to feel that something was happening that was putting the church inside the skin of the community in a way that it hadn't been before. My twenty years of ministry there have been marked by all sorts of pastoral reorganisation, building projects, selling off buildings, plans etc. But the whole thing of actually finding our way into the community itself, had never really happened, and it was a source of great frustration.

So it's astonishing, you see!

They wanted to bring flowers and they wanted to bring tokens and all sorts and kinds of things to this memorial service.....and we said 'Yes' to everything! We said 'Yes' to everything! The net result was that we had this remarkable memorial service with probably 150 people and one dog, which lasted three quarters of an hour. There were reminiscences, a couple of well-known hymns, and just the observation from me that we needed to see what was happening in the context of the whole of Pippa's life, and in the way that God saw her, and not the way other people saw her, you know.

What was very interesting was that they produced a large photograph, which they put on the altar, of Pippa in what could be called her 'glory days', and she was a very attractive person, far removed from the person that we had seen coming along.

People stayed around and chatted for a bit after the memorial service and then off they went. Those of us from the church just stood looking at each other and saying, 'goodness! What was all that about, then?' It was absolutely amazing. It was

amazing because we had this beautiful image in front of us of Pippa, which of course chimed in with what I was trying to say about how God saw her. I was anxious to communicate that God's love is inclusive, which is exactly the kind of message I also wanted to give the church.

We'd had this beautiful, beautiful Saturday afternoon and we'd had this amazing mix of people... quite an astonishing mix of people, actually, who had just made their way there.

I realised that even after all those years of ministry, I can justify those years in terms of the on-going story of the church...I realised on that day, that if we were going to become a real sort of community, a local church, then we had to stand with arms out stretched towards all sorts and kinds of people, and not be surprised by what comes our way. I really connected with that. If we were going to do that, that's where we needed to put our energies and there was a great deal of risk attached to that...because you are never sure what is going to happen!

Significantly in the story of the church, the church is moving on...Pippa's story was the kind of lead into all that, and if it was written into the story of the church, in ten years' time say, it will be seen as very, very significant. It's a very powerful story. Despite the forceful voices in the church that at the time wanted us to hold back, saying, 'hang on a minute!' The majority was responding with their hearts, and saying, 'we are desperately sorry about all this stuff about Pippa!'

It was just one of those moments in life...more than one of those moments... I think it was a transformational moment in the life of our church, really.'

Comment

Derek's story shows how a community that had been undermined and fractured throughout his twenty years of ministry by small-minded backbiting was healed and

transformed when brought together in heart-felt response to the death of Pippa. Initially this was a pastoral response by Derek, yet it culminated in the sacramental hospitality of the church community with a traditional service including a committal at its core.

Pierced and shaken by the impact of Pippa's death, Pippa's friends sought out the ministry of the church and were lovingly and generously received by the church community. Pippa's friends continued to see Derek as 'their priest' after the memorial service was over. Edmund Newey comments in *Praying for England* that today, 'bereavement is one of the key places where God's blessing is to be sought and found' (Newey, 2008, p. 93).

Derek's faithful, loving, traditional parish ministry had continued for many years without the change of heart he longed and prayed for in his church. But his hope and expectation that God would somehow act in the situation did not waver. Each week he said to his congregation before the 'event' of the parish Eucharist, 'Expect to be changed! You won't leave this morning the same person who came in!' At last all Derek's patient waiting, in addition to his own commitment and openness to personal change, had borne fruit. As he said, 'It was a transformational moment in the life of our church.'

7.3 Rhona

Rhona is a priest in her early forties, married to a male colleague she met at theological college; they have two young children. Rhona is currently chaplain to a psychiatric hospital in a grim, new town in the South East of England, an hour's drive away from her beautiful home in a cathedral close, where her husband is the precentor. Rhona is also a psychotherapist. Although she served her curacy in a parish, Rhona's ministry has mainly been in chaplaincy: she worked previously as a

prison chaplain where she ran a pioneering project helping prisoners come to terms with loss. Rhona is also a fellow doctoral student with me on the DPT.

I spent a morning alongside Rhona as she went about her ministry in the hospital. It was a bleak, deprived, airless environment, with locked doors, pale faces and everywhere a faint, sad, stale smell of tobacco and un-well bodies. All windows were sealed: the only open-air space was a sunless, chilly exercise yard where people could smoke - not in conspiratorial, cheerful smokers' huddles, but standing isolated from one another, intent and preoccupied. Through a window I glimpsed the hospital garden, a way off, the psychiatric patients have no access to this garden, it is not secure and they might abscond.

Into this soulless place burst Rhona, like a breath of fresh air. She warmly greeted everyone, patients and staff alike, a hug here, a squeeze of the hand there, a loving word, a friendly chuckle, an affectionate bit of banter. People loved her - patients clamoured for her attention and for the beautifully bound little New Testaments she handed out. As the flurry settled down, a nurse asked her to speak with a distressed new arrival, and she arranged to talk later with a bereaved member of staff in need of comfort.

I sat with Rhona in a side room as people came in one by one for a private word, or perhaps a prayer, or to give her an up-date on their news, 'they need that little taking to one side', she told me. Some days Rhona holds a communion service in that room, with music she chooses to be 'stilling and settling' for everyone.

Rhona sees herself reaching out to these desperate, lost souls in the hospital as a representative of the Christian community that is saying to them, 'we do care!' She realizes that her extrovert and resilient personality stands her in good stead, even though, as she says, 'it is all very much in my face and can be overwhelming'. But Rhona holds firm because she feels she is offering, 'that hope and

that comfort - it's all about that home-coming....I'm offering that patience and constant service'. Her ministry says to these patients, 'I will just stand alongside you and that's it'.

The morning I spent with Rhona was the most exhausting of the visits I made to familiarise myself with the contexts within which my interviewees were working. I think this was because I was partaking in the costly ministry of someone palpably mediating the love of God to desperate people, through her own body, mind and heart, in the rawest of circumstances – she has only the most minimal trappings of the institutional church. As yet there is no chapel in the hospital, although funding has recently been obtained to create one. In this context Rhona is herself the church. As she said, 'you're in a missionary situation, really.'

Rhona's electric moment story

'This story comes from when I was working in the Prison Service a few years ago and it's about a man I got to know quite well – a lifer. He'd come with 8 other prisoners on a course I'd run called 'Living with Loss': he was the articulate one of the group, and had genuinely made a decision that he was going to contribute, and that he was going to try and get the most out of this course.

As the course went on I went to see him on the wing, I went to see all of them to see how they were getting along, because I didn't like leaving them in the lurch in the week in between them coming to the chaplaincy, seeing me for a couple of hours, and then going away again. So this was just to find out how their journey was going along on this course.

We got talking and I asked, you know, 'what has brought you to this place?' And he said, 'well, I was in denial of my crime when I came into prison, I made a big mistake telling my solicitor that I hadn't done this murder and I got a lot longer than I would have done if I'd told the truth: I had a breakdown and it all came out.' Then he

got to tell me all the details about his offence and it was a really, nasty, horrible thing he had done, and he was very ashamed.

Anyway, he kept coming on the course and he didn't speak more about it and there wasn't much more personal interaction between us. The course came to an end and they had this option, the prisoners, whether or not they wanted to have a faith ritual which would kind of close things down a bit for them. They would be able to make their peace with whoever it was that had died, or whatever it was that they had lost...a relationship, a child, a partner - whatever was on their hearts, and they could each go to the faith minister of their choice.

So he said he wanted to come to me, and I thought, 'gosh! This might be a difficult one to gauge!' I'd given the group some ideas about how they might do their ritual. I did not want it to be out of a book - it wasn't a funeral, it had to be their own, and I asked them to bring along a photo, a letter, a poem, a psalm, a candle...whatever they wanted.

Anyway, he was first on and keen to get it over and done with. I was really anxious and thought, he's kind of confided in me, and I've got four more queuing at the door after he has finished. And so I had to gird all my strength to get through the afternoon. I thought, 'this is going to polish me off!' Anyway, in he came and said, 'well I've decided to write a letter to my dad who I killed.' He said, 'I want to voice to him all the things that I want to say, that I didn't say, because obviously, I'd killed him.'

I could feel in my heart it was powerful, absolutely powerful. I thought, 'we're both going to end up in absolute floods in a minute!' So I said, 'is there anything else you want as part of this service?' He said, 'I want to burn the letter after I've finished reading it out'. And I said, 'that's fine.'

He read his letter, I was crying, he was crying and he was saying sorry, pleading forgiveness for what he'd done. He was thoroughly ashamed for taking away the rest of his father's life and he wanted him to know that he still loved him. So we were both in floods of tears in this room - tissues out! - Just what a monumental turning point this had actually been in this man's life! He'd never had that opportunity to say it before, and he wanted to make amends. He had needed the support of the group: he wouldn't have been able to confront his actions in any other way.

It felt like it was in a sacramental context, in a way, because it was a confession, and also it was within worship, but worship that he had created and it was between me and him and God. I just felt, you know, the conduit there between what was going on with him and God.

He wanted to feel forgiven and make amends and we were able to offer him that opportunity: very positive, really. The language of faith was quite new to him - it was more a case of empowering him to write his own story, within a faith context, really, and to be able to work through those issues of guilt and forgiveness. I was the priest, there was no doubt about that, but within the faith ritual, it was more a case of him wanting to say the things that he hadn't been able to say to his father, so it was more about bringing a closure to the whole event.'

In the second interview, I asked Rhona what difference she thought it made that she was a priest, rather than a psychotherapist in this encounter. She replied that in a psychotherapeutic encounter,

'there isn't so much that action, or that gesture, or that ritual - that actual act. In psychotherapy it's more a case of listening, of silence and then comes the interpretation. Here the profound moment was more about action and presence - the physical - the laying on of hands and the anointing. I think it was the fact that he

was able to do it within the context of worship, as opposed to a therapy session. He understood it as worship, because of the prayer that took place, rather than just a conversation, and he felt somehow that he needed some conduit to receive that element of forgiveness - that was the only way he could access it.

When I gave him a blessing and made the sign of the cross over his head, there was a third party present, no doubt about it and that marked that he was worth blessing. He had acknowledged that he had gone through this time of looking back, and saying sorry, but now he wanted to move forward'.

I asked Rhona if she thought that he had sensed the presence of a third party.

'I have seen him since, and there is no doubt about it, this was a transitional moment in his life. The spiritual after-affects, and whether it awoke a faith that is a support to him, or whether he now has a relationship with God, I am not totally sure, because I don't think he has that cultural background to draw on. So in a way, it was a combination of the therapy and the electric moment of the ritual.'

Comment

In her interview, Rhona had two professional perspectives from which to think about what happened. It seemed helpful and freeing for her to be able to think of one thing in terms of another when reflecting on, and speaking about, this encounter.

She was aware of the professional blurring at some points in the way she conducted the encounter with the prisoner: was she a priest or a therapist? But this was not a problem for her - she knew enough to be able to improvise, and in her view both perspectives were necessary for the prisoner to fully engage with the process. The overall shape of what went on was sacramental, even though the content merged ministry with therapeutic technique.

Therapists write notes and have regular supervision to think about their work in a disciplined way and this training had clearly influenced the quality of Rhona's reflexivity about her ministry. It was a skill she had taken from one professional context into another: I was surprised to learn that in her demanding chaplaincy work, Rhona does not receive supervision or work consultation.

In therapy, the therapist holds the patient in mind and this is a powerful healing dynamic. I think the healing quality of this holding is one way of characterising the sacramental dynamic of Rhona's encounter with the prisoner. She herself not only represents, but *is* 'the church' in this 'missionary situation'. As she says, she is the conduit for God's action here and she absolves and blesses the prisoner in his name. Rhona's ministry exactly demonstrates what I am going on to describe in the conclusion as 'sacramental improvisation'.

7.4 Roger

Roger is married with two grown-up children and in his late fifties. He is Canon Pastor at a Cathedral and a doctoral student on the DPT. Although at the time of the interview he had been in post for two years, it was still clear what a wrench it had been for him to leave his previous parish after a long ministry in an historic church. I felt that perhaps he had been taken by surprise by the acute sense of loss he had experienced on moving away from familiar, much loved people - maybe he underestimated how much he would miss his long-standing and intimate pastoral ministry amongst them.

In the course of the two interviews, Roger recounted more electric moment stories than any other interviewee. Most of these emerged from his early parish ministry: he told me that many of the key players in these stories still send him Christmas cards, and family news, thirty years on. Most of the stories were of sombre moments in his ministry, and in his second interview he wanted to redress

the balance, 'one of the privileges of ministry', he told me, 'is that one is moving through different parts of the life cycle on a weekly basis. Sometimes you move from one to another in a single day, and it's a huge privilege to be actually engaged at those significant moments, with different people in different ways.'

Roger was attracted to Cathedral life by the prospect of participating in its rhythm of daily prayer and by the monastic connections of a great Cathedral. He feels less at home in the public role of a Canon in a busy Cathedral, facilitating grand events and civic occasions and it has taken him time to settle into these new kinds of clerical responsibilities. He told me, 'I am still finding my voice in that role and it took - certainly the first twelve months - to start to retrieve it, in a way.....being in a new environment wasn't easy'.

Roger was the only interviewee not to have read the transcript of the first interview before the second, and part of his second interview was spent exploring what his failure to do so might mean. He suggested at first that it might be 'just part of the shyness of the personality, really', but went on to say, 'I'm very busy – I just haven't had time for myself. I'm not distressed by that, or regretful of that – there's a lot going on at the moment, I'm trying to manage a number of projects at the Cathedral, a family wedding, a doctorate - maybe I have just short-changed my own space for self'.

I wondered whether taking time to reflect on the transcript, and noticing what occurred to him – having time for a creative response to his own thoughts – may need a particular kind of uncluttered mind-space that he had not yet managed to carve out of his Cathedral life. Perhaps he was also saying that this lack of reflective time was having an impact on other parts of his life as well, on his research schedule, for example. I thought Roger might be much angrier about these frustrations than he realised.

As Roger had not read the transcript, I shared with him things that had struck me in his first interview, and invited him to respond. This produced a fruitful, much more spontaneous dialogue, and Roger seemed to get in touch with something of the original emotional tone of his stories, which had been elusive for him during the first interview. Roger said of our second conversation, 'it's a resurgence of thought and feeling, really, and it puts you back in touch with certain significant moments and the meanings that have registered deeply within... I think the exercise that you have engaged with me upon has enabled some of those stories...has touched on some of those significant moments, and caused them to surface once more'.

Roger's electric moment story

'Very early on in my ministry, I was appointed as a curate at a parish church on the edge of a large Northern city. To start with, I had responsibility for a little community that was part of the church, and they were a very faithful and loyal band of folk, headed up, in quite a significant way, by a lady called Mrs Matthews. Mrs Matthews was someone who could take the minutes at meetings, and things of that sort.

I seem to remember them having this wonderful Christmas market. I had been to one or two such things at my own church, when I was growing into Christian discipleship, and they'd always been fairly tacky. Well I walked into this tiny mission hall expecting the same thing, and I was absolutely zapped! They'd put so much effort into producing some real quality stuff for sale. Mrs Matthews was at the centre of that really, and she used to sell thrift tickets throughout the year, so people could gather up really quite a lot of money to spend at the fair. They took a princely sum of money on this particular occasion.

It wasn't long afterwards.... that would have been my first summer after ordination.... we heard that Mrs Matthews had cancer and her health was declining

very, very, rapidly. I used to pop in and see her occasionally, but not probably as often as I might have done. She had a son who was a barber – they had their hairdressing salon downstairs, and she had the flat above.

Well, came the time when eventually I was asked to go and see her, because she was in extremis. I remember being very, very nervous because I hadn't built up a great deal of experience of being with people in a situation of dying or death. Very often in the Church of England you're contacted only after someone has actually died, you may get involved in that sort of preliminary role, but it's much less common than it used to be. So in this case, when someone was actually preparing to die, and wanting to involve the church very much in that, it was a new experience for me. I received this phone call from the son, would I go, because he felt his mother was near to death, and I didn't quite know how to prepare myself.

In those days, one relied quite heavily on the old Book of Common Prayer – it was before the time of, you know the Alternative Service Book and things – there were fewer resources about, probably. I remember going there in fear and trepidation, really, and when I walked into the room she was shrunken, but there was a radiance about her, and her eyes – I can see them now – large, brown, eyes looking out very clearly at me. Very engaging, and quite beautiful, and I was disarmed, really, the way she created a calmness.

Mrs Matthews was sitting up in bed, against her pillows and I went and sat on the bed beside her and held her hand. We talked, just a little, and she was clearly close to death – I didn't realise how close. As I spent a little time in her presence, she sort of steered the conversation, and she steered me through that period of nervousness, really. I looked back on that afterwards, and it transformed me in a way, because I felt that God had situated me in that scenario in order to give me a sense of confidence for the future, you know.

She actually led me in prayer! She said to me at a given moment, 'shall we say a prayer? Shall we say the Lord's Prayer?' And we sat and said the Lord's Prayer together and I went away feeling really lifted by the whole experience. I can't describe, actually, just how lifted I felt and it has stayed with me throughout my ministry. I came away feeling as if I had been touched, and certainly resourced.

Sometimes now, when I'm climbing out of the car to go into a situation, an unknown situation of bereavement, that sort of arrow prayer that you utter, you are mindful of the strength that comes from these earlier moments that have reassured you. Whenever I go into situations that are difficult, in this kind of extremis context, of which there have been several since, obviously, almost every time, I will reflect on that situation with Mrs Matthews.

She died two hours after I left her bedside, yet she was able to have the presence of mind to put me at my ease, to steer the conversation about her situation and about her death, and lead me in prayer. She was able to think about me even at that moment of death.....amazing. That's why I feel it has lived with me all these years. It was my first close encounter of that sort and I felt very privileged. That's not to say that everything has been easy since! It is just that you carry that with you into each situation in a way that gives you a sense of God's presence.'

Roger told me several other stories about pastoral situations where he had felt 'lifted', or 'carried', difficult situations on which he looked back and wondered how he had managed to serve.

'The only explanation that you can give is that you are not necessarily working from your own resources, but out of that which is working through the circumstances'. Talking about another occasion on which he felt this same sense of being 'carried', Roger said, 'there is this sense of – well I would talk in terms of the transcendent – that sense of otherness, that has connected at different important

junctions for me, I don't have the words, but that's the feeling. There are moments when as a priest you find you are traversing difficult boundaries, and they are hard to traverse, unless you get a sense of drawing deep from within. To draw from that well of living water, really, and I think that's what one comes back to again and again.'

Comment

There is in Roger's story a sense of his up-hill struggle as a sensitive, inexperienced young priest, in a demanding pastoral situation. He is aware of his own weakness as he goes to minister at the bedside of a dying woman, and strength comes to him, not from the Book of Common Prayer or any other institutional resource, not even, it seems, from his own personal prayer, but from a completely unexpected and gracious reversal of what might be expected: the dying woman ministers to him. It is she who exercises the sacramental ministry: she is God-bearing for Roger, making room in her mind for another person, even as she approaches death.

As Rowan Williams puts it in *Writing in the Dust*, when he writes about the last, loving, mobile phone messages American passengers on the hi-jacked planes recorded for loved ones, as they hurtled to their deaths on 9/11,

'That moment of 'making room' is what I as a religious person have to notice...God always has to be rediscovered. Which means God always has to be seen and heard where there aren't yet words for him. Saying something for the sake of another in the presence of death must be one place of rediscovery, mustn't it?' (Williams, 2002, p. 4-5)

I noticed an element of parallel process going on between the Mrs Matthews story and Roger's interview with me - both encounters featured a reversal. The interview process required an interviewee to be active, to read the transcript of his or her interview, ponder on it and then reflect on it in dialogue with me. In the case

of Roger, the most formal and traditional of my interviewees, the process was reversed. He didn't read the transcript and ponder on it – I did. I then led him into a reflective process to which he richly responded, indeed, his creativity flowed, story after story came out, he was animated – he even looked different –in other words, there was a transformation.

I pondered the meaning of this and wondered if it linked with what might have disappointed Roger about the cathedral's lack of facilitating embrace and his experience of it as making unexpectedly onerous and difficult demands.

7.5 Avril

Avril is a married priest with a grown up family ministering in a severely socially deprived industrial town in northwest England. She is a student on the DPT course. The town is split apart by racial tensions and poverty. The council estate in her parish is all white, whilst the next door parish is black and Muslim. There is a small area of private housing in her parish and its 'lower middle class, low skills' residents have traditionally remained aloof from those living on the council estate: Avril's church congregation has tended, historically, to come from the privately owned homes.

Her mission to the estate has been hard-going, and the church is present there mainly through participation in social and community initiatives. However, along with her church warden Jill, who was born and bred on the estate, Avril has managed to make some inroads into the wider community.

'God sent me an angel in Jill', Avril told me, 'I've spent ten years trying to bring a very open, interactive and practical theology of Jesus and his presence amongst us, and work out what that means for our life together, and what that means for our life in the community.'

A year or so ago, Avril conducted a funeral at the church for a local lad, nephew of a church member, who had died of a drug overdose. This event brought the estate community into church and many of the dead boy's friends were in a church building for the first time. Money collected for the bereaved family is being spent on the creation of a garden in the church- yard, in memory of the lad, and Avril hopes his friends will come again to its consecration.

Avril is a larger than life character - warm, robust and full of enthusiasm and humour; she lavishes her artistic gifts and beautiful singing voice on the church community she serves. I spent a morning with Avril and Jill, touring the parish in an icy wind. After experiencing so much raw dereliction, it felt like balm for the spirit to return to the calm, sanctuary Avril has created in her church.

Avril has felt unsupported by the diocesan hierarchy throughout her ten year incumbency in this difficult place. The diocese, she says, is second only to Chichester in its opposition to women priests and there is a big Reform presence amongst the clergy. Her Chapter has been unhelpful and she dismisses it with a laugh as 'the Horlicks Appreciation Society!'

Avril said she has experienced overt hostility from a misogynist Archdeacon, who consistently withheld diocesan funding for her projects. He explained to Jill that the diocese had been withholding support because Avril was 'emotionally unstable' – in Avril's view, what he really meant by this was 'female'! She feels even the local undertakers are against her, preferring to ask men to conduct services even when the funeral is for someone from Avril's parish.

I left Avril at the end of the day feeling that she seemed very isolated in her ministry. The year before she had experienced a wonderful renewal and affirmation of God's action in her life, and she seemed now to be living her priesthood out of that experience, against the odds, but with remarkable resilience.

She appreciated our day together, saying as we parted, 'it's been great to talk like this about my ministry.....wonderful to have someone else excited about what I'm doing'.

Avril's electric moment story

'I had just heard from Jill, who had taken the diocesan hierarchy to task, that the reason why my church's submissions for funding and support over the past ten years had been ignored was because the Archdeacon had been briefing against me in various unfounded and malicious ways.

I was furious and extremely upset. It was February, a dark time of year: I was in the slough of despair and very lost. I felt very angry with God and thought, 'I'm doing my best God, why did you allow this to happen?' So I decided to give up God for Lent. I gave up praying, didn't say the office, and I put God out of my mind. It was a grand sulk, really, and I wanted a response. It was a real protest at God; why had he allowed this to carry on like this for years and years?

Then this strange thing started to happen, and it happened four times. I was on a walk in the grounds of Dunham Massey, a National Trust property that I love. I was quite alone, at the furthest point from the house, when suddenly I felt as if I had walked into another time zone. Although the world was carrying on around me – I could hear distant traffic and see people - I walked into this profound and strange silence. I felt as if I was contained within this area, almost a physical area, of silence and I walked through this silence. I walked into it, I walked through it and I walked out the other side of it. I thought, 'well that was a bit strange!' I went home and didn't really think much more about it.

Then a week later it happened again. Again I walked into this silence. I could see the world happening all around me, but I walked into a physical block of silence

and this time I realised it was rather beautiful, and I began to think, 'I wonder if this has something to do with God? Is God answering my prayer?'

And then it happened again, but this time in church when I was celebrating the Eucharist. I was standing behind the altar and when I got to the prayer of consecration, suddenly I felt this incredible silence come down on me - not an empty silence, a full, compassionate, benign silence - it carried on all through the Eucharistic prayer and then sort of disappeared when I got to the administration of the bread and wine.

Of course, because it happened in the Eucharist I realised it was directly linked with God. It happened in church, God's house, while I was celebrating communion, the centre of my ministry and at the prayer of consecration - right at the heart of everything - the most significant place. It was as if God had come in through the East wall of the church and processed down the nave to the back, slowly moving, very beautiful. This encompassing silence, perhaps it's what Elijah meant when he heard the 'still small voice of calm'. It's funny to talk about silence happening when there was noise going on, but that's how it felt.

So that's what happens when you give up God for Lent!

I'd had years and years when I had no sense of God's presence. I believed in God in my head and would serve him with all my might, but I had no sense that he was anywhere around. A 'personal relationship with God' I wouldn't say was non-existent, but I could never really feel that God was there. But now I can find that silence almost all the time, beneath the noise. That's a great solace, and it gives me strength. It is full of love and it is very benign and overwhelming. It also gives me confidence that what I'm doing in my ministry here with others is important to God.

I had never understood and almost despised the evangelical thing about 'having a relationship with God'. I thought, 'What!' Half the time I think they are

kidding themselves, and what they are actually doing is whipping themselves into an emotional frenzy, and sort of turning Jesus into a divine boyfriend, which annoys me. But the other week, when I was preparing a sermon, I suddenly realised that I have got a relationship with God! Not in the sense that 'Jesus is my best mate', but my life is riven through with God – I'm like a bad piece of knitting that's got all tangled up with God.

I am now aware of the huge difference that it makes for me to be a Christian...it has given me a realisation, that in some very profound way, I am related to God, and God is related to me. I would never have known that before.

I don't think our tradition has got a very good way of talking about this sort of experience - maybe we are too intellectual and don't really talk about these sorts of experiences. It's why I was an evangelical, because they gave me a language to talk about what had happened to me when I was seventeen.

I couldn't stay an evangelical, because of the theology, but they could give me language to describe what had happened to me (when the liberal catholic Anglican tradition couldn't), and I suppose, in some ways, I am still following their language now. There needs to be another language...maybe we need to reclaim some of the evangelical language...there needs to be some way (in our tradition), of talking about these things.

But it's not so much how you describe it, as what you do with it afterwards. This is to do with God putting himself into our hands – it's about sharing with people – it's about being alongside people, not exclusivism. It's to do utterly with God being in the here and now, just as I, as a priest, am called to be in the here and now. It is like an incarnation of the Eucharist because that is when God puts himself in our hands. It's to do with me and God, joined with other people.

This is to do with this place and God's presence, that generosity, that profound generosity. The perfectly timed gift I shall never forget as long as I live. Its effect was to make me grateful rather than certain.'

I asked Avril if the language of the Holy Spirit was helpful in thinking about her experience and she thought it was:

'I mean the Holy Spirit is a bit of God, active and alive in the world and this was a spiritual experience, therefore of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't a musical experience, or scientific experience, it was a spiritual experience. It was moving – in every sense of the word moving. You know the description in the gospels of 'overshadowing', I mean it did feel on those second two occasions, very much like that - it wasn't creepy, it was very beautiful.

Comment

When I called at Avril's house to begin my day with her, I met her husband. The direct, affectionate and robust way she talked to him was very similar in tone to her reported conversations with God. Throughout her interview she is both wrestling with God, and giving voice to her thoughts about her experience of him, in a manner that is both contemplative and also intimately domestic: maybe not a 'divine boyfriend', more of a divine husband. She sulks with God, she's angry and petulant, she rebukes him for not looking out for her, yet she is deeply emotionally entangled with him, 'riven through with God'. Her experience of him is overwhelmingly beautiful and full of love, and she will always remember his generous and perfectly timed gift. In this interview Avril gave me a hymn of praise about her experience of God's presence.

As she says, the important thing is what you do with this sort of relationship with God and vivid sense of his presence. She describes her ministry as sharing God's presence when he puts himself in her hands in the here and now. 'It's to do

with me and God joined with other people.’ Avril is describing the sacramental dynamic of her ministry in language reminiscent of Etty Hillesum to whom we shall return in the conclusion.

7.6 Vivienne

Vivienne is a priest in her sixties who is married to a hospital chaplain. She was one of the first women to be ordained priest in the Church of England and at that time worked as a hospital chaplain with a particular focus on palliative care. Gradually her work in palliative care grew and became an area of special interest for Vivienne - she stayed in this post for twelve years.

Over Vivienne’s time as a chaplain, the role underwent enormous change following the introduction of the Data Protection Act. The terms of the act left it open for managers to decide how much access to patients and their records chaplains were given. Previously chaplains had tended to be integrated into nursing and medical teams, welcomed to meetings about patients, and encouraged to write thoughts and observations about patients in hospital notes. Vivienne left hospital chaplaincy some years ago, and when I interviewed her she was working at a Theological college where we met for the interview.

Vivienne is a fellow student on the DPT, but at a different university and I first met her after a seminar I gave describing my research and asking for volunteers willing to be interviewed about electric moments in their ministry. Vivienne told me that she had written at length about just such a moment in her MA thesis, completed several years before, and she kindly offered to let me read her thesis and then to interview her.

Vivienne's electric moment story

'Martin was a 70 year old man with lung cancer. He was a richly creative person with a passion for music and his life's work and joy had been to play the saxophone in a dance band. During our first conversation he defined himself as 'a spiritual person, not religious'. Over the course of several meetings, Martin began to share with me something of what mattered most deeply to him. There was anger at the conflict and injustice he saw in the world and there was deep sadness too, as he began to realise how ill he was. As far as I could I gave Martin my full attention: I listened and absorbed as he began to trust our relationship with his pain and anger and wonder at how life was.

Over the next few days Martin caught an infection. He became low and confused at times, one morning, when I went to see him he asked:

"I was thinking last night about what's going to happen next. What do you think? Up to now my life has just unfolded. I've never worried because when one door has shut and you haven't known what might be next something, if you wait, opens up a new road. Well I think it's like that now, only it's the big one. I'm at the end of this path and the next one will open up. It's hard waiting here not knowing, but I'm not frightened."

During my next meeting with Martin, something deeply significant occurred. After a long period of shared silence, Martin said, 'I've just been listening to the radio (he cries) Kiri te Kanawa was singing. When I hear her voice tears just roll down my face. It's so beautiful, I can't bear it.' I too was deeply moved and tears also rolled down my face. If as the poet and theologian Rubem Alves says, 'poetry is the language of what is not possible to say', so too, I would argue, is visual art, music, prayer, symbol, touch and tears. For Martin, his simultaneous perception of the utter beauty of the music, the awesome power of human creativity, and its

inevitable transience, bound up with his transience, became one movement of the spirit which flowed between us into a moment of intimate meeting.

Such moments, when we meet unashamedly in our vulnerability on the common ground of our humanity, come unbidden. The free gift of our genuine loving attention may often be the context in which such intimate meetings occur, but no learning, technique or listening skills can engineer them.

Such relationships are what Buber describes as 'I-Thou' in which one takes one's stand in relation to the other with the whole of one's being, as opposed to 'I-It' relationships where one relates to the other with only part of oneself, seeing the other as an object within one's own experience. In *I and Thou* he writes, "the thou meets me through grace - it is not found by seeking."...It was in the meeting between Martin and me that we were given something that we did not have before, and in the meeting there was healing.

We had met each other in mutual acceptance at the core of our being and at that meeting received an assurance beyond words that life has meaning and that we are not alone but bound up in relation. Such meetings have the power to transform and change our lives. It is in the in-between of self and other, in the mutuality of lived relation, that the life of the Spirit is realised. "It generates a certain quality of charged intensity which from time to time marks every man's relationship with the world around him and with whatever reality lies within and behind that world" (Taylor, 1972, p. 8).

In my meeting with Martin, through silence, listening and loving attention, we were drawn into the 'communion of the spirit', what Ivan Illich terms, 'the holding of hands of the lovers' (ibid, p. 229). Taylor is surely right to detect a particular role for the spirit as bridge of communication, the spark of electric charge between people

at hidden, non- conceptual levels of experience' (abridged from Vivienne's MA thesis).

Comment

Vivienne's work with Martin, described in such depth and so beautifully in her thesis, was undertaken a long time ago and was the only story I received in a closely worked, written rather than spoken, form. Receiving it as a reader, rather than a listener, meant there was none of the non-verbal communication and immediacy that tend to draw the listener into the world of the story teller.

Vivienne sent me her thesis and we met up to discuss it. Vivienne had not reread her story in preparation for the interview, and told me she had only, 'skimmed' the information sheet I had sent her in advance. It felt that as well as being distanced from her story, she had also distanced herself from the interview process by not reading the information sheet. Given the generosity of her offer to let me read her story, and the intensity of the material, I was interested by Vivienne's apparent dis-identification from the process and wondered what this ambivalence might mean.

Perhaps it is not just coincidence that, unlike all the other interviews I conducted, there was no intimate connection between Vivienne and myself during the interview. Despite her generosity in sending me her thesis, and the moving nature of her story, I did not feel I got 'inside' Vivienne's material, or experienced a sense of solidarity with her: indeed, from early on in the interview it felt like we were, in her words, 'at cross purposes'.

Thinking about the story before we met, I noted that although Martin knew he was close to death when he asked to see Vivienne, the Anglican chaplain, she gave him the gift of her loving, attentive presence, but did not offer him any of the comforts of the church for the dying, such as prayer and anointing. Even though

Vivienne had prayed with Martin on a previous occasion, and was herself vividly aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit as the connecting thread between them at this moment of intense intimacy, Vivienne sits with him silent and weeping: the profoundly sacramental dimension of the intimacy is left implicit. By also choosing not wearing a dog-collar in her chaplaincy work, Vivienne's priestly identity itself is left implicit.

On reflection in our discussion, Vivienne was adamant that it would have been an 'inappropriate' and 'exploitative' intervention to make the sacramental dimension of their encounter explicit to someone as vulnerable and poorly as Martin. Despite writing in her paper that, 'prayer and symbol' are ways of providing 'the language of what it is not possible to say', in this case, she was positive that sitting with Martin in empathetic and deeply attentive silence had been enough.

It felt to me that in choosing not to say something like, 'the Lord is here, his presence is with us', or by anointing Martin, Vivienne may have been withholding from Martin the expression of a dimension of the encounter he was unconsciously experiencing. Perhaps naming it in some way, either by word or gesture might have offered Martin a comforting supplement to the loving presence of Vivienne: such word or gesture might have conveyed to him that as well as being in the presence of each other, they were both also in the presence of God, as Martin slipped from life into death. I cannot see why this would be either inappropriate or exploitative behaviour for an Anglican priest.

When I asked her to reflect further on this decision, Vivienne was clearly taken aback and unprepared for what became my somewhat dogged questioning about why she might feel so strongly that naming the sacramental dimension would have been 'exploitative'. I wondered whether there might have been some confusion

here with the ethics of non-directive counselling, so influential in recent years in chaplaincy work.

This proved to be a difficult interview: with hind-sight, Vivienne's precious piece of work should probably have been left un-interrogated. I felt that in pursuing my line of questioning, and burrowing into a particular aspect of the material, I was somehow harming something close to Vivienne's heart. She had generously shared her story with me in good faith and after the interview I guess she probably regretted doing so.

I was upset driving home after the interview; I felt I had been aggressive. On my return I immediately listened to the audio recording and found that, although probing, I had not been aggressive. So where did the very strong feeling in me that I had been come from? I wondered whether the aggression I had picked up as my own, might in fact have belonged to Vivienne. Perhaps my counter-transference was telling me that this was how she felt towards me during the interview.

In an email she sent to me directly afterwards, Vivienne said she felt 'baffled by the way the conversation went' – she thought we had been 'at cross purposes'.

7.7 Donald

Donald is in his early 70's and is a Canon in the Church of England. He retired a few years ago because of ill-health from a busy, multi-cultural, inner-city parish, where it seems he was much loved by his predominantly West Indian congregation. His health subsequently improved and he now has a ministry as a spiritual director, retreat leader and is licensed to assist in his local church. I have known Donald for some years. We served together on the management committee of Elsie Briggs House, a small local house of prayer.

Donald, and Derek aged sixty seven were the two oldest priests I interviewed, and it was striking that, although very different in temperament, their model of liberal catholic Anglican priesthood was similar. They were much more reserved about their personal experience of God than the younger priests I interviewed.

The ministries of Donald and Derek have been undergirded by classical liberal catholic Anglican disciplines: the balance of a private inner life of prayer expressed through the daily offices, outward service to the world, and a deep, strong centeredness in the liturgy. Donald articulated his understanding of his sacramental role as one in which ‘through the incarnation, we have the capacity to bear something of God working through us to others’.

Donald did not want a second interview: he told me he had nothing to add to what he had already said. I suspect he might have regarded the invitation to ‘reflect’ as bordering dangerously close onto spiritual navel-gazing - most definitely not his style. I felt he was mildly irritated by my invitation to reflect, ‘the fact is’, he said, ‘you don’t know what you do and you don’t ask and you shouldn’t. If some of it comes back to you as grace, fine, lovely – but don’t ask, because then you get into manipulation...you lose your innocence in the matter, and it goes into control, and that is awful – the temptation is always there to do that, but we live by grace.’

I think Roger was saying something similar when he told me, ‘ there are so many things that you can never know...so it’s quite hard, isn’t it, to have an objective view point?...There is a lot of stuff that goes on at a level you will never know...you just will never know...’

Donald gave me a copy of a book he has written on forgiveness and a beautiful set of Lent addresses he had delivered to his congregation.

Donald is Canadian and married to Patricia, whom he met at primary school more than sixty years ago. They felt called to leave Canada and come to England

after the young Donald spent a summer working for the Anglican Congress in Toronto – the last such congress ever held. ‘It was great fun...so many stories!’ Donald told me, ‘I saw them all gather, bishops, clergy and laity from every diocese in the Anglican Communion. Suddenly, I had a sense of what communion might be like. This was the early 1960’s – ‘63, and it confirmed the thought forming in my mind, ‘let’s go and have a look at this world and this communion! It was there, the variety was there, the commonality was there’.

The main speaker at the Toronto Congress was Michael Ramsay, who had just become Archbishop of Canterbury. ‘He gave a wonderful sermon in the local cathedral one night,’ Donald told me, ‘here you had a holy man who spoke from the heart. He spoke from his own profoundness of faith and it gave me an example of what ministry might, should, be about; not the intellect – I mean it’s lovely if you have it, which he did, bless him - but the heart-faith. That’s where (our journey) began and we felt, it’s time to get out of this locality, this country -I was feeling compressed by a localness – let’s go! The world is possible! So we did!’

He felt a compelling sense of the wideness of God, and of his mercy, and began to discover that he felt most comfortable with the less than powerful, and that he could find a voice to speak out of that place, ‘I spoke from the underbelly’. Donald and Patricia came first to Europe, and then on to Africa, where Donald taught maths to African students before returning to theological college in London, and then ordination into the Anglican Church.

Donald’s feeling for the poor, and influence of Michael Ramsey on his ministry, were clearly evident in his inner-city, mainly West Indian church, when I went there to a service shortly before his retirement. Essentially the style of worship was classically liberal catholic Anglican, but with all sorts of exuberant additions: worship songs, everyone laying hands on everyone else for healing, extempore

prayer, arm-waving and swaying, people standing up to speak whenever the spirit moved them, and an extended peace that involved much affectionate hugging and kissing. After the service, a glass or two of rum punch and a delicious West Indian meal followed, rounding things off nicely.

But at its heart, there was Donald, a spare, rather frail, robed figure, presiding at the Eucharist with all the authority of his sacramental role, gathering everyone up with graciousness and devotion into the mystery of the event.

Donald's electric moment story

'Part of my role as a parish priest was to visit patients at the local acute hospital. Most patients I would see only fleetingly – maybe a couple of times, but one woman I visited, Alison, was her name, returned again and again for chemotherapy, and over two years or so I got to know her pretty well.

Back at the beginning of her treatment, as she lay in bed on the oncology ward, she asked me about the construction work going on outside her window. A new hospital wing was being built for mentally ill patients and each time she was readmitted for more treatment, we would discuss together the progress of the building. At last it was completed and I told Alison I was going there each week to give communion to the patients. She was interested to know more and I told her frankly that it was a bleak place – there was nothing there of beauty. When I gave the patients communion, the bread and wine were placed on a bare, chipped formica table. Alison was concerned for these fellow patients and said, 'I'd like to do something shall I make a cloth for the table?'

Months later Alison was again admitted, this time much weakened, and when I went to visit and say some prayers with her she brought out of her bag an altar cloth she had made. It was a linen cloth, finely and intricately embroidered with Christian symbols, a most beautiful gift.

Next time I took communion to the mentally ill patients, I showed them the cloth, setting the bread and wine on it while I told them the story of how Alison had come to make it for them, and how seriously ill she was. For a moment it was as though all the collective burden of their mental illness suddenly lifted and their eyes were full of wonder that someone should do such a beautiful thing for them. They wanted to say prayers of thanks for Alison and for her recovery.

I was able to tell Alison about the reception of her gift and the moment of transformation that I had witnessed so movingly in the faces of the patients, and she was glad. That was the last time I saw Alison because she died soon after.

Comment

This story illustrates the truth that there is always room for beauty in suffering, if someone will bring it. It is a complex, and delicately woven story bringing together different strands of suffering, compassion and gift, orchestrated and held together sacramentally by Donald. The dance that goes on between all the characters is expressed by the fine linen cloth, intricately embroidered with motifs that hold so much symbolic resonance. The altar cloth passes from the hands of the dying Alison, to Donald, and from Donald's hands to the mentally ill patients, who receive it with joy. It finds its place in a bare room, beautifying and transforming an ugly, chipped table into an altar, ready to receive the bread and wine.

Donald has mediated something of great beauty here at the heart of a group of suffering people, and somehow, by doing so, the suffering is momentarily transcended because something else enters in. This story illustrates how an imaginative and holy person can mediate God's presence: it is an incarnational story of great beauty.

7.8 Telling the Stories

Most of the 'electric moment' stories were previously untold and, as one priest said, 'none of this was written down'. Stories can disappear or just never get told to another person, and my feeling was that some of these story tellers had been waiting a very long time for the opportunity to tell their stories.

The story-tellers somehow all rose to the occasion. Priests got imaginatively caught up in the process of telling their stories to an attentive listening, other, shaping them in the moment in ways that generated new meanings for them, deepening and widening the truth of their experiences - surprising themselves. Reflecting on the transcripts of their stories later, several expressed 'astonishment' and 'amazement' at new thoughts that had spontaneously come to mind during the interview - 'did I really say that!?'

For the teller, the experience of hearing their own words when another was listening and understanding seemed to be one of more fully realising what they were saying. It moved them on in terms of finding ways of thinking about what they were doing in ministry and seemed to boost their confidence.

Mick told me, 'talking with you, I realise that you've helped me get in touch with certain things arising from my experience of God's presence in my life that I hadn't been asked about before. And I think it does emphasise...the potential that's missed if people aren't given any kind of opportunity to somehow follow up these special moments. So often the significance may need unfolding.'

Mick was not only talking about how valuable he had found reflection that 'unfolds the significance of special moments', he thought the people to whom he ministers might benefit from more opportunity to reflect on what a wedding, or a baptism, or a funeral had meant to them, 'a quiet conversation, perhaps...you know...how did you feel the wedding went?'

Rhona was appreciative of the space to tell her story and have it listened to, 'I often don't get an opportunity to be able to share those 'electric moments', although I would reflect on them myself about their profundity, it's not something I go and talk about to anybody else.'

Simon told me he had gone into church to read the transcript of his first interview, 'I walked up and down the aisle, not looking where I was going, but just turning the pages and reading it, getting quite absorbed into it and I was tearful. It was very affirming of my ministry and my faith, actually. It made me feel, this is what I'm supposed to be doing, and for all those times when ministry or life isn't clear, or feels a bit aimless, reading that again, my own experience put into words and written down, just made me feel quite good. I don't think that you often realise what you are capable of, or what the content of your conversation is, until you hear, or read it back and I was amazed at just how many examples I was able to give, and how much I had thought about them. I had not really thought about them consciously, but in speaking about them, and having a conversation about them, I did a lot of on-the-hoof sort of reflection and interpretation, and it was quite wonderful to read that back and think that I have actually dealt with these issues in my own head...It was very emotional reading it all again.'

Avril expressed surprise after reading the transcript of her interview at how little she had previously teased out for herself from her 'electric moment' experience, 'it had permeated me, but I hadn't rationalised it'. She found my 'probing questions' helped her to do that. At the end of the interview she said, 'thank you for listening and for sharing that experience.'

Derek was 'quite surprised' reading back the transcript. 'I didn't realise how deep this particular experience had been. There was a lot in there about priesthood, there's a lot in there about me...But I hadn't realised that (the Pippa story) had

actually coincided with such a shift in my own understanding of my ministry, really.....it's very refreshing, it's quite frightening, and it's refreshing'. Derek felt the reflective process had allowed him to be more imaginative about his ministry, whereas in the normal run of things, 'we don't give ourselves the chance and the opportunity to do that, really'. He told me he felt he was coming into a newly recognised part of himself, 'I don't want to retire, because there's all these exciting things going on, you see. And that's both liberating and bothering...bothering because one ought to have sorted out all this at a much, much earlier age. For God's sake I am sixty six, you know, not twenty three!'

For all but one of the priests the experience of telling their story, and then reflecting on their ministry in the light of it with an attentive, attuned listener, was creative and animating.

7.9 Listening to the Stories

Listening attentively to these stories, I was imaginatively engaged and absorbed by what I heard. The intent faces, voices and presence of the priest-story-tellers swept me into the vivid worlds of their stories. Clearly, the experiences of which they spoke had meant much to them, and witnessing them proved compelling. Engaging in reflective dialogue with the priests about their stories and what telling their stories had revealed to them about their priesthood, was a natural follow on from the story-telling experience we had shared.

7.10 Summing up the Interview Material

All the priests told stories about loving acts that were performed for God's sake. Whether or not, or how, God is actually named varies from story to story, yet despite this variation, the experiences and encounters of which the stories spoke had clearly evoked in the priests a profound recognition: they had recognised an

'electric' quality. John V. Taylor describes this sort of 'electric' quality as a 'charged intensity' (Taylor, 1972, p. 8), 'a numinous quality requiring ... a response and the only response was 'Yes!'" (ibid, p.13). God's indwelling presence in their own lives enabled these priests to discern his presence and action through the Holy Spirit, in the lives and circumstances of others. This is the electric quality they recognised. These are God-bearing stories, in them we find ourselves in the presence of God because all the stories say, in one way or another, 'this is what God is like!' The response the stories require of us as listeners is also 'yes!'

These electric moment stories shake the heart and, for a religious person, it is this heart-shaking quality of charged intensity that discloses the presence of God, both to the priests themselves, and also those to whom they minister, if they are attuned to recognising the religious dimension of experience.

8. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW DATA

Having explored and reflected on the 'electric moment stories' told to me by liberal catholic Anglican priests about their ministry, I considered the possibility of going further and clearly identifying the ministry of these priests as conforming to the pattern of traditional sacramental ministry, but in a modern way. In order to do this, I decided to draw out key themes across all the interviews which, if present, would clearly identify the practice of these priests as sacramental ministry.

Selecting Themes

Braun and Clarke (2006) write that when conducting thematic analysis of a data set, the researcher plays 'an active role in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest and reporting them to the readers' (Braun, 2006, p. 79).

After immersing myself in the material, I asked the data two questions I thought would lead me to the central themes:

1. What informed the priests' practice?
2. What form did the priests' practice take?

To help answer these questions, I turned to Hollis' description of the traditional sacramental priest: 'God's love is his driving force through the gift of the spirit; his greatest desire is to be so at one with God that it is God who lives and loves through him and so does the work' (Hollis, 1977, p. 44)

Hollis' definition answered my questions: what informed the practice of the priests - what 'drove and inspired' them - was their profound personal experience of God's loving presence in their own lives. The priests practiced by living out and transmitting their own experience of God's loving, indwelling presence to those whose lives they touched, both in loving service and through the liturgy.

The themes I selected for analysis were, therefore, **God's Presence** and **Holy Lives**. If I could trace these themes across the interview material, I would be able to show that the essence of what identifies sacramental ministry at all times, and in all places, was also present in the contemporary examples I had been exploring.

I now conduct a thematic analysis of the data.

8.1 God's Presence

Although all the priest/interviewees referred in some way to their own personal recognition of God's presence at the centre of their lives and ministry, there was considerable variety in the way they did so. For some priests this was a personal, private awareness, spoken about most explicitly and eloquently by Mick, but also by Roger and Avril in their stories.

Donald and Derek belong to an older generation of priests in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition, who tend to be more reticent about speaking of their personal experience of God's presence. As the interviews with them demonstrated, deep, devotional awareness of God's loving presence is implicit in their lives and ministries. They seem to feel most natural and at home within the 'heaven on earth' grandeur and poetic beauty of the liturgy.

Both chaplains, Rhona and Vivienne, are conscious of God's presence as a climate in which they live and exercise their ministry: Rhona is explicit about her sense of God's presence as the motivating power in her life and ministry, and this is clear from the natural way she prays with people and her improvisational use of the sacraments. Vivienne writes beautifully about her own vivid awareness of the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, in her work with a dying man, even though she doesn't actually mention God to the man himself.

8.1.1 'An Absolutely Bog Standard Piece of Transcendence'

Mick's story told of the most monumental electric moment of his life when, as a small boy, he had found himself in the presence of the transcendent God; it had been for him, a life-transforming, awesome experience. Mick was the only interviewee to describe such a full-blown, revelatory experience of what Francis Spufford calls 'an absolutely bog standard piece of transcendence' (Spufford, 2012, p.74).

Mick's story has a mystical quality to it - he spoke about what had happened to him rather like a lover, who cannot quite believe that the beloved's gaze has actually turned in his direction. He talked of 'being absolutely captivated' and of 'the sense of wonder' he experienced, standing before the altar, 'just an overwhelming sense of God's presence...you know, of glory, of God's power, but also of total regard by Him...this sense of divine presence, of being held and being loved'.

As a child, Mick was imaginatively open to this kind of experience of God's presence because he had not yet had enough life experience to build up an instinctual sense of the world as a place where this sort of thing doesn't happen – of a world where 'there is no room for radical strangeness' (ibid, p.68). In Mick's own childhood world of Celtic enchantment, this sort of thing could happen. As well as being a boy fascinated by stories, he came from a church-going family that went back generations and he both knew, and sensed, that the sanctuary was a special, holy place. His imaginative inner world was such that he could innocently receive and accept this astounding gift in a perfectly natural way.

Mick's poetic nature, coupled with his vivid, early encounter with the transcendent, marked his life indelibly, giving him an assured and instinctive template that enabled him to recognise God's presence in others and 'in beautiful buildings, set apart', in music and in beautiful natural settings.

‘You know, just sitting quietly, there is this same, close and beneficent regard from the ‘other’. These are personal experiences of my own, but there is also the sacramental, the profoundly interpersonal, the moment of prayer, the quiet conversation, that can evoke or enable or allow that beautiful moment to happen. Language fails, doesn’t it, but it’s allowing it to break through, or allowing us to acknowledge that God is present in our everyday lives and encounters.’

I met several clergy in the same age group as Mick, who described similar direct, childhood experiences of God’s presence and used the same sort of traditional language of transcendence when speaking about their experiences to me. Like Mick, these priests tended to come from devout families, they attended Sunday school as children, were raised within church communities and nourished by the background rhythms of liturgy and the calendar of the church year. This kind of serene religious life based in a church community, framed by traditional language and devoutly lived out from cradle to grave, is atypical in our day.

The culture has changed radically since Mick’s experience in the early 1960’s. Of my seven interviewees, only Mick’s electric moment story speaks out of a memory entirely framed by the supernatural world view that was being questioned at the time by Robinson (1962) and others in the radical wing of the Anglican Church.

However, there is also a ‘supernatural’ God, with similar paternalistic attributes, hovering in the wings of Roger’s stories, but Roger is less of a word-smith than Mick and more reticent about sharing personal experience. Roger was the only one of my interviewees to have a ministry based in a cathedral and as such rigorously subject to daily disciplines of morning and evening prayer, a mid-day Eucharist plus Sunday services. Roger is fortunate in his context because cathedrals have had something of a renaissance in recent years; their growing

congregations buck the general trend towards decline elsewhere in the liberal catholic wing of the Anglican Church. The beauty of the experience that cathedrals offer, musically, liturgically, and in terms of preaching, sets them apart. Between 2002 and 2012 the overall weekly attendance at Cathedrals grew by thirty five percent (Anecdote to Evidence, 2013).

The excellence of the musical tradition in the cathedral where Roger ministers is a source of deep meaning for him - a meaning he receives as gift, rather than one that he himself imposes on it. The music that surrounds and enfolds the liturgy is a vehicle for Roger's sensitivity and responsiveness to God's presence. For him, music seems to 'function as a language which enables heaven to slip back and forth between the aesthetic and the religious' and acts as a bridge between two worlds' (Reynolds, 2011, p. 87).

The deeply devotional, traditional tone of Roger's material suggests that in his role as a cathedral canon, he feels 'under authority' and in consequence, he seems less active and ego-involved than the other priests I interviewed. Roger is steeped in a traditionally structured, daily experience of being in the presence of God, as 'wholly other' that is untouched by time: his ministry is caught up in a rhythm unbroken for centuries, and which continues, whether or not he is present. In today's Church of England, with its emphasis on priest-as-leader-manager, the ministry of someone like Roger, who is almost monastic in temperament, is counter-cultural: perhaps this is why he finds the activism of the public event side of cathedral ministry so difficult.

8.1.2 Informalism

In contrast to the traditional view of God, and style of ministry exemplified by Roger and Mick, the influence of 'informalism' (Wouters, 2012), on the lives and ministry of the younger priests was evident in the interview material. They tended to come from

a place of less awe and deference and spoke out of their personal experience of relationship with God – theirs was a predominantly subjective way of knowing God as present in their daily lives.

One reported going into a ‘grand sulk’ with God, another was sure God would intervene if he was making a ‘cock-up’ of his ministry, and a third spoke affectionately and directly to God as if to a rather exasperating, senior colleague, ‘you’ve dropped me in it here alright, so you’ll just have to lump it if you don’t like the way I’m having to improvise to represent you and get your saving message across to people’.

This sort of informality provided a climate in which these younger priests could be profoundly intimate with God in a relationship which John V. Taylor calls, one of ‘intense mutuality’, where ‘truth faces truth...the other demands that I be truly myself, it demands also that I be all that I am capable of being. There is nothing inert or passive about the mutual giving; it is intense and exacting’ (Taylor, 1972, p. 15).

In Avril’s story, although she had been in ‘a grand sulk with God’, she also spoke of her life being ‘riven through with God...I’m like a bad piece of knitting that has got all tangled up with God...in some very profound way I am related to God and God is related to me.’

Recently ordained Simon, spoke of his experience of a personal relationship with God in intimate, robust terms. He told of a joyful dance with God - ‘I run into God’s presence - he loves us, doesn’t he? If I was making a cock-up of serving him, God wouldn’t let me carry on!’ Simon runs into church, ‘it’s God’s house and I’m happy because I’m going home – I am completely open in God’s presence and so for me it’s that idea of boldly approaching the throne of grace...you’re in God’s

presence wherever you are, but there in God's house, especially during times of worship, you should just shine and glow and run into the presence of God!

Like his contemporary, Francis Spufford, Simon speaks of 'shining and glowing and gleaming' in God's presence'. The attribute of shining, or of radiance, seems to be the outer, embodied manifestation of someone who is living in the presence of God.

The warm, familiarity of Simon's personal relationship with God, is balanced by the awe and reverence with which he conducts and participates in the liturgy, and his disciplined commitment to praying the daily offices in his church, makes them the focus for his church community in a very traditional way.

This sense of God's presence as close and intimate, yet at the same time balanced by a feeling of awe at his unknowable-ness, mysteriousness and grandeur, is central to the liberal catholic Anglican view of God. Intimate ministry and loving service to others, particularly at times of crisis, or key moments in people's lives, is enfolded into the wider, liturgical hospitality of the church through the sacramental presence of the priest.

D. M Allchin describes the balance, of inner devotion and outer expression in service to others and in liturgy, as the 'salient feature' of the Anglican spiritual tradition over four centuries: 'its search for wholeness and balance and its desire to spread itself outwards in a concern for all human life, and at the same time to turn inwards to explore the height and depth of the mystery of God's presence at the heart of human life' (Allchin, 1988, p. 322).

Post-*Honest to God*, the religious frame of Robinson, and those who followed him in the project of radically deconstructing and demythologising orthodoxy, created an atmosphere that enabled and encouraged critical scrutiny of inherited religion. Ironically, the resulting intellectual, emotional and spiritual

liberation freed many to relate to God in new deep, personal relationships, rather than to ditch him. The institution itself, meanwhile, remained hierarchical, paternalistic and deeply conservative.

8.1.3 A Glimpse of God

Some interviewees described to me the tantalising, ephemeral and uncertain nature of their awareness of God's presence. Often it is shy 'a wisp of presence as deniable as vapour' that cannot be clung to, yet it feels foundational to a person's life (Spufford, 2012, p. 73).

Derek spoke of feeling 'bothered' by a sense of God's active and disturbing presence in his life. Francis Spufford describes this as the 'troubling' quality of God's presence,

'the way it is, tremblingly, only just there, the way it slips out of definite reach, the way it eludes definition - a shimmer of sensation - It doesn't seem much on which to build an institution. It doesn't seem much to rest a way of living on. But that's the way it is. The whole thing is - has to be - uncertain right down to the root. The whole thing has to remain as flimsy as you judge the experience of God's presence to be' (ibid, p. 71-2).

This sort of experience of God's presence seems to be about noticing what might easily be missed: watching out for, and following up, clues. Something happens, but in order to recognise it, and name it, one has to be open to the unexpected, attuned to the religious dimension of experience, and also to have a context, within which what happens, adds up. When this occurs, it can be overwhelming. Avril said, 'we have to be given grace to notice it, and sometimes God sort of intensifies the zone, so you can't help but notice. It's almost like God trying to get through to us. I do believe God is there all the time.'

Although elusive, the feeling generated by such an experience is so strong that it 'illuminates the world and reorganises a life...It's a presence which may well not be there, but which can draw out of you, when you feel it, a trust that it is the thing that precedes all things, us included. That it shines...' (ibid, p. 72-3) and 'gleams intermittently in your mind' (ibid, p. 75).

8.1.4 Reading the Signs of God's Presence

Avril's story is an example of how something very important – God's presence intersecting her life - was almost missed, 'I might not have noticed it', but once noticed, its impact turned out to be life transforming. After God gives her what she describes as, 'a bit of a warm-up, which was nice', she eventually picks up on subliminal clues. A particularly intense and surprising experience of beauty leads her to wonder whether God might, in some obscure way, be answering her prayer of protest about his lack of response to her difficult circumstances.

The beautiful silence she had noticed twice before, in other circumstances, falls on her church during the Eucharist and she is left in no doubt, 'this incredible silence came down on me...slowly-moving, very beautiful...a full compassionate, benign silence: because it happened in the Eucharist, it was directly linked with God. It's funny to talk about silence happening, when there was noise going on – but that's how it felt'. Elsewhere Avril describes this experience of God's presence as, 'a bit magnificat-ish'.

Avril was able to tune into the God-bearing-ness of the moment, 'we don't really know what happened between Mary and Gabriel, but we get a sense of overshadowing, and the fruitfulness that came from that, you know, the description in the gospels of 'overshadowing', I mean it did feel very much like that, it wasn't creepy, it was very beautiful.' Mick also speaks about his sense of being benignly

'overshadowed' by God's presence and links his experience to references in the Psalms about being hidden under the shadow of God's wings.

God was present to Avril as someone 'profoundly generous' who had given her a 'perfectly timed gift.' She told me she can now find that silence almost all the time, 'beneath the noise, it's a great solace, it gives me strength and it's not very often that I can't tap into that silence which I was never able to do before. Maybe I was just listening in the wrong place.'

The idea of 'listening in the wrong place' is an interesting one, perhaps it is another way of speaking about not noticing, not recognising - missing something. Avril says, 'although I believed in God in my head and would serve him with all my might, I often had no sense that God was anywhere around.' She had been trying so hard in her own strength to overcome her discouragement - to run her church and get things right - that she was somehow unavailable to God...she was looking earnestly for something, but in the wrong direction, so there was no space or time for the gift of the unexpected to be given, recognised and received.

It wasn't until Avril gave up on God, and carved out space for herself, that something radical happened which she had the time and imagination to think about and integrate. This was a watershed moment that changed everything for Avril. Her ministry took on a new confidence - 'It's me who has the cure of souls here and that is a responsibility which God has entrusted to me and I take it seriously'.

8.1.5 God's Presence in Silence

Several priest/interviewees said they had recognised the presence of God in a 'particular quality of silence', and they used language similar to Avril's to describe it: 'silence beneath the noise', a 'thick silence', a silence that was 'qualitatively different from no noise', filling the priests with grateful wonder.

Donald linked this quality of silence with his 'glimpses of God' – moments of grace he had experienced several times in his ministry. 'Suddenly in the middle of worship realising that beyond this is a sense of the spirit binding us together in a way we did not expect. A glimpsing and then... you know...things shut down and you carry on as normal. It was silent, both times I can think of, there was a silence, a quality of silence, you know... for a moment our hearts open to something else, it is actually always there, but we don't know that.' In worship this quality of loving presence can enfold the worshippers, 'it is physical...these people, around the rail, kneeling, receiving, offering.'

During the very difficult funeral of an 18 year old girl, who had died of an asthma attack, Roger described a similar, unexpected quality in the atmosphere as he walked into church behind the coffin, 'I felt something very strange, instead of all the anxiety and all the apprehension that I had expected to feel, I just felt a serenity, a calmness as I led that procession into church, the only way I could describe it was that it was like 'the still small voice of calm' in the story of Elijah, you know. I went into that situation where I ought to be feeling anxiety, pressure – what am I going to say? - Grieving family - tragic circumstances, I was aware of all the things that I probably ought to be feeling, but what I actually felt as I processed into that situation was a sheer sense of calmness and serenity. I felt carried, I felt carried.' In both these examples the church building itself seems to be a vessel of quietness and calm within which the atmosphere is thin to the presence of God.

8.2 Holy Lives

I want to look now at how the priests I interviewed transmit their grace-filled experience of God's presence in their own lives to those they serve in ministry.

Samuel Wells writes that 'holiness is about two movements – a movement apart, to be distinct, and a movement towards, to be present. Christians are made

holy so that they may be a blessing to those they meet and serve' (Wells, 2011, p. 67).

8.2.1 A Paradigmatic Holy Life

Two days before he died, The Very Reverend Keith Jukes sent a message to his cathedral congregation, 'I know that come what may, God is with me, and my life is in his hands. Please pray for me, and for Susanne and our family. God bless you all. Keith'. In his obituary for Keith, his Bishop writes:

'Dear Keith was greatly loved by the cathedral community and by people in the wider city. He restored sparkle to cathedral life, worked for renewal, had a pastoral heart, and an ability to lead. He inspired a congregation in worship and the community in service. He was generous – he was always ready to spend time with people and gave himself unstintingly, we feared lest he would burn himself out. The result is that many from within and outside the church have had a powerful experience of the love of God mediated through Keith. We have lost a colleague and a friend. We have gained from a priest who showed God's love by his own modelling of the gospel. We say thank you for one who has been for us like Barnabas, a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith' (Church Times newspaper 24th may 2013).

Keith's obituary, tells of the holy life of one priest that could be replicated by the lives of countless others over the centuries, in cathedrals and parish churches, throughout the Anglican Communion. Keith's life illustrates the classical balance of love and service to others and devotion to God, described above by Allchin as the hallmark of liberal catholic Anglican ministry. Keith's was a loving life, overflowing with generosity, cultivated by prayer and worship and with an availability to be what God wanted him to be, a readiness of 'self-offering (as) a response to grace. That obedience, that willingness to be used, springs from the lavish gift of Christ's own

self' (Tilby, 2012). The picture of faithful, generous and self-giving ministry, as represented by Keith, is little changed since the days of George Herbert: person, role and vocation merge harmoniously and lovingly to form Keith's priestly identity, adding up to an exemplary 'holy life'.

8.2.2 People of Prayer

In her essay, 'Prayer, Place and the Poor', Sarah Coakley quotes Evelyn Underhill's words to Archbishop Lang on the eve of the 1930 Lambeth Conference. Underhill urges him to 'call the clergy to a greater interiority and cultivation of the personal life of prayer. God is the interesting thing about religion, and people are hungry for God. But only a priest whose life is soaked in prayer, sacrifice and love can, by his own spirit of adoring worship, help us to apprehend Him' (Coakley, 2008, p.7). Underhill assures Archbishop Lang that the sacramental ministry of such priests will bring about renewal in the Anglican Church.

Almost a century on from when Underhill was writing, I wondered whether this is still the case. In Coakley's view, Underhill's words 'are worthy of repetition and seem as fresh as ever' (ibid) because the liberal catholic tradition, today more than ever, needs priests formed in this way, and their 'faithful presence ...can be nothing short of electric' (ibid, p. 10).

Coakley writes that unless priests today 'are engaged, manifestly and accountably, alongside their people, in the disciplined long-haul life of prayer, of ongoing personal and often painful transformation, the Church at large runs the danger of losing its fundamental direction and meaning. It has lost the public, and therefore densely symbolic, manifestation of the quest for holiness to which all are called. And it should never be underestimated with what longing the laity look to the clergy for an example in this matter' (ibid, p. 8).

Although culture changes over time, the essential things about what it is to be a human being do not change, and it is to this level - of what it is to be human - that the saving story of Christianity is addressed. It is at this level Coakley identifies a longing for holiness in people she thinks is universal. Both Coakley and Underhill are making the crucial connection between a priest's own faithful, disciplined life of prayer and his or her ability to meet the longing for holiness in people through ministry that is potentially transformational. If these priests lose heart, and become timid in terms of witness, then modern unchurched people have little or no 'connecting apparatus' with the saving story. Their unconscious longing for holiness is left unidentified and unmet.

8.2.3 Parish Ministry

The parish ministries of Donald, recently retired, Derek, nearing retirement after ministry in the same church for over twenty years, and Roger, with a long parish ministry behind him, all conform to the traditional pattern of living out a holy life through the kind of dedicated ministry exemplified by Keith Jukes.

Donald talked nostalgically about his early years of ministry in a big inner-city church where he gradually became known and trusted by the community. 'At first I was a stranger to the people there, so I waited, I listened. It took me a long time to realise that they wanted to be touched, seen – especially touched, At that point I don't think I realised that, particularly when you get older, you don't get touched. The peace was full of hugs. Too right! Let's go and do it!'

Donald used to visit families in his parish, but nowadays he wouldn't do cold calls 'because society is so much more aggressively secular'. He would walk the streets on his patch... 'that's what you do, you walk the streets - in the inner city you can. People would recognise me after a while... a few years! Their hearts were guarded, but if you were welcomed in, it was very real'.

8.2.4 'Love the People and Pray it!'

After ministering as a parish priest for forty years, Donald summed up the role: 'two things: learn to love the people, and pray it!' Donald told me he learned to love his people within the regular patterns of worship and community life. He remembered looking at his parishioners one day as they gathered at the communion rail, and thinking - 'we were all just there, fragile human beings together before the one Lord, it was a glimpse of what common humanity might approach. It was a sudden insight, glimpse, call it what you will, which I have carried with me ever since.'

This is reminiscent of one of the significant moments in Auden's spiritual life Richard Harries recounts in his lecture on The Christian Reticence of W. H. Auden (Harries, 2009). Sitting with fellow teachers one summer evening, Auden was unexpectedly filled with quiet, joyful love and he thought to himself, 'this is what loving your neighbour feels like! It wasn't a romantic love, or an erotic love, but it was a sense of, 'well yes! This is *loving!*' A feeling of solidarity flooded him; it imprinted itself and he never forgot it.

Talking with Donald about the sustaining strength of this kind of low-key, joyful love of one's neighbour, he said, 'of course, we can also be appalling to one another...life isn't cosy or protected...it is wild and difficult and full of surprises, as well as full of terror and awfulness, and priesthood is also about bearing this kind of pain with, and for, others. The question is, 'how much of that can we stand?' It is part of the cost of ministry.

Standing in that place as priest is 'to be a vehicle, an agency of grace, set-apart-in-order-to. Priestly work is acting as a focus ...It's the sense of being available, and if wonderful things of grace happen - thank God! I may not know it I may not see it, that doesn't matter. It's one of the ministries of grace, that's publicly

acknowledged and the most important thing about a sacrament is that it is beyond words. It doesn't need to be explained, but experienced.'

8.2.5. Reticence versus Speaking Out

Mick spoke about the diffidence of priests and how hard it is for them to follow up baptisms and funerals and see them as opportunities for witness,

'Priests just don't feel comfortable saying, "would you like to come along again next Sunday?" Going back to the family, and giving them an opportunity to carry on connecting used to be such an important element in the parochial tradition, which I think has been lost. Priests don't visit now because they've lost confidence, or they are too busy, so these meaningful events in people's lives are often not followed up. Some people may come back to church, if their present experience reactivated some sort of Christian background, but the 'fresh start', so to speak, is very unusual.'

Simon, the priest with whom I conducted the pilot interview was more upbeat. He said, 'the priest's life should be magnetic...so attractive that you want to follow, or copy, or you want to seek it for yourself.' This sort of introduction to God, through the God-bearing-ness of another whose truth cuts across the prevailing culture, is the main way faith is transmitted. People can be brought into the presence of God when their lives are touched by someone who has been touched by God.

This is the essence of sacramental ministry and the tradition offers beautiful ways in which this sacramental dynamic can be poetically expressed and enacted through the liturgy. But it seems that for many priests in this tradition, finding ways to talk about God that are fresh, and speak directly to the hearts and minds of unchurched people is difficult, a difficulty compounded by the ambivalence embedded in the tradition about naming the holy directly - an uncomfortable sense

that to do so is somehow transgressive. The literature review discusses one of the origins of this reticence - the nineteenth century 'Theology of Reserve', espoused by a group of Tractarians and still resonant in the tradition today.

In contrast, the managerial culture of the current Church of England, with its clearly thought out strategies and programmes for Church growth, reflects the doctrinal clarity of the bible-believing evangelical wing of the Church where the present Archbishop - the driving force behind these strategies - came to faith. True to its Reformation roots, the evangelical tradition relies on the authority and reliability of the Bible in all matters of faith, doctrine and conduct: 'Sola Scriptura' – scripture alone. The coherent theology derived from this first principle, assures believers of salvation, through the doctrine of substitutionary atonement and sanctification through the in-dwelling Holy Spirit. This theological framework gives evangelicals the basis for believing that personal discipleship and a personal relationship with God are the duty and right of every believer and that every born again believer has immediate access to God (Wilcockson, 2002. Brown, 2013).

It is not surprising that a highly organised Church culture, that is an interpretation and embodiment of this evangelical world-view, can undermine the more tentative liberal catholic Anglican voice and adds to the sense of disempowerment in priests who are ministering in 'the context of an increasing prevalence of a discourse about ordained ministry that sees it as a category of employment, to be organised, appraised and resourced on the analogy of secular employment' (Bergquist, 2011, p. 63).

Although the view of the current leadership of the Church of England is that 'best practice in commercial life is the model for best practice in every kind of organisation', the ordination service tells a different story and recalls priests away from the 'particularity of doing a particular job, to wider themes of vocation and role,

and the shaping of human lives by God' (ibid) Rather than training priests to do a job, the emphasis of the ordination service is on 'forming' priests over a life time to grow and develop into holy people. The bishop prays over the priest, 'we trust you are fully determined by the grace of God, to devote yourself wholly to his service, so that as you daily follow the rule and teaching of our lord, and grow into his likeness, God may sanctify the lives of all with whom you have to do' (Rayfield, 2014).

The idea of 'growing into', or ripening into, holy people, more and more through a life-time of faithfulness, is a fitting description of the Anglican quest for holiness. It is about 'becoming something rather than having something' - holiness is 'an aim which involves being and becoming rather than possessing, and which makes much of the often neglected potential of the human heart and mind for development and growth' (Allchin, 1988, p. 314).

8.2.6 Talking about God

Avril and Mick both talked about the paucity of language available to them, as liberal catholic Anglicans, to talk about the experience of God's presence in their lives. The fact that they feel the need to find such language, and articulated this as a concern, suggests a possible shift in the self-understanding of the tradition.

Avril told me, 'I don't think our tradition has got a very good way of talking about this sort of experience - maybe we are too intellectual. Maybe we need to reclaim some of the evangelical language... I'm so hesitant to speak about these things because there is an absence of appropriate language I feel comfortable with.' Avril contrasted her own hesitancy with her memory of hearing the Bishop of Lancaster's confident preaching. He was a staunch liberal catholic Anglican and 'he was spot on... but he hid it behind humorous anecdotes'. That is, he was speaking about God, but doing so indirectly, and to a cathedral full of people who, on the whole, knew what he was talking about.

The interview process challenged Avril to find new language to talk about her inner, personal experience of God's presence, and also to name it as the action of the Holy Spirit in her life. As a result of speaking out in this way to me, she reported in the reflective interview that for the first time, she had talked to someone in her parish in a similarly direct way about their experience of God using the language of the Holy Spirit, and this had been something of a breakthrough for them both.

Like the Bishop of Lancaster, however, the liberal catholic tradition speaks most commonly about 'these things' metaphorically. In *Telling it Slant*, John Pritchard's essay about the arts and the numinous, he powerfully evokes the atmosphere of what it feels like for people when they sense the presence of God. He writes, 'the aesthetic experience of churches often combines with the deep contours of human experience to evoke the shimmering moment (shining again) of disclosure – the awareness of presence, the awareness of something going on' (Pritchard, 2009, p. 7).

However, for this kind of moment to 'stick' - for people outside the church culture to really 'get it' - their eyes opened and their lives transformed, it may not be enough to plunge them into the glorious landscape and atmosphere of the holy, as Pritchard suggests. Something further may be needed, some sort of interpretation.

Reflecting on the sort of powerful moment Pritchard has in mind, Mick said 'I think there is a very good question here about how these things are followed up. That's always been a kind of issue. I suppose I have worked with the expectation that the baptism or wedding or even the funeral can be very beautiful, and people can sense this peace, this presence, this encounter. But how one moves between that and then a kind of more explicit interpretation of it - I don't think my tradition has any kind of connecting apparatus'.

Colven, writing about his time as administrator of the Shrine of Walsingham, pondered like Mick on the need for some sort of 'connecting apparatus' for the unchurched. He writes, 'those who come as pilgrims, knowing why they have come and recognising the sign language, can use what is on offer, and the Shrine can become faith enhancing, a means to spiritual growth (however) the majority of those entering the shrine are not pilgrims in the proper sense, but visitors, what about them?' (Colven, 1987, p.17).

When people visit the Shrine, they are entering a holy place that 'witnesses to the basic sacramental encounter of the incarnation, and its very materialism (buildings, candles, holy water) is testimony to the God who chooses to reveal himself temporally and physically' (ibid). Although visitors to this holy place may 'sense the existence of another dimension', how, asks Colven, 'does one open up the sign language of the sacraments to those who find them immediately unintelligible? Some form of comprehension is necessary if the sacramental encounter is to be effective' (ibid, p.17-18).

Perhaps this gets to the heart of the matter for liberal Catholic Anglicans today: *is* 'some form of comprehension necessary for unchurched people, if the sacramental encounter is to be effective'? If so, what counts as 'some form of comprehension' and what would an 'effective sacramental encounter' look like? The thinking is that if there is no 'connecting mechanism', directly and explicitly mediating God's presence and making it intelligible to someone from outside the symbolic world of the tradition, then the sacramental encounter in itself can only be less than transformational.

Even when a visitor to the tradition instinctively knows that something loving and important is going on, if there is no cultural resonance, language or understanding to root the experience in someone's life, why would they link what

has happened with God? It may just be a beautiful, aesthetic experience - why drag God into it?

Perhaps both Mick and Colven are saying that receptiveness through understanding is necessary if the sacraments are to be efficacious for people today. For this to happen there needs to be witness to God's presence in both word and deed. Older priests I interviewed would not necessarily agree and might even see the quest for intelligibility as a manipulative interference in the flow of God's grace. Donald, for example told me God's action in our lives is to be 'experienced, not explained...if wonderful things of grace happen, thank God! I may not know it, I may not see it, that doesn't matter – it does happen.' Another elderly priest I spoke to in conversation summed up the traditional liberal catholic Anglican position when he said serenely, 'I think the Holy Spirit can manage without our help'.

Perhaps there is a balance to be struck: without being complacent, priests in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition need to trust that, confident about God's indwelling presence in their own lives, they can go out and discover new, improvisational ways of witnessing to God's action in the world and transmitting his love to others.

8.2.7 Egoism

The question of whether a sacramental experience can stand alone and be fully meaningful for modern, unchurched people without some sort of explanation, interpretation or 'connecting apparatus', came up in all the interviews in one way or another. Priests in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition are particularly fearful of egoism interrupting the flow of God's grace; like Donald, the preferred option is not to let the right hand know what the left is doing as the surest way to avoid manipulating situations and becoming the centre of attention oneself.

Of all the priests I interviewed, Simon seemed most conscious of the danger for a priest of his or her church becoming a kind of personality cult. After attending a service at his church, and meeting some of Simon's adoring fan club of elderly ladies, I guess his sensitivity to this issue comes from personal experience. He is aware that a tendency in a priest towards egoism not only inhibits the flow of God's grace in the church community, but when the priest moves on, a church that has centred on the personality of the vicar may well be unsustainable.

When Simon hands out 'gifts' to people, such as prayer cards, pictures of icons, rosaries etcetera, he is careful to say that these are gifts from the church, or from God, not from him personally. He wants his ministry at all times to point to God rather than him and this is one reason why Simon centres almost all his pastoral ministry in his church building. Simon struck me, more than most of the priests I met, as having a very clearly thought out, articulate theology of priesthood which has sustained him for ten years of happy ministry in one of the most deprived areas of northwest England.

Simon's model of ministry is fundamentally that of a traditional parish priest and this works perfectly in his mainly elderly West Indian community, with its ethos of England in the 1950's. Simon's scrupulousness was evident in the way he interrogated himself about his motives for adapting his own liberal catholic religious language and incorporating the more evangelical language of his church community. This isn't manipulative, he decided, it's about communicating.

In today's culture of informality, a priest's clarity about the distinction between his or her personhood, role and vocation - how they are separate, and how they merge - is more difficult to define. Perhaps this lack of clear role definition, combined with the loss of status of a prescribed and respected social role, makes

priests insecure and therefore more likely to fall prey to the pitfalls of individualism - egoism being one.

Simon, Donald, Roger and Mick all mentioned the need for priests to guard against a desire to take control or manipulate others. One priest spoke of his difficulty in gauging the fine line between stage-managing an event, like a marriage or baptism, so that people have the best chance of experiencing a beautiful, God-given moment within it, and manipulating the event.

There seems to be nothing organisationally in place to help priests keep their bearings in matters of this kind, when trying to serve a culture largely indifferent to their ministry. Terms and Conditions of Service that came into force in 2011 makes recommendations about the process of Ministerial Development Review (MDR), but there is no suggestion that priests would benefit from regular supervision or work consultations. The Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators (APSE) was set up in 2008 to meet this need but is not yet widely used.

8.2.8 The Cost

Exercising ministry in the borderline territory where earth and heaven meet is costly and difficult. It was clear from all the interviews that the high tension of bringing something personal and generous, into situations of suffering and joy, can be enormously draining for the priest. Derek talked about his exhaustion after taking Pippa's memorial service, and Roger told me conducting several funerals within a short space of time, for youngsters all of whom had been members of his youth group, left him drained and very low in mood. He said, 'I felt I never wanted to do another funeral.'

Rowan Williams writes about a priest's 'personal investment' in trying to weave a community together, a task which can be draining and frustrating. 'To be yourself a place where lines of force intersect, where diverse interests and passions

converge is one of the hardest aspects of that dimension of priestly life which is about living in the fantasies and expectations of others. It is unavoidably something to do with the heart of your personal being – and it is also something that can threaten your sense of yourself, your very integrity’ (Williams, 2005, p.170).

Stephen Cherry, another parish priest, writes in *Praying for England* that being God’s representative in an extreme situation of suffering, was a role he had found, ‘deeply uncomfortable’ and he had struggled in it. ‘The whole experience touched me, overwhelmed me wounded me. As I walked away I felt as if, like Jacob, I was limping’ (Cherry, 2008, p. 34). Cherry reflects on his representative role:

‘It was not ‘my’ ministry at all but Christ’s, mediated by an accessible, recognizable and authorized representative. The parish priest catches the imagination and features in the public mind in a similar way to the parish church. The priest and the building are windows onto God’s grace and glory – the one a walking sacrament, the other a stone one (ibid, p. 36-37).

8.2.9 Ministry at ‘Fateful Moments’

Although the priests I interviewed valued the opportunity afforded by parish ministry to get to know and love a community on a daily basis over time, several priests spoke about the special privilege of accompanying parishioners at ‘fateful moments’ in their lives, when they are deeply shaken by joyful or tragic circumstances. .Traditionally, at such moments, people have turned to their parish priest for help and this is still often the case, especially around important life-transitions such as birth, marriage and death.

One priest told me that during a single day in his parish ministry, he visited a recently bereaved widow, planned a baptism with new parents, talked with a family whose only son had been killed in military action, and prepared a couple for their marriage. It required of him the ability to be intimately present to all these people

with their different needs, but not so identified with their circumstances as to be completely overwhelmed himself.

The ability to bear this kind of tension – to both identify and dis-identify - to be present with people, yet have sufficient distance to hold them in God's presence and minister to them in their need, is a demanding part of the priestly role. In order to do this, the priest needs to be able to see the bigger picture – that is, to see the human drama in which he or she is alongside in the present moment, through God's eyes.

Rowan Williams writes: 'The priest must first of all be free to see...to have the opportunity of not being so swamped with duties that he or she can't maintain a sense of the whole landscape' (Williams, 2005, p.166-7). Williams suggests that those who preach most effectively are those who have a sense of the big picture and have 'known how to read the surface and the depths of things, not getting caught up in the shallows,' and by developing 'a fair bit of literacy about the world we are in and about the human heart' (ibid).

He writes 'the effective and faithful priest is a witness to how Christ's offering takes up what is ours to make it a gift to God; if 'what is ours' is not the focus of patient and truthful attention, if the human complexity of what Christ came to share is not grasped, how can it be brought fully into the landscape of his sacrifice so that it can be transfigured? (ibid, p.167) Derek's Pippa story illustrates the way transfiguration can happen, facilitated by the deeply attentive, faithful ministry of a broad-minded priest.

Derek, as a loving, canny old priest, who has been around the block a few times, had certainly got the measure of how things stood with Pippa when she was alive, and he was under no illusion about the life-style of her friends after her death. But there was nothing cheap about his response - through 'patient and truthful

attention' he recognised and entered into the genuineness of the anguish of Pippa's friends and the tragedy of her story - he went out to them, and gathered all this up into himself.

Through Derek's ministry, and the hospitality of his church community, the whole situation - this raggle-taggle group of people, and their sad, sad story – was transposed into gift. Pippa's life and death and the grief of her friends was 'brought fully into the landscape of Christ's sacrifice' through the liturgy, and transfigured. A transfiguration poignantly symbolised by the photograph of a young, beautiful Pippa, 'in her glory days', propped up on the altar during the memorial service.

Derek said he was sure that the 'wonderful transformation' continuing to take place in his church, was directly connected to the Pippa story. He stopped short of directly attributing this to the work of the Holy Spirit, but on being prompted, agreed that the Holy Spirit probably had something to do with it.

8.2.10 Ministry in a Secular Context

When everyone took for granted that there was a vague, Church of England backdrop to everyday life, the parish priest, as its representative, could undertake ministry in a low key way. The situation now is that for most people the religious dimension is a bit weird and irrelevant. People may experience intensity and depth in an encounter or event, but taking the next step of associating these feelings and experiences with the idea of God acting in their lives is unlikely, unless someone else makes the connection for them, either through their words or lives, as we have just seen in Derek's ministry.

Mick told me that he recognises holiness in others – 'somehow this person is rooted in something - they are drawing on something that is very nourishing and good which is all about them, but isn't generated by them.' W.H. Auden recognised the same quality of holiness in his friend Charles Williams who struck him as

'unqualifiedly good, he was a saint of a man. It was nothing he particularly did or said, and we never discussed religion. One just felt a ten times better person in his presence' (Harries, 2009). Because of Auden's own life-long embedded-ness in the Anglican tradition, the connection between Charles Williams' 'unqualified goodness' and his profound religious faith did not need to be spelled out. For insiders, the fact that he is 'a saint of a man' conveys the whole story.

But for outsiders, Mick told me, 'it's much less clear nowadays, because, as a priest, you don't quite know what you are doing.' As he reflected, Mick seemed to realise just how feeble this lack of direct, loving response to people is, in terms of the church's missionary task.

8.2.11 Challenge

The interview challenged Mick to think further about his own diffidence and lack of confidence, particularly in the light of the astounding gift of his life-transforming encounter with the transcendent God as a small boy.

'I'm trying to think back over my life...I wonder whether I have always had the same kind of assurance, (as in his childhood experience)... of the living God: this God as ever present and continually interested in me. Do I somehow communicate, in my daily behaviour that this is the case for me, or do I – I'm sure this is more true - often just lapse back into a kind of normal living and don't live out of that power, that intimacy?'

Perhaps Mick is saying here that if one's 'early love' is lost, then the religious life loses its critical and energising edge – its fire - and becomes, instead, domesticated and comfortable. At ordination a priest is warned to stay alert to this danger and 'in the strength of the Holy Spirit, continually stir up the gift of God that is in you, to grow in holiness and grace' (Archbishop's Council, 2007). Mick continued:

'living the Holy life isn't so much about gestures and practices, although I do think these are meant to sustain it, but it's living out of those beautiful powerful moments. Also it means being able to *know* other people because of that openness, that holiness, in the same way that you, yourself, feel known or regarded by God. I suppose other people can pick it up...but then most of my life ... I don't think I live every day in the light of that....you know. It's there underneath all the time, but it's rarely at the front of my mind, that being loved-ness by God that's been so formative. Maybe other people can still pick it up....I don't know. Perhaps I could live out of it more consciously'.

In answer to his own challenging question about his effectiveness as a living channel of God's loving action in the world, Mick admits that he does not live his daily life out of 'that power, that intimacy.' He senses he is in danger of losing his critical edge, lapsing into a domesticated comfortableness and becoming part of the problem. This seemed to me an important insight, and I wondered if it might apply much more generally to the liberal catholic tradition – has the tradition as a whole lost its living critical edge?

Although Walter Brueggemann writes for American readers, his powerful and rousing wake-up call may be useful here. Brueggemann sees the need for the transforming presence of 'Eucharistic imagination' in the culture of the USA, which, 'satiated by consumer goods, propelled by electronic technology, is one of narcotised insensitivity to human reality'. Waking people out of this state of numb mindlessness requires a new sort of prophetic voice. The old confrontational model of prophetic intervention is, he writes 'increasingly difficult to pull off', instead, he calls for a voice that is 'more cunning and more nuanced and perhaps more ironic...A relatively power-less prophetic voice must find imaginative ways that are rooted in the (prophetic texts) but that freely and daringly move from the text toward

concrete circumstances': Brueggemann is calling for a prophetic imagination that can bring about change (Brueggemann, 2001, p. xii).

The direction of Mick's self-scrutiny suggests his dawning awareness of the need to be free from seductive 'comfortableness' in order to exercise what Brueggemann calls his 'Eucharistic imagination': to have the chance to see the truth of what and where the church is and could be, and his own place in this story. Williams calls this sort of priestly role, 'prophet as watchman...seeing what others don't...not as a visionary privilege, but as a weighty and sometimes intensely painful responsibility undertaken for the whole community' that requires speaking out and action (Williams, 2005, p.166).

8.2.12 Beauty

The electric moment stories show that there is always room for something beautiful in the midst of suffering, if someone will bring it. In his essay, 'Telling it Slant' John Pritchard quotes Tina Beattie's observation in *The New Atheists* that 'it may be of the very essence of our humanity that we hunger for beauty as much as we hunger for food, and those who seek to do good in the world must be providers of it as well as of food to those in need' (Pritchard, 2009, p.8). Humanity needs beauty and is fulfilled by it: the liberal catholic tradition understands this and glories in beautiful buildings, paintings, artefacts and music - metaphors for the divine.

Traditionally the protestant wing of the church has been suspicious of the distracting, seductive power of beauty and the austerity of John Calvin is often held responsible for this suspicion. But in fact, Calvin was deeply appreciative of the beauty of God and of God's creation and 'the abundant delightfulness of the things God has created to the legitimacy of human enjoyment' (Jantzen, 2010, p.166). However, Calvin was at the same time aware of human nature's built-in tendency to create idols. In his view, whenever people use an image to help them connect with

God, they inevitably begin to think something of the divine abides in it. That is, an icon can easily become an idol - and worship can become idolatry. So in order to protect people from themselves, 'like Augustine, Calvin quickly reverts to suspicion of the world and its beauties, anxious lest we should be seduced by them to abandon single minded pursuit of heaven' (ibid).

Beauty is indispensable to the sacramental tradition and the challenge to those who love this tradition and value its depth is to find ways to imagine new symbols that have meaning for modern people and are accessible, although not necessarily easy.

Both John Pritchard and Theo Hobson write about the need to find new forms of symbolic life to connect people with the transformational potential of the gospel, 'the liturgy, the Eucharist, must be moved away from an aura of antique grandness and fusty clericalism, towards something more contemporary, participatory, artsy. The cultic centre of Christianity must be made new – that is how liberal Christianity can recover authenticity' (Hobson, 4.11.2011, Guardian Newspaper).

The two chaplains I interviewed, who have no church buildings, liturgy or artefacts to support their ministry, both use music as a medium through which to communicate something of the divine - 'music has the power to go very deep into our humanity, and to reconnect us with longings too deep for words' (Pritchard, 2009, p. 9). A shared love of music connects Vivienne and Martin in his final hours and Rhona carefully chooses 'stilling' music for her psychiatric patients, 'taking them something beautiful is very important', she told me. As Rhona plans the new chapel for the hospital that has been gifted by the King's Fund, she wants music in there, a beautiful painting or tapestry, something green and growing and perhaps a water feature.

In an attempt to connect her deprived congregation with the poetry of the liturgy, Avril sings it to them, thrilling them with her beautiful, trained voice. She has also taken to producing 'sermon pictures' as a way of communicating the scriptures. Through a process of bricolage, she collects objects and ideas during the week, as she ponders the gospel passage for Sunday morning she then brings all this together to make a picture. These sermon pictures 'have taken on a life of their own...a visual approach has been a very powerful tool here, in terms of evoking people's own language. I've taken away all the words...what they get is a picture and they can respond...it seems to enable people to get inside the gospel passages...I want to make them vivid and alive.'

8.2.13 Holy Buildings

The parish priests I interviewed were all closely identified with their church buildings: this was particularly so for those serving poor, disadvantaged communities where the church provides somewhere beautiful for people to gather in forsaken physical and social environments. Simon speaks of his church as his 'home' and he longs for his parishioners to 'relax and be themselves in church.....there in God's house, especially during times of worship, you should just shine and glow and run into the presence of God'.

For these parish priests it seemed as if the church building itself was alive with a life with which human beings can interact. Rowan Williams, in a BBC2 TV programme marking his departure from Canterbury, on New Year's day 2013 (Williams, 2013), spoke of a man's first experience of Canterbury Cathedral, 'when he entered the building, he felt immediately his life would have to change. Suddenly the world looked different...just letting such a building soak into one's mind and imagination can keep alive questions about how we are to live... here lives are changed' (ibid). Colven writes about the Shrine at Walsingham, 'if only we create

the right atmosphere (for the revelation of Christ), it will take place in wonderful and unexpected ways' (Colven, 1987, p.24).

In contrast, several priests who serve in multi-benefices have told me that regretfully, because they have several churches to look after, their churches are locked apart from at service times and in consequence tend to be cold and dead. This feels devoid of welcome and hospitality because there is still an expectation that the parish priest will be present in the church at all times, if not taking services, then at least pottering about and available to talk: 'I came to find you in church and you weren't there!' one parishioner said to his priest. 'Perhaps I should be!' he reflected.

The paradigm of a parish priest 'being there' in his parish church, knowing and caring for his people dies hard – the old idea of the parson being the 'person' at the heart of the parish is deeply ingrained in the culture and pattern of parish ministry and is still traceable in every community (Billings, 2010, p. 55). It is interesting that this idea of the priest being 'the person' at the heart of the community has revived in recent years when whole communities have felt helpless in the face of deeply shocking, sad and disorientating events. After the Soham murders and the murder of Jo Yates in Bristol, for example, communities turned to their parish priests to comfort them and mediate these events through the hospitality of the parish church and the liturgy (see Cherry, 2008; Bailey Wells, 2003).

8.2.14 Liturgy

For liberal catholic Anglican priests, conducting the liturgy provides the people they serve with both concrete and metaphorical ways to sense the divine. The liturgy is at the centre of everything – 'liturgy as heaven on earth...relates to the absolute baseline of Christian identity, reflection and activity. It ...is designed to be a transition into a new creation...liturgy is an event in physical space that has the

effect of moving you from one context or condition of heart and imagination to another' (Williams, 2011, p. 4). The priests I interviewed were aware that as animateurs of the liturgy, they were vehicles of this transforming power. Donald and Derek both described their sense of holding and tending a liturgical space in which, through their sacramental presence, something new can happen. This can only take place if what is occurring is made accessible, so that people can join in meaningfully otherwise the experience stays at the level of the aesthetic.

Donald and Derek both respond intuitively to the need for intelligibility and provide an hospitable openness to people bringing their own symbols, and symbolic life, into the liturgy. Pippa's friends bring along a range of Pippa memorabilia to include in the service to make it their own, and Derek's church, 'said YES to everything!' After the service they see this as 'their church' and Derek as 'their priest'. Donald's community bring their rituals, food, spontaneous music making and affectionate gestures into the liturgy. These symbols and symbolic acts provide a bridge of meaning into the rich symbolic world of the liturgy, and can make it possible for those taking part to find Christ.

There is no doubt that participating in the liturgy is difficult for modern people - it seems strange to them because it is 'proposing itself to an unprepared consciousness' (Williams, 2011, p. 3). But because something is difficult, it doesn't mean that all we need to do is replace it with something easy – with a kind of functional equivalence – and then all will be well. The many layered complexity of the liturgy is indispensable to telling the Christian story, because it shows us 'a way of existing in the world that was not there before' (ibid, p. 8). The challenge is to find ways to make the subtlety and depth of the liturgy accessible, rather than to dumb it down.

8.2.15 Chaplaincy

One of the main ways in which liberal catholic Anglican ministry has been reconfigured in recent years is in the development of chaplaincy ministry: a surprisingly high proportion of priests today spend some part of their ministry in chaplaincy work (see Ben Ryan's report for Theos, *A Very Modern Ministry: Chaplaincy in the UK*, 2015; also an interesting historical account of the prophetic role of chaplaincy between the two world wars by Linda Parker, *Shellshocked Prophets: Former Anglican Army Chaplains in Interwar Britain*, 2015).

Perhaps one reason for this is that the situational context of chaplaincy work offers priests opportunities to form the intense, profound connections with people that used to be part and parcel of parish ministry. The shape of parish ministry is changing: when parish priests retire they are often not replaced, instead a parish is likely to become part of a multi-benefice, heavily dependent on lay ministry. It is impossible for a priest, who oversees maybe seven churches, to form close, day to day relationships with those in his or her care, and at the same time build up a Christ-centred community. The particular quality of time and space needed for this sort of traditional parish ministry is something most busy priests no longer have. In such circumstances it is easy to see the attraction of chaplaincy.

The two chaplains I interviewed both offered, in different ways, an improvisational, informal interpretation of the traditional dynamic of sacramental ministry, outside the structures of the organised church. Both chaplains were drawing alongside people in extremity – prisoners, psychiatric hospital patients and the dying.

From Vivienne's moving written account of her 'electric moment' story, it was clear she understood her intimate, pastoral ministry to Martin, a man dying in a

hospice, as a sacramental one. She wrote, quoting Buber, about her sense of the Holy Spirit's presence in her encounter with Martin 'as the power within the I-thou relationship which draws us into communion with one another, within the life of God'.

Vivienne sensitively explores the religious significance of the experience she and Martin shared, within the context of a theology of the Holy Spirit, and her analysis is dependent on the work of Buber, John V Taylor and Tillich. She writes that 'those who care for the dying must also engage in the profound and important struggle to find language in which to bear witness to their experience, and to voice 'that which cannot be said''.

The point of interest to me, and one that Vivienne and I discussed is that despite writing beautifully in her paper about her sense of God's presence, and its blessing on the encounter with Martin, she doesn't at any point explicitly share this awareness with the dying man himself, either by word or sacramental action. Everything takes place unspoken between them; any dialogue goes on within the heart and mind of the chaplain herself, enabling her to be a profoundly loving presence for the dying man.

I questioned Vivienne about her reserve and wondered why she had not shared with Martin her own sense of God's presence with them at that time.

'It didn't feel appropriate...why would I need to have done that? The value those moments have is the value in their own right, in that particular moment of time, with that person. With people who are so very vulnerable it's incredibly easy to impose one's own views and interpretations...so I suppose one would always go with where the person is...My being there was what was communicating with him...We don't know what's happening, in many ways, in the depths of people's lives, where the Holy Spirit is at work. But these things happen and they change

people's lives... There are occasions when words are less appropriate than at others... My being there was what was communicating with him... talking would have been counter-productive... those particular times are sufficient unto themselves. How one worked over-all, was bearing witness.'

My interpretation of what Vivienne is saying here is that her ministry to Martin came out of her sense of God's indwelling presence, at the very deepest level of her being. From this place in herself she reaches out to God, at the very deepest level of Martin's being: this is their place of meeting, at what Tillich calls the 'inexhaustible depth and ground of all being'. This is the level of their communication – beyond words. She said, 'I wouldn't presume to know what the work of the Holy Spirit was in that moment, or to interpret it ... those moments are so powerful, that I think you know what is going on.'

Tillich writes, 'the name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is God. That depth is what the word God means. And if that word has not much meaning for you, translate it, and speak of the depths of your life, of the source of your being, of your ultimate concern, of what you take seriously without any reservation... He who knows about depth knows about God' (Tillich, 1963 (1949), p. 21).

I understand Vivienne to be saying here that the profound, intense relationship she makes with the dying man, in itself constitutes the presence of God, rather than this relationship disclosing the presence of God. If this interpretation is correct, it would explain why Vivienne felt, at this moment, words or gestures were superfluous.

There are both similarities and differences between Vivienne's approach to chaplaincy ministry, and that of Rhona, the other chaplain I interviewed. In both cases, their chaplaincy work is powerfully incarnational: it is about going out, joining

in, and finding God already present in situations. The 'church' is represented by the person of the priest going out into what Rhona describes as 'missionary situations'. But as Jenkins writes, 'it is less one's job to bring God into a place than to discern him in it, and less one's task to gather people together than to discover what they are up to, what moves them and what their desires are... The discipline is in waiting and paying attention...finding one's self put to work in hitherto inaccessible places' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 7-8).

As well as the difference in their personalities – Rhona is extrovert and demonstrative, Vivienne much quieter - the main difference of approach between the two chaplains is how explicit they are about God to the people they encounter in ministry. Vivienne doesn't mention God, whereas Rhona speaks about God with a loving naturalness. In difficult pastoral situations she carries on a kind of private, inner conversation with God - her tone is direct, 'you've got me into this mess, so you'd better see me through!'

Rhona introduces into difficult, sometimes desperate, secular situations, the sacramental shape of the tradition. She does it creatively, in improvisational ways - and she names it.

In her story about the prisoner she said, 'there's no doubt there was a third person present, and he knew it'. She hears the prisoner's confession in the context of a ritual that had been thought about, and devised together, then using religious language and gesture, she prays with him, absolves him and blesses him.

I am interested that as both a priest and a psychotherapist, Rhona does not find anything problematic about being in both these roles simultaneously. She uses all the skills at her disposal when caring for her prisoners or psychiatric patients. The purpose of Rhona's bereavement group for prisoners, for example, was primarily therapeutic, but the sessions took place in the chaplaincy. Painful,

unresolved material that came up for prisoners during these sessions was later discussed with Rhona in one to one therapy sessions which led into the kind of ministry described in her story.

I felt there might have been some confusion here. Who did the prisoner in the story think was hearing his confession and absolving him - Rhona, a kind, warm, wise person, or Rhona the priest? Personally, she was in no doubt that the prisoner saw her as a priest... 'God was present, although the context was therapeutic'.

8.3 Summary

It is evident from this analysis that the ministry of the liberal catholic priests I interviewed, as illustrated by their electric moment stories and reflections, conforms to the pattern of sacramental ministry as defined by Hollis. In some cases, priests' sacramental ministry took a traditional form, but with a modern twist, in other cases a sacramental shape is evident in ministry that is improvisational.

What drove and inspired all the priests was their profound experience of the loving presence of God in their lives: their ministry transmitted both their subjective experience, and their knowledge of God's indwelling presence, to others, through their holy lives.

The ministry of the priests I interviewed conforms to a pattern present in sacramental ministry at all times and in all places. By holding up and exploring the electric moment stories, and then encouraging the priests to reflect on their ministry in the light of them, it has become clear that the transformational dynamic of sacramental ministry is alive and well and at work today in the ministry of liberal catholic Anglican priests.

This means that the task for those concerned about the future of liberal catholic Anglicanism is not to address some sort of inherent ontological vulnerability

in the tradition, even if in its organisational/institutional form it may seem to be falling apart. The task is not a defensive one of fighting for the tradition's self-preservation, nor is it about questioning the dynamic, transformational, structure that underlies liberal catholic Anglicanism – from the electric moment stories we have seen this is alive and well.

The issue is whether, priests in this tradition can find new, imaginative and meaningful ways to bring the saving story at the heart of their ministry into the lives of those with whom they have contact, both inside and outside the church.

This brings us to a point in the research journey where some conclusions can be reached.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Before embarking on the conclusion, it may be useful to look again at the aims of the thesis:

- To find a way to excavate and enquire into the current practice of sacramental ministry within the liberal catholic Anglican tradition, through the lens of 'electric moment' stories about ministry told to me by priests.
- To articulate the sacramental model of ministry as it is practised today in order to explore its transformational potential and continuing value and importance for the mission of the church.
- To imagine the tradition forward by looking at the possible implications of my findings for future practice.

How far have the aims of the thesis been met through the research journey?

Regarding my first aim, deep dialogue has enabled me to reach parts that other methods have not got to. The experiences of God's presence at the heart of the 'electric moment' stories are difficult to talk about and are often unseen in everyday practice, but the research process enabled us to get glimpses of God's loving action in people's lives.

My concept of 'sacramental improvisation' is my way of articulating the way in which sacramental ministry is practised today and this concept will be developed and explained later in the conclusions.

As I shall show later, I feel the method I have used of enhancing reflexivity about practice and the notion of sacramental improvisation do provide glimpses of possible ways forward for this tradition

My findings have emerged from the process of doing the research and from the content of the interviews that the research generated and so I shall summarise my findings using these themes.

-The Process

- The Content

9.1 The Research Process

Story-telling proved to be an effective way to get to the heart of material that by its very nature is intangible and is also embedded in practice: it was a way of getting up close to practice. The priests were familiar and comfortable with the narrative form and therefore felt at home 'speaking out' within the idiom of story-telling.

However, all the priests found it much more difficult to take the next step and reflect on their 'electric moment' story and articulate its meaning and significance in terms of their own ministry. It was an unfamiliar thinking process for them - to begin with subjective experience and then point outwards towards the world. The freedom this offered priests to think new thoughts was not easy for them and they wrestled with it, but at the same time, for some at least, it was exciting, challenging and generative.

Reticence

The research process was designed in part to address the problem liberal catholic Anglicans have when talking about God because of the deep reserve rooted in their tradition. I hoped that if these priests could reflect on their electric moment stories and find language with which to speak in dialogue with me as the researcher, this

might free them to find new ways of talking about God with those they encounter in ministry.

There was some degree of reticence in all the priests I interviewed. Two expressed a fear that by talking about the sacred they would somehow betray it. Others were slow to grasp exactly what I meant by reflection on their story – thinking I wanted them to check the transcript of their story for technical accuracy, for example.

Avril and Mick both saw an irony in their inability to talk about God directly to people when they were speaking lavishly about the things of God three times a day, using the poetic language of the offices and the liturgy of the church. It was the need to transpose this language into a form in which it could communicate with modern people - how to find the 'connecting apparatus' - that exercised them. What was less conscious for all the priests was their inherent liberal catholic Anglican ambivalence about speaking out - was this really something they wanted to do - or should be doing, anyway?

The interview process helped some of the interviewees to see these problems more clearly. Avril and Mick, for example, when searching for profound religious language that was both true to their own experience of God and meaningful for others, found a gap in their own tradition - no such language seemed to be available. Avril said, 'maybe we need to reclaim some of the evangelical language – I don't know, but there needs to be some way of talking about these things'. She experienced 'speaking out' in the interview as rewarding and invigorating and reported going back to her parish more able to speak to people about God's action in their lives.

The oldest interviewee, Donald, took a much more traditional view and said that it doesn't do to 'enquire too closely into God's grace...just accept it as gift'.

Donald did not want to reflect on his practice, and seemed to regard talking in this way as potentially unhealthy. Donald turned down the second interview - he had nothing to add. Donald's close relationship with God was evident in the interview material, but he saw no need to think reflectively about it, or to interpret it.

As the research data shows, most of the priests, to varying degrees, were able to use the opportunity the interview process provided to lift the essential dynamic of sacramental ministry free of its traditional, richly symbolic church setting and habitual reserve, and set it instead in a context where this essential dynamic could be scrutinised and talked about.

A paradox

I thought the ambivalence towards scrutiny of, and reflection upon, practice that I encountered in these priests, a group who were in many ways an enlightened sample of liberal catholic Anglican priesthood, highlighted the paradoxical situation of the tradition today.

Deeply embedded reticence remains characteristic of this tradition, signifying a resistance to the challenge, or perceived threat, of late modernity. Its reluctance to reflect upon its practices and its preference to repeat what has been done in the past is undoubtedly part of the tradition. Since the method favoured by modernity rests upon the capacity of a person or institution to consider itself an object of inquiry, the built in resistance to this project in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition is problematic.

There is an implicit paradox in this situation, which is not susceptible to simple resolution. On the one hand resistance to the reflexive idiom of modernity can be understood as an attempt to conserve the practices and ethos of the tradition, but on the other hand, resistance exposes what it is trying to maintain to the threat of being wiped out by the managerial ethos of modernity.

During my research journey I felt I was working with this paradox: I was recognising the fundamental value and importance of the liberal catholic Anglican tradition - its practises and ethos and what it has to offer modernism - I did not want to see it sink without trace, or be eclipsed by the apparently 'modern', managerial model of ministry current in the Church of England. But at the same time I could see that if this tradition is to survive, it has to become more self-reflective as a practice - this is one of the tenets of modernity. However, as the research data demonstrates, self-reflection is a practice with which the liberal catholic Anglican tradition has considerable difficulty, so the paradox I was left with was whether it might be possible for liberal catholic Anglicanism to remain traditional, but in a modern way.

Furthering the stories in the interview process through reflection

It was clear from hearing the 'electric moment' stories that the quality we were noticing indicated to both the characters in the stories, and the priest- story-tellers, that something important had happened. But I did not want to leave things there.

I was seeking to move on from the collection of essays, *Praying for England* (Wells 2008), which was influential in my decision to write this thesis. Most of the contributions to this collection describe moving examples of contemporary ministry, but at the time these encounters actually took place, no theological understanding of what may have been going on was offered to the characters in the stories. For example, *Praying for England* includes Sarah Coakley's Parachute Story, the paradigmatic 'electric moment' story I sent to priests before their research interview.

Sarah Coakley writes, 'in his 'parachuting' mode Steve grasped the centrality of the orans posture, the absolute indispensability of prayer: at least once in his life he had experienced the ecstatic 'free fall' into the wind of the spirit' (Coakley, 2008, p. 18-19). This is Sarah's understanding and interpretation of the embodied connection Steve makes between his own parachute experience, and seeing her at

the altar singing the Sursum Corda with her hands raised, when he tells her, 'I saw you there; you were parachuting...' (ibid, p.17).

The God-bearing connection Sarah sees clearly, and later writes about so sensitively in her essay, using religious and liturgical language, was at the time left unspoken and un-interpreted for Steve. There is nothing to suggest that he has grasped the centrality of the orans posture, the indispensability of prayer, or made any connection between his own free-fall and the wind of the spirit. Coming from outside the church culture, and living on the margins of society, there was nothing that could possibly locate Steve in the same symbolic world as Sarah. He just knows something very important and meaningful has happened to him that somehow connects with the happiest moment of his life. But in terms of God's action in his life, the experience is left un-mediated for him in a rather tantalising way. Steve has no understanding of its potential meaning for him in religious or sacramental terms, or how to further it.

If no appropriate religious insight or hospitality is offered in response to experiences like Steve's, they are left unmet, unidentified and not given religious shape or meaning. When this is the case, the impact of 'electric moment' experiences on someone's life can recede, fall out of consciousness and get lost because the opportunity they offer to enter a new, life transforming relationship with God is not caught up, transposed into intelligible religious language and communicated to the other in ministry. In response to an 'electric moment' like Steve's, that shakes the heart of anyone who hears his story, the tradition has two problems: its resistance to talk directly about God, and a gap when searching for intelligible language in which to speak.

Although the circumstances are different, Vivienne's 'electric moment' story about her ministry to the dying Martin describes an encounter where the

sacramental dynamic is left implicit in the deep, empathetic connection between them. God's presence in the situation is left unspoken. Like Sarah, Vivienne reflects theologically on the experience herself, and writes beautifully about it. At some level, in both these stories, the priest takes shared meaning for granted. But it doesn't follow that because God's presence is so palpable to Sarah and Vivienne, they can assume the people to whom they minister share the same understanding of what has happened - each person's understanding of the meaning of the same event is likely to be different.

In this section I have looked at the difficulties some priests had with the reflective part of the research process. I have linked this difficulty with the reticence entrenched in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition about talking of the things of God and the problem this creates for priests who want to communicate the saving story to unchurched people today. The research process helped priests to reflect on their practice and invited them to articulate to another their understanding how God was at work, in and through their ministry, as illustrated by their 'electric moment' stories. The priests struggled to find new language about God that they could then take into their ministry and speak out.

Parallels between working as analyst and researcher

The model I used for the research interviews introduced priests to the reflective process – a model that itself was the result of my own reflection on practice.

At the beginning of the research process, during my first pilot interview, I had observed that when conducting this interview I felt exactly as I do when conducting an analytic session with a patient. Noticing that for me these two roles felt interchangeable seemed to be a very important and exciting insight and was to influence the design of my research.

As both analyst and researcher people were telling me deep, penetrating stories about their lives in intense, personal encounters that felt dynamic and generative. In both cases people were giving me their life testimonies and we were thinking about them together in a reflective process I was guiding. As I thought about my experience of working in one medium, it threw light on my work in the other; it was a cross-fertilization that was fruitful in the research process.

What goes on between analyst and patient in the therapeutic relationship gave me a paradigm for the transformational potential of the relationships I formed with the interviewees during the process of hearing about their own intense relationships with those to whom they ministered, as illustrated by the electric moment stories.

A method of modernity

In choosing to base my interviews on a psychoanalytic model I introduced my interviewees to a way of scrutinising practice that takes itself as an object of inquiry. Psychoanalysis embodies the method of modernity in that it takes the form of one to one inquiry: it is about analyst and patient together scrutinising the patient's life. Employing an adapted version of this method as a model for the research interviews provided a way for researcher and priest to scrutinise the priest's practice together, through the lens of an electric moment story. I modelled the practice of self-reflection in the way I conducted the research.

Referring to one thing in terms of another

In the chapter on 'Speaking in Parables' in *Theological Reflection: Methods*, the authors discuss Ricoeur's reflections in relation to metaphor. They suggest that those who assume 'metaphors are acting as a straightforward way to enhance rhetorical performance, are 'missing the surprising significance of '*the human capability to refer to one thing in terms of another* (emphasis added). Metaphors

bring together what were previously distinct terms into a new conjunction. They represent a disruption of thought and speech...The function of metaphor is thus not so much to adorn everyday language, but rather to push it to its limits and beyond. And thus through metaphor we receive 'a new way of being in the world' (Graham, 2005, p. 64).

It seems that Ricoeur believed something very important is happening when this kind of conjunction is made and 'human beings make a leap of vision that allows them to perceive the world in new ways' (ibid).

Reflecting with priests on electric moment stories about their sacramental ministry and investigating and extrapolating the stories using psychoanalytic theory and method, was a way of 'referring to one thing in terms of another'. It opened the priests up to another world, inviting them into a way of looking at their stories from a different perspective, where 'the imagination (is) being called upon to open itself to new possibilities' (ibid, p. 65).

To different degrees, four of the priests in particular seemed to be imaginatively stimulated by the research process and responsive to its method. Rhona, Mick, Avril and Derek were excited about new ideas, able to make creative connections and also to imaginatively speculate about implications for their future ministry in ways that may not have been possible had we looked at their ministry in a more traditional way.

Layers of relationships in the research interviews

The quality of my encounters with the priest/story tellers was mimetic of the relationships they were telling me about in their electric moment stories. The stories they told all had at their centre a sacramental dynamic: that is, they were rooted in the priests' own profound personal relationships with God: these priests were

steeped in God and by going out and living their holy lives, they mediated him to others in profound, intense relationship.

The research process involved working with these layers of rich, intense, potentially transformative relationships: between the priest and God, between the priest and the person receiving ministry, between God and the person receiving ministry (transmitted through the sacramental agency of the priest), and finally between the priest and me in the research interview.

A reflexive method

The research method I used enabled priests to think about their practice and subject it to close scrutiny in a way that enhanced and deepened their capacity for thoughtfulness. By introducing a third as researcher and dialogue partner - someone interacting with them but also commentating - the priests were guided into a process of reflexive practice and given the opportunity to engage with it. This was an active process, facilitating transformation and change, unlike the more passive process of reflection which is about looking back.

Engaging in this kind of reflexivity can feel counter-cultural and almost transgressive because it is all about thinking and deepening practice in a culture where the widespread approach to practice tends more and more towards the shallow. Also, encouraging people to think for themselves, and find their own meanings and forms of practice presents a challenge to conservative institutions with limiting ideas about how the world works. This can be threatening, especially when the culture of the institution is anti-intellectual. As David Heywood comments, 'hierarchical organisations, which the churches tend to be, have a built-in resistance to reflection: because reflection systematically questions the status quo it constitutes a challenge to institutional structures of power' (Heywood, 201, p. 200).

The discovery that they were thinking about their practice in ways that put them on the radical edge of the Church of England was a surprising, and not altogether comfortable place for some of the priest/interviewees to find themselves.

9.2 The Research Content

Telling their 'electric moment' stories and reflecting on them proved to be a rich way for the priest-story-tellers to come to grips with the vitality of their experience of God's action in their lives and ministry – something intangible, embedded in practice and therefore difficult to grasp and speak about.

9.2.1 Sacramental Improvisation

As I analysed the research material, I noticed that the numinous thread, or 'electric' charge, that ran through and characterised each story, had a family likeness in common with all the other stories. This electric quality seemed to be generated by profound, intense relationships between the priests and those to whom they ministered - often at what Giddens calls, 'fateful moments' in their lives when 'personal crises occur (and people's) sense of ontological security is ... under immediate strain' (Giddens, 1991, p.185).

As the 'electric moment' stories and data analysis show, in ways particular to each story, and with various levels of articulateness, these priests were all living lives steeped in the presence of God, and this indwelling presence made them holy people. The 'electric moment' stories show how their holy lives became conduits of God's presence for those they encountered in profound, intense spiritual/emotional relationships in the course of their ministry.

From a place in themselves, centred in a deep, loving relationship with God, these priests all found ways to take something of the generative essence of their own relationship with God out into the world and transmit it to others in an exchange

of grace. The God in them recognised and met the God in the other, making these relationships God-bearing and potentially transformative.

The process of transmitting God's presence through relationships in this way has an improvisational quality: it is a response to the moment which, although spontaneous, is deeply rooted in the tradition. The security provided by this traditional inner structure, formed over years of faithful practice, gives priests with vision and confidence the freedom to go out into the unknown and improvise the gospel whilst at the same time knowing, and being able to articulate, what it is they are doing, and how the shape of what they are doing, fits the sacramental tradition. This is a form of ministry that has emerged from my findings and seems particularly suited to the times: I am calling it, 'sacramental improvisation'.

This kind of ministry is extremely costly for the priests who exercise it. It requires flexibility and imagination to improvise the gospel in this way and, at the same time, remain focussed and self-aware, supported by the scaffolding of the tradition and knowing that what they are doing could be articulated and held up for scrutiny as a piece of ministry in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition.

Donald's altar-cloth story is a beautiful example of the sort of improvisational, sacramental flow I am thinking about here.

In the hospital where the altar-cloth story takes place, Donald moves out of the institutional church into a desolate world where he himself is the church. He carries within him the beauty and depth of the liturgy and the indwelling Holy Spirit and he improvises his ministry out of these inner riches. The story culminates in a simple service of Holy Communion where bread and wine are set out on the embroidered linen altar-cloth.

The numinous threads emerging from stories like this lead to an understanding of sacramental ministry today as deeply and profoundly relational

and improvisational. This does not mean that religious language and symbol have to be abandoned, as Donald's story makes clear. In some ways, this story is an example of how the liberal catholic Anglican tradition can be traditional in a modern way for those within it. However, it does not go far enough to embrace those outside the church.

Donald, as we have seen, was resistant to reflecting on what he thinks he is doing in ministry - he just does it and, as his story shows, he does it beautifully and that is enough for him. In his parish, with his people, a shared symbolic world meant much could be taken for granted, in terms of the religious context of his ministry.

In the late modern world that is not the case – the altar-cloth story is a moving story, but there is nothing to locate it for unchurched people as truth-bearing, to be embraced in the depths of their psyches: there is no bridging mechanism. Unless stories like this are held up, scrutinised, and in some sense interpreted theologically, the sacramental, God-bearing, saving dimension can be lost.

In an earlier section of the conclusion, the point was made that in order to survive as a practice, liberal catholic Anglicanism has to join in the modern project by becoming self-reflective and that this is difficult for a tradition that is essentially reserved. However, if this reserved tradition is to draw people from outside the church into the saving story, it must develop the capacity to take itself as an object of inquiry so that it can give an intelligible account of itself.

Of all the priests I interviewed and had conversations with during my research journey, Rhona's ministry comes closest to the form that I am suggesting needs to evolve if the liberal catholic Anglican tradition is to survive: Rhona's ministry is traditional, but in a modern way. The deep, intense relationship Rhona makes with the penitent prisoner is about her empathetic witnessing of his story and

his sorrow, and it comes to a climax in an improvised ritual they created together. Although for the most part the ritual is secular in language, it is liturgical in shape.

Concluding their meeting, Rhona says a prayer of forgiveness for the prisoner and she blesses him, making the sign of the cross over his head. On reflection, Rhona understood what happened between them as a therapeutic process, but in a religious context: she told me 'there was no doubt that there was a third person present, and the prisoner knew it'. In Rhona's view it was their shared sense of a 'third person' being present in the intimacy of their encounter, that made it possible for the prisoner to accept her naming of this as the presence of God. Identifying the power they had both experienced as the power of God felt natural and right: the crime had been so heinous that only the grandeur of God's redemptive love could wipe it out. This was what Rhona was mediating in the encounter, and the prisoner emotionally grasped that this was so. He was able to accept the forgiveness offered and feel forgiven and made new.

This is a supreme example of sacramental ministry in a modern idiom where nothing of the traditional sacramental dynamic is lost: it is free to do its saving and transformative work, but in an improvisational way. Rhona's story shows her imaginative ability to blend her priestly role with her gifts as a psychotherapist in a way that makes talk of God, and the religious gestures that conclude the encounter, seem a natural and essential part of its healing process - for the prisoner, as well as herself. She moves easily between two different ways of thinking about what is going on and this cross fertilisation frees her to practise in an imaginative way that meets the prisoner where he is and facilitates transformation.

Rhona's ministry is an example of what I am suggesting the liberal catholic tradition needs to discover if it is to survive, improvisational ministry that remains traditional, but in a modern way.

Earlier in the thesis I mentioned Etty Hillesum, the young, Dutch Jewish woman who cared for desolate souls awaiting transportation to Auschwitz in the early 1940's. Etty is a vivid example of someone who exercised a ministry outside the institutions of church, priesthood, and traditional Christianity, but in a form that unmistakably conforms to the dynamic shape of sacramental ministry. She is an exemplar of the kind of ministry I am calling 'sacramental improvisation'. In the view of Rowan Williams, Etty's life is one that counts as a 'religious life' in a distinctively modern way that is liberated imaginatively from the constraints of organised religion and its traditions.

Like Donald and Rhona, Etty's way of relating to others is profound and intense, 'the most essential and deepest in me, hearkening unto the most essential and deepest in the other, God to God'... It is a way of 'clearing of the path towards you in them'. As Williams points out, this is an expression of sacramental ministry that is completely in tune with classic accounts and illustrates the way that the sacramental dynamic can translate perfectly well into a modern idiom' (Williams, 2012, p. 135). Etty also illustrates a profoundly modern consciousness that is unafraid to take itself as an object of inquiry.

Another aspect of the improvisational turn in liberal catholic Anglican ministry emerging from the research material, is the way some priests are seeking to overcome the difficulty modern people have with the many-layered esoteric symbolism of the tradition, by trying to build symbolic bridges between these two worlds, making each more porous and accessible to the other. These priests are getting a sense of what is going on and joining in.

Derek managed to create a symbolic bridge for the friends of Pippa, by welcoming them into his church along with all the artefacts and Pippa memorabilia that had meaning for them. This welcome and hospitality gave the friends of Pippa a

sense of shared ownership of the memorial service: they felt at home in the church and over that time, Derek was their priest.

9.2.2 Situationally Responsive, Sacramental Improvisation: the Threatened Context

One of the problems for the liberal catholic Anglican tradition today, as the literature review makes clear, is that the kind of confidence priests need to exercise situationally responsive, improvisational ministry is being seriously corroded by the indifference towards it of both the current Church of England and wider society. It is difficult for priests to maintain a healthy narcissism and the resilience necessary to exercise their sacramental ministry in an inhospitable environment.

This reported lack of confidence in priests was not initially apparent in those I interviewed. However the fact that I noticed an upsurge in enthusiasm and vigour in all but one of the priests, as a result of going through the research process, suggests that they may have been rather more down-beat than I realised.

The interview material shows that the kind of improvised sacramental ministry I am thinking about here, exercised in the context of profound, intense relationships, works well in traditional parish ministry where one priest cares for one parish, and also acts as a kind of chaplain to the core community of church members. It also works well in a chaplaincy context in prisons, schools, hospitals and hospices, for example. All but one of the priests I interviewed, exercise their ministry in these traditional settings. In their current work situations, therefore, the priests I interviewed have not been directly affected by the changing culture of the church.

However when these parish priests retire, most of them will not be replaced. Opportunities for chaplaincy work have been diminishing, so institutionally, the future for liberal catholic Anglican ministry looks rather bleak. If priests in this

tradition are to exercise improvisational sacramental ministry, they need new ways to access people. One diocese is experimenting with a priestly role that is based on a chaplaincy model, but out in the community specifically concerned with issues of justice. This role is linked in to the liturgical life of a cathedral and the intention is for the priest to come and go, bringing the life of each world to the other – cross fertilisation again, bringing new forms of life to revitalise the liberal catholic Anglican tradition. A recent report written by Ben Ryan for the think tank Theos, *A Very Modern Ministry: Chaplaincy in the UK* (2015), describes the work of chaplains in casinos and shopping centres as well in more traditional locations and affirms the challenging, prophetic voice that chaplains can bring to the public square.

Tim Jenkins (2006) suggests that 'in a society where...fewer people feel licensed or committed or compelled to come to church, chaplaincy will continue to be enormously important to fulfilling the church's calling. But it must also be said that this cannot be done without worshipping congregations underwriting it. Both forms are vital and depend on each other' (Jenkins, 2006, p.113).

9.3 What Contribution Does My Research Make to Knowledge and Practice?

Contribution to knowledge

- My research gives vivid accounts of contemporary sacramental ministry that are not found elsewhere in the literature. Starting from real-life 'electric moment' stories about ministry, the research method enabled priests to speak and think about their stories and explain what they think they are doing in ministry, in a new way. The method allowed the sacramental dynamic of the ministry of the priests I interviewed to be held up for scrutiny and evaluated as a transformative practice, free of the trappings of the organisational church.

1. The thesis introduces the idea of 'sacramental improvisation' as a way in which traditional practice can make God's action in the world intelligible to unchurched people today, but in a modern way.

It is a form of ministry that stays true in essence, dynamic and shape to traditional sacramental ministry. It is situational, reaching out to people, and blending in with the world view, language and context of the person receiving ministry, whilst at the same time bringing God into it, through imaginative sacramental action and prayer. Sacramental improvisation can provide a 'connecting apparatus' that links modern people with the saving story.

2. The research process introduced priests to a reflexive way of thinking about what they are doing in ministry.

Starting from their subjective experiences described in the 'electric moment stories', priests were helped and encouraged by the researcher's interventions to think outwards from these experiences, with freedom to think new thoughts. By doing this they were joining in with the modern project of employing self-scrutiny as a way of knowing. This method of reflection and thoughtfulness was modelled by the interview process itself: it lifted the sacramental dimension of the 'electric moment' stories free of the limiting thought forms of the institutional church, so it could be thought about afresh.

3. It was possible to imagine the tradition forward, but in a modern way, by helping priests to transform the insights gained by self-scrutiny into self-understanding and to enable them to think creatively about how this new, articulate understanding about what they are doing, and not doing, could be ploughed into transformational practice. The confidence this way of thinking seemed to inspire in the priests was in marked contrast to the general down-playing of the tradition in the last three decades and consequent down-heartedness of its priests.

Contribution to practice

1. A method of appraisal/ ministerial development review (MDR)

The research interview process could be used with little adaptation as a method of appraisal/ ministerial development review (MDR) for priests in the liberal catholic Anglican tradition. It is a process of facilitated self-reflection that could be a more appropriate method of self-development than existing forms of MDR

After taking part in the research process, most priests were enthusiastic and appreciative. One said, 'it really got to 'the heart of my ministry' and another, 'no-one has ever asked me about my ministry like that before'. Priests felt the process valued them because it gave them time and space, and also they felt deeply listened to. Two priests said that the research process had been far more helpful to their ministry than their recent functional and bland experiences of MDR, based on a lengthy, concrete questionnaire. 'I couldn't answer any of the questions because none of them seemed relevant to what I actually do in my ministry' one of these priests told me, 'so it didn't look as if I did anything.' In contrast, the research process helped most of the priest/interviewees to think and talk about their experience of ministry helpfully; it was a way of 'getting to the heart' of their ministry and also gave priests a sense of its overall shape and direction.

Facilitators of an MDR process based on the research interview model I used would need to have an appropriate skill set. Transferrable skills could be constellated for facilitators in a training day run on the same lines as the trainings I ran for psychotherapists and priests who wanted to learn how to facilitate Balint-style groups.

2. Spiritual coaching

The attentive, empathetic style of the one to one research interviews, and the way that 'interpretation' and 'working through' were integral to the model as learning tools, makes it suitable for use as form of spiritual coaching.

For example, in the case of Roger, who hadn't read his interview transcript, the second reflective interview could have gone nowhere. However helping him, against considerable resistance, to think about the possible meaning of his not having read the transcript of his story, uncovered strong feelings about his current demanding work situation and underlying sense of loss, having recently moved from a much loved parish. These revelations came to him as a surprise and a relief and led on to my supporting him through the reflective interview in a way he found very helpful and self-revealing.

The interpretive method was used in Roger's case as a kind of spiritual coaching. This could usefully be added into an MDR process, as suggested above, for those priests lacking in confidence or experiencing difficulties in ministry and who might benefit from this kind of close personal attention and encouragement.

3. Supervision/ Work consultancy

The research interview model I used could also helpfully be used in a supervisory relationship that focuses on a priest's ongoing practice. Supervisor and supervisee enter a generative working relationship which evokes new insights about the issues brought to the supervision session and these then inform continuing practice. The receptiveness of priests to the research interview process and the depth of the material they shared suggested that the regular dialogue about work offered by supervision is a much needed component of continuing professional development currently missing.

4. Common Awards

In his paper on the new 'Common Awards' partnership between Durham University and the Church of England, Higton asks 'what the university and the church have to gain from one another in the area of theological education' and he argues that what the university can offer the church is help to 'extend the range of critical conversations in which the church engages, and help form some of the intellectual virtues required of those who pursue this reflection'. Higton writes that the kind of learning pursued in the partnership, 'needs to be understood as deeply engaged with the life and practice of the church' (Higton, 2013, p. 25).

Deep engagement with practice that is reflected upon, thought about and then ploughed back into practice with a new imaginative understanding and insight that changes things is exactly what the research method I developed was designed to do. In terms of its critical acuteness, as well as its emotional and spiritual dynamism and depth, perhaps this method would make a more useful a contribution to the common awards project than the widely used Action Learning method. Action Learning is a closed, rationalistic, altogether shallower system within which there is little space for the generation of new and imaginative thoughts. In contrast, the reflexive method I have developed - a Balint- style Group version of which is described in this portfolio - has the capacity to get up close to practice in a way that is both profound and transformational. I have also noticed that when priests are willing to work in this way, at this level, in a group setting, differences in churchmanship become blurred and irrelevant. Perhaps this is an additional recommendation of the method.

The liberal catholic Anglican tradition could have much to contribute to the proposed dialogue between church and university about theological education. In many ways this kind of critical, scholarly conversation is its natural territory. It is

important therefore, that liberal catholic Anglicans are enabled to hold their own with confidence, and are not side-lined by the strident, managerial voices of those advocating the new styles of Church the Church of England is undoubtedly moving into.

These emerging churches 'take us beyond the identification of 'church' with the way we have historically run things', and in order to serve them, new skills-based patterns of ordination training have been developed that pay less attention to priestly formation and personal growth than used to be the case. Having an articulate, liberal catholic Anglican voice at the table would remind discussants that 'an emerging Church without the recognisable signs and relations embodied in Catholic ministry is in serious danger of lapsing into the mode of a human assembly of those who agree and sympathize with each other' (Williams, 2005, p.174). In these circumstances the liberal catholic tradition within the Anglican church needs to reflect with care and imagination on how its ministry might be 'deployed' and 'resourced' (ibid) if it is to offer a clearly thought out articulation of a tradition that is attuned to late modernity.

Perhaps engaging in the kind of critical conversations between university and church envisioned by Higton, will in itself 'help form some of the intellectual virtues required of those who pursue this reflection'. It is possible that a process of this sort could be as transformative and renewing for the liberal catholic Anglican tradition as it was on a small scale for my priest-storytellers.

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APPENDIX 1

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for offering to take part in the research study I am conducting as part of my Doctorate in Practical Theology programme in the Department of Arts, Histories and Cultures at the University of Manchester.

It is important for you to know exactly what you are signing up to, why the research is being done and what your involvement will be.

Please ask if anything is not clear or if you would like more information.

WHY THIS RESEARCH IS BEING UNDERTAKEN.

The intention of this research is to excavate the current practice of sacramental ministry within the liberal, Anglican tradition and to articulate this model of ministry in order to show its value and importance to the mission of the church.

I hope to draw out of obscurity and give voice to some real life, hidden and unarticulated examples of personal transformation that have occurred in the context of spiritual/emotional relationships between priests and those to whom they minister. I shall try to clarify the sort of thing that happens in these sacramental encounters, why what happens is so valuable and important and how what happens can and must engage with the tradition if it is to be transformational for people.

I want to show that sacramental ministry, in the liberal Anglican tradition, has the capacity to facilitate transformation in the lives of post-modern people and, indeed, that priests in this tradition are particularly well placed in their pastoral ministry to discern God's action in people's lives and help them transpose their felt experiences of moments of grace into meaningful theology.

HOW I INTEND TO UNDERTAKE THE RESEARCH

In order to explore how sacramental ministry can be a vehicle of personal change, I am inviting six priests who are drawn from the Anglican tradition of sacramental ministry to describe moments of grace that have occurred in their own pastoral ministry and reflect on what they did with them.

I am naming such moments, 'electric moments' because when they occur, they 'shock' or 'surprise' people because they are intuitively recognised as having a numinous quality and personal significance.

WHAT I SHALL BE ASKING YOU TO DO

In advance of your interview I shall ask you to read two examples of the kind of thing I mean by 'electric moments'. These examples are attached to this information sheet.

With your permission, I should like to conduct the interview in your place of ministry so that I am able to contextualise what you say within your setting.

At the beginning of our hour-long, audio recorded interview I shall read the two examples of 'electric moments' to you in order to articulate some sort of shared understanding about what we are both talking about.

I shall invite you to describe an 'electric moment' of your own that has occurred in a pastoral encounter. I shall want you to explore it, articulate what you did with it, describe what happened and consider whether, and in what ways, you feel the transformational potential of the moment was realised.

Within a week, I shall send you the transcript of the interview and invite you to reflect on it.

A further face-to-face meeting or telephone conversation with me would follow, providing an opportunity for us to share our reflections and for me to ask you one or two follow on questions that have occurred to me.

WHY I HAVE INVITED YOU TO PARTICIPATE

I have invited you to participate because, in one way or another, you self-identified as a priest who has experienced 'electric moments' in your pastoral ministry.

Either in response to a paper I gave in July 2011 describing my proposed research, or in a private conversation, you told me, 'I know exactly what you're talking about when you speak of electric moments!'

In consequence I asked you to participate in my research study.

CONSENT

To participate in this research study you will need to have read this information sheet and signed the consent form.

The consent form assures you that, should you wish, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

The consent form also states that any material you share with me about your pastoral encounters will be held and processed in the strictest confidence and anonymity preserved.

Although participants are thanked in the acknowledgement section of the thesis, your individual comments, in the body of the thesis, will not be sourced to you in order to preserve your anonymity, and the identity of any persons you refer to in your comments.

I make it clear that the information you share with me as researcher may be used in the final products of the research.

Initially this will be in the form of a written thesis for the University of Manchester, but I anticipate that the thesis will form the basis of journal articles and lectures in the field of Practical Theology.

Individual and group interviews will be audio taped and the tapes will be securely protected, accessible only to me as the researcher and destroyed after 5 years.

Data stored electronically will be similarly protected.

VALIDATION

The research is being conducted under the supervision of:

Dr Peter Scott, Religions and Theology, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures,
Samuel Alexander Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester,
M13 9PL.

(0161 2753064)

Dr Helen Cameron, Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford.

(01865 874404)

MARY TRAVIS. UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER. 2011

APPENDIX 2

CONSENT FORM

1. I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in this research study.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for participants dated August 2011 and have been given the opportunity to ask the researcher about the study and what will be expected of me.
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice.
4. I understand that all the material I share in the research interview about my pastoral encounters will be held and processed in the strictest confidence and anonymity preserved.

Although all participants will be listed in the acknowledgement section of the thesis, I understand that my individual comments, in the body of the thesis, will not be sourced to me by name in order to preserve my anonymity, and the identity of any persons I refer to in my comments.

5. I understand that any information shared with the researcher may be used in the final products of the research, including written and oral presentations and I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study.
6. I agree that any individual interview or group interview may be audio recorded and I understand that interview tapes will be securely protected, accessible only by me as the researcher and destroyed after 5 years. Data stored electronically will be similarly protected.

Name of participant (blockcapitals).....

Signed

Email/contact number

Date

Name of Researcher (block capitals).....

Signed

Date

Part B

SUPPORTING CLERGY IN POSTMODERN MINISTRY

ABSTRACT

This paper is an evaluation of a Balint-Style group for clergy run in Bristol in 2004–2005. The group was provided as a resource by the diocese in response to a growing perception that clergy need new kinds of opportunities to discuss and think about their work and share their feelings about it. The group was run by two psychoanalytically trained leaders. Using qualitative research techniques this paper explores whether or to what extent the aims and objectives of providers, participants and leaders of the group were met and whether or not a Balint-Style group can provide a new and effective way of offering personal and professional support and development to clergy. It was found that the aims and objectives of all parties had been more than met and that a Balint-Style group is a very useful, adaptable and cost-effective way to support the work of up to eight clergy at a time. The group modelled for participants a particular way of attending to the unique situational needs of individuals. With its emphasis on careful listening and psychologically attuned attention, the group provided participants with psychological insights and some new skills to take with them into their ministry.

Keywords: clergy, development, groupwork, psychoanalytic, support.

1. BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2004 the Bristol Diocese Pastoral Adviser, Stuart Taylor, and myself, Mary Travis, a Jungian analyst and psychoanalytic psychotherapist with 15 years' experience of working with clergy in individual therapy, met together for a conversation. We wanted to think about possible ways in which the diocese might provide additional personal and professional support for its clergy.

For many years, individual counselling and psychotherapy have been available in the diocese for clergy experiencing personal or emotional difficulties and recently some individual supervision has been set up. One-to-one support of this kind is very expensive to deliver and therefore, of necessity, reaches only those few in greatest need. But there was growing anecdotal evidence of the need for resources of this kind to be made more widely available to all clergy, including to those coping really well. Both Stuart and I had noticed increasingly an acknowledgement amongst clergy that they would value more opportunity to reflect on their work and to share their feelings about it.

This is a comparatively recent and growing trend and may be due, in part, to the changing role and new demands on clergy to respond and minister to complex needs in a post-Christian, multicultural, consumer society. Stuart and I had a sense that many clergy were facing something of a professional identity crisis and feeling the need to reshape their ministry in order to be more responsive to the changing social context in which they found themselves.

Thinking about all this, Stuart and I wondered if there might be a way of providing some cost-effective, personal/professional support for clergy who, whilst not in dire straits, would, nevertheless, value a resource of this kind.

The current draft legislation on Terms and Conditions of Service for clergy, which is in the process of going through Synod, contains a section on Ministerial Development Review. It states that the church has a responsibility to,

assist in developing the skills, talents and abilities of those who have been selected and trained for the ministry so they are better able to meet the demands of ministry today and in the future (Draft Amending Canon no. 29. Section 48, p. 12).

It is interesting that the need we discerned as a result of our work on the ground with the clergy in Bristol is picked up here in draft legislation intended to apply to all clergy across the whole of the Church of England. It suggests that our work is timely.

2. AIMS OF THIS PAPER

This paper describes the process of setting up and facilitating a fortnightly Balint-Style support group for clergy in the Bristol Diocese during 2004-2005.

The group ran for a period of seven months and the paper describes the qualitative research techniques used to investigate its effectiveness, in terms of meeting the aims and objectives of the three parties involved:

- The Diocese of Bristol
- The clergy who participated in the group
- The group leaders

Finally the paper evaluates how far the Balint-Style group facilitated “emotional-intellectual learning experiences” for participants in ways especially suited to supporting their ministry to a changing world (Balint, 1992: xii).

3. INTRODUCTION

About five years ago, I ran a pilot clergy support group for several months in the Bristol Diocese. There was no formal evaluation of this group, but, anecdotally, it seems that it was appreciated by participants. Several group members found ways to continue their psychological work after the group ended (e.g., one went into analysis and two others sought supervision with psychoanalytic psychotherapists). Ongoing social links were forged between members of the group. A second group was proposed at the time but did not get off the ground; the then Pastoral Adviser was changing jobs and rumours circulated that the group was for “clergy with problems,” and no-one wanted that cachet.

The model which I used for this clergy group was based on one pioneered by Michael and Enid Balint, two psychoanalysts who worked with groups of GPs in the 1950s and 1960s at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Michael Balint describes at length and illustrates this model with copious, fascinating case histories in his books, *The Doctor, his Patient and the Illness and Psychotherapeutic Techniques in Medicine*.

A colleague of mine, Dr Peter Barwell, had been running a “Balintgroup” for GPs in Bristol for over ten years and we had often discussed together its simplicity and effectiveness in terms of facilitating personal change and increasing interpersonal sensitivity in GPs. In many ways the pastoral work of clergy is comparable to the work of GPs with their patients. Both GPs and clergy handle private, confidential one-to-one relationships with people in which intimate, emotive issues are discussed. In both relationships, one is the “expert” and one the “lay” person: the doctor is the expert on the body; the member of the clergy on the soul. I wondered if the group model used by the Balints with their GPs could be transferred and used as effectively with a group of clergy. My impression, after running the pilot group,

was that it could. The Balint model, with minor modifications, seemed to work extremely well for clergy.

Reflecting on this, Stuart and I thought that the time might be right to run another Balint-Style group for clergy. This time, however, it would be set up systematically and properly evaluated. It might then be possible to see if groups of this kind could provide useful, cost-effective, personal/professional support and development for up to eight members of the clergy at a time.

Stuart and I decided to go ahead with this project as a joint enterprise, funded by the Diocese. I asked for Peter Barwell to be my co-leader and for regular joint supervision with Amélie Noak, a group analyst, in order to monitor both the group process and our own feelings about the group. I undertook to evaluate the group after its conclusion and produce a formal research report. It was decided that Stuart, Peter and I would meet together to decide on a recruitment strategy for the “Balint-Style” group for clergy.

What Exactly Do We Mean by a “Balint-Style” Group?

In order to explain this, I need to first describe what a Balint group is. (This description is indebted to some written reflections of Peter Barwell.) When Michael and Enid Balint began their groups for GPs their aim was,

to help the doctors with the psychological aspect of their patients’ problems and their problems with their patients. The focus of the work was on the doctor-patient relationship; what it meant, how it could be used helpfully, why it so often broke down with doctor and patient failing to understand each other (Salinsky, 1997).

The Balints created in their groups,

a free give and take atmosphere, in which everyone could bring up his problems in the hope of getting some light on them from the experience of others (Balint, 1964: 3).

The group members would listen to each other “with a free, floating mind” (1964: 311), a quality of listening modelled for them by the leaders who would “teach more by...example” (1964: 306). Thus, the doctors were able to benefit from a psychoanalyst’s way of looking at the material, rather than from specific analytical interpretations. Group members’ transference to the leaders was not interpreted, which contributed to the group’s democratic atmosphere.

The groups consisted of eight to ten doctors who met every week. Each session a doctor would bring a case which was troubling him or her. Balint encouraged the group to concentrate on the relationship between the doctor and the patient rather than, as would have been more familiar to them, on the medical side of the case. The doctor would present the case without notes in order to retain the spontaneity of the original consultation. This often resulted in the group’s emotional reaction to the doctor reflecting the doctor’s reaction to the patient. Indeed, Balint noticed that there was a tendency in the group for the presenting doctor to behave like the patient and for the group to behave like the doctor, thus dramatically reproducing in the group the situation experienced by the doctor in the consulting room.

Although personal material sometimes came up, the group did not delve into the personal lives of its members. The useful things the doctors learnt about themselves leading to movement or change were gained through discussions about their patients.

The group was neither a discussion group nor a support group but aimed to look at what had been going on between the doctor and patient in the hope of understanding their meaning for each other and effect on each other.

There was particular emphasis on the feelings aroused in the doctor by the patient and why this might be so. Their experiences in the group helped doctors to use themselves more effectively in their interactions with their patients.

An Adaptation of the Balint Model

As with the Balints, the main focus of our clergy group was to encourage group members to express their thoughts and feelings about the professional relationships being presented. (In our case this was the relationship between clergy and parishioner rather than doctor and patient.) But, unlike the Balints and their GPs, we wanted to give time, weight and attention to the presenter's own personal issues or history where these seemed relevant to the material being presented. Our overall goal was, therefore, different from that of the Balints: their focus was on training and research whereas our focus was the personal and professional development of our participants and in providing them with support. Our clergy group was similar to a Balint group, but not identical to it, we would therefore call it a "Balint-Style group."

In Practice, Then, How Did our Balint-Style Group Work?

Each group lasted one and a half hours and two clergy presented material each time. Peter and I took turns to lead, with the other joining in the discussion.

The presenter would bring a current tricky, pastoral problem – often one that had also brought up for them strong feelings associated with previous, similar experiences. Using their empathy and own experience, the rest of the group would help the presenter to explore these feelings and to look carefully at what the pastoral problem had touched in them. Usually some understanding would be reached as to why this particular problem was causing this particular person difficulty and insight would be gained both personally and professionally.

The leaders' role was to try to keep the group discussion on task, that is, focused on the parishioner/clergy relationship and also to encourage group members to express their own thoughts and feelings about what they had heard; this was done mainly by example. The leaders held the boundaries in terms of time and its fair allocation and in terms of respecting the personal privacy of group members. The leaders were themselves well contained in regular supervision with a group analyst and I think that this contributed to the feeling of freedom and safety within the group.

Evaluating the Balint-Style Group

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the group, it was decided that I would carry out the study by means of qualitative research, using questionnaires in a face-to-face audio-recorded interview carried out by a research assistant shortly after the conclusion of the group. The design of this research study was discussed at a United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) research workshop in London which I attended in November 2004, just before the group started. One of the leaders of that workshop, Dr Tirril Harris, continued to be involved in the project throughout as Research Consultant.

How then, would the Diocese, Peter and myself know whether or not the group had been effective? What would effectiveness look like? What were we all hoping for from such a group?

Aims and Objectives of Balint-Style Group Sessions

Diocesan aims and objectives.

The Diocese, who commissioned the work, would consider the group effective if it provided:

- “good support for minimal outlay”
- “a model to encourage...other dioceses to use.”¹

The providers’ (Mary’s and Peter’s) aims and objectives.

Mary and Peter, whilst sharing the diocesan aims and objectives, had in addition a professional interest in discovering whether a Balint-Style group is a useful setting in which personal and professional support and development can occur. They would want to know, therefore:

- whether participants had noticed any slight changes in their personalities which they attributed to the group process, and
- whether group members felt they had acquired any new psychological tools which could enhance their pastoral work and self-understanding.

(Balint also looked for these indicators of change in his GPs.)

Setting Up the Group

In July, Stuart, Peter and myself met over lunch to discuss the setting up of the group and recruitment. Stuart then constructed a leaflet to send out to all the clergy in the diocese in their in-house mailing. This leaflet put a theologically attuned gloss onto Peter’s and my psychological schema for the group and all three of us were

¹ Personal note sent to Mary and Peter from Stuart Taylor, July 14th 2004.

satisfied that the leaflet gave a full and accurate picture to clergy of what was on offer.

The leaflet went out to all 96 members of clergy in the Bristol diocese in the mailing at the beginning of October 2004 and soon afterwards Peter and I received from Stuart the names and contact details of the eight group members recruited. They were self-selected on a first come first served basis, in the same way that Balint initially recruited the GPs for his group. The group was full, with a waiting list of four, within two days of the mailing. A few days before the first meeting, Stuart told us that one recruit, someone who had been long-term sick, was not well enough to attend the group and had pulled out.

The four people on the waiting list were contacted immediately, but, by this time—two days before the first meeting—it was too late for any one on the waiting list to unravel commitments in order to join the group. The group ran with seven rather than eight members.

Demography of the Group of Seven

Three women and four men were recruited for the group: one man in his 40s and everyone else in their 50s. One person was living alone, the rest were with partners. Two people had school-aged children still living at home and the rest had grown-up children living away. The length of time in the ministry ranged from five years to 33 years.

Table 1. *Demography of the Group*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>No. of Years in Ministry</i>	<i>Living with a Partner</i>	<i>Children at Home</i>
F*	51	27	No	No
F	52	5	Yes	Yes

F	58	10	Yes	No
M*	46	12	Yes	Yes
M	57	33	Yes	No
M	58	29	Yes	No
M	59	32	Yes	No

*Participants who dropped out

Leaders' Contact with Group Members before the Start of the Group

Ten days before the beginning of the group one of the leaders rang each participant to say "hello," to confirm the starting date, and to emphasize the importance of attending the first session. This call was followed by a letter giving dates of meetings, venue and starting time. Punctuality was highlighted.

Two days before the first session, participants were sent a letter explaining that, at the conclusion of the group, I would be evaluating participants' experience of being in the group, (the material discussed would, of course, remain confidential).

Participants were asked to write down and bring to the first session brief answers to the questions;

1. What are you hoping for from the group?
2. How would you evaluate the success of the group?

It was explained that these answers would be collected at the beginning of the first session and that, at the conclusion of the 12 sessions, each participant would be invited to say whether and to what extent their hopes for the group had been fulfilled. There would be individual interviews conducted by a research assistant using a questionnaire.

Participants' Aims and Objectives

Summary of what participants were hoping for from the group and therefore what success would look like:

1. Hope that the group members will share with each other through rich discussion.
2. Hope that the group will be a source of mutual support.
3. Hope to explore and better understand our role as clergy in today's world.
4. Hope to learn new things.
5. Hope to explore the problem of juggling the demands of work and the family.
6. Hope that the experience of being in the group will change attitudes towards and enrich ministry.
7. Hope to spend some time exploring personal feelings.
8. Hope to enjoy the group.
9. Hope to feel more able to thrive in life and work as a result of the group.

The Balint-Style Support Group for Clergy

Starting on October 28th, 2004 (11.30am–1.00pm), the group ran for 12 sessions over seven months—three terms of four fortnightly one and a half-hour sessions, with breaks for Christmas and Easter. It was convened at the home of one of the leaders.²

The material discussed in the group sessions remains confidential. However, I include a general breakdown of the main areas covered and the percentage of the group's time each area took up:

² Subsequent Balint-Style groups we have run in the Bristol Diocese have met in a more neutral venue with coffee provided in the half hour before the meeting.

1. Personal material 30%
2. Ministry in a changing context 26%
3. Interpersonal relationships (with parishioners and colleagues) 22%
4. Problems with authority 13%
5. Theology/churchmanship 9%

Dropouts

After two sessions one of the women group members emailed us to say that she wished “to withdraw” from the group and subsequently, after five sessions of very patchy attendance, one of the male group members also withdrew because he felt “unable to break free from parish commitments on a Thursday.” I will return in some detail to the subject of those who dropped out of the group in the analysis section of this study.

Research Evaluation

Collecting the data. Within a week of the conclusion of the group a research assistant visited six out of seven group members for a face-to-face interview using a questionnaire. Five interviews were carried out in the homes of the participants and one was conducted in the participant’s church at his request. The seventh member of the group had the questionnaire mailed to her and she answered by email. The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and they were audio recorded. The results were then transcribed and processed using qualitative research methodology.

Design of the questionnaire. The measures which were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the group were four sets of questions which together formed the questionnaire.

Section 1. Investigated participants' thoughts and feelings about the format and structure of the group.

Section 2. Sought to discover participants' feelings about how the group worked, that is, their experience of being in the group.

Section 3. Investigated participants' thoughts and feelings about the psychological emphasis of the group and how useful this was for them as clergy.

Section 4. Sought to discover whether and to what extent participants' aims and objectives expressed at the beginning of the group had been met.

The replies to these questions were transcribed, put into table form and then written up as research reports.

4. RESEARCH REPORT

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANTS' ATTITUDES TO THE FORMAT OF THE GROUP

Joining the Group

Of the eight people who signed up to join the group, all within two days of the dispatch of the leaflet, five stayed the course.

The five who remained (three men and two women) had first heard about it from the mailing sent to all clergy in the diocese. Two had discussed previously with Stuart Taylor the need for more clergy support and three recognized a description of themselves in the "eye-catching" leaflet which accompanied the mailing and "thought yes, just right for me now," "just what all clergy need, just what I need."

One person was suspicious about why he received the letter, "did what's his name select me to get it?"

The two people who dropped out said they had heard about the group from “the diocese.” The male dropout expressed considerable anger and hurt that “the diocese advised me to come to the group.” He viewed this advice in the context of not having been visited in his parish for nine years. “I did think at one point—well why [did] the diocese send me off to some third party person rather than come forward and say, ‘well X, I’ve come round to you to chat.’ ” He had thought at the time, “maybe this group has been selected because we’ve got big problems or issues.”

He was alone in his perception of having been encouraged to join the group.

The Format of the Group

Four of the group were uncritical and appreciative of its format, “worked well,” “good pattern,” “weekly would have been too much.” One participant would have preferred the 12 sessions to have been consecutive with no breaks.

Two participants had been “disappointed to miss” group sessions when they had to be absent because of prearranged commitments. However, the female dropout “just felt the way it was set up was wrong for me.”

When asked about other possible formats for running a similar group in other settings, (for instance as a daily slot at a five-day clergy conference or as a one-day event), three people thought other formats were “worth a try” and three participants felt that other models would make for a very different group. They felt the format used gave time and space for developing trusting relationships in the group. This was a characteristic of the group valued by all the participants who stayed the course. There were indications that had the group continued this trust would have continued to grow. One participant said that there were “certain things that I might have brought up but didn’t because of some male colleagues, but I think as we

finished, I was probably just getting to the point where I was confident enough to bring those things up.”

The female dropout felt “there are lots of other models which could have been followed.”

A Mixed Gender Group

There was no negative feedback on the mixed gender nature of the group. A mixed gender group was seen to work well, “very comfortable,” “male and female bring different things.” Even the male dropout expressed indifference about gender mix, “doesn’t bother me, makes no difference.” One participant felt that having both a male and female leader “related probably better to a mixed gender group.” Another did not think this mattered and that it would have been fine to have had leaders of the same gender.

The Leadership of the Group

Apart from the two dropouts, the group was enthusiastic in its appreciation of the leaders. They “complemented each other exceedingly well,” “great double act,” “bounced off each other.”

The leaders were experienced as “non-intrusive,” yet there was a sense that they had “directed us deeper,” “picked up on things,” and that their psychotherapeutic skills meant that participants were “not let off the hook.”

The male dropout was unappreciative of the leaders, who “did nothing nobody else could do.” He appeared to find it strange not to have the role of leader himself, “I am usually the one in the leader’s chair,” and he thought to himself, “why am I here?”

The woman dropout found the leaders, “very challenging and unbending in their approach.”

Three participants thought that it would have been different and not so good to have worked with only one leader and that the complementarity of the leaders enriched the group. Two of these participants made the point that because there were two leaders there was no sense of “a leader” who was “set apart.” “Being two made them part of the group” and “less separate from us,” it was “never us and them.”

One participant said, “in a way, it was something of a luxury to have two leaders.”

For two people, having two leaders as opposed to one did not matter, “probably not so different, but safety in numbers.”

The female dropout suggested that the group could have been divided into two halves, each with a leader. She perceived a sense of “them and us” and found the leaders “very difficult and looking to each other for support on their view or interpretation, versus the group.”

Quality of Attention in the Group

Six members of the group felt listened to and understood by the leaders and thought the leaders had the ability to listen “skilfully” and at “a very deep level.” “They listened better than we do ourselves and drew things out.” They “got down to basic emotions,” “they brought us back to the main point” and listened, “uncannily so because [they] not only listened, but remembered. I mean it was... I found it remarkable, I mean perhaps you should expect this from professionals, but they could remember stuff which had been said weeks before, not only by me but by others, which I’d forgotten.” The female dropout felt “at odds with the approach of the leaders” and that she was not listened to, but “cut across.” This was a contributing factor to her decision to leave.

To different degrees six people felt listened to by their colleagues in the group. One said, “we definitely grew, we’ve grown to appreciate one another and that was

because we did listen to one another. It was a very valuable experience.” Another felt that “the group very quickly cottoned on and knew that if someone was having their say you didn’t interrupt, you listened to what was being said.” One felt that the quality of listening in the group improved over time, especially after the first couple of sessions. Another, however, thought that sometimes people saw the contribution of others as “an opportunity to chip in and make a point... they might hear what the other person says, but they didn’t really respond to it. And so sometimes we were listened to and sometimes not.”

RESEARCH REPORT

SECTION 2: PARTICIPANTS’ FEELINGS ABOUT HOW THE GROUP WORKED (THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE GROUP)

What Was Surprising?

We asked participants if anything about the working of the group had surprised them. Two people were unsurprised; one saying that, “the material that had come through the post said it as it actually was.” The other was not surprised because he did not know what to expect and felt “agreeably pleased” with what he found.

Two other participants were surprised by the fact that two people dropped out and that the male dropout appeared to give commitment to the group such a low priority.

Another participant had been surprised by the mix of the group and the different churchmanship/theology that colleagues represented, commenting that, “Some of the things they said and introduced into the group did surprise me, but also, I think, it stimulated me and sort of developed my own thinking.” The female dropout was surprised that the group was “so dominated by the leaders” in the two sessions which she attended.

How Democratic Was the Group?

Of the five people who completed the course, four experienced the process of the group as “democratic,” but within a clearly and explicitly defined structure. There were two leaders and “you were very aware they were there,” but this “didn’t diminish the democracy.” One participant felt “they would have listened if we had said no!” However, another said that he did not think there was scope for individual members to influence proceedings. Nevertheless, he did not consider this “irksome”: “It was sort of spelled out what was happening and we more or less followed and we were happy to do so. Maybe the two who left found the style uncongenial: it was go along with it or opt out.”

Feelings about Each Other

Six out of the seven participants expressed very positive feelings about the rest of the group. All said that their feelings of warmth and sympathy towards others grew over time. At the beginning of the group three of the six had been very aware of the differences between themselves and others; differences of gender, ministry, situation, background, theology, time in the job, and so on. This meant that there were natural affinities between people and also natural reservations.

One felt “when it began that I wasn’t going to have any common points of contact with most of the people there.” However, “as time went on and the professional guards went down I think all of us as people started to come through. And I think from that point I came to value and respect and cherish them all.”

Another said, “what was super was the mutual appreciation...that has grown out of this.” Yet another had learnt more week by week about where the others were “coming from” and so grew in sympathy: “As time went on, as the group progressed, I discovered more about them and I became more sympathetic, more understanding. So that was good for me, really.”

Two other participants expressed their feelings about others in a more detached and measured way. For one the group had “progressed” and although this person had worried at first that the more “needy” participants might dominate, this was not the case, “everybody had a turn...time was fairly allocated.” Another said it was “fascinating getting to know (the rest of the group) and see them opening up. I thought we worked pretty well together.”

The female dropout was, at the beginning, “immediately pleased with the group’s make up. Left alone I do feel we could have achieved a great deal.”

Different Churchmanship in the Group

Nobody admitted to finding the churchmanship of others in the group inhibiting, but some of their positive answers contained qualifications.

Two participants had no difficulty with the varied churchmanship in the group. “God is bigger than religion” said one. “Variety is one of the joys and challenges of being a Christian in the church” said another, “it is good to have a contrast...” This participant commented that the group contained both a conservative and, “on the other extreme,” a radical and that it was “helpful to have a range.”

Another participant had a different view of where on the spectrum the others stood,

I don’t think any of us were way out of balance, sort of one end of the scale or the other. I don’t think any of us were overtly Evangelical or overtly Anglo Catholic... We came to understand where people stood. But that was good. That was interesting. That was a challenge sometimes.

Two people mentioned inhibitions. One admitted being “at first a little bit guarded,” aware that “my theology for some of them would seem a bit off the wall.” Another mentioned that the “liberal theology of one colleague made me think a bit and I wondered where he was coming from in ministry.”

Was There a Sense of Solidarity with Others?

The five people who completed the course all felt that the group was on their side. It was not an issue for the female dropout. Two participants had some doubts at the beginning. One was sensitive to how others felt about him and had sensed indifference in a fellow participant. However, he felt this “disappeared as we got to know each other.” Another was aware at the beginning that others were not always in agreement with her.

A growing sense of “mutual support” and “understanding” as the group continued was reported; “we came to respect each other as we got to know each other and as people were sharing deeper.” One participant felt that the developing sense of solidarity in the group was one of its values: “we were there for that...to support one another and listen to one another and to help each other sort of unravel what was going on.”

Six out of the seven group members said that it helped to know that others were in the same boat when it came to discussing issues. Although the leaders did not allow the group to become a “clergy talk-shop” and stuck to the “psychoanalysis side of things,” it “helped” and “reassured” people to have “common ground.” One participant remembered “one of [the group] coming out with things and I was thinking yes, yes yes, this is all ringing bells.” Another said, “you sort of empathize.”

Participants found that empathizing with other people’s experiences normalized their own. One thought that once people dropped their successful...happy...contented front it was reassuring to know the depth of frustration in some cases... I mean one or two seemed to be very comfortable and not have very huge issues and others had large issues. And I always feel drawn to people who’ve got big issues because somehow it makes...if I have issues, it makes ...yes it is helpful to know other people are...in the same boat, like that.

For another “it was interesting that for some people things were not big issues, but were really quite major for others which had a sort of balancing effect, I think.” One person speculated that one of the people who dropped out might have done so because they had issues with which the others found empathy difficult.

The group seemed like a first incumbency group to the female dropout and after 27 years of ministry she felt “somewhat intolerant of the psychological approach to some very practical first incumbency issues.” The male dropout felt that being a clergyman “can be a lonely job because you are giving so much all the time and that came across. We were all in the same boat, so I suppose the companionship of the group was good.”

Good to Share?

Six out of seven participants found it helpful to share difficult feelings with each other in the group and everyone appreciated the group’s confidentiality. People felt able to share points of view or experiences or feelings that you might not be willing to share in other circumstances.

For one there were “certain things you would not say to the Archdeacon or the Bishop, but in this context, I could say anything.” Different people found sharing helpful in different ways. One found just voicing things helped in itself, “it was helpful to say things, it was, it always is.”

Another found that sharing in the group had given him new insight into some long-standing difficulties,

I’ve had it wrong for too many years; too much of a loner... [I] didn’t know where to go for the sort of help I needed...this was just the job... I’m aware of things, I can express things. I’ve seen a difference in me and it’s thanks to the group getting things going. It’s sort of turned over the soil as it were, let the air in, if you like.

One participant felt that the group had provided “space...to work through something pretty major. Once I started taking that to the group, in various forms, across the sessions... I found myself being empowered and growing in confidence to claim the feelings as OK.”

The female dropout felt that having no “rapport with the leaders...detracted from the benefits” she received from others in terms of sharing difficult feelings. Another group member mentioned the leadership more positively. He felt that the leaders’ way of relating to the group made it safe to say things which might be controversial, “you felt that they would handle it well.”

Four people thought that the kind of sharing that went on in the group was very unusual for them, particularly in a professional context. One had talked in this way about feelings with a counsellor and continued to do so with his Spiritual Director. Two people shared with their partners and two mentioned close friends. One person described herself as an extrovert, “so sharing feelings is a doddle.” The female dropout said, “our training has always involved this kind of sharing.”

Was the Group Ever Unsettling?

Six people said that they had sometimes left the group feeling unsettled. “By its nature it was challenging. You’re dealing with deep matters, yourself and life and your job and your faith.” Someone else “sometimes took away issues and thought about them afterwards...I don’t think I was upset or disturbed, but it certainly made me continue to think.” One felt left with unfinished business when he raised something near the end of a group session which was not picked up or returned to at the next meeting.

One participant chose what to bring to the group and made a judgment about which issues needed more time and were more appropriately discussed with a Spiritual Director. “Because of what I chose to bring...it was contained and I never went

away feeling unsettled...that I'd been sort of let down or left hanging and I had to wait another fortnight. I never felt like that."

Were People Honest?

In general people felt that they were honest about themselves in the group and that this was encouraged by confidentiality, strong boundaries and the challenging but holding function of the two leaders.

There was general agreement that honesty increased over time, as people became more familiar with one another, relaxed and built up trust and mutual respect.

People were prepared to be open, "If one person was prepared to do that and it was well handled by the leaders and by the whole group, then you felt confident about being able to be honest and open as well. And again I'd say we felt it was a safe context."

Two said that they were "guardedly" honest and that "perhaps there were some things we might have talked about, but didn't." One commented that "in any situation you choose how much of yourself to reveal... I wouldn't have wanted to share my deepest secrets and deepest fears, but felt comfortable sharing what I did, things that were of real concern for me at the time."

When asked if they felt others were honest everybody thought this was the case.

One said,

Yes, which was quite good for clergy! We sometimes find it quite difficult to be honest, I think, because we're set up, you know, to be better than other people but we know personally that we aren't. But to admit it is not always easy, but perhaps in that context, the fact that people were prepared to share their experiences pretty openly and in some depth, encouraged honesty.

Another thought, “all were honest at times and we all weren’t at other times...we’ve all got stuff inside. And the older you get, the more you lock it away.” One commented that some people got nearer to revealing their “deepest secrets” than others and another said that “we all tell stories we think the group will appreciate and help us to tell [but I] didn’t feel I had to play a game.”

Were the Leaders Challenging?

Five people found the leadership of the group challenging, but as one put it, “in a good way” not in “an aggressive or rude way... I mean, it was a sort of positive way of challenging. I don’t recall them saying, ‘well, I think you are speaking rubbish there.’ ” One said “these two beady-eyed facilitators picked things up. When we started to hide behind the sort of professional guise, they encouraged us to pull that apart.” Another group member thought the leaders “pressed us to take things further, challenged us to get to the sort of root origins of what we were saying.” For example, “they contradicted people when they said, ‘what I’ve just said doesn’t matter’. If they said, ‘oh I didn’t really mean that’ then Peter or Mary would come in and say, ‘well maybe you did mean that!’ ”

The female dropout found the leaders “very challenging...in this kind of situation a greater flexibility is called for, allowing an individual to be heard, whatever the content of the sharing might be.”

Will the Group Keep in Touch with Each Other in the Future?

When asked if they expected to keep in touch with one another, now that the group was over, the five who completed the course all spoke with warmth about their planned reunion for a pub lunch, which was already booked!

The female dropout felt a loss: it was “a real shame that having dropped out I do not feel able or entitled to return to that particular group.”

Four participants said that meeting again in a support group context would be different without the leaders. There was a general feeling stated that people were sad the group was over and that they would have liked it to continue. "I feel as if we are just beginning"; "my gut feeling is this group is not long enough."

One person said that the group "went so far and not further because we knew that this was a limited time. I felt that we had just reached the point where we were all sufficiently confident with each other and able to trust each other and our leaders or facilitators that we could really start to do some very important work, and then we stopped."

Someone else said that he "would have liked to have seen this as something with a much longer term investment. Two years...it feels a little bit unsatisfactory to have ended."

Another spoke of his surprised realization that it was all over: "It wasn't until I got out of the car yesterday and I thought, I wonder when the one after this is? And looked in my diary and realized that this is the last one...and it's all been...we are suddenly...ah...it's ended!"

RESEARCH REPORT

SECTION 3: PARTICIPANTS' FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPHASIS OF THE GROUP AND THE USEFULNESS OF THIS EMPHASIS FOR CLERGY

Were Psychological insights Helpful?

Of the five people who stayed the course, all found the psychological insights they gained in the group helpful rather than threatening. Two felt "challenged," but in a positive way and one found this sort of positive challenge, "affirming...I found [the leaders] personally very affirming which was very helpful."

Another chose not to bring some tricky and unprocessed issues to the group because she anticipated being challenged and said, "I don't know how I would have reacted to that, but because I didn't bring those things up, that question has not been tried and tested."

The male dropout could not remember there being any psychological insights in the sessions which he attended. The female dropout found the psychological insights interesting, but not that important or relevant to the practical business of "just getting on with things in ministry." In the group she "felt unable to make real and actual suggestions of any practical course of action. Any attempt by me to do so resulted in a clear and testy return to psychological roots."

Was the Group Mind Expanding?

Five people thought that the psychological model of making sense of things was mind expanding in that it broadened understanding of self and others and of the job, "everything we raised in terms of our professional dynamic issues - it all went back to a personal level." One said, "I'd like to think that we had all come away thinking that this is such a positive thing that it should really be part of our lives as ministers." Another wished "I'd done this when I was at college...clergy need this. We need these insights because it helps."

Someone else found watching the leaders at work instructive: "observing how the leaders responded, I'd say that my mind was expanded by the way they did things, seeing you know the sort of methods they used. Some understanding of the psychology they were using."

Where Was God?

When asked whether the psychological emphasis of the group left God out a bit, five people thought definitely not. One had feared that God might get side-lined but

found that this was not the case. "God was in all of it." Someone else said, "we were talking about God all the time."

One person sees "God in a psychological way anyhow" and for another "the psychological and the spiritual are so intertwined and it was lovely to have that confirmed for me, in what was a useful situation."

Two participants mentioned that one leader was Christian and one not Christian and that this gave the group, "a balance."

The male dropout found God absent as he had expected: "I knew probably that God would be left out because that's the nature of these groups."

Was Much Learnt?

When asked whether they had learnt anything professionally or personally from the group, five people said they had learnt "a tremendous amount" and one thought he had learnt "stuff" but was unclear exactly what.

Four said that they had learnt the value of a group setting for sharing both personal and professional material. Another felt "other members of the group taught me an awful lot about our business and our two professionals were teaching us an awful lot about how to look deep into ourselves." Sharing in the group made one participant grateful that he was "not alone, not unusual." He had past experience of feeling that there was "nobody to go to, nobody would understand. When I was getting some help psychologically, one felt wouldn't it be lovely to address this also from the faith angle and this answered all those sorts of things."

As well as appreciating a sense of solidarity within the group, people also talked about learning from difference. One said "the different personalities involved, the different issues that came up, I learnt from those things."

Another participant had

learnt a lot about other people and, I think, what I learned from one person in particular was that even though his views were exactly opposite to me, that was OK. That didn't matter. We came to a place of understanding that was a good place to be in and I could actually see things from somebody else's point of view.

This was echoed by another, "I came out of it with a much greater respect for some of my colleagues. Not just in the group, wider, who I was sometimes a bit impatient with."

Two said that they had learnt, through discussions in the group, a great deal about the personal cost of living up to people's expectations of the clergy role. One person had learnt above all else "that we live up to the expectations of others in our professional work at a terrible cost to ourselves personally and this is a huge issue that has to be addressed and we can't address it by ourselves." This participant felt that the group started to touch on some of this, "it was helpful in starting that process, [but] I think it needs to be a much longer investment."

Another talked about this same issue and although she felt it was addressed, she "wished [the group] was on going." Someone else said he "would have liked the group to be continuous... I think our ministry would be enhanced by something like that being able to continue."

The female dropout felt she gained more from her car journeys with a colleague to and from the group than she did from the group itself. The male dropout felt that what he had learnt from the group was that he would not go again.

Did the Group Help People to Thrive in their Ministry?

We asked people if they felt that the group had helped them to thrive more in any way, professionally or personally. Three people definitely felt that it had. One said,

“certainly, always stimulating. Sharing experiences gave a positive message to ministry.” For him, the group provided a place “to take things that happened between groups which was quite cathartic. It helped me and my ministry thrive.”

Another participant agreed that having such a “forum in which just to speak” was affirming. “To speak and be heard is itself a thriving thing, or a therapeutic thing, I think.” One felt that the group was an enabling space, “to bring some of the things I’ve been discovering in other areas to a group of colleagues, and to explore...in that context.”

One person, whilst not going as far as to admit to thriving, felt that the group helped him “to be more comfortable in my own skin and to know what I think and what I feel is OK.” Another said that the group had given him a belief that he could thrive, and helped him to see “that there were still needs and problems and things I want to address.” He felt that the group, plus an excellent leadership course put on by the diocese and also some personal work, had made him feel part of a team and “more cared for and more valued than I’ve ever felt.” He said, “the group is definitely helping me” and he expressed a wish that it should continue. The female dropout felt that the failure of this group for her had made her more aware of the kind of group in which she might be able to thrive.

Would You Recommend a Group Like This to Colleagues?

Six of the participants felt that they would recommend the group to others. One was emphatic,

I think it should be obligatory... I think we often go into ordination not really having addressed quite what it is going to be like, and I think it should be part of the ordination programme that we are all part of these groups. Take money out of something else and put it into this, I think.

Another had already enthused about the group to others and said that he would feel “very sad if this was the end of this, I think this is a good thing. If the diocese in its wisdom are going to continue this, I would whole heartedly say, go for it!”³ One participant, although very enthusiastic himself, wondered if all colleagues would take up the offer of such a group: “if they would and could just enter it, you know, openly and so on, the church is full of problems and this is a great way of addressing them.”

Another felt that, although he would recommend the group to colleagues, not enough thought had been put into what happens when such a group ends. He would have liked the group to continue “for a year or even two.”

The female dropout felt she could recommend the group to others, but that she would want to express her concerns as well. The male dropout felt unable to recommend the group and cautiously suggested home groups as an alternative. However, he had the experience of these going badly wrong as well, but on balance, thought them a better bet.

Is Such a Group a Useful Resource for Clergy?

Six thought that this sort of support group should be made available to all clergy. One reflected that “this has been the only kind of group that I have ever been to that has provided the psychoanalytic side of things...I think it should continue if it’s humanly possible.” Another thought that just “as we are all encouraged to read the Bible, I think we should be encouraged to read ourselves.”

The wish that this sort of resource had been available earlier in a long ministry was also expressed, “If only I’d had this sort of thing actually made part of what was expected.” Another agreed that it would be “good for all clergy...a lot of us work on

³ After two successful pilot groups, the Bristol Diocese agreed to fund an ongoing Balint-Style group which has now run for one year (three terms of six sessions). It operates on a rolling basis, i.e., when one participant leaves, another joins from the waiting list.

our own, it's not terribly healthy really, you need some sort of supervision, some sort of sharing context." Three people made the point that, unless a group like this was obligatory, some clergy would definitely choose not to take part. "Many clergy would run a mile from it, or say no I'm not into that at all." There was a general sense that it would be good "if this sort of thing was simply part of what it is to be a minister in the Church of England." One participant suggested that the Diocese should "just put in a clergy support framework and not let anyone slip through the net. It should be a three line whip—it shouldn't be an option."

However, the participants all acknowledged that providing such a resource would be a considerable financial commitment for the Diocese.

Special Interest Groups

We asked people if they thought that it might be of benefit to have this sort of Balint-Style clergy support group for particular interest groups, for example, for single clergy or those about to retire.

One was very enthusiastic and thought this an "excellent idea," suggesting that such a group could be part of ministerial training either at college or if not then at post-ordination stage. "Let's go for it, let's have it before people actually get the dog collar." Although three others could see the value of single interest groups, they were less enthusiastic. One thought intensive concentration on one set of issues, "might be a bit overwhelming," another that it would be too "narrow," and another felt single interest groups were not a good idea.

What four people particularly valued about this group was "difference": "We are all at different stages—it covered a wealth of experience and I found that very helpful... One of the beauties of this was we were a mixed group," "it was the mixture that was the value, a broader experience."

5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH REPORTS

The results of the questionnaire throw up several themes for discussion.

Those Who Dropped Out

The most immediately obvious theme is that of the contrast of response to the experience of being in the group between the five who stayed the course and the two who dropped out. This striking contrast constantly recurs in the material. What might explain this?

First, the dropouts' aims and objectives for the group which they, along with the other participants wrote down at the beginning were almost identical to one another and these fell outside the stated purpose of the group.

One of the dropouts hoped "good friendships [would] be made in the group," and the other that the group would "continue in some form and have an ongoing life of its own." Both said they hoped that the group would be the "start of an ongoing support network," which would "continue after the group ends." Membership of a group like this often does result in good friendships being made, but this is a spin-off from the work agenda. None of the five who stayed the course had expressed expectations of this sort in their aims and objectives at the start of the group. Their aims and objectives were consistent with those stated in the initial leaflet and were therefore more realistic and achievable. They were more likely to be satisfied by what was delivered.

One dropout was feeling the loss of a long term cell group which had ended and wanted to find a replacement source of nurture. The other felt very isolated, uncared for and abandoned in his ministry and wanted some personal care and attention. He felt "fobbed off" by being sent to the group. Both hoped to have their overriding personal needs met by the group, both showed impatience with what was actually

on offer and one expressed some contempt. Disappointment was inevitable for these two because they were hoping for something from the group that it was not designed to deliver, at least, not in the ways they wanted.

It is poignant that those who stayed the course did forge strong bonds with each other as a result of working together and becoming increasingly open and trusting. They achieved just what the two who dropped out had been longing for.

As a result of their disappointment and dissatisfaction with the group, the two who dropped out reacted angrily, although in different ways, whilst still group members.

One developed a disturbed pattern of attendance, either arriving very late or arriving very early for sessions, absent without explanation and eventually dropping out.

This disruptive behaviour felt like an attack on the group and provoked negative reactions from other group members. The other person, who dropped out after two sessions, was more directly confrontational in the group, particularly with one of the leaders who kept the group firmly on task and met the challenging behaviour head on. This participant tried to impose a different personal agenda on the group and was “continually at odds with the leaders’ approach...it was as if they [the leaders] were determined to redirect the discussion with their own agenda.” This person was also critical of the group on the grounds that it needed “greater flexibility, allowing an individual to be heard whatever the content.” Other group members were discomfited and out of sympathy with this person’s critical attitude to the way the group was being run.

Balint (1964: 315–17) writes about the people who dropped out of his groups. His first groups, like our own, were recruited by self-selection after being advertised within the profession. He saw it as inevitable that in such a group, “the tempo of progress and the atmosphere of the discussions” would develop to suit the majority

of the group and this would not suit everyone. This was certainly the case in our group.

Balint writes about four categories of doctors most likely to find themselves in a minority and subsequently drop out of a group. For example, he describes one such category as those who are really in need of individual therapeutic help and yet who seek it inappropriately from the group, “under the disguise of training” (1964: 315). These doctors “select themselves out” when they realize that what they need is not on offer.

Another category Balint identifies is the “superior” doctor.

These were well established, experienced practitioners with a good reputation both among their patients and their colleagues and with a very strong “apostolic zeal.” From the outset they preached their own well-proven methods while being practically incapable of listening to, and still less of seriously considering, any methods other than their own. This inevitably brought them into competition with the psychiatrist leader representing the aims of the seminar and this resulted in a rather strained and awkward atmosphere. After some unsuccessful attempts at converting the rest of the group to their “faith” these doctors dropped out, almost certainly dissatisfied and hypercritical (1964: 316).

Balint’s categories of dropout doctors could well have some relevance in helping us to understand why two of our clergy may have dropped out.

The process of dropping out caused those who did so pain, disappointment and anger and was difficult and upsetting for the rest of the group. This throws up questions about the wisdom of recruiting a group of this sort using self-selection. Balint recruited his first few groups using self-selection, but because of a 60% dropout rate he subsequently interviewed all applicants and managed to just about halve his dropout rate to 35%.

Perhaps we should consider some form of selection next time, either by interviewing applicants (alert to Balint's four categories of those most likely to drop out) or by having an information-giving session before people decide whether or not to select into the group. This could provide an informal setting, where people for whom the group was not appropriate could be directed towards other possible sources of support.

The Beginning of Small but Significant Changes in Group Members Who Stayed the Course

Looking at the material, it seems that four out of the five people who completed the course noticed some small but significant changes in themselves, which they attributed to the experience of being in the group. Twelve sessions were not quite enough for the fifth participant to open up and trust the group to help him work through the issues which he brought with him. New insights were glimpsed, but not sufficiently integrated for the beginnings of change to occur. He definitely experienced some benefit, "just to speak about it and be heard is itself a therapeutic thing." But of all the group members, he expressed most regret that it was not going to continue after the 12 sessions were over. He would have liked the group to run for two years and also said that he would have preferred no gaps between the three sets of four sessions.

The four participants who noticed small changes in themselves mentioned shifts in attitude towards others and an increase in both self-understanding and self-confidence. Two had noticed changes in their habitual views and assumptions.

One participant found that the group provided a space "to work through something pretty major in terms of my professional work. And I found that once I started taking that to the group in different forms across the sessions, I found myself being empowered and growing in confidence to claim the feelings as OK."

Another found that his “attitudes to certain things were swayed, shall we say, if not definitely changed. I think it was definitely an enriching experience.” One participant noticed a change in himself with regard to some long-standing emotional difficulties. The group helped him to understand his difficulties, not just experience them. He was able to take more charge and to go on to seek the personal help he needed after the group ended. He wished “there was a way of this continuing...it’s so easy, isn’t it, to slip back? ...This was just the job - I’m aware of things and can express things. I’ve seen a difference in me and it’s thanks to the group.”

Despite finding the format of the group “challenging,” one participant felt “affirmed” and could see the value of the group, “we learnt quite a lot about ourselves and what was going on in the various situations we’d been in, so we came out understanding things better. In that sense our minds were expanded.” Sharing issues with the group was “quite a cathartic experience” for him and had enriched his ministry, “It would make your ministry thrive, I think.”

Honesty and Openness

The fact that the group had clear boundaries, was confidential, and was led by experienced, well-qualified facilitators who were independent of the church hierarchy, meant that participants soon realized that the group offered them a safe, trustworthy space in which to work. One felt that “you could literally be even more honest when you realized how much you could trust Peter and Mary, but also how much you could trust the others in the group.”

But people varied over how honest they were prepared to be and, for most, this increased over time. One said, “I think I was honest, but I think I was guardedly honest. I think if it had gone on longer, we would have become more honest and less guarded.” Two people said that there were things they chose not to bring to the group. Given more time, one felt, this might have been different, but the other was

ambivalent about the idea of revealing more. “There were things I could have said and didn’t, I didn’t reveal my deepest secrets!”

One group member, half-jokingly, said he thought a group that encouraged honesty was “good for clergy! ...We sometimes find it quite difficult to be honest, I think, because we’re set up, you know, to be better than other people.” Someone else noticed that:

the more that we saw of each other and the more that we got to know each other it became easier... I think that we brought our vulnerability and I think also that the two facilitators were challenging. They challenged us. And when we started to hide behind the sort of professional guise, they encouraged us to pull that apart again and I think that it only takes one person, you know, to be open and honest, to give others permission. And I think that started to happen.

For example, the honesty of one participant about painful feelings he had been left with after the previous session, prompted someone else to reflect on their contribution to the interchange that had provoked these feelings and to conclude that, “maybe I was a bit insensitive to other people in the group at that time.” This illustrates how one person’s honesty could provoke frank self-examination in another.

Change in Attitude to Each Other

The composition of the group was diverse, “an interesting assortment of people. Different, very different experience, different genders, different backgrounds and different times we’d been in the job, in ministry, different points of view theologically.”

People had natural affinities. One felt:

with some people in the group I was naturally sympathetic in the sense that I related to them more easily. But there were some others in the group that...whom I didn't relate to so readily...and so some of the things they said and introduced into the group did surprise me, but also I think it stimulated me and sort of developed my own thinking and my own reaction.

One of the most interesting things about the group noticed by several participants was the way in which their attitudes to each other had changed over time.

One participant described the group process as,

a learning experience in the sense that as we went on week by week, I learnt more about where they were coming from and their situations, and I became more sympathetic towards what they were saying, I think, and their experiences. And whereas I think, in one or two instances I had some hesitation...this was not a gender issue, it was perhaps more about personality or theology... as the time went on, as the group progressed, I discovered more about them and I became more sympathetic, more understanding, so that was good for me really.

There was a general feeling that as well as mutual understanding growing over time, participants, despite their differences, also became fond of one another. One said,

I warmed to people. I felt that when it began that I wasn't [going] to have any common points of contact with most of the people there. So I began thinking that I'm going to be out of sync. Which is why I think it took me so long to settle into it. But as time went on, the professional guard went down and I think from that point I came to value and respect and cherish them all.

Another participant spoke of his appreciative feelings towards "some colleagues who I had hardly even met before. We were a real mixed group. But it's nice to feel

that around the diocese there are these individuals that I've got a great regard for now on a deeper level than average."

Different Churchmanship

As time went on and trust and openness grew in the group, one or two tricky issues to do with different churchmanship and theology surfaced. Sometimes this happened in ways that successfully turned upside down the stereotypical assumptions people may have made about each other. For example, there was a memorable clash between two group members about an issue centering on one of the contentious subjects dividing the Anglican Church as a whole. The rest of the group observed, good-naturedly, how interesting it was that the liberal was being vehement and categorical, whilst the conservative was very tentative and mild. This astute and rather mischievous observation diffused the atmosphere and helped people to move out of their theological corners into a much more vulnerable, heart-felt discussion. The "big issue" out there became personal. The person with the opposing view was someone known, respected and warmly regarded. This made a difference. One of the group members said,

I learnt a tremendous amount. Because, I think, I can be very black and white and, say on certain theological things, how on earth can anybody else think that because I don't? And I think that what I learnt, from one person in particular, was that even though his views were exactly opposite to me, that was OK. That didn't matter. We came to a place of understanding. That was a good place to be in and I could actually see things from somebody else's point of view.

New Ways of Looking at Pastoral Interactions

One aim of the group was for participants to increase their psychological insight: to give them a kind of psychological lens through which to view their pastoral interactions. The group gained in psychological skill through watching and

experiencing the way the two analyst leaders worked with the material brought along by participants and not by any formal teaching. The process occurred more or less unconsciously, participants finding that they had just “picked things up,” as if by osmosis. One member of the group, who had some counselling training was very aware of what was going on. He often had an interested eye on how the leaders were handling things,

they sort of weren't intrusive, but they did direct us, I felt, and with their skills, they sort of picked up on things...directing us towards deeper feelings...they took us into deeper dimensions...observing how the leaders responded, I'd say my mind was expanded by the way they did that, seeing, you know, the sort of methods they used. Some understanding of the psychology they were using.

The leaders facilitated learning, rather than taught the group.

Another participant commented that it was helpful to experience the leaders' “skilful, deep, listening” and the fact that they “remembered” what they had heard. Several people noticed that the quality of listening to each other in the group developed over time and perhaps this was a consequence of having “good listening” modelled for them by the leaders. Balint considered this the main clinical achievement of his groups for GPs; they learnt to really listen “by example.”

One participant felt he had learnt something about how to challenge people through watching the way the leaders challenged people in the group: “They weren't challenging in an aggressive or a rude way... I mean it was a sort of positive way of challenging rather than a contradictory way of challenging. I don't recall them say ‘Well I think you are speaking rubbish there,’ so I think they were challenging, but in a good way.” The participant who was most conscious of the way the leaders worked is thinking of developing his own counselling skills and seeking further

training. He found the group “really valuable and really helpful and it has contributed to the sort of new road I found myself on.”

Idealization

Often in a group there is initially some idealization of the leaders—a kind of honeymoon period usually followed by some disillusionment. In our group, judging by the answers to the questionnaire, disillusionment never set in for the five who stayed the course. All the comments about the leaders were warm and appreciative.

One or two points could be made about this. Although the group ran for several months there were only 12 sessions in all so, in a sense, the group was still in its honeymoon phase when it ended. Secondly, the group withstood the attacks on its viability from the two who dropped out, and this seemed to bond the group members who stayed. When the dropouts left, the group work really took off. The negative feelings which are inevitable in any group and often get attached to the leaders, were perhaps, in this case, projected onto the two who dropped out, who in doing so had caused distress and discomfort in those who remained.

Thirdly, the group was democratic. Although the leaders directed the group, none of the five who stayed the course felt that there was a sense of “them and us.” This feeling of all being in it together may have been reinforced by the fact that the leaders made no transference interpretations regarding themselves and group members. Indeed, Balint remarks about his group that the absence of individual transference interpretation helped to maintain the leader as just another member of the group.

Normalizing

Hearing about the experiences and difficulties of others helped group members to get their own into better perspective. One said,

Clergy are very good at...putting on a front, giving the impression that they are actually successful and are happy and contented and they are making a go of things, and I think it was reassuring to know the depth of frustration in some cases...it is helpful to know other people are in the same boat.

Another found it “interesting that for some people things were not big issues, but were really quite major for others, which had a sort of balancing effect, I think.”

This kind of sharing led to a sense of solidarity with others which was greatly appreciated by one participant who had felt rather isolated with his difficulties for a long time. He said, “I remember one of them coming out with things and I was thinking, yes, yes, yes, this is all ringing bells and obviously it makes one feel easier—common ground. Very reassuring and very helpful.”

Expectations

Other people’s expectations of the clergy and group members’ expectations of themselves were two related and frequently mentioned themes. The group helped one participant to “realise what a burden the expectations of others can be in this particular job.”

Another person, more recently ordained, felt it was important to educate one’s parish by making the parameters of the job very clear. For example, by giving a fixed number of hours a week that the vicar works. People’s expectations of the clergy might then be more realistic. But presenting the parish with a clear “job description” was a difficult idea for people in the group who had been in ministry for many years. For them, their sense of “vocation” meant there were no such sharp boundaries between private and parish life.

All participants agreed that ministering to a mainly post-religious society brought difficult and often complex challenges for today’s clergy in addition to the pressure

on them to fulfil traditional expectations. It was easy in such circumstances for clergy to feel overwhelmed and not quite sure “how we do it now.”

6. CONCLUSION

The five participants who completed the course felt that their aims and objectives for the group had mainly been met; “the group was definitely hitting all these points, I’m glad to say.” Two people felt that work/life balance was a topic that had not been covered and one felt that the group had not explored the role of clergy in today’s world. Inevitably, some topics had been explored in more depth and others only touched on.

All five enjoyed the group, although one participant admitted, “sometimes more than others—sometimes you came out feeling a wee bit jaded and jangled, but yes, in a deep sense I did enjoy it.” The other four expressed unqualified enjoyment. It was “a unique experience” for one and another expressed how much he “appreciated it and enjoyed it and how enriching and I looked forward to those Thursdays. I was sorry when I had to miss one. I just enjoyed the whole concept of the whole thing and I don’t think I can enthuse anymore, really, except to say thank you.” One participant, speaking of his very positive experience of the group said, “It’s almost a bit boring it’s so positive!... I wish this was built into every year for me because I can see how valuable this is.”

The group enjoyed having the two analyst leaders involved because, in the words of one participant, “you felt, these guys have had years of counselling, so they have thought about these issues and have insights into them and that felt a very good feeling.” Perhaps he was saying here that he felt safe and well held by the professional leaders.

All five participants expressed regret that the group was over and wished it could continue. One spoke for everyone when he said, “I just wish there was a way of this

continuing...if somebody had offered something more of this I would be one of those saying yes please!" It was the "greatest hope" of another that the group would recommence.

Two participants would have liked a continuing group,

I'd say that clergy would benefit enormously from this sort of thing being set up as a normal part of ministry in the diocese. I think it should be readily available for all clergy and it would certainly help ministry a lot, they are always talking about clergy going off, down with stress. Something like this would save quite a lot of that sort of thing.

Another participant was aware of the financial expense involved in setting up support of this kind;

brilliant though it was, I mean it was only twelve weeks and I can't see with the best will in the world, [how] the diocese can have this ongoing, for a long time for all clergy. Some kind of mutual support system, I would have thought, was the challenge and I would love to see that, I would like to see the diocese and Peter and Mary thinking about this... Not many of us work in team situations. It's not terribly healthy really, you need people to share with from a professional point of view. You need some sort of supervision. Some sort of sharing context.

One member said "I know this was a pilot scheme and I gather from Stuart (the Pastoral Adviser), he was saying that it was more than a pilot scheme for Bristol, but it's nationwide, so I think it's definitely a thing we should be having, not only in the diocese, but elsewhere."

After the group finished, Peter and I felt that it had been very effective and had also met the Diocesan aims and objectives. This feeling is borne out by the results of the research study. It can be seen from the results, that group members who stayed the

course felt that they had been well-supported. Even running with five people, the group was cost effective (i.e., much cheaper than providing one-to-one support). By introducing some sort of selection for potential group members (along the lines described earlier in the analysis section) we might reduce the dropout rate in subsequent groups, but we are undecided about the principle of selection and need to think about it further.

In terms of this Balint-Style group providing a model of clergy support for other dioceses, it seems from the results to have been both useful and appreciated in Bristol and there is no reason why the group could not be replicated elsewhere.

Employing professional leadership for a Balint-Style group is expensive, but it is, in our view, essential, because as one group member put it, “you just don’t know what is going to be opened up.” We are strongly of the opinion that having two experienced leaders, who are themselves undertaking rigorous supervision from a group analyst, was fundamental to the success of this group. Amélie our supervisor kept us aware of the group process, the emergence of themes and the development of individual group members over time. She was also invaluable in helping us deal with the strong feelings evoked in us by the withdrawal of two of our group members.

We thought that it was really helpful for the group to have leaders who were conversant with the clergy culture, but not part of it. This meant participants found the setting confidential enough for them to be open about themselves.

Peter and I had an additional objective in running the group. We wanted to know if a Balint-Style group could provide a facilitating setting for personal and professional development to occur in group members in addition to offering them support. We were looking for evidence of slight changes in participants’ personalities, which participants themselves would attribute to their experience of being in the group.

Also we were looking for evidence of participants feeling themselves to have acquired some new psychological tools to help them in their work and interpersonal relationships. It can be seen from the research reports and analysis that group members who stayed the course did perceive themselves as having developed in both these ways. We wonder if the experience of being in a cohesive, encouraging and supportive group accelerated the process of modifying the super ego for some of the members. This can take years of individual therapy but in the group things seemed to happen quite fast. The effectiveness of the group in terms of offering support and enabling development to occur in group members exceeded our best expectations. There were, after all, only 12 sessions.⁴

One or two comments can be made at this point: firstly, a thought about the format of the group. Three sets of four fortnightly sessions with two breaks meant that, although the group only met for 12 sessions, it went on for seven months, a substantial period of time. The spaces between sessions and the breaks gave participants opportunity for thought and integration and for new things to happen which they could bring along to the next session. It is clear from the research reports that people looked forward to the group and they learnt to rely on it as a resource for the seven months of its duration. Participants missed the group when they were unavoidably absent and felt sad when it ended. Although the format of the group was chosen originally for practical reasons, Peter and I would choose to use it again because it worked so well. This was not only in terms of its effectiveness in accomplishing the aims and objectives of all parties, but also in terms of fostering relationships between group members and between group members and the leaders. Seven months gave time for relationships to develop and deepen (it is interesting that those group members who stayed the course have met together socially since the group has ended).

⁴ It would be interesting to do a follow-up interview with group participants two years on to see what they think are the longer-term effects of the group.

The composition of the group is probably also relevant to its unusual cohesiveness. All the participants who stayed the course and both the leaders were family people in their 50s, so there was a commonality of background both socially and professionally (although there was a wide range of churchmanship and of length of ministry from five to 33 years). It is worth noting here that both the people who dropped out did not fit the social profile of the rest of the group. The man who dropped out (in his 40s) commented that he perceived the rest of the group as nearing retirement, whereas he felt in the midst of bringing up a young family and working a busy parish. He felt at a different life stage.

All the members of our self-selected group, except one, were in their 50s and yet in the diocese as a whole only 50% of the clergy are in their 50s. We wonder if we ran another group on the same basis, whether we would attract the same age group again and why this might or might not be so. Also what kind of support and development might the other 50% feel they require? (they were mainly clergy in their 40s and 60s).

Peter and I would be interested in running a Balint-Style group weekend for clergy in post-ordination training and to find out their response to this kind of support and development in a group setting.⁵

One further thought about the composition of the group. A Balint-Style group should not be seen by the diocese as a substitute for one-to-one work with clergy who have big problems or issues. Such people are a drain on a group and stop it working properly. They need individual help. Both the people who dropped out of our group had significant personal issues and their disappointment with the group and

⁵ In March 2008 we ran a two-day Balint-Style residential group (four, one and a half-hour sessions) for eight first-year curates (four stipendiary and four non-stipendiary) in the Bristol Diocese. The intention is that this will become a regular component of post-ordination training in the Diocese. Attendance will be required and I have done a small piece of research looking at the reactions to the experience of being in the group of those participants who would not have freely chosen to participate.

withdrawal from it was mainly because of a mismatch between their needs and the group's task.

Having two leaders was "something of a luxury," according to one group member, but it meant that group members were well contained by a competent, harmonious "couple." The fact that Peter and I met to debrief after every session and also had joint supervision from a group analyst meant that group members were "held in mind"⁶ by us for the seven months duration of the group (and for six months afterwards during the writing of this research report). The "holding in mind" of patients by their analyst—or indeed of children by their parents—is recognized as powerfully therapeutic, and we wondered if the fact that the two leaders worked in this way contributed to the feelings of satisfaction with the group which everyone who stayed the course experienced.

Finally, as was said in the introduction, in addition to their traditional role, today's clergy have to adapt to new forms of ministry, particularly amongst the unchurched. In a society where patriarchy and prescriptiveness are unacceptable and authority is questioned, ministry requires a new kind of situational responsiveness which is very demanding on clergy and can leave them feeling vulnerable. The sort of support group that we ran in Bristol could have a useful contribution to make at such a time of change. Its style certainly seemed to be in tune with the needs of group members who stayed the course.

It was a democratically run group where members could bring heartfelt dilemmas and tricky pastoral relationships to responsive colleagues and psychoanalytically trained leaders. It provided, therefore, both a learning environment where new psychological skills could be picked up, and also modelled a particular way of attending to people's unique situational needs. This model could be taken out from

⁶ The idea of "holding in mind" one's patients derives from Winnicott's theory of Primary Maternal Preoccupation. See "Primary Maternal Preoccupation" (Winnicott, 1975).

the group and used in ministry, particularly in ministry to those unfamiliar with the traditional church and its culture. Although the model is fundamentally a psychological one, the rest of the group agreed with one member when he said he felt that despite the psychological emphasis, "God was in all of it."

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Supporting Clergy in Postmodern Ministry: A Postscript

Choosing the Balint model

As I indicate in the introduction to the paper above, choosing to use the Balint model for the clergy support group I set up in 2004 in the Diocese of Bristol was serendipitous. At that time a psychoanalytic colleague, Peter Barwell, was running a Balint group for GP's and had enthused to me about the model's effectiveness in helping a small group of GPs to reflect on their difficult, complex consultations with patients. In Peter's view participants not only developed professionally in the Balint group, but they also flourished personally in its confidential, convivial atmosphere, where there was time to tell their stories and experience being carefully and deeply listened to by empathetic colleagues and psychoanalytically trained leaders.

It struck me that there were parallels between Peter's GPs and the clergy with whom I was working in individual psychotherapy, helping them reflect on their ministry in a complex, post-Christian society. I wondered whether, with a few modifications, the Balint group model could work just as well for clergy as the GPs for whom it was originally designed. Many of the clergy I was meeting in the consulting room were demoralised, often isolated, and seemed to have difficulties in common. I thought that a Balint group experience might be able to offer these clergy fellowship and solidarity, in addition to professional support and personal development and this felt like a very interesting idea.

Peter Barwell offered to co-lead if I went ahead with a Balint group for clergy and my decision to do so was probably influenced by the appealing thought of working with a friendly colleague.

The choice I made to use the Balint model was not primarily a critically reasoned one. I did not look for evidence that the Balint model was the best option, testing out my choice by comparing and contrasting it with other potentially appropriate and more contemporary group models such as Action Learning, Theological Reflection or a Narrative-based model, and I had no exploratory conversations with other possible co-leaders.

My decision to choose the Balint model was basically an intuitive one - the result of an instinctive process that connected my liking and respect for Peter Barwell, the knowledge I had built up over time about un-met clergy support needs, and an interest in a group-work model that offered both personal and professional development to participants.

The sort of intuitive 'knowing' on which my decision was based is self-authenticating: that is, I just 'knew' the Balint model would work for clergy and that it would be enjoyable to co-lead a group with Peter. The decision did not feel as active or conscious as having made a choice, it was more like receiving a given which came my way by happy accident, and somehow fitted the bill, leaving me in no doubt that I could both trust and act on it.

In the paper above I take the Balint model as a given and expect the reader to do so also. Proving the suitability of the method came later in the sense that the research results show it worked well for participants. However another method might have worked just as effectively, or more so, but in a different way.

The model's greatest strength and greatest weakness

The great strength of the Balint method is the direct way it gets beneath the surface of a presenter's problem by asking 'why is this particular issue a problem for this particular GP – or in our case - priest?' The group helps the presenter to go deeper and reflect on what might be the personal, psychological hook that is snagging

things up and making this particular issue a sticking point. At all times, when wrestling with the problems presented, the group gives primacy to the emotional dimension of life.

The emphasis on getting below the surface of a problem often enables the presenter to get in touch with something hitherto inaccessible to his/her conscious mind. Such insight is valuable in terms of a priest's self-development, but also and importantly in a work-focussed group, the model has the potential to introduce participants to a deeper way of thinking about the problems of those who seek out their ministry – the group offers priests actual *experiences* of thinking under the surface.

The greatest strength of the method, however, can also be its weakness. Without firm, boundaried leadership the group can lose its primary focus on work issues and stray into the often more fascinating territory of a presenter's own psyche and personal problems.

A tendency towards introspection for its own sake seems to have been encouraged in the early Balint groups and considered an important element of the group's task. The focus was on exploring and understanding what might be going on for a presenter, rather than on finding a solution to his problem, thus implicitly encouraging self-disclosure.

As in individual psychoanalytic sessions, stories participants told in the early Balint groups were uninterrupted so that associations and emotional expressiveness were undisturbed. Indeed Balint regarded questions as an intrusion and he disapproved of them, 'if you ask questions, you will get answers but hardly anything else' (Launer, 2002, p. 207).

This open, free-ranging approach can lead presenters into emotionally charged, sometimes dangerous, inner territory and it is interesting that Balint

nowhere flags up this possibility as a warning to group leaders and participants. Seeing a patient four or five times a week in personal analysis provides a completely different kind of container for powerful psychic material from a forty-five minute slot in a group session once every several weeks. Unlike a personal analysis, the constraints on a group model mean it is unable to explore and contain free-ranging, complex, personal material. Once such material is opened up, the presenter is unlikely to reach a satisfactory closure in the time available, and may, in consequence, be left with nowhere to take the raw, and perhaps distressing, feelings evoked and exposed in the group session. This is neither a creative or helpful outcome and it seems that the Balints themselves began to realise this and introduced firmer group boundaries as time went on.

Closing down issues and dissuading people from self-exposure, are not parts of the traditional psychoanalytic remit, so to keep the group safe in a more focussed situation, leaders of Balint groups need additional skills. They need to be very clear that the group-work focus is on practice and pro-active and directive in order to keep people on task. Participants' personal, psychological material in such a group is relevant only in as far as it relates to the work issue under discussion, and managing this work/personal tension needs a firm, practised hand.

The modernist view underlying traditional psychoanalysis, as practised by Balint, regarded working on someone's story in the free-floating way described above as a method of getting at objective truth that is there to be discovered. However, contemporary psychoanalytic thinking, that is in touch with postmodern approaches to story, would criticise the Balint approach as being somewhat dated. When psychoanalysts use the Balint model today, they tend to adapt it in ways such as those I describe below.

Comparing the Narrative-based and Balint group models

John Launer in his book, *Narrative-based Primary Care (2002)* compares the Balint model of supporting practitioners with the Narrative-based model that he himself espouses. Although both methods seek to facilitate change through the medium of story-telling, the theory behind the two methods is fundamentally different.

In contrast to the modernist view underlying traditional psychoanalysis, the postmodern theory that underlies the Narrative-based method holds that truth is relativistic: truth lies in the telling, or way of telling, a story. That is, the narrative or discourse itself generates an account that is truthful and this can change in the telling, or in dialogue with another.

I do not agree with Launer that this is really what distinguishes the Narrative-based method from psychoanalysis. As most analysts recognise, stories are likely to enliven experience in the re-creative process of telling and being heard by another, whose listening attention assists the teller to realise what they say.

The Narrative-based method distinguishes itself from psychoanalytic procedures in that it is both constructive and reality based in seeking solutions to problems. Launer is critical of what he considers the Balint over-emphasis on the emotional dimension of experience, in his view this tends to lead practitioners 'to explore emotion for its own sake...a habit observed perhaps more than any other in practitioners who report they have been influenced directly or indirectly by the Balint tradition' (Launer 2002 p208).

Launer is also critical of the encouragement doctor-participants are given by the Balint method to 'lower their own emotional defences' (Salinsky 2001) in the service of promoting intense emotional engagement with patients. In Launer's view this can lead to potentially harmful, personal over-disclosure both for practitioners presenting in the group, and also in their encounters with patients. He sees a real

risk in encouraging what he calls 'whingeing or emotional wallowing' because this 'may end up reinforcing stories of helplessness rather than creating opportunities to change them' (ibid p206). I think this is one of the most interesting criticisms Launer makes and it echoes a criticism levelled more generally at psychoanalysis: that it relates only to psychic reality and makes short shrift of the real-life constraints of actual people's day to day lives. This view assumes a questionable consensus in psychoanalytic procedure. Many psychoanalysts are inclined to adopt more pluralist approaches to the work of psychic transformation (Bollas, 2007, p.6-8).

Although the narrative-based method espoused by Launer also values emotion and intimacy, the practitioners of this method are less identified with the emotional dimension than the Balint practitioners. They are observers as well as participants in what goes on. Narrative-based Practitioners are not averse to handing the occasional tissue to a distressed patient – but nevertheless they would also ask themselves at such a moment, 'what have the tears achieved? Is it merely a transient release of emotion or is it a more substantial change? If not, could change have been achieved in another way – perhaps through an intervention promoting empowerment?' (Launer, 2002, p.206).

The Narrative-based method focusses on making empowering, dynamic interventions and its practitioners regard asking questions as a prerequisite for helping patients move from 'a linear to a more interactive understanding of their problem, from static to dynamic. It is a way of changing old, repetitive stories into new ones' (ibid). Practitioners contribute to the new story 'by taking into account the complex multi-layered social context' in which the patient lives and helping the patient construct a new story that works better in his every-day life' (Launer, 2002, p.29).

In contrast, Launer characterises the classical psychoanalytic approach underlying the Balint method as one that remains aloof from the social and political context of a person's ordinary life. Instead it tries to tease out underlying causes for distress, believing there is always something deep and meaningful that is hidden from view – that is, there is always an objective truth to discover.

Launer's criticism of active encouragement of emotion for its own sake is valuable, but he is perhaps overly disposed to dismiss emotionally toned disclosures in perjorative terms. As he suggests, 'whinging or wallowing' would be likely to reinforce helplessness, rather than constellate a sense of agency. However participants' disclosures may be coloured by other emotions such as love or gratitude which would aid rather than impair the working of the group.

Modern proponents of the Balint method

Modern proponents of the Balint method, such as his widow Enid, and John Salinsky (2003) describe a more flexible, democratic approach than the traditional one. In contrast to the paternalistic approach of classical psychoanalysis, Salinsky et al follow a strand of Balint's thinking 'that runs through his work, and psychoanalytic thinking in general, that is non-dogmatic, sceptical and self-critical. It is a strand of thinking that regards exploration as more important than labels, and conversation as more therapeutic than interpretations' (Launer, 2002, p.211). Here the practitioner is a 'fellow traveller...mostly there to share experience and reflect on it' (Salinsky, 1987). Any change in the patient's world is spontaneous and unplanned and comes about as a result of the doctor/patient connection.

The narrative method achieves change through the type and focus of the questions that the doctor asks the patient, change is 'planned conscious and led' with the patient having the final responsibility. In the sense that it is 'led' by a doctor, the narrative method could be seen as directive and therefore potentially more

'paternalistic' than the open ended, spontaneous Balint method. However, at the same time, 'the search for meaning is collaborative, constantly evolving, always provisional and only truthful in so far as it produces an understanding which the patient finds helpful in some way, and for some time' (Launer, 2002, p. 211). The Narrative –based method is pragmatic: what is true is what works.

Adapting the traditional Balint model

The Balint method has evolved, and today has much in common with the narrative approach in that it seeks a middle way between intense empathy and the more dispassionate questioning stance of the narrative method. Contemporary Balint groups, including our own, are much more dynamic and active than the traditional ones and employ techniques borrowed from other group models.

The framework of our Balint group for clergy conformed to the traditional model: sessions of one and a half hours, with two presentations of forty-five minutes each. The work-focussed task of the group was also, theoretically, the same as that of Balint. Like him we provided information about the group for potential participants and those who joined self-selected to attend. An exception to this was when we ran Balint groups as a module of curate training, where attendance was compulsory. The Balint model does not suit everyone and in each of the groups of curates we worked with, there was usually somebody who seemed defensive and uncomfortable: in one case a curate stopped attending because she found the psychological emphasis of the group so difficult. In future I would in all circumstances make attendance at Balint groups voluntary.

Unlike Balint's exploratory, open ended way of working, and his emphasis on intense emotional engagement for its own sake, our group was rooted in the real world, ordinary, day-to-day issues, of participants. The psychological insights gained

in group sessions provided participants with tools to use in their ministry contexts. So for us, self-development was secondary to the work focus.

Where we most obviously diverged from Balint was in our leadership style. We were proactive, constantly bringing participants back to the focus on work issues, moving them away from what one of my research interviewees called, 'a tendency to navel gaze'. We were not looking for participants to have an intense emotional experience in the group – as in a Balint 'flash' *– but for them to gain insight into the psychological blocks that were hindering them in their work and relationships. However, the research results show that some participants did change as a result of the valuable insights they gained during their time as members of the group.

The function of the leaders in the kind of group clergy need for support is, in our experience, one of encouraging engagement, receptiveness, candour and a capacity for thoughtful dialogue and reflection. Although Launer's criticisms, and his reservations about psychoanalytic procedures helpfully alert attention to what can impede the working of a group, there is no reason why, if the leaders are prepared to adapt to the requirements of new situations, psychoanalytically orientated approaches to group process should not be psycho/social in both conception and delivery.

The push-back technique

In our training work we also used techniques from other models to enhance the Balint group experience for people: for example, the 'push-back' technique described by Salinsky (2003).

After a participant has told his story to the group, the leader asks the presenter to 'move his or her chair back a few symbolic inches then, while continuing to listen, to take no further active part in the discussion for about twenty

minutes. This is called the 'push-back' phase....the group is now free to get to work on the case themselves using their own experience, their imagination and most importantly, their own emotional reactions. After twenty minutes the presenter is invited to re-join the group and share her thoughts' (Salinsky, 2003). In other words the presenting subject is asked to assume the role of witness to themselves, as the object of discussion.

This sort of dynamic technique is a helpful accretion to the Balint method, even though it places the method at quite a distance from classical psychoanalysis.

As well as using the sort of adapted format just described, I have, of course, made a fundamental adaptation of Balint's original model by using it to support Church of England priests in their ministry, rather than doctors in their consultations with patients. The adapted or updated version of the Balint group we conducted proved amenable to a project which sought to find common ground for conversations between equals in which a readiness to explore, discover and narrate were interweaving processes. The group was both an embodied response to a perceived gap in provision for clergy, and also, as it turned out, a valuable instrument of research.

***Note** In Balint's view, the focal point of the intense engagement experienced by the doctors, firstly in the group, and then also in their encounters with patients was something he calls the 'flash'. This is 'an intense moment of mutual awareness in doctor and patient, resulting in the possibility of change or enrichment in the working relationship' (Gill 1979).

What Balint calls the 'flash' is almost identical to what I call an 'electric moment' in the thesis part of this portfolio when describing transformational

moments that occurred in intense encounters between priests and those to whom they ministered.

Gertrud Mander in *Diversity, Discipline and Devotion in Psychotherapy* (2007) describes such a moment as a 'flash' of understanding which unites patient and doctor and is felt by both: a meeting of two minds and a moment of truth. Mander suggests that Balint's 'flash' can be translated into Stern's 'inter-subjective matrix' (1985), his description of what happens when two people make a special sort of contact which involves an 'interpenetration of minds'. Stern thought this is what psychoanalysis is largely about, 'it promotes the work of developmental repair in which the therapist's affective attunement and implicit knowledge of the patient's mind may bring about the desired change in psychic functioning' (Mander, 2007, p.25-26).

Although recent practitioners of the Balint method are more modest in their expectations, most would hold that a therapeutic result of something of this kind, on a more ordinary level, is the desired outcome of the encounters between people the method promotes.

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REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this paper is to reflect on a confusing and complex 'critical incident' that happened to me on completion of a three-year research project that looked at professional and personal support for clergy and was commissioned by a diocese in the Church of England. The incident I am going to discuss is one that Schön (1983, p.4) might with accuracy describe as 'real world', 'messy and indeterminate'. I have written frankly and self-revealingly about my experience in an attempt to open it up to scrutiny in a systematic, self-critical way and ask, 'what is going on here?' I have endeavoured in what follows, to try to understand and answer this question. My hope is to find some sort of coherence of meaning in what was a painful and difficult experience.

The paper is in two parts. Part 1 describes the research project and its reception by the commissioning diocese and Part 2 reflects on this account in a number of different ways.

PART 1. THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND ITS RECEPTION

Where I am coming from: there is no such thing as a view from nowhere

"We frame problematic situations in different ways, depending on our disciplinary backgrounds... those who hold conflicting frames pay attention to different facts and make different sense of the facts they notice" Schön (1983, p.4 & 5).

This is certainly the case in the situation I am going to discuss.

I need, therefore, to be clear at the start about my own disciplinary background. I am a Jungian analyst and psychoanalytic psychotherapist working with clergy both individually, in a clinical setting, and in groups and I am also involved in the training

and formation of clergy. I am a committed Christian in the liberal tradition, a feminist and a Christian Socialist.

My academic background is in theology and alongside running a private practice as a psychoanalyst I have conducted several research projects that have spanned the two disciplines. Most recently this work has been submitted to Manchester University as part of my doctoral studies in Practical Theology.

The Situation

Project remit

As someone described by the hierarchy of the commissioning diocese as a 'long-term, trusted friend of the diocese', I was commissioned in 2006 to undertake a three year research project, working one day a week, and it is the reception of the findings of this research that is the subject of this paper.

The project was a follow on from a previous research study evaluating a Balint-style support group for clergy I facilitated (Travis, 2008, p.95). The evidence from this study suggested that the Balint-style group had excellent results in terms of providing group members with new insights and skills, renewing their confidence and enthusiasm and reinvigorating their mainly long term ministries. The overall aim of the support group was achieved: to help clergy meet new demands and challenges more effectively as they sought to recast and reshape their ministry and serve their communities in contemporary society.

This first research study identified a real and largely unmet need in the Church of England for the kind of clergy support offered by the Balint-style group.

In the follow on study, I wanted to investigate the nature of this gap in provision and find other imaginative support and training initiatives across the Church of England that were attempting to fill it. On the basis of this research I

would make recommendations the diocese about how to improve its support for clergy. The Bishop set his sights high; he told me he wanted to provide 'world class' support for his clergy.

The project coincided with the introduction in the commissioning diocese of an ambitious new North American-style management strategy ('The Strategy') intended radically to reshape the understanding of ministry in the diocese, and introduce new patterns of delivery. It was clear that successful implementation of The Strategy would require additional mechanisms of professional support for clergy and I hoped my recommendations would be timely and dove-tail neatly into The Strategy at this time of change.

Methodology of the three-year research project

In pursuit of this goal I conducted research in three dioceses, the commissioning diocese itself, the rural diocese of Hereford and the multicultural, socially deprived diocese of Blackburn.

I used several different methods of information gathering including formal, audio taped interviews with both providers and recipients of support services in all three dioceses and I also conducted focus groups for clergy in two of the dioceses. I wanted to know what forms of support for clergy were on offer, what providers and recipients thought about the quality of the provision available, and what they thought was missing. I also asked people about their best ever experience of either receiving or providing support.

Using a questionnaire, I surveyed all the Archdeacons in the Church of England and asked them what kinds of provision of support for clergy they would aspire to in the best of all possible worlds. I also invited them to give 3 examples of new forms of support that it might be practical for them to implement, by building onto existing structures in their dioceses. The data I collected was recorded and

analysed. Some of the Archdeacons who had responded to the questionnaire indicated they would like to talk further with me about their ideas and several follow up conversations took place.

One of these conversations resulted in my collaborating with the Archdeacon of Sherborne to organise two national Think-Tanks that explored issues to do with the support of clergy in postmodern ministry. Participants, who came from a wide range of perspectives, wrote papers about their work and these were collated into a Think-Tank Manual (2009) that was disseminated across the dioceses. The rich material that came out of the Think-Tanks fed into my research.

Also, in various other ways, I became experientially involved in the research journey and in generating data myself – that is, I was a participant as well as an observer. For example, I continued to co-facilitate the Balint-style support group for clergy and further developed this model, writing it up and teaching others to use it. I participated in diocesan events and conferences, enjoying informal conversations, mingling with clergy and generally watching and listening to what went on in the diocese, alert to picking up any hidden dynamics.

I set up three one-day workshops for clergy to explore, in multi-dimensional ways, themes that were beginning to emerge from my research findings. For example, one workshop explored women's experience of ordained ministry: their disappointments, their delights and their need for new forms of support to help them handle the painful paradox of apparently sharing the priesthood on equal terms with men, whilst, at the same time, being part of an institution that condones sexism.

It was agreed when I took on the project that I would collaborate with officers at Church House when setting up workshops etc, and would receive some research assistance and administrative help. This working contact provided me with an enlightening 'insider' lens through which to observe the administrative infrastructure,

office processes and working relationships within Church House that would otherwise have been inaccessible to me as a researcher.

My process of information gathering included both traditional forms of qualitative research and also insights gained from a more ethnographic approach - the insider's perspective - gleaned from being in the field and active myself (Ellis, 2004, p.24f.). As a psychoanalyst, the approach of the ethnographer felt like home ground for me, calling out my professional skill-set of careful listening, watching, testing out intuitions and interpreting.

Although the research project was commissioned by the Bishop, my proxy client/immediate contact, was the Archdeacon. He had oversight of the project and I reported to him. We met regularly each month for two-hours of informal, unstructured conversation about the research journey. In this way, the Archdeacon was kept fully informed about my findings as the work progressed.

How the project evolved

On the surface the three years of work that preceded the presentation of my report in November 2009 went smoothly. The interim work in progress paper I presented to the funding body was appreciatively received and various papers and seminars based on my research findings also seemed to go down well at conferences. The Archdeacon who oversaw my work was happy and everyone seemed to think the intention to write up the research journey in narrative form was a sound one. The research process and qualitative methods I was using had been scrutinised and approved by the academics at Manchester University who were supervising this component of my doctoral work. However, on reflection, especially as the ethnographic component of the research became core to the project, I am not sure how well the commissioner and the Archdeacon understood the methods of gathering information I was using.

It was my intention to make the research findings accessible to a wide readership because the understanding from the beginning was that, although commissioned by a particular diocese, and primarily about that diocese, the work would be relevant to the wider church community. The expectation was that I would present my report to the Bishop in November 2009 and a launch to publicise my findings and recommendations would follow. All seemed well but I felt uneasy.

In the next pages I provide a first-hand, somewhat personal account of my experience of the research journey and I shall then offer some reflections on this experience.

Some misgivings

Throughout the research journey I was open and candid with the Archdeacon and my supervisors at Manchester University that I was discovering, on several fronts, some difficult and surprising material about the culture of the commissioning diocese. There seemed to be a lack of transparency and clarity about diocesan structures and financial accountability. In addition the implementation of The Strategy was problematic and its negative reception by many clergy on the ground appeared largely to be ignored by senior staff. It also became clear that apart from some counselling provided by the pastoral advisor for those in extremis, and the ongoing Balint-style group, there was an absence of basic, systematic, built-in support and care for the clergy as required by The Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009.

Over the three years of the project, the number of clergy in the diocese off work with stress or emotional problems escalated. At one point, fifty percent of the clergy in one deanery were seeking help for stress related problems. Although the Pastoral Advisor had collated these worrying figures and informally shared them with me, he told me that since there was no mechanism in place to formally report

them to Bishop's staff - for example as part of an on-going review process - information about clergy distress in the diocese remained anecdotal, rather than evidenced, and in consequence, could be overlooked.

A Paradox

Almost from the start of the project I was aware of something of a paradox. On the one hand, in terms of conducting the research, my engagement with the field was absorbing and yielding exciting results. I was interviewing people who were full of ideas and glad to participate and the focus groups and workshops were well attended and successful. I was gathering an almost overwhelming amount of interesting, relevant material.

On the other hand, however, in terms of my experience as participant-researcher it was a different story. From the beginning of the project my research notes log difficulties I experienced with administrators and secretaries when seeking co-operation and administrative assistance for workshops and events I was setting up as part of the project. Much of the administrative back-up that I had been promised seemed unwillingly given and unreliable - often even small, routine tasks like answering an email, were left undone. I felt a growing concern that the success of the project could potentially be undermined by weaknesses in office processes and the unhelpful attitude of some administrative staff.

Indeed, I began to wonder if senior managers had made it clear to their staff that administrative help and research assistance for the project had been agreed and time allocated for tasks such as transcribing the tapes from the focus groups, interviews etc. I was puzzled by the fact that secretaries seemed to be in charge of deciding which tasks to fulfil, when to do them, or indeed, whether to do them at all, regardless of urgency or their managers' priorities. I found it disconcerting to be always uncertain whether a task I had delegated would be

completed - or even undertaken – and to encounter such powerful resistance when seeking assistance: I felt as if I was continually going against the grain of the culture.

The effects of this resistance were cumulative; for example, I discovered too late in the day that a workshop venue had never been booked, publicity material was careless and shoddily produced and information about up-coming events was always sent out late to busy would-be participants, potentially compromising the viability of events. On one occasion a day event was cancelled because the administration ground to a halt. When excuses were offered they were disengaged and off-hand and I felt the attitude of administrators towards me conveyed the message that I was unreasonable and demanding in my requests for assistance.

It was a negative and blocking atmosphere within which to work, or even think, creatively, and I found it almost impossible to do so. It seemed as if something was going on under the surface of which I was unaware, and I suspected this had little to do with me personally. The strong negative feelings invoked in me suggested that whatever was going on was very powerful and was being projected on to me, the outsider, in a way that felt personal and disturbing.

Denham Grierson points out that 'what appears on the surface as random does have point and meaning from the perspective of those who belong' (Grierson, 1984 p.23). However, I did not seem to have the right tools available to think about what this meaning might be, and at the time felt unable to distance myself sufficiently, I just felt caught up and very angry, upset and disorientated.

By becoming a participant in the culture I was at the same time researching, I felt I had stumbled into what Denham Grierson calls 'the hidden life' of the diocese (ibid p.11). Despite such an experience being one of acute emotional discomfort, in Grierson's view 'such entering-in leads to the possibility of transformation' - an

aspiration central to all research in Practical Theology. It certainly felt important to try to understand the connection between my own very difficult feelings, and the 'hidden life' of the diocese.

Although I discussed the practical side of my difficulties with managers who had oversight of administrators and secretaries, the nettle was never grasped – my concerns were side-stepped: it was 'just the way things are'.

In terms of getting on with the project, these difficulties became insurmountable and I retreated from Church House. It seemed that the only way to make sure things got efficiently done was to take on the administrative tasks connected with the project myself, and pay for the research assistance I needed. This was hard, additional work I had not expected to undertake, but my renewed sense of empowerment and enjoyment in the project, having cut loose from any dependence on back-up from Church House, made me realise just how debilitating and demoralising my experience with the diocesan administration had been.

It became clear over the next few weeks, that my decision to be independent was resented - ranks closed, information I needed for the research was withheld and pre-arranged interviews with senior administrative staff abruptly cancelled. I felt punished for challenging a system that had in effect frozen me out because I became a threat to its accustomed patterns of behaviour. I had been cast in the role of a 'difficult outsider'. It was painful for me to be treated as a stranger rather than given my customary welcome as a friend, but as Grierson points out, 'this marginal position enables the stranger to see what those living within the taken-for-granted life of the (diocese) cannot see' because they belong in the 'deep structure' of its life (ibid, p 23). Perhaps it was fear that I was beginning to understand something of the shadow side of the diocese's taken-for-granted life that made me a threat to those who were heavily invested in the status quo.

I think now that I had taken my status as 'friend' too much at face value and been insufficiently sceptical. People who belong to a tightly-knit culture are bound to feel ambivalent at some level towards the outsider who comes in as 'both bearer of gifts and an unknown threat' (ibid). By not taking this ambivalence into account, and firmly identifying myself as a 'friend-bearing-gifts', I lost the distance which would have made me less vulnerable to the passive aggressive attack I sustained from the 'insiders'.

I was interested that the view of me as a difficult and threatening outsider went unchallenged by the managers with whom I was collaborating – these were people who knew me and my work well over many years. My impression was that there was a general unwillingness amongst them to challenge the status quo: the power and authority assumed by secretarial and administrative staff somehow seemed central to the way things were.

A wider context

As the research journey continued I began to understand what had happened to me within a wider context. I found what had felt like a personal attack was mirrored in the experiences of many clergy with whom I had conversations during the research fieldwork. They told me stories about high-handedness they had encountered in the manner of both senior and junior administrative staff, and the disconcerting way resources and support were withheld when they legitimately sought diocesan services and assistance. Many said they had given up asking for help or resources, and several identified the behaviour towards them from administrators as 'bullying'. Clergy told me they feared retaliation were they to complain.

There seemed no process in place through which clergy could voice their discontents and some were extremely angry even years after the experiences they described had taken place. I wondered whether the escalating number of clergy off

sick might, amongst other reasons, be a silent and unconscious expression of resistance to an uncongenial regime.

Even senior clergy could be treated in a disrespectful way by administrators. For example, I saw the anger of one Archdeacon who, having asked a junior Church House secretary to send a memo from him to all clergy, received a phone call from her, in my presence, to say his request had been vetoed on the authority of the diocesan secretary. Witnessing this incident and the apparent helplessness of the Archdeacon in terms of asserting his authority, suggested to me that there was some sort of power struggle going on between himself and a senior administrator about who was really in charge. In this instance it was clearly the administrator - she assumed authority, took the power and had the last word and the Archdeacon was furious. I wondered if my own experiences with much more junior administrators could be the result of a trickle-down effect that came from this sort of battle for supremacy strife at the top.

A new track of thinking: the research field widens

The experiences and observations discussed above set me on a new track of thinking that began to run parallel to my continuing work on the original research brief. As a result of the research process of information gathering, I had begun to suspect that the resistance I had picked up was not just about me and my work, but was endemic to the culture of the diocese.

It was becoming clear to me that the support clergy needed was more than just pastoral. If they too were enmeshed in the debilitating, institutional problems I had encountered myself, and discovered in the experiences of others, it was important that these problems should be brought to light so they could be faced and dealt with.

On reflection, this widening of the field of my research, and the reasons why I thought it necessary, should have been made clear to the commissioner at this time. However, when I first began to follow this parallel track in my field-work I was not fully aware of the meaning or significance of the findings I was investigating. These findings often seemed inconsequential in themselves, but the effect was cumulative and the associated feeling tone was powerfully negative.

Also, I noticed in myself an instinct to draw back from pursuing this line of enquiry - I felt that by continuing I was entering dangerous territory.

I seemed to be discovering at the centre of power in the diocese, a constitutional resistance to new initiatives and change that was built into the system. My research notes detail examples of inefficiency and ideas being nipped in the bud, blocked or apparently sabotaged in countless small ways. I had experienced this myself, and heard other people's stories about how their enthusiasm and creativity had felt crushed by the institution.

My findings suggested that a powerful and narrowly focussed administration, heavily invested in maintaining the status quo, was successfully controlling the delivery of services, and too often, the people making decisions were unqualified to do so.

What was interesting was that the power of this bureaucracy, and those in control of it, seemed to go unquestioned. In the face of it senior clerics were choosing not to exercise their personal authority, and indeed, most had absented themselves from Church House altogether, leaving the diocesan secretary in charge.

I felt I had inadvertently stumbled upon the shadow side of a diocese apparently so bright, forward looking, vigorously led and ready for new ideas and initiatives. Indeed, I had discovered in my fieldwork that there was no shortage of

bright, creative people in the diocese, full of good ideas. Needing people to come up with ideas was not the issue. The core of the diocese's problem lay in mal-administration. It was an institutional problem.

I felt that the institutional problem I had discovered was very serious and needed to be tactfully, yet robustly, flagged up in my report, not only because of its implications for the implementation of my recommendations, but because, more crucially, it would inhibit the full implementation of The Strategy.

An institutional problem

The parallel track I was pursuing in my research journey became in some ways more intriguing and interesting to investigate than the original research task. It felt impossible to confine myself to the original brief, because it seemed self-evident that my findings necessitated a significant change of emphasis in the final report. I was caught up with the idea that, however valid and relevant my recommendations for improving clergy support might turn out to be, they would not be implemented unless there were radical changes in the infrastructure of the diocese.

Whilst I still think, with hindsight, this was an accurate assessment, I might have benefitted from being challenged by my supervisors, or the Archdeacon, to give a robust, critical and thought-through justification for going off-piste, in terms of the original research brief. Had I looked more self-critically at my motivation for entering territory I intuitively knew was dangerous, I might have been more prepared for what happened when I presented the research report.

The report takes a new direction

As well as pursuing the original research brief, describing and recommending new forms of personal and professional support for clergy, I began to explore the

underlying institutional problems that in my view were threatening innovation and change in the diocese.

I realised that this would not be the report the diocese was expecting, but the Archdeacon seemed un-phased by the widening of my research focus, and continued to make appreciative and helpful comments during our regular discussions.

Looking now at the report's change of emphasis, I need to ask myself whether at this point in the research journey I began to lose some professional objectivity and allowed myself to be carried away by my zeal for reform.

In retrospect, I should have checked that the Archdeacon was making the change of emphasis in my work absolutely clear to the formal commissioner, the Bishop. Had he done so, the commissioner could have challenged me about this new direction. In fact, it seems that the commissioner was not informed in any full or systematic way about the progress of my work and nobody challenged me when, in addition to my original brief, I began to shift my attention to the institutional problem and ask for sight of relevant information: pay-scales, job descriptions etc. I wanted to understand more about what was going on and looking at the power structure seemed a good place to start.

Although the diocesan secretary queried my request for access to this kind of material and told the Archdeacon's secretary that she was very angry about it, after a three month dispute her objection was eventually over-ruled by the Archdeacon and the information I requested was made available.

Frances Ward describes facing a dilemma similar to my own, when she changed focus during a research study. She was investigating the 'corporate identity' of a church congregation in the North West of England and as the study progressed the central research question developed and became another, much

more politically sensitive question, focussing on institutional racism and gender issues. She writes, 'for various reasons the ground shifted and a widening gap emerged between where I was going with the research and the understanding that the commissioner had of what I was doing...with hindsight, I should have talked more' (Ward, 2004, p.129).

I did talk, frequently and at length with the Archdeacon about the direction of my thinking and he engaged with it enthusiastically, always apparently in agreement with my interpretations. I shall look more closely at what might have been going on between us later in this paper.

My Manchester University supervisors and peer group were circumspect; despite their appreciative evaluation of my research work and the hidden dynamics in the diocese it had revealed, they warned me to expect a rough ride from the diocese when I presented the report. Although their comments worried me, I was able to put them on one side because I felt I had to bring to light the problems I had discovered. I went ahead, but perhaps more in the spirit of a crusader than a researcher.

Preparing to submit the report

I submitted the draft research report to the Archdeacon and at his instigation we spent a day together going through the text meticulously in order to get every ecclesiastical detail, job title, etcetera, accurate, and in addition, reinforcing one or two of my arguments with supplementary material volunteered by him. The Archdeacon said he wanted the report to be 'as water-tight as possible, so they can't say, 'she hasn't even got her facts right!'' I was struck by his comment but failed to register an implicit warning about the possible reception of the report.

The final report was then sent to the Bishop and, probably rather naively, I was taken by surprise by what happened next.

What happened when I presented the report

Following earlier discussions with the Archdeacon, I had anticipated that there would be some sort of launch of the report prior to its dissemination to all the managers in the diocese. I had then expected to be included in discussions at Bishop's Staff and Chapter level about the report and implementation of its recommendations.

Instead, the report was received into a complete silence. Apart from the conversations with the Archdeacon, discussed below, no-one from the diocese has ever spoken to me about it.

According to the Archdeacon, who took on the role of go-between, I understand that the report was read by members of Bishop's staff and later, following several months of what he described as 'wrangling', the area deans were also given sight of it. Since the diocese holds the copyright, and I was told not to circulate it to the funding body, to interviewees or any other interested party, so no-one else has read it: the report has effectively been suppressed.

Report!? What report?

It is interesting that since submitting the report, and unattributed to my work, almost all the detailed recommendations about improving clergy support have been implemented. Also, some significant changes in the management structure and office processes have occurred in ways that are consistent with my critical analysis of the institutional problems endemic in the diocese. All this suggests that the report has been taken seriously and its recommendations acted on.

However, from a personal point of view, I find it very difficult that the report has been given the silent treatment, and my research and field-work have been ignored and unacknowledged - it is as if the report was never written. I feel as if my

ideas have been stolen and my authorial voice silenced and this continues to shock me as an attack on my integrity as a researcher and a person.

The unofficial response to the report, according to the Archdeacon

The unofficial feed-back I received came through the filter of the Archdeacon who oversaw my work. I had considered him an ally throughout the three years - I thought we had become friends and had built up a respectful, enjoyable relationship.

However, when the Archdeacon read the final version of the report it was as if he realised for the first time how, using his word, 'explosive', the findings were. This seemed odd to me because we had discussed them together as the research progressed and he always gave the impression that my research findings did not surprise him and indeed, resonated with his own personal view of how things stood.

According to the Archdeacon's account the report went first to a sub-committee of Bishop's staff of which he was a member. Two of the four senior people on this committee felt themselves heavily criticised by the report's findings and the Archdeacon told me 'all hell broke loose'. He said the report met with a 'ferocious attack' and never before had he seen his colleagues 'so incandescent with rage'. It seems they were outraged by my presumption and 'rubbished' my research methods saying, 'this isn't proper research! It's just her opinion.'

I am dependent on the Archdeacon's account of the chronology of events, but I understand that the sub-committee wrote a summary of the report's findings and recommendations. This was, in the Archdeacon's words, 'a blistering attack' which was sent to members of Bishop's staff ahead of (or maybe instead of?) the full report. I was not sent a copy of this document, nor was I invited to the subsequent meeting to discuss it.

I asked the Archdeacon if, as a member of the sub-committee, he had distanced himself from the attacking summary they had written. Since he would not answer my question, I concluded that he had not.

Personally, this was a low point for me. I was chilled by the report's silent reception, which I experienced as a personal and contemptuous rejection of my three years of dedicated work. Even more painfully, perhaps, I felt abandoned by the Archdeacon who I had counted on as someone who knew my work well and respected it. I felt I had wrongly and naively assumed he would stand up for the report, knowing it to be a true account of carefully researched findings.

I felt cast out; the diocese had put up a wall of silence and closed ranks behind it. They did not like what I had found and wanted no discussion or further contact with me.

This was an interesting reaction to the critique of someone who was supposedly 'a friend of the diocese' and revealed an ambivalence towards me that had probably always been there, just below the surface. It was certainly an extraordinary way to receive a professionally researched report, commissioned at considerable expense. It felt like a violent, passive aggressive attack and I was angry and deeply hurt.

The reception, or non-reception, of my report and the underground way this was handled is consistent with the account I give in the report of the way the diocese does things. For example, its ability to simply ignore unwelcome facts, the lack of transparency and accountability in diocesan affairs, the tight control over who sends out information and who receives it, the influence of hidden power structures and the disrespectful treatment of those who, in one way or another, do not toe the line.

What is going on here?

In seeking to answer this question, I realise that I can only make one side of this complex story conscious and accessible: my side. In 'setting the problem and in choosing and naming' the things I shall notice and reflect upon, I am showing what is important to me (Schon, p.4). This built-in, subjective bias will inevitably influence the reflective process. Also, apart from hear-say, I do not have access to information about how the report was received: I was excluded from the process myself, therefore any account of the report's reception by the audience for which it was written, is missing.

PART 2. REFLECTION ON THE RECEPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

A Method of Theological Reflection

Having described the research report and its problematic reception, I need to find a way to reflect theologically on this situation that, as far as possible, distances me and makes space for thinking around it, in order to reduce the subjective bias. But I am still coming to the material from somewhere, rather than nowhere, and this necessarily imposes limits on the reflective process.

Stephen Pattison suggests that reflecting theologically means engaging 'in a three-way 'conversation' or dialogue between (my) own ideas, beliefs, feelings and perceptions; the beliefs, assumptions and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition; and the contemporary situation which is being considered' (Pattison, 2000,p.135).

I have chosen to use Simone Weil's idea of 'attention' as a reflective container within which to hold the problem, in all its rawness and unfinished-ness.

This special sort of container will, I hope, provide contemplative space where I can wrestle with the problem in the hope that new truths will emerge (Weil, 1950, p.66).

At first sight, Simone Weil is not a thinker obviously classifiable as a practical theologian. However, taking Pattison and Woodward's definition of practical theology, as 'a prime place where contemporary experience and the resources of the religious tradition meet in a critical dialogue that is mutually and practically transforming' (Woodward, 2000, p. xiii), Weil's work more than meets the criteria.

Her short life was one of intense political activity united with a profoundly religious outlook on life, 'there was a deep coherence, more than with most writers, between her political activism and mystical thinking: between her thought and life'. This is partly because she was astonishingly quick to put her principles into practice and partly because 'she was also an extremely practical thinker whose ideas tended to spring from the situations in which she found herself' (McLellan, 1989, p.1).

I feel an affinity with Weil's approach both personally and professionally, and realise that my continuing feelings of anger and hurt about the reception of my report might benefit from being held in the cool space offered by Weil's idea of attention.

The kind of attention she gives to the situations in which she finds herself is all about receptivity. Weil cultivates and works on a spacious inner hospitality in order to receive whatever occurs in the present in the belief that something new will reveal itself.

Professionally, my experience of working with patients in analysis and undergoing my own analysis has much in common with the kind of attentive, contemplative reverie - the waiting for something new to happen - that Weil writes about. All that is already known about the patient and all intention in the analyst are

suspended and hover in the background of the present moment. The analyst waits quietly and with openness in this generative space, sometimes for a long time, for the hitherto un-thought thought to occur in the patient's mind and a new truth begin to dawn. This repeating pattern and its interpretation is one way of describing the healing dynamic of the analysis as it proceeds.

As well as feeling a professional affinity with Weil's idea of attention, I also feel a personal connection with her intensely feminine way of giving attention to a problem. Weil writes, 'our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it' (Weil, 1950, p.72).

Returning to the problem at hand and reflecting on it within this sort of generative, feminine container provides a welcome counter-balance to the negative, masculine energy permeating the world of the problem. Although as Celia Hahn writes, 'the traditional way of holding authority as primarily received appears to be waning in our culture', in the world of the institutional church this is not the case (Hahn, 1994, p.16). A hierarchical, male establishment continues to dominate the Church of England, taking for granted its right to privilege and superiority and maintaining it with a 'language of power – of social power'. Ursula Le Guin calls this language 'the father tongue' and writes that 'those who don't know it or won't speak it are silent, or silenced, or unheard' (Le Guin, 1989, p.147-8).

Attention

Although I am indebted to Schon for his clarity in terms of how to set out situations and problems, I find his method of analysis over-active and therefore not a helpful or natural one for me to use.

Weil has something to say about the pro-active approach, she writes, 'all faulty connections of ideas...are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some

idea too hastily and being thus prematurely blocked, is not open to the truth. The cause is always that we have wanted to be too active; we have wanted to carry out a search' (Weil, 1950, p.72).

Looking back I can see that my crusading zeal to explore and be highly active might have meant that during the research journey some of the information gathering and interpretation may have lacked sufficient detachment and I could be criticised on this front. A lack of detachment probably also contributed to the powerful feelings I experienced on the non-reception/rejection of my report.

Can Weil's essay help me to reflect on this?

Weil says, 'we do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them' (ibid, p.73). W.H.Vanstone expresses the same idea in *The Stature of Waiting*. He writes that if one waits in a condition of alert passivity, 'the world discloses its power of meaning...man becomes, so to speak, the sharer with god of a secret' (Vanstone, 1982, p.112).

In her 1942 essay, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a view to the Love of God', Weil says that the faculty of attention can be developed through wrestling with any problem, whether in geometry or ethics (or, indeed, my problem with the reception of my report) if the aim is to increase one's grasp of the truth. Even if the problem is in the end left unsolved, the process of attending to it 'in a special way, of waiting upon truth, setting our hearts upon it, yet not allowing ourselves to go in search of it' will 'create light in the soul'. New meanings and understandings will emerge (Weil, 1950, p.73).

The quality of attention Weil writes about is, in her view, synonymous with prayer and is thus an act of love aimed only at increasing one's grasp of the truth.

Attention is not to do with how one feels, instead it consists of:

'suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object, it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts, as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains' (ibid, p.72).

When I first attempted to attend to the problem I have outlined above in this sort of detached, prayerful and loving way, I found it impossible. I could hardly bear to think about it at all, let alone look squarely at what had happened. I realised that I was still angry and hurt and felt harmed and humiliated by the treatment I had received. Whilst not exactly depressed, I was subdued, preoccupied and very upset.

However, Weil's words helped me persevere. She writes, 'there is something in our soul that has a...violent repugnance for true attention...this something is closely connected with evil...that is why every time that we really concentrate our attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves' (ibid, p.72). I felt challenged to stick with the discipline of attention despite my strong negative feelings, in the hope that something might change.

Perhaps if the problem I had experienced as so dark could be held in this context, in an attentive atmosphere of love and prayerfulness, then there was the potential for a whole new dynamic, hitherto pretty much absent on both sides, to enter the world of the problem. It was a struggle for me to find enough generosity in myself to keep going, but Weil helped me to climb down and look at where I might have been at fault myself. As she says, 'there is a great temptation to do the opposite.... and we have to withstand this temptation'. She writes, 'we work without making much progress when we refuse to give our attention to the faults we have

made', but by attending to our mistakes, we 'acquire the virtue of humility... and a sense of our own mediocrity...no knowledge is more to be desired' (ibid p.69-70).

Weil helped me to move from self-justification to self-examination and on to self-accusation, or put slightly differently, to confession. Unexpectedly, and by a rather strange route, I found myself tipped into the familiar liturgical pattern and momentum of confession and absolution.

As a result, I felt more able to enter into an attentive place and think about the problem without being encumbered by overwhelmingly angry and hurt feelings. I hoped the ground was clearer and if I waited, there might be the possibility of new disclosures and of increasing my grasp of truth. I felt much happier, as if a burden had fallen off my back.

On reflection, I think that this way of personally entering into, and somehow being held by the liturgy that had formed me within a worshipping community, may be distinctively Anglican. Tim Jenkins in his paper, 'Anglicanism: the only Answer to Modernity' suggests that 'the point of using a liturgy is that it offers a transforming structure. The participants are altered as they pass through it, purged as it were of their own wills and desires, and opened to the mind of God. In this way, their prayers are curiously distanced from their desires, hopes and fears – though not indifferent to them' (Jenkins, 2006, p.114). My experience of being caught up in the familiar liturgical pattern of the Anglican Church, in such a personal, moving way led to a fleeting, but profound sense both of what Rowan Williams calls, God's 'Almightiness' (Williams, 2007, p.16), and also 'the imperative reality' (ibid, p.21) of his hand on my life. In consequence, the world of the problem was transformed.

Having reached this new perspective, I now want to think further about various aspects of the problem.

New perspectives on the problem

The commission

From the beginning there was confusion about the commission. Although I had been a 'trusted friend of the diocese' for many years, it had been in my capacity as a confidential, helpful provider of support for clergy. I was no threat to the status quo in this role; my dealings had been with the diocesan pastoral advisor so I had little or nothing to do with the institution and its administration. The report I wrote evaluating this work was complimentary, presenting the diocese as forward thinking in its pastoral care of clergy.

When I was warmly invited to undertake the further research project I had proposed, I was flattered and keen to be helpful. However, neither the diocese nor I took account of the fact that the task was actually very different from the previous work I had undertaken and that in the role of researcher I would have different objectives and be using a different set of skills. The expectation of the diocese was, I feel sure, that I would produce another report patting them on the back; neither of us anticipated that the research brief would take on a new direction and eventually result in a far-ranging and hard hitting critique that directly challenged any assumption that things were as they should be.

Having been a sort of honorary insider of the diocese for so long, the degree to which I was, in fact, an outsider and would be working in a new role which carried the authority of 'consultant' was never thought through or made explicit either by the commissioner, or myself.

Also, the liberal churchmanship, feminism and socialist politics that had shaped me and my world-view were additional factors that put me out of step with the conservative evangelical diocese that had commissioned my work. Somehow my radicalism had never surfaced as an issue in my previous more traditional role in

the diocese, so it seemed almost discourteous to flag it up at this point. On reflection, I think this is rather self-revealing and indicates ambivalence in myself because although radical and left-wing, I was at the same time unconsciously invested in the traditional feminine role of not wanting to say difficult things and upset the patriarchy: I wanted to please. I discuss this further below.

Although I thought that I had made it clear to the diocese, that in terms of this project, I was approaching the research task from the perspective of a practical theologian committed to the idea of changing things for the better, maybe I should have spelled out more clearly that the process of change can be very difficult and challenging to the status quo. I had in mind at all times those who would be most affected by my recommendations: the under-resourced clergy working at the coal face and the gap that existed in terms of their personal and professional support. In other words, I had a reforming agenda.

The Contract

Another aspect of the problem was that the practical nuts and bolts of my contract lacked clarity. The Archdeacon to whom I reported was the proxy client and probably did not really have much of a grip on what I was meant to be doing; it was a fluid and informal arrangement. Boundaries were not in place and, by way of long, enjoyable conversations, the Archdeacon and I slid into a situation where the serious implications of the changing focus of my research were never fully taken on board and reported back to the real client, the Bishop. In consequence he was unprepared for the report he received. One of the golden rules of consultancy, I have since learnt, is not to pull a rabbit out of the hat at the last minute; the commissioner does not want to be surprised. When people's expectations are unmet and they feel themselves criticised, they tend to be very angry indeed, and that is my interpretation of the silence that greeted my report.

One problem with the kind of soft authority exercised by the Archdeacon is that it can create a situation where no-one really knows where they stand. A person who exercises soft authority is unwilling to act out of his or her authority because it risks other people's displeasure. This can often end up becoming manipulative, because real interests and real feelings are hidden and silence or indecision substitute for conflict.

There is always a danger of being manipulated if you enter into someone else's world which they know all about, and you do not. Such a situation lends itself to under-the surface power games being played out, especially when people want to be seen as nice.

Clerical men are heavily invested in being seen as sweet-natured and mild - one old charmer I interviewed told me his 'soft, Irish brogue' had served him well in this respect. I wonder if the aggression these men feel is largely unconscious and projected outwards - onto over-controlling, scary female administrators, for example...or women researchers.

Everybody's angry

One of the themes running like a murky underground river through this paper is anger. Everybody is angry - unsupported clergy are angry, women clergy are angry, administrative staff, are angry, the diocesan secretary is angry, senior staff members are angry, the bishop is angry, I am angry. Interestingly, the only person in the dramatis personae who appears not to be angry is the Archdeacon to whom I reported, and it could just be that he was the angriest of all.

None of these angry people express their anger directly: it all happens off stage – reported in personal stories, communicated by hear-say, darkly rumoured, anxiously hinted at, fed back with relish, written about, and transposed into icy silence, passive aggression and unhappiness.

In their paper, 'Strong Feelings in a Polite Church: Re-evaluating anger and Aggression in Ecclesial Polity and Pastoral Praxis', Emma and Martyn Percy discuss what happens when anger, and other strong, raw feelings are left unacknowledged in a church which cultivates good manners and 'embodies passionate coolness'.

Good manners can, they say, 'be a form of quasi-pastoral suppression that does not allow true or strong feelings to emerge in the centre of an ecclesial community, and properly interrogate its 'settled' identity. This may rob the church of the opportunity to truly feel the pain of those who may already perceive themselves on the margins of the church, perhaps even disqualified, or who already feel silenced' (Percy 2004).

The authors challenge the idea 'that the interests of the church are best served by a 'silencing of subjectivity' and argue that 'the rightful appropriation of anger and aggression can enable the work of the church, taking pastoral praxis away from the cerebral and peaceable, and into the arena of feelings and desires'.

Learning to express anger and channel it is, in their view, as important as being able to control it, because 'where the expression of anger is denied its place, resentment festers and breeds, and true love is ultimately distorted'.

This resonates with the conclusion I came to after exploring my anger and sadness about the reception of my report in the light of the Weil essay. From all sides of the problem there was a complete absence of love which was deeply destructive to the possibility of creative anger leading to resolution.

'Anger denied subverts community. Anger expressed directly is a mode of taking the other seriously, of caring. The important point is that where feeling is evaded, where anger is hidden or goes unattended, masking itself, there the power

of love, the power to act, to deepen relation, atrophies and dies' (Harrison and Robb, 1985, p.15 in Percy 2004).

Under Attack

Towards the end of my data gathering, when co-operation began to be withdrawn, and later, when the delivery of my report was met by silence, I felt that as a woman and an 'agent of change' I was receiving the projections of an institution that did not want to change. I found this hard enough, but it was disturbing to also endure a personal attack at second hand, when spiteful, denigrating comments, allegedly made by members of Bishop's staff, were reported back to me by the Archdeacon. Distancing myself I understood this hostility as representing the diocese's almost paranoid defensiveness against receiving criticism of any kind.

I was shaken to experience my own powerful, negative feelings of retaliation towards my alleged attackers and until I started to work on this paper, in the light of Weil's essay, these unresolved feelings remained with me, undermining my well-being. I think my feelings mirrored the residual, hurt, angry feelings that have settled heavily and immovably upon many of the clergy I spoke to, who have felt, in various ways personally attacked by the institution and experienced themselves as being without a voice to protest.

Even more difficult for me to process without being harmed was what felt like the envious attack of the institution. A psychoanalyst colleague summed it up: 'they bought your ideas and spat you out.' It certainly felt as if the diocese had stolen the ideas and recommendations in my report and passed them off as their own. This is consistent with the behaviour of the 'envier' as described in psychoanalytic theory, it was as if the diocese was saying, 'we want to be the ones with the bright ideas: we want what you've got and we'll get rid of you to get it' (Ulanov, 1983).

The way the diocese 'got rid of me' was to silence me by cutting me dead and by suppressing the report - it was enormously powerful stuff. As Rowan Williams says, 'silence is poisonous and evil when someone is being silenced by someone else...it is malignant and destructive, because it is about words falling away into helplessness so that falsity and idolatry take over' (Williams 2003, p.107/8).

The cost

I think this account makes clear that during the research project, and for a period of time following, the relationship between my identity, and the work I had been asked to do by the church, felt a disordered one. I think now that I was in a vulnerable position and the reception of the report highlights this because it was a denial of relationship and as such devalued both the diocese and myself.

Although the diocese called me in as an outside 'Consultant' to undertake a specific task, I did not have the protection of a clearly defined role or job description to fall back on when things got difficult. It would not have been so easy to freeze me out had I initially received the employment rights conveyed by a properly thought out job description and contract. In the event, it is only as a result of writing this reflective piece that I feel my work and my personal identity are back in alignment.

It strikes me that my experience highlights some of the pitfalls for the church, as it engages increasing numbers of laity to perform significant tasks and to become involved in new patterns of ministry. Strong boundaries need to be in place and employment procedures followed: the institutional Church needs to look carefully and imaginatively at new kinds of role definitions for laity that both reflect and protect their invaluable and essential contribution to the life of the twenty first century Church.

Reflecting on gender Issues.

There is little doubt in my mind, that the fury my report allegedly provoked was connected with my being a woman. The Church of England in general and conservative evangelical dioceses in particular, has a problem with women.

'Who does she think she is?' was one interesting comment, amongst many criticisms of my work, reported back to me by the Archdeacon. This suggests anger at the audacity of a woman who dares to challenge the institution with her own strong, critical, authorial voice. I understand there was also mistrust of my 'soft' (feminine?) qualitative research methods and a suspicion and denigration of these, in comparison with 'hard' (masculine?) quantitative methods.

Emma and Martyn Percy draw attention in their paper to Ursula Le Guin's distinction between the 'father tongue' – the language of power, 'spoken from above', and what she calls the 'mother tongue' – 'inaccurate, coarse, limited, trivial, banal' (Le Guin, 1989, p.149). The alleged criticism of both the research, and the style in which the report was written, seems to denigrate my work on the grounds that it is not communicated in 'the father tongue' - 'the clinical language of the lecture theatre or the professions (that) distances the emotions, passions and desires' (Percy 1984). However it does not automatically follow that the report can therefore be dismissed as written in the inferior, 'mother tongue'. The report is written from an implicitly feminist perspective that has a different sort of authority and authorial voice independent of the received authority of the patriarchy and not easily dismissed as 'inaccurate, coarse, limited, trivial or banal'.

I think it may have been my audacity in daring to find this different idiom in which to work that was one of the reasons why the report was experienced as so outrageous and threatening to the status quo (Hahn 1994).

As discussed earlier, the process of information gathering I was using was complicated and the ethnographic approach, in particular, probably did need more explanation as it is still quite controversial in traditional academic circles. Maybe this could have been included as an appendix to the report. However, all my methodology had the approval of experienced academic researchers working at Manchester University where my doctoral work was being supervised.

All in all, the attack on the feminine I experienced was very disconcerting and my own feelings were confusing. I felt indignant and outraged, and also exposed and shamed, as if somehow I had transgressed and that writing my report was an act of disobedience. Irrationally, I felt I had done a bad thing. Juliet Miller in her book, *The Creative Feminine and her Discontents* is helpful here. She points out the huge cost for women who go against the status quo and the 'profound feeling of wrongdoing' it provokes. It is, she suggests, an old trick of the patriarchy to 'treat the feminine as lacking if ideas or emotions are expressed that challenge the orthodoxy' (Miller, 2008, p.4).

The covert, emotional battering and bullying of the feminine I experienced in connection with my research report was exactly mirrored by the institutionalised misogyny directed at women priests that was so painfully voiced in the women's workshop and in individual interviews conducted during the research field-work.

Throughout the project, I came across examples of wounding misogyny in the stories of women clergy: stories told to me in what Le Guin calls 'the mother tongue' spoken from experience in voices previously silenced or unheard (ibid, p.151). But more often I sensed a more subtle, hidden misogyny in the oppressive patriarchal structures and attitudes that too easily pass unnoticed in the institutional church. Juliet Miller draws attention to the way in which the presence of this kind of negative masculine energy has tended, throughout history, to fear and suffocate

female creativity. Miller's ideas provide one way of understanding why it felt so heavy and emotionally upsetting to work on the project for three years in a patriarchal institution that was, I realise now, deeply inhospitable and crushing, towards feminine authority.

My view of the institutional church as misogynist predated the start of the project and came from experiences in my own theological background, my experience of the church and from many years working with clergy and hearing their stories. Clearly, the research findings support this view, but the intensity of feeling I continue to have around this material suggests that there may be more unpicking to be done in order to integrate it and bring to light and correct any bias in my research reporting.

The archetypal strength of feeling provoked in women who are the butt of misogynist projections and the personal cost to them, should not be underestimated. These negative, emotion-laden experiences of women in the present are so painful because they hit against what Edward Farley calls the 'repressed past' of the situation. He writes, 'deep structures of homophobia and sexism are virtually invisible. They are part of the formation of the institution. It is the way in which tradition disguises the origins and the existence of much of its own content, especially as these contents function to oppress, to establish and to maintain power' (Farley 2000, p.120/121).

Farley suggests that 'to grasp the present situation of men and women in the church calls for more than simply describing present policy. For the present is comprised of and structured by these disguised repressions of the past we need new ways to deconstruct' (ibid).

The Archdeacon and me

When I presented an early version of this paper to the British and Irish Association for Practical Theology conference in July 2010, much of the discussion that followed centred on my relationship with the Archdeacon, there was a general feeling that he and I had fallen into some sort of folie a deux. This was a useful, if uncomfortable, idea that I needed to think about.

I remembered that while preparing the paper for the conference, I was suddenly struck by the parallel between how I felt when the Archdeacon tried to tease me out of my distress on hearing from him about the attack on my report, and the way my father used to make me feel as a girl. They both used droll humour to tease me out of strong, difficult feelings about things that mattered to me; I would end up laughing rather than crying. I would feel better, but what had mattered to me very much was somehow trivialised and devalued.

Had I been playing the role of the 'father's daughter' in my relationship with the Archdeacon, I wondered? After all, he is a father himself, as well as a Father in holy orders. Had I, in fact, acted into the sexist scenario I have described above and with just as much unconsciousness as the male chauvinism I have been berating?

I had certainly used lightness and humour to cover over, or make more palatable, my challenging ideas. Perhaps, without realising it, I had employed persuasive feminine charm in my relationship with the Archdeacon and the uncomfortable thought occurred to me that maybe I do this quite a lot: hide the iron fist, which can pull a fair punch, in a velvet glove - this can be disconcerting for others and disempowering for me, because it is really an abdication of my personal authority.

Looking back, I feel rather foolish and naive to have confided in the Archdeacon and relied on him so unquestioningly, simply because he was someone

I could relate to easily. I should have thought more deeply about the ambiguity of his role. Certainly he was the sympathetic and interested overseer of my work and intellectually in tune with its reforming agenda, but as Archdeacon he was, of necessity, something of an organisation man who needed to be loyal to the status quo.

On reflection, I think that he, probably unconsciously, egged me on and his careful attention to the accuracy of my report and helpful suggestions lead me to think now that I was probably saying things he would like to have said: that is, he was saying tough things vicariously through me. Certainly he told me that I had ‘hit so many nails on the head’ and I wonder whether he might have looked forward with some relish to the ‘explosion’ my report would cause.

When the explosion happened, however, I felt left in the firing line, abandoned by my main ally.

Thinking about all this now, I am struck by how subtle spiritual temptation can be: in this case, the Archdeacon and I may each have fallen for the other’s unspoken flattery. Perhaps the Archdeacon enjoyed playing up to my admiration of him as the diocese’s free-thinker. On my side, I was flattered to be warmly welcomed into the diocese as an ‘honorary insider’, full of new ideas, and I was therefore unmindful of the potentially huge personal cost of being an agent of change in a reactionary institution.

CONCLUSION

As a result of my reflection on this situation, I think I am more able to understand why the commissioner and senior figures in the diocese were reportedly so provoked and enraged when they received my research report.

My feminist perspective, reforming agenda, persuasive and charming approach, and the ethnographic component of my information gathering combined to produce a report that was probably a very surprising and discomfoting one to receive.

During the three years of the project the commissioner had given my on-going work little attention, as a trusted friend of the diocese he left me to get on with it, overseen by the Archdeacon. However, as I have shown, the research task widened, the Archdeacon's oversight became blurred and the commissioner was not kept fully informed of the change of direction and emphasis.

There was inherent confusion from the beginning of the project about whether I was an insider or an outsider of the diocese, and there is a sense in which I was both. Maybe my complicated research methodology exploited this unusual insider/outsider perspective; certainly from the point of view of a researcher, it yielded fascinating and penetrating results. But I can see that, because they did not really understand my methodology and, crucially, because they did not see why my research task needed to widen, the diocese may have felt that I took advantage of them and the access to their thinking they had afforded me.

I think now that there are certain ethical issues around the status of some of the material I gathered, that may have been insufficiently thought through at the time. Perhaps there was also a lack of clarity for people about my role as the conductor of the research. For example, in what capacity did people think they were telling me things? As a diocesan insider and part of the team, as a psychoanalyst - well known to people in the diocese as a good listener and trustworthy with confidential information - or was I being told something in the role of traditional, qualitative researcher? Who exactly was I for people? This was never really made explicit because, in a way, I was coming to the research task as someone who was

in all three of these roles at once: indeed, this was the background that had particularly qualified me for the research task in the first place.

There was not a problem with the formal audio taped interviews I conducted, where professional qualitative research conventions were observed. However, the lack of clear role definition may have been more problematic in the informal interviews that took place in an ethnographic context. There may have been confusion in some interviewees about my boundaries and, in consequence, some may have felt they said more to me than they intended. Of course any such anxieties would have been exacerbated by the fact that interviewees have not been allowed to read the final report. The complexity of using several different research methods in the same project probably needed to be more fully worked out at the proposal stage so that the boundaries were clearer, particularly in the ethnographic component of the research.

Change is difficult and complex, particularly in a large institution like the Church of England, and it is probably an inevitable and necessary part of the process of introducing change that people find it painful and resist it. The question I am left with is, could things have been handled differently, or must we accept that it is rarely, if ever, possible to bring about change in a spirit of peaceful co-operation?

The reality seems to be that reform involves struggle, and often bitter struggle. As Jung observes, bringing about change is always an *opus contra naturam* and the personal cost is very considerable. This was how it was in this situation and maybe how it always is.

The diocese felt attacked by my report and I found the emotional cost of being an agent of change very heavy indeed: I think both sides felt harmed by the other. Considered in the light of the Weil essay, the rawness of the situation

becomes starkly obvious: there was an absence of gentleness or loving kindness on either side.

Perhaps this should not come as too much of a shock. One way of understanding the hurt felt in the diocese and in me might be to see it as part of the pain in the body of Christ, to which, as imperfect people, we all contributed.

The disappointment for me is that the diocese's non-reception of my report means there has been no discussion between us about my findings and recommendations. Had we been able to have some dialogue and share our real thoughts and feelings in this real situation, perhaps we could have begun to see the suffering Christ in each other. Instead of being left with a strong sense of broken relationship and unfinished business, understanding and reconciliation might have been possible.

Despite all the difficulties, there has been a good outcome for the diocese and for myself in the end. Most of the report's detailed recommendations about improving clergy support have been implemented and in consequence, the gap between the need clergy have for support and its provision has narrowed. The outcome of my conclusions about the broader, institutional problems of the diocese is less clear: change in this area inevitably happens slowly. However, it is possible that some of the restructuring that has taken place since the report was received may mean that my recommendations have been taken on board.

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RESEARCH PROPOSAL

TRANSFORMATION IN PRACTICE:

Sacramental Ministry as a Vehicle of Personal Change

Introduction

The intention of this research study is to excavate, and enquire into, the current practice of sacramental ministry within the Anglican tradition and to articulate this model of ministry in order to show its value and importance to the mission of the church.

The study draws out of obscurity and gives voice to some real life, hidden and unarticulated examples of personal transformation that have occurred in the context of spiritual/emotional relationships between priests and those to whom they minister. I shall try to clarify the sort of thing that happens in these sacramental encounters, why what happens is so valuable and important and how what happens in practice can and must engage with the tradition if it is to be transformational for people.

I am offering practical theology as a way of doing this because it is 'a prime place where contemporary experience and the resources of the religious tradition meet in a critical dialogue that is mutually and practically transforming' (Pattison and Woodward, 2000, p. xiii).

I want to show that sacramental ministry, in the Anglican tradition, has the capacity to facilitate transformation in the lives of people living in our post-modern, highly secularised society and, indeed, that priests in this tradition are particularly well placed in their pastoral ministry to discern God's action in people's lives and

help them transpose their felt experiences of moments of grace into meaningful theology.

There is, however, a difficulty. Whereas other traditions may be quick to explain, formulate and share what they think is going on in the sort of pastoral encounters I am discussing, Anglican priests in the sacramental tradition are more likely to be reticent. They are less inclined to talk about their felt experiences of God's action in their own lives or in the lives of others. It is as if these priests feel that by talking about the sacred, they would somehow betray it. The literature is consistent with this kind of reticence, as my literature review will show. What actually happens in sacramental ministry is inadequately articulated and left vague and mysterious.

In the past this model of ministry worked because it could implicitly rely on the fact that priests, and people who receive their ministry, shared the same symbolic world and therefore needed only the merest hint, or oblique prompt, to trigger existing resonances that then firmly located them all in the same sacramental world. However, times have changed and this is an assumption that can no longer be taken for granted in a postmodern world. As Timothy Jenkins observes, 'The world appears to be full of forces that are indifferent to faith a great many people, rather than living with any sense of crisis, appear to be able to live without recourse to faith. For these, apathy would be the best description, rather than hostility'(Jenkins, 2006, p. 104).

From the perspective of postmodernism, with its 'playful eclecticism' and multiplicity of forms, ideologies and agendas (Lakeland, 1997, p.7), any sort of implicit sacramental ministry can seem weird or just irrelevant, outdated and part of a world that no longer exists. But the fact that the shared symbolic world that traditionally underpinned sacramental ministry and gave it coherence has been lost does not

mean that, in consequence, this deeply significant model of ministry is now redundant.

The intention of this study is to affirm the value of sacramental ministry and to show what it can and should mean in today's world. People still experience moments of grace in their lives, but they need to find new ways to understand them that make sense, both in terms of the tradition, and also in terms of the postmodern world to which they belong.

Sacramental ministry provides a model that can ground these experiences, but only if it is held up, valued and articulated in new ways that build on an appreciation of its traditional strengths and at the same time, recasts it in a way that engages real people leading real lives today.

I want to ask whether priests in the Anglican tradition are finding ways to offer this kind of ministry to people and I want to help them to articulate what they think they are doing. How are they facilitating transformation through their ministry and finding ways to invite people into new life in Christ?

Using qualitative research techniques, I shall invite six priests who are drawn from the Anglican tradition of sacramental ministry to reflect on what they do with moments of grace when they meet them in their pastoral ministry. I am naming such moments, 'electric moments' because when they occur, they 'shock' or 'surprise' people because they are intuitively recognised as having a numinous quality and personal significance. These moments can herald the beginning of a process of transformation for people, which, given the right conditions, unfolds within a pastoral, relational context that also enables people to be enfolded by the liturgy of the worshipping community.

I shall invite the priests I am interviewing to describe an instance of an electric moment occurring in a pastoral encounter, I shall help them to explore and articulate

what they did with it, what happened and whether, and in what ways, they feel the potential of this electric moment was realised. I am interested to find out if these priests feel that the transformational potential of these moments was awakened through the medium of their theologically articulate, prayerful, priestly presence. Did people's lives change and did they feel consciously connected into the core of Christian experience, identified and named as new life in Christ? Perhaps these electric moments were not as transformational as they could have been and on reflection, priests might feel they could have done things differently.

Although the process of transformation is experienced by both parties, my research study will investigate only the priest's experience.

Priestly Presence

There is a range of understanding about what priestly presence means and this will be explored in the literature review. Some of the literature about priesthood describes the priest as himself a sacrament and, as such, especially sympathetic to identifying and mediating electric moments of grace when they occur in ministry. The priest is seen as 'a token of Christ' in these situations, 'a walking sacrament... wherever he is' (Farrer, 1960, p.110), open and awake to the presence of God and a channel through which God's grace is imparted. The sacramental vocation of the priest is well described by Michael Hollis in a chapter entitled 'Priest: Person of Prayer' in 'Living Priesthood': 'for the priest God must be central to his whole being. God's will is the priest's touchstone; God's love is his driving force and inspiration through the gift of the spirit; his greatest desire is to be so one with God that it is God who lives and loves through him and so does the work' (Hollis, 1977, p. 44).

In his book, 'The Christian Priest Today', Michael Ramsey summarises the sacramental role of the priest in a way that cannot be bettered:

'Today the ordained priest is called to reflect the priesthood of Christ and to serve the priesthood of the people of God, and to be one of the means of grace whereby God enables the Church to be the Church' (Ramsey, 1997,p.111).

My sense is that priests in today's world who inhabit this sort of sacramental role in a traditionally reticent, unarticulated and passive way are unable to provide postmodern people with the kind of mediation for their experiences of God that is meaningful for them. Even without a church background, people know when they have experienced an electric moment and sense its importance, but they have no understanding of its potential meaning for them in sacramental terms, or what to do with it. If no theological insight or hospitality is offered in response to their electric moments and these experiences are left unmet, unidentified and not given shape and meaning, then the risk is that these moments remain at the level of spiritual glow and their impact on someone's life recedes, they fall out of consciousness and their potential for transformation and new life in Christ can be lost.

Background

In order to contextualise this research proposal, I want to mention briefly two strands of my work that have led to my interest in the question this research study seeks to answer.

1. Research at Manchester University

The first of these two strands is the research I have undertaken over the last five years at Manchester University looking at support for clergy in postmodern ministry (Travis, 2008 and 2010).

During my fieldwork for these two projects, an issue that kept coming up informally in conversations and interviews was the personal distress of many older, liberal catholic Anglican clergy. Often these priests, who had exercised long, faithful sacramental ministries, felt that the way they had been trained originally, and the

ministry they were formed to undertake, was now widely devalued and marginalized. They felt that senior clergy/strategy-makers in their dioceses regarded them as 'other worldly', hopelessly out of touch and irrelevant to real people leading real lives. Some clergy told me they had been pressurised, even bullied, to take early retirement and move on. The message was clear: your form of ministry no longer fits.

It seems that the liberal catholic Anglican sensibility, expressed in parochial, sacramental ministry and rooted in the discipline of daily prayer is being squeezed out and this is deeply wounding to the priests concerned and a loss for the rest of us. This seems to be particularly the case in dioceses where the espoused model of ministry is functional rather than sacramental and the emphasis is on leadership and growth rather than on character formation and holiness.

Offering a secularised ministry in response to the spiritual needs of a secularised society is an accommodation with the world that can blunt the sharp edge of the representative role of priests and dilute the life changing gospel message they bring either to kindness and good works in the community, or to the efficient management of a functional community. The priest becomes indistinguishable from the social worker or the middle manager.

In her essay, 'Prayer, Place and the Poor', Sarah Coakley shares these concerns and asks what priestly ministry can and should mean in today's world. She points to the dangers for the church of an increasing erosion of priestly commitment to 'the long-haul life of prayer, of ongoing personal, often painful transformation (and) the quest for holiness.' Without a commitment to the daily offices, she warns, there is 'no public witness to the clergy putting this task first in their hierarchy of 'business'; more insidiously, there is a drifting away from the centrality of the prayer

of the psalms and from the constant – sometimes creatively jolting – input of the week day lections (Coakley, 2008, p.8).

With prophetic seriousness Coakley warns that ‘the creeping loss of disciplined clerical prayer in a busy age is fatal. Its absence,’ she writes, ‘is – quietly, but corrosively – devastating. In contrast, its faithful presence can be nothing short of electric’ (ibid, p.10). Unless ministry is rooted in this way and priests steeped in a life of public and also private, invisible prayer, then the Church’s capacity to make a difference, to minister to people and mediate their deep transformational experiences is seriously weakened.

What is needed is a theology of priesthood that reflects a sacramental Anglican sensibility and affirms that it is alive and well and winning hearts and minds for the kingdom of God: to regard sacramental ministry as anachronistic is to totally misunderstand its radical nature and saving power. Nourished by regular, faithful prayer and a living experience of the liturgy, sacramental ministry is grounded in the immediacy of encounter. The priest pays prayerful attention to hearing and seeing and touching real people and real situations, ‘finding the right words to connect people with the gospel’ and drawing them into what Rowan Williams describes as, ‘Christ’s place ... a kind of space cleared by God through Jesus in which people may become what God made them to be (God’s sons and daughters)’. The church’s first task, he says, is to ‘inhabit this place as a climate or a landscape’ (Williams, 2004 p.2).

At its best, transformational, sacramental ministry comes from this place and shows us by presence and by example how to enter it.

Priestly presence: being there for people and enabling this sort of life changing and life giving encounter, is essentially what the church is all about. But if the transformational experiences I am investigating are to be sustained and people

led on into the fellowship of the liturgical life of the church, then clergy will need a reflective space within which to stand back and think about these things through God's eyes.

My impression, confirmed by the appreciation of clergy who have attended the Balint-Style clergy support groups I have co-run in Bristol Diocese for the last ten years (Travis, 2008), is that today's priests do value a reflective space where they can think deeply about their pastoral experiences. It is not an easy task to convey the gospel in today's world and imaginative ideas about how to bring Christ into pastoral situations and how to rewire and retell people's stories in ways that speak to them of God's action and his love need both time and a creative space in which to form and incubate.

2. Clinical work as a Jungian Analyst

The second strand of my own work that has led to my curiosity about transformational ministry and my strong, intuitive sense of its importance is my professional practice as a Jungian Analyst and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist.

I think there are parallels between what happens in transformational ministry and the transformation that can happen during a successful analysis.

In this research study I am inviting six priests to reflect on the transformational potential of electric moments that occur in their pastoral ministry and part, at least, of my interest lies in the fact that something very similar can happen to patients at electric moments in analysis. The difference lies in how these moments are understood and interpreted and the language used to describe them.

Jung describes the process in alchemical terms: patient and analyst are co-joined in the alchemical vessel of the analysis with its special boundaries of time and space. Intense heat to the relationship is applied in the form of frequent analytic

sessions that facilitate the patient going deeply into the truth of who he is and why. If all goes well and the intensity builds up, something new and often astonishing occurs. At that moment, both analyst and patient are changed. Jung writes, 'the conflict between the opposites can strain our psyche to the breaking point...no solution can be seen. If all goes well, the solution, seemingly of its own accord, appears out of nature. Then and only then is it convincing' (Jung, 1961, p.367).

The analyst midwifes the newborn insight or self-understanding by identifying it and interpreting it within a theoretical framework together with knowledge of the patient's psyche and personal history. Thus the new understanding can be integrated into the patient's psyche and something changes. In successful treatment, many such transformational moments occur and as they accumulate, the personality develops and blossoms, a process Jung calls individuation, 'whereby a person becomes himself, whole, indivisible and distinct from other people or collective psychology' (Samuels et al, 1986, p.76).

The desire of the analyst is for the patient's personality to ripen in the crucible of the analytic relationship and for this to propel him or her into a more wholehearted, rich and fulfilling life in the external world.

The priest will interpret the 'electric moments' I am looking at in this study in terms of a theological rather than a Jungian analytic world-view and will understand the transformation that can occur in the sacramental relationship as spiritual, rather than psychological, using religious language to both describe and mediate it.

A fruitful sacramental encounter, therefore, feels the same but different. It is also about facilitating human flourishing, but this is spoken of in terms of salvation and entry into the kingdom of God. The language may be different, but the dynamics of the two processes feel to me virtually indistinguishable.

I think this was probably Jung's own view. He wrote that this sort of transformation, when it occurs, 'is felt as "grace"' (Jung, 1961, p.367).

One thing seems clear: no matter what we call them - epiphanies, disclosure moments, 'ahaa' moments, electric moments, transformational moments – these are moments of import. They 'shock' us; we feel in sudden and unexpected contact with something new and other than ourselves that seems to come from outside. Whether we experience these moments as God bearing, deepening our relationship with him, or as insight bearing, taking us more deeply into ourselves in a process of individuation, they open up for people the possibility of flourishing and seem to require a response. The kind of response we make changes things.

What am I bringing to this research?

An important reason for choosing to research the way in which sacramental Anglican ministry can be transformational, and to make a case for its preciousness, is my personal gratitude to the priests whose ministry has challenged, nurtured and formed me and who, by their presence, have shown me what it looks like to inhabit 'Christ's place' (Williams, 2004 p.2).

Also, I have worked for many years in the crossover territory between theology and Jungian analysis both clinically and academically. I have offered analysis and psychotherapy to clergy in distress and run support groups for clergy. In these different contexts, I have seen transformation occur and people's lives change and it has been illuminating to be able to talk to clergy and help them think about their experiences, using the language of both theology and psychology. Indeed, I have noticed how fruitful for people's inner lives this sort of cross fertilisation of language and meaning seems to be.

My personal and professional lives have, therefore, led to a high level of curiosity in me about the process of transformation and what kind of mediation or facilitation needs to be in place if it is to happen.

The scope of the research and my research question

This research study will identify a model of sacramental ministry and a practice within it that I want to articulate and explore. I shall do this by demonstrating that, although what I am calling, 'electric moments' may occur in other contexts, what goes on between a priest and another person in a pastoral encounter at such a moment has the potential for something to happen that is unlikely to occur in any other way. This is because the priest can, through his/her sacramental presence, convey the gospel and, in the shared experience of the emotional/spiritual electric moment, find words that speak about God where otherwise there would be no words about God to speak.

I want to explore how this particular model of ministry can be especially attuned to post-modern sensibilities and can, therefore, find not just 'words to speak', but the RIGHT words to speak at that moment to facilitate something new happening.

The research question I am asking is:

In what way can sacramental ministry be a vehicle of personal change?

I shall ask my six interviewees to focus on a specific example from their pastoral ministry and invite them to describe what happened in practice:

Can you describe an 'electric moment' that occurred in your pastoral ministry that felt God-bearing and then reflect on what you did with it and what happened?

Choosing eight priests to interview

I shall look very specifically in this study at sacramental ministry in the Anglican tradition, so I have chosen only to interview priests from this tradition. They represent a purposive sample, chosen for their sameness rather than their difference. I have also, as described below in the section on method, selected for interview only those liberal catholic Anglican priests who resonate with the idea of electric moments occurring in their pastoral ministry.

Selecting a priest for the first of two pilot interviews was opportunistic.

I was in conversation about research techniques with a clergyman colleague on the doctoral programme with me at Manchester University, and mentioned that my preliminary focus was to be on 'electric moments' in pastoral ministry. He knew exactly what I was talking about, he exclaimed, and had experienced just such a moment in his pastoral ministry only the week before! He volunteered on the spot to be my first interviewee. Five other potential interviewees have cascaded from this conversation, first an old theological college friend of my colleague and then other contacts through the Society of Catholic Priests.

What do I mean by Electric moments?

Although the priests I am going to interview may, like my colleague, think they 'know exactly' what I mean by electric moments, there does need to be some sort of articulation of shared understanding about what we are all talking about. I do not want to be too directive here, because over-defining risks thinning the quality of the experiences I am asking priests to think about deeply and carefully and to explore imaginatively. More impressionistic attempts to describe electric moments feel truer to their nature and more respectful of their innate mysteriousness; illustrating them by analogy, for example, rather than by pinning them down.

I have decided, therefore, that before I interview each of the six priests I shall tell them a story that shows the kind of thing I mean by an electric moment. It is a retelling of a story Sarah Coakley tells in her essay, 'Prayer, Place and the Poor' (Coakley 2008).

Steve's Story

One summer, Sarah spends a great deal of her time as an assistant curate in the parish of Littlemore, closely attending to the needs of Steve, a desperate man in his late forties. Steve has serious, immovable depression and a life that is broken in many, different ways. He has no job and although he takes no part in the life of the church community, he hangs around the church building each day pathetically asking for help.

During this particular summer, Sarah decides, with her incumbent's blessing, to give Steve special time, space and attention in the hope that this might shift his unremitting despair. She meets to talk with him three times a week in a room provided by nuns at a nearby convent and things begin to improve for Steve.

One day, during one of their conversations, Sarah asks Steve if he can remember any time in his life when he was genuinely and completely happy. He answers immediately that he can. He once did a parachute jump for charity and in that moment, when he was pushed out of the aeroplane and took flight, leaning into the wind and feeling the parachute bearing him up, he'd known the most glorious ecstasy of his life. It was unforgettable.

Shortly after he had shared this memory with her, Steve decides to come along to the main Sunday mass. He arrives late, crashing through the West door, stopping short at the sight of Sarah. Just at that moment she is singing the Sarsum Corda and she turns from the altar, as if towards him, with her hands raised.

'I saw you there!' he tells her when they next meet, 'you were parachuting....'

The only problem with offering this story to interviewees as a paradigm for an electric moment in pastoral ministry is that it is so powerful! I need to make it clear that I am not implicitly inviting the priest-interviewees to compete with Sarah and trump her story with a brilliant example from their own pastoral ministry. The emphasis is not so much on the content of the example, but on the intensity of the process: how the interviewee dealt with it when it happened. I am saying to them, an electric moment feels something like this, what do you do with such moments when they occur in your own pastoral ministry?

Method

My thinking about methodology for this project is indebted to the ground breaking work of John Swinton and Harriet Mowat who, in their study, make a creative and convincing link between practical theology and qualitative research (2006).

The fieldwork for this qualitative research study falls into two stages.

The first stage involves pilot interviews with two Anglican clergy in the sacramental tradition selected opportunistically, as described above, in order to test out the design of the research and the rationale and intelligibility of the preliminary research question.

I shall ask for telephone feedback from these interviewees shortly after their interviews and follow up with a review of the pilot interviews with my supervisors to discuss whether modifications or adjustments need to be made before embarking on the second stage of interviewing.

In stage two of the fieldwork, another six priests, three men and three women, will be interviewed. In advance of the interview I shall send to each potential interviewee an information sheet about the research project and a consent form; these will be designed once the research proposal has been approved. Potential interviewees will also be sent a copy of the parachute story I shall be

reading to them at the start of the interview. The information sheet will make clear that I want to interview only those priests whose pastoral experience in some way resonates with the intensity of the parachute story.

Interviews will last one hour and be unstructured. I shall start by telling the parachute story and when I have established that the interviewees can identify, and have a general understanding of electric moments, I shall ask each of them to describe one such moment from their pastoral ministry and see where this leads.

Conducting open and unstructured research interviews uses the same skills that I have developed over my years of working as a Jungian analyst. For example, I am practised at closely tuning into the material that people bring me and then facilitating their movement towards deeper insight, using associative and interpretive ways of clarifying, asking the occasional direct question and sometimes gently challenging people.

I am asking my interviewees to describe an electric moment, reflect on what they did with it and what happened then. In the background, I shall have a wheel of subsidiary headings that I am interested in covering during the interview, so that I can prompt people, if necessary. For example, I shall encourage them to carefully examine how they recognised the electric moment they have identified and to consider how far, and in what way, they feel that their own contribution to the pastoral relationship mediated some sort of transformation in the person concerned. How far do they think that the relationship they had with the person concerned acted as a bridge into the worshipping community? How did this happen in practice? Has it proved to be sustainable? What about language - the move from the ordinary discourse of a pastoral relationships into special, religious language communicating gospel truths – was that a stumbling block?

Perhaps the priests feel there is further potential to explore, or if they know the end of the story, the outcome may not have been a good one.

Having shared their reflections, I want to challenge the interviewees to look back and, with hindsight, think about whether there is anything they wish now they had done differently then.

Interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed and this data will be categorised and analysed. Themes that are identified will be crosschecked and then amplified with data from other sources: from the literature, for example, or my prior knowledge or from professional conversations with supervisors, advisers and colleagues.

In this way, the answers that participants give to the electric moment question should generate some major themes that can be discussed and interpreted and will, hopefully, indicate how transformation can happen in practice and the meaning for those concerned when it does, from the viewpoint of the priest.

I can then look at what the process of transformation, as understood by my interviewees in their specific examples from practice, tells us in general about the special value of sacramental ministry. I hope then that this meta-view will enable me to generate an articulated model of sacramental ministry that shows it to be in tune with postmodern sensibilities in a way that can be transformational.

Finally, having done my analysis and articulated a model of sacramental ministry, I shall present my findings to a seminar group of Anglican priests in the sacramental tradition to see if my findings strike home with them in a way that confirms their validity. This session will be audio recorded and the findings included in the conclusion of the research report.

Ethics

From my discussions so far, it seems that this research project is unproblematic in terms of ethical issues and that departmental scrutiny of my proposal should be sufficient.

I intend to give interviewees and members of the validation group an information sheet about the project that sets out exactly what I shall be asking of them and a form to sign giving their consent to the process. The information and consent forms will be designed in line with Manchester University requirements once the research proposal has been accepted.

Each interviewee will receive a copy of the transcript of their interview and at the conclusion of the project, a copy of the final report for their comments. Priests taking part in the validation group will receive a copy of the final report.

I shall reserve the right to let my report stand. That is, I shall not be committed to change anything I have written in the report as a result of interviewee feedback.

Review of the literature

I have included a comprehensive bibliography at the end of this proposal listing the books, articles and papers I have discovered so far that are relevant to the research topic. I am much indebted to Chris Hart's key text on writing a literature review as I plan this part of the work for this study (Hart, 1998).

As the research study is undertaken it will be annotated with references from the bibliography.

The bibliography covers four areas of the literature and at this planning stage I have chosen six texts to be my initial 'conversation partners' as I have

formulated the research proposal. I also list several titles from the bibliography to indicate further reading in each section.

The four areas of the literature, my conversation partners and further reading titles are as follows:

1. Anglican priesthood

The literature on Anglican priesthood, published in the last ten years; particularly looking at liberal catholic Anglicanism and its clash with Calvinism.

I shall be looking at the understanding of formation and process present in these texts and at what the literature says about priestly presence.

I am interested to learn more about the inherent reticence of the liberal catholic tradition that seems to be at the core of its identity and to explore the idea that, in this tradition, intense personal experience can be held both collectively and individually in and by the liturgy.

Conversation Partners

Wells, Samuel, and Sarah Coakley (eds.). 2008. *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*. London: Continuum.

This is a short collection of essays written by a group of young, liberal catholic Anglican priests, who each reflect on what priestly ministry can and should mean in today's culture. The essays are a response to the challenge put to the church by Rowan Williams at his consecration, 'to think about how to recapture the imagination of the nation for the gospel' (Wells, 2008, p.1).

One theme that runs through the essays is the nature of the demanding 'representative' role of the priest and to what extent this role should 'remain

somewhat invisible or untheorised' (ibid, p.4), rather than explicit, both to others and also to the priests themselves.

Williams, Rowan. 2004. *'The Christian Priest Today': lecture on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Ripon College, Cuddesdon*. Accessed 13th November 2010: DOI: www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1185cuddesdon

The title commemorates Michael Ramsey's seminal text, *The Christian Priest Today* and this challenging and profound lecture seeks to discover God's will for ordained ministry in the Church of England in our day. Ministers need the 'skill and willingness and space for at least three things', Rowan Williams says, 'the priest has to be a lookout, an interpreter, and what is best called a weaver' and he goes on to amplify these three characteristics in terms of his wide understanding of what priestly formation involves (Williams, 2004, p.3). Archbishop Rowan urges priests to keep in mind the big picture, to 'have a theology worth talking about, a picture of the universe within God's purpose and of Christ as both the agent and environment of the new creation.' Theology should proclaim the truth of 'the whole world renewed through Christ', he writes and concludes with a summary of the priest's central task: it is 'essentially to proclaim that world renewed – in personal care, in public teaching, in sacramental action' (ibid, p.8).

Further reading

Billings, Alan. 2010. *Making God Possible: the task of ordained ministry present and future*. London: SPCK.

Greenwood, Robin. 2009. *Parish Priests: for the sake of the Kingdom*. London: SPCK.

Jenkins, Timothy. 2006. *An Experiment in Providence*. London: SPCK.

Percy, Martyn. 2006. *Clergy: The Origin of the Species*. London: Continuum.

2. Transformation

The literature on transformation through encounter.

The psychoanalytic literature, particularly the work of Carl Jung and Neville Symington, can shed a helpful, comparative light on the process of personal transformation and on the conditions necessary to facilitate it that psychoanalysis and pastoral ministry have in common. Some first person accounts of different sorts of transformational encounters will provide useful illustrations of the key idea that 'electric moments' have transformational potential.

Conversation Partners

Symington, Neville. 1986. *The Analytic Experience: Letters from the Tavistock*. London: Free Association Books.

Symington's intention in this collection of lectures about the process of psychoanalysis is to convey the atmosphere of the analytic encounter. Psychoanalysis is an experience that happens between two people; truth emerges between them, 'it is a deep experience and can only be very inadequately communicated to another person' this is best done using 'imagery and analogy that spark off an emotional sense in the reader who has some cognate experience' (Symington, 1986, p.9).

Symington richly illustrates his central idea, that 'a meeting between two people can generate an enormous explosion of emotion with lasting effects'. He quotes a memorable section from Bertrand Russell's autobiography where Russell describes his first meeting with Joseph Conrad:

'We talked with continually increasing intimacy. We seemed to sink through layer after layer of what was superficial, till gradually we both reached the central

fire. We looked into each other's eyes, half appalled and half intoxicated to find ourselves in such a region. The emotion was as intense as passionate love, and at the same time all-embracing. I came away bewildered, and hardly able to find my way among ordinary affairs' (*ibid*, p.27-29).

Motion, Andrew. 2010. 'I've Seen the Light and it Flickers on and off'. *The Times*: 18.12. 2010, p.28.

Motion writes that, along with millions of others in Britain, his faith is in the 'ambivalent middle.' He describes this as a place 'where faith flickers off-on like a badly wired lamp'.

The history he gives of his connection with the church shows it to be interwoven with the comfortable conventions of middle England – a village church, a C of E primary school and a secondary school and Oxford college, both with religious foundations and a pattern of daily worship in chapel.

Due to personal circumstances, Motion dropped his faith thirty years ago and fell into a benign agnosticism punctuated by 'spurts of orthodoxy' at times of crisis. And so it continued until recently.

'Then I met a priest,' he writes, ' I read a book by him, went to hear him preach, and soon afterwards became his friend. Up till this point, sermons had generally been the low point of my church going life.... suddenly, I was listening to talks that were clever and funny and moving and that made me think about things I hadn't thought about before...I realised that while he drew me forward into new ways of thinking, he also reconnected me with things in my past...(bringing) a feeling of settledness and connection I had known as a child.

Further Reading

Jung, Carl Gustav. 1983(1963). *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. London: Fontana Paperbacks.

Jung, Carl Gustav. 1958. 'Psychotherapists or the Clergy', in *The Collected Works Vol.11*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Williams, Rowan. 2000. *On Christian Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

3. The literature on Grace

Underlying this study is an implicit belief that in and through the electric moments in pastoral ministry I am exploring, can be discerned the palpable presence of the Holy Spirit. The priest has eyes to see this and to feel it. But how this presence is named in the priest's own heart and mind and whether this is disclosed and named to the other, is another matter. Can the priest find words to convey to another person the gracedness of their own world?

With the exception of Rudolf Otto, I am mainly relying here on the Roman Catholic literature on Grace to provide the theological language with which to think about the god-bearing quality of electric moments. As yet this is a new literature for me to explore.

Conversation Partners

Otto, Rudolf. 1973 (1923). *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Otto coined the phrase, 'the numinous feeling (das numinose Gefühl)' (Otto, 1923, p.10) to describe that aspect of the deity which transcends or eludes comprehension in rational or ethical terms.' He uses the word 'feeling' in this

context, not as an equivalent to emotion, but as a form of awareness that is 'neither that of ordinary perceiving nor of ordinary conceiving.' He tries to identify as precisely as possible, 'by hint, illustration, and analogy the nature of the subjective feelings which characterise this awareness' (ibid, p. XV1).

The holy cannot be taught, 'it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes of the spirit must be awakened...There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it. He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reach the point where the numinous in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness' (ibid, p. 7). The priest merely co-operates with the process.

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Mc Brien, Richard. 1994. *Catholicism*. London: Continuum.

De Loubac, Henri. 2010. *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Schillebeeckx, Edward. 2012 (forthcoming). *Christ: the sacrament of the encounter with God*. London: Continuum.

4. The literature on practical theology

Practical theology is about bringing theology into dialogue with the secular world in ways that enable people to lead flourishing lives. That is, it has both a transformational agenda and a missionary intent. Although respectful of secular ways of knowing and being, practical theology has its own way of knowing and is increasingly confident about its position. This is based on the belief that human flourishing depends on an encounter with Christ.

In terms of the academy, there seems to be a fundamental tension between practice and tradition against which practical theology constantly struggles.

Conversation Partners

Pattison, Stephen. 2007. *The Challenge of Practical Theology: Selected Essays*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Pattison is a practical theologian and a priest who is in touch with what Rowan Williams describes as 'the human hinterland of priesthood' ((Williams, 2004, p.9). His interdisciplinary background and wide ranging experience of the secular world of work means he can bring theology into the conversation and engage with a whole range of people and situations where space is not usually made for talk about God. Whether he does actually talk about God is less clear, and maybe there is some reticence in his approach.

As a generous hearted liberal, he is perhaps overly hesitant to bring to the pluralist table the uncompromising Christian message that to flourish and to be all you have it in you to be means to be in Christ. His self definition is deftly evasive on this point; he describes himself as a 'critical theologian of care; a person who seeks to analyse and create action guiding strategies of religiously informed care which will preserve, develop and enrich human well-being within a horizon of faith' (Pattison, 2008, p.197).

Further Reading

Cameron, Helen, et al. 2010. *Talking About God in Practice*. London: SCM.

Woodward, James and Stephen Pattison, (eds.). 2000. *The Blackwell Reader in Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

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