

Josephine Bax : The Good Wine

Spiritual renewal in the Church of England

CHP 1986

Notes by Alison Morgan March 2005

A clear and helpful survey of renewal up to the mid 80s; it's good for its individual comments and sentences, rather than from any overall analysis. Bax was commissioned by the Board of Mission and Unity, and spent a year researching and travelling. This is the result; what she calls 'an impressionistic picture', focussed on the coming to life of lay people in renewal, and their subsequent participation in the life, work and ministry of the Church.

Introduction

Graham Chadwick: 'Renewal in the Spirit is something of the whole of life, because the Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world. It's to do with personal growth and renewal but it's to do also with relationships, with structures, with politics, with social issues and with everything that is in heaven and earth.'

Openness to renewal comes as the result of personal/corporate crisis, which prompts those involved to search for a spiritual way through their problems. As people come to realise the presence of God there is an awakening to the spiritual dimension. But you can't just add the HS and stir; there has to be a repentance, a change of mind, and the cleansing which follows – otherwise the 'yeast of sin' (1 Cor 5.7) turns it sour.

1. Setting the scene

What is renewal? Charismatics use it to mean charismatic renewal. Some A-Catholics/Evangelicals use it to mean a return to fundamentals. Others see it as the result of ecumenism. Radicals believe it comes through involvement in the issues that face society. Liturgical renewal is about worship.

For this study the terms used is spiritual renewal, and the criterion is relationship.

Ps 51: renewal is a movement from sin to holiness, brokenness to joy and praise and restoration of relationship with God through the HS. And then the building up of a community.

Renewal in the NT:

- Rom 12.2 – metanoia, a change of mind
- 2 Cor 4.16 – our physical body is dying, but our spiritual body is being renewed
- Eph 4.23 – the new mind, heart, self that are created in the likeness of God
- Col 3.10 – old self put off, new self put on

We are renewed not primarily as we turn to God, but as God the Trinity turns to us. Renewed structures should flow from an understanding of the Trinity – relationship. Small groups give people the opportunity to belong; one of the most striking aspects of renewal is 'the coming to life of the laity' – see Report 'The Charismatic Movement in the CofE'. Many are looking for a deeper spiritual life; not anti-rational but rather irrational. At the same time, we must avoid justification not by works or by faith but by experience.

We need a church that smells of beginnings (Cray).

Renewal starts with individuals committing their lives to God, but it happens in the context of community. Renewed churches are marked by the presence of new Christians.

'The old church is dying, and a new one is coming to birth.. The Church has increasingly become a museum rather than God's house, a cemetery full of sepulchres rather than a living body... Faithful Christians pay respect to the past but forget the promise of new life.' 15-16

'The Church is (or should be) a demonstration model of the Kingdom, that is, in a prefiguring form, the new society', 17.

2. The challenge of crisis

Spiritual renewal implies the restoration of something that is in decay. It happens like this:

- Crisis – challenge
- Search for right response, and resources to carry it out
- Breakthrough

Prayer is not a matter of *thinking*.

Stress of living – people come to Jesus with a need for ministry; in the early church they had services called ‘scrutinies’ the week before baptisms, to rescue candidates from the evil influence of the society in which they lived. We still need this process (Gunstone). People have more and more problems; clergy become overwhelmed. Loneliness is the most common problem today. Parishes in renewal share the ministry with others, then train the newcomers to do the same. Are our Christians truly Christianised, or are we just working very hard at it?

Cursillo aims to bring spiritual renewal to hard-working Christians.

ARM find 2 kinds of frustration:

- ✧ Casualties of the traditional church who have complied with the lowest common denominator of commitment which the church seems to require, but have no resources to meet any real crisis
- ✧ Casualties of the charismatic renewal, who fail to reintegrate into the churches from which they came

Gerald Coates, to *Renewal* magazine: ‘it is about time the CofE, among others, asked why institutional Christianity has lost over 200,000 members in the last five years, and the so-called House Church Movement has gained 180,000’, 32. St Augustine: ‘when everything is crumbling, then one is facing reality’.

3. The Search

‘Spirituality is that which succeeds in bringing one to inner transformation... What generally goes under the name of spirituality is merely the record of past methods’ – Anthony de Mello.

Typical question: ‘there must be more to life – but what is it?’ Our counter-culture is full of people who are searching. But in an age of instant coffee, people often expect instant spirituality. Individual spirituality isn’t a private luxury, but the essential life of the Church and the source of its mission’ – Martin Thornton.

People are looking for signposts on the way. Signposts being used are:

1. The Bible

Clergy feel there is a lack of penitence; same in RC church, which feels the sacrament of penance is being badly used – people are not confessing things of real significance, they just seem to want to pour out the weaknesses, doubts, fears, things which are not really sin, and to be reassured of God’s love, power and forgiveness in their weakness.

2. Social justice

How much should we look to the Church to be an alternative community, and how much should it be a community of support to those in secular society?

3. Charismatic experience

Hoyle: the charismatic movement is not about the gifts of the Spirit, but the Lordship of Christ.

Some think the charismatic renewal is over; but rather it is growing, splitting into renewalists (who leave) and restorationists (who stay).

4. The healing ministry

5. A changed prayer life

There has been a shift; the centre of our praying is moving from head to heart, using Jung, C14th English mystics, and Orthodox spirituality, all of which insist that experience of God is no mere intellectual knowledge.

Maddox: the biggest need of the Church today is for a healed leadership.

Moltmann: *earlier, mystics withdrew into the loneliness of the desert in order to fight with demons and to experience Christ’s victory over them. It seems to me that today we need people who are prepared to enter into the inner wilderness of the soul and wander through the abysses of the self in order to fight with demons, and to experience Christ’s victory there, or simply in order to make an inner space for living possible, and to open up a way of escape for other people through spiritual experience. And in our context this means wresting a positive meaning out of the loneliness, the silence, the inner emphasis, the suffering, the poverty, the spiritual dryness and the knowledge that knows nothing.* 59.

4. The awakening

'At the heart of spiritual renewal, after the crisis of emptiness, and the search for the missing element, comes a turning point, an awakening, a fresh encounter; a new sense or perhaps a fresh perception of the reality and presence of God.' 61.

Visser d'Hooft (*The Renewal of the Church*). 'Be renewed... means expose yourself to the life-giving work of God. Pray that he brings the dry bones to life. Expect great things from him. And get ready to do what he commands'. Renewal requires a depth of repentance – all great renewals have been movements of repentance. Repentance is turning from the old to the new. Problem is that many come to the church as a refuge of security; they fear change.

All renewal is of the Holy Spirit. But not all is charismatic. Eg Cursillo, which predates the charismatic renewal but which invokes the HS at all stages. Progress in the spiritual life is not just about whether people believe in God, and propositions about him, and wish to lead a good life; it is about whether they are willing to open up their psyche in trust to him and allow reconciliation and healing to take place at deep level – Christopher Bryant, p72.

All attempts to bring renewal at structural level fail. Structural change has to follow a resurgence of spiritual energy. But then it is needed, because it will just spill around ineffectually. 'All forms of Church are an attempt to provide this structure, to surround the holy with safeguards, checks and balances while preserving the sacred sprints from which the Christian community draws its life', 79.

Cursillo is structured, and works within the structures – it takes place only with the blessing of the bishop, and participation of the clergy. The charismatic movement is more spontaneous; but the only really effective charismatic renewal has been that which is clergy-led.

5. The community

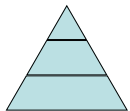
She found ordinands committed to renewal were sceptical about the parishes they were being trained for, and their willingness to change; and yet she found individuals and groups longing and praying for parish renewal. Many lay people feel imprisoned by the Christian community structures we now have, but find it hard to see a way forward.

Those involved in spiritual renewal have diagnosed the fault as a spiritual one. Others look first for structural problems – though they can be better at diagnosis than at cure (like Peanuts cartoons: Lucy as psychiatrist to Charlie Brown as patient: 'I don't give answers, I just tell you what the problem is). People are looking for a community where they can encounter God and each other; but the structures often hinder. And yet the attempt to impose structural reform without inner change leads to mismatch – it forces people to wear something that does not fit. Liturgical renewal carries this danger. But spiritual renewal without structural reform leads to equal discomfort.

Parishes are moving through 3 stages:

1. the vicar is the Church and he does it all – a pyramid
2. the lay people are here to help the vicar run the parish – a circle in the middle of interlocking circles
3. the vicar is here to help the lay people to be the Church

In stage 1 churches renewal tends to mean people leave, unless the structure changes. This stage relies on model of God as Father. Hierarchical; pyramid structure.



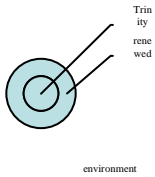
Renewal in a parish attracts people from outside who require time-consuming ministry. The vicar chooses to move to a stage 2 structure. It's always possible, even if people require a lot of training. Small groups emerge, and the vicar has to let go and not be there. Clergy are trained to work through directive teaching, rather than through an enabling, training role. And yet this is what clergy themselves would like;

disappointment of no one in authority ever sitting down with them and saying, what are you trying to do, and how can I help? And we have no theologians willing to do theology from the perspective of the laity, to articulate and interpret their viewpoint with his expertise.

In stage 2 churches the vicar takes on a managerial role. The temptation is to turn newly active laity into tools to keep the parish machinery working; or to match people to jobs rather than jobs to people. It can't be done hierarchically; the pyramid has to turn into a cellular structure, with the vicar as a circle with lots of others interlocked or distributed around him. The model becomes Jesus, with interlocking circles of relationships, some closer (disciples), others more distant (crowds). Sometimes hard to establish – lay people are used to the hierarchical structure at work, and expect it in church.



In stage 3 churches the model becomes the Trinity. The vicar is there to help the laity become the church; an episcopal role. Still a temptation to give them jobs; but they are there to be released into what God is bringing into being in and among them. Vicars of these churches commit themselves long term to the parish, and work through the difficulties. Where the gifts of lay people are released, this leads to a release of energy which overflows into the environment. Model becomes Trinity as a circle at the centre, spinning out to a renewed church, spinning out to the community.



Stage 3 churches follow one of 4 models

- ✧ the Catholic model – a lay apostolate
- ✧ the Evangelical model – the multicellular evangelical charismatic parish
- ✧ the Celtic model – non-parochial communities linked through network
- ✧ the Radical model – parishes/communities open to the wider community through centres of social concern

the greatest need in our society is loneliness; the greatest need is fellowship. 'Spiritual and structural renewal are essential in the process of learning how to be God's people now, in the world and in the Church. Where I saw both being achieved, I saw the Church being renewed for mission.' 121

6. Renewal and mission

Origins of parochial system lie in agricultural, feudal society of early medieval times: rural parishes, units of 200 people and one priest. Psychologists say 200 people is the number with whom we can make a real relationship. We now have an urban society with thousands per priest – most of whom are therefore unreached and unpastored. Solutions:

1. The Catholic model and Cursillo
2. The Evangelical model and the charismatic movement

First wave: Pentecostal movement C20

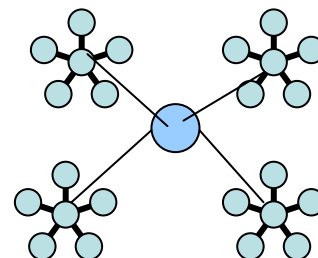
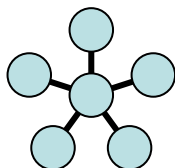
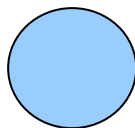
- ✧ Second wave: charismatic movement – renewal + house church movement
- ✧ Third wave due: interpretations vary from prep for 2nd Coming to Wimber's view that it will bring a wider spectrum of the Church into renewal

Charismatic renewal infiltrates a parish like this:

- a. Individuals experience charismatic renewal
- b. Charismatic groups come together for worship, Bible study, ministry – the 'Weds night' phase
- c. The charismatic renewal has an impact on the main structures of the parish – Sunday worship, congregational structure – the 'painful' phase
- d. The whole community is renewed

David Wasdell defines the structures as:

- a. Unicellular – everyone relates to vicar
- b. Multicellular – group leaders relate to vicar
- c. Multicellular – group leaders relate to intermediate group of leaders/staff team : enormous potential for growth



3. The Radical model – case study of an estate church
4. The Celtic model – a group not rooted in a parish, eg industrial mission

7. Living worship

ASB 1980 – a lot of this chapter is about its reception.

NB the attempt to impose a more corporate (friendly) style of worship can alienate people – it expresses a togetherness they may not feel.

‘The danger of modern renewal of all kinds is superficiality. As God comes closer there is more demand for us to be holy, not less.

A new sense of the presence of God in worship leads to expectation: what is he going to do next?

In talking to people all over the country, only one alluded to the eucharist as an ongoing form of spiritual renewal.

‘How much the cutting edge of the Gospel is being presented, and whether or not it is being received, is a perennial problem for the Church’, 176.

Easy to get bogged down in questions of style, and whether people like it or not. Because modern renewal movements present themselves in mod dress, they are often dismissed as trivial. The liturgical renewal aimed at simplicity; but it was too simple, it lacked poetry and was resisted as banal.

8. What next?

‘A pilgrim Church is one which has feet for walking, and is always setting off into the future’, 189 (Archdiocese of Vitoria, Brazil).

Her research showed that in 1984, 10-20% of parishes were in renewal (of which 7% charismatic renewal). Need to embark on a process through which the whole Church starts to take renewal issues more seriously, and puts them at the centre of its agenda. Lambeth 88 will address ‘Renewal of the Church for mission’.

Few churches offer the whole range of what people seem to need in their total spiritual journey.

The biggest change that needs to happen in the CofE is the transition in both attitudes and structures from a Church that caters for Christians to a missionary Church.

‘Spiritual renewal has the effect of moving people who used to be under the Law to an experience of the Gospel.’ 197.

.Many of those who have taken the path of spiritual renewal have found that it makes them radical in matters of style, communication and structure, but conservative in matters of faith and doctrine’, 200.

Diocesan lay training is too academic. People are looking for relationship based on experience, not on tradition – and this is one of the signs of the times we need to recognise. A woman shouted to Martin Luther King, ‘tell us what the Lord has done for you in the last 2 weeks, not what he did 2000 years ago’. Her cry is echoed by our contemporaries.

‘Spiritual renewal.. is about turning to God and seeking for hidden treasure, for the resources that he provides to enable us to respond appropriately to what he is saying and doing today.’ 203. We need to ask ourselves, What is the Church for, and then to look at what we are doing to see whether it facilitates the task or not. What is the task? Maybe the yardstick is the state of the society in which the Church works. How are we doing? Most of those committed to charismatic renewal have not yet realised the depth of the task to which God is calling them.

Carlo Carretto: *would you like a piece of advice? Don't keep saying 'Everything is about to collapse'. Say, since this is nearer the truth, 'Everything has collapsed already!' You will find it much more cheering and rewarding to think of yourself as building for a new tomorrow, than as defending a past already old and moth-eaten.*

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