

SUBVERSIVE ORTHODOXY: IN DIALOGUE WITH KENNETH LEECH

Kenneth Leech has spent 40 years in innovative urban ministry, working mostly in the East End of London. He was most recently M. B. Reckitt Urban Fellow, and Community Theologian at St. Botolph's Church, Aldgate. This unusual position, funded by the Christendom Trust, speaks to his influence as one of the leading contemporary theologians in the Anglican Communion.

Leech was born to a working-class family in Manchester in 1939. A graduate of King's College, London and Trinity College, Oxford, he trained for the priesthood at St Stephen's House, Oxford; and was ordained in 1964. In the course of his ministry, in Hoxton, Soho and Bethnal Green, he became one of the Church's foremost experts on the drug culture and related social problems. He also pioneered its engagement with racism; and served as the Race Relations Officer on the Board for Social Responsibility. Since founding the Jubilee Group in 1974 he has been a leading representative of the Anglo-Catholic socialist tradition, and a prolific historian of the movement. More recently, his espousal of contextual theology has provided a bridge between academic theology and the Church; addressing pressing issues of globalisation and urbanisation within a multi-cultural context.

His published work includes: *A Practical Guide to the Drug Scene*, *Youthquake*, *Soul Friend*, *True Prayer*, *True God*, *Struggle in Babylon*, *Subversive Orthodoxy*, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*, *We Preach Christ Crucified*, *The Social God*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *the Sky is Red*, and *Through Our Long Exile*. In retirement he continues to write, and lectures in the United States and Canada.¹

I was attracted to Leech as my dialogue partner because of several factors: the urban setting which gives focus to his work; his disposition toward Anglo-Catholicism; and his espousal of what he calls a "subversive orthodoxy"; by which he means a combination of traditional faith and radical commitment. Leech coined this phrase to describe the vigorous movement of radical Christian witness that had begun in London's East End in the 1870's, and which is still present. It is subversive because

¹ For the details of Kenneth Leech's "bio" I have relied on an article by Canon Kendall Harmon, [Farewell to the days of birettas and cassocks](http://titusonine.classicalanglican.net/?p=1304), found at <http://titusonine.classicalanglican.net/?p=1304>, supplemented with material about the author gleaned from the short descriptions on the flyleaf, dustjacket or back cover of several of his books; notably those published by Sheldon Press.

Christians who were part of it are non-conformist; at odds and in conflict with prevailing injustice, and passionate in advocacy for the poor and dispossessed. It is Orthodox in that it is their sense of contradiction between the faith they profess and the conditions they encounter which is the driving force of their witness. This tradition is the product of the encounter between the sacramental religion of the Oxford Movement, and the Christian Socialism of the heirs of F.D. Maurice.²

In addition to Maurice, Leech was influenced by Thomas Merton, William Stringfellow, Dorothy Day, Conrad Noel, Michael Ramsey, Trevor Huddleston, Rowan Williams, Beverly Harrison and Cornel West.³ The other 'character' playing a major role in the development of his theology was London's East End itself. Cable Street, where Leech lived and worked in the 1950's and 1960's, was described by Patrick O'Donovan in a 1950 BBC Radio broadcast in this way "The Challenge of Cable Street ... a sense of hopelessness and poverty that has ceased to struggle ... I think these few hundred yards are about the most terrible in London." Brick Lane, where Leech lived from the 1970's through the 1990's, was once in the Jewish ghetto. By the mid 1970's, it was the centre of the largest Bengali community outside Bangladesh.⁴ In the East End, Leech encountered a revival of Neo-Nazism, "Paki-bashing", skinhead gangs, racially motivated killings and the radicalisation of Muslim youth.⁵

Anglo-Catholic Socialism

Leech's theology is rooted in Anglo-Catholic socialism; therefore a brief summary is in order before turning to a dialogue on practical theology.

As noted above, Anglo-Catholic Socialism was the result of the fusion of F.D. Maurice and the Oxford Movement. Rooted in social incarnational, sacramental religion, it was a socialism of an evolutionary and reformist kind; embracing the cooperation as against individualism. As such, it provided the Christian basis for the welfare state. The catholic tradition also nourished a more revolutionary movement. Committed to involvement in revolutionary struggle; it represented the libertarian and prophetic tradition of Anglo-Catholicism. There were then two traditions of Anglo-Catholic socialism: a middle-class, liberal tradition of social reform; and a more

² Kenneth Leech, Subversive Orthodoxy: Traditional Faith and Radical Commitment, (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), 13.

³ Ibid, 9.

⁴ Ibid, 10.

⁵ Ibid, 11-12.

grassroots tradition rooted in concrete struggles, a tradition of "socialism from below."⁶

Leech believes and that there is much within the Anglo-Catholic tradition that could support the liberation movement theologically. He maintains that socialism is compatible with a catholic view of humanity and the social order in a way that capitalism is not. Moreover, he feels that an alliance between prophetic Christianity and progressive Marxism offers the last humane hope for humankind.⁷ He believes that the only hope for a Christian response to the contradictions and dilemmas of contemporary capitalism lies in a renewed Catholicism that is able to engage with the structures of an advanced technological society. Furthermore, it offers the only way out of the present crisis of the church in the West by transcending the conceptual limitations of Reformation theology, especially its individualism. He sees the Anglo-Catholic tradition, combining catholic theology with an openness to modern critical thought and experience, as the most hopeful way ahead.⁸

Anglo-Catholicism does have some serious weaknesses. It has been a very English movement, at times arrogantly nationalist. It has promoted clericalism. Although the majority of Anglo-Catholics are black, and its traditional strongholds are in central and south Africa and the Caribbean, its public face manifests the perspectives and the interests of white men. It has several serious problems: a profound inability to cope with issues of human sexuality - a dread of women, rooted in an ambivalent relationship between Anglo-Catholicism and homosexuality; an organic and rigidly hierarchical view of both church and society that veers toward a kind of fascism; and the creation of a world within a world - the Tractarians unconsciously made religion a life substitute rather than a life revealer.⁹

In spite of all this, the tradition has great richness, theological depth, and vision. It offers a way of being a Christian that takes into account both the need to have doctrinal and spiritual roots in a historic tradition, and the need to develop a dialectical encounter with contemporary society. To Leech, in spite of its manifest failures, limitations, and weaknesses, the theological framework of Anglo-Catholicism offers the best hope for the renewal of social vision.¹⁰

⁶ Kenneth Leech, The Renewal of Social Vision: A Dissident Anglo-Catholic Perspective, in *Sewanee Theological Review*, (Sewanee: Vol.49, Iss.2, 2006 accessed on through ProQuest Databases), 177 to 189.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Pastoral Theology

Leech considers himself to be first and foremost a pastor¹¹. He notes that The Incarnation – the truth of the World made flesh – drives us to seek and serve Christ in the poor, the ragged, the despised and the broken;¹² who in his context, are the marginalised, and the victims of urban deprivation and oppression. Jesus mixed in bad company, made friends with disreputable characters, and exposed himself to every kind of criticism as a result. Leech believes that if we are to recover a genuinely Gospel ministry, we need to be less bothered by our reputations and people's opinions of us, and motivated more by the desire to serve Christ in the victims of society.¹³ Moreover, we must do it with love and compassion, for you cannot minister to people whose culture you ignore, or despise.¹⁴

It is not only social and economic condition that creates a need for pastoral ministry, human dignity – the very nature of what it is to be human - is under attack. The integrity and freedom of the person – the very survival of the human community – is under strain and serious threat. Human integrity is challenged by disintegration from war, famine, global inequality, a growing refugee crisis, AIDS, homelessness and unemployability. More and more it appears that human fate is exile and displacement. Our predicament goes deep, to the very notion of self, which only exists in relationship. Tragically, many of the structures of relationship have eroded, leading to sense of lostness, fragmentation, and exile.¹⁵

What is pastoral care in such a context? The traditional answer is the giving and receiving of strength, support and guidance to and from actual people.¹⁶ The assumption is that the primary concern is to reduce conflict and tension. However, the nature of the pastoral relationship does not allow us to escape from the inner struggle. Rather, it intensifies it. Pastoral ministry must place a high priority on the intimate encounter with human beings in their inner striving for God; but if the encounter takes place, the result may not be tranquility but tumult and the intensification of conflict.¹⁷

¹¹ Kenneth Leech, *The Sky is Red: Discerning the signs of the Times*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1997), 228.

¹² Kenneth Leech, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*, (London: Sheldon Press, 1987), 38.

¹³ *Ibid*, 93.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ Leech, *The Sky is Red*, 10.

¹⁷ Leech, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*, 35.

In making this observation, Leech notes that “The provision of opium for the people is not the purpose of the pastoral ministry.”¹⁸

Priests work at those points in human life where the Church meets the varied circumstances of human life; and try to interpret the relevance of the one to the other, offering a fresh perception of both.¹⁹ A central feature of the radical Anglican Catholic approach to ministry is closeness to people, a strong commitment to the local area, refusal to separate personal from political issues, and rootedness in prayer and sacraments.²⁰

In order to effectively serve the people, the priest needs to think in terms of growth by multiplication – increasing numbers of small groups – and a network model of pastoral care by which we learn to minister to each other, and nourish each other, releasing the pastor to be a resource and guide rather than a managing director.²¹ In fact, He sees a serious danger in the spread and general acceptance of managerial and professional models of ministry. It reduces pasturing to a secular model.²² Pastoral ministry, he observes, takes place in all kinds of odd places at all kinds of odd hours; noting that if he followed the advice on appropriate boundaries much of his pastoral ministry would not have occurred.²³ He is concerned at the way churches have closed their doors, and clergy have become remote and inaccessible. “When pastoral theology is determined, not by the Gospel, but by the church insurance company”, he said, “we are in deep trouble. The Church dies, as the Catholic anarchist Dorothy Day said, when security takes the place of the life and death of ordinary people.”²⁴

Finally, while he hopes that all ministry is diaconal in character, he notes there is much more to Christian pastoral care and the identity of the church than the servant role. He believes it is important that the servant church not replace the prophetic church – the Church as social critic and advocate.²⁵

I share Leech’s concern for the increasing professionalization of ministry. Clergy seem to spend more and more time on committee work, and in meetings – many outside of the parish. Increasingly, they are difficult to contact; not least because church offices, and church buildings are kept locked much of the time – even if the

¹⁸ Leech, Spirituality and Pastoral Care, 134.

¹⁹ Leech, The Sky is Red, 245.

²⁰ Ibid, 247.

²¹ Leech, Spirituality and Pastoral Care, 80.

²² Leech, The Sky is Red, 230.

²³ Ibid, 233.

²⁴ Ibid, 234.

²⁵ Ibid, 240.

staff are inside – due to security concerns. The days when one could “drop-in” to see the parish priest are pretty much over. Everything is by appointment. At the same time, there has been, at least in my parish experience, an increasing degree of clericalism, whereby lay ministry, if not discouraged, is not enabled. Two Lay Readers with long service has recently “retired” because they are no longer permitted to function at the principal service. This particular parish has raised up an abundance of theology students, none of whom are permitted to do more than be more than acolytes, until they have been a postulant for a diocese for some time.

To someone looking in from the outside, there appears to be little involvement by the clergy with anyone from outside the parish family – little in the way of evangelism, although I know there must be.

To me, a principal task of the clergy is to enable the laity to ministry. This presupposes a pastor that is prepared to be a mentor, rather than a CEO. I acknowledge that it would be difficult for the parish incumbent to be intimately involved in encouraging ministry with every member of the parish. For that reason, I support the concept of cell church- house churches of up to a dozen people – where the actual “ministry” of the church, as opposed to the celebration of the Sunday services – could take place. Bible study, felt needs support groups, community outreach, prayer ministry, projects for the broader church community, such as a Sunday School class, or a ministry of hospitality could all be run at the cell group level. They could even be responsible for evangelism, and may do a better job of it because of their more intimate setting. The parish incumbent, in such a model, would mentor the cell group leaders; and provide the clerical functions – principally the sacraments - beyond the capability of the small group to handle themselves.

A cell-based church would be more directly connected to its community and more responsive to the needs of its members. By involving them as participants in the process, rather than simply attendees, the cell-based church has a greater opportunity to actually effect change in their lives – to facilitate the process of metanoia. Moreover, to the extent that the parish clergy are freed from day-to-day pastoral responsibility for the entire church body, they will be able to fulfill the prophetic role of social critic and social justice advocate that Leech, rightly in my view, includes in the category of pastoral ministry.

Should the church desire to grow, it would be possible to adapt the Sunday services for community outreach; being principally services of praise and worship

which all could attend and participate in. The parish communion, to sustain the members of the family, could be celebrated using reserved sacrament in the context of the individual cell groups.

I believe such an approach is the way of the future for churches that want to remain relevant and continue to grow.

Social Theology

In *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*, Leech remarked:

*In every generation, there are certain vital issues which present the Christian community with a fundamental challenge to its spiritual integrity. If it fails to respond, many thousands of people turn their backs upon it and seek God elsewhere. Such issues today include nuclear disarmament, the quest for racial justice, the response to the poor both nationally and internationally, the issues raised by feminism, and the challenge of Marxism.*²⁶

As Church, our tendency is to avoid such issues as divisive. However, such a course is not only profoundly mistaken; but untrue both to the Scriptures and the message of the gospel. “Jesus”, Leech notes, “promises not peace but a sword, not unity but division.” If we believe the holy spirit is leading the church into all truth, it should be possible for Christians of differing opinions to grapple with contentious issues lovingly, prayerfully, and seek a common mind. If the Christian community cannot do this, Leech asks, then what hope is there for humanity?²⁷ Silence is not an option, “For a silent church is not a neutral church, but one that takes the side of the power structure of the day.”²⁸ Although we are not a Christian society today, but a plural one, we can and must speak Christian testimony to and within social structures.²⁹

Christian social hope and vision is rooted in the Jewish tradition; with emphasis on justice, hospitality, reverence for the land and belief in the presence and action of God in history. Christian social ethics, grown from Jewish soil, emphasizes centrality of love, non-violence, the presence of God’s Kingdom in our midst, and commitment to those who respectable society rejects.³⁰ Sanctity (holiness), Leech observes, is more central to the New Testament than morality. Christians are called not to be moral, but to be saints. Without holiness there can be no authentic Christian witness.³¹

²⁶ Leech, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*, 39.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 41.

²⁹ Leech, *The Sky is Red*, 138.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 141.

Leech notes that liberal churches operate with minimal ethics; and low expectations, combined with high tolerance and compassion. The voice of holiness, however, issues a different call – to heroic discipleship, and a hunger for God. Separation from the world, in the sense of sinful and unjust demands and structures of the fallen world order, remains a requirement for us if we are to be transformed rather than conformed.³² While it is important to defend the positive contributions of political liberalism – civil rights, personal liberty, the dignity of individuals – there are serious weaknesses. Liberals, and Christian social thinkers with liberal assumptions, have little taste for conflict, and want to effect social change without any major disruption, a possibility this more mirage than reality. Equally serious is the liberal understanding of the self – a self not socially grounded – and neglect of the social context of selfhood. Atomistic and shallow individualism, Leech remarks, is deeply ingrained in liberal attitudes.³³

One of real problems in theological liberalism is that tends to engage with issues from ten miles above battle; operating at the level of working parties, task forces and commissions.³⁴ But it is not involved in the turbulence, pain and perplexity at the base – with the actual process of change.³⁵ The left, on the other hand is unable to respond authentically to the key issues of everyday life – racism, sexism, the environment, sexual orientation, personal despair and religion.³⁶ Coming generations, he notes, will only respect Christians if we can be shown to have thought deeply and reflected carefully about issues, and if our rhetoric is free from cliché, platitudes and simplistic phrases.³⁷

The Anglo-Catholic socialist tradition recognizes that visions and dreams must be constantly tested against the experiences of real people; and concrete struggles-against the realities of homelessness, racial oppression, and the collapse of communities. Anglo-Catholic social vision has always been worked out in the back streets, and in and through involvement with very concrete struggles.³⁸

³² Leech, The Sky is Red, 141-142.

³³ Ibid, 148.

³⁴ Leech, Subversive Orthodoxy, 27.

³⁵ Ibid, 28.

³⁶ Leech, The Sky is Red, 155.

³⁷ Ibid, 161.

³⁸ Leech, The Renewal of Social Vision, op.cit.

For Leech, the heart of social ethics is the parish. Through its prophetic, critical and conflictual roles, it is a social force for righteousness in the community.³⁹ However, the question must be asked, “Is the parish ... a structure which exists only for its own membership, or does it witness to truths and values which must be proclaimed within, and over and against, the surrounding culture? Does the Church serve the Kingdom ...and does the church address the public arena?”⁴⁰ The most powerful weapon in Catholicism’s armoury in the struggle against injustice is the doctrine of the Body of Christ; an insistence on a visible fellowship of believers, and that Christian love must be acted out in visible terms.⁴¹

At the end of the day, the Christian struggle against all forms of injustice cannot take place in the board rooms of the managerial radicals, but only at the base where the pain is.⁴² Leech’s great fear is that the Christian community at the base – the primary cellular fabric of Christian consciousness and action – is being starved of resources at the point where it is most beset by racism, poverty, violence, despair. The Church itself, top heavy with consultants, managers and bureaucrats is, not making the resources available where it counts. Energy and vision for resistance can only come from strengthened Christian communities at the level of the back streets.⁴³

To me, the key to social justice ministry is direct intimate involvement with the community in which the parish church is located. The parish I attend is a gathered community. Less than five members of the congregation live within the parish borders. The music and liturgy and ritual is sublime and enthralling; but it feeds only the members of the congregation, and some cognoscenti who come for particularly special services, like Solemn Evensong, or Candlemass, or the Paschal Triduum, all of which are glorious. But if we apply Leech’s test – “Is the parish ... a structure which exists only for its own membership...” I would have to say yes.

As a result of its “family-oriented” focus, and given that almost nobody lives within the parish proper there is little involvement with the social issues in the surrounding community, and there are many. Individual members of the congregation have been involved in various social justice issues in the community; and more are involved in the communities in which they live. But really very little is done, by the Church, to engage the community around its building.

³⁹ Leech, Subversive Orthodoxy, 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 16.

⁴¹ Leech, Subversive Orthodoxy, 26.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 27.

As a result of the lack of direct involvement with “back street” issues, the church has the vague liberal-oriented view of social issues that Leech alludes to. Its all out there, and very theoretical.

To me, this church is failing in its responsibility to be the Body of Christ – Christ’s hands, eyes, ears, feet, mouth – to do Christ’s work in the world, and to proclaim the Good News. This church does not serve the kingdom, or address the public arena.

I subscribe to the Anglo-Catholic socialism that Leech advocates. This, to me, is an area where the clergy have the responsibility to lead. The prophetic role of the priest includes the responsibility to be the conscience of the community, and confront the evil of the day with courage. The “kingly” role of the priest includes setting a vision – in the case of social justice, a vision of what should be according to the Christian viewpoint – and taking the lead in spiritual conflicts, like differentiating between good and evil. The congregation look to the clergy for such leadership; and if the congregation are not looking, it is the responsibility of the priest to get their attention, and bring them to an understanding of what the Christian faith requires them to do, to live the gospel message in a particular situation.

The priest is required to be not only the conscience of the community, but the conscience of the congregation in their responsibility to the community.

By prophetic ministry, and enabling others to pastoral and liturgical ministry, the priest will be enabled to lead the social justice ministry of the church. As a model, he or she could not do better than imitating Christ in his engagement with everyone in the neighbourhood, regardless of his or her rank or station. If that much is done, the Lord will order the rest.

Cultural Theology

“...the Christian gospel is social at its very heart.” Leech says, “It is embodied in a community, and it is the life of this community which is the central concern of the New Testament.”⁴⁴ Theology is about the pilgrimage of a community.⁴⁵

However, there is also a second paradigm at work – the paradigm of exile. Leech notes that it is possible to see the history of the Jews as a response to the Babylonian exile.⁴⁶ Within the Christian tradition there is also the sense of being exiles of the

⁴⁴ Leech, *The Sky is Red*, 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 44.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Leech. *Through Our Long Exile: Contextual Theology and the Urban Experience*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2001), 8.

dispersion (1 Pet 1:1), and of being strangers and aliens no longer (Eph 2:19) because our real home is elsewhere.⁴⁷ Our world economy today produces exiles – refugees, displaced persons, homeless, people who belong nowhere – on a vast scale. This paradigm is so true of East London that Leech commented:

*The experience of East London has made me see that we need to develop more transitional, dynamic, moving models of the church, in which ideas such as pilgrim people, sojourners, or in Alan Ecclestone's words 'a people of tents rather than temples' are of central importance*⁴⁸.

In keeping with the analogy of pilgrimage, Leech commented, "It has been said that any true theology is a 'theology of travellers'."⁴⁹

Leech comments that theology had been regarded as a universal pattern of thought unrelated to class, gender, race, or social and cultural position. That model is now recognized as failing to recognize its contextual character, limitations and privileged status.⁵⁰ He proposes a different model – a disciplined, prayerful, listening Christian community that tries to understand and respond to immediate problems in its own context. Such a theology has the advantages of being rooted in the worship and corporate life of actual community; begins with concrete and specific issues, and moves outwards; and overcomes the syndrome of facile optimism – seeking to deal with problems over too wide an area, at a level general principles and moral rhetoric.⁵¹ In applying it, he notes, we need to reject false polarities of worship and work, liturgy and life, sacraments and social action, piety and politics. Moreover, the struggle for justice cannot take place purely at level of the mind, the conquest of ignorance; or at the level of streets, the conquest of territorial space. More importantly, it must take place at the level of creation of communities of dissent, communities of justice, and communities of the creatively maladjusted.⁵²

Leech's own experience leads him to the following conclusion for contextual theological work: It is done best in groups of people working together, supporting, criticising, and challenging each other in a framework of common discipleship and struggle. It is vital to understand the immediate local as well as the wider context in which one is working. We need to reflect on the content of our experience – feelings and hopes as well as thoughts. We need to let scripture and tradition challenge the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 127.

⁵¹ Leech, Subversive Orthodoxy, 28.

⁵² Leech, Subversive Orthodoxy, 29.

present. We need to scrutinize the tradition in light of past and current experience. And, we need to recognize that all is in movement – nothing is fixed and final.⁵³

In determining the kind of spirituality needed for the 21st century, Leech asks whether its main purpose is to provide comfort, reassurance and inspiration; or to challenge, confront and transform our lives.⁵⁴ His answer, is of course, the latter. Indeed, he quotes Sharon Welch, who said: “The truth of the Christian life is at stake ...in life and death struggles...It is in this arena of the determination of the character of daily life that the truth of the Christian faith...must be determined.”⁵⁵ For her, and Leech, the focus of a liberating theology must be on the creation of redeemed communities: baptismal communities, stressing continuing conflict with structures of oppression and injustice, and continuing call to a conversion, metanoia, and the continuing availability of God’s grace; eucharistic communities, emphasizing the commonness of spirituality, rooted in physical crudity of incarnation, resurrection and eucharist, and mystery and wonder of God’s kingdom; communities of Biblical people, remembering the justice and mercy of the Hebrew prophets and Christ’s saving history in his death and resurrection; Inclusive communities, who ensure nobody is left out; and Communities of expectation, of vision, and that keep alive the flames of renewal.⁵⁶

Leech outlines the elements of doing theology at the local level as: the need to see each local Christian community as the locus for theological activity – the community is a theologian; the need not only be intellectual – poetry, art, music etc can be forms of theological expression; theological work must involve cross section of people – class, age etcetera; theological work is ongoing without an end point; understanding theology is messy, confronted by issues and crises to which it does not have simple answers; prayer is central – without a prayerful, contemplative base the whole activity fails; theology involves belief since it is concerned with truth.⁵⁷

Given the multicultural nature of our society, Leech says, “Christian testimony within a context of plurality of faiths should be marked by reality, not fantasy; by humility, not aggressiveness and arrogance; fidelity, not embarrassment; and openness, not inflexibility.”⁵⁸

⁵³ Leech, *Through Our Long Exile*, 129.

⁵⁴ Leech, *Subversive Orthodoxy*, 41.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 41-43.

⁵⁷ Leech, *Through Our Long Exile*, 135.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 155.

I very much agree with Leech's emphasis on contextualization as the key to building relevant communities within the church. Without contextualization – the particularization of ministry to the community and the congregation, there is little compelling reason to get involved. Without an involved congregation – there is little means of involvement with the surrounding community or building the kingdom of God.

Our gathered community at St. Thomas's is a community of exiles as Leech describes. Most of us are like ships passing in the night, not even aware of each other's existence unless we happen to go to coffee hour, and then the interchange is fleeting. There is little that would bring us together, into social interaction with each other, if all we did was attend Sunday Service. The vast majority of us live somewhere else, and if we pursue a spiritual discipline between services we do so, on the whole, privately. Unless we are a part of one or another of the guilds that support the worship, we are unlikely to even greet one another on Sunday. There are some who are involved in education events and social occasions, but typically it is the same committed group of guild and advisory board members that attend such functions. Most of the parishioners go directly home from church, and do not even make an appearance at the agape of coffee hour.

Conclusion:

On reflection, all three of these areas of practical theology – pastoral, social, and cultural – are interrelated. None stands on its own without the support of the others. In that respect we need to heed Leech's admonition that it is impossible to compartmentalize our lives. God is everywhere, and our faith must perforce pervade everything we do if we are to be authentically Christian. Compartmentalization into spiritual and world, God and Mammon, is the way of Gnosticism.

Leech's theology is very much a lived and experiential theology. As he has stated it is essential that it be tested, in context and in struggle, with actual involvement with actual people. If it is purely theoretical it will not meet the people where they are; and will fail to meet the test of building the Kingdom of God. In addition to the paradigm of the kingdom, Leech's theology is driven by the paradigms of Incarnation and Exile. The former directs him to the marginalized, the victims of society whom Christ himself focused his ministry on. The latter informs his emphasis on building community, to create someplace where we can all feel at home, that we belong. Without that feeling of belonging, of ownership, we are likely to do little more

than attend Sunday worship as part of our private spirituality. The theme of exile is comprehensive enough in our busy modern, dislocated world to bring us to an understanding that we are all exiles, and in that we have commonality and the basis for building fellowship. We all need the community Leech describes.

As to Christ and Culture, it would appear that Leech is firmly ensconced in the conversionist, Christ Transforming Culture, paradigm. I say this because of his emphasis on metanoia, and his stated religious orthodoxy. The natural place for an Anglo-Catholic would appear to be a synthesist, Christ Above Culture. However, Leech acknowledges the sterility of Anglo-Catholicism without the socialist modifications wrought by the heirs of F.D. Maurice. Previously I would have called myself a Synthesist, but after reading Leech I believe I need to reconsider my position; since I too ascribe to most of the positions he holds, and honour Temple and F.D. Maurice.

J. Brian Bartley

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