

COR Newsletter – 19 November 2008

Dear all,

I couldn't write the newsletter last week because I was in the UK so there is a lot to catch up with from two Sundays ago.....

Remembrance!!

In Bucharest: I wasn't here of course, but I believe that a good few people braved the cold to drive on to Tancabesti for the usual and very moving service there, after our own Morning Prayer service.

In Sofia a well attended church service led to a large multi national service at the Commonwealth war grave which I led. 12 separate nations were represented and laid wreathes - a child - Georgina - read the Lord's Prayer. After our own devotions we then walked to the German cemetery where the German Lutheran pastor took over, and we all laid wreaths there and then we finished at the French cemetery (They are all interconnected). The Bugler was provided by the Bulgarian military. I personally want to thank the British ambassador and his wife - Steve and Fiona - for looking after me and John Storrie and John Mulroy from the Defence department for their organisation and convivial company.

In Skopje: I want to make special mention of a very moving and special ceremony that our dear friend **Dr. John Barker** presided over in the Macedonian country side. While out hiking in the hills, some ramblers came across an old memorial to commonwealth war dead that had long been forgotten. No-one knew about it and it was overgrown and unkempt. To cut a long story short, the ground was cleared the monument dusted down and John was asked to preside at a re-dedication service at the memorial.

At the re-dedication ceremony, 60 people (including more than one ambassador) climbed 300 metres which took about an hour to attend a very moving ceremony led by John. It sounds to me like it would have been a memorable experience, aching limbs and all.

Last Sunday in Bucharest

A robust congregation of about 50 souls which included a whopping 14 children attended worship. I and the Sunday school teachers - Frans and Dagmar - don't coordinate what we are going to say, but they dovetailed nicely today with the children learning that we need to be lights in this world, individually and corporately, to successfully convey God's love to his world. Now that we have quite a few children - Look out for a nativity play in December!

Just over the road.....

Maria, the cook from the British residence has opened a restaurant - "Chez Maria", literally 20 yards from the church. Our old friend Andrew Littauer took me and Alex there after church to check it out - it has been beautifully renovated and the food really is lovely - and is in the middling price range. Maria says she will provide mulled wine and minced pies after a carol service as a gift to the church - if I let her know when.

Next Sunday in Bucharest

Is Christ the King - the last Sunday before the Advent season. Holy Communion at 10am as usual with Sunday school.

My past comes back to haunt me

On the Saturday night before Remembrance Sunday I attended a dinner party given by the Defence attaché - just as we did last year. They are a great crowd and we get on well. After a long and hair-raising taxi ride by a driver who seemed to be unaware which country he was in, let alone which city, we arrived at the party and a discreet phone call was made to our host by my travelling companion Denise (from the consular division). I thought nothing of it, but I didn't realise that this was a cue. As I walked in to this smart and convivial occasion "Anarchy in the UK" by the Sex Pistols was fired up on the CD. Me and the DA have similar backgrounds and musical histories. At the end of the evening I left to the strains of "Pretty vacant" again by the Sex Pistols. The defence department in Sofia is closing this year and John Mulroy is retiring. God speed to a great bunch of people.

Council meeting

A council meeting, postponed from last week will happen tonight in church at 7pm. The most important business of the evening, as far as I am concerned is to fix the dates for the Christmas services, which this year we will add a **nativity play** by the children.

Thought for the day

A part of me thinks that I should leave the thought for the day just as "Isn't air travel tedious" and leave it at that. I'm sure that would resonate with a lot of people. But my travels to Bulgaria and the UK last week did open up an interesting avenue for me. While in the UK I was given a book to read written by a man called Brian McClaren called "Generous Orthodoxy". As I was reading it, I was unaware that he had actually spoken at the Lambeth conference, so his ideas are not considered completely off the wall. It is a fascinating book, one of several he has written around the themes of an "emerging" Christianity. The movement, if it can be called a movement - it is probably too diverse to be called that - is referred to as the "emerging church" - so if you hear that phrase at any time you will have some idea where it is coming from. How can I describe it?

Well, the clue is in the title. It describes a flow of Christian people out from all the old definitions and denominations, who are emerging into the sunlight searching for a new, more generous, more humble way to be Christians. Concepts like post-liberal, post evangelical abound. It describes a Christianity that sees the good things evident of each tradition and wants to incorporate them into some kind of coherent whole. (I have seen the "fresh expressions" movement within the Cof E described as being allied to it)

While reading it I recognised myself and my experience of liberal, charismatic, evangelical and catholic Christianity. I too, have layers of all these traditions that don't disappear when you immerse yourself in another tradition - you want to discern and sift out what was found wanting from each and take with you what was vital from each tradition. I truly believe that it is not an either/or situation. You really can "emerge" to be a liberal, evangelical, charismatic and catholic Christian all at the same time. One of the more mischievous but profound questions he poses is: If the historical Jesus were around today - would he be a Christian?

The Orthodoxy that Brian McClaren talks about is not Eastern orthodoxy, but he means "right thinking" and he is fully aware of how elastic that can be. He is aware that what he says is also contingent and could be wrong (a rare humility in Christianity) but he is trying to put into words something that a lot of us are feeling.

He aims to steer away from the premise that because I hold certain things to be true, someone else must be wrong. The other essential watchword here is "generosity". This generosity extends beyond the bounds of different Christian traditions to people of other religions and none. A generosity markedly missing from the Christian history of the last 2000 years. A recognition that all our views are contingent and can be subject to modification.

I took to this book enormously because it describes the journey I was already a part of - I didn't realise I was a part of any movement - there is no official movement of course - more an awakening happening across all the old divides all over the world - people tired of wearing the same stifling and unfulfilling straightjacket year after year. Does this describe the COR in Bucharest and Sofia? We count many different denominations within our number - most of which are officially antagonistic towards each other. On Sunday we had Orthodox, catholic, Anglican and Protestant, and Unitarian Christians standing together, transcending the structures of which we are nominally a part. If this is not a shining example of "generosity" of different approaches towards the person of Jesus coming together to break bread in love and peace I don't know what is!! The "orthodoxy" is provided by the Anglican Church liturgy. Did you know you were a part of a cutting edge movement in Christianity?

The following, and I think pertinent **prayer for today** is taken from the "Anglican province of the Indian Ocean" no less.

*For a clearer vision of the work you have set before us and for a better understanding of your gospel,
Lord direct us.*

For a deeper commitment in your service and a greater love for all your children.

Lord direct us.

For a fresh understanding of the task before us and for a sense of urgency in our proclamation,

Lord direct us.

For a greater respect and acceptance among Christians of different traditions and for a common goal in evangelism,

Lord direct us.

Love and peace

Martin