

PART 12: REPOSITIONING MY VOCATIONAL LIFE BEYOND THE NOTES

IN THIS PART I turn my attention from the past to the future to consider what might be involved in repositioning to my vocational life beyond the Notes. I do so under the following headings:

- I Generic principles and underlying assumptions
- II My continuing vocational life
 - The nature of my future life and work
 - The pattern of my work
 - Subtle relational aspects of my work
- III Work to which I am committed
- IV The Notes
 - Their nature
 - Their uses
- V Next steps?
- Epilogue

I GENERIC PRINCIPLES AND UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Whilst preparing to write this section, it occurred to me that over the years I had become committed to several principles: over many years I discovered first one and then later another of these principles. Gradually, over the years they became a cluster of interrelated principles and assumptions at the heart of my theology, philosophy and praxis. Progressively, as they evolved, they guided the development of my vocational life and work. Surprisingly, up to this point I do not think I have overviewed them. It occurred to me that this was a strategic point at which to do so. As they define principles and assumptions at the heart of my vocational being and how I now go about my vocational life and work they are key factors in repositioning myself and in my subsequent vocational life and work and the direction it takes. So, I teased them out and summarised them in the following ways.

Fundamentally, principles and assumptions relate to the way in which I perceive my own discipline and those of others. At the heart of my approach to ministry is a deep desire: to develop and improve my understanding of the theology and praxis my own discipline and my ability to practice it; to learn as much from other disciplines as possible whilst remaining true to my own; to collaborate with people from other disciplines to pursue and further the common good.

The Principles which have guided my approaches to my ministry at various periods are as follows.

Principle 1: commitment to:

- my own discipline and its development through reflective praxis;
- exercising my vocation as a presbyter in the Methodist Church.

Principle 2: pursuing my ministry contextually through the Methodist Church.

Principle 3: studying and foraging other faiths and disciplines for insights and understandings which will inform the philosophy and theology my own discipline and enhance its praxis.

Principle 4: theologically appraising what I discover from studying other disciplines and faiths, testing it for viability and, when proven to be of value to the praxis of ministry, incorporating and integrating it into my own discipline and its praxis through processes of enculturation.

Principle 5: as necessary and possible, establishing egalitarian relationships with those of other faiths and disciplines and none who are committed to human well-being and the common good and working with them collaboratively.

These five principles form a unity: *principle 1* of itself can lead to parochial denominational ministry; principles 2–5 combined with principle 1 leads to an inter discipline and interfaith ministry firmly based in my own Ministry and the Methodist Church.

The assumptions underlying these principles are as follows.

Assumption 1: *the church has unique contributions to make to human and spiritual well-being, divination and salvation.*

Assumption 2: *the church does not and cannot acquire all the expertise, knowledge, insights, skills and resources to achieve all of its purposes related to human and spiritual well-being, divination and salvation.*

Assumption 3: *much practical and professional effort and good husbandry are necessary to equip churches and its practitioners as adequately as possible for their missiological tasks, and, given the nature of things it is not possible for them to be fully equipped and resourced.*

It is necessary to accept this with humility and realism and to avoid being overwhelmed and paralysed by the task and the shortage of resources

into pessimistic resignation. Faith in the belief and conviction that God can and will achieve his purposes and that he will use his church and people as fully as possible enables us to do so.

Assumption 4: *to remain relevant and effective ministerial praxis, philosophy and theology must be continually developed.*

Assumption 5: *inevitably, pre-service courses, syllabuses and schemes for educating and training the church's workforce continually need to be updated to make them increasingly more apposite to the contemporary working situations and practices.*

This is particularly true in relation to human behaviour in groups, communities, organisations and institutions. It was so in relation to my own ministerial training, and theological education and to all the people who attended Avec courses and used its services during the second part of the 20th century. As we shall see, there is some evidence that this is changing with developments in theological institutions and training schemes. However, it must be acknowledged that it is extremely difficult for those responsible for and engaged in pre-service education and training to keep up with the changes in the multiplicity of working situations and their contexts, the development of different forms of ministry and mission and the ways in which practitioners themselves are developing and refining their praxis to make them more effective in the work in which they are engaged. This underlines the need for and importance of in-service training, consultancy services and interpersonal support – and for feedback loops to pre-service training.

During the 70s – 90s several different groups were seeking opportunities to lead seminars on their specialisms in the training colleges. Even the staff members who were sympathetic found it difficult to find opportunities to accommodate us. My approach now would be quite different. It would be to get students to consider: (a) ways of relating to and working with people; (b) different ways in which reflective ministerial practitioners had found help in other disciplines and made use of them in relation to their own discipline; (c) their approach to their own discipline and that of others and the relationship they intended to establish with them; (d) the religious and secular constituencies with which they desired to work directly and contextually and the relationships they wanted to establish with them.

I shared these thoughts with Richard Andrew on 12 January 2015 in a discussion about my paper 'Future Uses of The Non-directive Approach to Church and Community Development and Work Consultancy'. He said that these things were already written into college and training curricula.

And there was I thinking I had something original to say! Accepting what he said, I realised how I was thinking in relation to a training context no longer in existence rather than the one that is!

Assumption 6: *the non-directive approach is proven to be essential to the praxis of ministry.*

Assumption 7: *God is active in the whole cosmos and his mission is more comprehensive than those of any religious faith and secular movement.*

Assumption 8: *God is operative in other faiths and disciplines.*

Assumption 9: *competent as they might be to make significant contributions, the church and its practitioners do not have and cannot acquire all the expertise, knowledge, insights, skills and resources to achieve in its entirety what God desires and intends for the secular and religious world;*

Assumption 10: *help is available to the church and its practitioners in other faiths and secular disciplines.*

The Christian church has much to learn from other faiths and secular disciplines and especially from the behavioural sciences. It does not by any means, have a monopoly on good practice in human relationships and working with people for development. In many ways it lags behind secular developments and has much to learn from the world. Therefore, in relation to equipping itself appropriately and adequately to pursue its mission, the church is dependent upon secular disciplines. Ministers and workers need to accept this with due humility.

Assumption 11: *it is possible to access other disciplines to supplement that of Christian ministry.*

Ministers need to accept this with due humility and to be schooled in accessing other faiths and disciplines to help them to pursue their own. The principles outlined below may help them to do this.

Assumption 12: *the church and its practitioners must be willing and able to engage in egalitarian interdisciplinary collaboration.*

To do this to best effect Methodist activists must engage with those of other faiths and disciplines confidently from their own ministerial discipline and church base.

The assimilation of these principles and assumptions into my philosophy, theology and praxis enhanced my effectiveness and my ability to work from basic principles and to help other practitioners to do the same.

I am more thankful than I can say that through the grace of God I have

remained securely anchored in my basic discipline, Christian ministry and from that base pursued my ministry in the Church and community through the NDA to CCD. All too easily, as these Notes show, my commitment to this approach could have led me to make community development my basic profession and pursued it as a worker, academic and consultant in secular organisations institutions of further education. This would have happened, for instance, if I had succeeded Reg Batten as the Reader in Community Development in the University of London – which is what he tried to arrange. Thankfully that did not happen; I remained a Methodist Minister under the discipline of the Methodist Church, howbeit working ecumenically in the sectors. To maintain my commitment to my vocation and the discipline of Christian ministry *and* to practice the NDA to CCD *and* draw upon other disciplines in the ways described involved, inter-alia, incorporating and integrating them into the praxis and theology of ministry. (Earlier in these notes and elsewhere I have written about what this involved.)

II MY CONTINUING VOCATIONAL LIFE

As the writing of these notes comes to a conclusion I find myself musing about the life beyond them. What follows is based upon the assumption that I will be able to continue my disciplined way of leading my vocational working life, which, roughly speaking, involves dedicating to it several hours a day (diminishing slowly in numbers!). But this should be under review.

It seems to me that a new phase of my life could be on the horizon in which I sense that the pattern of life could take on a different form, and that new areas of work will be revealed to me or open up for me. Shaping and forming it will take some courage, determination and energy. Once these notes are completed I feel that I need/or want to take time out (and possibly away) to review my life and try to reposition myself in relation to its various aspects. Whatever time and energy remains for me to pursue my ministerial vocation actively – and it is unlikely to be very long – I am committed and desirous of using it as God intends as far as I can determine that. My vocation is for life and, to use a current, saying, I am ‘still up for it’! I have been given a quiet assurance that God still has things for me to do, possibly new ones, and that he will reveal them and open up the way for me to do them.

Here I consider some of the changes I think could/will occur in my work and vocational life when I have completed these Notes which I need to take account. They are: the nature of my life and work; the pattern of my work; subtle relational aspects of it.

The nature of my future life and work

Is this time for a radical change in my vocational life and work? Should I continue to do some vocational work? Should it be in the same field that I have been engaged in the past? (During the Sunday morning service at Lidgett Park Methodist Church on 25 January 2015, I was struck by the line in a prayer about God might be calling us from ‘our expertise’!) Tough questions that I ought to/must address but feel disinclined to do so. I need courage and help to face such questions and the possibility of quantum changes in my vocational life and work

The pattern of my work

From May 2012 the Notes have been my core work, my main job to which I have given and continue to give most of my attention and energy. Other things are fitted around it. Intermittently the focus changed to other things such as sermons, and writing papers, such as the ‘Future Uses of The Non-directive Approach to Church and Community Development and Work Consultancy’. Centring on some major piece of work for prolonged periods of time is typical of some of the most creative periods of my working life. Doing so has influenced and informed all my other work. With the completion of the Notes a large amount of core working energy and time will be freed up. *None of my other work is of the kind that could replace it as a long term project unless, that is, following through these Notes does.* Consequently, an opportunity presents itself that has not been available for six years either to replace it with some other long-term project or for my future working life to become a portfolio of short-term projects or some quite different pattern of life and work. This is a timely opportunity to review my life and vocational work comprehensively and reposition myself. Amongst other things, that involves giving serious consideration to: my spiritual and devotional life; my preaching ministry; my studying, reading and researching; how I use my leisure time, and particularly the unresolved problems I have experienced since Molly’s death; and??? Realistic plans for doing this should be made after the Notes are completed.

Subtle relational aspects of my work

Some eighteen months ago I became aware through reading Matthew Parris’s autobiography that a subtle relational aspect of my work will occur when I complete these Notes. In the final chapter, he writes:

We are each of us two people, observer and observed, but for the most part, nobody is taking notes. With autobiography, a reporter enters the room,

the couple are themselves observed, and we become three. Two has been company these last fifty years, but over many months now three has been a crowd. I looked through the eyes of a writer, and often to my sorrow the view was messy and unremarkable. (*Chance Witness: An Outsiders Life in Politics*, 2002, p. 483.)

These profound insights into the inner dynamics of engaging in autobiographical writing (or in my case autoethnographical research writing) I find fascinating and exciting; they resonate with my experience of researching and writing these autoethnographical Notes. In my case, I found that in addition to the three participants identified by Parris. Periodically I was greatly blessed by spiritual experiences of the real presence of Christ. At different stages various other people were very much present, sometimes vividly. A particularly moving experience of this was in relation to my paternal Grandmother and my baptism as an infant. Indeed, at times I really felt that I was writing in the presence of members of the communion of saints. I cannot overstate the importance of these mystical experiences. Unlike Parris, I found them enriching, deeply rewarding and moving spiritual and mystical experiences; their presence blessed me, I did not find the company a crowd. They stood in stark contrast to the endless hours of struggling on my own to find ways of expressing myself adequately and depressing experiences of feeling inadequate to the task and of 'writer's block'.

Parris's insights also helped me to a new understanding of aspects of my experience of writing these notes and niggling concerns I have experienced from time to time which I have written about. These concerns were variously about: whether I was taking myself too seriously; whether I was engaged in a self indulgent exercise; was I becoming preoccupied by the past and living in it at the expense of living in the present? was I becoming too introverted and self-centred using enormous swathes of energy and time on my past vocational life rather than on pursuing it in the present and into the future? (In the next two sections I will be addressing these concerns that I wish to note here that the way which I have written about my past, as had an accumulating effect upon me and how I have lived and worked during the past six years.)

The pattern and these relational aspects of my work change significantly when my attention and focus is on the present and future rather than on the past. (The relational aspect will continue in my praxis and discipline of journaling illuminated by the insights gained from Parris and my experience of writing the Notes.) Of itself, this is an enormously significant act of repositioning: the presence of those people summoned up through

the autoethnographical writing will make their exit from the room of my life – apart, that is, from the risen Christ – and leave the other two people, the observer and the observed, to resume their life together. Being aware of this is very important. These insights will greatly influence my future vocational life, and particularly my journalling.

III WORK TO WHICH I AM COMMITTED

Work and tasks to which I am committed are:

- determining what should happen to the *NFR* and whether it or not there is anything that I ought to do, resulting from them (see next section);
- putting my papers and files into the West Yorkshire Archives and move on to other things;
- following through the responses to *Reflections on Life and Ministry in Retirement* and *The Future Uses of the NDA to CCD*;
- consultancy to the work/researcher of a three-year action research programme into promoting sustainable community development ventures in a number of rural churches in three circuits in a Yorkshire district;
- ad hoc, consultancies (of which there are two at present);
- the co-consultancy group with Charles new and Ian Johnson;
- preaching appointments (varying from 1 –4 a quarter at present).

A factor that must be taken into serious account in making decisions about my future vocational life and work is the momentum of some aspects of this programme of work and their tractive power. It would be all too easy to be carried along by it; the pull of some aspects would be difficult to resist should that be seen to be necessary.

IV THE NOTES

There are three parts to this section: the nature of the notes; their uses; next steps.

Their nature

The Notes are a self-contained piece of work and as there are two working copies they could possibly be bound.

Before I started to write these notes I thought long and hard about why I should write them, what I wanted to achieve, whether I should be doing

so, the style that I should adopt, whether they should be handwritten or typed and their possible uses. Preliminary discussions about these issues led me in June 2008 to write a paper entitled, ‘My Rationale for Attempting a Reflective Vocational Autobiography’. Using this paper I consulted Molly, Catherine and other colleagues before eventually deciding to go ahead. (See Part I, 1.1 – 16). I struggled to find an appropriate writing voice. At various stages I grappled with and sweated over difficulties, doubts, my motivation and the issue of publication. I was greatly helped to work my way through these issues by my colleagues and by journalling and writing my way through them. Records of and references to these issues and how I dealt with them are in the Notes and can be traced through the Subject Index. Some of this is what I have referred to as ‘scaffolding’ which I had to ‘erect’ in order to write the Notes. This is a story within the story which I note but have decided not to analyse or summarise here. Instead I focus on the Notes *as written* and attempt to describe salient characteristics of their nature, their genre, or more precisely what I see them to be, in contradiction to how I envisaged or intended them to be.

1. Notes not a manuscript for publication

As written, the Notes are not a manuscript for publication although some sections could be. This is entirely in line with the original intention, which was to concentrate on getting the material on paper without an eye to publication and making it publishable. Nonetheless, I disciplined myself to produce a carefully structured and indexed text as clear and readable as possible. These aspects of the Notes are just as they would be in a manuscript prepared for publication. This approach freed me to examine my vocational life and work as honestly and thoroughly as possible without the distracting constraints of writing for publication. I gave myself to describing what emerged as accurately, clearly and honestly as I possibly could: as honest as I could, that is, without betraying confidences or revealing some of those aspects of one’s being and life, the should remain private. In one sense I was writing for myself to straighten out some of the crooked lines of my life and in another to make material I considered could be of some interest to others readily available for posterity. As a result, I believe that the Notes have the sharpness and accuracy that normally attends writing for publication, be it an article for a book and a specific readership. I think they have, however, lost out slightly from not writing to the discipline of a given number of words: in places they are more expansive than is necessary and would be improved by being more concise.

1 Dr Lovell changed his mind about this after completing the draft. See Editor’s Note.

Some of the text I wrote straight off; other parts I edited thoroughly to get at the best possible statements that I could of the insights that I was grappling to express. So, some of the text would requires only sub editing to prepare it for publication.

The text as it now appears in manuscript comprises some 1370pp + appendages. As some of the pages are typed and others hand written it would be very tedious and time-consuming to get an accurate figure of the number of words. Assuming typed pages are c480 words and the written pages are c350 and taking an average of 400, a very rough estimate is that the text is a document of some 1370 pages and 550,000 words plus appendages! This figure embarrasses me; the thought of working on a long document is intimidating. Given my other writings, it would seem that for some years I have written in excess of 100,000 words a year. When planning my future work I need to look at this carefully.

2. Notes are supported by extensive background material.

Background material to these Notes is extensive and of itself could be of interest to posterity. I am arranging, indexing cataloguing it for my archives to correspond with the structure of these notes.

3. Notes and background material are readily accessible.

The ways in which the notes and background material are arranged, indexed and cross-referenced make them readily accessible.

4. Notes are autoethnographic

Earlier in these notes I describe how in 2014 I discovered that they are autoethnographical; now, I describe the characteristics which I believe qualifies them to be described as a particular form of this kind of research and writing.

Heather Walton defines autoethnographical as:

...an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*). (See *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* p3.)

Essentially, the Notes are about the evolution and nature of the culture, praxis and theology of a particular form of Christian missiological ministry. They are about a particular form of ministerial, praxis and theology of the non-directive approach to church and community development work and the culture of vocational life and ministry associated with it. They demonstrate that this approach and its culture. (which is, inter alia, collaborative and egalitarian) is apposite and essential to:

- ordained and lay workers in Christian churches and their communities;
- the nature of a Christian missiological culture and ethos which facilitates working for the interrelated development and well-being of churches and communities;

They explore and expound this through tracing out and describing:

- the evolution of my own version of this work culture;
- attempts to codify it;
- experiences of inducting practitioners and churches denominationally and ecumenically into *their* idiosyncratic praxis of it;
- attempts to make form of work and vocational culture widely known, understood and accessible.

Heather identifies three forms that autoethnography takes: telling evocative stories, analytic and performance. I think that some, if not most of what I have written is of the analytical form, other sections are either evocative stories or performance autoethnography. The titles of the first two of these forms are sufficiently indicative for my purposes here. The third require clarification

Heather says that performance autoethnography ‘can be a stage act, an intervention, public and political display. It may be a display that takes place textually or in an educational context.’ (op cit p7) And that the understanding behind it ‘is that the social world is a *performed* world in which people *act out* their lives in accordance with the “big scripts” of race, economics, gender and so on. However, within the performance of personal lives there is always the chance to improve, invent and change – or simply forget your lines and thus make involuntary adaptations. This is why the insertion of personal testimony into the social arena is important. It challenges the idea that there is just one way to be, just one form of the “good life”, and insists that experience is infinitely varied, particular and creative. (op cit pp 7 –8) in an interesting chapter, she uses auto ethnographic

techniques to explore the nature of preaching, and in particular, preaching, as a vocational act. *ibid* pp 10 – 20). This casts light on what I have written above my own preaching

At an early stage, I decided to write a *vocational autobiography*, which determined that it was written from my *experience*. This led me to the idea of writing in relation to what I thought of as the *vocational axis* of my life and work: this proved to be a good conceptual axle to the Notes; I used it consistently to help me to decide what to select and write about and to order and structure it; it proved to be an effective way of keeping to my purposes. I am convinced that approaching the notes in this way and using these concepts has made them to be a form of auto ethnography even though I did not realise it until most of the writing had been completed! Interestingly, I think that *Telling Experiences* was a form of autoethnographical research.

I understand from my neighbour, a history professor, that this genre of writing is considered to be of some considerable value and that there is a dearth of it.

Their uses

Writing these Notes has disciplined and facilitated me to:

- revisit, review, prune and organise background material;
- examine, describe and reflect aspects of my early life relevant to my vocational theme, my engineering career and my ministerial vocational and life's work and what I feel and think about it now;
- reflect upon unresolved issues.

Doing this has been enormously useful to me personally in many ways. It has enabled me to reflect upon some unresolved issues to my advantage. Outstanding amongst these are those related to: personal class and educational issues; my need for affirmation; my collegial relationship with Catherine; my deployment after resigning as a director of Avec; the closure of Avec; the devastation caused by the Fruitful Field programme and my inability to influence its implementation. I cannot overstate the value of having done this. Overall, it gave me a more balanced and much healthier perspective of and feelings about my person and my life. It enabled me to discover autoethnographical writing. It has therefore, for me personally, been an invaluable exercise and project. For all this I am deeply grateful. (See also the Epilogue.)

At a practical level, much progress has been made in preparing my papers for my Personal Archives.

But what of their wider usage? That is a question to which I have already given some thought and intent to tackle it as best I can after I have completed these Notes but I am a little apprehensive about it because it is not going to be easy. Several thoughts have occurred to me which I simply wish to jot down here as a basis for further consideration and consultation.

Inter alia, the Notes as they are potentially useful for research purposes into: denominational and ecumenical ministerial vocational life and work (active and in retirement) from c 1960 to 2014; the introduction of radical change in the working culture of the Christian church; autoethnographical reflective theological writing. Publishing them as they are is not an option and I am very unsure about the viability and wisdom of publishing an edited version of the whole text. Typing up all the Notes and making them available electronically, as Rita has suggested, would make them much more accessible for these purposes. But this is an enormous undertaking.

Using sections of the Notes to write articles on insights into issues and topics of wider importance and interest could be a way of making some of what I have discovered more widely available. I am thinking, for instance, of articles on: the writing of these auto ethnographical notes and the insights I have discerned for contemporary and future ministry and the ongoing life of the church (see my discussion with Brian Frost on 16 July 2012, p1.25); implications of my ecumenical experience for inter-faith working relationships; ministry in retirement; future uses of the NDA to CCD; the downside of servant ministry; systemic preaching. (This is an enormous work agenda!)

The notes could be a resource to writing a vocational biography or an autobiography.

To my surprise and joy, writing this section has become an invaluable preparation for and an aid to repositioning myself for my future life! It will serve well as a briefing paper for that exercise but I must resist the danger of pre-empting that exercise by engaging with it before I have completed these Notes.

V NEXT STEPS?

To tidy up; to prepare my papers for and to deposit them in the West Yorkshire Archives; to consult about the uses to which the Notes should be put; to decide on the next steps; to take some time out!

EPILOGUE

Providentially, and thankfully I come to the ‘Epilogue’ to what has been a monumental undertaking. The title chose itself, it simply came to me. As I now contemplate what I want to say the title seems most appropriate: the content is as much from my heart and my soul, as from my mind. The headings of the sections are:

Impact upon Molly and me
 My doxology
 A concluding prayer
 Appendix: hymns for this epilogue

Impact upon Molly and me

I have described the adverse effect of writing these Notes had upon Molly and upon me. In part this was triggered off by the first Part inappropriately at an early stage. I deeply regret this. I wish from the bottom of my heart that she had lived to see the completion of them and, hopefully, to feel better about them. That was what usually happened. Perhaps she rejoices with me in heaven: she will certainly be rejoicing that my work in general and these notes in particular have made vital contributions to my salvation since she died – an important consideration as I think about my future vocational life and work.

Overall, the impact upon me is many sided and extensive. I have described aspects of this impact in various places including the section above on ‘uses’. Clearly it has not and could not, in any way change my vocational life and work as I lived, experienced thought and felt about it as it evolved. But, very importantly, it has reshaped how I *now* think, feel, see, think and talk about it: this adds new healthy interpretations of the ways in which I *now* recall my vocational life and work by reforming my memory of my past from the perspective of the present. (This insight came through watching an excellent programme by Maureen Lipman, ‘If My Memory Serves Me Right’ on BBC1, 18.4.13). All in all, writing the Notes has given me a deep sense of fulfilment and I am thankful to God that I was allowed to complete them. I have been brought to feeling of ‘closure’ of the major stages of my vocational life and, amazingly and surprisingly to the beginning of a new phase. Over the past few months, as I come to the end of these Notes, I have felt that there is something new awaiting me around the corner. I approach the next stage in my vocational life and work with a mixture of eager anticipation and apprehension. It is going to take some

courage and personal discipline to face up to the issues realistically. However, I feel quietly confident that God has work for me to do. Consequently, my propensity is to maintain my disciplined way of vocational living, but, if at all possible, I want to find a better social and leisure life; this to needs serious reconsideration.

My doxology

As I reflect on what I have written in these notes and the vocational life they attempt to explore, I am deeply moved by the awesomeness of the amazing grace and love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit that I have experienced in so many different ways over such a long period of life and ministry. Incredibly, God through Christ and the Holy Spirit:

- called me to Christ's ministry and mine;
- gave me Molly as my soul friend in ministry who supported me and helped me in so many personal and practical ways;
- equipped me for my ministerial vocation and missiological tasks beyond my own competence;
- used me in ways beyond my wildest dreams, I am amazed at what he has achieved in and through me;
- gave me such wonderful colleagues and soul friends to accompany and work with me throughout my life's work; (In addition to the people with whom I have worked intensively for various periods of time, a large number of people have accompanied me through their writings even though I never met them.)
- was utterly faithful in and through the covenant relationship he established and maintained with me;
- continued to stand by me and to use me when I got into difficulties – some of my own making – and betrayed him by falling short of fulfilling in their entirety my marriage and ordination vows;
- never gave up on me;
- has brought me to the concluding phase of my life and ministry feeling that he has enabled me to make a modest contribution to church and community;
- has capped it all by allowing and enabling me to reflect on my vocational life and ministry over a period of six years and more and to conclude this autoethnographical account of it (I am so grateful that the nature of these Notes was revealed to me towards the end of writing them, but surprised that it took so long);
- has honoured me through the gift of a DD;

- has maintained my ability, desire and energy to think and work critically and creatively, howbeit in reduced and reducing ways;
- given me a quiet assurance that there is still more for me to do which will be revealed to me in due course, which I look forward to eagerly and which warms my soul.

All in all, I consider that I have lived and greatly privileged vocational life and a richly endowed ministry.

For all this and so much more my deep heartfelt doxological response is an unqualified, Thanks be to God and to my Lord and saviour Jesus Christ and to my enabler the Holy Spirit and to the Church, and especially my beloved Methodist Church.

Were I to lead this epilogue with a group of my erstwhile colleagues and soulmates, I would want to sing one or more of several hymns or selected verses of them. They are presented in the appendage with an explanation of why I have chosen them.

A Concluding Prayer

Some years ago Catherine Widdicombe drew to my attention to the following prayer from the liturgy of the Iona Community. I can do no better than conclude with it.

I ask you humbly and from the bottom of my heart;
please, God, could you write straight with my crooked lines?
Out of the serious mistakes of my life
will you make something beautiful for You?

Teach me to live at peace with you,
to make peace with others.
and even with myself.

Give me a fresh vision.
Let me experience your love so deeply
that I am free to face the future
with a steady eye,
forgiven,
and strongly in hope.
Amen and Amen

Appendix: hymns for this Epilogue

Were I to lead this epilogue with a group of my erstwhile colleagues and soulmates, I would want to sing one or more of the following hymns or selected verses. *And are we yet alive*, I choose and because it is the hymn that is traditionally sung at the opening of the annual Methodist Conference; *Amazing grace* because it was that which inspired me to get into this epilogue and to write this section ‘my doxology’; *Author of faith, eternal Word*, for the lines ‘Whate’er we hope, by faith we have/ Future and past subsisting now’ which express quite profoundly the past, present and future of my vocational life which unite inextricably in these Notes; *Once to every man and nation / comes the moment to decide*, because all *Avec* short courses ended by the singing of this him, and particularly for the lines which epitomised what we were doing in promoting a new approach to working with people ‘New occasions teach new duties;/ Time makes ancient good uncouth;/ They must upward still and onward/ Who would keep abreast of truth.’; *THIS, this is the God we adore*, was sung with great gusto and fervour to conclude all social events, as Mary Street Methodist Church and therefore evokes precious memories of my childhood and youth and it refers to everything that has gone before it. But there are so many more hymns.

1. And are we yet alive,
And see each other's face?
Glory and thanks to Jesus give
For his almighty grace!
2. Preserved by power divine
To full salvation here,
Again in Jesus' praise we join,
And in his sight appear.
3. What troubles have we seen,
What mighty conflicts past,
fightings without, and fears within,
Since we assembled last!
4. But out of all the Lord
Hath brought us by his love;
And still he doth his help afford,
And hides our life above.

5. Then let us make our boast
Of his redeeming power,
Which saves us to the uttermost,
Till we can sin no more.

6. Let us take up the cross
Till we the crown obtain,
And gladly reckon all things loss
So we may Jesus gain.

[Charles Wesley *Hymns and Psalms* 707]

- 1 Amazing grace how sweet the sound
 that saved a wretch like me!
 I once was lost but now am found,
 was blind but now I see.
- 2 God's grace has taught my heart to fear,
 his grace my fears relieved;
 how precious did that grace appear
 the hour I first believed!
3. Through many dangers, toils and snares
 I have already come;
 God's grace has brought me safe thus far,
 and grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me,
 his word my hope secures;
 he will my shield and portion be
 as long as life endures.
5. And, when this heart and flesh shall fail
 and mortal life shall cease
 I shall possess within the veil
 a life of joy and peace.
6. When we've been there ten thousand years,
 bright shining as the sun,
 we've no less days to sing God's praise
 than when we'd first begun.

[John Newton, *Singing the Faith*, 440]

1. Author of faith, eternal Word,
Whose Spirit breathes the active flame;
Faith like its finisher and Lord,
Today as yesterday the same.
2. To Thee our humble hearts aspire,
And ask the gift unspeakable;
Increase in us the kindled fire,
In us the work of faith fulfil.
3. By faith we know Thee strong to save;
Save us, a present Saviour Thou!
Whate'er we hope, by faith we have
Future and past subsisting now.
4. To him that in Thy name believes
Eternal life with Thee is given;
Into Himself He all receives,
Pardon and holiness, and Heaven.
5. The things unknown to feeble sense,
Unseen by reason's glimmering ray,
With strong commanding evidence
Their heavenly origin display.
6. Faith lends its realizing light,
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;
Th'invisible appears in sight,
And God is seen by mortal eye.

[Charles Wesley *Hymns and Psalms* 662]

1. Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, some great decision, offering each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever, 'twixt that darkness and that light.
2. Then to side with truth is noble, when we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses while the coward stands aside,
Till the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.

3. By the light of burning martyrs, Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track,
Toiling up new Calv'ries ever with the cross that turns not back;
New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth,
They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth.

4. Though the cause of evil prosper, yet the truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong;
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

[James Russell Lowell, *The Methodist Hymn Book* 898]

1. THIS, this is the God we adore,
 Our faithful, unchangeable Friend;
 Whose love is as great as his power,
 And neither knows measure nor end.
2. 'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last,
 Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
 We'll praise him for all that is past,
 And trust him for all that's to come.

[Charles Wesley *Hymns and Psalms* 277]