

PART 6: CLASS ISSUES IN MY PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES

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¹PREAMBLE

What follows is an attempt to put into some order an explosion of thinking about class issues in my private and personal lives best triggered off quite unexpectedly through writing about my experiences at Accrington Union Technical College (Personal Notes for Retirement, 5510-12, 5th & 9th June 2009). All of a sudden I saw that my experience of these issues was complexly multifaceted in one facet after another came to mind in rapid succession. It was a moment of disclosure of my reality and release from an imprisoning narrow guilt engendering approach to the issues. Instinctively I knew/felt that I had stumbled on an overview which would help me to a more wholesome and healthy approach to these issues.

First I am going to distinguish the facets and aspects and then to reflect on them and the shift in my perception and understanding.

I. FACETS OF MY EXPERIENCE

21. Middle Class Acculturation, 1942-1949

My initial formation was into what can be roughly described as an upper working class culture in an industrial Lancashire town, which is described in Section 4. There was an upward orientation or thrust epitomized by the oft repeated injunction in our home is “talk properly” i.e. not to speak in dialect and by maiden units on my Father’s side, particularly by their table manners and way of life. I am not aware of the day school in the local Methodist Church influencing my formation other than in a respectable upper middle class culture. But I do remember the respectful ways in which my parents talked about and addressed those they considered to be their superiors in class and status. For instance, my father held the pit engineer in great regard and always spoke of him as Mr Ward or similarly the pit manager – but not the landowner!

If anything my Father was inclined to be deferential (for instance he addressed Catherine Widdicombe as Miss Catherine) but my Mother was not. I remember her telling me about the visits to a village in Buckinghamshire to visit a relative when she was a girl and how she would not courtesy when the lord or lady of the manner passed by in the sheet as was the accepted custom at the time.

1 12.6.09

2 15.6.09

As far as I can tell the beginnings of the modification and eventual transformation of my initial formation started when I went to the Junior Technical College and the Archer incident. Critical aspects of this time are becoming clearer as I reflect upon them and write these notes.

Several different cultures were actively represented in the college life, all of which I experienced and interacted with internally and externally whilst I observed them interacting with each other. Mrs Archer was middle class and somewhat snobbish and patronizing; Mr Nuttall who taught engineering practice was working class, brash and rough. For instance, he punished and made a spectacle of any student who made a mistake by rubbing heavy black engine oil on his nose and forehead which he was not allowed to wash off during the session. These two made no secret of their dislike of or disdain for each other, they criticized each other publically in our presence. Mrs A was incensed by his mode of punishment which she declared to be unhygienic. (I seem to remember she was asthmatic and overweight). Mr Eric Cordingley taught woodwork and was a nice working class craftsman. Messrs Marsden & Overend were gracious, middle class gentlemen. Then there was the caretaker, a thoroughly lower working class Lancastrian man, somewhat gross and uncouth, who held court daily in his den under the stairway. He allowed and encouraged us to smoke and regarded us with his strongly held views which he expressed forcibly. He was pro Nuttall and anti Archer and he respected the other members of staff. One of his recurrent themes was that practical subjects were important because they enabled you to earn a living but English, geography, history were a waste of time. Undoubtedly, he was an influential figure and for many an opinion and attitude former, either for or against his positions.

Then there was the student body, twenty three in my year and about the same number in the one that preceded and followed mine. They were from various strata of the working class community. My closest friend for most of this period was Eric Barlow who lived in Accrington. Quite often at weekend and during the holidays we stayed overnight in each others homes. He was the only child of a family but, whilst I think they were working class, lived much as a middle class family. This was the first time I had experienced this kind of culture. I suspect they were a bit snobbish. I suppose they welcomed the friendship because I was doing much better in my studies.

³[At this point I found myself drifting into personal reminiscences. After writing the best part of page I became uneasy about the deviation which was

interrupting the flow of the argument but I felt a compulsion to complete the reminiscences or at least to continue with them. After some dithering I decided to separate out reminiscences and to create a section for them. They sketch out incidents key to my personal and vocational development].

⁴Looking back I have no recollection of thinking out my position or where I stood in relation to these different lifestyles but there is no doubt in my mind that Lawrence Marsden was and remains my role model and that, possibly unconsciously, I was attracted to and beginning to aspire to aspects of middle class ways of living and behaving. Having said that, I have no idea where I should in relation to middle class values. In all probability I had not distinguished between life style and values – but possibly more on this in the next subsection.

⁵Two things have dawned on me. The college was my first experience of the interaction of different cultures. Mr. Shaw was middle class and the first time I entered a middle class home occurred when he held the 11 plus prep classes in his digs in Blackburn Road. I suppose the other teachers were verging on middle class. Like doctors, however, they were seen as educated and professional. That was the distinction I think I was aware of, that between artisans and professionals, rather than that between classes. They were a station above us; we knew it and our place. Later in my teams I got to know one of the teachers, Miss Annie Butler, much better and was privileged to have her friendship when she was the youth club leader and when she coached me in English. I owe much to her and, whilst I did not think much of her when she taught me when I was 9 or 10, I later held her in great respect. As a teacher she could not keep discipline and rapped our knuckles rather viciously with a ruler. She was a good local preacher in her later years. The second thing that dawned on me was that since my college days I have always been in association with and worked with and for people from a broad range of class backgrounds in my private and public lives. I return to this is subsection 3.

My experience of these different cultures led to processes of acculturation that gradually changed my life and made me what I am today. It stimulated social and professional aspirations and development. Four years after leaving Accrington Tech College I had a good academic engineering qualification and when I returned from eighteen months in Egypt my sister said as I greeted the family, “Cor, doesn’t he talk posh!” with considerable disdain. By this time I was well on my way to being a professional middle class

4 18.6.09

5 19.06.09

person. Reflecting on this period of six and a half years I became aware of a stream of people and experiences which fostered the acculturation:

- my friendship when I was in my teens with Raymond Routledge, who went to Cambridgeshire and was professionally and socially very ambitious;
- Auntie Constance (she epitomized middle class and upper class behaviour, customs and manners and introduced me to them. She was particularly helpful when I was preparing to go to Farnborough. Made sure I had the right kind of wardrobe, e.g. a dressing gown which was entirely new to me and a trunk. She entertained Molly in me in what appeared to be stately houses. Undoubtedly she influenced me greatly or gave me confidence to move in middle and upper-middle classes as a person in my own right);
- my experiences of the staff at Burnley Municipal Technical College both as a student and as an assistant tutor to Professor Riffkin;
- the staff of the drawing office and research section at Howard and Bullough's and especially Tom Fitton, with whom I became very friendly. He was 15-20 years older than me, married with a young family. We invariably went out to lunch together in local cafes. Tom had been in the army during the war and had some horrendous experiences in Japan. He always dressed well and was cultured and encouraged me to develop professionally and socially;
- some private coaching took me into one or two middle class homes;
- working at the RAE was a culture shock which had a great impact on my development, about which I intend to write about this later in this section, 5.) Those to whom I was directly responsible were upper class graduates. My "boss" was Ian Keiller a member of the jam dynasty, for example. And the southern culture was so different from that in the North. In many ways it was a transforming experience. Then there were new friends, particularly Norman Heaps with whom I discussed the new experience.
- during my time in the army I had much to do with officers whilst in Egypt even though I was not commissioned and with a staff sergeant, George Apps and his family. George was from Thornton Heath, a regular soldier who had adopted the officer culture and eventually became one. I taught him and others mechanical engineering. Then there were two chaplains with who I did much work and the doctors. (An incident illustrates how much I had changed. I was visiting a sergeant major for our church and his family in the married quarters one afternoon. Dressed in civvies I went into the guard house to ask directions. As soon as I spoke the two or three military police on

duty jumped to attention and addressed me, a corporal in disguise, as though I had seen an officer. I was terrified at what they would do – they were generally more vicious than regimental police. I played to the initially unintended deception and got out and away as quickly as possible!)

⁶During the time that I was experiencing these acculturative influences I was living in three different community contexts. From 1942-49 I was living in my parents' home firmly based in my native Lancashire working class culture, attending Accrington and Burnley (part time day release and evening classes) colleges and working in engineering firms: first of all in a drawing office, then as an apprentice fitter in a foundry (Cherry Tree Machine Company) and then in a design/research office. The ambience of the offices was middle class; that of the foundry was thoroughly working class. With some notable exceptions the language was coarse and vulgar.

Exceptions were: a man called Harold Starr who was a very good fitter and a Christian, apprentices used to sign behind his back “Twinkle twinkle little star, O I wonder where you are”; a labourer who was a Salvationist; two or three highly skilled fitters who were a cut above the rest culturally. Possibly, to ingratiate myself with the fitters and apprentices and to be seen as one of the boys (being the only one doing National and Higher National Certificate studies and already better qualified than anyone in the foundry apart from the chief engineer I was seen to be “clever”). I am sorry and ashamed to say I developed the ability to swear with the rest of them. I had a vulgar and coarse tongue but I do not think I blasphemed. To my shame I used this to shock my middle class grammar school boy friends – or was it – to show off to cover my feelings of inferiority, I don't know. It seems to show that I was ambivalent, confused about which class I wished to be identified with. Looking back on it I wonder if it was an outward sign of the struggle that was going on deep within me to discover my identity. Reliving conversations I had with Raymond Routledge walking in Rishton Park and down Blackburn Road when I was particularly foul mouthed I am aware that I felt uncouth and being both proud and ashamed of it as the same time. What an awful waste and spoiling! Ever since, I have felt insecure by the thought that when I was ill or dogged I would revert to that kind of language. God forbid. Occasionally I do use the odd expletive and there was a time when for private under my breath as it were I would find rude words coming out but, thank goodness, that seems to have passed. It is so difficult to eradicate these linguistic bad habits.

⁷An incident occurred in 1948/9 during an abortive attempt to qualify for a major grant to pursue a degree course at Manchester University which I feel constrained to note here (cf section 5). It happened in an interview with three elderly academics in a large, dark, musty, gothic room. The three men dressed in morning suits sat at the end of a long dark oak table, I was seated at the other end. It was a somewhat intimidating situation. After questions about my engineering experience and ambitions the interview took a sudden, unwanted and unexpected turn and focused upon my personal and family background. They asked and pressed questions of this kind: Which papers did my father take? (My reply: “Daily Herald”, “News of the World”, the “Pink” / “Lancashire Evening Post”). Which journals? (My reply: “The Picture Post” and my Mother the “Woman’s Own”.) To which club did he belong? (My reply: Working Men’s Club). Understandably, but unwisely, understanding the significance and implications of these blatantly designed to reveal my class background, I became angry and lost my temper. I asked them what these questions had to do with my ability to do the course and qualify for the grant. Looking down and at each other they dismissed me without answering my questions with the words, “that will be all Mr. Lovell”. At that moment I knew with a sinking feeling that I hadn’t got the bursary. (As I write these notes the feelings of gross unfairness, injustice I experienced than return. They are sickening. I am re-living the anger at the gross discrimination and my hopeless powerlessness and weakness in the face of it. I am also incensed as I was then all those years ago, at the awful effrontery of it to my parents and to me and to my class background. What right had they had to be so condescending and dismissive by inference and implication of so such that was fine and noble and good in my house, my parents and class and who were the people who by default or design maintained them and their sort in their academic, upper middle class life style? I am near to tears as I battle with the frustration of the injustice not simply to me but to my people. My responses then, over the years and now to this incident demonstrate beyond any doubt that, notwithstanding my acculturation to a middle class life style and my irritation at some aspects of working class culture, I remain deeply committed to the class into which I was born and in which I was nurtured. I do not disown my origins. I value them even though I am critical of aspects of them. I feel deeply the ways in which my people and my class of people have been ill-treated, deprived, used ... and the ways in which they have harmed and failed to develop themselves. Contributing to correcting that has been a major objective in my ministry.

Writing this has been cathartic and cleansing. I feel I understand myself better and have got in touch with deeper levels of my being but I also feel that these are depths yet unplumbed, not least because I have not found the words to plumb and express them.

To put this incident into perspective, as I say in Section 5, it is possible I did not do well enough in the exams but that in no way invalidates this experience which as lived with me.

2. Formative Influences on the Development of my Class Culture and Consciousness Post 1949

So much for the period 1942-49: now I turn to the period 1949-52. From September 1949 to January 1950 I lived in Farnborough and worked at the RAE, an experience already mentioned. It was largely an experience of middle class south of England life. As I recall that time, I fitted in well, I liked it. Surviving until pay day at the end of my first month was a struggle but I managed it. Professionally it was an eye opening experience into another world, but more on that in Section 5.

Culturally it was a steep learning curve about middle and upper class people as I met them in ways that I had never done before.

⁸Describing in any detail the sequences of the formative influences upon the development of my class culture and consciousness post 1949 is a formidable and intimidating task which I am not going to undertake here – not least because I do not think it is going to add much to achieving the purpose of these notes. That has become increasingly clear to me now I return to this section some fourteen months after I wrote the first paragraph on this page! What I attempt is to record some observations which have come to me as I have reflected on the development of my class consciousness and simply note some of the cardinal influences.

Observations

Increasingly from 1949 onwards, when I left Lancashire never to live there permanently again, the dominant formative influence upon my preferred and actual life style has been that of the lower middle class. It has been the main stream of my existence. It has been both my living and my work base – my home. Much of my work, if not most, has been

done within it, through it and from it with a very wide spectrum of people. Living a particular lifestyle has not in itself enabled me to work effectively with people of the same or of a different lifestyle. As noted later a cluster of attitudes and skills are required even though affinities of class and lifestyle can be advantages even historical ones.

Being myself with integrity and being comfortable with whom and what I am has been of cardinal importance, combined with respect for others and the ability to make them feel comfortable with who and what they are when they are not. For me, Reg Batten exemplified this ability: he lived an upper middle class lifestyle and had a distinctive Oxford accent and yet he could get on with and work with people of all classes, religions and races. (See my chapter on his life and work in *Essays in the History of Youth and Community Work*..... and internet piece, 2007).

RAE

Returning to cardinal influences, during my time at the RAE I was exposed to: upper middle class people of a kind I had never met before (my immediate boss was Ian Keiller of Keiller Marmalades and then his boss was Reynolds); large numbers of middle class people; southern as opposed to the northern culture and community life and army and social relations. The differences were enormous. Whilst I met and associated with all kinds of people in the army and during basic training delinquents from the East End (conversations in the barrack room after lights out on the first night led me to put all my valuables such as they were under the mattress!), I was at home with and influenced by middle class culture through people like George Apps and Robert/Bob Cottingham. So much so, that by the time I was discharged I was recognizably middle class by my manner of speaking. Evidence of this is in my sister's comment after greeting the family when I returned from Egypt. In her best mocking imitation of an upper middle class accent, "Cor, doesn't he talk posh!"

Church life

Similarly, in my life in the Church I met people from all walks of life and worked with them but overall there was a somewhat dominant middle class influence. (As I write the memory of my experience in the Carmarthen and Llanelli Circuit comes to mind to illustrate this. What a privilege to work with such a wide range of people and Burry Port, Pontardulais almost entirely working class; Kidwelly a classless mixture of saints with some sinners; Carmarthen middle class local government officers such as Mr. Hindley, local business people and senior executives in the tax office,

electricity and gas services. But my overwhelming experience of Wales was of its classlessness and its relative lack of snobbishness). This will become apparent in Section 9. In *Avec* I worked mainly with middle class people and some of the upper classes. Through the trail, I work with and came to respect a group of ladies mainly from the upper echelons of society.

93. Features of my Reluctant Class Culture and Consciousness

Writing this section has proved unexpectedly problematic but also a learning experience. Several attempts have run into the ground and the last one was interrupted by twenty four hours in hospital which was unplanned!

When I set out on it my plan was to profile my present class culture and consciousness succinctly. So far I have failed to do so and wonder whether I can do so such as I would like to. Various attempts have failed for various reasons: a propensity to drift from describing my own experience to tasks beyond my competence and the scope of these notes, the exploration and classification of different forms of class culture and consciousness!, my inability to describe features that seem so elusive and difficult to capture in words. As I write I have glimmering new insights which I have not yet assimilated. In fact, my class culture and consciousness are not static entities nor have they ever been for any length of time. They are in an evolutionary flux and my understanding of them is in the same state. Reflecting on them and trying to write about them agitates both my consciousness and my understanding of these aspects of my social and religious existence. Therefore, it is not surprising that I find it difficult to write about them and I now see that I have been trying to do so as though they are fixed, static entities when they are anything but. Undetected, this unconsciousness, unintended deception would distort descriptions of my experience, undermine their integrity and render them superficial. So, whatever I write here is and must be understood to be, about aspects of my being and identity in the making; it is the best description I can make of my experiences of class culture and consciousness of my consciousness and my understanding of it at various stages of its evolution up to the present.

What I now intend to do, with all this to guide me, is to attempt to write up all that is in my mind on this theme, almost as brain scan, in the hope that critical features of my present class culture and consciousness will become clearer – at least to me!

My class culture and consciousness are the resultants of enormously rich and varied interactive experiences of an unusually wide range of personal, social, denominational, economical, religious, liturgical and working cultures as lived by an equally wide spectrum of classes of people. Many of these dimensions are well illustrated at a glance by the different people with whom I worked in the Avec team, trust, courses, projects and consultancies.¹⁰ Whilst this is a fragment of the infinite kinds of world cultures and classes the breadth of it is significant in my development when compared to that of my parents and even more so that of my grandparents. The expression of their intimate relationships was governed almost entirely into working class culture as is that of my sister and was of my brother.¹¹ Reflecting on this I am amazed that I have been so incredibly fortunate and greatly blessed to have had and been formed by such a rich fount of experience: thanks be to God.

This experience affected me in many different ways, positively and negatively. It was exciting, revealing, insightful, opened up new and more satisfying ways of living and being and doing; it was disillusioning about all cultures and classes. It was a profound learning experience; at times the learning curves, upwards and downwards, were steep. Some of them were disturbing and heartbreaking, causing much stress. Others were the opposite. New ways of relating to people and doing things had to be acquired quickly. Attitudinal as well as behavioural changes had to be made. And all this and more I grappled with whilst retaining and refining my own idiosyncratic personality and integrity and being myself naturally and honestly: a tricky human development programme/agenda. (Illustrations of all this are threaded through these notes).

At my best I have engaged with my experience in order to form and develop my personal cultural attributes, my way of life and my class consciousness in order to make myself what I consider to be a better Christian person, minister and humane and spiritual development worker. Amongst other things this involved (and still does) grappling with those aspects of my personal and occupational life which, because they are embarrassing or debilitating or confusing, adversely affect my ability to function personally, professionally and spiritually. My success is limited, I regret to say, especially

10 See *Avec, Agency and Approach* (1996) See particularly Appendices I-III *Telling Experiences: Stories About A Transforming Way of Working With People* (1996); *Avec Archives Annotated Catalogue* (2002)

11 Minister, doctors, etc introduced another dimension but they, my relatives, would generally be in a subordinate and somewhat formal relationship with them.

with those traits and reactions and responses which are deep seated in my personality and psyche. Various things help me to work constructively and to counter these problems and the more positive and pleasing aspects of my experience: personal and interpersonal reflection, especially that with some friends and those with consultancy skills; prayer, worship and other means of grace and pastoral support; study and research (see later); journaling as always! These developmental processes are ongoing; much has been achieved but much needs to be done. However, by the time I started my active ministry in the late 1950s, I had an inbuilt basic structure and the shape and marks of a culture and a stance on class styles that was rough fit for the purposes of lining and working with people in church and community and ministering to, through and with them. Becoming involved in experiential Christian education in the 1960s refined it.

¹²Discovering the non-directive approach (the NDA) as described and defined by the Battens, in the late 60s had, and continues to have, a transforming effect upon the still rough hewn and only partly articulated shape of my working culture and my approach to people of different classes and ways of being and doing. At the heart of the NDA is the concept and philosophy of working with rather than for people, the reverse of my previous orientation and that of the cultures in which I had been nurtured and those in which I lived and worked. Adopting it wholeheartedly and assimilating in a thorough going way revolutionized my attitudinal approach to people of any and all cultures and classes and to my ways of relating to and working with all people whatever their societal or religious status or position or standing. (There are times when directive action is appropriate and necessary such as when, for whatever reason, people are unable to think, decide and act responsibly for themselves.)¹³ Discovering this alternative approach led to a mutation of the rough-hewn shape of my work culture and approach to people of different classes (roughly speaking it was a democratic one with an egalitarian bent) that has been permanently evolving ever since. The mutation had a new character; its various parts were integrated and formed a working system in which their functions and purposes were clarified; a coherent new working theology and philosophy of my stance to culture and class started to emerge. I am now in my fifth decade of exploring the praxis and philosophy of all this

12 14.10.10

13 For a discussion of the uses of directive and non-directive action see: publications by TRBV, CW and me; my file on directive and nondirective and self-help (in Avec Archives, Westminster; in this file I think is a copy of an outstanding essay by Nick Perks which he wrote on the NDA whilst doing DMA consultancy course.

and new treasures – and tricky issues – emerge. It has been and remains an absorbing (possibly obsessive), wonderful intellectual, spiritual and vocational pilgrimage in great company with other pilgrims. At times it has been difficult and demanding but I would not have missed it. It has been an enormously privileged vocational life thanks to the Battens, to God and to countless colleagues and soul friends.¹⁴

Incredibly these processes formed a disposition deep within my psyche to class and culture which released me from some of the disabling effects of the class and culture in which I was nurtured and initially formed. (These are described and discussed in various parts of these notes). So much so that I found I could relate and work creatively with a far wider spectrum of people from all classes, cultures, religious persuasions etc than I could previously. (There were, of course, people I couldn't work with and they couldn't work with me! People, for instance, who were authoritarian or reacted negatively and defensively to analytical processes that they found disturbing even when they were necessary keys to progress). Possibly this was because I knew I had found an approach which transcended class and culture and was, therefore, universally applicable. This release from the restrictiveness of the negativity of my class consciousness and the new found broader field of operation so wonderfully accessible is of great importance and value to me. It is a pearl of great price for which it has been worth forfeiting much.

Working and Vocational Cultural Features

This is an attempt to identify these features. They are listed as they occur to me, so the order is not significant.

Approach to work and time: I am industrious, motivated by the Protestant (or Puritan) work ethic. I work systematically and order and use my working time with great care. I hate to waste time. I undertake long-term projects and organize, plan and discipline myself to carry them through. I work well in private on my own, in small groups and in public. I do need private time.

Approach to people: Serious but friendly. I am a good and attentive listener. I am empathic. Fundamentally I am non-directive, naturally collaborative. I relate with humility with a tendency to think educated people from higher classes are more intelligent and able than I

¹⁴ This is well documented — see my CV.

am. Normally and habitually I do not act in a superior or patronizing or aggressive or intrusive ways and I do not like and respond negatively to those who do and especially to those that are 'loud'. My habitual approach to people and response to issues they raise is purposeful; I seek to work things out with them. My stance, attitude and deportment enable people from a wide range of cultures and classes to relate to me and engage with me purposefully and in depth – intellectual and spiritual.

Language and Speech. I speak in a neutral, cultivated and possibly educated way with a slight northern accent. Most people do not find it easy to identify where I was born and nurtured. I use language as carefully and precisely as I can. I use my linguistic gifts such as they are for not against people. I am inclined, less so now than earlier in my life, to be in awe of classicists, linguists and grammarians and those with a 'good education'. Roughly I think of them as 'properly educated'. They can intimidate and de-skill me, significantly less so now than in my earlier life. At one time I automatically assumed that those who spoke in a refined or high class way were ipso facto more intelligent than me.

Class Features

¹⁵This is an attempt to put down some thoughts about my class consciousness.

Class Location

I am middle class in outlook and lifestyle. I order my life in the mode of middle class people. I live in a middle class area. That is the case but I still think of myself as belonging to the working class community. I do not disown my heritage. But I do not think that those members of my family who live working class lives and working class people generally see me as working class just like them. I have spiralled out of their way of life, ways of thinking and ways of speaking. Consequently I often feel that class-wise I am between classes: a welcome visitor to working class society especially by my family; a resident but not a native of the middle class society. At times this has been painful and a high price to pay for growing out of my birth environment. But my present class location and my lifestyle are those that I prefer.

Reactions to people of other classes (and cultures)

There are significant differences between the ways in which I react and

respond to people from different classes and cultures when I am engaging with them purposefully, formally or informally ('working with them') from when I am socializing with them or in the same public place with them. When I am engaging or working with them or in serious conversations with them I accept them as they are and feel warmly positive towards them regardless of their class, culture or education.¹⁶ When I am simply mixing with them in a public place I can be irritated by them, their manners and their speech. This happens with upper as well as with working class people. Such reactions do not please me. I feel I am being patronizing, judgmental, bigoted and snobbish. And that is certainly not to my credit, especially when I react so strongly to people who are condescending, arrogant and patronizing to others and to me.

There are, of course, things I do not like in the behaviour typical of each and all classes but one thing I do like about middle class culture is the ability to provide an acceptable and banding pattern of social and personal life for people engaged in all kinds of work. (e.g. Jack Clennell's family). I found this in Wales: there was classlessness about their society.

One of the things I envy and covet from upper middle class culture is their social confidence and self-assurance. Things I have lacked. Had I had them I think I would have been much more effective and suffered less social pain and embarrassment.

I am embarrassed when working class people try to imitate people from higher classes, their so called "betters", and it doesn't come off. This embarrassment turns to anger when people are amused by it and sneer and snigger. Then I feel deeply hurt because they are doing this 'to my people'. At such moments I know where my loyalties are.

There are still chips on my shoulder and work to be done!

4. Continuing Conflicts and Tensions

Most of these have emerged in this and other sections of the notes. By and large the intensity of the conflicts and tensions has been reduced with the passage of time and the accumulation of experience. The notes make this clear. The tensions have been further reduced through the writing of these notes. A case in point is the recurring desire that my childhood and particularly my education had been more privileged. What emerges

¹⁶ This is all of a piece with my commitment to work with and for the poor and the sick. See my unpublished paper on this in the box file in my shelves, "Articles and Papers".

is that whilst it was anything but privileged in the conventional sense it was nonetheless rich and provided substantial advantages in relation to my ministerial vocation. The following paragraphs demonstrate this conclusively. Whilst moments of the regret may recur and I might dream enviously of what might have been had my education been better, the truth of the matter is that between us, God and I, have made much of my beginnings.

One thing that does however haunt me, is that I have not lived and worked with the poorest people for their development. I have contributed to their wellbeing through work I have done with several people and groups. But I have not worked with them in the way, for instance, that Ros Colwill and others have done¹⁷ and as advocated by the emphasis on the preferential option for the poor and taught by Jesus.

5. A Dysfunctional Experience

Although the experience took place some twenty five years ago, I am resisting writing about it because of the emotions the memory is engendering. It occurred at a special annual residential conference of the Church of England Board of Social Responsibility. John Gladwin¹⁸ was Secretary to the Board. Peter Selby and I had been asked to act as consultants to the committee as it prepared for the Conference during the period 1984-85. Major issues were on the Conference's agenda but I cannot remember what they were except that they were contentious.¹⁹ The consultations went well and my contributions were well received and as I recall it I emerged as the lead consultant. Selby and I worked together very well and made complementary contributions. We had also been invited to act as consultants to the Conference in 1985. At the final consultation with

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- 17 During the 1960s I was inspired and greatly influenced by Bruce Kenrick and colleagues (*Come Out the Wilderness*, 1962); David Mason; Geoffrey Aniger and Norwyn Denny (Eg *News from Notting Hill: The Formation of a Group Ministry*, 1967). I was in the Methodist Conference when Donald Soper made a stirring speech about the racial situation in N.Y. which led to the formation of his group ministry. Later I got to know David Mason and had much to do with Norwyn). John Pelow (*The Concrete Village*) (I had meetings with him over a period of time); Sally Trench (*Bury me in my Boots*, 1968). But I did not evaluate them. More on this later. Then there was the sociologist Prof. Glasgow whose name eludes me.
- 18 Over many years I had a good relationship with him and before I knew him his wife prior to her marriage when she was in Sheffield and London – Lydia Adam. He became Bishop of Guildford and then Chelmsford.
- 19 The working papers are in the Avec Archives, file [118], see *Avec Archives Annotated Catalogue*, p42

the Committee Selby said for reasons he could not disclose he could not now do this.²⁰ (He had in fact, it transpired, been appointed a suffragan bishop and had to be at some event in relation to this appointment at the time of the Conference).

Pressed to continue on my own, I agreed to do so but with some apprehension. With hindsight, it would have been prudent to recruit an Anglican to be a co-consultant but we felt it would not be possible to induct anyone at that late stage so that they would be an asset.

Over the first meal I was viciously attacked and undermined by an off beat avant-garde self opinionated Anglican priest dressed in black leathers for presenting myself tentatively on the conference briefing note. Throughout the Conference, which probably lasted three days, even though I had the full support of John Gladwin and the Committee members, I found it difficult to get a sympathetic or considerate hearing. I was not an Anglican and the only non-Anglican present. They tended to freeze me out. Their culture was for me almost impenetrable. However I did useful work with the Committee between sessions. During the evening of the penultimate day the Conference members were in deep conflict and the day ended with them in an impasse. As the arguments went on, I managed to identify a possible consultative intervention which would have/could have put the issues in from which would have helped them to consider them more constructively, but the chairman simply would not allow me to contribute. I found the experience humiliating, frustrating and de-skilling; it seriously undermined my confidence.

After the session I had socialized even though I felt inwardly devastated. Quite determinedly I kept my own control and retained my dignity – at least outwardly. I resisted strong inner urges to discuss the situation and to fish for sympathy, support and affirmation. That would have been suicidal to my role and function. When I went to my room it was very late and I felt deeply and distressingly on my own. Being in such a situation is to be in a very lonely, painful place. I lay on the bed exhausted and had an awful experience. I felt paralyzed by fear and a sense of failure. I had a distressing debilitating panic attack of a kind I have not had before or — thank God — since.

I was culturally and professionally isolated in an alien class and religious

20 He had been appointed a Suffragan Bishop of Kingston-upon-Thames and whilst in that appointment he came on an Avec course of people working at regional and national levels. Later he became Bishop of Worcester. At the time he was diocesan missionary, Diocese of Newcastle.

group. I have no idea how long this attack lasted but somehow or another as an act of will and dogged defiance that “they” were not going to beat me through silencing me, I roused myself and forced/disciplined myself to think through the issues, explore possible causes of the conflict and to model the situation. I designed and used facilitating structures to enable me to act as a consultant to myself. All my thinking was done on paper as it were. By five or six am I had formulated in words and in a diagrammatic model an analysis of the issues and the situation, possible ways forward and their pros and cons and the choices to be made: in short, I wrote a position paper. Having done so, I felt deeply satisfied. I had honoured my consultancy role. I was exhausted but energized! I showed my work to John Gladwin as soon as I could after an hour’s rest and said I wanted a hearing, indeed that in my role as consultant I deserved one and I demanded it as my right. The Chairman reluctantly agreed and gave me an all-too brief time. There was a mutual acknowledgment of my contribution which I believe was used. (I had written it up briefly and had it duplicated as I remember). It is still painful. It was not the last time that Peter Selby let me down (he became a trustee of Avec from 1989-1996).

One of the lessons which I learnt at a great price was: whenever possible to have a colleague consultant who is from the culture of the group and persona grata to them. (I didn’t in Zimbabwe and paid a price for it; I did in Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria and was greatly rewarded as was the consultancy work).

II. PRINCIPAL EFFECTS ON MY VOCATION AND WORK

²¹So far much of what I have written related to class issues is about growing up and being educated in a working class community and culture (Sections 4 and 5) and my becoming middle class (Section 5.1-5). In these passages I tend to emphasize the difficulties and disadvantages of my working class beginnings and background. This presents a one-sided and somewhat distorted view of the complex way in which I have related and continue to relate to my working class heritage. I am variously: proud of it; I love some aspects of it and thoroughly identify with them, dislike others and distance myself from them and disown them; I am thankful for much that I received from and through it and regret and resent the disadvantages associated with it. These aspects additional to those already discussed in this section came to mind through further reflection.

1. Social credibility with working class people

First, I have used my working class background quite extensively at different times, in a range of circumstances to my advantage. Quite unashamedly, in the 60s, 70s and 80s, when I was deeply involved in church and community development I used it to gain credence, acceptability and status. At that time those on the left wing of community action, development and work and some radicals in the church were on the side of working class people and strangely attracted to their culture which they (we) tended to idealize and exalt. (Rubbishing middle class culture tended to go hand in hand with this). Such people highly identified themselves with working class people and their struggles for survival, betterment and development. They stood up for them and with them. I associated myself with much of this. So it was an enormous advantage to be from the working class; in today's jargon it was 'cool'. It was assumed that such a heritage meant automatically that you had relevant experiential knowledge and understanding of that culture which made for a better worker. It was commonly thought that it enabled you to speak for working class people, to stand by them, to be for them, to interpret them and their culture in ways in which people of other classes and culture could not and able all to be acceptable to them and accepted by them. Whilst there is some truth in this, more for some people than others, it did not always follow that those with a working class heritage had these attributes, especially when they had spiralled out of their native culture and had become thoroughly at home in middle class society and lived a middle class style. Nonetheless, and side-stepping for a moment how much of this applies to me personally and how I assess my ability to work with people of different classes and cultures, my working class heritage of itself gave me and those like me credentials and status in the milieu I have described denied to those of a middle class and upwards background. Uncritically and quite unashamedly I capitalized on this: I boasted about my origins when it was to my advantage and the causes I exposed and I pulled rank against some middle class people. To my great discredit I did just this to Dorothy Household, possible to compensate for a sense of the inadequacies my background induced in my association with middle class people, until she despaired, and to a lesser extent to Catherine Widdicombe. God forgive me. Dorothy was able, if not more so than me to get alongside working class people and for that matter those of any class: there was a classlessness about her way of relating. Catherine too has similar abilities, and certainly can get along with those from upper classes much better and more naturally than I can.

And I did these things even when I was disenchanted with my background and depressed and frustrated by the ways in which inhibited growth and development of individuals, communities and churches.

2. Engendered commitment to helping disadvantaged people

The second aspect is that from 1962 onwards when I went to minister in South London at Sydenham and Anerley, I became increasingly more committed to working with deprived people of any class or society. That story will emerge in Section 9. Two things from that early period, however, illuminate the theme of this section. Through my experiences with ‘skinheads’ in Parchmore I realized that I could not work with them for development directly. My working class background did not enable me to do this. Progress was made by working with and through an intermediary, Dan Rodney. Dan was acceptable to the skinheads and to us as they and we were to him. He could and wished to relate to both the skinheads, to me and the other youth workers. Without this working arrangement he would not have achieved as much as he did with the skinheads and we would have been made to pursue our developmental agenda and purposes. Nor would I and the church people have had anything but negative relationships with the skinhead young people.

Dan built bridges. A never to be forgotten experience illustrates this. Dan took over the club for this group after the most awful aggressive behaviour had led to police involvement and to the closure of the Centre.²² For several months on Dan’s advice I did not attend the club nights as I had done previously and been abused. Eventually he said I could attend. By this point he had established his authority. When I entered the club, dressed in a clinical collar, he greeted me warmly, turned to a group of members who had gathered round in their typical aggressive manner, extended his arm, gave the thumbs up sign and said in broad South London accent, “He’s alright, he’s straight”. That is all. They dispersed and from that point onwards I had good quite open relationships with many if not most of them. (I became quite emotional as I wrote that story). That was an incredible privileged experience which taught me a profound and solitary lesson about my limitations in bridging and crossing cultural divides and about relational ways of doing so which of themselves build communities.

²² This is described in detail in PhD thesis. See also *Human & Religious Factors in Church and Community Work*, pg 29-32

The other thing is that beyond any other attribute, acquired or endowed, the one which has enabled me to work with people, those with whom I have much in common and those from whom I differ, is the non-directive approach, more of that later. But here I simply note that it is that approach, not class, religion or education, which is the master key to creative inter formal relationships. And for that gift I am eternally thankful to the Battens.

²³This is an appropriate point to return to the issue I sidestepped earlier, the ways in which my background helped and hindered me in my work with people. The task of making an assessment intimidates me. All I can do here is to record the thoughts emerging as I write this piece as a contribution to that task. ²⁴ In some ways my background helps me to get on with working class people (as does my engineering and National Service experiences do). It enables me to form relationships and to bond with people with similar origins quite spontaneously through sharing and comparing details of our histories and anecdotes about domestic, community, industrial and lives – even when our current positions, jobs and ways of life are dramatically different. This gives me a head start in forming personal, pastoral and working relationships. However, more than common roots are necessary to capitalize on them. On the other hand my background has at times made it more difficult for me to relate to and engage with some people of other classes, particularly those who are from the upper middle classes and especially those whose culture and form of speech is that representative of high social position and origin, “top drawer”. They variously intimidate and anger and put me at a social disadvantage especially when they adopt superior attitudes and stances. In some circumstances I find myself behaving clumsily and ineptly and at a loss to find the right words; in others ‘chip on my shoulder’ leads me to act aggressively and rudely by way of

23 6.10.10

24 One of the things that intimidate me is the deep seated feeling that I have to do all such things as completely and comprehensively in a rounded way. I know that is impossible, it has considerable power over me for goodwill. It haunts and hounds me, holds me back and drives me forward. Scanning my experience and dredging the depths of every aspect of it sequentially is not the best way of proceeding. As I move on reflecting on different parts of my vocational life as deeply as I can go at various stages I find new insights emerging about previous parts of my life which I thought I had bottomed. Pursuing those is enormously enriching. So scanning of my life is a way of producing deeper and insights into different aspects of it and building up a more comprehensive understanding of the parts and the whole. One consequence of this is that some of the sections grow somewhat haphazardly but they do gather the material which could then be edited into the kind of reflective analysis I would like to be able to produce in one fell swoop.

over compensating behaviour. These things happen far less often now than once they did.

3. Pursued applied studies in communities, cultures and social structures

The third aspect of my responses to class issues is that I started to read voraciously about different classes of societies and community in the early 1960s soon after I started my ministry in South East London and became involved in open youth and community work. It all began seriously through the pioneering research carried out on the Bethnal Green Institute of Community Studies and particularly that undertaken by Peter Willmott and Michael Young. Like so many other people I became excited by their publications such as *Family & Class in a London Suburb*, an epoch making community study published in 1960. (Subsequently I followed Young's innovative writings and much later at a commemorative dinner for Richard Mills I met him. By then he was a peer of the Realm and much feted). Then there were the writings of Richard Hoggart²⁵ and later Jeremy Seabrook²⁶ which were much more directly about the kind of communities in which I grew up. Studying for my PGCE and doing my PhD extended my studies in this field especially through Basil Bernstein's ground break work on socio-linguistics (key articles were "Social Class Differences in the Relevance of Language to Socialization", "A Socio-Linguistic Approach to Learning", "A Socio-Linguistic Approach to Socialization with some reference to Educability". See my PhD thesis pp 673 and 37). Bernstein was the Professor of the Department in which I studied and he lectured to our group and led seminars. We were all greatly excited by his concepts. I used them to great efficiency work in Parchmore. An interesting experience would be to revisit my early life and subsequent development in relation to his findings. Then, in the 1980s and early 90s I read extensively in the field of "community studies" (secular and religious) which flourished for roughly half a century (1920-1970) and was an enormous help to me in my work. I designed a module on it for our Church & Community Development Post Graduate Diploma, lectured on it and got students engaged in their own

25 See *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-class life with special reference to publications and entertainments*, 1957

26 *What Went Wrong: Working People and the Ideals of the Labour Movement*, 1978? Some parts of which had been published earlier in *New Society*, which I used to read. One chapter 5 on Blackburn, which is very near to my home ground, geographically and sociologically. Also there were countless articles through which I first met him.

community studies.²⁷ These were heady days of thoroughgoing academic work into class and other issues in community and social and religious life. It was a very exciting time.

[An earlier incursion into this subject was during my time with the Board of Lay Training when Alfred Gilliver and I wrote three booklets on aspects of community life. (See Section 9:3) Community studies such was unknown to me at that time.]

²⁸WHAT I AM LEARNING FROM THESE NOTES ON CLASS ISSUES

Class and cultural issues have been and to a much less extent still are tetchy ones for me, very much as education has been. They variously disturb, irritate, intimidate and challenge me; they have held me back but they have also stimulated growth in my spiritual, personal and professional lives. Writing these notes has proved to be much more difficult intellectually and emotionally than I had expected. But it has also been revealing, healing and given me a better purchase on the issues. I feel much more on top of them and better able to understand and handle them responsively and proactively.

One thing which has emerged is, that first as with my abiding regrets and needs for appreciation, I dwell on class issues and aspects of my background selectively: I fasten on issue to another out of context with the cluster of positive and negative of interrelated ones. Result — distorted feelings, moods and perspectives; I am off-balance; I talk and act irrespectively. The various issues are an interactive system.

This aspect of selective recall reminds me of the way my Auntie Constance's memory worked in the last few years of her life. On one visit, for instance, when she was in the Home at the top of the hill in Breadsall, she would talk happily and with perfect recall of her days at Leylands but would have not been able to remember her brother, my father. On another visit the reverse would be true. Eventually, when she had come to understand and accept the way in which her memory was functioning or malfunctioning, she would say when she could not recall vital parts of her

²⁷ A paper I wrote in September 1991 for the course members surveys the field and indicates the extent of my work is set in the context of other disciplines and fields of any operation. Another copy with notes of my lectures etc is on the shelf files on the subject.

²⁸ 16.10.10

life, “It will all come back to me later”. Selective disconnected recall!

Another thing I have become aware of is that all these class issues, and other similar ones, are closely related to fundamental psychological and spiritual issues in my life and characteristics of my personality. Indeed they are manifestations of the mixture nature syndromes. What, for instance, are the respective contributions to how I have and continue to respond to class and culture and the kind of person I have become of my inherent personality traits and my class background and initial education? What would have been the outcome had I been more extroverted? I do not know.

Computing and calibrating the complex interaction between these aspects of ones being and experience is simply not possible and it is probably not profitable. Nor, therefore, is it always possible to discern whether responses to situation derive from or is displaced from one’s nature or nurture. Determining and understanding the various ways in which one is interacting with events is made more difficult because changes between inner convictions, personal orientation, understanding and behavioural patterns take place at different rates: they are not always synchronized (in ‘sync’) or in harmony; they can in fact be in conflict or tension. Consequently, the psycho-spiritual-behavioural dynamics can be complex and impenetrable.

These reflections are helping me to understand and make several transitions in my thinking about and approach to class issues and my experience of them. The shifts can be roughly profiled in the following way:

FROM	TO
A deeply embedded and somewhat indulgent propensity to polarize my experience and my attitudes.	Conceiving and seeing them holistically and contextually.
Confusing and confounding my various internal and external experiences of and responses to issues.	Distinguishing and differentiating between them.
Selecting aspects and factors indiscriminately and unconsciously.	Conscious awareness of my propensity to do this and the dangers of doing so.

FROM	TO
Personalizing issues.	Socializing and contextualizing them.
Assuming that my experience of class should be singular (i.e. belonging to one class or another).	Accepting the rich tapestry of plurality and the unitive and eclectic conformation of my class make up – and rejoicing in them!
Being regretful, conflictual and judgmental.	More graciously accepting my origins with their advantages and disadvantages, enjoying what I have become and have, and, in the light of these reflections aspiring to make better creative responses to my past and to future class issues.
Analysing.	Constructing.

