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Being a Christian in the North East

In this article Liz Hoare attempts to describe dominant features of Christianity in the North East of England. The North East is itself a region that contains great diversity, past and present, in its Christian presence. The author draws on themes from the lives and mission of northern saints and churches past to reflect on both the post-industrial settings in the cities and the decline of the northern rural economy encountered today. She concludes that the region affects perceptions, distinctively shaping worship and mission.

‘...we were discovering in a torrent of questions that we liked not only the same things, but the same parts of it and in the same way; that both knew the stab of Joy and that, for both, the arrow was shot from the North’. (C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*)¹

Introduction

Is there a north-south divide, or is it all in the imagination and folklore of the English? As I begin to write this, hosepipe bans have just come into force in the south. Here in North Yorkshire rain is pouring down and some of my neighbours are watching the nearby streams with trepidation in case they rise and flood their homes as they did last year. Does a difference in climate – and it is chillier and less forgiving in the north than the south, of that there is no doubt, make for differences in people and culture? Does the fact that we pronounce our vowels differently mean we are different at a deeper level? And does any of this matter for the mission of the Christian Church or the spirituality of the individual Christian?

Theological framework

My own Christian upbringing in the northeast, first in an independent Baptist church followed by various Anglican churches, has coloured my perception of the gospel as I have sought to apply it to life and experience here. I begin from the assumption that there is one Gospel and a reminder that God speaks his work to the north and the south, and also the east and the west (Isa. 43:5,6). How the Christian faith is heard and lived out in the north depends on perceptions of life here and attitudes formed by culture, history, economics and indeed climate. My approach has inevitably led to an emphasis on incarnational aspects of the Christian faith, but the cross in all its

1 C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, Fontana, London 1959, p97.

dimensions from suffering to resurrection is firmly present too. I want to affirm what is good and draw attention to what the Gospel challenges and critiques.²

Method

It quickly became clear that there is more than one northern culture and that anything I wrote about it would not apply to the entire northern region. Therefore I decided that I could only write about the northeast, not least because that is where I have spent nearly all my life and it is what I know best. Roughly the area under consideration covers the dioceses of Newcastle, Durham and York and stretches from the Tyne to the Humber. Such an area would have been familiar to St Bede, the Father of Church history, as Northumbria. Rather than comparing north and south at every point, it seemed best to proceed by describing some key features of life in the north and drawing conclusions for Christian life and witness in this region.

It was vital, however, to glean information from those who have not spent their whole lives here in order to be as objective as possible. I mentioned to fifteen people that I was writing about being a Christian in the north and asked for their response. The fifteen individuals questioned included those who have lived here all their lives, those who have moved here from elsewhere, those who have left the north and moved south and one who travels around the country regularly. They included Anglicans and non-conformists, lay and ordained. No one was puzzled by the question and responses were immediate and emphatic. There are indeed some clear differences from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Most mentioned differences in similar areas and what follows draws on their responses.

I have not relied on statistics, nor will the reader find lists of facts or graphs as to where the northeast figures in the national state of things. The article is unashamedly impressionistic which will infuriate some and delight others. It seems to me that what it feels like to live in the northeast is important, whether or not the statistics question the felt moods.

Ecclesiastical history

The first distinctive feature of the northeast is the story of the coming of Christianity to the region. A great deal of ink has been spilled telling and re-telling the story of Celtic Christianity and it has gained a lot of romance and outright distortion in the process³. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that there are important aspects of the coming of Christianity to these parts which were different and which still leave their imprint on the life of the region. Being a Christian in the northeast means being acutely conscious of certain places associated with the early days of Christian mission in these islands as a whole: Lindisfarne, Whitby, Hartlepool, Lastingham, Hackness, York. Scotland, too, is just over the border with Iona and its Celtic influence. Moreover, Northumbria was a major player in the story of Europe in the early centuries of Christian mission there and all that followed. In

2 For a helpful picture of the kind of theological balance I am seeking cf A. Bartlett, *Humane Christianity*, DLT, London 2004, esp ch 6.

3 cf I. Bradley, *Making Myths and Chasing Dreams*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1999, for a useful survey of how Celtic Christianity has been interpreted at different point in history.

the northeast, there are to be found churches named after northern saints: Aidan, Hilda, Cuthbert, Oswald. Not all of these were Celts, but they were shaped by the Celtic way of being Christian. St Augustine and his companions began their mission in the south in 597, the year that St Columba, abbot of Iona, died. St Paulinus who was part of that mission reached as far north as York, while Celtic missionaries in their turn travelled south to the Wash. Thus even here there is overlap and ambiguity. Whatever the recent resurgence of interest in Celtic spirituality might suggest, these early witnesses were not propagating two different versions of Christianity, although there were different nuances and customs. Today there remains a strong sense of affinity with the northern saints and a real consciousness of being linked with them down the centuries. Many churches have chosen to tell the story of the coming of Christianity to the north as a way of sharing faith with today's generations: St Aidan's at Bamburgh, St Hilda's at Hartlepool are two fine examples. During the early nineties, I was asked to give a talk on Celtic Christianity to a study group at a church just north of Newcastle. They listened politely while I told them about the Celts' love of scripture, their high crosses, their strong sense of the supernatural world, their prayers which they had for every aspect of daily life and so on. At the end when I invited questions, someone blurted out: 'So what's special about all that?' I had been telling them what they already knew, the essence of the faith which sustained them, and they understood full well what they owed to the saints who had walked there before them. It is important to go on building on this strong sense of identity and encouraging a sense of connectedness with a past that is positive and Christian. There is much that resonates with the present in the rediscovery of Celtic Christianity: a strong sense of community, lay participation, sitting loosely to structures which do not match reality, and an affinity with the natural world and creativity which embraces the whole of life. There is a sense of something fresh, even though it is about our roots, something which provides an alternative from mainstream organized religion.⁴

Power and authority.

In 616 Prince Oswald fled to Iona where he became a Christian. When he returned to Northumbria to reclaim his throne in 633, he sought help from the monks of Iona to bring Christianity to his people. This request inaugurated the Irish mission which was primarily responsible for converting Northumbria and also made an important contribution to the conversion and thereby the culture of England as a whole. The first bishop who came could not make headway with the stubborn people of the north of England, but eventually St Aidan, who advocated a gentler approach made his way to Oswald's kingdom along with twelve companions. The king gave him the island of Lindisfarne for a monastery and episcopal seat, close to the royal residence of Bamburgh. Oswald was also important politically for the north, as he united the two parts of Northumbria: Bernicia and Deira and other Anglo-Saxon kings acknowledged his overlordship. Oswald and Aidan worked closely together. Sometimes the king accompanied the monk on his missionary journeys as his interpreter.

4 For example, awareness of the Northumbria Community, whose influence in the mainstream Church is widespread.

Such authority has not always won the Church friends in the north. Durham exercised huge influence throughout the north until the Reformation. It held patronage and lands and its continued political place in the scheme of things was designed to instil awe and obedience. Driving along the roads towards County Durham and being told that we are now entering the 'Land of the Prince Bishops' is viewed with ambivalence by many Christians. Durham Cathedral continues to dominate the skyline for many residents of the north as well as passing travellers on the train. It stands as a witness to the glory of God, but also a powerful symbol of the temporal as well as the spiritual might of the Church in former times. Being a Christian in the northeast means being conscious of holding power in the past and coming to terms with a certain powerlessness in the present. It means acknowledging good and bad in our heritage and going back again to the Gospel to hear the word of God critique the place of power in the Christian church and in our personal lives.

Culture and learning.

The story of the early days of the Christian faith was preserved for us by St Bede, who spent practically all of his life in the twin monasteries of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, though these establishments were by no means parochial or isolated from the wider world. Through the efforts of the founding abbot, Benedict Biscop (628-689), who was a scholar and patron of the arts, books, manuscripts and ecclesiastical artifacts were brought to the north of England and there was regular traffic between here and Europe. Benedict was from a noble Northumbrian family and became a monk following a visit to the monastery at Lerins in the south of France, visited by so many early Christian monks. Benedict had been to Rome with Wilfrid (c633-709) and went again on a number of occasions. He was abbot of Canterbury for a short time. He brought Frankish stonemasons to Northumbria to build his monasteries besides glassmakers and other craftsmen. He drew up a rule for his community which was based on that of St Benedict and the customs of the seventeen monasteries he had visited on the continent. He even brought the archcantor of St Peter's Rome to teach the monks by word and writing the roman liturgy and uncial script. With a track record such as this one is tempted to imagine that the northeast was far more outward looking then than now. Being a Christian in the northeast means continuing to value and build on this precious heritage of culture, learning and biblical understanding. It means looking beyond our boundaries and having our vision expanded from far away places and cultures. There has been considerable cultural regeneration in the region, Gateshead being an outstanding example. What does this mean for Christian faith and witness today?

Past and present

One of the essential tasks of being Christians in the northeast is to relate our history to that of the scriptural account of how God has revealed himself in time. The need to be in constant dialogue so that each enlightens our understanding of the other. Both scripture and the history of the Church in the north will interrogate us and challenge us as to our own situation. We may recognize the privileges we have

and may also hear the particular call to discipleship which living in this region puts upon us.⁵

Poor relations?

Comment about the lack of material wealth in the northeast compared with the south was made by everyone I questioned. The demise of so much that brought prosperity to the region with its accompanying job losses and other demoralizing effects limits choice and enterprise. Until recently, for example, the region had the lowest percentage of small business in the UK. There is a tradition of loyalty and obedience in the northeast which is partly a product of the enormous dominance of heavy industry.⁶

In North Yorkshire loyalty and obedience takes on a feudal feel. The owner of 'the big house' in the village may still exercise huge influence on the community, including that of the parish church where he is likely to be churchwarden. (I know of one village where the timing of the PCC depends on when the local squire has his dinner.) This can easily lead to a lack of initiative and a reluctance to take any responsibility.

There is money about but often it is in the hands of people who spend rather than generate wealth for they made it elsewhere and moved to Yorkshire to enjoy the good life. Children from such families are often sent away to school, usually in the south. But wealth affects spirituality as well. A lack of initiative in the economic realm can have the same hold in the ecclesiastical and spiritual. Many clergy will be familiar with the experience that their congregations are happy being led. Indeed, one church I know regularly complains about the lack of strong leadership. When trying to encourage another congregation to embrace a more collaborative approach to ministry, one woman announced it was being introduced because the clergy had grown lazy.

There is only a handful of Anglican churches in the northeast that are large enough to employ their own staff or act independently if they chose. We may dream great dreams, but it is more difficult to translate them into reality when the cashflow is not there. Being a Christian in the north east means coming to terms with this situation and moving forward in spite of it.

Christians in the northeast felt like 'poor relations' said one person. 'We miss out'. This can lead to a narrow parochialism which would shock many better-informed churches. One parish priest noted that his church still hadn't heard of Graham Kendrick.

'Down south'

For many northerners the south holds few attractions, save the possibility of jobs. Nevertheless, there is a perception that everything happens in the south and this too spills over into the Christian Church. We are remote from where the money, the

5 I have been unable to track down a lecture given by the Rt Revd Alec Graham shortly before he retired as bishop of Newcastle which examined key characteristics of the region. Briefly he identified positive traits which could easily become negative ones.

Hence a strong sense of identity can turn into parochialism, for example.

6 In the same lecture, Bishop Alec spoke of loyalty which easily becomes a lack of self-confidence and initiative.

power and the action lies. Most of the big Christian events; New Wine, Green Belt, tours by Christian artists, and so on, take place in the south. Resources are based in the south. So frustrated were we at the lack of training for spiritual directors in the northeast, that myself and another minister in Yorkshire started our own course which now continues under other auspices and has never been short of applicants.

The fact that there are fewer courses on spiritual issues available for people to attend may be because people cannot afford them and regard them as optional extras for those with time and money on their hands. It is harder, for instance to generate interest in subjects to do with the arts in the region, though they seem to be plentiful in retreat houses in the south.⁷

Perceptions about the north-south divide work both ways. Just as northerners think everything happens in the south, so many southerners imagine that nothing happens in the north. There is an image problem which is difficult to dispel even. But live here? Brrrr! I trained for the Anglican ministry at a theological college in the south (relatively speaking) and of my year only two of us returned to the north. Most of my peers did not even consider looking at the northern province.

On the margins

The Celts are often referred to as people on the margins. Hostile invaders drove them to the edges of the British Isles: Ireland, Wales, Scotland and to some extent the northeast. One of the myths of the Celtic story is that if Britain had followed the Celtic tradition at the Synod of Whitby in 664 when King Oswy was persuaded by the oratory of Wilfrid to go with Rome instead the future of the Church in Britain would have been very different. In fact the synod was a small affair and it was unlikely that the British Church could have survived without being connected to the Church in Europe. The perception that the Celts were marginalized is the important point, however, and that sense of marginalisation goes on to this day. It is a feeling that can induce a strong sense of identity as already noted, but this may also turn in on itself and produce regional parochialism. Being 'up against it' reinforces that sense of 'us' and 'them'.

In the York diocese, the size of congregations does nothing to dispel this feeling. 90% of churches have fewer than 30 people attending on a Sunday. In London these congregations would not now be considered viable. Small numbers have many positive implications: better pastoral care, closer relationships and so on, but also fewer resources and less self-confidence. There are many beautiful church buildings but, once again, money looms large as their upkeep is contemplated.

Signs of life

How may we speak of God to people who feel powerless and deprived of resources? A number of those questions commented on the toughness of the spirituality of northerners. A 'gritty faith' said one. The spirituality of people in

⁷ Compare what is available in *Retreats* magazine, which publishes annual programmes and events in over 200 retreat houses, the majority of which are in the south.

the northeast is down-to-earth, based on a faith that works and helps people cope with their everyday lives with its ups and downs. This characteristic is not unrelated to a sense of being on the edge of things. I do not detect a spirituality-as-therapy atmosphere among northerners, rather a 'does it work?' attitude. It is a faith which endures. It has shown itself to persevere in the past and many Christians get on with life in spite of everything. In the material West, where we are surprised when adversity strikes, perhaps northerners have something to say about hope that does not disappoint because it has been refined in the furnace of suffering and endurance. (Rom. 5:3-5). Being a Christian in the northeast means walking by a faith which is injected with a note of realism.

In the face of this kind of outlook, perhaps what the people of the north need to hear more is the compassion of God and to see it lived out in the life of the churches. It is good to note then, that there are plenty of signs of new life in the north. There is as much interest here in fresh expressions of church, for example, as in the south. Once again resources are an issue, for there is a need for some full-time posts to pioneer new ways of being church, but on the ground being a Christian in the north does not only mean clinging to traditional ways. Ecumenical co-operation is also high with Yorkshire and the northeast leading the way for the rest of the country. In the countryside, being a Christian in the northeast could mean attending church in the morning and chapel in the afternoon. Such close relations have brought Christians of different persuasions closer and enabled them to overcome barriers to find strength together.

Community

One noticeable feature of the northern saints is that they were peripatetic, whilst on the whole, saints associated with the south tended to be static. There has been an interesting reversal here since people in the north are less likely to have moved far from home. One of the features of the Christianity of the early Celts was the emphasis on community. The Irish form of the Church, which found success when St Patrick based his mission in Ireland on tribal connections rather than the non-existent towns which was the continental practice, was continued by Aidan and others here in the northeast. Community life is still strong in the north and commented on. Community values seem to have survived better than in the south. It is not a myth that perfect strangers tell you their life story while waiting for the bus in the northeast, or that people greet one another in the street. Grandmothers and other extended family members are often around to help with child-rearing and family networks are noticeable in both town and countryside. In North Yorkshire there are villages where one name is dominant and many people are related by marriage. It is important to know who is and isn't on good terms within these complicated family networks and to read carefully. In many communities, including some which might be classed as suburbs of larger towns, people know their neighbours, they greet each other in the street, visit those who are confined to the house and know what is going on. It still takes at least 30 years for an incomer to be regarded as local in every village I have encountered across Yorkshire and beyond. This certainly has implications for clergy who move around a lot.

What overall effect, if any, does all this have on the Church? Does the fact that you are likely to find yourself chatting to a stranger on the bus in a northern town translate into friendly and welcoming churches? Not necessarily so, would be the experience of many I have spoken to and churches can be as excluding in tightly knit communities as anywhere else, perhaps more so, especially with 'new' people from the south who bring 'new' ideas. Community can easily turn into clubbishness.

More important is the fact that many people who attend church in such communities do not locate their sense of belonging in the church, because they already have a sense of being rooted beyond it. On the other hand, the churches do not have to contend for a place in the community. They have always been there and they are part of the furniture. This means Christians can get on with the job of being salt and light and get involved in local issues as the church without apology. The Church is still expected to play a part in civic life and does so. Clergy still command a modicum of respect and can represent kingdom values to the wider community as a matter of course. All this is enormously important for the mission of the Church, but cannot be taken for granted for ever. The northeast is changing and old-fashioned values such as those just outlined will not survive without cultivation. Being a Christian in the northeast means valuing what is good in our communities and building on it.

Women and community

As far as women are concerned, the northeast has a traditional feel, both in the workplace and the domestic sphere. In the Church, women are not conspicuous in senior posts. As far as lay women are concerned the work of Ellen Clark-King among women in one region of the northeast is key. She noted in her book, *Theology by Heart: Women, the Church and God*,⁸ that of the women she interviewed from four congregations in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, their self-perception was founded on their place within an interlocking network of relationships – as daughter, mother, aunt etc.⁹ This relationality extended to strangers when they entered the community but hardly to those outside. These relationships are described as 'embodied, and often embattled, real rather than idealistic.'¹⁰ Clark-King goes on to discuss the image of God as seen by these working-class women. He is characterized as strongly male but also as being in relationship. God is experienced as involved in their lives; he listens, cares and breaks into their world to work for the good of those who petition him. He is a God whose prime imperative is seen not as ensuring human flourishing by means of social change, but, rather, ensuring the individual's flourishing via personal encounter and assurance. Clark-King points out that the immanent God who is known in a personal encounter that retains a perceptible transcendent character calls for the church to be a space for the vertical relationship between the individual and her or his God.¹¹

Industry

It is often thought that Celtic Christianity, at least as we interpret it for today, is something of a rural idyll: fluffy clouds floating by, sheep safely grazing and Celtic

8 Ellen Clark-King, *Theology by Heart: Women, the Church and God*, Epworth, Peterborough 2004.

9 *Theology by Heart*, p191.

10 *Theology by Heart*, p195.

11 *Theology by Heart*, p196.

saints writing poetry beside still waters. The northern countryside with its rugged scenery illustrates the reality. Another sharp reminder that it was never like the image lies close to where I live: a sleepy village of less than one hundred inhabitants now, but once a busy mining community of over six hundred people supplying ironstone. The church is named St. Wilfrid's, but the industry was well-established by the time of its foundation and probably existed before the Christian faith arrived here. The whole of the northeast was once an industrial area and was justly proud of its contribution not only to the rest of England but on a worldwide scale. Yorkshire too was a producer: the East Riding has some of the richest agricultural land in the country. Coal, ship-building, heavy industry, and of course wool all contributed to the world economy and helped the people of the northeast to feel that they had a stake in things.

At the end of the 1970s Margaret Kane wrote a study of the northeast entitled *Gospel in an industrial society*.¹² I revisited it to write this and was struck by Kane's candour in seeking a witness for the Christian church in this region which was faithful to the Gospel and real in people's experience. She recognized much that was dark and difficult, close to despair even, but also perceived signs of hope. Time and again she calls for integrity of word and action.¹³ It is perfectly possible in the northeast, as anywhere else in our western society, to be a wholly individualistic kind of Christian, preoccupied with a purely personal relationship with Jesus. But as Kane states: 'So long as the church insists on thinking only in terms of saving individuals and does not take account of the different groups and cultures to which people belong, it will fail in its mission to industrial society.'¹⁴ A moment's reflection on the nature of the northeast makes it difficult to maintain that God is only interested in saving souls and not also interested in transforming communities. Much has happened in the quarter century since Kane wrote. New technology has brought some regeneration to areas which had their identities shaped by the heavy industry of a previous age. Yet it is difficult to see that the new sources of labour have provided the same sense of purpose and identity which has been lost. Being a Christian in the northeast means being thrown back upon our identity in Christ, rather than depending on power and success from the world's point of view.

The Church has traditionally been seen as failing to adapt to industrial society and losing ground in these areas. Hence the early strength of non-conformity, true in the northeast as in other parts of the country. My own perspective from a rural part of North Yorkshire is that the Church is now struggling in rural areas to a similar degree. Paucity of resources and a sense that the countryside is not 'where the action is' is giving rise to a demoralized Church. Another side to this, however, is that while many Methodist chapels have closed down in the countryside, where they have joined forces with the local parish, there has been gain and a wider vision. It is not all bleak by any means.

Conservatism

The huge changes which have taken place in the northeast during the last fifty years have led to a sense of insecurity. A pretty village in North Yorkshire might have no discernible social problems but job security could be a pervading anxiety.

12 Margaret Kane, *Gospel in an industrial society* SCM, London 1980.

13 Kane, *Industrial Society*, p149.

14 Kane, *Industrial Society*, p162.

Translate that to the towns and cities and it should be no surprise that unemployment, or the threat of it, has made many people cling to what they know. It is hard not to hark back to 'the good old days'. The Church is seen as a stable factor in an unstable world. While this makes people more ready to support the church in their community, it makes change in the church all the more difficult. People are much more likely to want the church to remain exactly as it was in their childhood and so are reluctant to countenance anything new or different. Yet that fear can be overcome as the success of 'Fresh Expressions' shows.

On the positive side, as already described, there are attractive throwbacks to another era in some of the conservative attitudes of northerners. The Christian faith is primarily about the other: God first, then our neighbours. Northerners do a reasonable job of following the second commandment but would not necessarily see it in Christian terms. Being a Christian in the northeast means building on these signs that folk are 'not far from the kingdom of God'. The early northern saints were adept at affirming what was good in the world: quick to bless, slow to condemn. It has always seemed to me that there are plenty of bridges provided for us in society and in creation to enable us to meet people halfway so as to earn a hearing when we want to introduce them to Jesus.

Resurrection

Loss is a recurring theme in any consideration of the northeast of England. Loss of industry, loss of pride, loss of identity, the list goes on. We live in a world which glorifies freedom of choice, but when money is tight, choices are far more limited. When people live with loss, they need hope to continue on. Being a Christian in the north means embodying the hope we find in Christ without resorting to trite words or empty gestures. Rather it means staying in the mess with people, seeking out where God is already at work and sharing with him in the struggle to build new hope. It means being attentive to what is going on around us and making that the focus of our praying, our thinking and our actions. It means working with political structures but not expecting new investment to provide all the answers. What does it mean to build a 'good society'?

Although there are signs of regeneration through new investment and enterprise, it takes a more fickle form and lacks the sense of achievement of earlier activity. It certainly does not permit the same sense of identity and purpose as before. The Gospel has profound things to say about (the right kind of) pride, worth and identity, and is well placed to fill the vacuum left by the material basis of what has been lost. While community values still prevail it is important to continue to work at a corporate spirituality to counteract the ever-increasing individualism of our culture.

Transforming Gospel

Where does transformation come into this divine-human relationship? Should the people of the north be content with knowing God in personal, individual ways within the structures of things as they are, or should we be seeking transformation for ourselves and society? Christians from different traditions tend to emphasise one or the other according to their theology and their context. Every point of view

will be found here in the northeast, so Christians inevitably speak with more than one voice. This article has tried to highlight dominant features which make the region a distinctive place to be Christian. There are very positive features of life here which call for celebration, and which provide firm foundations on which to build further. There are some clearly negative features, too. Rather than grumble about them or find ourselves in bondage to them, we can name them and seek Spirit-led change. We may not like change in the northeast, but the Gospel may demand it.

Likethe early Celtic believers, it seems to me that we do not need to wipe the board clean before beginning the task of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. To flourish, people need encouragement and affirmation before they can hear the call to change, to grow, to be transformed. From experience and observation of life as a Christian in the northeast, I am confirmed in my own belief that we must remain hopeful without falling into too much over-realised eschatology. As the Doctrine Commission put it in *The Mystery of Salvation*, 'Both the continuity of creation and salvation, which an emphasis on incarnation highlights, and the discontinuity, which is emphasized by attention to the mystery of the cross and resurrection, are important. The Christian view of the world makes sense only if neither is absolutised.'¹⁵

So the northeast is part of God's story too. This is good news. We have a place in the bigger picture.

A final thought. Jesus spent the first part of his ministry in the north, in Galilee. Though not without its blockages and opposition, the region gave the Lord a theatre in which to teach and heal and proclaim the kingdom of God. Over him lay the shadow of the cross, and death and resurrection ultimately took place in the south, in Jerusalem. The effects, however, are for the whole world. The 'north' had a vital part to play in the story and has left us with a rich treasure house of incidents and discourse on which to feed and grow. Where does the north fit into the great overarching story today and what does it mean to me to be a Christian where I live? It has been a fascinating question to consider. In trying to separate the myths from the facts I have been firmly persuaded that regional perceptions matter.

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15 Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation*, Church House Publishing, London 1995, p56. Quoted in Bartlett, *Humane Christianity*, p129.