

REDISCOVERING THE MUSIC OF THE SILENCE –
WHAT CAN CESAR MANRIQUE'S SPRITUALITY ADD TO
THE RENEWAL OF THE REFORMED SPRITUALITY OF
THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH?

By

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Theology and Religion
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The University of Birmingham
October 2010

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To Janette
with thanks for your love, support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

Spirituality has become a discipline, which in many ways is now separated from religious activity. It has gathered a momentum of its own, whilst at the same time spirituality within churches, particularly the United Reformed Church, appears to be in decline.

The contrast between these activities, inside and outside the church, prompted this investigation. The starting point was the author's personal experience of spiritual renewal through the work of César Manrique in Lanzarote which posed the question, could those experiences be helpful in re-energising the spiritual life of the URC?

Bevans' transcendental model of contextual theology was used to examine and assess Manrique's work in Lanzarote and three measures of Reformed theology, the Bible, prayer, and engagement with the world as the gauge of authenticity. Three things were identified as being particularly relevant to the URC; firstly enabling people to reconnect with, and to value, their traditions; secondly, engagement with the world, through nature, creating places of opportunity for engagement with God and for spiritual renewal; and thirdly, 'discovering the music of the silence' – the process of interior renewal through engagement with the natural world. Ways of implementation and development of these ideas within the URC were examined.

INTRODUCTION

One noticeable feature of modern British society is the exponential growth and explicit interest in 'spirituality', understood broadly as a search for meaning and purpose to life, perhaps including a transcendent referent. In this regard, Cottingham points out that 'spirituality' refers to a wide range of concerns, including those held by purveyors of magical crystals, angelology and astrology, to the simple recognition of a 'creative and meditative space left over when science and technology have satisfied our material needs'. (Cottingham 2005, p.3). Moreover, the attractiveness of 'spirituality' seems to be inversely related to its distance from conventional religion; the latter is seen by many as controversial and questionable, the former, at least in its most inclusive form, as a universal interest, not least because 'spirituality' is generally understood as a praxis rather than a set of dogmas. Further, the growing British interest in spirituality appears to reflect an international trajectory, such that Drane (2005) noted that in 2004 an on-line search for 'spirituality' produced 15 million hits, rising to 27,900,000 hits in 2009. If, as one might suppose, the British churches have been, historically, the dominant vehicle for the resolution of the spiritual questings of the British, what might the growth of spiritual questings outside Christianity and other major faiths say about the contextual adequacy of conventional religion to the spiritual needs of the British people? Might, indeed, the new spiritual paths that some people are exploring be signposts to church renewal? This, it seems to me, is a clue that is worth pursuing. Within each of the major British denominations there is a ferment of concern and action around church renewal, and significant progress has been made. The suggestion that this thesis will explore is that this

process may be assisted by paying attention to and learning from extra-church spiritualities that have proved meaningful to contemporary Europeans. Let a qualification be added; the suggestion is not that we need to jettison our faith and replace it with the non-Christian or the meagrely Christian, but that our Christian traditions may be refreshed and re-orientated through hearing the voice of God as it found in the spiritual sub-cultures which are thriving around us. That is, the thought is that, through encountering the disaffection of the British people, as a whole, with the churches, we might find a catalyst to encountering the voice of God afresh. The idea of encounter here is that of a moment or series of moments where we become intensely aware in a novel way of feelings, fears, expectations, hopes and so on, which will give rise to fresh ways of thinking about the spiritual needs of our time and our own faith and practice as Christians. (Atchley, 2009, pp.1-2). The intention is that the churches might find ways of reconnecting with the spiritual needs of their contexts as they learn from the luxuriant range of vigorous spiritualities found around us in the world. To illustrate this point the present thesis intends to explore a particular spirituality associated with César Manrique which might offer a means of reconnecting British people and their spiritual needs.

Church decline and the growth of extra-church spiritualities

A much noted feature of British church life in the second half of the twentieth century has been the severe numerical decline of the historic denominations. The work of Peter Brierley is key in informing us of the various indices of this decline. To take just one of his publications for indicative purposes, in *Religious Trends 5* (Christian Research, London, 2006), he shows that total Sunday church attendance in England

between 1980 and 2005 declined from 2,099,900 to 1,233,200, and in Scotland from 326,450 to 207,520, whilst the Sunday attendance of under 15s in the same period declined in Great Britain as a whole from 757,090 to 273,060 (p.2.21). Again, the statistics on total UK church membership shows a similar pattern of decline from 6,634,335 (11.5% of population) in 1990, to 5,634,324 (9.4%) in 2005. (p.2.23)

Projecting ahead, Brierley points out that, whilst in 1990 one in 9 of the population was a church member, by 2020 only one in every 14 will be a church member. Moreover, Brierley points out that the age profile of the churches is towards the older aged person, so that the projected decline, on current trends, is set to continue (p.2.23). More specifically, and to focus on the denomination that is at the heart of the current thesis, the URC, Camroux (2009, pp.222-3) reports that in the 30 years since the church's inception in 1973 there was a 64% reduction in adult membership. In 1973 the church 's adult membership stood at 192,136, in 2007 it was 73,503 and in 2009 it was 68,816. Brierley suggests further that the URC's membership in 2020, on current trends, will have declined to 46,200 – only half of what it was in 1990 (p.8.10). Mirroring this latter statistic, Brierley projects a URC ministry 250 strong in 2020, a sobering thought for ministers, congregations, and theological colleges!

Moreover, the seriousness of this decline is further highlighted by the age profile of the URC membership and the declining numbers of children and young people involved with the church. The most recent URC yearbook (United Reformed Church, 2010, pp.14-15) suggests, for example, that over the years from 2000-2010 there had been a 22% decline in the average numbers in Sunday congregations, but a 40% decline in the number of worshipping children.

Mirroring the decline in active involvement with the churches there seems also to have been a decline in Christian belief amongst the population. In this regard Hollinghurst has drawn attention to the statistics offered by the European Values Survey which points to significant change in people's personal beliefs about God. In 1947 80% of those questioned expressed a belief in a life force outside themselves of whom 50% described this as God and 50% as a personal life force. By 2000 the overall figure was 70% with only 20% opting for God. Even more interesting was the analysis of those born in the 1960's and 70's, 68% believed in an external life force but only 10% described this as God, and for those born in the 80' and 90's 65% believed, but only 4% in God.

Whilst some such as Davie have contested the extent to which Britain really is a secular society (Davie, 1994), yet accounting for the decline in the numbers involved with the churches has been a staple of the sociology of religion since the 1960s. In a recent book McLeod (2007) challenges as simplistic the idea that the decline of the churches was an inevitable aspect of the rise of modern society, a view that has been touted by writers such as Wilson (1976) and Bruce (2002). In contrast McLeod argues that the decline of active church participation is multifactorial. He identifies a wide range of contributing factors both within society and in the churches themselves that he argues have contributed to the decline of churches.

In society, he sees mass production, full employment and rising affluence as key factors in bringing about change (McLeod, 2007 p.29). The growth of a youth culture which offered young people a new range of activities away from church-based activities, and the nurturing of attitudes in society that emphasised individual freedom (McLeod, 2007, p.256) have tended to challenge the traditional customs and beliefs

with which the churches were associated. The growth of women's and gay liberation both played their parts in societal changes and attitudes. He makes an important point that since the 1960s many of the younger generation have been growing up with little or no exposure to Christianity in childhood or adolescence. Brown (2001) expressed similar views. McLeod points out that by the end of the 1970's clergy and congregations were predominantly middle-aged and elderly, but churches still had a large number of active participants and a wide social influence (McLeod, 2007, p.256).

Hollinghurst in his analysis of the decline in churches also picks up the issue that children and young people no longer have any church experience or connection (Hollinghurst, 2010, p.11) and that they are becoming members of the unchurched rather than dechurched communities (those who have had connections but are no longer active).

The decline in church religion has been matched, as has been suggested above, by a rise in interest in 'spirituality'. We may surmise, as Cottingham suggests, that the decline in Christian belief and practice is related to the growth in the discourse of spirituality. Historically in the UK, Christianity and spirituality were likely to be closely linked, such that many people would seek and find meaning and purpose through their association with the churches, not least through the occasional offices. It can be opined that the declining reach of the churches over the recent past, as testified by Brierley's statistics, partly explains why the concern with spirituality has become dispersed in a number of forms beyond the churches themselves. Clearly the churches have continued to cultivate their own traditions of spirituality, closely tied to traditional ideas of belief and practice, but for many the quest for spiritual fulfilment

has become disassociated from conventional religious observance, activity or link. This recognition of the quest for spiritual fulfilment, as a valid activity in its own right, has led to the rise in the growth of a myriad forms of spiritual quest, each claiming authenticity and value. In parallel with this increase in the quest for spiritual meaning and purpose in people's lives has been a rapid decline in traditional forms of religious observance. This spiritual quest, which Armstrong describes as:

'the need to step outside of the norm, 'to seek out ekstasis' is still very strong in the human psyche, but is no longer sought in a religious setting but in music dance, art, sex, drugs or sport'. (Armstrong 2009 p.19).

is according to Hardy, writing about religious awareness, a biological phenomenon and very much part of our natural being (Hardy, 1979).

It seems that whereas the churches have been in decline, the need for a spiritual dimension in life, whether or not it includes notions of God or what Hick calls the 'real' continues to be an important part of many people's lives, a need of individuals and groups of people. As Cottingham suggests, there is an on-going and socially accepted need for a sense of meaning and purpose that extends beyond the satisfaction of material needs. Newbiggin (1990, p.7) argues that this surge in interest in spirituality may reflect a reaction against the mechanistic understanding of life promoted by 'modernity', though he also holds that some of its expressions are narcissistic with an over-emphasis on self-fulfillment to the exclusion of broader concerns.

A recent piece of empirical research that confirms the vibrancy of the spiritual quest in Britain was that undertaken between October 2000 and June 2002, into the religious activities of people living in the Cumbrian town of Kendal, which had a population of 27,610 in 1999. A team from Lancaster University undertook a

longitudinal study of this typical English town, from which they suggested that they could draw inferences applicable to the whole of England. Their study was presented as a snapshot of English religiosity in the early 21st Century. In this regard they found that there was still much church-related activity going on, but that, in line with national statistics, there was a pattern of decline in attendance at church – 50% down over the period from 1987 to 2001 (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005). Alongside the churches and their declining constituency there existed however 53 other groups affiliated with some sort of ‘spiritual’ activity, ranging from aromatherapy to pagan activities, Taizé singing, and yoga. The network of new spiritual groups had grown dramatically from 1987 to 2001 from an initial 30 people, by 2001 there were 126 people involved in new forms of spiritual quest - an increase of 300% in the ‘holistic milieu’ .

The question of why there has been a growth in new forms of spirituality remains an open one. McCarthy, writing from an American perspective, identifies four specific factors that may have been particularly important, and her analysis is at least suggestive for the British context (McCarthy, 2000, pp.194-195). Firstly, there is the postmodern consciousness, which is to do with the recognition of the particularity of every perspective, shaped by local cultures and histories. Secondly, there is the globalising effect of contemporary forms of communication. The possibility of the global travel of goods and people underpins the awareness of diversity that is integral to the postmodern experience. For instance in America there is a widening interest in Native American spirituality, and in Britain that the perception of diversity has legitimised the recovery of what are perceived to be the indigenous religions of Britain. One of the largest in Britain today, claiming 40,000 adherents

(Times Educational Supplement 2007), is 'paganism', a collection of religious practices that includes witchcraft and wicca.

Thirdly, the advent of space travel has allowed humans to grasp, on the one hand the extraordinary beauty, unity and vulnerability of the Earth and, on the other, the smallness of our planet in the vast expanse of space. This change of perspective is epitomised in the famous photo of the Earth sent back by astronauts from the surface of the moon. Moreover the awareness of the darker aspects of technology, seen most evidently in the development of weapons of mass destruction, the stripping of the Earth of its natural resources and the use of factory techniques in the various mass killings of the 20th century, have led many to question ideas of progress and unlimited growth. In this regard, the turning from modern myths of inevitable progress has opened the way for people to reconsider pre-modern forms of spiritual quest and wisdom. In this regard the association of Christianity with modernity may be one reason why people are turning from the churches to other forms of spirituality.

Fourthly, the awareness of human cruelty that is inescapable in the face of the holocaust, ethnic cleansing, racism and other such phenomena has lent an urgency to the spiritual quest of our generation.

A challenge and opportunity

If we think of the spiritual sphere as a marketplace, then we are likely to think of the growth of new, extra-church spiritualities in Britain as a challenge to be countered. However, in this thesis there is an intention to take a different tack. Following McCarthy (2000, p.195) I choose to regard the growth of new spiritualities as proving the catalyst or opportunity for Christians to retrieve an authentic, contextually relevant

form of spirituality. In pursuing this possibility we do, however, need to be guided by a clear sense of the tradition within which we stand; take heart from the straws already in the wind, and work with a clear sense of theological method allowing us to be creative whilst staying with what is theologically justifiable.

The place of tradition

Kaufman (1993) has pointed out that we cannot address matters of the spirit without a language in which to speak. This is to say that the issue of how to develop a contextually relevant spirituality should not give rise to the search for a spiritual Esperanto – a novel and neutral language that will try to appeal to all people. Rather, we must speak in our own language, but seek to develop our speech and practice in ways which will connect with the people of our place and time. Keeping faith with the deepest insights and values of our tradition, we must develop that tradition to meet the challenges of the time. This it seems to me is the task and, indeed, there are already many voices urging the Western churches towards such a perception of the contemporary task. Some stress that in order to meet the spiritual hungers of our age it is imperative that Christians remind themselves of their own spiritual inheritance. McGrath, (1993), for instance, has written of the need for evangelicals to recover the ‘past glories’ of their heritage in this respect. Again, Hinson (Allen 2004, p.16.), speaking from his lifetime experience of mission in the Baptist tradition in America, urges particular traditions to strengthen their roots in their own history in order to provide a secure personal faith identity for their members. This is of particular relevance to this essay since many members of the URC, as will be discussed in detail later, expressed insecurity in being able to share, or even discuss, their faith

with others. Stortz, addressing a Lutheran conference on 'Wellsprings of Lutheran Spirituality,' advocated that Christians should remember the symbolism and meaning of the basic elements of their faith. The Lord's Supper she advocates (Stortz, 2007, p.170), is holy food, not simply eaten but shared, and she defines Eucharistic living as: 'a practice of blessing in the midst of a banquet of beggars'. Through the Eucharist, Christians are changed; as she says (Stortz, 2007, p.171) 'marked for blessing' living in generosity, giving and receiving both blessings and bread. Through Baptism we become part of a new community, the body of Christ in the world, reaching out to our neighbours and to the world (Stortz, 2007, p.178).

Alongside the concern to recover the Christian traditions of spirituality there have been some instructive attempts to reconnect the Christian heritage with the spiritual needs of the time. The indices of church decline have been somewhat counterbalanced by the growth in spiritual awareness within the churches, expressed in movements of renewal of many different theological and ecclesiastical hues. One example is that of the Iona Community, which offers a distinctive approach to worship and community, and which has grown from strength to strength since its founding prior to the Second World War. (Ferguson, 1990) The Iona movement, in parallel with the Taizé Community, were both founded by ministers of the Reformed tradition and both have enjoyed a worldwide influence that has contributed to spiritual renewal amongst Christians. Each of these communities lives by simple basic rules. The Iona Community summarises its simple belief system in the following way:

'We are full Members, Associate, Youth and Staff Members, Volunteers and Friends of the Iona Community. What we share, expressed in many different ways, is an experience of the liberating power of Jesus Christ, and a commitment to the personal and social transformation that spring from the vision and values of the gospel.'

Members share a common rule which includes:

- Daily prayer and reading the Bible
- Mutual sharing and accountability for our use of time and money
- Regular meeting together
- Action and reflection for justice, peace and the integrity of creation

Members meet regularly throughout the year in local groups and in four plenary gatherings, including a week on Iona'. (The Iona Community Website, 2010)

In 2008 full membership of the Iona Community stood at 270, and Associate membership at around 1800. The influence of the community on worship and personal spiritual growth is immense, although perhaps difficult to quantify in any numerical way.

The Taizé community is equally effective and influential. Direct membership is much smaller since it actually involves living in the community and welcoming many thousands of visitors each year to share that experience for a short visit. Again the members live by simple rules summed up in this statement from the founder:

'Since my youth, I think that I have never lost the intuition that community life could be a sign that God is love, and love alone. Gradually the conviction took shape in me that it was essential to create a community with men determined to give their whole life and who would always try to understand one another and be reconciled, a community where kindness of heart and simplicity would be at the centre of everything.'

Brother Roger: "God is love alone" (The Taizé Community Website, 2010)

Equally there is the remarkable influence, and success, of the Alpha Course inviting people to undertake an exploration of faith. Since its inception 26 years ago (The Alpha Course Website, 2010), 698,000 individuals have attended Alpha courses in the UK, and a staggering 15 million worldwide.

Each of these organisations has taken some of their vitality by their independence of denominational structures There have however also been a number of attempts by

the denominations themselves to address the challenges of the time and to seek 'new ways of being church' which has become known as 'Fresh Expressions' (The Fresh Expressions Website, 2010). At the time that this was happening in England, the Church of Scotland launched an initiative at their Assembly in 2001 called Church Without Walls (The Church Without Walls Website, 2010). They resourced the Church Without Walls initiative by making funds available for churches wanting to embark on this type of mission work. They were not prescriptive in how churches should react to their local communities but laid down some general guiding principles as to how this initiative was seeking to enable churches to change. By 2008 there were 36 very different, successful operating projects reported on the Church Without Walls Website (2010). 19 of these were church based and were in the English churches' 'fresh expressions' mould, exploring different ways of 'being or doing church', two were a mixture of church and community projects, and 15 were community-based projects. In May 2008 the Church Without Walls National Gathering was reported to expect to attract 10,000 delegates to one of its sessions. (Church of Scotland, 2008).

Within the URC, parallel processes have gone on, which is the immediate occasion of the following essay. The National Church Life survey in 2001, (United Reformed Church, 2004), was designed to present a picture of church life in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 21st century. The results for the URC were somewhat sobering. The age profile comparison with the mean of all the churches, showed the URC to have lower than average numbers in the 15 – 54 age range and significantly higher than average in the 55 – 84 age range. The gender balance was the same as other churches and 75% of URC people had a 'long term' church

connection. 45% were not aware of, or saw as only an idea, the concept of church vision; 20% had experienced no personal spiritual growth in their church life, and 30% considered God of less importance in their life than other things. 60% had no involvement in outreach of any kind (this was the same across all the denominations), but hearteningly 55% were willing to try something new.

The General Secretary of the URC, David Cornick, undertook to prepare a response to this survey for further consideration by the church's Mission Council, and eventually, the whole church. The Mission Council remit (United Reformed Church (2002) was: 'to urgently and radically rethink the Church's priorities, programmes and processes'. This process began its life under the title 'Catching the vision for God's tomorrow' which became eventually 'Catch the Vision'. This led to a radical restructuring of the church organisation, and a planned process of reinvigoration and spiritual renewal of the whole church, in different stages, until 2011.

The national initiative of planning for renewal within the URC has been mirrored at local levels. One example of this is the case of the West Midlands Synod of the Church (a synod is the local district unit of organisation within the URC). In response to the mission and spirituality parts of the national 'Catch the Vision' process the West Midlands Synod of the URC contacted each of its 140 churches and asked them two questions in relation to their church: 'Where do you see God at work in your church? What do you see as the needs of your church – particularly the spiritual needs?' They set up teams of visitors who between them visited 126 of the 140 churches, recording their responses, and producing a report to the Synod in 2007 (West Midlands Synod, 2007). The report suggested that there were signs of vibrancy and growth. 16 or 13% of the churches reported growth in the number of

members and people attending worship. 43 or 34% of the churches, or groups of churches, were identified as having projects or activities, outside normal services, that merited a wider sharing across the Synod.

From the perspective of this thesis, the results of the second question were more interesting, in that the question specifically targeted the spiritual needs of the church. However, in reality, the spiritual needs of the church were rarely voiced, probably because many of the churches were in 'maintenance mode'. 88, or 70%, of the churches, perhaps reflecting the age profile of their congregations and the URC generally, expressed concern about the age profile of their church and the need for children, young people and young adults. Only 22, or 18%, talked about the need to explore and develop people's faith and 33, or 27%, talked of the lack of confidence of people in being able to share and make their faith public. In addition to this, as perhaps with any open question, there were 57 other categories of needs, ranging from car parking to how to share the Christian vision. Although, like the rest of the URC, the spiritual needs of the congregations represented in this study are probably great, they were not necessarily perceived and recognised, by them, as such.

On a personal note, one congregation that I served, Friary URC (Friary), West Bridgford, was about four years ahead of the URC in recognising many of the facts highlighted in the 2001 Church Life Survey in its own life, without necessarily having the empirical hard evidence of that survey. Friary was a gathered church, rooted in their church tradition. The church however was not inward looking. Some members recognised that the 'traditional' pattern of church life was not sustainable on its own and were open to considering new ways of 'being church'. One concrete instance of this was that some members recognised a local need for a daytime meeting point for

many, in the main, single, homeless men, housed in the nearby Musters Hotel, which had effectively become a DHSS Hostel. In response to this local need, a drop-in centre, which became Friary Drop-in, was started and it became one of the most respected day centres in the area.

For all that the drop-in centre was a step forward in trying to connect with local spiritual needs – in this case for companionship and support – there was a recognition of this being only the beginning. However, recognising the problem was one thing, having the will and the impetus to change was another. At that point the church had the opportunity to be part of ‘The Woodlands Project’ (The Project) a research project involving six suburban churches, which aimed to encourage the changing of the attitudes of local congregations from ‘maintenance to mission’ utilising the Natural Church Development process.(Schwartz 1998) This was a very useful process in helping churches and congregations to look at themselves critically, and helping them to change in order to facilitate growth, spiritual and numerical. It was, however a long process and required commitment and dedication over a number of years to bring good results. Each year of the process highlighted a different area of concern and the church worked in improving that area of its life. In the third year the particular concern was with the deficit of ‘passionate spirituality’ which was interpreted by the congregation and minister as a lack of a vivid perception of a personal living relationship with God. Over the three year period of The Project, Friary showed the most progress in its overall profile of all the churches involved. The project reached its conclusion without an option to continue the process. The church had not reached the full development potential offered by this process but it had perceptibly changed as a result of taking part. Those who had

been on the fringes were now playing a much more active part in the life of the church and looking to do something new; the traditionalists were much more open minded to allow it to happen. At this point the moment was right for the introduction of a '9.15 a.m. Service'. The church community was persuaded to step into the unknown and try something new. There was perhaps a reluctant acceptance of the inevitable, rather than a Spirit-led enthusiasm. We looked at various alternatives including different days and possible 'target groups' and decided to devise, as a first attempt, a service style and time that would be particularly attractive to families with younger children, and would fit easily into a busy family weekend schedule. Several key elements were built into the planning: Prescribed start and end times 9.15 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. Informality; to be inclusive of all ages in style; Bible based; encouraging of interactive discussion and questions with a maximum of three songs. The service when it was started attracted a small number of families on the fringes of the church, who became regular weekly attenders. Despite having a very limited 'advertising budget' for publicity, at least two new families arrived and stayed. An 80 year old Elder made a recommitment of her faith and went through a total emersion re-baptism at her daughter's church. The "Difficult Questions Club" was introduced, with membership cards that authorised people to ask any question they liked. One of the church's oldest members asked to join this. When he came to the 9.15 Communion Service, he described the experience as one of the deepest spiritual experiences he had had. But despite all of this, many traditionalists still had deep reservations about the service; one named it 'that blessed 9.15 service'. However, the apparent alienation of some from the service seemed worth bearing when, toward the end of my ministry at Friary, four girls from the 9.15 service wanted to make their individual

commitment to Christ, that is, they wanted formally to profess faith and become members of the church.

Conclusion

This introduction has suggested that the crisis of the church in Britain is evidenced in the story of decline told by such as Peter Brierley and the growth of spiritual traditions outside the churches, as evidenced in the Kendal study. The growing interest in spirituality is both indicative of the churches' failure to be successfully and sufficiently contextual, and also suggests more positively that there is still an appetite for the spiritual, and this represents a challenge and opportunity to the churches. The challenge is to renew our spiritual traditions to connect more effectively with our times. As a minister of the URC I am most concerned with that denomination. Happily the URC has *prima facie* turned its hand to the task of spiritual renewal with some vigour and the present essay aims to be a modest contribution to this work. The specific task is to make a contribution to the process as it is found within the URC, given that this is the church which has and continues to nurture me and within which I labour as a minister. I aim in this essay to explore two questions that appear significant to meeting the challenge of the times. First, is there within the URC a clearly Reformed sense of how to respond to the spiritual needs of the time? This is important, given my belief that we must learn to speak our own spiritual language more effectively, not look for a new language. Second, if indeed, as I believe, the URC inhabits a coherent, Reformed tradition of spirituality, then through what process can that tradition be renewed?

There are several methods by which the initial question might be addressed; here the focus will be on an analysis of some of the utterances of the General Assembly of the URC and its committees, as well as those of its inferior courts. These utterances, which are the institutional expressions of the Church's mind, are at least one place to begin in exploring the URC's approach. Using the prism of some of the marks of Reformed spirituality as identified by David Cornick, it is hoped to show that the General Assembly's understanding is rightly described as Reformed.

The response to the second question will have a particular theological flavour. Drawing on the approach to theology that Bevens calls 'transcendental' it will be argued that the tradition requires renewal through engagement with movements of spiritual vigour that exist outside of the formal structures of the church. This study was initially prompted by the energy and vigour observed in situations outside the church, contrasted with the apparent lack of vigour and energy inside the church, albeit that there are movements such as 'Iona'. To illustrate this point the spiritual movement associated with César Manrique and his development of the island of Lanzarote will be described and an attempt made to draw from this movement ideas that stimulate new ways of being Reformed and Christian in twenty-first century Britain. No great claims are made for the insights drawn, for, as John Oman once said, the important thing here is the method itself.

The following essay will unfold through five chapters. The first will review some of the current literature on spirituality, taking the temperature of recent discussion on the definition of spirituality and the challenge to the churches of plural ways of being spiritual. The second chapter will then address the initial research question through probing the URC's self-understanding of its own spirituality, as reflected in the papers

of the General Assembly and in the work of inferior bodies within the URC, and in the light of Cornick's recent work on the shape of Reformed spirituality. The third chapter will offer an outline of the transcendental approach to theology, as this has been outlined by Stephen Bevans amongst others. Chapter Four will then switch to a description of the spirituality of Manrique and its exemplification in developments in Lanzarote. Finally, Chapter Five will aim to exemplify the value of an transcendental approach to the renewal of the church by exploring the significance of Manrique's spiritual vision as a catalyst for the renewing the URC's tradition of spirituality.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEFINITIONS

In this chapter I intend to review aspects of the current discussion with regard to 'spirituality'. Allowing that my interest is in developing a contextual spirituality, the chapter begins with a brief review of some of the writings on the development of spirituality within Christianity. It then turns to survey some extra-church discussions of spirituality. The next section then gives attention to competing and complementary definitions of spirituality and Christian spirituality that allow the development of a definition of spirituality/Christian spirituality.

Biblical and historical development of Christian spirituality

As was said in the introduction, up until recent times Christian forms of spirituality were the predominant narrative of spirituality told in Britain. This section, then, examines briefly some writings on the biblical basis of Christian spirituality and its subsequent development. The number of writings in this area has grown significantly in the last 30 years. There are, for instance, a number of volumes dealing with the historical developments in this area. Rait, (1998), and McGinn, (1989), have edited wide-ranging multi-authored volumes offering authoritative historical and theological works. This two-volume series mirrors the three-volume *A History of Christian Spirituality* series written by Catholic scholars in the 1960s. The *Study of Spirituality*, edited by Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold (1986) was again a multi-authored volume, but this time with a significant ecumenical dimension. A novel dimension of this volume was its treatment not only of the theology and history of spirituality, but also

its attention to the spiritualities of other major faiths and its focus on the pastoral aspects of traditions of spirituality. A less scholarly, popular and more recent multi-authored volume is *Christian Spirituality*, edited by Mursell (Mursell, 2001). Alongside the general treatments of the theme are books such as *Celtic Spirituality*, translated and introduced by Davies (1999); *Evangelical Spirituality*, Gordon (1991), *Reformation Spirituality*, Veith, (1985), all of which seek to illuminate one historical moment or one strand in the tradition. A classic treatment from the Methodist camp is Wakefield, (2001) *Groundwork of Christian spirituality*. Most recently the publishers, Darton, Longman and Todd have produced a series of books on traditions of Christian spirituality, which now runs to over 25 volumes and includes David Cornick's (2008) book *Letting God be God*, which is on the Reformed Tradition and spirituality.

Most of those who write about spirituality include an historical and biblical section within their work. Of these by far the most comprehensive, so far as England is concerned, is that of Mursell (2008) whose two volume work is a rich vein of information about the development of spirituality in England. A review of Mursell's work as a whole is beyond the scope of this study. However there are interesting features of his discussion that may inform it. Whilst Mursell cautions that the meaning of the term spirituality has changed over time and it is not until the 16th century and onwards that we begin to see the term used in a similar way to our current usage, yet he points out the extent to which the Bible's usages are important to the understanding of the tradition as a whole. In one part, for instance, the Bible's (and Bible translators) use of the term 'spirit', in its Latin, Hebrew and Greek forms, can draw us to appreciate important aspects of the on-going Christian tradition on this

topic. Mursell, (2008, p.4), points out that 'spirit' derives from the Latin *spiritus* whose primary meaning is breath or breeze, but which also has an important secondary meaning 'inspiration or breathing in'. Thus 'spirit' suggests a physical, yet unseen, force that could affect the lives of individuals and of communities. This idea of spirituality as a lifegiving force is an important one and its development and implications are explored and developed by others, but will form an important element in this work. The Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma* both hold similar meanings. Mursell quotes the verses from the opening passages of Genesis:

'In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said "let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good: and God separated the blight from darkness . God called the light Day and the darkness he called night.'

Mursell comments:

'In these few majestic verses something of the essential nature of 'spirituality' in the Judaeo- Christian tradition is revealed' (Mursell, 2008, p.5).

Further, Mursell usefully spends some time explaining how the material, temporal and spiritual dimensions of life were perceived both in Greek society and in Paul's thinking. He argues that Paul, in positing a duality of spirit and flesh, was concerned, not with two parts of the self, but with two different life-style choices, one lived according to the flesh - a life lived narrowly and worldly, and the other according to the spirit:

'a life lived in the perspective of our relationship with God as God in Jesus, a life in which the fruits of Christ's self giving on the cross are made available to us',

and that for a Christian life becomes:

'all of life lived in the light of our relationship with God in Christ.' (Mursell 2008, p.8).

Christians live a transformed life, no longer living for themselves but for Christ. Thus, life in the spirit arises in the individual, which then manifests itself in the corporate life of the community, the church.

Mursell suggests that these Pauline insights are critical to understanding Christian spirituality as a whole, for instance, the patterns of thought that we find in Augustine and Calvin. In relation to Augustine, Mursell points out that he was a great influence in shaping the Christian tradition of spirituality. Augustine was very interested in the way in which the human will was fleshly – predisposed to the life of the flesh. This was because, thought Augustine, the sin of the first human beings in Eden had tainted the human will, making it predisposed from birth to choose against God. Augustine conceived of human beings being caught in a dilemma: we are created in the image of God but because of the sinful predisposition we try to satisfy our longing for God by inappropriate means. Human beings are created with a divine longing and:

‘the closer we come to God the greater our desire for God becomes transforming us in the process as we grow in a personal union of love, which is the goal of human life’. (Mursell, 2008, p.15)

This is to say that the challenge of the Christian life – Christian spirituality – is to live in the power of God’s transforming love. The predisposition to the sinful life is always attractive because of original sin, but the underlying grounding of the human life in God means that there is always a desire within to pursue God – this is never quite extinguished.

Sheldrake (2007), surveying the historical development of Christian views of spirituality, identifies six periods, and makes the very important point that each period and tradition reflects the people’s response to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the

context of their own time and place, meaning that spiritual responses are not fixed and will change in different times and circumstances – a point that is apt to the task of this thesis. The periods that he discusses are: Scriptures and Early Church; Monastic 300-1150; Spirituality in the City 1150-1450; Reformation 1450-1700; Age of Reason 1700-1900; Modernity to Post-Modernity 1900-2000. He goes on to say that the: ‘fundamental scriptural image for Christian spirituality is discipleship’. (Sheldrake, 2007, p.14) Discipleship is a very helpful concept because it is much more than simply belief in a set of principles or values, it implies an adoption of those principles and values as a way of living as a direct response to an encounter with Jesus Christ. This will be a helpful idea later in reaching a definition of “spirituality”. Sheldrake (2007, pp.38-9) emphasises that at the heart of the Christian understanding of spirituality and spiritual transformation is the concept of God’s abiding presence, both in the life of the Christian community and as an indwelling, empowering force in every person.

Thompson and Williams (2008), in the first part of their book offer a history of spirituality with detailed attention to different people and periods of history that have helped to influence the shape of spirituality. Significant discussions, from our point of view, are those on Celtic spirituality, with its rooting in the earth and creation, and its focus on monasteries as spiritual centres (Thompson and Williams, 2008, p.44) – the reappropriation of this movement has been influential today most notably in the Iona Community, discussed earlier, who have taken the idea of the spiritual centre one step further, by introducing it into the heart of everyday living. Thompson and Williams also fascinatingly discuss the medieval women mystics in Belgium and in this country, particularly Julian of Norwich, all of whom related their mystical

experiences in their native languages, as opposed to Latin, and whose images were earthly, bodily and feminine and whose writings have a contemporary resonance in a time when issues of female and lay spirituality are of great concern. (Thompson and Williams, 2008, pp.61-63). Attention is also given to Bonhoeffer's 'religionless Christianity' (Thompson and Williams, 2008, p.103) with its advocacy of the abandonment of much religious show and practice and nominal observances to be replaced by 'subversives, working secretly for God's kingdom'. Might this have some resonance within the URC in helping members to rediscover their spiritual identity and purpose?

Spirituality outside the church

A striking feature of contemporary life in Britain and elsewhere is that the language of spirituality has become commonplace in inverse proportion to the numbers of people who claim a religious allegiance.

In an exploratory study of 204 university students, few of them with explicit religious connections, Kane et al (2010) found, using questionnaires, that most of the respondents agreed that spiritual/ religious values were important to them and that their spirituality would help them to overcome problems and challenges in their lives. Hay and Hunt (2000) found much the same in their interviews with people who did not go to church. They raised two important issues. There is a gap between the way that people outside the church interpret their spiritual experience and the way that people in churches understand it, and that because there is no common language or understanding of spirituality its potential and energy to act as a cohesive bond in society is lost to society (Hay and Hunt, 2000, pp.4-5).

Many different contemporary organisations have recognised the value of the spiritual dimension in people's lives. Mitchell and Hall (2007) explored the use of art as a means of entering into the "spirituality" of the birth process. In this small study 16 student midwives were invited to create a piece of art work, which for them conveyed the meaning of birth. Most of the students found it a very helpful process. This could be used as a process for helping people in general to explore aspects of spirituality.

Nixon and Narayanasamy's (2010) study of neuro-oncology patients in Nottingham concluded that some patients had spiritual needs which were not consistently met by nurses. They concluded that nurses need to be made more aware of these needs and a structured approach taken to ensure that they are consistently met when needed. One cannot help but wonder that had the URC over its life had a similar concern for the spiritual wellbeing of its members, as the NHS of its patients, the results of the Church Life Survey for the URC might have been radically different!

Other examples of organisations that give attention to the spiritual needs of their members are: Alcoholics Anonymous, which advocates, in the 12-step plan to recovery that: 'a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity', (Alcoholics Anonymous 2009), and the National Schizophrenia Society, which defines spirituality in one of its policy documents as:

'It's a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation, that strives for inspiration, reverence, awe, meaning and purpose, even in those who do not believe in any god. The spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, strives for answers about the infinite and comes into focus when a person faces emotional illness, physical illness and death.'
(Bible Reading Society, 2005, pp.5-6).

Swinton (2001) examines in depth the concepts of the spiritual dimension in people's lives, the transition in part from religious to secular, and the relationship between

religion and spirituality. Although he is looking particularly at issues around mental health, he asserts the importance of the spiritual dimension in all human lives and demonstrates its importance and interaction across all the different aspects of life.

Principally a collection of writings about mental health issues and spirituality, his chapter '*Spirituality, Values and Mental Health*', sets the context of those issues into the general field of spirituality and as such is a helpful overview of the field, particularly from a more general, rather than theological viewpoint. Gilbert (2007) in the first chapter, examines some definitions of spirituality and building on Swinton's work identifies five key features of spirituality:

'Meaning, making sense of life and finding purpose in our existence. Value, having cherished beliefs and standards which are used to measure worth or value. Transcendence, and appreciation of experiences beyond the self. Connecting, with others, God/ higher powers. Becoming, reflection, developing a sense of yourself in relation to others' (Gilbert, 2007, p24).

He reflects that religion can help in providing this world view, but that faith communities can also be exclusive and stigmatizing, particularly of those with mental health problems. Fernando (2007) looks at spirituality across cultures and writes of the Rastafarian principle of 'I am I' expressing a oneness about community, and the Native American 'spirit of energy' and how being out of balance within themselves takes people in a disruptive direction.

Moisio and Beruchashvili illustrate the diversity in the use of the term 'spiritual'. They record the transition from the religious model to the model they describe as 'the spiritual model of well being'. In a detailed analysis they show how groups such as 'Weight Watchers' have used religious motifs in encouraging a recognition of people's individual powerlessness to overcome their problem and an awareness of how their particular programme can lead them to 'salvation'; the achievement of their

goal. This is simple example of the way in which the language of spirituality has been 'converted' to new uses.

Towards a definition of spirituality

The question of how to define 'spirituality' is a vexed one and this is reflected in the literature. Drane (2005) poses the question as the title of his book, *'Do Christians know how to be spiritual?'* The answer to this question is dependent on responding to a much bigger challenge, what do we mean by spirituality? In seeking to answer this question Drane, whilst recognising that historical perspectives can be helpful, argues that they are less important than the meaning that is attached to it today. Drane traces a turning point in the history of 'spirituality' to the Reformation's emphasis on the individual's direct, unmediated relationship with God, which was of course an aspect of the attack on the medieval Catholic Church.¹ This, he argues is the underpinning of the development of the contemporary viewing of spirituality as to do with individual fulfilment and meaning; the quest for private and internalised meaning that has largely, for many, replaced traditional religion.

As against Drane, Carrette and King (2005), in their attack on the commercialisation of spirituality, probably sum up the feelings of many people, within and without the church, toward the word 'spirituality' when they say:

'there are perhaps few words in the modern English language as vague and woolly as the notion of 'spirituality'. In a consumer society it can mean anything you want as long as it sells' (Carrette and King, 2005, p.30).

They go on to ask the question, why then is the term so popular? Because, they say:

¹ The emphasis of the Reformers on the direct relationship between the believer and God implied a new ecclesiology and view of the sacraments. It was grounded not only in theological considerations, but arose out of the renaissance and the humanist movement which placed much emphasis on the human person than previous forms of thought. (Alister E McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

'it has become the 'brand label' for the search for meaning, values, transcendence, hope and connectedness in advanced capital societies'

From their perspective the marketisation of 'spirituality' means that it is virtually impossible to come to a universally acceptable definition. This may be a reasonable conclusion if one is thinking of a definition that will adequately encompass all the ways in which the word is used (i.e. a descriptive definition), but it clearly does not rule out a prescriptive definition of the word.

Sheldrake, writing from his nearly 30 years experience of teaching spirituality on both sides of the Atlantic, suggests that the current vagueness in defining spirituality comes directly from the detachment that has been made between 'spirituality' and 'religion'. Despite this, he does offer a useful starting point in a search for a definition of 'spirituality'. Spirituality he says:

'refers to the deepest values and meanings by which people seek to live. In other words, "spirituality" implies some kind of vision of the human spirit and of what will assist it to achieve full potential' (Sheldrake, 2005, preface xiii).

This definition speaks of spirituality as to do with values – what is held important – and meanings – what is regarded as significant, and says that spirituality is to do with how meanings and values imply an understanding of what it is to be human and what the ideal shape of the human life might be. The definition also suggests that spirituality is currently understood to be concerned with personal fulfilment and satisfaction.

Wakefield (2001) offers a complementary definition of spirituality to that of Sheldrake when he states:

'My own rather crude definition would be to say that our spirituality is 'what makes us tick.' It is the sum of our force, influences, beliefs, disciplines, conscious or unconscious, which possess us, determine our motives and behaviour and shape our personalities' (Wakefield, 2001, p1).

This definition amplifies that of Sheldrake with its emphasis on the fact that our values may be unconscious as well as conscious and with its stress on the way in which the meanings and values that make up our spirituality inform our disposition to action. On the other hand, neither Sheldrake nor Wakefield's definitions are specifically 'Christian'.

Cornick (2008), drawing on the work of Schmemmann, suggests that 'spirituality' should be replaced by talking about: "*Christian living*". This suggestion has some merit in that it captures the point that Wakefield highlights – that spirituality is about a way of living - and does move us beyond the vagueness and negative connotations associated with 'spirituality', but what it gains also involves losing the more specific aspects identified by Sheldrake and Wakefield in talking of meanings and values.

Callen (2001), developing an idea of Sandra Schneider, offers a definition as:

'the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms, not of isolation and self absorption, but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives' (Callen, 2001, p,17).

This definition suggests a prescriptive element not mentioned thus far, and that is that 'spirituality' is to do with self-transcendence. Callen is also suggesting here that 'spirituality' needs to be conscious – I wonder if this correct in the light of Wakefield's helpful emphasis on the way in which unconscious influences and disciplines may shape our dispositions. The emphasis on conscious awareness of our values seems to betray an over-estimation of the degree to which our inner life can be fully transparent to us.

If, as Callen does, one thinks of self-transcendence as to do with a relationship to an ultimate value, conceived as God revealed in Jesus Christ, then his definition takes us towards a Christian view of spirituality. In doing so, Callen makes three

assumptions: that communion with God is possible because we are made in God's image; Christian spirituality is a lived experience of God in Christ revealed and empowered by the Spirit, and that spirituality is the experience of an actual relationship with God.

A highly prescriptive and contentious understanding of spirituality is that offered by Owen, (1969). He argues that not all who call themselves Christian should necessarily be described as 'spiritual' people. The qualification for being called a 'spiritual' person is having the experience of a direct awareness of God. Albeit that there is evidence of widespread experiences of a mystical kind, nevertheless Owen's approach is likely to lead to the perception that many church-goers are 'unspiritual'. There is an important issue being touched on here. Perhaps the issue is that, whilst in terms of the wider definitions of spirituality offered by Sheldrake, Callen and Wakefield it is unlikely that any church-goer will entirely lack spirituality of any kind – they are likely to have a range of values and meanings which inform their lives and which will include an element of self-transcendence - yet if they lack a conscious, self-reflective and critical relationship to their spiritual motivations there would seem to be something lacking in their Christian discipleship. Without being conscious of how one is shaped through the encounter with God, it would be hard to see how any ongoing and continuing relationship could develop and grow. This is one way of interpreting the supposed lack of 'spirituality' in the URC mentioned and observed elsewhere in this study.

Fox , arguing on the basis of a teaching learnt from a Native American Elder, states:

'Goodness is the natural state of the world. The world is good, even when it seems evil it's good. There's only goodness in God. And that same goodness is in all of us. You can feel it for yourself. You know when you feel good inside. Yes you're God's child, too. You are good. You are sacred. Respect yourself.

Love the goodness in yourself. Then put that goodness out into the world. That's everybody's instructions' (Fox, 2000, p5).

This is more a teaching than a definition but it may help us to understand some of the values that inform the spirituality of some people, though some might see in this definition maybe more than a hint of Pelagianism – an unqualified belief in the goodness of life, which the empirical facts of experience seem to contradict!

Woods offers not a definition as such but a helpful reflection:

'Christian spirituality is the story of how the Spirit of God is present in everyday life, in the grand and sometimes tragic movements of history, and the depths of each human spirit, guided and shaped the lives of women and men over the ages as a people, not merely a knot of individuals, a clan or a nation (Woods, 2006, p.279).

What is brought out here is the element of self-transcendence that seems to be essential to a Christian account of the issue. The values and meanings that inform a Christian spirituality have a relation to the perception of God as being active in experience.

Christian spirituality aims to be transformative. This was a distinction picked by URC Moderators writing about spirituality in their report to General Assembly (United Reformed Church 2003) when they highlighted the continuum of spiritualities found in British society, from those searching for the transcendent and the search for 'the other', at one end, to those on a quest for a purely individual fulfilment, at the other.

One of the distinctive perspectives brought to the issue by George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, is that the transformation that Christian spirituality brings is not only interior to the individual but also is naturally expressed in the actions of the person in the world. He writes:

'The true mark of Christian spirituality is to get one's teeth into things. Painstaking service to humankind's most material needs is the essence of spirituality' (Paynter, 2002, Month 1, Day30).

Clearly McLeod is offering a distinctive view of matters here, but it is apt to notice that he is speaking of the 'mark' of spirituality, not its essence. One might say that he is arguing that where a person is truly spiritual then this will be reflected in 'service to humankind's most material needs'. McLeod is almost offering a paraphrase of the message of James. The tenor of his approach is aptly summed up by Gutierrez as 'the spirituality of the activity of the Christian in the world' (Gutierrez, 1974, p.7). Ballard & Pritchard in their work sum up much of what has been said thus far about spirituality, especially Christian spirituality. They argue that it can be defined as:

'that disposition of heart and mind from which all Christian action follows. It is a way of being before God and with others such that the responses of a Christian discipleship are made holistically and wisely. It engages the whole personality, holding together the reasons of both spiritual wisdom and intellectual commitment' (Ballard & Pritchard, 2008, pp.177ff).

This definition takes matters forward in that it emphasises the notes of disposition, discipleship and self-transcendence already discussed, but introduces new elements in its talk of the role of wisdom and intellectual commitment in forming and informing Christian spirituality. This relates back to the comment above that, whereas all Christians will have a spirituality that is somewhat informed by the Gospel, the ideal that Christians must strive towards is a spirituality which is self-reflective and critical – growing through the study of the Bible and the search for wisdom and understanding. The accounts of spirituality that have been looked at suggest that it is possible to give a broad descriptive account of spirituality and to offer a prescriptive account of Christian spirituality, which will serve as the litmus test for later discussions.

The broad definition of spirituality sees it as a range of ways of seeking human fulfilment through drawing on a range of meanings and values. The meanings and values that inform spiritualities will assume some notion of what it is to be fully human. The spectrum of spiritualities is differentiated by the degree to which they aim at transformation and the degree to which they are conscious or unconscious. All however will be expressed in dispositions to act in certain ways. Spiritualities are also differentiated by the degree to which they are wholly individual or rooted in group experience, through which an individual might discover and explore a personal spiritual journey. Spiritualities also vary in the degree to which they seek meaning and value through offering a connection to that which transcends the self/material world.

A prescriptive vision of Christian spirituality will have many of the features of spiritualities in general with some distinctive elements. A Christian spirituality is a distinctive way of seeking meaning, a source of values and human fulfilment; rooted in a relationship with God in Christ; developed within the community of the Church; critically informed by the Bible and the tradition of Christian wisdom and theology, and expressed in a concern for self transformation and the transformation of the world. Implicit in this definition is the idea that, whilst all baptised Christians will probably have some form of a Christian spirituality, the ideal is for that spirituality to be an aspect of the conscious, reflective life of a person, which will mean that it can be pictured as a dynamic journey of encounter and learning. Christian spirituality recognises God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as an energising, or animating presence, and seeks in relationship with God the realisation of personal wholeness

and the restoration of the harmony and wholeness of God's creation and the community of all people.

Reformed spirituality

The Reformation was not a single event which suddenly changed the 16th and 17th century world, but a series of challenges to the authority of the church, about different issues, at different times, over a period of time, and in different places, by individuals. It collectively became a movement of fundamental challenge and change. On this point McGrath has identified four movements of the Reformation: the Lutheran, Reformed, Radical and Catholic that collectively constitute the movement of reform in church and society (McGrath, 1999, pp.5-11). The meaning of 'Reformed' when applied in this thesis is to do with the way of being a Christian that finds its origins in the 'Reformed' reformation which arose in Switzerland in the 16th Century, particularly associated with leaders such as Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin and Beza and cities such as Zurich, Berne, Basle and Geneva. According to McGrath this movement was distinguished from the Lutheran reformation in Germany by its emphasis on the reform of the morals and worship of the Church, as against Luther's emphasis on doctrinal reformation. (pp.7-8).

The causes of the Reformation are beyond the concerns of this present essay, but amongst the factors are political, social and religious questions. Linder comments that Reformation is:

'A broad term used to denote a religious movement in Western Christendom which arose about 1500 and culminated around the mid-seventeenth century, with antecedents going back to the fourteenth century. Although conditioned by political, economic and intellectual factors, the course of events and the writings of the Reformers themselves reveal

that it was above all else a religious revival which had as its goal Christian renewal' (Linder, 1998, p.830).

Linder's mentioning of the spiritual impetus behind the Reformation raises the issue for consideration here. I have suggested above a definition of Christian spirituality. Here the task is to define that segment of the Christian spiritual tradition that is integral to the Reformed tradition of which the URC is part. The suggestion is not that the Reformed tradition of spirituality is a separate entity from the broader Christian approach which seeks to find meaning and value through faith in Christ. Rather, the Reformed tradition is part of that broader tradition, but one with distinctive emphases – with distinctive strengths and weaknesses.

There are, in relation to the Reformed tradition, many books discussing its theology and practice. McKim, for instance, has written and edited a number of books discussing the tradition, such as his edited volumes *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* (McKim, 1992); *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (McKim, 2004); and his monograph *Introducing the Reformed Faith* (McKim, 2001). Placed alongside the work of McKim is that of Alston who has written recently about ecclesiology - *The Church of the living God: a Reformed perspective* (Alston, 2002); edited a volume with Welker on ecumenicity - *Reformed Theology: Identity and ecumenicity* (Alston & Welker, 2003) and edited a volume with Welker on biblical hermeneutics – *Reformed Theology: Identity and ecumenicity II: Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed tradition* (Alston & Welker, 2007). Again, in relation to the URC itself David Peel has written *Reforming Theology: explorations in the theological traditions of the URC* (Peel, 2002) However, it is noticeable that in these various volumes and in others such as that edited by Willis and Welker *Towards the future of Reformed Theology* (Willis & Welker, 1999) there is little discussion of Reformed views of spirituality. There is, of

course, writing on the historic traditions of spirituality (see for instance the work of J. I. Packer on Puritanism) but there has been little contemporary comment on this aspect of the tradition. This being the case, in seeking to clarify this tradition, I make primary reference to one recent book by David Cornick, *Letting God be God* (Cornick, 2008). My approach is not a historical one, but one that attempts to take soundings in how we might interpret the Reformed tradition of spirituality from the vantage point of the 21st century.

Cornick suggests that there are five marks of Reformed spirituality: an emphasis on preaching; a stress on the place of prayer; the centrality of 'election'; the thought of being spiritual within the world, and a distinctive ecclesiology.

The Bible

Despite Calvin's own emphasis on the need to balance word and sacrament within regular worship, the dominant place of preaching is evident within contemporary Reformed worship (Cornick, 2008, p.55). Thus, for instance, in Scottish Presbyterian practice it is not unusual for a congregation only to celebrate the Lord's Supper on as little as two occasions during the year, whilst it is the norm for services to be shaped around a sermon. The centrality of scripture to Reformed life is expressed in the subordination of reason and tradition to the Bible in much Reformed theology. Barth's insistence, for instance, that the 'what' of Christian theology is drawn from the Bible seems somewhat alien to the spirit of the Methodist quadrilateral (Barth 1949, p.12). There are of course many disagreements amongst the Reformed on matters of interpretation, but there is a common commitment to the Bible as the place where Jesus, the Word, is testified to and where therefore God's voice is heard. This

explains why Reformed diets of worship are mostly shaped around preparation for hearing; hearing and responding to the declaration of God's word (Cornick, 2008, p.56). Indeed in Calvin's view preaching has a sacramental purpose. It is nothing less than the encounter with God in the preacher's words; an enacted part of the salvation that God brings to the world. In the words of H H Farmer, the English Presbyterian, the sermon is 'God's great activity of redemption in history in the world of persons'. (quoted in Cornick, 2008, p.57) Or in Brueggemann's terms, preaching is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in a godless world, 'it is not only the announcement of the alternative but the practice of the very liminality that does not yet know too much'. (quoted in Cornick, 2008, p.60) This emphasis on the role of the Bible and preaching is reflected in Calvin's major theological work, *The Institutes*. Each chapter, section and sentence of that work is carefully structured (McNeil 1960 p3) to 'allow easy access to the divine word, to advance in it without stumbling' Calvin was, as he declared, a teacher and his calling, as he saw it, was to enable everyone to enter into a relationship with God. He produced a complete set of commentaries and provided margin notes in the Geneva Bible that people might enter into a relationship with God through their encounter with the 'Word'. Calvin is a prime example of the energising force of the Holy Spirit. He was driven by his sense of vocation to ensure that people were given every opportunity to engage with God. Evidence of his driven nature and his sense of vocation for his task is found directly in some paragraphs in the introduction to the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, when he apologises for having been ill with fever, which had limited his ability to finish the work according to his planned timetable. More indirectly in his commentary on Isaiah when

he talks of Isaiah's call in chapter 6 explaining Isaiah's call, and the enabling gift of God's grace to accomplish the work:

'Now this remarkable instance of obedience ought to produce such an effect on our minds that we shall cheerfully undertake any task he may be pleased to enjoin and shall never refuse any task, however difficult we may imagine it to be' (Calvin, 1849, p213-4).

Calvin spent much of his life engaged directly in preaching.

The centrality of the Bible as the authority for life, living and church governance was the key building block of 'being Reformed' which Cornick sums up very aptly as:

'To be Reformed is to be caught up in the dynamics of the Word, because Scripture is one of God's trysting places, where the Word spoken before all time, the Word incarnate and the words written about the Word become, through the activity of the spirit, the living word'' "the heart of reformed spirituality is scripture that forms and re-forms us, week by week, day by day. That is the core discipline' (Cornick, 2008, p.55).

In relation to Calvin, Reeke (2004 p126ff)) suggests that his view of the believer's relationship to God was that it was: 'an attitude that includes true knowledge, heartfelt worship, saving faith, fitful fear, prayerful submission and reverential love'.

Piety is about being in total relationship with Christ so that the believer is

'animated by the secret power of Christ; so that Christian may be said to live and grow in him; for as the soul enlivens the body, so Christ imparts life to his members' (Reeke, 2004, p.126)

Prayer

Alongside preaching, the Reformed tradition also places emphasis on hearing the Word of God through the spoken word. If the effectiveness of the bread and wine are related to the discernment of the body of the Lord by the receiver, so the preached word only becomes the word of the Lord if it is heard in faith. An important aspect of this is the part played by public prayer in Reformed worship and private prayer as a form of devotion. According to Cornick the Reformed Tradition at best emphasises a

balance of freedom and form in prayer, expressed in a tradition encompassing both the extemporary and the written. (Cornick, 2008, p.66).

Moreover, prayer is not just a form of words, but part of the movement of the individual and community towards the mystery of God, as articulated by the noted Reformed theologian, John Baillie, prayer 'is thinking towards God' (quoted in (Cornick, 2008, p.68). In this sense prayer articulates the attitude and emotions of the believer – reverence, adoration, desire, confession and intercession. (Cornick, 2008, p.69)

Alongside public prayer, the individual's personal relationship with God is another very important element of Reformed spirituality, which Calvin called 'piety'. 'Pious' and 'piety' can have negative connotations in our times, with images of 'holiness' and being set aside or outside the day-to-day things of the world, the exact opposite of Calvin's time when his followers were very much engaged in their worldly duties, but 'driven' by their living relationship with God. One of the positive outcomes of the Reformation was to free faith in God from the control of the clergy, the church, and the cloisters! However, Reformed Christians have always realised that the relationship does not just happen, it needs to be nurtured and developed. Cornick (2008 p53ff) described this relationship as 'A speaking God and a listening people'. It is about a real and living daily engagement with God, principally, but not exclusively, by prayer in its many forms. Rice (1991), writing about Reformed Spirituality, identifies an authentic piety (or spirituality in terms of this essay) as having at least four elements: private and public devotion through which each enriches the other, meditative Spirit-led engagement with the scriptures; accepting the goodness and wonder of the created world with a careful stewardship of it; not

being driven by possessions, and the desire for a quietness and relationship with God in Christ which leads to faithful service in the world. The key, Rice tells us, to understanding Reformed spirituality is to keep the tension in the balance between them all.

Prayer is the essential source of our relationship with God. Cornick summarises Calvin's four rules of prayer, spread over many pages in the original, as:

'We must be disposed in mind and heart as befits those who enter conversations with God ... a resting in the Spirit, secondly prayer arises from a burning desire to obtain the ends prayed for, thirdly the focus should be on God not ourselves, and fourthly prayer should spring from the sure hope that it will be answered' (Cornick, 2008, pp.71ff).

Forsyth (1996 p11ff) talks of the energising, transforming, power of prayer for the individual. In and through prayer the individual enters into true fellowship with God and is truly transformed and empowered. In prayer we engage with the whole of God's created world.

Oman calls this 'the fellowship of the spirit', in our relationship with God, the world and people through the fruit of the spirit, love, we can enter into a myriad of possibilities of good things. He develops this idea of fellowship as follows:

'The right use of fellowship is for a society which depends on no other bond than the spirit of the whole being in each member and the freedom of each member being realised in the service of the whole Only as each member, by being in it heart and soul, finds in its service the realisation of his own individual and personal call is it fellowship' Oman (1941, pp.138ff).

He does however recognise that it may never exist in reality but none the less sees it as a goal to which we should be working. Interestingly he goes on to describe our relationship with God as hearing a music with a common beat:

'The only keeping step that ever means real progress is by each hearing for himself a music which has a common beat, through a double source, which we may call the music of the spheres and the low sad music of humanity, being thus of the spirit both of God and man.'

Gunton, writing much later, talks about the 'spirit of freedom' and the life of a community living in the freedom of the spirit as having

'the God-given freedom to be like God... not only enabling communities but also individuals: '.....enabling the ordinary and especially ordinary life in the human body, to be what it is made to be' (Gunton 2002, p.66).

Sell (Sell 2008) made two other important points in his review of Cornick's work that he thought there was a case for using 'Piety' rather than 'spirituality' since it took a person more from the quest for 'self' and self fulfilment, which seems to pervade much of the spirituality of our time, to the quest for engagement with God. I think that the negative connotations of the word 'piety', discussed earlier, outweigh this, particularly since in Christian circles these ideas will be automatically included. He goes on to say that genuine spirituality, he believes, concerns the head, heart, hands and that: 'it is not inconceivable that the rediscovery of it (spirituality), where that is required, would reinvigorate our mission'. Reformed spirituality is very much about a continued and living engagement with God and the world.

Election

According to Cornick, at the heart of Reformed spirituality is the idea of God's providentially planning the economy of salvation from before the beginning of time. (Cornick, 2008, p.82) In a striking phrase, Cornick – drawing on the work of George Matheson – talks of the Reformed perception of 'Calvary older than Eden', that is, the plan of God from the beginning included and was summated in the Cross of Christ. This leads to the Reformed understanding of election, which developed out of Luther's discovery in his own experience of the passivity of faith in the face of grace

(Cornick, 2008, p.84). If human beings are passive and helpless in coming to faith, then the inference could be drawn that the difference between the disciple and others was the choice – the electing, predestinating choice of God (Cornick, 2008, p.85). The interpretation of the doctrine of election has been fought over since the time of the Reformation and particularly within the Reformed churches themselves. Indeed, so controversial did the doctrine become, that its significance was underplayed until Barth's reworking of the doctrine in the 20th century, with its emphasis on a Christological interpretation. Gunton expounds the belief that God has chosen the whole human race in Christ to live in relationship with their creator in order that the world might become: 'the theatre of God's love, a place where his gracious purposes of love can take shape' (Gunton, 2002, p.66).

Albeit that the doctrines of election and predestination have been on-going matters of debate within the the Reformed world – although these are not exclusively Reformed beliefs – it is important to appreciate the spirituality of the doctrine. As Cornick points out, the doctrine in Calvin's hands was concerned with emphasising the purpose of God in history and thus 'Election is about purpose and therefore service, participation in the mission of God' (Cornick, 2008, p.90). This is to say that the perception of the human goal in Reformed theology in contrast to that of Aquinas – contemplation of the divine – was that faith is a response to the divine love and is an invitation to service of God's purposes in history. Cornick comments:

'The positive contribution of the doctrine of election to Reformed spirituality was a sense of liberation, and a sense of calling to live a godly life for the sake of Christ's kingdom' (Cornick, 2008, p.90).

This emphasis is aptly summed up in John Bell's hymn:

'We rejoice to be God's chosen,
not through virtue, work or skill,
but because God's love is generous,

unconformed to human will.
And because God's love is restless
like the surging of the sea,
we are pulled by heaven's dynamic
to become, not just to be.'
(Iona Community 2003 No 141)

Again Sell comments (2008) that election is:

'the joyous recognition that we did not get to where we are under our own steam, but that God had an eternal purpose for us'.

World spirituality

Cornick points out that the Reformed tradition has often been wrongly accused of philistinism (Cornick, 2008, p.103). This, he claims, is a gross misunderstanding, for whilst the Reformed tradition does take very seriously the second commandment, so that iconography of the divine has typically been excluded from Reformed churches, yet Calvin believed that alongside scripture, the world was a 'theatre of God's glory'; a context in which redeemed humanity could find God and express what it was to live fully human lives, which he summarised as:

'The proper understanding of God to be found in the scriptures, discerned under the Holy Spirit. Christ forms a bridge between God & humanity. Acceptance of Christ through grace brings about a re creation of the individual and the possibility of living as human beings are meant to live, in a world that Calvin describes as the Theatre of God's glory. God has appointed trysting places – the preaching of the Gospel and the Lord's supper where the benefits of Christ's work can touch the human heart - hence the benefit of the church community.' (Cornick. 2008, p.101)

The simplicity of Reformed churches was meant to emphasise that God is to be found in scripture, but also in and through engagement with the world, since 'the world crackles with the rationality of God's providential ordering'. (Cornick, 2008, p.102) Moreover, the de-emphasis on visual pictures was related to an emphasis on hearing the word preached in a visual way (Dyrness, 2004). This went along with,

arguably, a encouragement to visualise oneself as participating in the continuation of God's story in the contemporary world (Cornick, 2008, p.106). These strands of Reformed thinking – allied to the emphasis of Luther on the earthiness of discipleship – led, argues Cornick, to the breaking down of the metaphorical space between the sacred and the secular (Cornick, 2008, p.106). This is to say that all space, the liturgical and the world outside are to be regarded as sacred because God is revealed in scripture and in the world. This introduces the interesting concept of the possibility of the whole of life being lived in constant engagement with God. Field (2008) in his essay teases out Calvin's interpretation of creation through his commentaries on various Bible passages, and concludes that Calvin believed that 'the whole of creation bore witness to God's goodness and power' becoming as others have also said 'the magnificent theatre that displays the glory of God' . Field interestingly argues also, in relation to Calvin's Trinitarian and pneumatological theology, that for him, Calvin, 'the Spirit is understood as the creative source of life and energy in the universe'. Calvin did not in any way seek to disengage people from the world but encouraged his followers to live out their relationship with God in the world as Christ's disciples.

Whilst the Reformed tradition has distinct things to say about liturgical space – especially with its emphasis on simplicity and the focus on preaching, yet it also emphasises public space. (Cornick, 2008, p.110) The idea of God's glory being found in the world had as its concomitant the notion of the civic space as a place of discipleship. This explains the social and political emphasis of the Reformed tradition exemplified in Calvin's attempt to shape the life of Geneva according to what he

perceived as gospel principles. (Cornick, 2008, pp.110-1) Lying behind the disputed legacy of Geneva there is the fact that:

‘Calvin’s ordering of social and political life was intended to bear witness to the reality of God’s love, to reflect God’s glory in God’s proper sphere, the world. That meant nothing other than the establishment of a new way of social cohesion, and the laws of the state and work of the consistory were ways of achieving this’ (Cornick, 2008, p.111).

Following Luther, Calvin believed that all people had a priestly vocation in their ‘particular way of life’. The ordinary was turned into ‘the material of God’s kingdom’. (Cornick, 2008, p.112). Moreover, it is not only that work is sanctified, since Calvin also thought that the world had been made beautiful for the enjoyment of human beings (Cornick, 2008, p.113). Further, Calvin argued that the blessings of the world should never distract from the divine giver, nor lead to acquisitiveness: ‘We are simply stewards of the earth, and one day we must give account of that stewardship’. (Cornick, 2008, p.113) Thus, as Cornick states:

‘A Reformed spirituality is ... one which is politically and economically responsible, which seeks to see the beauty of God reflected in the ways in which societies order themselves and people treat each other’ (Cornick, 2008, p.114).

Cornick discusses some examples of this expression of the Reformed tradition, what he calls ‘social spirituality’ in the work of R W Dale, Reinhold Niebuhr and John de Grunchy (Cornick, 2008, pp.114-22).

A spirituality of community

In distinction to the ecclesiastical fragmentation that was engendered by the Reformation, the ecclesiology of the Reformed church from the beginning was simple and catholic. Eschewing notions such as ‘apostolic succession’, thinkers such as Calvin and Knox simply asserted that wherever the gospel was truly preached, the

sacraments truly celebrated and Christian discipline truly exercised, there the church was to be found. (Cornick, 2008, p.132); and also in the *Scots Confession* (Church of Scotland, 1937, pp.69-78). Beyond this catholic affirmation of the marks of the church, the Reformed tended to de-emphasise the elaborate ecclesiastical practices of the medieval church. There was a particular dismissal of monastic communities on the basis that all Christians were called to live out their devotion to God and responsibilities to others within the context of ordinary life (Cornick, 2008, p.136). Hood explores a similar theme in his article 'Governance' in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* (Hood, 2008, pp.536-549). Interestingly, as Cornick points out, this vision of the Godly commonwealth, whole societies transformed in their social, political and economic life by faith, was one which energised the remarkable ministry of George McLeod, Reformed minister and founder of the Iona Community. (Cornick, 2008, pp.137-148) McLeod's vision was that of finding Christ within every human soul and at the centre of all things (Cornick, 2008, p.145). This is to say that for McLeod the 'material and the spiritual were inseparable' (Cornick, 2008, p.146). This approach is entirely consistent with that taken by Calvin himself. As we have seen a concern of the reformers was that spirituality had been cloistered behind monastery walls and had been reduced to celibate, ascetic and penitential devotion. Calvin helped people to understand piety in a new way, living and acting everyday according to God's will in the midst of human society. Protestant spirituality focused on how one lived the Christian life in the family, the field, the workshop and the market place Reeke (2004 p145).

Spirituality as a means of engagement between the church and the world

One of the motivating factors for this study was the observation of a lack of 'spiritual energy' in the United Reformed Church, both nationally and locally, in comparison with situations and events in the secular world, particularly the spirituality lying behind the development of the island of Lanzarote, which in turn led to the question, could the concept of 'spirituality' be a link that could bridge what appears as the ever widening gap between the church and the secular world?

The rise of a general concern with spirituality and its distinction from religion has engendered discussion about the relationship between the two. Schneiders (2003) identifies three distinct possible relationships between spirituality and religion, firstly that they were entirely separate enterprises with no connection; secondly, that they were conflicting realities: the more spiritual a person was, the less religious and vice versa; and thirdly, that the two might be in partnership. In examining the conflict between the two, she believes that the Christian religion is intrinsically difficult to reconcile with a postmodern society, but that non-religious spirituality exactly fits the period because, among other things, it makes no doctrinal claims, imposes no external moral authority and can be changed or abandoned whenever it no longer seems to work for the person (Cornick, 2008, p.173). However, she argues that the quest for God is too important and complex to be reduced to a private enterprise and that religion is actually the best context within which people should explore spirituality, since it offers community and aims at spiritual integrity, though, interestingly, she talks of the need to sit lightly with the institution framework of religion. Thus she maintains the hope that the spiritual quest might offer a bridge between church and world and that people may recognise the distinct advantages to

pursuing the spiritual within Christianity, if not within a formal commitment to the Church.

McFarland Taylor (2005) in her essay on 'Creation Spirituality' defines this as the place where global indigenous traditions meet and interact with Christian mysticism embracing the whole of creation as 'original blessing' holding a view that sees 'the divine in all things and all things in the divine' She examines the work of Fox who created the Institute of Culture and Creation Theology, and concludes that:

'the creation spirituality movement aims to reinvigorate western religious traditions through spiritual consciousness keenly attuned to the cosmic and earthly created order' McFarland Taylor, 2005, p363)

These ideas are useful given the task of the present essay being to examine how one particular form of spirituality, arguably a kind of 'creation spirituality', might help to rejuvenate a settled Christian tradition. Taylor obviously does imagine that there can be fruitful interaction between Christian and non Christian forms of questing.

Cruchley-Jones (2008) in his essay makes a very interesting, hard, but probably realistic analysis of the current attitudes in churches towards mission, spirituality and their probable engagement with the world. Recognising, through Burgess' work, that there is spiritual concern amongst Christian congregations, he argues that the current framework of church life does not necessarily encourage spiritual growth or the expression of spirituality to those outside the church. He concludes that: 'spirituality does not belong to religion, rather it is an aspect of our deeper human-ness that binds and bears us in and through all aspects of life', that it cannot be branded and by nature is intrinsically wayward. He calls this transformative spirituality which is 'to be alive to life and to Christ's life' but which cannot be tamed or limited to one place or one people, and creates an inclusive, just society that values all. This image of

individuals, transformed by their spiritual engagement, creating and living in community may be an ideal, which he does not see necessarily being obtained in churches. However, one is struck by his contention that Christians share spirituality with the wider population and by his view that authentic spirituality can and must draw from the biblical and Reformed stream. Once again there is in his work the concept, like that of Taylor, that spirituality may well be a point of meeting between church and world.

Drane, as part of his academic work, has attempted to bridge the gap between church and the world through developing bridging spiritualities. The development of a set of Christian tarot cards with which he held Christian tarot readings in pubs was one such enterprising attempt. This idea emerged from his perception of the popularity of tarot readings at 'Body Mind & Spirit' festivals. This very practical example offers a recognition that if the Church is to relate to different non-churched groups of people, it will have to understand and accept them, acknowledging their different needs and aspirations and accommodating them in what it does. Moreover, Drane's work suggests that he believes that the spiritual quest might indeed be a bridge between church and world, for

'being spiritual is not an exclusively Christian or religious activity, it is a human activity Spirituality is a common human experience and religion is what happens when the experience is codified into ways of life, systems of belief, cognitive beliefs and so on' (Drane 2000 p78).

Rob Frost (2001) spent most of his ministry as an Methodist evangelist organising and running beach and other missions which could perhaps best be described as the 'direct challenge approach' of mission. However from his research into 'New Age Spirituality' he produced a very different approach, which he developed into a six-week course called 'Essence' (Frost 2001), described as 'An exploration of

contemporary spirituality which looks towards a lifestyle integrating body, mind and spirit.' This is a long way from where he began his ministry. It was a development that suggests he came to see that common human aspirations, as found in the 'New Age' are a point of meeting between the Gospel and world.

Moynagh (2001), who, before his ordination, was a policy advisor on pay and employment issues at the CBI, has looked at the church and its decline from a somewhat different perspective to that of life-long clergy. From his research he agrees with Drane that the church in Britain needs to rebuild itself from small units who find God in diverse ways and practices, perhaps being linked by using the same building and occasionally coming together in a common faith celebration. He gives several examples of where churches have engaged well with the community in which they are set. One URC church was included in his study, Bromley by Bow in London, which was visited as part of this study. This church plays a significant role at the heart of its very mixed community. The church was in sharp decline numerically when the Rev'd Andrew Mawson arrived. Indeed the congregation was past even being in 'maintenance mode' which perhaps gave Mawson the opportunity which he certainly grasped. The church was in a very deprived area of London with many different immigrant groups living and arriving in the area. As a consequence of its deprivation, many different and large funding sources for development work were available. Mawson grasped the moment and the church has developed to become the hub of the community, restoring life not only to the community but to individuals. The Church Centre has a GP Surgery, restaurant, and community gardening scheme, which has redesigned and now manages several gardens in many of London's 'squares'. Attached to the premises are several studios which are let out to various artists, all of

whom must offer a community involvement. An example of the success of this project was the story of the 'Sculptor in Residence', at the time of my visit, a local person who had been through a church connected training scheme and was now receiving commissions from many large organisations including the National Trust.

The question that might be posed in relation to his work is that of how far it represents the church making a spiritual contribution to Bromley by Bow. Bromley by Bow certainly shows that there are opportunities for the churches to make incursions into the life of their communities, but it is less obvious that the model shows how spirituality can be a bridge between church and world. Whilst the concerns of Bromley by Bow church may well be an expression of Reformed worldly spirituality, it is not obvious that they are a genuine example of the church and world meeting in spiritual concourse, except in a sense that broadens 'spirituality' so much as to make it quite indistinct.

Another example of a Christian attempt to forge spiritual links with the wider world is that of Baker (Baker, Gay & Brown, 2003) and others, who, whilst working for the Youth For Christ movement, devised 'The Labyrinth' (Baker & Collins, 2000), an interactive spiritual journey experience, with some similarities to Frost's *Essence*, that was first sited in St Paul's Cathedral in March 2000. In the Labyrinth there are nine steps arranged in two phases: inward journey: noise, letting go, hurts, distractions, holy space / incense; outward journey: self, planet, others, impression. People progress through each section at their own pace and have the opportunity to explore spiritual issues about themselves and their life journey.

Alongside evidence of actual links being formed between churches/Christian faith and the world in the area of spirituality, is evidence that there is quite significant

receptivity amongst non-church people to the idea of God or religion. For instance, in 1995 Nottingham University ran a seminar about genetically modified (GM) crop production. Nottingham had been at the forefront of the production of GM tomatoes. During the seminar we were given the results of some market research about GM crops undertaken by the Food and Drink Federation (1995), taken from a representative sample of the population aged 15 years and over. In the middle of this work was the question 'How important is religion in your everyday life?', to which 39% of the respondents responded with very or fairly important. Even more marked is the unpublished Woodlands Survey (Brierley, 2003), carried out by a group of URC churches in their community, which reported that '48% of the respondents said that God was fairly important to them and a sixth, 18%, said that God was the most important reality in their lives'.

Again, in November 2007, Tearfund produced a report about people's prayer habits in the UK, (Tearfund, 2007) which offered some startling findings about the prayer habits of the UK population, for instance, that nearly a half of UK adults, 20 million people, claim to pray.

In contrast to work cited so far, Heelas and Woodhead's (2005) research in Kendal suggests that there is far less scope than some think for the churches to relate productively to emerging spiritualities. Between October 2000 and June 2002 they carried out extensive research about the religious and spiritual activities in Kendal. This is an important study in that it sought to offer a rigorous empirical study of an area of concern where supposition or "gut feeling" had guided thinking heretofore. The research team divided their researchers into two groups, which they called "The Congregational Domain" and the "Holistic Milieu Activities". The Congregational

Domain consisted of 25 churches with a total membership of 2207 people. The Holistic Milieu consisted of 53 very different groups, ranging from aromatherapy, pagan activities, and Taizé singing, to yoga, numbering in total 1675 people – that being the total number who responded to questionnaires.

The study offered the following propositions:

‘Life as forms of the sacred, which emphasize a transcendent source of significance and authority to which individuals must conform are at their expense of the cultivation of their unique subjective-lives, are most likely to be in decline.

Subjective-life forms of the sacred, which emphasize inner sources of significance and authority and the cultivation or sacralization of unique subjective-lives, are most likely to be growing.’ :(Heelas and Woodhead, 2005 p.6).

The research team set themselves to test this thesis by undertaking two primary tasks: to see what was going on and to see how much of the different forms of activity was going on. The primary research method involved the use and analysis of questionnaires. They found that attendance at churches from 1987 to 2001 had declined by 50% and that activities in the Holistic Milieu has increased from 30 in 1987 to 126 in 2001, an increase of 300%. This suggested that Kendal had not at that point experienced a fully-fledged spiritual revolution. However, it was extrapolated from those figures that this would happen in the next 25 to 30 years, as average church attendances shrink to 2% (3% for congregations of experiential difference & 1% for congregations of humanitarian experience) (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, p.148). They also found little overlap between the two groups which at one point they described as having ‘a chasm lying between them’. (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, p.31) This suggests that there is perhaps little meeting point between the two groups and they will always remain two distinct groupings, and has implications to be considered seriously in mission activities. There was one small but

not necessarily statistically significant exception to this in the members of the Unitarian Church (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, p.31), (6% of the Congregational Domain) who were regularly actively involved in Holistic Milieu activities. The evidence of the Kendal study would seem to lead, then, to the somewhat uncomfortable conclusion that the recovery of a greater spiritual 'sense' on the part of churches will not necessarily have a significant missiological dimension as far as those attracted to the 'New Age' goes. This does not, of course, mean that other non-churched people outside of the 'New Age' might not be attracted by a renewed sense of spiritual vigour within the churches, but it challenges easy assumptions as far as this goes.

The difficulties of making spirituality a meeting point between church and the wider society are also related to the lethargic approach of some Christians to their inheritance of practical spirituality. In his St Antholin's Lectures, for instance, McGrath (McGrath, 1993) examines the present state of spirituality in the evangelical tradition in Britain. He concludes that a developed sense of spirituality and spiritual growth is not strong within that tradition, despite its history of spiritual concern and practical discipleship, and that active steps needed to be taken to ensure that this was remedied and suggests going back to the sacraments as a point of personal devotion and reflection, and developing some scripturally based role models to help people develop their relationship with God.

In a way similar to McGrath, Rodgerson Pleasants (2004), analysing the work of Leonard Sweet, advocates that the way forward for churches is through the re-examination of and reconnection with their past, because postmodern people respond to the past or as Sweet puts it:

'To be 'radical' in the post modern era means not to tear up the roots ... but to go to the roots' and there find the direction, energy and nutrients necessary for growth and movement' (Sweet, 1999, pp.88-91).

In his development of these ideas in a later work he argues that 'ancientfuture' faith, as he describes it, looks back at the past but moves forward using its tradition and history as an anchor and strength and will be 'EPIC' (Sweet 2000). This is to say: experimental; people need to experience God for themselves; participatory and interactive, people live with interdependency; image driven, people react to images and stories; and connectional, people long for community - the success of 'facebook' and other internet-connected activities are testament to this. This model of a future shape for the church is stimulating and links well with the current project, which includes the attempt to explore the rooting of the development of a spirituality for the future in the Reformed tradition of spirituality that characterises the URC. Moreover, Sweet's approach in looking to relate tradition to current movements in the life of non-church people (eg the success of facebook) also corresponds with the tack taken here.

'Spiritual energy' in secular situations

This essay was prompted by the observation of a 'spiritual energy' in some secular situations, a phenomenon which was apparently lacking in the United Reformed Church both locally and nationally. There are many examples of the ways in which spiritual energy has been found outside formal religion. Hamilton, for instance, writing about his childhood and upbringing in Northern Ireland, wrote of a place, An Cheathru Rua (The Red Quarter) in Connemara as a special place for his family in Ireland which they visited only once a year:

'It was a place where you could live in your imagination, my mother said, a place where everything was simple and you didn't need possessions,It was a place full of things you could not pay for with money , a place where you could be rich with nothing but silence and landscape. All you needed was sandwiches and milk and the wind at your back' (Hamilton, 2003, p.180).

This place became for the Hamilton family a place of liberation from the pressures of daily existence, a place where they were free to be themselves, a place where they found their total fulfilment, a 'touching place' that changed and energised their existence for the rest of the year until they could return again.

Dr Ian Player, founder of The Wilderness Foundation, a foundation dedicated to enabling people to undertake visits to remote places in the wilderness in order to promote their preservation, and allowing individuals to experience short stays in wilderness areastells, in a radio broadcast (Midweek 2006), of how people said after a few days in the wilderness that they felt 'at home,' which he described as 'the million year old man within connecting with the now'. The foundation website has as its heading a quote from J.S. Mill in 1848 (Wilderness Foundation)

'Solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could ill do without'.

McIntosh (2004), working with perhaps a less exclusively individualistic perspective, and, drawing on his experience in the Scottish Highlands and islands argues, that the future of human society depends upon building better communities in the widest sense, by which he means communities with a real and living engagement with the earth and environment and within which people are valued by each other, and with their souls. If we understand and build our communities in this way, he says, 'Love becomes incarnate' He says the test of any course of action is: 'does it help the poor?, Does it restore the broken in nature'?

Lanzarote, an island in the Canaries, has been, for me, similarly a place of spiritual renewal, of closeness to God in a very special way. Here one man, César Manrique, worked to shape the development of the island, energised by his personal engagement with nature. Despite the death of César Manrique some 15 years ago the island of Lanzarote has continued to follow and develop his ideas and principles. Because of my personal experience of the effect of the engagement with and preservation of the environment through the energy and motivation of Manrique, without any apparent religious spiritual base, I have chosen Lanzarote as a case study for inclusion in this research.

Lanzarote is a small island in which Manrique and his work are generally held in great esteem. Much of the literature about him is published by his foundation and therefore *The Lancelot Magazine*, published quarterly, with over 100 editions, was one of my primary sources. The editor of this magazine since its inception, Mr Larry Yaskiel, was a personal friend of Manrique. Research through all the editions of this magazine and a personal interview with Yaskiel did reveal some rifts that had existed between Manrique, individuals and the government which enabled deeper exploration in other interviews.

Lanzarote Arquitectura inedita (Manrique et al, 1998) is a photographic record of the architecture across the whole of Lanzarote, before any development took place, and is Manrique's major work. In this he captures, in photographs, the essence of what the island meant to him, in both his engagement with the landscape and the people. His meticulous eye for detail and patience to capture the right lighting effect is recorded in both the words and in the images. It is in this work he talks about 'discovering the music of the silence' which he uses to describe the possibility of

human engagement with the powers of creation, which some people choose to do and others do not..

An important interview was that with Antonio Hormiga, (1995), author of *Lanzarote: antes de César (Lanzarote before César)*. An official government historian he pointed out that Manrique was very skilful in his careful development of the island, preserving the essence and external appearance of what was there but adding modern interiors.

César Manrique 1950 - 1957 (Fundacion César Manrique 2006) documents the work of Manrique as an artist over this formative period of his life, his time in Madrid.

César Manrique (Gordillo 1995) and *César Manrique in his own words* (Gordillo 1997) both look at the man, his art and his engagement with nature. It is not however compiled from an interview process but from the collections of notes, drafts and unpublished material held by the Foundation. It is a helpful work in gaining some understanding of Manrique's motivation and thought process. Published by the foundation it can be considered a reasonably accurate representation of the facts.

For a more general undersatnding of the island and its culture *Natura Y Cultura De Las Islas Canarias* (Hernandes 2003) is a comprehensive record of the environment and culture of the Canary Islands. *Concépcion* (1998) also offers a helpful history of the origional inhabitants of the islands and their desendants.

Alongside the study of the main primary sources as far as Lanzarote is concerned, I have found a range of secondary sources which have helped me understand and evaluate the Lanzarote case study. Amongst these are the following. Heintzman (2010) examines the complex relationship between nature-based recreation and

spirituality through examination of past studies and theoretical models, concluding that engagement with nature can lead to enhanced spiritual experiences.

In this case study conducted in 2006 - 7 of a specific religious site in Canada, Williams, (2010) by observation and personal experience, was attempting to assess the therapeutic value of that particular site for healing and spiritual renewal. Although it was very difficult to measure objectively, she concluded that the stillness and the opportunities of engagement with the environment were therapeutic for those who visited. This site already had a religious significance, but this and the other examples in this section suggest that engagement with a particular place, landscape or environment can enhance spiritual renewal and healing.

Sheldrake (2009), in an unusual paper was seeking, through conversations with architects, planners and others, to connect people with their built environment, open spaces and the cities they inhabit. He advocates that buildings should reinforce 'the value of people and the shared public life rather than project the profiles of economics or social elites' (Sheldrake, 2009, p.148) and that open spaces should be designed to allow interaction and involvement rather than pure functionality.

York (2005) in his essay gives a very detailed explanation of Pantheism which will be discussed in fully in Chapter 4 (p.115).

Oman (1950) in this sermon, *A Dialogue with God* explores and challenges the listener to reflect on how they interact with God. That interaction is the true measure of our real engagement with God. He gives the example of Jesus as the supreme example of an authentic engagement with God. Of him he says: 'Jesus humanly reveals God because the will of the Father was the breath of life to him so that he gave the right to answer to every word of God' It is not what we say about scripture

but how we respond to it. If we have the right thoughts and actions God will be there. God challenges us to a living interactive, accountable, whole-being relationship, in all we do.

McFague (1993), writing some years ago developed in this essay from her previous work the model of the world or universe as God's body. In her development she argues that we should think in terms of space, where we fit in with the rest of the world, adopting a natural perspective rather than a historical one, because that helps us to find the relationship between justice and ecology. Part of her case is that we need to recognise that the earth is our true home and that we belong there

(McFague, 1993, pp.101-3). In her 'Organic model' She develops some of the pantheistic ideas discussed by others. She argues:

'If the world is God's body, then nothing happens to the world that doesn't happen to Godthe God who is the breath of our breath is closer to us than we are to ourselves; this God is in us and with us no matter what happens' (McFague, 1993, p.176).

These ideas are helpful in interpreting Manrique's views and could be helpful in engaging URC members with God in perhaps a different way of thinking.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I have surveyed a broad swathe of material relating to the tasks of the thesis. My review of the history and analysis of Christian spirituality and of extra-church spiritualities has suggested a definition of both, which sees spirituality in general as being to do with the achievement of a sense of purpose and meaning, including sometimes corporate and sometimes a reference to a transcendent source of meaning. Christian spirituality, it has been suggested, is similar in ways to the general understanding, but places emphasis on God and Christ as the ultimate sources of meaning and is irreducibly corporate. Christians will always have an implicit spirituality, but the ideal is that it should be part of the conscious life

of the Christian, which is the only basis for the on-going and controlled development of Christian spirituality in line with the set criteria of the Christian life that include the guidance of the scriptures and the goal of personal and social transformation. Given that this thesis is concerned with the URC and the renewal of its tradition of spirituality, the focus then turned to an outline of the distinctive features of the Reformed way of being spiritual. Following Cornick, five marks of Reformed spirituality were identified. Drawing from this analysis and, in part, to keep the thesis manageable, it is proposed in subsequent chapters to concentrate on working with only three of Cornick's 'marks': the place of the Bible as the vehicle of divine speech; the role of prayer; and the advocacy of a world spirituality. The justification for this is not only practical. The mark of 'election' raises significant theological questions that lie beyond the scope of this thesis; the ecclesiological 'mark' seems to me to be very close to that of 'worldly spirituality'. The discussion of Reformed spirituality led on to a review of some of the literature dealing with 'spirituality' as a bridge between the church and world. Here it was seen that there is a mixture of views. Some, such as Drane and Frost, see potential in the church's using the language of spirituality as a point of contact between church and the world. Others, such as Heelas and Woodhead, are more cautious about this, suggesting that the 'New Age' has developed largely in opposition to the churches, rather than as an augmentation to Christianity. Indeed the 'New Age' perhaps has developed as an alternative for those who have been alienated from the churches. Nevertheless some voices such as McGrath and Rodgeron Pleasants encourage a recovery of Christian forms of spirituality, suggesting that the way forward is to reassess implicit traditions of spiritual growth and fulfilment, which Christians have neglected. Interestingly, Bradley

has recently suggested that such a reappropriation of Christian history will also have the beneficial effect of blunting the movement towards fundamentalism in the churches caused by an ignorance of the messy and very human past of the Christian tradition – itself perhaps a spiritually worthwhile achievement! (Bradley, 2010). Finally the chapter finished off by surveying a sample of the some of the forms of non-church spirituality that have energised people in the recent past. A focus of this section was a brief introduction to the Lanzarote experience, which will be used as a case study later in the thesis. The hope is that, notwithstanding the views of Heelas and Woodhead, signs of the continuing spiritual interests and desires of our contemporaries suggest that there is a well of interest that the churches should and can tap into, if only they will give proper attention to offering spirituality paths that scratch where modern men and women itch.

CHAPTER 2

IS THE URC BOTH REFORMED AND SPIRITUAL?

This chapter picks up a question posed above: 'Is there a Reformed understanding of spirituality present within the URC?' The assumption being made is that one dimension of spiritual renewal is having an understanding of that which is to be renewed or recontextualised. Thus, the question of whether the URC as a whole has a grasp of a coherent spirituality is rather fundamental. The thesis of this chapter is that the shaping documents, the liturgical tradition and some of the expressions of the Assembly and the lesser courts of the church, and of key Church figures have indeed conveyed tacitly and sometimes explicitly a Reformed spirituality consistent with Cornick's description of Reformed spirituality as being Bible focused, prayer based and concerned with the transformation of the whole of life. Though, as we will see, there is no consistent pattern and the Assembly itself has been somewhat less than able to articulate the glories of the Reformed tradition.

Since its formation in 1972 the URC, initially formed from the amalgamation of the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in England, had never anticipated that it would have a long life. The hope was always that the forming of the URC would be the catalyst for the natural growth of larger ecumenical entities. However, with the rejection of overtures for union by other denominations in 1980, the URC found itself in a position it had not planned for and has, perhaps, been struggling to find its identity ever since. There have been some further unions: with the Reformed Churches of Christ in 1981; and the Congregational Church in Scotland in 2000, but the wholesale reconfiguration of British Christianity that was envisaged in the 1970s has not come about, leaving the URC somewhat in a state of limbo.

The URC is not a homogeneous church. By the nature of its formation, compromises have had to be made to accommodate the different constituent parts. This is to suggest that there is no single uniform 'URC spirituality', though my argument is that, for all that there is diversity, the URC as a whole shares the three features of Reformed spirituality that this essay is concerned to discuss, namely, Bible, prayer and a world-focused spirituality, though this sometimes goes unrecognised by members and ministers, particularly those with no history in the pre-union denominations.

At this point it may be useful to reflect a little on the characteristic diversity that defines the URC. The diversity of the URC is most acute in the realm of ecclesiology. Congregationalists, who formed the largest component part of the URC, believe strongly in the independence of the local church, with the local church meeting having a place of great significance. In contrast, Presbyterians have a far more centralised system of church government, involving an ascending series of church courts, each subject to the one above it, with the national General Assembly standing at the apex. The URC has tried to combine elements from both of these systems, maintaining the independence of the local church and its church meeting as a congregation's primary decision-making body, but added to this there are three other wider layers of additional governance: Districts, Synods and the annual – now biennial - General Assembly. The Churches of Christ, who joined the URC after its birth, brought to the URC, believer's baptism, weekly communion, and a non-stipendiary ministry – all of which have been included within URC structures, which make up in ecumenical graciousness what it lacks in consistency.

The diverse principles of governance and ministry that are expressed in the URC find a reflection in the theological diversity of the church. URC members, ministers and congregations may be found at every point on the theological continuum, including conservative evangelicals, charismatics, traditional liberals and non-realist Christians. Camroux (2008c, p.144), using the 1989 English Church Census Results, suggests that 24% of URC members might describe themselves as 'evangelical', 37% 'liberal' and 36% 'broad', but he suggests that "broad" means nothing more than simply not evangelical. In a later, unpublished piece of work examining churches that were growing in the URC, Hopkins invited participating churches to describe themselves:

'16 churches (27.59%) were roughly speaking 'conservative evangelical', while 14 churches (24.14%) were roughly speaking 'liberal', with the remaining 28 churches (48.28%) representing varying degrees of being 'middle of the road' (Hopkins, 2001, p.12).

These were a specifically defined group of churches in the URC that were linked by their growth in numbers, but the results do reflect the earlier findings and again illustrate the extent to which the URC is not a homogenous church.

In seeking to create a new legal entity and a new church, the URC had to bring together traditions, theologies and practices into a legal framework which had to be approved by the denominations concerned, as each amalgamation took place, and by Parliament. The United Reformed Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000, were this legal framework, which was known within the church as the Basis Of Union and is contained for use by churches in 'The Manual', (United Reformed Church, 2000) amended and updated periodically, as necessary, by the General Assembly. The Basis of Union contains 25 general statements about the Church, its relationships with others, its purpose, faith and ministry, and contains detailed appendices about

how various matters of governance are to be exercised in the Church. A summary of these points was brought together in *A Statement about the nature, faith and order of The United Reformed Church* (United Reformed Church, 2000, Schedule D) and both will be referred to collectively as 'The Statement'. The original Statement and a second, accessible version for congregational purposes, as approved by the General Assembly in 1990, are both set out in the schedule. Each of the nine sections of this document begin with 'The United Reformed Church ...' and although principally a document about what the URC believes, it is also used as a statement to which Ministers are required to assent, both at their ordination and at subsequent inductions, on changes of pastorate. Elders are not required to directly assent to the 'Statement' during their ordination, but it must be read as part of any elder's ordination ceremony and declarations made in that ceremony are made 'In the light of this Statement ...' (United Reformed Church, 2000, Schedule B, p.A12). The 'Statement' is not required to be read at the admission of members and no direct references are made to it in the affirmations that are required to be made by new members. It is surprising, perhaps, considering the centrality of the 'Statement' to the identity of the URC, that it is used very infrequently in the lives of local churches. But how does 'The Statement' measure up as statements of the URC's Reformed heritage and spirituality, understood in terms of Cornick's emphasis on the Bible, prayer and a worldly spirituality as being typical of Reformed spirituality?

The Bible and its primary importance is very clearly stated:

'The highest authority for what we believe and do is Gods' word in the Bible, alive for his people today through the help of the spirit' (United Reformed Church, 2000, p.A18).

This is very firmly a statement consistent with Reformed spirituality, which has stood the test of time, and manages to straddle the balance between the evangelical group within the URC - GEAR (Group for Evangelism and Renewal within the United Reformed Church), which tends to emphasise quite strongly the supreme authority of the Bible, and the more liberal wing of the Church which would want to place greater emphasis on the Spirit-led interpretation of the text. It is true that GEAR, which has 400 members, has found it necessary to frame its own affirmation of the place of the Bible stating:

'We affirm that the Bible is His written Word, inspired by His Spirit, entirely trustworthy and supremely authoritative for the faith and conduct of all people'.
(GEAR, 2010)

This affirmation however is consistent with that of the 'Statement', being a gloss on the latter. The unifying function of the 'Statement's' comment on the Bible holds, notwithstanding that, as Riglin has shown, the process of debate within the URC on the legitimacy of homosexual practice focussed on hermeneutics and tested the bonds of the Church's unity to the limits. (Riglin, 2008)

The role given to the Bible in the 'Statement' is reflected in the day to day lives of the congregations and institutions of the URC. At the General Assembly the importance of the scriptures is stressed by the fact that each day's business is begun with the ceremonial bringing in of the Bible to be placed on a lectern in a central position where it remains throughout that days Assembly's business. This symbolism suggests that the Church sees the Bible as the key source of divine guidance, for there the word of God is heard and divine wisdom is to be sought. Many local congregations ape the Assembly through having similar ceremonies to mark the beginning of worship, whilst others note the Bible's importance by having an open

Bible permanently on the communion table, a central feature in most churches. This symbolism is important, though people may not always appreciate its significance.

The Bible text, important as it is, is only one part of the equation. Preaching and exposition of the word are equally important since, as Calvin's own devotion to preaching testifies, the written word is unprofitable unless it is broken open by the preacher. In this vein, Gunton, another important Reformed theologian (2002, p.125) tells us that the Gospel will not be heard unless it is communicated and interpreted by those to whom it has been entrusted, and that the proclamation of the Gospel, the sharing of the news of Jesus acting in the world, brought about the foundation of the church. Dodd (1936, pp.1ff) also reminds us that the preaching of the early Church was an act of proclamation of the good news of Jesus to people who did not know. Preaching has been and still continues to be a fundamental part of weekly worship in the URC. Traditionally, the sermon is set toward the end of the service, as an exposition of the scriptures heard earlier, and the climax of the worship. Its importance can be measured against the celebration of the sacrament of communion, which in most URC churches happens monthly. In the Congregational tradition, communion was celebrated in a separate short service after the main service. In the Presbyterian tradition, the sacrament was generally celebrated quarterly. In the Churches of Christ there was a weekly celebration. Infrequency, so far as the Congregational and Presbyterian traditions are concerned, should not, however, be taken as an indicator that these services were seen as unimportant in the life of the Church. Indeed, infrequency of celebration was often related to an increased sense of significance.

Another indication of the importance of preaching to the URC is the architecture of many older churches. Typically, the pulpit is a dominant fixture at the centre of focus at the front of the church, with the communion table either over to the side or under the pulpit. In either arrangement there is an emphasis on the importance of word and sacrament together as pointing to the Word, Jesus. In this regard it is interesting to note that Calvin thought of the sacramental life as being a kind of visual display that only made sense in the context of the word preached and proclaimed.

Reflecting the importance of the scriptures is the folk memory of the 'great days' of the Church, which tends to focus on stories of the power of good preachers to bring in people off the street to listen to the word. Be it Dale's ministry at Carrs Lane in Birmingham, Weatherhead's (A Methodist minister) work at the City Temple, London from 1936 to 1960, or Ker's work in 19th Century Alnwick, these famous ministries are remembered primarily for the way in which they used the spoken word to convey the Gospel message in understandable ways. In this regard, Camroux (2009c), in his eulogy of the state of the URC, highlights not only the lack of theologians in the contemporary URC, but also of high calibre preachers.

In distinction to Camroux, it might be argued that the decline in older forms of preaching is not necessarily a sign that the Bible and preaching, per se, are being valued less. Rather the changes that he interprets as indicative of decline may be simply an adjustment to new circumstances. Certainly the place of the sermon is still assured in URC worship. Times, however, have changed. No longer are people thirsting to hear "the word". Preaching has changed; it is still important, but is evolving in different ways. Sermons typically will still be measured by exposition and teaching, but there is increasing use of digital projection and other media to try to

convey the message to those who live in an age of television and the internet, where concentration levels are diminished through exposure to quickly changing images and information sources. So though the 'traditional sermon' may be passing in some churches, yet there will still be a place for the use of speech and other media to perform the role played by the sermon, namely that of communicating the word, both to those who have not heard it before and who happen to drop into church, sometimes on account of occasional offices, and to those who are more regularly in church. The challenge is to find forms of communication that can fulfil the role traditionally performed by the sermon in Reformed spirituality, that is, to forge modes of communication that include interaction and real exchange with congregations in both bringing the scriptures alive, making them relevant to people's everyday living, as Calvin sought to do in his time.

Whilst there is significant account taken of scripture in both the 'Statement' and in common usage in the URC, the same cannot be said for prayer, the second mark of Reformed spirituality that concerns us here. Important as prayer is in the Reformed tradition, it receives scant direct mention in the 'Statement'. Mention is made of 'the Spirit' but little of how people might engage with the Spirit through prayer, which, arguably, is the most distinctive feature of any religious/spiritual practice. The value of the individual conscience is clearly stated, but this is more in relation to specific issues. In the second section of the 'Statement' it talks of:

'The life of faith to which we are called is the Spirit's gift continually received through the Word, the sacraments and our Christian life together' (United Reformed Church, 2000, p.A18).

It might be imagined that recognition of the place of prayer is implicit in the 'Christian life together', but it is perhaps telling that there is no explicit mention of prayer and

that this omission has not been corrected in the 38 years in which the URC has existed. From a perusal of the Assembly Records it seems that there has been no attempt to make good this deficit in the 'Statement'. True, this deficit has been remedied, to some extent, in the Vision4life material, with the second year of learning totally devoted to developing the life of prayer. Moreover, to coincide with the Vision4life process, GEAR have produced a booklet to nurture prayer in the URC (Hargis & Harley, 2009), which encourages the reader to enter into the 'transforming power of prayer' and offers practical examples for individuals and churches to follow. So, whilst there is a historic deficit in this area, there are attempts being made to remedy the situation, though the URC arguably falls far short of its Reformed heritage in this respect. As Cornick points out, Reformed spirituality has placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of public liturgical prayer in drawing people into the orbit of the word. One example of this emphasis from the 20th Century is that of George McLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, who typically spent much time and effort in coining his public prayers. To what extent ministers and others within the URC who bear responsibility for public worship value the framing of their prayers as a key responsibility is perhaps open to question.

An aspect of prayer in the Congregational tradition is identified by Sell (2009, p.157), that of the Church Meeting. Rather like in the Quaker tradition (Muers, 2004) the Church Meeting in Congregationalism and by extension the URC and, indeed, any meeting of a congregation, does not just act as a democratic decision-making body, but is a body gathered together to seek the will of God, and it aims to achieve this through a process of dealing with issues through listening, discussion, prayer and eventually a vote.

The third element of Reformed spirituality that I am concerned with is 'worldly spirituality; 'to what extent is this dimension recognisable in the URC?' Section 11 of the Basis of Union of the URC, devoted to the purpose of the church, picks up this idea very firmly. It talks of

'receiving and expressing the renewing life of the Holy Spirit' and living out lives of joyful and sacrificial service' (United Reformed Church, 2000, p.A2).

The URC holds, according to this document, that central to its identity is the call for all members to live out their faith in their lives in the world. Underpinning this is the thoroughly Reformed notion that there is no absolute distinction to be made between the material and the spiritual; that Christ is Lord of both and that therefore discipleship involves a recognition of his Lordship in all spheres of life. Barth sums this up well:

'Faith is not concerned with a special realm, that of religion, say, but with real life in its totality, the outward as well as the inward questions, that which is bodily as well as that which is spiritual, the brightness as well as the gloom in our life.' (Barth, 1982, p.21).

The evidence in the Church Life Survey detailed in chapter 1 suggests that whilst the URC does subscribe to this holistic vision of discipleship, yet it isn't a vision that is widely enough identified with by the membership as a whole. Or, where there is an emphasis on social reform and justice issues within the URC, it may be that this is not always perceived as a mode of Christian discipleship and witness. Barth comments that 'Gospel and law are not to be separated' (Barth, 1982, p.19), by which he means that ethical principles, for the Christian, need to arise from a grateful response to the Word of God in Christ. It may be that URC members are not always aware of this intrinsic relationship between faith and a concern for social reform.

The above has suggested that on the litmus test of Bible, prayer and worldly spirituality that there are evidences that the URC identifies itself with these 'marks' of Reformed spirituality, though it has been suggested that there is ambiguity in this identification. Very often, it has been suggested, the ideas of a Reformed way of being spiritual are present tacitly, but it may be that the membership as a whole are not sufficiently aware of their inheritance in this respect. For instance, the underlying meaning of revering the Bible in worship is one thing, it is quite another for worshippers to perceive clearly what is being indicated by this reverence given to an 'old book'. This is to suggest that there is a tradition of spirituality operating within the URC expressed, sometimes tacitly, sometimes explicitly, in its communications, forms and practices, but that there is a problem with members owning this tradition fully. One important aspect of this, Rice tells us, is to resolve to preserve the balance between the different elements of Reformed spirituality. Perhaps, for instance, the URC along with other Reformed churches, has been rather good at emphasising the Bible, but less good in recognising the importance of prayer. This may be a factor as to why URC congregations have not always been successful in developing a rounded spirituality amongst its membership. By necessity, allowance, or even choice, certain features of Reformed spirituality have taken priority and upset the search for balance. The URC has perhaps recognised this in the Vision4life materials, with their emphasis on three elements: Bible, prayer and evangelism, each of which is perceived as crucial in enabling individuals and churches to rediscover, as Cornick puts, their 'roots in Reformed spirituality' (United Reformed Church, 2006).

The suggestion has been made that there is operative in the URC a distinctively Reformed spirituality. However, consideration of reports and other theological

expressions which have been presented to URC committees and groups over the years suggest that, whilst there may be an implicit understanding of spirituality, at the level of Church discourse a less certain note has sounded.

An important series of articles written by Camroux (Camroux 2008, a ,b, c, and 2009) and published in the influential journal of the URC Historical Society, asks the question 'Why did the United Reformed Church Fail?'. In trying to answer this question Camroux notes that the URC had been in permanent numerical decline since its inception. This helps to explain why so many General Assembly reports have been focused on mission and church growth, all without any apparent success. He also points out that behind the bare statistics lie other facts including a decline in numbers at worship and the numbers of children involved in the life of the church, this latter accentuating the skewed age profile of the church identified in the Church Life Survey 2002 referred to in Chapter 1. Camroux argues that any hope of renewal lies in local congregations achieving a theological renaissance which would give the church both identity and direction:

'Theologically active local congregations with a vision of what the gospel is and a delight in it and the conviction that 'The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word'.

He says that the Church has:

'a long-term record of programmes that have been inadequately funded, too short, and too superficial, which have been without any impact on the life of the churches. Nothing about Vision4life so far indicates that it will be anything different'. (Camroux, 2009, p.221)

My own research seems to confirm this latter conclusion. Vision4life did get off to a poor start in its first year, due to inadequate resourcing and the poor take up from churches. Moreover, due to the study materials appearing late, much of the initial momentum of the scheme was lost. More generally, my interest in Camroux's work is

that it seems to reflect at least dimensions of the Reformed spirituality that have been discussed above. Camroux, with his emphasis on a theologically led spiritual renaissance, is clearly articulating that aspect of Reformed spirituality that is to do with hearing God's word through the Bible and listening to it through prayer. The fact that Camroux's articles have been carried in one of the main organs of the URC, that they were written by one of the most prominent of URC clergy, and that they have occasioned a great deal of interest within the URC all suggest that the model of spirituality that he is proposing has echoes and roots in the URC itself. Though, if his analysis is right, the model of Christian spirituality that he is advocating is one that broad swathes of the Church have only a tenuous grasp of – a view that corresponds with my own perspective.

Another important indicator of the spirituality of the URC is the unpublished thesis of Keith Riglin *Animating Grace: The practice of Authority and Order in a Reformed Church*. (Riglin 2009). Riglin (2009), a former minister of St Columba's URC, Cambridge, looks in his work at the decision making process in the URC in relation to three key recent issues, the scheme for a covenanting unity with other denominations in 1980, the debate around human sexuality in 1997, and that concerning lay presidency at the sacraments in 1998. He devised a very helpful term 'animating grace'. He comments:

'In this thesis I use the term 'animating grace' to express this central doctrine – seeking to express the distinctly Reformed concept (at least in origin) that the authority of God the Father and God's action in Christ, God the Son ('grace'), is perceived and realised through the activity ('animation') of God the Holy Spirit' (Riglin, 2009, p.12).

Riglin's idea of animating grace is that the Word of God, which is the ultimate authority in the Church, is not identical with texts or creeds, but becomes active

within the Church through the witness of the Spirit as the Church strives to discover what it must say and do in its own context. In this sense Riglin is expounding that aspect of Reformed spirituality which is to do with a speaking God and a listening people. In this way of thinking, the Bible is the witness of the prophets and apostles to the Word of God, but is not that Word in itself. They are inspired words pointing to the Word, which is only discerned through the testimony of the Spirit speaking to the Church as it attends to the Bible and tradition in an attitude of prayer. Working with this principle, Riglin's analysis aims to ascertain whether and to what extent the three discussions within the URC that he is concerned with were marked by animating grace. He concludes that, although the URC professed 'animating grace' as a means in its decision-making processes, other priorities took over and decisions were taken on other grounds. However, the interest for the present thesis is simply Riglin's recognition and description of the Reformed notion of a speaking God and a listening people, which he suggests was present in these formative moments of the Church's recent life, even if it was not ultimately determinative, in his view, of the decisions that were made.

Set against the three 'marks' that I am concerned with here - the reports of the URC General Assembly since the Church's inception strike a more ambiguous note.

From my research in these reports I found that, whilst a fairly regular theme is that of the need for congregations to become engaged in outreach and mission, the underlying purpose of this plea seems to be the need to counteract the rapid decline in numbers noted above. I found little evidence of any consistent effort to encourage spiritual growth amongst members.

An early indicator of the tenor of the reports is found in a report offered to the General Assembly in 1979. By the beginning of 1978, only five years after its formation, financial pressures were building on the church which some thought were symptomatic of a deeper malaise in the church. The original concept of a church that would not exist in ten years' time certainly seems to be reflected in this situation. A working group was set up to look at the problems, with the purpose of creating a vision or map for the decade to come. The group charged with this responsibility submitted to the Assembly an Interim report in May 1979. This report was incredibly long and detailed. In the preamble there was, from the point of view of 'spirituality', an encouraging comment that:

'The profoundest riches of the Church are spiritual and almost by definition immeasurable' (United Reformed Church, 1979, Appendix 8).

However, the promise of this early idea seems to have been totally lost in the remainder of the report. Indeed the idea of spirituality is not introduced again until deep into the appendices where the nebulous comment is made that

'To plan for growth will require renewal of the Spirit and a commitment to evangelism and stewardship throughout the whole church' (United Reformed Church, 1979, Appendix 8, p.xx1).

Perhaps in the light of the report discussed above, the Assembly created in 1984 the 'Faith and Life Department' as part of the centrally organised activities of the Church. The responsibility of this department was to nurture discipleship and effective witness amongst members. In its first report to the Assembly there were two significant statements about the tasks needing to be done:

'The structuring of the life in the local churches in order to deepen understanding and practice of our faith and make witness more effective'.

and

‘The common theme running through is the growing up of all our people in spiritual maturity, so that the church may show forth the life which God is giving as the new age breaks in’ (United Reformed Church, 1985, p.50).

However, there is, disappointingly, no sustained discussion in the report of how this envisaged spiritual growth is to be achieved.

In 1986 there was an interdepartmental report on evangelism which made six suggestions for churches and departments to follow, under the heading of ‘Planning for Growth’. One of the proposals was that there needed to be the commitment to ‘Making time to wait on the Spirit with expectation’. This report came out of what was obviously a powerful group and all the central departments of the church were required to consider their plans for responding to the report and to report back to the Assembly in 1987. Synods, the primary district organisational unit of the Church, were likewise asked to respond actively to the report to the General Assembly and they did so in 1989. This was part of an initiative across all the denominations. In their reports back, each department produced ten steps that they were taking to enable their departments and congregations to grow. The Synods did as requested in 1989. Some of their reports were very long, detailing initiatives that had been taken, others a single paragraph. However, for all the work the reports and suggestions are largely lost in subsequent Assembly reports. This bears out Camroux’s assertion that a major problem characterising the URC is that initiatives have been short-lived and under-resourced.

During the few years after this major initiative, the Faith and Life Committee reports to the Assembly do not contain significant suggestions as to how to deepen the spiritual life of the church, however, in 1990 there was a major amendment to the ‘Statement’. The main paragraphs were unaltered, but additional responsive sections

were added between each paragraph and the 'Statement' then included in the *Rejoice and Sing* hymnbook produced by the URC in 1991. This was designed to make the 'Statement' more participative, when used in services. To coincide with this, the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee produced a five session study pack called *Nature, Faith and Order – What is the United Reformed Church?*. This explored each of the topics in the Statement, encouraging people to understand the issues more fully. The introduction to the pack told its own story as to what the Committee felt was the significance of the 'Statement' in the life of the URC; it commented:

'When the deeper implications of these phrases are appreciated they become not empty words to be parroted, or the 'boring bit' at an induction service, but spine chilling testimony to the kind of church we are or hope to be'(United Reformed Church, 1991).

This was a valiant effort to engender some interest in the 'Statement', but, from my perspective as a long-term minister of the URC it seems that 'the spine chilling testimony' has not yet been appreciated by the broad membership of the Church. Alongside the commentary that they offered to the 'Statement', the Discipleship and Witness Committee, in 1996, also added an additional statement of belief that was to stand alongside the original one in paragraph 17 of the 'Statement' and this included a new paragraph about prayer:

'We rejoice in God who has given us being, who shares our humanity to bring us to glory, our source of prayer and power and praise; to whom be glory, praise and adoration' (United Reformed Church, 1996, p.26).

Whilst this phrase is not exactly an endorsement of Reformed spirituality as I have come to define it, yet certainly in its stress on prayer as a response to God's Word in

Christ – ‘who shares our humanity’ – there are shades of that distinctive element of Reformed Christians being those who strive to listen to God as He speaks.

Looking through the accounts of the Assembly’s meetings, one comes across from time to time mention of the discussion or presentation of reports touching on the spirituality of the Church. Thus in 1998, the South Western Synod (United Reformed Church 1998) reported that they were creating more learning opportunities in the area of spirituality. Again, in 1999, the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee drew attention to the work of their Silence and Retreats Group, but this seems to have been a matter of course, since in the next four subsequent years there was an almost identical report on the work of the sub-group.

Interestingly, the Synod Moderators’ Reports seem to be the greatest source of inspiration and guidance on spiritual matters, so far as the Assembly proceedings are concerned. Some that stood out included that of 1987 which encouraged small churches to be centres of celebration, places of belonging, bases for mission and communities of hope. The report was headed ‘A small church is not a failed large church, it is simply different’ and encouraged district councils to support small churches, particularly where there were opportunities for mission. (United Reformed Church, 1987, p.178). The 1990 report adopted the theme of seeking quality in worship, pastoral care, and discipleship. (United Reformed Church 1990, p.63) In 1993 there was a specific encouragement for churches and individuals to seek growth in spirituality, recognising that there was:

‘a longing in a large number of individuals and churches ... to discover or rediscover a richer spirituality’. (United Reformed Church, 1993, p.63).

The report went on to give examples of the ways people might enrich their spiritual experiences from Bible study, silence and retreats, helping others, each of which

they described as 'discovering the depths of being'. Interestingly this summary statement touches implicitly on the three 'marks' of Reformed spirituality as I have understood them: the study of scripture, the search for attentiveness and discernment in seeking the voice of God through scripture, and witness to the Gospel through works of Gospel service in the world.

In 1995 the Moderators took their inspiration from the part of the 'Statement' highlighting the call to ever new obedience to the living Christ, urging churches to look for new ways of service and witness, and to look forwards rather than backwards. (United Reformed Church, 1995, p.25)

The report of 2000 focused on ministry in the church, clarifying the roles of ordained ministers, but encouraging the ministry of the whole church, and calling for local churches to look at ministry in different ways, using people's individual skills and talents to undertake specific tasks of ministry. (United Reformed Church, 2000, p.19). Again this approach echoes the thought that is so central to Reformed spirituality in its advocacy of worldly spirituality, that there is no absolute distinction to be drawn between the spiritual and the earthly and that all therefore have a vocation to serve God where they are placed and with what gifts they are endowed.

Following the Church Life Survey in 2002 and the launch of the Catch the Vision work, the 2003 report, entitled 'The Great Feast,' was an in-depth examination of spirituality and the setting of Christian spirituality within the wider context. Within the context of falling numbers and financial problems they urged people not to give in to the temptation of despair, but to be reminded of the power and strength of the Holy Spirit offering life in all its fullness. The report gave many examples of expressions of spirituality in the modern world, but went on to acknowledge and list the ways in

which the church did not necessarily meet the spiritual expectations of those outside, and sometimes inside the church. It went on to explain how Christian spirituality offered a

‘great feast ... a God-centred spirituality that is holistic and relational and brings creativity, freedom and hope’ (United Reformed Church, 2003, p.25).

Clearly this is a most important statement on the URC and spirituality from those working as leaders amongst the local churches. Some of the distinctive features of Reformed spirituality are touched on through the emphasis on the importance of engaging with God through the Spirit (the function of prayer) and on holistic witness. However, there is perhaps a lack of grasp of the details of the spiritual tradition that the URC inhabits and which provides a basis for both responding to the needs of the time and critically examining some dimensions of the spiritual hunger that the report noted.

With the publication of *Catch the Vision for God's Tomorrow* in 2004 the moderators urged the church to ‘live up to its calling’, to look at new ways of being the Church, and to be open to radical change. (Reports to General Assembly, 2004, p.21) This is all good and well, but one might have hoped that these articulations would have had a greater sense of the need to dig deep into the URC’s inheritance of spirituality, as well as the need to be willing for the novel.

This chapter has tried to answer the question, ‘Does the URC inhabit consciously its inheritance of Reformed spirituality?’. My findings have been somewhat mixed. I suggested, on the one hand, that the ‘Statement’, which is key to the self-identity of the Church, does reflect a Reformed understanding of the Christian life with its emphasis on Bible and worldly spirituality, and, to a lesser extent, prayer. Moreover, it has been suggested that the some of the main emphases of the ‘Statement’ are

enshrined in the practices of the Church, notably in the importance given to the Bible and preaching. On the other hand, other kinds of evidence are more ambiguous. Camroux's work suggests the urgent need for a rediscovery of the basics of Reformed spirituality, a finding which corresponds with Riglin's claim that 'animating grace' has been notable by its absence in the making of crucial decisions. Moreover, the reports of the Assembly that I have looked at are shy of clearly articulating the key dimensions of what the URC believes about the Christian life, though regular in calling for spiritual renewal. Indeed, it is only when one comes to the reports of the moderators that one comes close to hitting the mark and, even here, there still seems to be an obsessive concern with the novel rather than the re-appropriation of the familiar but still relevant tradition of spirituality that is the URC's own. Helping members of the URC to rediscover the 'animating grace' of their Reformed heritage could be a key to bringing life back to many URC churches. However, as against the constant pleas of the Assembly for renewal, raised to a large extent as a response to the practical problems of decline, the rediscovery of 'animating grace' should be for the sole purpose of the restoration and renewal of the people of God, that they together may become the whole people of God; those who hear and respond to God's word through holistic service in the world.

CHAPTER 3

USING BEVANS' TRANSCENDENTAL MODEL AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

In order to understand the theological relevance of César Manrique's life and work in Lanzarote to the renewal of the spirituality of the URC, a framework was needed that would allow for structured reflection on the different situations, enabling theologically justifiable conclusions to be drawn for the URC from reflection on Manrique's work. To identify such a model I turned to consider the suite of models offered in Stephen Bevans' *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2007. Bevans depicts six different models of contextual theology, ways in which the Gospel can be related to context. He offers different ways of relating the Gospel within, through, and to particular contexts. Interestingly, the task in hand was almost the reverse of this, to look at a particular situation and context, Lanzarote, to reflect on it and to seek to apply any insights from that into the situation of the URC. The fact that this was what was envisaged narrowed down the selection of models appropriate to the task in hand to one, the so-called transcendental model, which is not so much concerned with the direct application of lessons from one context to another, but of the underlying attitudes that can be learned in one context and their applicability to another. However, prior to coming to a descriptive analysis of this model and its application, I will turn first to addressing some of the background issues in pursuing contextual theology.

The two traditional strands of theological reflection have been the Bible and tradition, both offering insights into situations, but taking little conscious account of the situation itself. Many preachers, including myself, in using passages from the Bible have taken time to look at the context from which the passage comes, the time and

events that surrounded its writing, and tried to reflect some of the truths and relevance of that passage into the context and situations of the listeners, but not necessarily allowing the listener's situation, or context, to shape the discussion and development of ideas.

Bevans, in the early chapters of his book, argues that:

‘contextual theology recognises culture, history, contemporary thought forms are to be considered alongside scripture and tradition as valid sources for theological expression’ (Bevans, 2007, p.4).

He goes on to say that all of our life experiences are different, but that our experiences shape who we are, and how we experience God in our lives, and that our contextual settings do give us individual and different world views. He also points out that the Bible itself emerges from its own cultural setting, or in fact many settings, being written in and from many different cultural settings. He also challenges the traditional approaches as: ‘not resonating with contemporary experiences’ (Bevans, 2007, p.9). This is a very pertinent point - a Gospel and tradition presented as absolute truths, impervious to question and challenge - which could be a factor in people seeing the church as increasingly irrelevant to their lives. He defines culture as:

‘sets of meanings and values that inform a way of life’

and theology's function as

‘precisely the way that religion makes sense within a particular culture’ (Bevans, 2007, p.9).

This does seem to be exactly where traditional methods of theology and churches have failed and, as a result, are not now engaging with people and the world, in a way that offers meaning and purpose to their lives and living. Incarnation, he argues,

is about God becoming visible, graspable, and intelligible, and the Trinity representative of God as a 'dynamic relational community of persons whose very nature is to be present and active in the world'. He argues further that theologians need to do theology contextually, 'because God is present and acts contextually' (Bevans, 2007, p.15).

Bevans suggests four simple guidelines for undertaking theology contextually (Bevans, 2007, pp.16ff). Firstly, that human experience and Christian tradition are to be read together dialectically. That is, that they are to be allowed to interact and mutually shape each other. Secondly, that theology is much wider than just scholarship and that tradition, hymns, sermons or expositions of the word, and rituals can all express God's activity and presence. Thirdly, that traditional theology is usually carried out by a highly trained scholar, whereas, with contextual theology, the people, grounded in the experience of the context, work out their own theology with the skilled theologian supporting their efforts through offering insights from the wealth of tradition. And fourthly, that theology must be an activity of dialogue emerging out of a mutual respect between 'faithful' but not technically trained people and 'faithful' and listening professionals.

Bevans, (2007, pp.16ff) in addition, raises some important issues pertinent to this particular essay. There is, firstly, the question of whether a non-participant in a context can do contextual theology within that context? His initial answer is no, but he then goes on to say that the 'outsider' can make some contribution by approaching the cultural setting openly, with a willingness to read and learn about the culture, with both humility and honesty.

With regard to this point, clearly a question is being raised about the ability of an outsider to get inside a context and understand it well. This is relevant to what I intend here, in that I wish to make use of Lanzarote as a means to understanding how the spirituality of the URC might be revitalised. The situation does not raise questions about my 'right' to theologise for that context, but there is the question as to whether I have the 'right' to make use of Lanzarote for my own context with any integrity. In this regard I would agree with Bevans. Whilst I have engaged with the people and the culture under examination, namely Lanzarote, my reflections and conclusions are always likely to be somewhat lacking in penetration since they will always be those of an outsider, and they do not arise directly from the people of the context themselves. Nevertheless, I think that I have tried to enter empathetically into the situation I have been looking at and to this extent I feel that there is something valuable in what I have learned that can make a contribution to the development of contextual spirituality for the Church of which I am part. I believe that using Bevans' transcendental model as a means of pursuing a structured analysis of the lessons to be learned from Lanzarote for the URC is acceptable, providing the limits and constraints of my understanding of an 'alien' culture are recognised.

Bergmann (2003, pp.87-91) in making a critical assessment of Bevans' work raises some other pertinent issues. Looking specifically at the anthropological model, but of no less relevance to the transcendental model and this research, he suggests that where there are different languages involved in a culture being studied, there may be problems in interpretation and establishing the true meanings of words. Research into rites may also present problems with the many unspoken or unexpressed connections between the outer and inner rites, the material and the social and mental

culture. Bergmann also questions Bevans' tendency to counterpose the Gospel and culture as two opposing poles, whereas it may be better to take a: 'more Lutheran sense of meaning as interpretation of life, which we preach, receive and live believing in Christ'. Bergmann helpfully suggests his own interpretation of contextual theology:

'God inculturates him or herself on a people's world: the Son and the Holy Spirit contextualise themselves and become flesh in dwelling in different created beings in unique situations for the sake of the world. To contextual theology, God is God in function' (Bergmann, 2003, p.90).

Warren makes another important general and pertinent point about how one should investigate and engage with a different culture, He writes:

'Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival' (Warren, 1959, preface).

This also requires an openness of heart and mind in the researcher and a recognition their own cultural situation. Beliefs and presuppositions that they bring to the situation may influence their interpretation and understanding. The researcher or observer can, of course, hope to fully engage with the culture and situation, observing and learning from it within the constraints noted above.

Vincent, (2007, pp.7-13), speaking from his own vast experience of working with contextual theology in urban situations, recognises that the boundaries and definitions of what contextual theology is, are still unclear and says that Bevans: 'should be more help than he is'. Vincent concludes with four points:

'That there is no common language across the radical, liberal and evangelical divide to describe common experiences.
The perception and description of the context itself is never capable of objective analysis. Every contextual perception and description is a highly "loaded" phenomenon.
Contextual theology is to be welcomed and worked at as a way of making theological sense of discipleship

Contextual theology can best be made sense of inasmuch and in so far as it embodies the absolute basics of one's existence – not as one analyses them or perceives them culturally, but as they actually are in basic bottom up experiences' (Vincent, 2007, pp.13)

There are, Bevans advocates, two broad orientations for approaching contextual theology: creation oriented theology, and redemptive centred theology, which are different, but not unrelated perspectives, since in the work of many theologians, for instance St. Irenaeus, creation and redemption are two parts of a continuum of divine grace.

In the creation orientation approach, whilst the world is not regarded as sinless, yet there is the conviction :

'that human experience and so context, is generally good...grace builds on nature, but only because nature is *capable* of being built on, of being perfected in a supernatural relationship with God' (Bevans, 2007, p.21).

Whereas, in the redemption-centred approach:

'God's word can only reach men and women by breaking into the world and calling men and women to say no to the world and yes to God' (Bevans, 2007, p.22).

That is, a redemption-centred approach tends to view creation and culture as vitiated with sin and requiring a fundamental re-ordering.

Those holding a creation-centred approach to theology will see that a contextual theology, which affirms the presence of God in culture, can offer a richness to their understanding of God in the world. However, those having a redemption centred approach will not find the concept of culture as having equal value as scripture and tradition. Snoeberger, writing from an evangelical viewpoint, concludes:

'nonetheless, this proactive model allows for a wide variety of means to gather an audience and create a spirit of goodwill that actively creates "open doors" to the presentation of the gospel'. (Snoeberger 2004, p.377).

His interpretation of the value of this approach was that by getting to know and be alongside people you could much easier present the unerring, unaltered gospel message. There is here an important issue for my own project. Clearly the way in which I have framed my approach suggests that I am taking a creation centred approach. I am expecting to find lessons from Lanzarote that can inform the culture of one Christian church, the URC. That is, I am affirming that God may have been active in the, formally non-Christian spirituality of Manrique and that Christians have something to learn from him. This clearly assumes that culture is fundamentally good in general and that God is active amongst people of all types. My creation-centred approach is an issue that will have to be taken account of in presenting any conclusions of this research to the wider church, since there will always be a body of people who will not accept the basic premise on which the research was based, that observations of situations and events from a wider world setting might in themselves be able to offer something directly to the Christian tradition that might enhance and strengthen that tradition.

A third and very important question is, 'How do you measure the orthodoxy of any contextual theology?' If a contextual theology is to gain acceptance and recognition in wider circles there must be credible measurement criteria, fully acceptable to those outside the situation, by which they would consider the events or theologies to have recognition and value. Bevans, (2007, p.22), outlines some of the fears and suspicions present in evangelical circles, but also at the heart of the Catholic Church. 'In Roman Catholic theology pluralism is a fact, but it is also a fact that pluralism is often viewed with suspicion and caution'. The United Reformed Church is a 'broad church' with evangelicals and liberals sitting generally easily alongside each other,

tolerating their differing views. Allowing for diversity of the Spirit's gifts, and individual's beliefs, the Nature, Faith and Order Statement (The URC Constitution) sets the pattern, in the main, for the local church to take its own decisions about acceptability and practice with the provision for General Assembly to decide in matters of conflict. Rather than devising his own measures of orthodoxy, Bevans (2007, p.23) suggests the possible use of two existing systems. The first one is that of De Mesa and Wostyn who advocate three simple measures, that contextual theology should be orientated to other successful and approved Christian formulations; that a theology that points to or suggests 'un-Christian actions' is wrong; and thirdly, that any theology must have acceptance by the wider church.

Another possible approach is that of Schreiter who suggests five measures, some of which are similar to those mentioned above: firstly, a theology must have inner consistency; secondly, a true expression of contextual theology must be able to be translated into worship; thirdly, the theology must reflect actions in the community such that 'by their fruits you shall know them'; fourthly, the theology should be open to challenge and criticism, and finally, that the theology should be able to contribute positively in a dialogue with other theologies.

Cooper (2003), suggests the addition of four further, complex criteria, most of which are inappropriate to the URC. However he does make one helpful suggestion about the importance of staying within the boundaries of ones' community corresponding with my own view that, however the URC comes to view spirituality, it must remain within and seek to revitalise its tradition in this area.

The purpose of the latter part of this present essay is not to produce a contextual theology as such. It is, as explained earlier, an analysis of a situation in Lanzarote

and the attempt to apply principles from that situation, under the rubric of the transcendental approach, to the context of the URC's Reformed spirituality. However, whenever theology is being done, even when there are modest aims, the question of orthodoxy is relevant. In the quest of contextually relevant spirituality we must stay in continuity with the tradition of which we are part. Within the context and ethos of the URC, De Mesa and Wostyn's criteria would be sufficient measure of the orthodoxy of any developing contextual spirituality. A specific emphasis, given the argument above that there is a discernible Reformed spirituality present in the URC, would be that an orthodox spirituality for the URC must be in continuity with its own tradition, understood here as involving an emphasis on Bible, prayer and worldly spirituality. This would be part of the meaning of 'acceptance by the wider church' so far as the present thesis is concerned.

Finally, before coming on the 'trascendental model' itself, a word about the concept of theological models and what this means, and perhaps more importantly, what it does not mean. Models are used in all sorts of disciplines as a means of understanding and mapping different possible theoretical approaches to issues. They are ideal types, in Weber's sense, and thus are never found in their pure form, but point to tendencies that are found in the actual world of theological endeavour.

Bevans is very clear on this point:

'Models are constructions – they are not mirrors of reality 'out there' they are ideal types or constructed theoretical positions' (Bevans, 2007, p.29).

He proposes six different models, each starting from a different theological perspective, and grades them on a scale from the Anthropological Model, which starts from the experience of the present or context at one end, to the Countercultural Model at the other, which starts from the experience of the past, with the Gospel

shaping and transforming the world. He is clear that there will be crossovers in different situations and that no one situation will fit exactly into one model.

Moon (1995, pp.228-36) is critical of the use of models because he sees any attempt to systemise contextual theologies, and fit them into models, as actually contradicting the whole purpose and being of an indigenous (contextual) theology. This is true to some extent, but the whole purpose of the models are that they are a means of understanding a particular situation where few other structured measures exist and to this extent they are a valid and useful tool. In the present thesis my approach is to take the transcendental model as a trajectory by which to understand how a contextual spirituality, in this case that of Manrique, can assist us in developing a contextual Reformed spirituality.

Bevans describes six models of contextual theology: the translational model – the approach to theology that sees the task as translating the core truths of the Gospel into forms that can be enveloped in a fresh cultural context to enable understanding. A key value of this model is that the context will always have a subordinate role to the never changing core Gospel message. The anthropological model is the approach that centres on the value and goodness of creation and culture and seeks to find God's presence, offering life, healing and wholeness in the midst of a cultural experience and setting. In this model culture plays an equal part with tradition and scripture in the formulation of a theology; The praxis model – the approach that can be briefly described as focused on and arising out of practical action in the world to change and liberate that world. In this way of thinking, found notably in Liberation Theology, God is encountered in liberative struggle, and scripture and tradition are part of the way in which the praxis of the Church is scrutinised and enhanced. The

synthetic model derives its name from its emphasis on seeking a synthesis of Gospel and culture. This is an approach that seeks to preserve the importance and integrity of the Gospel and tradition, whilst not ignoring the complexities of social change and context and the growing knowledge of the sciences. The transcendental model - this is one of the more complex models in that it is not primarily about finished theologies, but more about the individual/community and the mental processes and changes and the perspectives that they may need to share in order to fully understand God at work in their lives and contexts. The starting point for this model is the self/community and the search for authenticity through self-knowledge in context. From the perspective of this model revelation happens through the engagement of authentic (self-understanding) individuals and communities with their environment. Authenticity allows people to open themselves to God and allow Him to transform their lives. An important assumption in this model is that, although we are historically and culturally conditioned people, there are universal, basic cognitive processes which transcend cultural differences. The countercultural model is not anti- culture, but recognises that within human experience and culture there are many things that are not 'of God'. This model seeks to allow the Gospel to take the lead in engagement with culture, such that the culture is shaped and transformed by the Gospel and not visa versa. This model is often implicit in approaches which highlight the 'prophetic' role of the Church.

The main thrust of this essay is to understand and interpret the work and spirituality, of César Manrique in the context of the development of Lanzarote, and from that to reflect on any concepts or principles that might be of relevance to the spiritual life of

the URC. Bevens tells us that the key insight by which to understand the transcendental model is:

‘that there are some things we cannot understand without a complete change of mind. Some things demand a radical shift in perspective, a change in horizon – a *conversion* – before they can begin to make sense. (Bevens, 2007, p.103).

The theological approach which is conceived as the transcendental model begins with the recognition that the experiences and self-awareness of the individual are paramount; the individual, and their experiences, are the starting point of any theological reflection. Those individual experiences are shaped by the setting of individual’s lives, both physical and cultural. This is particularly pertinent to any reflection on the life of an organisation such as the URC, since individuals are key to the success of all such.

Bevens suggests that there are four foundational ‘presuppositions’ of the transcendental model. First, this model holds that our understanding of any reality must begin with ourselves. We can begin to see the truths of things when we begin to recognise the true reality of who and what we are, as Bevens puts it ‘Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity’ (Bevens, 2007, p.104). When we fully know and recognise ourselves, as we really are, then we can approach situations with authenticity and a genuine openness to engagement and learning from that situation and encountering God in that situation. Second, although the experiences of the individual might seem a very narrow starting point, this is actually the best starting point to be speaking to others simply because you share your historical, cultural, and world views that enable points of interaction, exchange and reflections of shared experiences. That is, in seeking to engage in theology in context, the key

thing is that the engagement is pursued through striving for personal authenticity, which will include an understanding of oneself and the context within which one has grown and matured as a person. In this sense, personal authenticity includes an understanding of the community and context in which one is located.

The third presupposition is that God is not simply revealed in the words of scripture, but is in fact the personal apprehension of God's word within human experience and includes how people's experiences and reaction to those words are lived out in their daily lives, as Bevens puts it:

'Revelation, in other words, is only revelation – revealing God's self and offering friendship to men and women – when men and women are actually attending to the fact that God is pouring love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit' (Bevens, 2007, p.105).

In this regard one might point to Oman's understanding of revelation as the personal apprehension of God – the fruit of an honest search, which includes the consecration of a person to the truth they have glimpsed. Revelation in this way of seeing things is deeply personal and involves commitment to a change of life.

Bevens' fourth presupposition is that, although concepts and images may differ, the cognitive processes of human minds are the same across different cultures. This is to say, that whilst people may have very different ideas and their contexts may be wholly unlike, yet we can learn from them, from their way of being authentic within their own cultures. We can learn from other people's struggles for authenticity and meaning in their lives. What we learn is not so much what we should say or do, but how we can go about discovering for ourselves what we should do and say in our own context. In this regard, Oman makes the striking claim that even Christ cannot instruct us as to our words and actions. What we learn from him is how to pursue a sincere search for truth for ourselves.

In thinking about the biblical basis for the transcendental approach to theology, Bevens cites Jesus' teaching about new wine and old skins:

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.' (Mark 2:21-22, English Standard Version)

Bevens is suggesting that the transcendental approach to theology is about a person's authentic search for God in a context, arising out of personal authenticity, and how this process of reflection will inevitably bring about change, as new insights, which may have some bearing or relevance to their situation, are generated. There are also some other useful biblical passages that might enhance our understanding of this model. The parables about the kingdom in Matthew Chapter 13, verses 44 to 45, which tell us of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value and that we should do all that we can to obtain it, and in Luke chapter 17, verses 20 to 21, when Jesus answers the Pharisees who ask when the kingdom of God was coming, telling them that the kingdom of God was among them. Both these passages reinforce Bevens ideas about God's revelation and that our searching for the meaning, purpose and energy in our lives should begin from where we are, with some added intensity and vigour.

Since I intend to use the transcendental approach to make links between Lanzarote and the URC, it is important to consider the strengths of the model of theology. One strength is clearly that this model sees theology as a dynamic activity or personal process. From this way of doing things, theology is not about the encoding of an unchanging set of theological principles, but 'a careful but passionate search for authenticity of expression of one's religious and cultural identity' (Bevens, 2007,

p.108). It seems to me that such an approach is consistent with the idea of contextual theologising and of a God who reveals himself, not only in scripture, but in the warp of everyday life.

A second advantage is that the transcendental approach clearly recognises the cultural and contextual setting of the person undertaking the research. Again this means taking the personal and cultural context seriously as a locus of theological insight – even revelation. Such an approach, for example, if applied in the debate on the appropriateness of homosexual practice, might give revelatory significance to the personal experiences of homosexual people.

Thirdly, whilst the transcendental approach takes context seriously in the theological process, yet because it asserts that there is a universal structure to human knowing, it allows for the possibility of theologians learning from the example of those pursuing spiritual truth in other contexts than their own. This is, of course, the basis upon which the current project can go forward. The transcendental model suggests that whilst it is not possible just to extract from the Lanzarote experience ideas and practices, yet the example of Manrique can inspire an approach and attitude which will be beneficial to the URC in its own context.

Of course, no model is perfect. Some find the transcendental model too abstract and difficult for people to grasp as a concept, since theology on this model is not so much a matter of words or principles, but the actual activity of seeking deeper engagement with God through active engagement with one's situation. Complexity, however, does not seem a good reason for rejecting the approach!

Again, some claim that the idea that there is a universal shape to human cognition is 'but the product of western male dominated cultural thought forms' (Bevans, 2007,

p.108). Clearly I do not agree, though it seems difficult to know how one might prove the case for or against this bold charge that is made against the transcendental model. Perhaps it is best to say that mere assertion is not the making of a case.

Bevans amplifies his description of the model by citing two examples of it in use: the work of McFague and Gonzalez. McFague, working from her context in North America, has, according to Bevans, 'articulated one of the most authentic North American theologies I have been exposed to.' Beginning with an analysis of the characteristics of postmodernity, she developed metaphors and stories that might relate to that situation. One of her early works (McFague, 1993), involved the production of an ecological theology, with the claim that God is revealed in and through creation. Note here the creation-centred character of her work. Later work included her development of alternative models for speaking of God as 'friend', 'mother' and lover - useful ways, in her view, of expressing the nature of God in a society where 'Father' has become problematic. Each one of these images points to the way:

'God loves (gratuitously, passionately, and challengingly), the way God acts (creating, saving, sustaining) and the way God relates (in justice, as healer, as companion) in a way that affirms God's transcendence on the one hand and human responsibility on the other.' (Bevans, 2007, p.112).

Gonzalez was born in Cuba and is a Protestant now living in the USA. Bevans uses him as an example of how theology can arise from, and be on one's background and personal experiences. Gonzalez' work reflects not only his Hispanic identity, but also his experiences within a religious minority in his own country and living in a minority population within America. Gonzalez argues that the only way he and his community can read the scriptures is through the guilt and pain of the past and with the suspicion of those who have been systematically marginalised by the majority of

society. In working through some examples of Christology he shows that traditional interpretation of the texts, outside the Hispanic context, could lead to an acceptance of negative experiences and persecution in this life, with consolation being offered in the life to come. Gonzalez' theology, arising from his deep commitment to the Christian tradition and the value of his Hispanic identity, gives rise to a liberating and encouraging theology.

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to outline a theological framework within which the lessons of Lanzarote may be applied to the Reformed spirituality of the URC. After a review of some of the issues relating to contextual theology, the chapter looked at the different approaches to contextual theology outlined by Bevans. The transcendental model has been chosen as a useful approach to the issue of this thesis, since it places emphasis on learning from the attitudes and approaches of others, rather than trying to apply concrete principles, articulations or practices across cultures.

CHAPTER 4

MANRIQUE, HIS LIFE AND WORK

Spirituality as defined in Chapter 1 (pp.36 - 37) is about individuals finding meaning and purpose in their lives, through which they find some notion of what it means to be fully human. Those who connect with this dimension in their lives often find that it acts as an energising force, not just in their own personal growth and development, but also in building communities, particularly within the context of Christian communities. This chapter examines the concept of places acting as centres of spiritual renewal, particularly in the life and work of César Manrique and his part in the development of Lanzarote.

In Chapter 1 (pp.61-2) we read of the powerful motivating force that was generated from the experiences of the Hamilton family and by those who visited wilderness areas with the Wilderness Foundation. Coelho, writing in his novel about a young man searching for his destiny, caught something of what this engagement means in his description of the young man's moment of realisation of the significance of what was happening in his experience:

‘Actually it wasn't that those things, in themselves, revealed anything at all; it was just that people, looking at what was occurring around them, could find a means of penetration to the Soul of the World’ (Coelho, 2006, p.96).

Finding a ‘means of penetration to the Soul of the World’ is a helpful attempt to describe what is otherwise a difficult concept to understand. If spirituality is about finding meaning and purpose in one's life, in these examples people experience a deeper enrichment and strengthening of their whole being through their personal engagement with some external source of energy and power. It is not the landscape or place per se, that is the energy source, but that, in and through that particular

place, and for those particular people, at that particular time, they find a special point of connection to a source of energy that helped them to cope with their lives, or to look at their lives in a new way.

Connection with God through the landscape describes my experience on my first visit to Lanzarote in the Canary Islands. Its stark unspoilt volcanic landscape drew me into a new and special relationship with God, in a way that I had not experienced before. Experiencing this energising force directly, and reading of the situations outlined above, simultaneously counterbalanced with experiences of the apparent lack of 'spiritual energy' in the URC, at all levels, led me to ask if understanding this spiritual engagement with God through nature and the world could be a means of helping to reinvigorate the spiritual life of people within the URC. This chapter seeks to identify, as tangibly as possible, some of the pertinent factors in this experience in Lanzarote. The development of Lanzarote as a tourist resort in the 1960's, was primarily driven by one man, César Manrique, who died in 1992. Understanding him, his spirituality and his engagement with the environment and with people was a key part of the research. This involved close examination of documented material, personal interviews with people who knew him well and with members of his family, and visits to the island, and to the places he created.

Lanzarote the place

'Lanzarote is the easternmost of the Canary Islands, with an area of 725 sq km and a highest point of 683m above sea level. It is 58km long and about 21 km across at its widest part ... The general appearance of the landscape is of undulating plains or plateaux, in some areas covered by recent lava-flows, rising above which are volcanoes ... ' (Oxford University Exploration Club, 1969, p.119),

The natural landscape of the island is very stark, in the main volcanic rock or ash. There is little or no natural vegetation with few natural trees, due to the sparse rainfall and the lack of any rivers. The economy has, traditionally, been fishing and small-scale agriculture, corn, potatoes, wheat, onions and grapes for wine production. There are few animals; camels were used in agriculture, but are now mainly occupied in tourism, goats are kept for milk production which is then used for cheese making. The harsh environment and lack of rainfall meant that those trying to produce crops were forced to truly engage with the landscape and the climate of the island in order to produce any crops at all. This nurtured in the people of Lanzarote a special relationship and respect for creation and their environment. It also developed ingenuity in enabling things to grow against all the odds. All the farm land is covered with a layer of small black volcanic pebbles known as '*picon*'. This serves two purposes. Firstly it helps to prevent what little water there is from evaporating in the daytime sunshine, and secondly, at night, it collects any condensation of dew which then soaks through into the soil. The wine growers of the Geria region of the island developed these ideas further by creating hollows to funnel any dew collected directly to the plant, and walls for individual vines to protect them from the wind. The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York has catalogued this as (Yaskiel, 1984, p.7): 'a significant masterpiece of 'engineering without engineers'.

The people of Lanzarote have, since the earliest recorded chronicles, been seen as very gentle and honourable people worthy of respect who showed great honesty and respect for each other (Yaskiel, 1989, p.23). Research (Concépcion, 1998, pp.18ff), suggests that the original inhabitants of Lanzarote were Cro-Magon people of North Africa who, because of the total lack of any indication of inter-island travel, were

thought to have been cast adrift in a boat as some sort of punishment, rather than being a seafaring people, who eventually made landfall on Lanzarote. Stone (Stone, 1989, p.29) writing in 1887 recognised some special qualities of civility, politeness and hospitality in the residents of Lanzarote. The Oxford University Exploration Club (1969, p.132) also noted some of these special qualities, but feared that they would be lost in the sudden tourist economic boom that was to come. Fortunately these qualities have not been lost and the people of Lanzarote are still resourceful, caring and hospitable.

But however resourceful and hospitable the people of Lanzarote were, the island and its people were not held in very high regard by the people of the other Canary islands. When Manrique first went to La Laguna University at Tenerife in 1937 Lanzarote was still not generally regarded as a good place to come from. People tried to hide their origins:

‘When I was a student, people were ashamed to tell anyone they came from Lanzarote. All this was imprinted on my heart. For me Lanzarote was unique, there was nowhere else in the world like it. It was a beautiful, but raw, work of art, that required a suitable frame to be appreciated’ (Yaskiel, 1985, p.23).

These were common feelings among Lanzarotians, but one by-product of Manrique’s work has been to make the people not only proud of their Island and its history, but also proud of themselves. Each *Ayuntamiento* (Local Council) has recognised the value of helping people to understand their origins and traditions and all fund folklore, dance, and music groups in their local areas through which children and adults learn to play traditional instruments, such as the *Timple*, and learn their traditional dances that reflect the historical connections with farming and fishing. This plays a very

important part in helping people to understand their historical roots, to value them and more importantly, to recognise their own individual worth and value.

In the 1960's many of the other islands in the Canaries were developing their all-year-round sunshine potential as tourist destinations, and as a result, enjoying the resultant economic boom. However, this was at the price of extensive building development, much of which was high-rise, funded from outside the islands, with the subsequent income travelling off the islands. As a consequence they are similar to the universal tourist developments across the world and have lost any uniqueness. Lanzarote was ready for some development to take place, to take advantage of the growing worldwide tourist boom, but was totally restricted by the total lack of water.

In the 1960's the technology was developed for large-scale water desalination and one of the first desalination plants in Europe was installed in Lanzarote. Using their natural resourcefulness, and engagement with their environment, it was decided to build on the traditional methods of water delivery with the desalinated supply. Each property already had an underground water storage tank (*aljibe*), which had in the past been used to collect rainwater. These were retained, and continued to be built into all new properties. This meant that the desalinated water only needed to be supplied to each area of the island for three days each week.

This delay in tourist development, as it turned out, was perhaps fortunate for Lanzarote. César Manrique, a local but internationally renowned artist, returned to the island at that time and persuaded the *Cabildo* (the local parliament) and the people, to take overall control of the tourist development and to only allow strictly controlled developments in particular designated areas. It was recognised at the time that this decision would directly limit the growth of the potential tourist economy and

income. This decision, on an island with no natural resources, an economy dependent upon sparse agricultural production and a declining fishing industry, was a courageous step. Strict controls on development on the island were implemented, which limited tourist development to three specific areas within which there were strict controls on the density, style and height of buildings. Outside these areas no large development was permitted, with the exception of the capital, Arricife, where six storeys were allowed. The island was restricted to two-story development following the external appearance of traditional buildings. This control included restricting the colour of external rendering to white and paintwork to green, blue, black or brown. However the result and benefit of these decisions is to be clearly seen on the island today making it a unique tourist destination and recipient of the designation in October 1993 of a Unesco Biosphere Reserve. The development of the island was as a direct result of the ideas of, and their execution by César Manrique.

César Manrique the Person:

Manrique was born on Lanzarote, into a middle class family. His grandfather was the island's Notary and his father a business agent. He had two sisters, one of whom was his twin, and a brother. As a family they spent three months of the summer in La Caleta, a small fishing village near to the Famara cliffs, on the west coast of the island. His father eventually built a house in the village, overlooking the sea, which is still occupied by his sister. This was a formative place for the young César where not only his artistic skills of observation and execution were honed and developed, but also where he developed his affinity to nature and to the Atlantic ocean. The textures, shapes, people and climate of Lanzarote became the bedrock subject of his artistic

creations. He also learned to be content with his own company and grew in self confidence and self assurance, all of which were to be key things in shaping his life, his beliefs and his spirituality. His brother recalled later (Yaskiel, 1995, p.58) how César would miss meals because he was engrossed in a painting. At this time he also began to develop a different world view to many of his friends. His father travelled abroad and César read many magazines, brought home by his father, and developed a great interest in art and artists (Gordillo, 1997, p.10), but was often frustrated by the limited interests and perspective of his fellow islanders.

It was also during this time that he came to love and respect the Atlantic Ocean: 'The Atlantic, my true master, a supreme, constant source of enthusiasm, passion and freedom' (Gordillo, 1997, p.45) and the wonders of creation in the rocks and lava formations which he describes as his life force, and which were to form the subject of many of his later works: 'The direct contact of my flesh with the naked rocks of nature gives me the vital strength of LIFE'S energy' (Gordillo, 1997, p.105). This is the basis of his 'spirituality' his driving force, to which he returned to revitalise and re-energise himself. This will be examined more fully in a later section.

The Spanish Civil War (1936 – 39) began in the Canary Islands where General Franco was then based. Manrique fought for Franco's Nationalist Movement but his experiences of these three years had a profound effect on his life and his views. He returned from his military service in his uniform but when he arrived home he took it off, burnt it, and from that point on was totally opposed to any expression of nationalism including uniforms and flags (Gordillo, 1997, p.26).

In 1939, having tried unsuccessfully to persuade his father to let him study art, his true vocation, he acquiesced to his father's wishes and went to Tenerife to study

construction engineering, but in the second year left the course and returned to Lanzarote, and to art. In 1942 he held his first exhibition and in 1944 exhibited, with others, in Madrid. As a result of this he was offered a scholarship to study fine art in Madrid where he graduated as a teacher with a degree in Fine Arts. Enjoying the freedoms, experiences and the interaction with other artists, he was growing both in style and renown as an artist. Picasso had a great influence on his artistic style, which can clearly be seen, in his paintings of this period, and also in many of his later creations. Whilst in Madrid he met Pepi his wife. Pepi had been married before and they lived together for a period, which was denounced by the local priest in Lanzarote, from the pulpit when they once visited (Ramirez, 2006 & Yaskiel, 1985, p.12). This event may have helped crystallise his views of organised religion and the Catholic church. He had been a 'token' church attender, due to family pressures and state dictates, but after this event his church attendances ceased. At this time he was mainly resident in Madrid making only occasional trips back to Lanzarote. In 1963 Pepi was diagnosed with cancer of the womb and died later that year. Manrique was devastated, a loss he describes :

'When my wife Pepi died I almost died of grief at the same time I sank into a deep depression I wanted to get far away from these unhappy memories, that is why I went to New York' (Yaskiel, 1985, p.13).

He was offered the opportunity to work, exhibit and live in New York. Here he met with fellow artists of that time, also based in New York, such as Andy Warhol and he soon became an established part of the New York art scene. It was during this period that, perhaps, Manrique was influenced by the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Examining his use of light, space, and areas of painted white surface, particularly in the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the similarities of Manrique's

work are surely more than just coincidental. Wright also pioneered the creation of buildings that were in total harmony with their environment and landscape, the exact concept used by Manrique for most of his creations in Lanzarote.

Having worked through his grief for Pepi and tiring of the lifestyle in New York, he pined to get back to Lanzarote, to his true roots, to his source of inspiration and spiritual energy.

‘In New York, I found myself constantly casting my mind back and recalling Lanzarote as a haven of peace and tranquillity. Somewhere I would be able to paint undisturbed and in total harmony with surroundings’ (Yaskiel, 1985, p.13).

Such was his drive to get back home that he wrote a giant scroll to the President of The Cabildo, José Pepin Ramirez, pleading to invite him back (Yaskiel, 1997). Ramirez, a lifelong family friend, invited him back specifically to help with the island development. From this position he was able to influence the whole development of tourism for the island. On his return he created his home at Taro de Tahiche, now the home of the César Manrique Foundation (Riley, 2003). When looking for a site Manrique saw the top of a fig tree growing out from the solid old lava flow and realised that there must be a large bubble in the lava at that point. He purchased the land and found three underground bubbles in the lava flow, large enough to become rooms, which he connected with passage-ways and made into circular sitting rooms. One still has the original tree at its centre. In each of these rooms people engage directly with the lava of which they are made, its natural colours and flow patterns as it solidified. Above ground he created a studio, one large window of which follows the natural flow and shape of the solidified lava, leaving some of the lava inside the room and some outside it. The window immediately engages the viewer with the huge lava flow on which the house is built. At the same period he also toured the island making

a detailed photographic record of all the buildings and architectural nuances such as the different styles of chimneys in the different *Ayuntamientos* (Local Councils) across the island. This work, '*Lanzarote, arquitectura inédita*' ('*Lanzarote, unknown architecture*') (Manrique et al, 1998) was first published in 1974 and is now regarded as the definitive record of Lanzarote architecture. He did not just talk to the people with political power, he visited communities across the island, showing them slides and photographs of the large-scale developments that had already taken place in the other Canary Islands. If he saw someone knocking down a traditional building he would stop and explain to them why they should keep it. Bishop Mehaffy, a Church of Ireland Bishop and visitor to Lanzarote, summed up some of the special characteristics he saw in César Manrique in a sermon as 'his ability to preserve the local culture and tradition whilst helping people to grasp the opportunities that were there for them' (Sunday Worship 2005). A similar opinion was also expressed by Homiga (1995), both in his book and in a personal interview, when he explained that most of the things that Manrique did and developed were already in existence on the island and in the people. His ability was that of being able to look at situations, interpret and refashion them, fired by his love for the people and for the island of Lanzarote.

It became apparent that, as with many things, there was no one person or causal effect in bringing about the changes in Lanzarote, but a combination of many different things all coming about at the same time. Handy (1999) in looking at 27 British entrepreneurs, including Richard Branson and Trevor Baylis, and searching to identify any common traits that could be used to identify and encourage future entrepreneurs, described them as 'New Alchemists'. He identified them as people,

not necessarily motivated by money, but who individually bring about great things. Manrique was in this sense also a 'New Alchemist', the driver and enabler of a significant process of change happening in Lanzarote.

Manrique was fun loving, had a wide vision of the world, knew exactly what he thought should happen and was prepared to try and make sure it did. His motivation was not for himself. He received no payment from the *Cabildo* for his work in developing the tourist sites (like many of Handy's 'New Alchemists'). He was a perfectionist, to get things exactly right he sometimes lived on site in order to supervise and progress the work directly. He was a very special person, and probably because of his contacts, his personality, and the respect in which he was held; because of his international recognition as an artist, the only person who could have been 'The Alchemist' at that point, but for the alchemy to happen each of the other factors discussed later needed to be there as well.

Spirit and Spirituality:

As discussed earlier, connection with the spiritual dimension in their lives can give people not only meaning and purpose in their lives but also a renewed source of energy. Manrique was a spiritual person and his spirituality was the primary driving force or energy of his life and work. From early childhood he had a very real empathy and engagement with nature, particularly with the Atlantic, which he never lost throughout his life. From this he gained strength, energy for living and inspiration for much of his creative work, which he described as follows:

'Nature's freedom has modelled my freedom in life, as an artist, and as a man'
'The direct contact of my flesh with the naked rocks of nature gives me the vital strength of LIFE'S energy'.

We must find time to enjoy contact with Mother Nature. She teaches us to behold her awe-inspiring aesthetics and creativity' (Gordillo, 1997, pp.105/6).

This early spiritual engagement is not unique to Manrique or unusual in children. Hay and Nye (1998, pp.57-75) suggest that the categories of spiritual sensitivity, awareness sensing, mystery sensing, and value sensing, are all very much part of a child's natural development and experience, but that later experiences in societies, as children grow up, can negate and diminish these childhood experiences. This was not the case with Manrique, for him they became his life source. In response to a direct question about his belief in God, he did describe these beliefs and feelings as a belief in God, but not a God confined and restricted by religions, a God much broader than any religion:

'I take the pantheistic view of religion. For me God is in all the forces of nature and in all natural things. God is in the flowers and in you as you watch and communicate with me. I don't believe in God as a repressor capable of meting out external punishment in Hell. My concept of the Creator is of a higher, more benevolent being' (Yaskiel, 2003, p.109)

Manrique was not a theologian and his description of God was not strictly a pantheist view, but a panentheist view of God. Manrique did not believe that nature and natural things were the sole expression of God, he talks of God also being outside these things, 'the higher more benevolent being' which fits with the panentheist view that God is identified in and through the world and nature as part of his being but that nature is not the whole expression of God's being. He is found outside it as well (York, 2005, p.1257). However there is a wider debate here than simply definitions of Pantheism or Panentheism. Fox (2000) argues that creation spirituality embraces all of creation and that we should not think of original sin but of original blessing. McFarland Taylor (2005, p.363) summarises Fox's view that his creation-centred

theology is rooted in the ancient wisdom traditions and earth based cultures, and has six tenets: the goodness or blessing of creation, of the earth itself, cosmic consciousness, panentheism, the motherhood of God and compassion understood through interdependence and justice making. Manrique would have been able, I believe, to accede to this view of creation. He would equally have been very much at home with the ecological reformation views outlined by Nash (2005, pp.372-5) celebrating the fecundity of the planet with its tens of millions of species, the biological kinship between species, the universal relationality and interdependent relationship of all the species, the recognition of the biological boundaries and the role of human beings in their 'dominion of nature' as nurturers of God's creation. McFague (1993) argues for the model of the world or universe as God's body, and that we should think in terms of space, where we fit in with the rest of the world, adopting a natural perspective rather than a historical one, because that helps us to find the relationship between justice and ecology, and that we need to recognise that the earth is our place and we belong there.(McFague, 1993 pp.101-3). In her 'Organic model' she develops some of the panentheistic ideas discussed by others. She argues:

'If the world is God's body, then nothing happens to the world that doesn't happen to Godthe God who is the breath of our breath is closer to us than we are to ourselves; this God is in us and with us no matter what happens'
(McFague, 1993, p.176).

These ideas are helpful in understanding Manrique's views.

Calvin, and the other reformers, according to Field (2005, pp.344-348) held a slightly different emphasis on the unique glory of God and therefore greater distinction between Creator and the created, with God exercising fatherly care over all creatures and as a consequence 'the entire creation bears witness to God's goodness and

power, becoming a magnificent theatre that displays God's glory' (Field, 2005, p.344) or, as Calvin put it himself, 'a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible'. Manrique's view was slightly different to this, he saw an immanence, the real presence of God in nature, but for both engagement with nature and the natural world was very much a means of an engagement with God as an energising force. In Calvin's terms this was through the Holy Spirit which he understood as the source of life and energy in the universe, for Manrique God was revealed in and through the sea, the rocks and the created world, his source of energy.

I have found no reference anywhere to the use of the word 'prayer' having been used by Manrique. However this didn't mean that he did not 'pray' in the broader sense of its meaning. Calvin (1960, p.851), writing of prayer, describes our entering into relationship with God such that God reveals himself as wholly present to us, which brings peace and repose to our consciences. Macquarrie (1972, pp.25ff) describes the concept of prayer as 'thinking,' engagement with God through 'passionate thinking', responsible thinking', thankful thinking, when the person engages with God through an open-minded engagement, which leads to wholeness and renewal. In these broader senses of prayer Manrique prayed, opening his whole body to the elements of nature, sun, sea, lying on the naked rocks he found engagement and renewal from his direct connection with God through the elements of nature.

Earlier in this chapter we examined some of the problems experienced by different people in trying to describe 'the spiritual experience' in any measurable, concrete terms. In his book on architecture Manrique talks about this in terms of discovering

the secret of the great music of the silence through engagement with nature
(Manrique et al 1998, Section *Geología y paisaje*):

<i>'Esa instantánea del tiempo.</i>	(That snapshot of time.
<i>Ese principio tan quieto.</i>	That beginning that is so quiet.
<i>Esa gran musica de tu silencio.</i>	That great music of your silence
<i>Ese secreto Escondido que solo</i>	That hidden secret that you only
<i>das a los que tu comprenden'</i>	reveal to those who understand you')

Two other writers use the metaphor of music as a means of describing spiritual engagement. Oman (1941, pp.138ff) in describing our relationship with God believes that it only makes real progress when we hear the music of God and the music of humanity with a common beat. McIntosh (2004) in talking about connectiveness and community asks the question, among others, about the validity of community: 'Does it bring music to the soul?' All three recognise that not all people make that deeper connection. However, as we discussed in Chapter 1, most people have some spiritual awareness. Music may seem an odd metaphor to use in conjunction with silence. Listening to music can touch our deepest emotions and it is in this sense that these writers are thinking, we engage with God at that deepest level, in a passive awareness of God's presence.

The vast majority of visitors to Lanzarote from the UK never venture from their resort, or even, with the advent of the 'all inclusive package', from their hotel. In 2007 there were about 1.6 million visitors to the island of whom about half were British (Lanzarote information 2010). The César Manrique Foundation (2010) has about 300,000 visitors a year, 19% of the total visitors to the island. I have been unable to verify individual visitor figures to the seven Manrique sites, though it is reasonable to assume that the figures will probably not be greatly more than the foundation visitor figures. This suggests that only about 20% of the visitors to Lanzarote each year

expose themselves to the possibility of this deeper spiritual engagement. Owen (1969, p.335) suggests that something similar happens in churches, although not perhaps at the same low level, but that there are regular members of congregations who have not made a specific commitment to Christ and are therefore do not have that deeper spiritual engagement. However their very presence in the worshipping community, week by week, implies some degree of commitment and spiritual journey. This research also suggested the presence of a different type of spirituality, to be found in people's attitude to life. People's approach to issues can be positive and negative. Negatively spirited people look for the problems, reasons why things can't be done, and can be destructive and limiting forces. They often want to have every possible outcome covered before they feel able to give assent to some work or to a project. Positively spirited people grasp the vision, even though they may not have all the answers, they are willing to take a risk even though it may lead to failure. Sufficient people at the time of the development on Lanzarote were positively spirited people and enabled things to begin. There were negative voices. It was three years after Manrique's death before he was honoured by the government, even then with some controversy (Yaskiel, 1996, p.63), because some had objected to the honour being given. Manrique was freed to wrestle with his ideas, to try experimental things, which led to seven unique tourist centres, a Unesco Biosphere award, a sustainable tourist industry and an island that is attractive and flourishing because of its difference. His great ability was to be able to communicate his ideas to all those he met, such that people took his ideas and principles to heart. Almost 15 years since his death, there are still no advertising hoardings anywhere on the island, (a control introduced to conserve the appearance of the island). People still paint their houses

white with green, blue, black, or brown paintwork. Having a vision and being able to communicate it, even though it was not at that stage a detailed plan, were critically important then and to us today.

Manrique's seven tourist developments

Manrique's vision for Lanzarote was that all development must be in tune and in sympathy with the natural landscape of the island. At each of his tourist developments his spirituality and connection with the environment are clearly displayed. Each site was designed to connect with its landscape or area in special ways, each one blending seamlessly in to its environment, and each invites the visitor to enter into and share Manrique's spiritual journey. He used materials from that location, and within each site areas of white painted concrete that created local harmony and peace, but also a link across all the sites. Each site has some site specific sculptural creations which often add an element of fun or mischief.

Manrique paced the development work over a period so that he could have a personal involvement in all that happened, sometimes, as discussed earlier, even living on site. The developments were developed 'on the hoof' allowing for alterations if they were needed, reacting to situations as they arose. His political awareness, his ability to change as needed, and having a realistically achievable vision were key factors in actually making his dreams a reality.

Not surprisingly perhaps, after his New York experience, one of his earlier developments was the International Museum of Modern Art in the old military fortress of the San José Castle in the capital Arricife. This houses some of his own collection,

the works of other artists and travelling exhibitions from around the world, offering a continual engagement with the creativity of artists across the world.

His first major site development was the *Timanfaya* complex which was built at the summit of the volcano that last erupted in 1824 with a lava flow that covered vast areas of productive land on its six mile journey to the sea. Much of this area remains untouched since the eruption. Manrique's visitor centre at the summit includes car parking, visitor facilities and a restaurant, all constructed of volcanic material and designed to be almost invisible within the landscape. Manrique connects his visitors to the volcano by using the heat from the volcano as the source of heat for cooking and having bore-holes which when filled with water exude a noisy fountain of steam. He cut a roadway through the lava flow enabling visitors, travelling in coaches, to see and experience the colours, shapes and different configurations of the lava. All this leaves the landscape unharmed.

In the north of the island he constructed a viewing area at an altitude of 475m, *Mirador del Rio*, which allows the visitor uninterrupted views of both Lanzarote and *La Graciosa*, a small island to the north.

The Cueva De Los Verdes (Greens Caves) is the simple opening up of a cave system located in a volcanic tunnel which again enables the visitor to experience, directly, the colours and textures of the volcanic landscape.

Nearby, in another volcanic tunnel, is the spectacular *Jameos del Agua*. Very little of this attraction is visible from the surface but as you enter, make your descent and walk along the tunnel you experience an engagement with a different world. During excavation work a lake, fed with sea water, with its inhabitants of rare albino crabs was discovered. A gentle ascent at the end of the tunnel brings you to a large blue

lake created by Manrique with his trade-mark white painted concrete. At the end of the lake, concealed doors lead to a concert hall, in another tunnel, with raked bench seats leading down to the concert platform. The lava of this tunnel provides a natural acoustic quality to rival the best concert hall in the world.

His least busy attraction is in the very centre of the island, the Museum to Farming and the Monument to Fertility (of the land) and is a tribute to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of farmers. This was also designed as a centre for crafts people to work from but many of the workshops have remained unlet. This has probably been because of the El Patio Farming Museum at Tiagua a few kilometres away where they have more animals and working exhibits.

The north of Lanzarote was traditionally the area for cochineal production. Cochineal is produced by crushing a particular type of tiny beetle that feeds on the flat leaves of cacti. It is still produced in the area but in much lesser quantities than it was. Its production method has alienated particular groups of people and alternative, more animal-friendly substitutes have been discovered. It is in this area that Manrique sited his last attraction the *Jardin de Cactus*, or Cactus Garden. In the site of an old quarry he constructed multi - tiered gardens of cacti from around the world. On the highest point he has placed a traditional windmill and at the entrance a large metal sculpture of a cactus. Lanzarote has, as part of its natural climate, an almost constant breeze. Manrique engaged with this by creating several different wind driven sculptures. These are several metres tall and placed on traffic islands and intersections in different parts of the island. The most spectacular of these is near to the Foundation at Taiché and has pieces moving in many different directions at the same time driven by a wind flowing only in one direction.

All of these creations not only offer visitors a unique interaction with Lanzarote and the elements of its life and being, they also provide employment and generate income for the benefit of the island and its residents. Each offers the visitor a peaceful, calm, interaction with nature, as it is, an opportunity to enter in to Manrique's own walk with creation and the Creator, or as he would describe it, to engage with 'That great music of your silence, that hidden secret that you only reveal to those who understand you'

The words of welcome at the El Patio Farming Museum capture something of the experience of Manrique's Lanzarote,

'let us try to live at a slower pace, breathe in time with nature, enjoy the silence of a magical landscape, feel the passage of history, wander about peacefully for a while without the pressure of mass tourism' (El Patio Museum, 2004).

What are the key elements of Manrique's spirituality?

As a result of this research three key elements of Manrique's spirituality were identified. They are firstly, his ability to energise and encourage people by re-connecting with and valuing their traditions; secondly, his sense of place, recognising God's presence in nature and the natural world, and his ability to engage with that world through buildings and constructions which in turn, enable others to make that connection, and thirdly, what he called, 'Discovering the music of the silence' – the process of personal interior renewal by daily engagement with nature, the source and energy of his very being.

God's presence in and through nature was very real to Manrique and was reflected totally in the way he lived, in regular contact with plants, flowers, lava, rocks and the sea from which he not only gained energy for living but inspiration for his artistic creations. Everything that Manrique built connected with the environment in which it

was set. By the selective use of materials, shapes, and design the constructions themselves blend totally with their environment but also invite the visitor directly to also enter into that relationship. All exude an atmosphere of calm and peace which invite the visitor to participate in the total experience of their visit. To enhance the visual experiences in some sites he has created site-specific sounds and music. He succeeded through his life in showing the people of Lanzarote the value of their island, their environment, but most of all themselves.

These experiences of Lanzarote could simply be a romanticised holiday dream rather like the Celtic spirituality described by Meek (2000, pp.9ff) when he guards against developing an alternative Celtic spirituality based on 'an indefinable loveliness in wind and sea and sky; dazzling sunrises and soothing sunsets'. However in the final chapter I will seek to analyse this situation objectively, using Bevans' transcendental model, and the measure of acceptability of the Reformed values of the Bible, prayer, and engagement with the world, to discern any general concepts from the Lanzarote situation that might suggest further investigation, and development, within the Reformed tradition of the URC.

CHAPTER 5

CAN THE URC LEARN ANYTHING FROM MANRIQUE?

This essay arose from the observation and experience of vibrant 'spiritual energy' in situations outside the Church, primarily in the life work of César Manrique in Lanzarote, but also in other situations, and the apparent lack of that 'spiritual energy' within the United Reformed Church at all levels. 'Spirituality' has become, as illustrated in Chapter 1, a word with many different meanings. With this in mind, a wide variety of definitions, uses and ideas, about spirituality, both religious and secular, were examined, resulting in the conclusion that spirituality in general was seen as:

'a range of ways of seeking human fulfilment through drawing on a range of meanings and values. The meaning and values that inform spiritualities will assume some notion of what it is to be fully human' (Chapter 1, p.36).

and Christian spirituality as:

'a distinctive way of seeking meaning, a source of values, and human fulfilment, rooted in a relationship with God in Christ, developed within the community of the church, critically informed by the Bible and the tradition of Christian wisdom and theology, and expressed in a concern for self transformation and the transformation of the world.' (Chapter 1, p.37).

In Chapter 2 the key elements of Reformed spirituality were examined, principally using Cornick's (2008) model, with the help of other writers from the Reformed tradition. These were identified as a living, dynamic engagement with God through his word, the Bible, kept alive by preaching and by study, or as Cornick puts it

'the heart of Reformed spirituality is scripture that forms and reforms us, week by week, day by day. This is the core discipline' (Cornick, 2008, p.61).

This continued and living engagement with God is maintained and sustained through prayer, and leads to a holistic blending of the spiritual and the material, through

loving service in the world. One key sign of this engagement among Calvin's followers was a dynamic spiritual energy, which focused their lives and their living. This was the dynamic spiritual energy that was observed in Lanzarote and the work of Manrique, but was less immediately obvious in the life of the URC. Prayer, or living engagement with God in the case of Manrique, it will be shown, is an essential element of engagement with God and the energising force of the Holy Spirit. Calvin (1960, pp.852ff) describes in detail the means of prayer, whilst others speak of what can be achieved by prayer. Rice (1991, p.67) suggests that, through prayer, we learn to accept the goodness and wonder of the created world, and are then driven to its careful stewardship. Forsyth (1996, p.11) also talks of the energising, transforming power of prayer, through which we engage with the created world. Oman (1941, pp.138ff) describes this as 'the fellowship of the Spirit' through which we have the possibility to enter into true relationship with God and with each other. Gunton (2002, pp.155/6) describes this spirit of freedom as 'the God-given freedom to be like God' which enables each individual life to be 'what it is made to be'. Ballard and Pritchard (2006, p.177), make the very important point that this relationship, as with all relationships, needs to be cultivated and nurtured by what they call 'habitus', regular and sustained effort.

Another relevant part of Reformed theology to this study is our view of, and engagement with, the world. Calvin saw the world as a means of the whole of creation bearing witness to God's goodness and power (Field 2008, pp.344-348) and 'the Spirit as the creative life and energy in the universe,' and thus engagement with creation, and its life-giving force, as important for all Christians. This same sort of energy was observed in the stories of Hamilton (2003, p.180) and from the

Wilderness Foundation examined in Chapter 4. Sheldrake (2009, pp137-156) argues for the need for spaces in the design of cities that 'renew humanity'. Cornick (2008, p.101) refers to these places of interaction with God as 'trysting places', places and moments in our living, that give us a deeper engagement with God and with each other. Manrique created places that enable visitors to engage, not only with the place, but also with creation and the Creator. The importance of this will be examined in detail later in this chapter.

This energising, motivating, force is the essence of what was generally perceived to be lacking within the URC. This does not mean that people and churches within the URC have no spiritual dimensions to their lives, but that this does not always manifest itself in the vigour and energy observed in some other situations both within and outside the church. This was clearly recognised by the church in the 'Catch the Vision' reports to General Assembly.(United Reformed Church, 2004).

The three key elements of Reformed spirituality, identified earlier, as a living, dynamic, engagement with God through his word, sustained through prayer, leading to loving service in, and engagement with, the world are good bench-mark measures of individual spiritual journeys, and the corporate spiritual journey of the church. They will be used as the basis of the 'measurement of authenticity' in the later use of Bevans' analysis. Not of such direct relevance to this particular essay are the Reformed ideas of election and ecumenism, and these have therefore not been included.

Methodology and context.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Bevans' models of contextual theology were designed as ways by which the observer might, by engaging in deeper examination of particular contexts and situations, gain new insights and understanding, which might allow the Gospel to be discovered or rediscovered in new ways. They act as means of understanding different situations, offering the user some 'mapping points' with which they might make comparisons, and through which they might draw some helpful conclusions.

Bevans' transcendental model was chosen as the model for this study, and has been fully described in Chapter 3. It will not therefore be examined any further in detail here. The essence of this model is that of 'prompted reflection'. The observer, starting from where they are, with their beliefs, their culture, their theological framework, encounters and experiences a new situation and reflects on their own situation in the light of those experiences. This reflection may suggest changes or new ideas that might enhance the subject's situation.

The strengths of the URC were to be found in its self-governing, self-financing individual churches, but herein also lay its weakness. The picture we saw was of declining, ageing congregations, locked into maintenance mode, struggling to support the structures of the church. The situation was not however without hope. The example from Friary URC, detailed in the introduction, indicates that things can happen, and changes can be introduced, even in very traditional settings. Hopkins (2001), in his analysis of churches that were growing in the URC saw pockets of growth across the liberal / evangelical spectrum of churches. The Fresh Expressions of Church Movement in England and the Church Without Walls Movement in

Scotland are also both indicators of new life blossoming within churches. Do the Lanzarote experiences have anything to offer to help in tackling some of these issues?

Adequate description of the situation in Lanzarote and of the life of Manrique has been given in Chapter 4. The following sections seek to examine and evaluate those events, using Bevans' transcendental model and three specific measures of Reformed spirituality: the Bible, prayer and engagement with the world, as the criteria of their acceptability as ideas, that might then be translated in some form, or simply as concepts, within the very different context of the URC. Three key elements to Manrique's work were identified as; firstly his ability to energise and encourage people by encouraging them to reconnect with, and to value, their traditions; secondly, the possibility of human engagement with the material world, through nature, creating places of opportunity for engagement with God and spiritual renewal; and thirdly, 'discovering the music of the silence' – the process of interior renewal by attention to detail and meaning found in engagement with nature. Each of these will now be examined in detail and possible applications within the URC considered, making use of the transcendental model.

Learning to value history and traditions.

One important element of Manrique's spirituality was his engagement with, and encouragement of, people. Manrique was very much in touch with his fellow islanders despite having, as we discussed in Chapter 4, a much broader world view than most of them. Manrique knew the good caring and loving qualities of his fellow islanders from his personal experiences, qualities but he also knew from personal

experience that people from Lanzarote, as discussed fully in earlier chapters, were held in low esteem by others, and as a result had very low self esteem (Yaskiel, 1985 p.23). Manrique's work resulted in the preservation of the environment on the island, which gives the island its special character, and it also changed the views and attitudes of the people. Manrique was willing to engage with people. In his travels across the island he took time to stop to talk to people, to listen, and to share his ideas directly with them. He respected everyone and, from that engagement with them, earned their respect. His authenticity came from his spiritual engagement with the created environment of the island and his personal engagement with God the Creator, from which he drew his energy and passion, and through which he won the hearts and minds of the people. Manrique took people back to their roots, he showed them the beauty of their traditional architecture, their traditional, and unique methods of farming, the beauty he saw in the volcanic landscape, their traditional engagement with the environment that had enabled their survival. Through a reappraisal of their past, and their environment, the people of Lanzarote found a new focus, a new energy and vigour that enabled them to step outside the norm and follow a different path, in the assurance that the things they had were actually of great value and that they, as people, were equally valued, something which they had certainly not been encouraged to think before. It was only by these steps that they were able to rediscover their true identity and worth. What we might call Manrique's spirit-led life led to the transformation in Lanzarote. Over time, more and more people have engaged with his ideas, such that 15 years after his death very little has changed. Much has been written about Spirit-led communities by, in particular, Oman (1941) and Gunton (2002, p.66). They were specifically concerned to demonstrate the

blessings and strengths this brings to a community. McIntosh (2004) writes about a real and living engagement with the earth, the environment, each other and our souls as a means of bringing 'music to the soul' and of helping people to 'blossom' and to build communities. The work begun by Manrique has been continued by each local authority who, as we discussed in Chapter 4, take active steps to encourage people to keep engaged with their roots, their history and their heritage of which they are now duly proud. Because people recognised his commitment and authenticity, Manrique was able to take people with him, enabling them to recognise the true value of what they had, to rediscover their true identity and authenticity.

One of the true marks of Contextual Theology, according to Bevans' transcendental model, is the search for personal and communal authenticity within the context of that community, that is self knowledge. Our true understanding and openness to other situations come when we fully understand ourselves. Revelation comes when we recognise God in our interactions with others. Manrique's development work was driven by his attempt to make connections with the traditions of the island, helping others to know and to appreciate the richness of what they had. There is, it seems, an important underlying message for the URC in this. If a renewed spirituality is to be achieved it will need energy from a rediscovery of the tradition in which the URC was forged, namely the Reformed tradition. In this tradition, through attention to the Bible and prayer leading to loving service to, and engagement with, the world, people found a new energy. There seems no reason why this could not happen again within the URC.

The self-esteem of URC members could be likened to the people of Lanzarote, before Manrique began his work. As has been shown elsewhere, the Church has been in decline since it began, church members were at best in maintenance mode (Warren, 1995) or at worst simply struggling for survival. Some people in the URC lacked confidence in their faith as identified in the West Midlands Synod (2007) work and in the Church life survey (United Reformed Church, 2004). Cornick advocated in introducing the Catch the Vision process that the Church needed to go back to its Reformed roots. He developed this idea partially in the Vision4life programme with the study of the Bible and prayer, but with the poor take-up this is not a whole church initiative. Sweet (2000) suggested that in a post-modern culture where history was important churches need to re visit their roots. Allen (2004) reviewing the life of Glenn Hinson, a Baptist with a lifelong concern for mission, documents his view that it was essential for

‘particular traditions to strengthen their roots in their own history – to provide a secure personal faith identity – a prerequisite for dialogue with other faiths’ (Allen, 2004 p.19).

The URC needs to rediscover and recover some of its Reformed identity. Its identity, as we saw in Chapter 2, is rooted very firmly in the Reformed tradition, engagement with God through the Bible, prayer and service, acting in community and energised by a personal spiritual engagement. Oman (1941) and Gunton (2002) each affirm the power and possibilities of Spirit-led communities. The challenge is how to help people to make that connection. The Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee had in 1990 tried to revive interest in the statements of faith of the church but with little apparent success (Chapter 2, pp.87-88). Individuals and churches have sought some greater spiritual depth from outside the church through movements like Taizé and the

Iona Community but little has been done within the URC to encourage people to understand and learn from the rich heritage that is our Reformed tradition. The 2010 programme for the Windermere Centre, the church's main centre for education and learning for members, offered four courses relating to spirituality, none of which were specifically focused on the Reformed tradition. This probably reflects the current lack of demand for such courses, or perhaps a lack of awareness of what Reformed spirituality has to offer. (The Windermere Centre, 2010)

There has been a tendency within the URC, in order to try to create some sort of new URC identity, to discourage people from talking about which formation branch of the church they had their roots. As a result some of that rich history and heritage has been largely ignored. The original plan for the URC was that it would cease to exist within ten years. For various reasons this didn't happen and the URC is in a position now of looking at its identity and purpose. Re-examining the history and roots of the church would demonstrate the energising spirit led force that the forming churches were. Calvin and his followers were 'driven people', Spirit led, and energised by their engagement with God through the Bible, its proclamation, study and through their prayer lives. But this was not just confined to life in the church. Calvin sought to structure the whole life and order of Geneva according to Biblical precedents, but as a separate entity from the church. Forrester (2000, pp.161-184) in his essay 'Reformed Radical Orthodoxy', asking the question, can it be retrieved? showed how the ideas of the Scots Reformation were intrinsically bound into the structure and ordering of civil society, developing real concerns for the care of the poor and for education. He concludes that it is appropriate for the Church of Scotland to revisit many of these issues in its relationship with the state. McGrath (1999, p.267) reminds

us of another important part of the Reformed heritage, what has become known as the 'Protestant work ethic', that all human work was capable of glorifying God leading to the glorification of God in all that we do. He also highlights the growth of human rights and the emergence of the study of the natural sciences, commended by Calvin, as ways of 'uncovering further evidence of the orderliness of creation and the wisdom of its creator', (McGrath, 1999, p.274). Sell (1987) also writes of the spirit-led energy of the early Congregationalists driven by the lack of spiritual engagement in the churches of their day to worship in their own way. Manrique's ability to re engage and re energise people through reconnection with their heritage and roots is certainly a concept that the URC can learn from. It does, as demonstrated by the West Midlands Synod, require resources and commitment to make sure that it happens. The URC is currently researching a programme to look at its identity. Understanding the depth, strength and energy latent in the Reformed traditions must be an essential inclusion in that process. Certainly there are some signs of a resurgence of interest in the Reformed tradition of the URC with the recent republication of P.T. Forsyth's *The Person and Place of Jesus*, by the URC and a recent conference looking at Oman's work at the URC Westminster College, Cambridge. However, looking at the past experiences of such attempts within the URC, to have any reasonable chance of success any such programme needs to be properly resourced and engage directly with the members.

Many of the URC central church programmes have failed for one reason or another. Primarily this appears to arise from a lack of direct engagement with them from members and churches and the lack of resource in the central church to deliver programmes properly. The vison4life programme faltered badly in its first year

through lack of dedicated resources. The material was delivered late and those churches that had opted in felt let down and discouraged. This was acknowledged and a dedicated member of staff appointed for the second year. In contrast to this the West Midlands Synod (2007) managed, using small teams of volunteers, to visit almost all the churches in the Synod in their response to the Catch the Vision process. As an example of the effectiveness of this as an 'energising force' in people, in 2009 the same vision4life course offered in two Synods attracted 35 participants in the West Midlands and only 2 in the East Midlands Synod, where no visiting of churches had taken place. Manrique gained the engagement of the people through his own integrity and authenticity, and his valuing of those individuals. Much of the URC heritage is about communities living in and through the Holy Spirit. Perhaps through a rediscovery of this heritage, individuals could become authentic people of faith with the authentic spirituality which is rightly theirs.

Spirit driven engagement with the world

One of the key aspects of Reformed theology is our engagement with God through prayer, piety in Calvin's terms, and how in turn that engagement leads us on to loving service in and engagement with, the world. Manrique's personal spiritual journey will be looked at more fully in the next section, in this section we will be examining the links between his inner spiritual journey and how that manifests itself in his life and works, how prayer, or in Manrique's terms, his engagement with God, 'articulates the attitude and emotions of the believer' (Baillie quoted in Cornick, 2008, p.68). Manrique's spiritual awareness drove his living and his engagement with people and the world. The buildings and constructions he made acted as direct interfaces

between people and God, made visible through nature and creation. Each of his constructions became 'touching places' or in Cornick's terminology, 'trysting places', (Cornick, 2008, p.55) drawing people into an encounter with 'the Creator' and into a direct engagement with their environment, living out the tradition of the people of Lanzarote. There are many examples from the Reformed tradition of this Spirit-driven engagement with the environment and community. Calvin began the process in Geneva; the Scots Reformation sought to engage with the whole of society, and, more recently, we have the example of the Iona Community helping engagement with the environment and the world in its worship and service by its members.

Alongside this is the 'theology of place'. Manrique turned spaces into special places; the URC could well reflect on these possibilities. Bruggemann (1978) in looking at the journeys of the people of Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, argued that spaces became 'places', special places where people's lives were changed by words spoken or events that happened in those spaces. The 'spaces' then became special 'places', and became significant places in the history of the people where subsequent generations were able to enter into that encounter afresh in their generation and their time. There are many instances of this in the many sites of pilgrimage across the world where visitors become spiritually engaged with God, the event, the moment, and the place, as instanced by Williams (2010) in her essay. As we saw expressed in Chapter 1, Gunton's belief that we have the God-given freedom to be like God and the inherent ability to be what we are made to be is an important part of our Reformed tradition (Gunton 2002, p.66). Places can be part of that enabling process.

The island of Iona, because of its long history and the recent work of the Iona community, has become a very special place, with spiritual significance for many

people, including those with no particular religious connection. In an edition of *Open Country* (Open Country, 2006) the presenter, Richard Uldrige, talked to four islanders who were not connected to the church or the community, each of them spoke of the special way that they engaged with the island. The Taizé community connects more with those who are 'religious' but has been non-the-less effective in helping people to discover and enhance their spiritual journey. These are examples of well-known places but we all have our own special places. Most people carry with them memories linked to special, and particular, places to them, where something special has happened in their experience, or where they have simply found inner peace and wholeness.

'Spaces' become 'places' for all sorts of reasons and, as we have seen can be created in different ways. Calvin saw the preaching of the word and communion as 'places,' 'trusting places', in Cornick's terms (Cornick, 2008, p.55), the interface between God and people in a special way. 'Places' can be created and recreated, and in a later paragraph we will look at how this might be achieved in the URC.

Others have explored the significance of 'place' in different, but in no less relevant ways to this study. Inge (2003, p.125) sees places as 'intrinsic and essential to the building of human communities'. Spirit-led communities are very much within the Reformed tradition. Bevans, in his third presupposition about the transcendental model, reminds us that God is not simply revealed in the words of scripture but within the human experience and how people's experiences and reaction to those words are lived out in people's daily lives and cultural experiences, as he puts it:

'Revelation, in other words, is only revelation – revealing God's self and offering friendship to men and women – when men and women are actually

attending to the fact that God is pouring love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit' (Bevans, 2007, p.105).

and Bergmann that God is very much alive in our world:

'God inculturates him or herself on a people's world: the Son and the Holy Spirit contextualise themselves and become flesh in dwelling in different created beings in unique situations for the sake of the world. To contextual theology, God is God in function' (Bergmann, 2003, p.90).

If this is true, how we engage in our communities is important. Our engagement with each other should arise from our spirituality and our engagement with God. Kemmis (1990, p.79) explores these ideas when he writes about people who are simply 'inhabiting' places and have somehow lost the sense of their capacity 'to live well in a place', to develop relationships with their neighbours and have a public life as a community. The church growth survey work at Friary URC, referred to in the introduction, showed that even in a church community, knowledge about other members was at a superficial level, suggesting perhaps that this may need some attention in the life of churches more generally. In a later work Kemmis (1995, p.198) explores the organic relationships between people and activities in cities and suggests that in a good city the synergy of all these events gives the city a life force of its own. Inge (2003, p.133) suggests that the relationship between community and place is very powerful and that each reinforces the other. All of these suggest that there is merit in churches examining their role as 'places', places of opportunity of encounter with God, and with others, in building communities within and without their church. Cruchley-Jones, (2009), in his recent essay exploring the current trends in spirituality, gives a warning that the spirit is very much alive, and hovering around churches in the life of the community in general, but that attitudes within churches could prevent any interaction.

Manrique developed seven 'places', each one an expression of his own spiritual journey with God and, each one an opportunity for the visitor to encounter God in the same way that Manrique had. Can any of these ideas and concepts help URC members on their individual spiritual journey and perhaps enable churches to become 'places', instead of 'spaces', where real and living encounters with God may happen? Places where the inner experiences of people are expressed in the exterior life of the community.

Bevans reminds us that this model allows us to look at different situations and to reflect on them to see if they can offer anything to our own situation. The evidence of Manrique is that his spirituality was very much expressed in his living and in what he created. His engagement with God was simply part of his whole being. As with all spiritual journeys, touching God in and through the natural world takes time to achieve, but is a relatively easy and sustainable process. Taking time each day to engage with God in and through the natural world soon begins to build and strengthen spiritual relationships with God. However that is not the only way. The method of building our daily relationship with God isn't the critical issue, the need to build the relationship is the important part, such that the community is developed and grows in and through those relationships.

The evidence from the various surveys, and the rapid decline in members, suggest that the URC has not yet achieved this spiritual dimension to life in many of its churches. It could however be achieved in many churches by a conscious and committed attitude to change the life of the church community, to create not only a 'place', but also a Spirit-led community in the true reformed tradition, a community that serves and interacts with its wider community, rather like the example of the

URC at Bromley by Bow (Chapter 1, pp61-62) .In a report, looking primarily at involving children in the life of churches, The Consultative Group on Ministry among Children (C.C.B.I., 1995) produced some examples of models of being church, one of which is of particular relevance to this situation, since it can be created almost in any situation namely 'The Hospitable Space'. In this model the church is a place of hospitality and nurture, following Christ's example of loving acceptance:

'In the Spirit of Christ the Church itself offers hospitality with courtesy and with unconditional love. It accepts people for what they are and celebrates all that is good in them and all that they may become. It provides a safe space, physical, psychological and spiritual, within which they can grow. To be a place of welcome it must be a place of forgiveness; to be true to itself it must be a place of hope and transformation. For this to happen it cannot afford to be guided only by sentiment. A hospitable community is a place where love confronts as well as forgives. In order to offer tolerance, forgiveness and affirmation it must also be honest and mutually accountable' (C.C.B.I.. 1995, pp.58-60)

This model of being church would be a place of 'community' in the reformed tradition and would be a 'place' that had time and space for other people. Although a simple model and achievable by almost any church, it would require considerable effort and commitment by the whole church community. Again the exact 'model' of being church is not critical. What we can learn from Manrique is that we can create 'places' from 'spaces', places where people might be touched by their engagement with that place and that community.

'Discovering the music of the silence'

As we saw in Chapter 4 (pp.127-8) this phrase is about a deep, daily, engagement with God through what we described as 'passive awareness'; knowing the presence of God, and your relationship with him, as the background of your very being. Manrique was not a 'religious' person in any conventional sense. This was

emphasised strongly in conversations with Ramirez (2006), and Yaskiel (2006), both of whom knew him well. As we saw earlier, Manrique may have fallen out with the authorities and teachings of the church, but one of his first and least-known restoration projects, when he returned to Lanzarote, was the internal decoration of the small village church at Maguez, close to where he was eventually to live. There he created a carved mural, in lava rock, completely covering one wall behind the altar. Although clearly his work, it does not bear his name, in deference, as he said, to the 'greater creative power of God'. Manrique may not have wanted to define himself as a Christian but he was certainly a 'spiritual' person, and would have probably been happy to accept that description. His energy source, that gave him purpose and meaning to his life, was God (Yaskiel, 2003, p.109), but God defined very much in his own terms, and not within the constraints of one religion. Manrique's spirituality led his life, shaping all that he did, expressed in all his creative work, and his interaction with people. His spirituality was the driving force of his life. As we saw earlier he would never have called it 'prayer' but it was a living and energising relationship with God.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Calvin saw prayer as a key part of an individual's relationship with God. It was through this direct engagement with God that the individual grew in inner strength and energy. The powerful nature of spirituality as an energising force for the individual is not limited to the work of Manrique, there are many examples, over the centuries, of people who have achieved so much. The degree of 'connection' with their spirituality does not need to be phenomenal in order to generate an energetic response. The Lanzarote situation was the very simple engagement with the environment and nature through which individuals may perhaps

hear the 'music of the silence.' Bevans' transcendental model encourages the individual to reflect on their observations and experiences of situations and, in the light of their own experiences and culture, to see if there is anything in that observed situation that might enhance or develop their own theology, or spiritual journey

A personal, individual, living engagement with God was the root of Manrique's work. As we have shown earlier, this is the core of our Reformed tradition, through this communities are built, love is shared and God's kingdom built. As discussed earlier the URC is very much centred on its members. Their personal engagement with God is a key part of finding renewed energy for the church's life. As we saw in Chapter 2, individual spirituality and prayer have not been predominant in the focus of the Church, although this was recognised in the 'Vision4life programme' set up by the church. With two of the three years being dedicated to the Bible and to prayer, more could be done to encourage individuals on their spiritual journey in other ways.

Prayer, as we have observed in the Lanzarote situation, is about making a real and living lifetime engagement with God, the means of making that connection being less important than the fact of the connection actually being made. Connection with God through nature and the created world, as in the Lanzarote experience, is a very easy route for people to follow. Taken at a very simple level there are few parts of the day when there is no opportunity to reflect on God's creation revealed in and through nature. However a disciplined daily prayer time or times would be an equally valid route. The importance is in each person making, and maintaining the connection. From that spirit led, energised communities would be built.

Using these ideas, and recognising that this is only a very small beginning of a much larger process, I looked for a simple means of helping people in the URC to connect

or reconnect with 'the music of the silence'. As mentioned earlier, most people, when given an opportunity to reflect, are able to identify specific places where they have found a special peace and closeness to God. Equally, most can identify key people or communities who have helped to shape their lives. Using this as a basis, I have developed what I call 'A simple look at personal spirituality' (appendix 1) for use with groups as a simple exercise to help people to begin to think about and perhaps engage with their spirituality. It works around a single sheet of A4 paper which each participant folds in half vertically and then horizontally, forming four sides to use. The introduction begins with reading 1 Corinthians 12, and talking about who we are, looking at all the aspects of our lives. On the first page people are invited to draw a picture of themselves and to reflect for a few moments about who they are and what makes them particularly special. On the next page they are invited to write two characteristics that they share with others, and two things that make them unique. There is then an opportunity for sharing these in groups. In the next section they are invited to reflect and write down the names of people who have shaped their lives and then the special places, and to perhaps share these with others. In the final section people are asked to reflect on these three statements, From where do you get your energy and strength – what is your energising force? Think about the special people – how do you keep in touch and how often? What about your spiritual relationship with God? How do you build and strengthen that relationship? I have used this with a variety of different groups, just on its own or as a starter for wider discussion. On all occasions I have received positive feedback about its usefulness in prompting people to at least think about their spiritual journey. This could be

developed into a practical course for churches to use to develop the spiritual life of the URC and this will be pursued further in due course.

Conclusions

In the Introduction and Chapter 1, I was able to examine the historical, Reformed and current general contextual setting of spirituality within the URC. The literature review led to a greater understanding of the depth and breadth of the spiritual arena, and how spirituality might be a means of the church reconnecting with the world, although the work of Heelas and Woodhead (2005) would suggest that this is not likely to happen. The key elements of Reformed spirituality were identified and used as a measure against which to measure the life of the URC, and the work and life of César Manrique in Lanzarote. The life of the URC was examined through the records of General Assembly and its committees. The trigger point for this essay was the spiritual energy observed and personally experienced in the life and work of César Manrique and the development of Lanzarote and the apparent lack of spiritual energy within the URC.

Bevans' transcendental model of contextual theology offered the most appropriate means of identifying and mapping the Lanzarote situation, and the Reformed values of Biblical authority, prayer, and engagement with the world, the measures of authenticity. As a result of looking at the work of Manrique, three factors were identified which might be helpful in the URC. Firstly, his ability to energise and encourage people by helping them to reconnect with and to value their traditions, secondly his engagement with the material world, through nature, creating places of spiritual renewal, and finally, passive interior renewal through engagement with the

created world. Each of these was explored, reflected upon, and suggestions made as to how try and see how they might be developed in some way within the setting of the URC. Renewal and nurturing of personal spiritual growth must be a priority for the URC. Helping all its members to discover or rediscover 'the music of the silence' would, as we have seen, have a profound affect in re-energising a tired church. Reconnecting with its great historical spiritual treasury would be an important step in that process.

In the literature we saw examples of people such as Drane and Frost who had used the method of reflection about situations they had experienced and developed their own theology in a new way, Drane with his tarot readings, (Chapter 1, p.52) and Frost with his Essence course developed from his experiences of New Age spirituality (Chapter 1, p.53). In order to accept and develop exercises like these from outside our own experiences, Bevans (2007) and others (Allen, 2004, Rodgerson Pleasants, 2004, and Sweet 1999, 2000) tell us that we need to be sure of our own faith and our history in order to engage with the world in confidence. Manrique enabled the people of Lanzarote to grow in confidence by helping them to revisit and understand their rich heritage. This would be a very helpful model for the URC to follow.

However it became apparent, during the research, that the record of the URC in introducing and operating successful national training initiatives is somewhat suspect. Having identified these issues and developed one small initiative, I am currently exploring possible ways in which other ideas can be developed and delivered effectively within the URC. The need for some form of spiritual renewal is still there, and recognised within the church. How to address the issue is less clear.

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