

Michael Ramsey: 20th Century ecumenist

Priest, Professor, Primate and Prophet



In March 1966 Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, visited Rome and met with His Holiness, Pope Paul VI. In the course of that visit, on March 22, he dedicated the Anglican Centre in Rome, saying: "The Anglican student is often a debtor to writers within the Roman Catholic Church. This Centre is an attempt to repay that debt by making available the resources of Anglican learning to any who will come and enjoy them."

Archbishop Michael Ramsey's visit to Taizé

Canon Michael Moore worked from 1967-1982 in ecumenical relations with successive Archbishops of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace. Here he writes of accompanying Archbishop Michael Ramsey to Taizé in September 1973.

After personal encounters with Pope Paul VI, a succession of Orthodox Patriarchs and leaders of other Churches the Archbishop had a well-deserved reputation as an ecumenist. Less was known then of his extraordinary rapport with young people of many nations. Our first entry into the Chapel at Taizé will remain a powerful memory with me. Seldom have I been 'hit' by such an atmosphere of silence and prayer. The chapel was only dimly lit and one was conscious of its being full of people, the Taizé brethren, and hundreds of young folk, late teens and early twenties, kneeling or sitting on the carpeted floor. At the end of the Evening Office the Archbishop gave the Blessing with what the young people called a 'voice from heaven.'

Next day, Michaelmas, there was a Eucharist in the Chapel. The Archbishop read the Gospel and then gave a short meditation, yet a meditation which contained all the material for a weekend retreat: the Jacob's ladder open to heaven for the two-way offering of worship to God in the highest, and service to the world of love and suffering. This was inspiration, for the Archbishop had not then seen that the ladder with the Cross in its midst is a main motif of the Chapel.

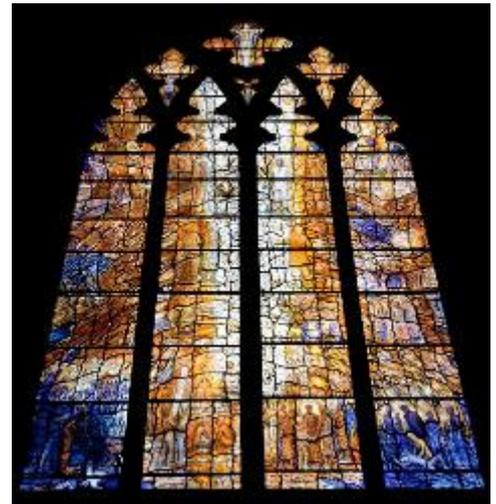
During the day there were conversations between the Archbishop and groups of young people. A contribution from a Spanish youth was memorable. It had to be translated through French to English. He criticised his bishop for visiting a poor parish wearing a bejewelled cope and mitre: how can the Church preach holy poverty to the poor and be so rich in its institutions? Those of us who had heard the discussions in the afternoon recognised much of the Archbishop's sermon at the Evening Office. It was a crystal-clear summary of what he had said in answer to the young people's questioning. There was no doubting their interest again. The thousand gathered listened in wrapt silence.



Michael Ramsey asked: What is the call of Taizé? — to find one's Christian self, one's Christian fellows and fellowship; and to find in humility in the shadow of the Cross. What is the hope of our calling? — heaven, the Kingdom of God on earth, and the unity of Christian peoples. How can this unity be realised in terms of the Church? — not by resignation to present structures; not by opting out; but by renewal of the institutional Church from within. The call is for renewal in worship and for renewal in service for the suffering. The call is the Lord's; once it is heard there must be no turning back, only a going back home from Taizé to share the call.

If those who had heard the Archbishop before were lost in some wonder, those who had not could only have been entranced. No doubt a prophet had been among them.

Durham Memorial



A new "Transfiguration" window in Durham Cathedral was dedicated in memory of Michael Ramsey, a former bishop of Durham and residentiary canon of the Cathedral, at Evensong on September 25. The preacher was Canon John Andrew OBE, Ramsey's former chaplain. Below, a detail of Pilgrims, with Ramsey portrayed on the right.

Photos: Robert Cooper, www.cooperphoto.co.uk

