As his retirement approaches we are delighted to publish two personal reflections on the life and times of Bishop Colin Buchanan.

**Bishop Colin Buchanan**

Bishop Roy Williamson writes:

I first met Colin in 1966 at a Conference Centre in Cwicwicke. He was lecturing on the riches of the new Liturgical Movement – an experience which he later described as trying to sell beer to the Salvation Army!

The Church of Ireland had just taken ‘the giant step’ of permitting a Cross to be placed on the altar table. Colin congratulated those present on such a liturgical breakthrough and then, with a wicked twinkle in his eye, said: ‘You’ll have to take them all of again to accommodate the Western Position at the Eucharist!’ Shell-shocked and didn’t quite know what to make of him.

But for those of us who knew him, it was vintage Buchanan. His charm, heart, mind and ready wit enabled him to entertain and enchant the listeners and, at the same time, to raise their eyes to more straining and exciting possibilities.

For me, it was the beginning of a friendship from which I have gained inspiration, encouragement, unfuliling loyally and refreshing honesty. There are many things I would like to mention in this brief article but must limit myself to three endearing characteristics of Bishop Colin’s ministry. The first is integrity. The second is encouragement. The third and final figure are the same; a rare quality among leaders. He is primarily active in person, as he is in public debate. It was integrity that took him from being Bishop of Aston to being Vicar of St Mark, Gillingham. It is his integrity that General Synod Members over the years have recognised and applauded. He hasn’t always won the argument but usually he has won their respect and warmed their hearts.

His warm heart, sharp mind, and ready wit enable him to accommodate the Western Position at the Eucharist – a scary prospect for many. He has won their respect and has won the argument. But for those of us who know him, it was vintage Buchanan. His charm, heart, mind and ready wit enabled him to entertain and enchant the listeners and, at the same time, to raise their eyes to more straining and exciting possibilities.

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The Rev. Dr Giles Fraser writes:

I like Colin Buchanan. In fact, most people do. A natural polymath and raconteur, he wins you over with an easy combination of conviction and good humour. As he steps down as Bishop of Woolwich another of the Church of England’s greatest characters passes into retirement.

It has been a roller-coaster journey with Bishop Colin. Converted whilst in the army, Colin has remained a conviction evangelical from way back in the days when evangelicals were a marginal minority, still a curate and perhaps only 33, Colin was appointed onto the liturgical commission then dominated by old-style anglo-catholics, some of whom were born in the nineteenth century. Since then church politics has been in his blood. His first thought was pure realpolitik: ‘If I stay for twenty years, I’ll see you lot off’. In fact, he said, ‘it happened in four’.

‘Has he ever really changed his mind?’ I ask. Not really. Perhaps he has softened a little being Bishop of Aston where one meets. He wears his purple robe and ministry of Colin but in the place we began and know it best, the Church of England year meets that need and/or shows a patience that defies the law.

What does he mean? Nothing could be further from the truth. Even when under pressure he pays attention to people, gets to their heart and, when appropriate, offers the kind of care that meets that need and/or shows a way forward. There are untold numbers of lardy and clergy in the Church of England and, indeed, across the Anglican Communion who have no idea what the effect he has had upon their life and ministry through his compassionate and effective pastoral care, would rise up to call him blessed – and I would be in the front row!

And I would also be on my feet today acclaiming the virtues of his wife Diana. Please do not interpret this final paragraph as patronising, for I have known Diana Buchanan almost as long as I have known Colin and for a good reason. She spoke about his work in retraining for those who had opened his eyes to the kind of work which Desmond Tutu came to preach at Aston Villa Football ground. They wanted 35,000 people. In end only 5,000 came, making a loss of £200,000. Bad organisation, dodgy weather and an organised campaign by the South African government to discredit Tutu as a terrorist all contributed to the mission’s failure. Colin offered the Bishop of Birmingham, Mark Santer, his resignation, which was promptly accepted.

Following the Aston disaster, Colin retreated to the Diocese of Rochester and, after a year in the wilderness, when he came to see his name removed from the Church of England year book - he was appointed the Vicar of St Mark’s Gillingham. Still active in General Synod, Colin became the only incumbent in the House of Bishops.

Sitting in his study surrounded by piles of books, we discuss the past and the future of the Church of England. In his time he has seen the evangelical constituency grow in strength. Kick-started by Billy Graham’s 1954/55 mission, Colin was perfectly placed to sur the increase in the conservative zeitgeist. He was there at the famous Reule conference in 1969 and has been there throughout the more militant years when it didn’t seem a particularly conducive place for a bishop to be.

I ask him to comment on the current state of the church. ‘Very dark’ he sighs. The debate over homosexuality is as bitter a debate as he can remember and, the take on the situation is summed up through the story of the postman and the dog. ‘The dog of the postman is to deliver letters. The dog, however, barks at the postman. I imagine that the postman believes that the postman is the evangelist, delivering the good news to all. The dog is a nuisance, distracting the postman from his daily tasks. I guess he believes his own pro-gay stance is the distraction. I smile at this story. For it strikes me that Colin has a great deal of the banker dog in his make up as well as a natural desire to be the postman. He agrees.

The Rev. Dr Giles Fraser is Vicar of Putney and Lecturer in Philosophy, Wadham College, Oxford.

**Bishop Colin’s ministry**

Delbert Sandiford writes:

Southwark Diocese Black and Minority Ethnic Forum (BMEF) celebrated the ministry of Bishop Colin Buchanan at St Michael’s and All Angels, Woolwich.

The Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Chair of the National Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns, said she had found him to be a ‘real source of strength and encouragement’. Commenting on his impending retirement, she added: ‘Sometimes, you persuaded that the holy grail is right around the corner, but it never appears. I am so persuaded, and have so determined by God’s observation that the end of all things is near, that you ain’t finished yet’.

The Rev. Dr Giles Fraser is a装卸 of the Church of England Biblical Institute. He was an important influence on my thinking in my early days as a theologian. He was the distraction. I smile at the thought was pure realpolitik: ‘If I stay for twenty years, I’ll see you lot off’. In fact, he said, ‘it happened in four’.

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Bishop Colin’s official ‘farewell’ takes place on Sunday 17 July in Southwark Cathedral. If you are unable to be there, they have a full report and pictures in September Bridge.