

Hugh Marriage looks back to the birth of *Christian*

Where should one begin the story of *Christian*? One point is in the 1960s, when Alwyn and I were students, reading the excellent *New Christian*, from which *Christian* is a direct descendent. Or one could start with *New Fire* (on which Alwyn edited the poetry), or later, when that journal merged with *Christian* and *Grassroots* to form *Christian*, edited by Charles Elliott - an excellent publication which came to a sticky end when Murdoch took over its publishers in 1990.

When Charles became Dean of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, he and the board of *Christian* tried to persuade Alwyn to take on the Editorship, and she eventually accepted on the basis that the journal was unlikely to survive as there was no money to finance it.

A further contributory factor should perhaps be Thatcher's education policies of the late 80s which made Alwyn's Philosophy of Art post at Surrey University both less rewarding and less secure. Alwyn had just finished *Life-Giving Spirit* and - briefly - had time to consider what she should do next. Readers of *Christian* were writing urging that the journal should continue. They spoke of their isolation in the Church, and the fact that no other publication was addressing the issues that mattered so much to them. Many were generous enough to send contributions towards a re-launch fund, and the constant stream of letters could not be ignored.

So it was that, in the middle of 1991, Alwyn sat up in bed and announced that she would relaunch *Christian* as an independent journal, continuing the ecumenical tradition of its forerunners. Everything would be in house: there would be no moguls; it would use desk top publishing (cutting edge then); it would be affordable and accessible; it would use volunteers (starting with the family); it would be financed by a £1000 grant from USCL. A dear friend saw the size of the task and gave us a fax, one of the first domestic versions.

Christian was reborn in its current format in October 1991 in the teeth of the recession, with the first

Farewell and fare forward

issue sent free to as many former subscribers as we could trace or recover from the publishers. No wonder the theme was *Taking the Risk*. Not everything went right on that first shot: Creeds, our faithful printers, misunderstood the instructions about the colour on the front (has any reader ever spotted that the banners follow the seasonal liturgical colours?) and the



Photo: Hugh Marriage

whole cover came out as pink as the *Financial Times*. But we were there: on the treadmill.

Fortunately, we did get some things right first time: the format has survived and developed. Although the number of pages is limited by the need to keep within the lowest postage band, we could increase the weight of the outer pages to give *Christian* a better feel. The 1980s Psion database has shown itself up to the task of maintaining the subscription list (once we had written the software to print the labels). Time-consuming negotiations with the Charity Commissioners resulted in *Christian* becoming a registered charity. Contributors have risen to the challenge of keeping articles short. Win King has created *Christian* as a character (last seen reading the Bible) but, like God on Sinai, have you ever seen his/her face? A band of volunteers helping with the mailing keeps the costs down.

So our cellars began to fill with back numbers, envelope supplies, filing cabinets of subscribers' forms and the like. It was to be less than a year before Alwyn was appointed Director of *Feed the Minds* and she began on a second

phase - fitting *Christian* in between an increasingly demanding timetable of visits to Africa, Latin America, the Indian sub-continent, Eastern Europe and the Far East, not to mention writing more books, fulfilling numerous preaching engagements and conducting retreats. Although no issue has ever been late, there have been enough close squeaks (some people call them crises) for it to be clear that the time has come to pass on the Editorship.

Christian is now well established: it is a stand-alone charity; improvements in technology mean that desk top publishing is easier; laser printing is commonplace; computer labels can be bought in the High Street; it has a web page; and many articles now come in by e-mail. As with any journal, maintaining the level of

subscriptions is always a problem: most journals reckon to lose a third of subscribers on renewal. The loyalty of *Christian* readers means that we lose fewer and still retain many of our original readers (your letters have often been a great source of encouragement): but *Christian* nevertheless needs continuous initiatives to maintain the subscriber base. Issuing *Christian* subscription leaflets has become a family routine and, as we enter a church - from remote chapel to cathedral - across the world, we have a joke that 'good heavens, it has just run out of *Christian* leaflets'. There must be a host of vergers who have found their bookstalls reorganized to accommodate a fresh supply.

For us, the moving of *Christian* will be like a child leaving home (something we have also experienced in recent years). Alwyn's 24 hours a day duties will have gone; though I already detect the gleam in her eye that means more books are brewing. No doubt the coming weeks will bring something of a sense of loss as the child goes to Cambridge; but the bonds of affection will not be easily broken.

The last word

Dear readers,

There is a certain biblical resonance about completing seven years as Editor of *Christian*. It has been an exciting and rewarding challenge, and as I hand over the Editorship I should like to thank all who have shared this experience with me. I feel I have come to know many of you, and I have been enormously grateful for your support.

I have learnt a great deal in the last seven years. It is one thing for a poet and philosopher to edit a journal: it is quite another for her to find herself creating and managing the administrative structure necessary to running a charity and publication business.

As Hugh suggests, taking leave of *Christian* will be a little like watching a child leave home. The pain of childbirth, the nurturing and the sitting up all night have all been worthwhile. Now the child is ready to face the world independently, and can be encouraged to leave home, knowing that our love and care go with it, but that we cannot live its life for it.

I have attempted to keep *Christian* equally committed to spirituality, awareness and action. Writers and readers have been drawn from all denominations and many countries; and the parity of male and female writers moved one Minister of State to remark after reading the journal: 'There seem to be a lot of women writers!'

After this issue *Christian* will be edited by Emma Hebblethwaite, the chaplain of King's College, Cambridge. I welcome her most warmly to the post, and look forward to watching the journal go from strength to strength under her leadership. All correspondence regarding *Christian* should from now on be addressed to her at **King's College, Cambridge, CB2 1ST**. However, my address remains the same (see page 2), so if any of you do wish to get in touch I shall be delighted to hear from you. Who knows, I might even catch up with my correspondence for the first time in seven years!

love, joy and peace

Alwyn Marriage