

I am often asked why or how I was ordained and today (when I celebrate the 50th anniversary of my ordination) seems a good excuse to tell you. I was baptised in January 1929 at All Souls Church, Brighton six months after I was born, but my parents were not churchgoers. My next contact with the Church of England, other than Grammar school assemblies, was as a Boy Scout attending the St George's Day services. But the seeds of religious enquiry were being sown and a few years later I attended the Sunday Evensongs in the Saxon Church at Shoreham-by-Sea.

When I was conscripted into the army in 1946 I always attended Sunday services. In July 1947 I went to Singapore to GHQ Signals Military Intelligence. In the office was Sergeant-Major Eric Penn, who was to become a life-long friend even though we were only together there for six weeks. Eric and I immediately 'clicked'. He was a member of the Cathedral Choir and he coerced me into joining the choir and this led to my subsequent confirmation; and my becoming a Server in the Garrison Church.

One late evening in early 1948, I returned to Barracks, after seeing a marvellous Italian film of the opera "The Barber of Seville" and was enthralled by it. Those who have been to the Tropics will know that when there is a clear sky at night, it really is clear; and this was such a night. The stars hung like jewels against a backcloth of blue-black. Millions of them twinkled and shone as far as the eye could see. Amongst the fairy lights was the silver moon, clearer and closer than any television picture since seen. Sleep was impossible amid this breath-taking scene; so I lay down on my back on the grass outside my room for about five hours looking between the silhouetted palm trees and thinking about the wonders of this universe. As the early morning dawn filtered through the sky erasing the picture, I went to bed for a couple of hours of unnecessary sleep. That night sticks in my memory, as a complete and ultimate revelation of God the Creator and Father of all, the re-assurance of my belief in God.

In Singapore I continued as a Scout Master and Youth Club Leader which stimulated a desire to serve mankind in a vocational way. When my time for leaving the army drew nearer I went to the Army Chaplain for advice. We discussed various options and he suggested that I might seriously consider ordination, but I had no desire to be a clergyman.

After returning to Singapore and Malaya in 1957 as a Chartered Insurer, I became a regular attender of the Church in Kuala Lumpur but otherwise took no active part. Then the Vicar wanted to start a Church Library and I agreed to operate this. Up to then I had thought no further about a vocational calling but one evening in January 1963 changed my whole attitude. My wife had gone to a meeting and I was sitting quietly at home, reading a novel and drinking a small glass of whisky and soda (yes, it was a small one!), when suddenly and without any prior stimulation the thought came into my mind, as if someone was standing beside me and speaking, to: "Go ye therefore into many lands". It was so obviously a call 'out of the blue' that I searched my Masonic Bible and found a similar quotation in St Matthew's Gospel (28.19). I then picked out four verses at random.

They were all relevant and the last one from St Paul (Acts 16.31) said: "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved". I was so shaken that I promptly got myself another whisky and soda! Obviously it was a case of the two spirits working; one Holy and the other Scottish! I made an appointment with the Vicar and he said that the best way to test the Calling was to immerse myself more deeply in church affairs. It so happened he needed a new Church Council Secretary so I accepted and was involved in the management of the School for the Blind, the Leper Colony Farm, a kindergarten, a large elementary school, a secondary school, and a bookshop. Soon afterwards the Bishop of Singapore asked me to be Secretary of a newly formed Diocesan Board of Evangelism. I also became the Founder of the Inter-Church Unity Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

Then in August 1963 I was unexpectedly asked to go to Borneo as Area Insurance Manager for the three countries of Sabah, Brunei and Sarawak. I became friendly with Alan Burn, the Cathedral Dean though I was far too busy in my work to contemplate an active participation in the church other than for Sunday attendance. Then in February 1964 I led an ascent of the 13,500 feet Mount Kinabalu. Whilst on top of that mountain I felt that God was again calling me to dedicate my life to his service. On my return to the city I immediately tried to contact Alan to seek his advice but learnt that he had that day gone Outstation to visit churches throughout the West Coast and would not be returning until after I had gone on leave to the United Kingdom. Imagine my disappointment as that week I also was going on tour to visit my Agents in the Interior prior to going on leave. The first stop was at a jungle town. I arose the next morning at about 6.30am and, as usual, strolled through the town before breakfast. To my complete surprise, there coming towards me was Alan Burn. We had a long discussion over breakfast in a Chinese coffee shop and he suggested that I contact a local Vicar in England.

On arriving in England, I contacted the local Vicar. He put me in touch with the Diocesan Director of Ordination in Brighton and the Director suggested that I attend an Ordination Selection Board; though the only one available during my six weeks' leave was in the north of England nearly 400 miles away. The Selection Board's questioning was searching and sometimes provocative and I was rather terse with one member for, I was not anxious to be selected as I had a highly paid and very interesting job. This must have become apparent for, after saying farewell to the Secretary, he called out to me: "Raymond, I must ask, were you hoping we would fail you?". It was then that I guessed that my selection for training had been approved and sure enough a letter was received from the Bishop of Chichester saying that he would sponsor me. After much soul-searching and discussion with my wife, we returned to Borneo for two further years; to see whether I could work this feeling out of my system. But when I informed the Dean of the situation I was immediately made a Lay Reader without any training, being thrown in off the deep end! I was soon asked to lead Sunday Matins in a Chinese Church in a jungle town 35 miles away, as the Dean could only get there for Holy Communion once a month.

Eventually I gave in to God's call and returned to England for two years theological training,

though my employers offered to keep my job open in case I changed my mind! I was made Deacon in 1968 just weeks before my 40th birthday. Within a month I was in charge of a very alive daughter church. When I was priested nine months later, the newspapers were intrigued by this 'wild man from Borneo'. I was asked what I hoped to achieve and replied 'only to be a good parish priest'; so when in 1976 I was invited to be Archdeacon of Rotherham and later, Dean of Hong Kong, I declined both offers. Little did I expect to still be working today!