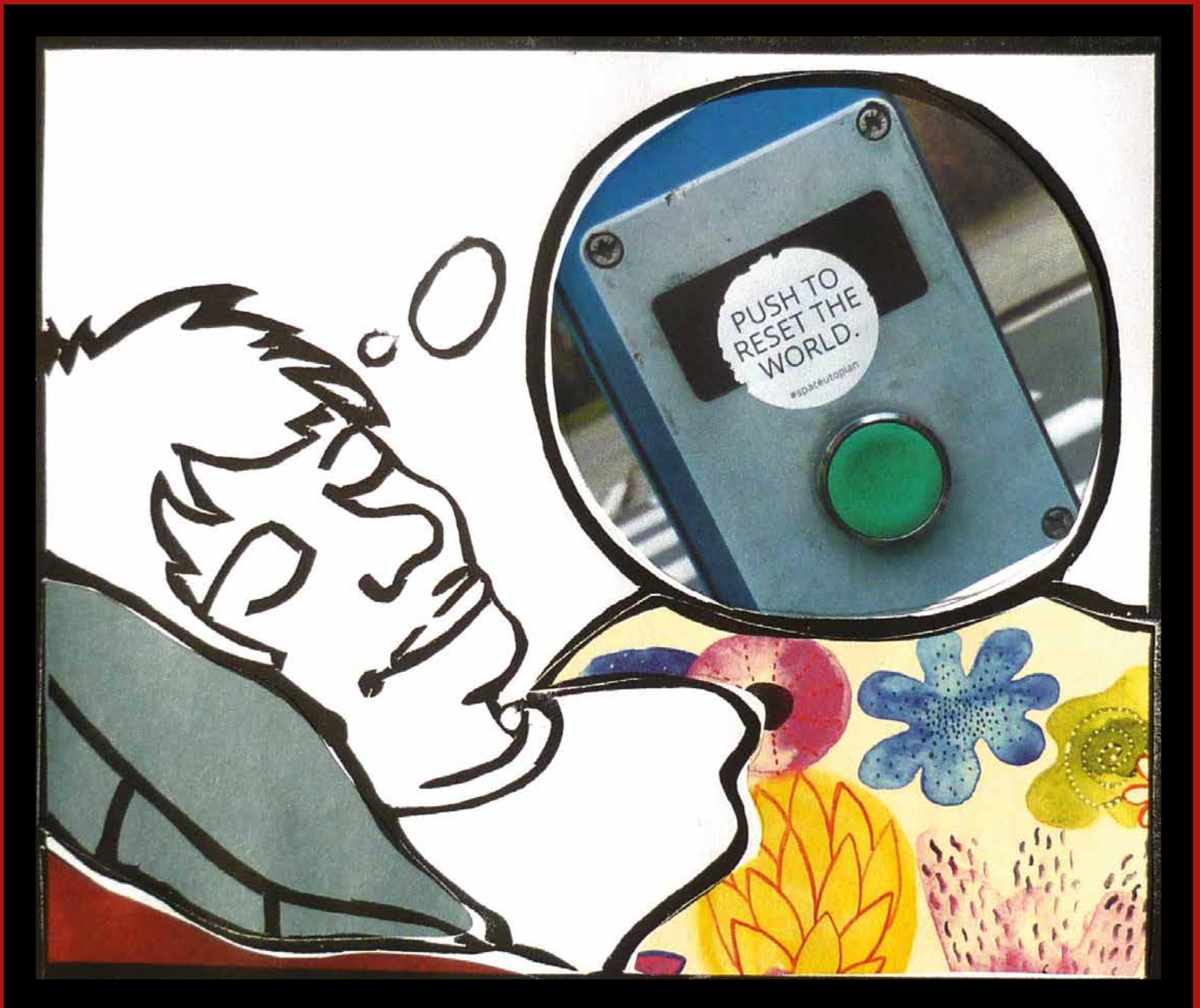


Christians Aware

Magazine



Autumn 2021

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FOR OUR PRAYERS

COP 26 in Glasgow – beginning on October 31st.

People of Afghanistan.

People of Haiti – following the August earthquake.

People of Gaza – still suffering from the May war with Israel when so much was destroyed. Hardly anything has been rebuilt.

All people who have to leave their homes and become internally displaced or refugees.

CHRISTMAS CARDS 2021

Please buy our cards and introduce them to your friends and local communities. We can supply extra flyers, by post or e-mail.



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE

Our Saxby Street office is structurally unsafe and we have vacated it.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO WRITE TO SAXBY STREET.

We have an arrangement for the post office to pass on all our letters.

Our office manager is now in temporary accommodation and our work continues well.

We are grateful to our members who have made an extra donation to help us to pay for our relocation.

Front and Back Covers – Beate Dehnen





EDITORIAL

Autumn 2021



Francis Hoyland's etching is from the story of the feeding of 5,000 people taken from St. John's Gospel. The story is set by the Sea of Galilee in the springtime and quite close to the Passover festival. The feeding of the 5,000 is a story of people who met Jesus and his disciples and moved from the fetters of hunger and despondency to surprise and new life.

I can imagine that the boy hesitated for the briefest of moments when he was noticed, and then he stepped forward to share and so to bring freedom and new life to so many. He stood at the crossroads of uncertainty and then chose the path of generosity and love. We are all asked by Jeremiah to:

'Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths and where the

best road is. Walk on it and you will have peace.'¹

We all face choices every day of our lives, we stand at a crossroads and our hope and prayer is that we go down the best path and share what we have to bring freedom and new life to others.

But in today's world there is such a lot of suffering and sadness that we may well ask ourselves whether any little we can do will make any difference at all. This magazine alone includes some appalling reminders of what people have to endure.

But actually we can all begin to bring change for the future of our world. We have included our new leaflet, '**Advent Hope**' with this magazine and it has many challenges for us to take up.

We can change our lifestyles and reduce our carbon footprint. We can notice sustainable farming and encourage it, we can support green policies locally, nationally and around the world. We can show an interest in COP26 and let our MPs know that

we expect our government to work for a sustainable future for the whole world.

We can benefit by learning and being encouraged by other people, including materially poor people. I met a woman on a recent visit to Zambia who dragged herself and her whole family out of poverty by growing and selling cabbages. Christians Aware has a link with women in Nepal who make jewellery to sell in order to earn money to send the children to school. The Kenya Greenbelt Movement, which has inspired hundreds of people to plant trees, is recognised and followed all over the world. It began as the vision of one woman, Wangari Maathai, who never left the path of loving service for her people and country.

Barbara Butler

¹ Jeremiah 6. 16

We are thankful for the life of Julia Flack. Julia died suddenly in August following a heart attack. She lived a life of service as a probation officer. In recent years she wrote for this magazine. She was a keen gardener and walker. Some members will remember meeting her at the January 2019 annual conference.

Julia's husband, Bishop John Flack, who is one of our trustees, is in our prayers together with all the family.

'CAMINO TO COP' SETS OFF FOR GLASGOW CLIMATE SUMMIT

Ellen Teague

A service at St James, Piccadilly, followed by a walk to Parliament Square where a vision statement was read out, launched the 'Camino to COP' on Sunday 5 September.

Walkers from London and another stream leaving Bristol on the 9 September aim to arrive in Glasgow on 30 October for the eve of the United Nations Climate talks. Banners and messages of hope were waved as a lively 40-strong group, accompanied by a samba band, walked northwards through central London on the first day of the 500-mile pilgrimage.

The purpose of the 'Camino' is to lobby world leaders meeting in Glasgow and communities along the route about the need for meaningful action to address the global climate and ecological emergency. The walk will take place over an eight-week period in stages averaging around 10 miles a day. Eleven people of various faiths and ages, mostly linked to Extinction Rebellion Faith Bridge, are walking the whole route, among them 60-year-old barrister and mother of four Catholic Melanie Nazareth of Christian Climate Action. She says, "one of the things that has struck me is that actually climate migrants have to do this; there isn't a choice; those of us who are doing it make the choice to do this and it feels a little bit about trying to experience something that stands in solidarity with them." She was raised in the Solomon Islands where rising sea level is a looming catastrophe and is passionate to spotlight the climate emergency. Another half dozen walkers are doing stretches of several



weeks, with day walkers invited to join in.

The second evening of the walk, walkers held an open meeting from their stopover at Kenton Methodist Church in Harrow, one of many churches offering accommodation and hospitality along the route. Members of local Methodist, Anglican and Catholic churches were among a group that heard, "the walk is for everyone, and not just faith communities". A 'Coat of Hopes', carrying positive messages and images, was displayed. Small square patches of rainbows, trees, waves, and flowers have already been sown into the coat and others will be added along the route.

A Jewish member led morning prayers before the group set off on Tuesday morning. It was Jewish New Year so a Shofar animal horn was blown and the group ate apple dipped in honey, to signify sweet times ahead. Among the walkers was Reverend Helen Burnett, who is the vicar of St Peter and St Paul's Church in Chaldon, part of the Anglican Diocese of Southwark. She will be doing three days a week of the whole Camino to Glasgow and then 12 days of prayer in Glasgow during the COP. "In times of crisis and injustice" she reflects, "people have chosen to set out on

foot to demand change but walking does so much more; it slows you down, you notice more, you see the minutiae of the world, you see the detail, you become a tiny part of a much bigger picture, you show solidarity with your fellow walkers and with the communities and landscapes you walk through.

Meanwhile the Young Christian Climate Network

'Relay to COP' walked through the Peak District the same week, and in very hot temperatures. They have been travelling to Glasgow since the Cornwall G7 meeting in June and have been very appreciative of the support along the route, including hospitality from numerous churches and opportunities to speak to local communities about climate action.



Rachel Mander with relay to Cop in Cornwall.

Camino to COP
<https://caminotocop.com>
plus videos on their facebook page and twitter

Young Christian Climate Network 'Relay to COP'
www.yccn.uk
plus regular updates on twitter

WHAT FUTURE FOR AFGHANISTAN NOW?

David Page

With the Taliban back in power after an absence of 20 years, Afghans are facing a whole set of serious new challenges. Thousands have already voted to leave the country, either by plane or by land. But millions of Afghans remain and will have to adjust to a world turned upside down by the precipitate US withdrawal and the collapse of the elected Afghan government. In this article, David Page, a trustee of Afghanaid, examines the prospects for Afghanistan and its development in the years ahead.

When the Taliban were in power from 1996 to 2001, their government, which they called the Emirate of Afghanistan, was only recognised by three countries – Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Pakistan. Other countries turned their back on what was widely seen as a pariah state because of its use of harsh Islamic punishments, its draconian policies towards women and its harbouring of Al-Qaida and its leader, Osama bin Laden, who planned the attack on the twin towers and the Pentagon twenty years ago. That attack changed the world in many ways. It provoked the US war on terror and led to a massive deterioration in understanding between the West and the Muslim World. It also prompted the NATO intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, which dislodged the Taliban regime and paved the way for the election of a new government, which for its security forces, its administration and the country's development was always heavily dependent on foreign funding.

The last twenty years produced much measurable progress, at least in the first fifteen years. A government development programme implemented by NGOs like Afghanaid took development down to the village level across the country's thirty-four provinces. Elected local councils set their own development priorities and were helped to repair infrastructure, to improve agriculture and to build schools and health clinics. After the prohibitions of Taliban rule, girls went back to primary school in large

numbers and in smaller numbers to secondary schools and universities. Women's empowerment became a strong element in many development programmes, leading to the emergence of women entrepreneurs in many country districts. With international assistance, Afghanistan developed a media sector which boasted over 30 national TV channels and over a hundred local FM radio stations, many of them holding the government to account. Though many rural areas remained very conservative in outlook, in the towns, particularly the capital, Kabul, a more metropolitan, liberal, atmosphere prevailed, with boys and girls educated alongside each other at universities and professional women emerging in many spheres of life. As the Taliban took city after city in August and eventually walked into Kabul, it was the fear that all this progress was about to be cancelled that provoked the flight of so many professional people and their children from the country.

The Taliban leadership have claimed that this time it will be different, that they have learnt from the mistakes of their last time in power. They are certainly more aware of the international community and the requirements of diplomacy. From their base in Qatar, they have successfully negotiated with the United States for the withdrawal of its troops from the country and they have said they seek international recognition for their regime. Though they are predominantly drawn from

the largest Afghan ethnic group, the Pashtuns, they have spoken of creating an inclusive government. They have offered an amnesty to their opponents. They have said they want Afghans to work together and not to leave the country. They have promised that girls and women will be allowed to be educated and to work. However, though the leadership has made these positive noises, in many places the rank and file have acted very differently, and despite the talk of an inclusive government, when the Taliban announced their interim government in early September, it was entirely drawn from their own ranks and there was no woman minister at all. For the moment, therefore, many Afghans remain fearful and are looking for reassurance not in words but in actions.

A month after the takeover, a greater degree of stability has emerged. The Taliban are being more successful in securing the return to work of some police and military personnel and some civil servants. Corruption is reported to have been much reduced. Security has improved and after years of fighting between the Taliban and the Government, many rural areas are experiencing a peace dividend, though pockets of resistance remained in the Panjshir valley, famous for its resistance to the Soviet forces. What no-one yet knows is what sort of peace it will be.

For the Taliban, the task of transforming themselves from an ethnically and religiously exclusive military force into a political class capable of running a complex modern state of many ethnic communities is a huge challenge, not least because the world has still to recognise their assumption of power. After the fall of Kabul, the US froze the country's dollar assets and the IMF suspended its drawing rights, with the intention

of using this as a lever to extract concessions from the Taliban. Unfortunately, the economic impact on ordinary people and on businesses has been dramatic. The sight of long queues of Afghans waiting all day to take a maximum of \$200 dollars out of their accounts was a first sign of the difficulties ahead. These limits on cash withdrawals have prevented Afghan businesses and NGOs like Afghanaid from accessing funds or paying their staff and economic activity has stalled. The Afghani currency has depreciated and prices have risen. Ordinary Afghans have had to sell their possessions for much less than their worth just to obtain the money to live. All this has only encouraged Afghans with resources to leave the country.

In addition to these transitional challenges, the Taliban have taken over a country reeling from the impact of recent conflict and suffering from successive surges of Covid-19 and a very serious drought. Ten years after 2001, a review of progress against UN indicators demonstrated some steady improvement in life expectancy, access to healthcare, maternal mortality and literacy. But after the draw-down of most NATO forces in 2014 and the ensuing increase in conflict across the country as the Taliban re-asserted their power, the speed of social and economic progress declined. One major social problem today is the number of people internally displaced by the conflict. According to UN sources, over four million Afghans were displaced by the end of 2020 and a further 500,000 in 2021. As a result of climate change, the country is also facing more regular droughts, which is impacting the productivity of agriculture and the numbers of Afghans in need of nutritional support. According to an assessment in May 2021 by UNOCHA, the UN body coordinating humanitarian aid for the country, nearly half of the population (18.4m people) need humanitarian and protection assistance, a 40% increase within one year. Even more dramatic is its assessment that nearly half of all children under-five are expected to

face acute malnutrition this year.

One of the major concerns of the UN and of the NGO community is that the suspension of aid, the withholding recognition of the Taliban government and the exertion of financial pressure aimed at securing its commitment to international human rights standards, will only increase the danger of a humanitarian disaster. Even before the Taliban takeover, humanitarian partners had prioritised 15.7 million people to receive multi-sectoral assistance in 2021, though only a small proportion of the US\$1.3 billion required had been pledged and less than a quarter of the target population had been reached. Since the Taliban takeover, the situation has become more acute. The humanitarian community has called on the US and other Western countries not to stop aid to Afghanistan but to channel funding urgently through the UN and through NGOs, which have the experience to deliver it directly to the affected communities. Unless this happens, it says, there is a danger of famine in some parts of the country.

For Afghanaid, the last few months' events have added another turbulent chapter to the history of its nearly forty-year commitment to the country. As a precaution, our six international staff were airlifted out of Kabul in August but our three hundred Afghan staff remain in the country. Our Kabul office was closed for a week but re-opened when the security situation improved. Female staff worked from home for some weeks but in late September they began to return to the office after negotiations between the UN, the NGO community and the Taliban.

In the provinces where Afghanaid works – Badakhshan, Samangan, Ghor and Daykundi – the Taliban and other armed groups have long been a fact of life. For years, the Taliban have had a full shadow administration in all provinces and though the government controlled the main towns their writ has run in many rural areas. NGOs have had to negotiate with them when implementing their programmes and Afghanaid

has experienced staff who are used to these situations. In the new situation, though there have been some small incidents, the Taliban have encouraged us to keep working. Afghanaid commands local respect, not least because our programmes are grounded in community support. Much of our work is in natural disaster prevention and humanitarian relief and this is essential for community survival. The Taliban have made it clear to the UN that they wish this work to continue. The future of Afghanaid's work on women's empowerment is less certain. Our female staff are being permitted to work in most provinces, though in some places there have been attempts to restrict them to the field rather than the office. But there is a concern that as the Taliban establish firmer control, these restrictions will become more severe.

Though the Taliban are trying to make a new start, they remain a very conservative religious movement with a past record of intolerance towards other ethnic communities and religious minorities. Their social conservatism is less of an issue in the rural areas than in the urban areas but over the last twenty years many rural areas have also changed and support for girls' education and for women's involvement in business and commerce has increased. If the Taliban wish to rule by consent, they will have to make allowances for these significant social changes. If they do not, then local resistance to their rule is bound to increase.

Afghanaid has been working in Afghanistan for almost forty years and plans to continue to work with Afghan rural communities to improve their livelihoods for many years to come. As ever, it is the contextual challenges which pose the greatest risks to our work. After forty years of invasions and civil war, the ascendancy of the Taliban opens a new chapter for the country. We must hope that it will not be yet another chapter of suffering for the Afghan people.

David Page is a trustee of Afghanaid



Samangan landscape.



Arid hillside.



Terraced hillside.



Afghanaid works alongside women in some of the most remote and underserved parts of the country, providing them with the knowledge, resources and agency they need to transform their families' lives, exercise their rights and become leaders in their communities.



Afghanaid is currently helping conflict-affected families protect themselves by distributing vital emergency support including shelter, food, hygiene kits, heaters, fuel, cooking equipment and blankets for the harsh winter months.

Afghanaid
www.afghanaid.org.uk

In this difficult time, one thing is clear: we must not forget Afghanistan. Approximately six times the number of people in the country were already in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021 as compared to four years ago. Now, the conditions have worsened and, with winter fast approaching, the need is urgent. Together, we can make a real difference to these people. Please donate what you can today to help those who need it most.

Scan the QR code or visit
<https://www.afghanaid.org.uk/Appeal/help-families-in-afghanistan>



 Afghanaid.org  @afghanaid  @afghanaidhq

Crisis appeal window.

ACTION CARD - SEPTEMBER 2021: REFUGEES FROM AFGHANISTAN

'Remember that all refugees are human.'

Inderjit Bhogal

The world faces a new refugee crisis now that Afghanistan has been taken over by the Taliban.¹ It is estimated that throughout most of 2021, as the Taliban have taken over more and more of the country, up to 30,000 people have been fleeing Afghanistan every week.² Many people have fled to Kabul province and hundreds of thousands are internally displaced. Now that Kabul has fallen to the Taliban people are desperately trying to get into the airport and to get onto planes, mostly unsuccessfully. They are driven to desperation not only by fear of the Taliban but also by drought and Covid.

Many countries will accept Afghan refugees but others have reached saturation point. For example, Pakistan has said that it can't take more than the roughly 3 million people it has already received. The UK has agreed to take in, gradually, 20,000 Afghan refugees. Hopefully the process may be speeded up and much more flexibility shown. The Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy – ARAP – was introduced in April. However, it is vital that safe legal passage is offered to far more people than the current scheme allows for. Many Afghans have cultural links to the UK and many are women and children. The reason for this is that some of the men who worked for the British are already dead. Afghanistan is no longer a safe country and this must be acknowledged by the UK.



A new movement, following the rise of cities of sanctuary is 'Churches of Sanctuary,' linked to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The hope is that churches may become welcoming places for all and 'proud to offer sanctuary to people facing violence and persecution.' The welcome and care may come to include all vulnerable people. No-one should be isolated.

Three steps forward are suggested – remembering that God took sanctuary amongst us:

- Learn what it means to seek sanctuary
- Embed welcome and inclusion in the life of your church
- Share the vision, work and achievement with pride

Some possible actions:

- Read 'Farewell Kabul' by Christina Lamb, published by William Collins. This will help in understanding Afghanistan and its people
- Use 'Sanctuary for all. A study guide for individuals and churches', prepared by Inderjit Bhogal and available from CTBI
- Introduce 'Churches of Sanctuary' in your own church and work to become such a church.

¹ Taliban means student of Islam. The Taliban are Pashtuns who are Sunni Muslims.

² UNHCR.

TAKING STOCK AND LOOKING FORWARD: REFLECTIONS ON INTERFAITH PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FALL OF THE TWIN TOWERS

Peter Colwell

Looking back is not always advisable! In the Book of Genesis, Lot and his wife are told not to look back as they leave Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities destroyed for their betrayal of hospitality and the rejection of aliens, yet Lot's wife looks back and is "turned to a pillar of salt" – calcified to the spot and unable to move forward to the future. Looking back, it seems is dangerous! For those of us who have been involved in interfaith relations for many years, we are prone to the dangers of "looking back", to ideas and practices, books and resources, heroes and trailblazers and wish that others would treasure them as much as we did, and hope that the excitement of the radicalness of the past could be rekindled. The trick then is to not to stand and stare at yesterday with nostalgia but to carry that which was of value on the journey to a future that will not resemble the past.

The twentieth anniversary of the terror attacks of 9/11 are perhaps an opportunity to pause and reflect on how interfaith relations have been changed and challenged in the 21st century, without dwelling too much on looking back, or dwelling too much on interfaith relations prior to 9/11. It is often said that 9/11 changed the world on a single day, but this is not quite the case: even before 9/11 the context of world politics and interfaith relations

was changing in Western society with growing anxiety amongst many about the changing nature of identity, particularly within the British Asian community, with new forms of political Islam coming to the fore. The Salman Rushdie affair brought to the surface not only an underlying orientalist suspicion of the East that Palestinian writer Edward Said eloquently identified, but also the tension that comes from religious convictions and sensibilities in a post-Enlightenment society that assumes that human beings can make it on their own without reference to God. Decades before 9/11 the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) was inspiring a new generation of Muslims with his message that secular Arab nationalism had failed, that the West was its decadent enemy, and that Muslim self-respect could be regained through a cosmic war against the dual enemies of the Christian West and Zionist State. The Islamophobia that rose sharply after 9/11 did not come out of nowhere – the excessively negative portrayal of Muslims in the popular media and the absence of any realistic portrayal of Muslim families living in Western society, coupled with stereotypes of long held colonial assumptions made it almost inevitable that Islam would be viewed in the most frightening of ways.

9/11 was vivid to those who

remember it. I remember the grief of many of the Muslims with whom we worked then, distressed at the loss of life but in equal measure with a deep anger that any Muslim could do this or approve of this. At times it felt like a grief observed (to borrow from C.S.Lewis). Have we spent enough time observing, responding to and standing alongside Muslim grief? In popular discourse there was the deep suspicion that the real face of Islam had been shown to the world: that narrative was at times overwhelming and for the first time back then I had moments of doubt and that I had got it wrong about this "interfaith stuff" – what a luxury it seemed to be to talk about dialogue and the peaceful teachings of all religions, when only a few days before, people threw themselves from the twin towers, or were incinerated, or left traumatized and bereaved because of an apparent religious conviction that had turned evil. The fear was overwhelming. And the accusation from some quarters was that interfaith was naïve and not to be taken seriously. And then there were the Hindu and Sikh communities who felt pushed to the sidelines, with one Hindu leader commenting "How many people should we kill to get on your agenda?"

But amidst the fear, the grief and the doubts were many wonderful things: Lasting friendships that came about because different faiths came

together. A determination not to lose faith in peace and non-violence. So why is the negative and difficult stuff remembered more? This may have something to do with global politics, security and therefore social cohesion came to dominate interfaith relations as we became recruited into political strategies. Interfaith became dominated in many arenas by questions of integration, security, how to prevent radicalization and violence and much less about friendship and mutual understanding. And even where the latter has been done to great effect, there was always someone to spin it in a security direction.

What we are left with is a tension between interfaith as being primarily about friendship and human dignity and a political desire to overcome radicalized faith because of the danger that it is perceived to pose (the instrumentalization of interfaith). Perhaps the most important contribution in the post 9/11 context was that of the late Rabbi Jonathan

Sacks, particularly his idea of “the Dignity of Difference” (the title of his book published immediately after 9/11), for this goes to the very heart of what the interfaith encounter is all about. “Difference” characterizes human existence yet is something most people struggle with in some form or another. At some level we all want to have an instinct that says, “that’s enough difference, we are not going any further”. Yet what Sacks was telling us just a year after 9/11 that the only way to avoid a “clash of civilizations” was to affirm the essential dignity of difference in a society and globally.

So undoubtedly interfaith has been changed by the concerns of security but the essential need for friendships and human understanding remains. So, in conclusion – what has changed in 20 years since 9/11? Of course, much has changed – we are in a much more diverse and secular religious culture. But questions remain about the colonial assumptions on which interfaith dialogue is built,

especially in the West. And related to that is the increase in diversification of the issues: gender justice is now much more central to interfaith engagement than it was, as is anti-racism and the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement. In addition, LGBTQI people across the different faiths are finding mutual support from one another, and the Refugee and Climate crises have resulted in interfaith being much more social justice orientated.

After 20 years of so much violence and heartbreak, the task of interfaith continues even with a much-changed context. Yet politicians and their agendas come and go. They all pass – eventually. What doesn’t pass is the human instinct towards compassion for one another, which is what dialogue is rooted in.

Peter Colwell is acting General Secretary at the CTBI (Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland).

CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

John Perumbalath

Was there a time when the church was not engaged with politics? Your answer will depend on your definition of ‘politics’ but I should say, broadly speaking, the church was always involved in politics, although it did not always engage with the real issues. It is here we may have to ask the questions, “Which politics” and “Whose politics.” In this article, I am not asking provoking questions but just giving an overview of Church’s involvement in politics. I will do that by identifying three broad categories of traditions.

First of all, there is engagement with the **political power or political authority**. Here the issue is opposing the state or supporting/ patronising the state. In most of the instances this kind of alliance or enmity between the political power and the church has nothing to do with the political issues that affect the common

people. It is often either to protect the Church or to gain patronage or other advantages for the Church.

So in the New Testament Christianity, we find a moderate approach to the state advocated by 1st Peter and the book of Hebrews alongside an attitude of resistance in the book of

Revelation. We have no reason to conclude that these struggles had anything to do with the issues of peace and justice.

In the fourth century AD, with the conversion of the emperor himself to the Christianity, church became an ally of the state. This power sharing continued into the modern period. The story of the Anglican heritage is not much different. The church was seen standing alongside the state through the early days of colonialism, slave-trade and apartheid.

Then we have partnerships. Church’s practical partnership with the state or political power that we see in the

modern days is a development from the biblical roots itself. The state is conceived in the New Testament as an agent for doing good, which should be supported as long as it serves the community. Church has supported the state or engaged with the state in this sense and worked in partnership with it. But again this is not a choice based on the ideology of the incumbent political party or the government's policies; most often it has to do with finding opportunities and support for church's work in the community or making the church's presence felt in the socio-political scenario.

The second kind of engagement is with **political ideologies**. Christian faith and scripture have good enough directions for political action, which were not explored well until the modern times (I do not underestimate the theological reflection and contribution from St. Thomas Aquinas).

In a modern world where political ideologies are defined and shaped and where the state is run by political parties with well-defined political agenda, serious Christian endorsement or engagement with political ideologies became a necessity. So Christians have mostly endorsed the political ideologies that gave way for colonialism and fascism with some breaking the ranks and opposing them. Those Christians who initiated the campaign for the abolition of the slave-trade or those in Germany who stood up to the fascist Hitler were not reflecting the mind of the church as a whole.

The later part of the 19th century and 20th century witnessed serious engagement with political ideologies. Christian traditions seriously engaging with capitalism, socialism, Zionism, and fascism abound in this period, even though they are not always supported by the church hierarchy; but they have influenced church's thought and action and sometimes guided the church bodies and their thinking.

Notable among these ideological engagements is the story of Christian socialism in England, which has its

roots in the response of FD Maurice and his friends to the political events of their day in mid 19th century. This socialist tradition flourished through different Christian socialist groups with notable contributions from Stewart Hedlum and Conrad Noel, and more recently Kenneth Leech. Social Christianity in the United States owed much to the developments in England. Washington Gladden, Reinhold Niebuhr, and more recently Philip Wogaman did play significant role in developing this social Christianity in the USA.

Liberation theology, with its roots in Latin America, has engaged constructively and critically with the ideology of capitalism on one hand and Marxism on the other. For half a century now, Liberation theology has been the general framework for radical Christian political thinking and action. Feminist theologies, black theologies and anti-Zionist reflections are inspired and influenced by Liberation Theology.

Confessing Church and Dietrich Bonhoeffer are examples of political engagement in the context of fascism. Palestinian Liberation theology and the engagements of churches in England with Far Right ideologies represented by political parties like BNP and ELD are contemporary signs of active engagement in this area.

We cannot leave this section without mentioning Christian conservatism which is as notable as social Christianity for its continuing influence on faith and society.

Christian conservatism predates social Christianity at least by half a century, and is traced back to Parson Malthus in the late eighteenth century. In England, Ralf Harris, ER Norman and Brian Griffiths are associated with Christian conservatism.

We also need to recognize the presence of Christian groups within political parties, who engage with their party's political ideology from a Christian perspective. We have Christian fractions within each mainline political party in England. And there is 'Christians in Politics'.

The third kind of engagement is with **political issues**. This is the way most Christians seem to be involved and engaged in politics today. There is reflection on issues that confront people. Such serious reflection (apart from what we see already reflected in the Bible) dates back to St Basil and St Ambrose.

And then follows the action by Christians. Wilberforce's and others' initiatives for the abolition of slavery is an example. Churches or individual Christians participation in the Campaigns for a Living Wage in London, Jubilee 2000, Make Poverty History, and the promotion of the Fair-trade by the churches are examples for engaging with particular political issues. Christian advocacy and activism on environmental issues continue to find increased support among Christians. Support for these engagements come from Christians holding differing political views. People do not commit themselves to any political ideology here or reflect seriously of the political implications, but they support what they think is a just cause. We also see this happening with the support for Christian Aid and similar agencies.

These three are not neatly divided categories. They do often overlap; these days, Christians can be, and sometimes are, engaged in all three levels.

We all are involved in politics some way of the other. Either we silently and passively participate or support the status quo, or we make some choices for involvement.

But "Engagement" is not passive and silent support. Engagement is active participation. We have seen that there have always been some Christian traditions that took this political engagement seriously. There are questions that we still need to ask: "Whose politics are we are engaged with?", or "Whose benefit is in our mind – church's or of the larger society?", or "at what price?"

**John Perumbalath is
Bishop of Bradwell
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AN END TO POVERTY AND INEQUALITY? ALL EYES WILL BE ON THE UK IN THE COMING WEEKS

Jenny Brown and Ann-Marie Agyeman

The overriding message in our (Ann-Marie and Jenny's) presentation at the summer school was that in the face of deep global poverty and inequality there is, nevertheless, hope. That message, as we explained, is, however, conditional on action, which needs to be urgent and can't be left only to politicians. We discussed what the terms 'poverty' and 'inequality' mean, and what they look like in practice. That led us to talk about the global climate summit taking place in Glasgow this November, why it's so important, and how all of us can help achieve a good outcome.

The poverty and inequality that we witness around the world is evidence of a collective failure to protect the most vulnerable members of society. There's a common view that poverty is 'only' a lack of money. However, people who actually live in poverty tell us that there's much more to it than simply the financial aspects, significant though they are. Poverty is multi-dimensional, and can be defined as a lack of resources for well-being, and a denial of the human rights that allow every individual to participate in their community life in an equal and meaningful way. This includes inadequate access to healthcare and education, lack of safe shelter and housing and an inability to exercise political rights. People living in extreme poverty in particular, experience these at greater intensity and for longer periods of time, which makes it incredibly difficult for them to break out of the cycle. Reducing poverty in this holistic sense is a means to enabling human flourishing, fullness of life.

We also recognise that poverty is a political phenomenon and a result not of coincidence but of choices that are made by governments, politicians and other decision-makers, whether at local, national or global levels. These choices can prevent transformational change and instead sustain poverty and inequality rather than helping end them. However, like all choices, they can be influenced. That's where you, we at Christian Aid, and millions of others around the world, have a role and responsibility. As Christians, our shared desire is to celebrate people as they flourish out of poverty by recognising that their sense of belonging, hope, joy and fulfilment is an integral part of the restored world that we envision.

Like poverty, inequality is experienced differently in different contexts and by different groups of people. There are two broad categories that it's helpful to consider: inequality of opportunities and inequality of outcomes. Opportunities are unequal when not everyone in a society has the same access to, for instance, education, employment or healthcare services. Even where there are laws and policies which ostensibly provide equal opportunities, for instance on equal pay, things often don't turn out as intended. For a variety of reasons, even if there is equality of access, say to education, the outcome in terms of levels of attainment can be unequal. This is not just an issue in low-income countries: in this country black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups have been far worse impacted by the virus than their white British counterparts, with significantly higher rates of



Christian Aid, June 2019.

hospitalisation and death. This is despite the principle underpinning the NHS of equal access for all to healthcare and other welfare services,

Christian Aid's response to the pandemic across the globe acknowledges the inequalities of opportunity and access and the different ways in which these are experienced. Partners are supporting the most vulnerable communities by adapting existing projects to address their emergency needs: in Nepal this includes the use of local radio to share information about how to reduce the risk of transmission, and to tackle common misconceptions and suspicion about the virus. In Cox's Bazaar, in Bangladesh, in addition to the provision of information our partners are supplying basic hygiene facilities, such as soap, to enable Rohingya refugees to take precautions against the virus.

Covid is a global crisis affecting billions of people, and we would not dream of understating its impact and the devastation and tragedies that it causes. Climate change is, however, on an even greater scale, a threat to everyone and to every

living thing on the planet. If we don't turn it round without further delay, all the other problems the world is facing, including Covid, will pale into insignificance.

The climate emergency (for that is what it is) is at heart an issue of global injustice. We've seen extreme weather in the UK and elsewhere in Europe and North America recently, with heatwaves and flooding causing chaos and destruction, but the greatest and most devastating effects of the climate crisis are always on the poorest communities in the world: be they floods in China, India or South Sudan, storms in the Americas or locust swarms and drought across East Africa, the list is endless and the results are always catastrophic for millions of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in the world, especially women and people of colour. Global heating is historically caused mainly by the economic activity and lifestyles of the richest, so-called developed, countries such as the UK, but they're not the ones who suffer its most severe effects. There are hundreds of examples we could give from Christian Aid's programmes around the world, of how our partners are addressing this injustice. We mentioned one project, in Kenya, where our partner the Anglican Church in Kenya supported small farmers who, because of climate change, were unable to predict when the rains would come, and therefore when they could plant and harvest their food crops. When you have to feed your family, guesswork is no good. Using simple mobile phones, our partner sent accurate and detailed weather forecasts to hundreds of families, who were therefore able to plan their planting and harvests and even enjoy a surplus which they could sell for extra income. Depending on the context, our partners provide drought-resistant seeds, advise on new agricultural techniques, plant mangroves to reduce coastal erosion, provide housing that's more likely to withstand storms – the list goes on. So does global heating, which daily becomes more of a threat and a challenge.

The challenge is not insurmountable. That's where the mysteriously-named COP26 comes in. This 26th United Nations Conference of the Parties is happening in Glasgow in a few weeks' time, and it's a key opportunity for all governments to come together and agree on some very (and necessarily) ambitious commitments. And then they have to do what they promise. The UK government, as host and Chair, is well-placed to lead the negotiations and influence the outcome, but at the time of writing its position seems confused: saying many of the right things about what COP26 needs to achieve, which include rapid moves towards ending the use of fossil fuels, but at the same time giving serious consideration to a new oil and gas field off Shetland and a new coal mine in Cumbria. If it continues with these contradictions, it risks losing credibility with its counterparts in Glasgow and COP26 risks failure.

That would be catastrophic. The pandemic has not put the climate crisis on hold and countries on the front line have inadequate resources to spend on tackling Covid, strengthening health systems and responding to climate disasters. They've done the least to cause global heating, yet they suffer the most as a result of the high-carbon lifestyles that rich countries continue to enjoy. This has got to change, fast.

A top priority at COP26 must therefore be a serious and substantial funding commitment. In 2009 rich countries promised \$100 billion per year by 2020 – in 2021 they're still \$20 billion short, and \$100 billion is now woefully inadequate. The money is needed for a range of purposes. First, to help people *adapt* and *build resilience* to the changing climate: there are so many ways in which this can and needs to be done: projects supported by Christian Aid include, in Nicaragua, reducing dependence on coffee, which with rising temperatures and heavier rains becomes harder to grow, and transitioning to cacao and honey production; and in Kenya growing

grass for fodder, rather than beans and maize which need much more rain. Building resilience also takes many forms, from new sustainable fishing practices in the Philippines using solar light for night fishing, to enabling Bangladeshi women, so often excluded from decision-making in their communities, to play key roles in planning responses to climate-related disasters.

Compensation must be provided for the irreversible *loss and damage* to poor communities from catastrophic climate-related events such as hurricanes and floods which they did nothing to cause.

Mitigation of climate change is crucial: ultimately this means the reduction of carbon emissions to effectively zero by 2050, which can only be achieved if we end the use of fossil fuels and shift to clean renewable energy. In many communities, Christian Aid is supporting green energy projects, for instance in Honduras where women are being trained to make and install solar panels.

All of this is going to cost a lot of money but the costs, human as well as financial, of ignoring the problem will be far greater. The longer we leave it the higher they'll be. That's what COP26 has to deliver – serious financial commitments particularly from the rich countries, including the UK.

So Christian Aid has joined with people all over the world, challenging their governments to do what's necessary to protect the world from further global heating. We're part of global movements such as the ACT Alliance, bringing together churches campaigning for climate justice. We all see COP26 as a crucial step in the journey.

In the UK we're lobbying the government, pushing it to take a strong lead ahead of COP26 so that it achieves a good outcome. To do that it has to get its own house in order, which means: increasing aid to the world's poorest so they can better confront the climate crisis, Covid-19

and other urgent priorities; investing in a green recovery that leaves no-one behind – anywhere; stopping the expansion of fossil fuel energy and stepping up support for clean energy. You can help make that happen!

Join us in supporting the Young Christian Climate Network (YCCN) and their Walking Relay from Cornwall (where the G7 leaders met in June) to Glasgow to highlight the climate crisis. By the time you read this the walkers will be north of Newcastle: do check the route and timings and if you can, encourage them by going to meet them and attending events while they're in Edinburgh or Glasgow. You can find out more about this inspiring initiative on their website: www.yccn.uk.

Prayer has to underpin everything we do, and we're so grateful for all your prayers. You can pledge to pray for

the COP26 and for our YCCN friends here: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/news/pledge-pray-cop26>.

Another idea, and as a way for your voice to be heard at COP26, is to make and send a prayer boat. YCCN are carrying a model boat on their pilgrimage, representing our hopes to set sail towards a more just future. Find out more here, including how to make the boat – it's not difficult!! <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/prayer-chain>.

And please talk to your MP, or write to them, and sign our climate justice petition to the Prime Minister: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/climate-justice-2021>. It's so important that our politicians know that we really care about the climate crisis and that we want them to act, and they won't know unless we tell them!

As Christian Aid's climate lead for Africa, Fredrick Njehu, says: "In Africa we have lived with the destructive nature of the climate emergency. Whether it was Cyclone Ida, changing rainfall patterns or overbearing heat, Africa has been waiting for the rest of the world to catch up and act on climate change for years." COP26 is their big opportunity to do that – please join us to make sure they take it.

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CLIMATE CHANGE: AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE

Paul Dastoor

In reflecting on the evolving perspectives towards climate change in Australia, we need to consider the nature of the country and its people. To many, Australia is a land of contradictions. It is renowned for its abundance of agricultural produce whilst being the driest inhabited continent on Earth. It is a prosperous nation, often appearing within the top ten wealthiest nations worldwide, and yet for its first nations people disadvantage is endemic and entrenched. It has been coined the "Lucky Country" for its history of opportunity but is known for disparaging "tall poppies"; successful individuals who stand out from the crowd.

Fundamentally, Australia is a land of extremes, as Dorothy MacKellar states in her famous poem "My Country":

*I love a sunburnt country,
a land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
of droughts and flooding rains.*

*I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror
– the wide brown land for me!*

Indeed, it is against the backdrop of these extremes, especially with respect to weather events, that the climate change argument has flourished in Australia over the past 20 years. Despite numerous scientific climate change impact reports by the country's much respected national scientific research body (the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, or CSIRO) climate change scepticism

within the Australian community (including at the highest levels of government) has persisted for many years. This view has been reinforced by an Australian economy that has been highly dependent upon fossil fuels; both for domestic electricity generation and steel production as well as for high-value exports.

The paradoxical nature of Australia was perhaps most apparent when, at the same time that its prosperity was increasing on the back of the exports of its abundant coal and coal seam gas reserves, scientists were increasingly warning that of all the continents on Earth, Australia was most vulnerable to climate change. In particular, the predicted increased temperatures, sea level rises and extreme weather events were foreshadowed to result in increased

droughts, bush fires and flooding rains. Data from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) shows that the fire risk for inhabited parts of Australia increased two to four-fold from 1978 to 2017. As Professor Tim Flannery writes in his recent book, *The Climate Cure: "We have purchased our prosperity at terrible cost"*.

These trends culminated in the 'Black Summer' bushfires of 2019 – 2020. September 2019 to March 2020 marked the worst bushfire season in Australia on record. The severity of the season had been foreshadowed for over a year with leaders of the rural fire brigades across the nation warning of a potentially calamitous bush fire season, driven by an extended period of drought and increasing Australian summer temperatures. These warnings were mostly ignored by the Australian Government. In total, 46 million acres were burnt equivalent to 186,000 square kilometres; an area greater than the whole of England. More than 2,700 homes were destroyed and 34 lives lost directly to fire. The air quality was hazardous across all of south-eastern Australia, face masks to protect against air-borne particulates were in short supply and over 400 people were estimated to have died due to air pollution. Moreover, in an update to his January 2020 study, Professor Chris Dickman at the University of Sydney has estimated that 3 billion koalas, kangaroos and other animals were killed or displaced in the 'Black Summer' bushfires. Estimates from NASA indicated that the bushfires emitted around 306 million tonnes equivalent (Mte) of carbon dioxide (CO₂); more than 50% of Australia's annual CO₂ emissions. 80 % of Australians were affected by the Black Summer fires and I recall being in the UK on a year's sabbatical at the University of Cambridge and calling colleagues in Sydney who were coughing inside their offices due to the smoke pollution.

For many Australians, the 'Black Summer' fires brought the realisation that the risks of climate change could

no longer be ignored and raised the question of whether there was still time to take action to mitigate their worst effects. In their 2020 article in *Nature*, Professor Tim Lenton and co-authors at the University of Exeter highlighted the threat of exceeding established climate tipping points; defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as 'large-scale discontinuities' in the climate system that could occur above certain global warming thresholds. For example, the West Antarctic ice sheet may have already reached its tipping point with growing evidence that the ice, ocean and bedrock confluence is retreating irreversibly and consequent predictions of sea-level rises of 3 metres. Combined with potentially similar situations in the East Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets leads to the prospect of 'baked-in' sea-level rises of 10 metres for as little as 1.5°C of global warming. Increasing sea temperatures have produced mass coral bleaching, with around 50% of Australia's shallow corals of the Great Barrier Reef already affected, and an estimated 99% of the world's coral reefs lost at the tipping point of a 2°C rise. However, mitigating the magnitude and extending the timescale of these changes (perhaps to thousands of years) is still within reach if the global temperature rise is limited to 1.5°C. However, current greenhouse gas commitments, even if met, are foreshadowed to result in at least 3°C of global warming and, according to Professor Lenton's analysis, the prospect of a global cascade of tipping points. As such, the University of Exeter team argue that '*we are in a state of planetary emergency*' that requires urgent action. The focus of the global response to this call to action lies in the forthcoming 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow on 31 October – 12 November 2021. A key question is whether global body politic, including Australia, has the ability to respond to the challenges ahead.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an immediate case study of the global community's response to

'a state of planetary emergency' and the opportunity for learnings and pathways to addressing other global challenges such as climate change. The pandemic has been the greatest global challenge of a generation and the impacts upon public health and the global economy have been considerable. To date, the total number of COVID-19 cases is approaching 300 million people with 4.7 million deaths worldwide. The global economy shrank by 3.2% in 2020 with the advanced economies of the world decreasing by 4.6%. However, the COVID challenge has also driven the creation of new medical science at an unprecedented rate, with numerous vaccines based on a range of different technologies developed within months and, so far, almost 6 billion vaccine doses administered worldwide. Countries that have been able to follow a science-led response have fared the best, implementing rapid detection facilities, effective social-distancing rules and rapid vaccine development. The pandemic has exposed generational fault-lines, with older generations more vulnerable to the disease and thus critical of younger generations who, in their view, didn't want to sacrifice personal freedom for community benefit. This situation mirrors the climate change debate with younger generations more vulnerable to the long-term consequences of global warming and hence critical of older generations who, in their view, refuse to make decisions in the future interests of the global environment. The acute nature of the pandemic has driven an urgent and rapid response from the entire global community, which contrasts to the world's approach to the more chronic issue of climate change. Finally, there is widespread recognition that the highly interconnected nature of the modern world requires rich nations, such as Australia, to ensure that low-cost vaccines are available for the entire global community.

Returning to climate change, there are several important lessons that the pandemic offers us. Firstly, our

response needs to be innovative and science led. Moreover, these solutions need to work for all communities and generations. **In my own area of research, we have developed 'printed solar', incredibly lightweight and flexible solar panels that can be manufactured at low-cost using roll-to-roll printing**

technology, with the vision of delivering inexpensive electricity for all. We need to understand that climate change is as acute an issue as the pandemic and that, without a similar emergency response, human suffering will increase dramatically. Indeed, to quote an article penned by Bill Gates in August 2020:

"If we learn the lessons of COVID-19, we can approach climate change more informed about the consequences of inaction."

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AUSTRALIA AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Chris Garland

As the time for COP26 draws close, I am still hopeful that the Australian government will respond to persuasion from other countries and update its laggardly response to climate change. Australia has already felt the impact of extreme weather events caused by climate change in the form of both forest fires and floods. There are many both in the churches and in the public at large who wish to see a stronger response.

The Climate Council is an organisation of concerned climate scientists in Australia who are advocating for more measures in

Australia to reduce CO₂ emissions and I am running the October virtual City2Surf to engage sponsorship and support for them.

Australia is very well placed, through its abundant sunshine, open spaces and access to wind, wave and water power to take a lead in transition to renewable energy and would benefit much by making the transition ahead of the curve.

I recently took part in a zoom meeting of "Voices of the Hunter" in which we explored opportunities for new job opportunities through a transition

to renewable energy. However there are powerful vested interests in carbon-based industries like coal mining and the government fears their impact in a forthcoming general election.

Gradually even some members of the ruling coalition are moving to show concern about climate change. We can only hope that as COP 26 focussed minds, the government will pay more attention to the long term good of Australia and the planet than to its own short-term political calculations.



HARMONY FOR THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY AND THE EARTH

Stephen Skinner

1)

INTRODUCTION – Recent Key Books on “Harmony”.

My awareness that the concept of “Harmony” is an exceptionally powerful way of both interpreting our world and interacting with it was aroused at the 2019 Summer School. I expressed my initial thoughts on this subject in an article that I wrote in the Summer 2020 Issue of our “Christians Aware” Magazine. I was greatly stimulated by a talk at the Summer School delivered by Patrick Holden from the “Sustainable Food Trust”. He utilised the concept of harmony to describe the fundamental importance of how wise farmers seek to foster a deeply harmonious relationship between themselves, their livestock, crops and the soil. A focus upon enriching the soil as part of the wider ecology of the farm and its environment produces a mutually beneficial harmonious relationship for the whole natural world. This is the foundational philosophy of “The Soil Association”.

Patrick Holden made great mention of a book entitled “Harmony – A new Way of Looking at the World”, authored by Prince Charles along with Tony Juniper and Ian Skelly (Blue Door, 2010). I need hardly say that I purchased a copy of Prince Charles’ book, and was very impressed with its 330 erudite pages. I recommend that you also obtain a copy!

I give an extended review and appreciation of this ground-breaking book in the Article that I have already mentioned. Prince Charles argues that we must learn to reconnect with ancient, traditional and

classical experiences and wisdom – especially drawing upon Greek, Native Indigenous, Eastern and other religious faiths to provide depth to both our philosophy and practice. Various practical applications of the principles of harmony are addressed in detail – most notably in the fields of architecture, art, interfaith relations, farming and horticulture, health care, education and of course the global environment crisis.

I was delighted to discover that there has been a huge amount of further thinking, writing and practical action in the development of “Harmony” since that book of 2010. By serendipity I have obtained a book that builds upon “Harmony” in an extraordinary variety of ways, It was published in 2020. It is called “The Harmony Debates”, edited by Nicholas Campion, with a Foreword by the Prince of Wales. The book runs to over 600 pages, with 44 Chapters by a highly eclectic collection of scholars and practitioners.

The publishers of this excellent and comprehensive book are the Sophie Centre Press, based at the University of Wales Trinity St David College / Campus. This university is an international pioneer in this endeavour, establishing the “Harmony Institute”, and the “Harmony Project” to further this work through conferences, courses and additional publications. Clearly the concept and practice of Harmony is gathering huge momentum for our future well-being and indeed our whole planet. I encourage “Christians Aware” to inform themselves about the good work at the University of Wales and to engage with it.

2)

PROFESSOR CADMAN’S Definition of “Harmony”

Having introduced this subject of Harmony, it is time to open up the subject from both theoretical and practical perspective, for debate in small groups later. Here is a definition of Harmony as suggested by David Cadman, a Professor of Harmony at the University of Wales:

“Harmony is an expression of wholeness, a way of looking at ourselves and the world of which we are a part. It’s about connection and relationships. The emotional, intellectual and physical are all connected. We are connected to our environments, both built and natural; and all the parts of our communities and their environments are connected too. Harmony asks questions about relationship, justice, fairness and respect in economic, social and political relationships. As an integrative discipline Harmony can be expressed in ideas and practice.” [p. 22 of “The Harmony Debates” Introduction by Nicholas Camion.]

It would seem that Harmony is a ‘catch all’ concept that lies at the heart of everything good and worthwhile in life – but we could debate if it is in danger of over-reaching itself!

Professor Cadman draws his understanding of the principles of harmony through attempting to discern nature’s principles rather than through any revelatory principles set forward from Christianity or any other belief system. He believes this is a valid approach, because of

the 'wonder' of nature observed by him in its principles of wholeness, connection, interdependence, diversity within wholeness, cycles of time and season, patterns, rhythms, reciprocity and mutuality and justice and lawfulness. He suggests that this systematic intertwining might constitute a form of governance that, if followed, could align us with what is good for us and good for the earth. I suggest that in the Judeo-Christian tradition this could be labelled the "Wisdom" tradition such as we can see portrayed in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms and aspects of the responses to Job's predicament in 'his' book by his apparent but duplicitous 'friends'.

Interestingly Professor Cadman asserts that the 'governing principle' to this naturally harmonious ordering is Love [p. 43 of "The Harmony Debates"]. Not love as virtue or romantic sentiment, but as being of the essence, or shaping all that is (in existence). He backs this assertion by reference to two social biologists that claim we are by ancient nature a loving species; 'homo sapiens amans' [Humberto Maturana & Gerda Zoller]. This is an assertion that seems very attractive, especially from the Christian perspective of a belief in the fundamental nature of God as 'pure, unconditional Love' (see in particular 1 John Chapter 4: 7 – 21). However, the evidence of history would seem to offer ample evidence of the darker, more tribal and selfish aspects of human nature. I think it is exceptionally important to be realistic and balanced in our analysis of both human nature and the interrelationships of all of the natural world.

Does the natural world reveal these purported fundamental principles of harmony, such as suggested by Professor Cadman – in what ways, in your experience?

1. How might these principles square with the notion of the 'survival of the fittest' in evolutionary terms ("nature red in tooth and claw")?

2. Does human nature reveal a fundamental bias towards goodness and love, or towards competition and selfish seeking of power and acquisitiveness?

Underlying this delineation of the principles of harmony there is a serious challenge to the Abrahamic Religions of the Middle East. Prince Charles in his Forward to "The Harmony Debates" says that it is no longer valid to conceive of "God" as being a separate entity 'out there' beyond Creation. He says that the most fundamentally original 'perennial philosophy' is that God is at one with the natural world and to be discovered intimately and organically within it. This argues in favour of the far Eastern traditions of, for example, Buddhism and also Native American traditions – that we and "God" are 'at one', all fellow participants in Creation and therefore the whole creative process. The ideal goal is therefore for us to live in total harmony with the "God" who is in us and around us. One such example, highlighted by Sherri Mitchell introduces us to the idea of "**Kciye**" – "Harmony with the natural world". This teaches us that it is not enough to know that we are part of one living system. We must take active steps to live in harmony with the rest of creation, as keepers of a way of life that is in harmony with the Earth. We are part of one living system, a unified whole, so we cannot adopt attitudes that place us 'above' the natural world. This challenges the Christian model of humankind as Stewards of Creation!

3) DAVID RUBIN: "Harmony" in Judaism.

In this Session we will study the Bible, and grow in our understanding of "Harmony" as it can be understood according to our shared Jewish / Christian heritage. Although the word features only very rarely in the Bible there are various other words and concepts that can enrich our understanding of this important subject. I have been greatly aided

by one of the Chapters in "The Harmony Debates", written by a rabbi called David Rubin. ["The Concept of Harmony in Judaism"; pages 153 – 174]. He works with a definition of Harmony from the Greek original 'harmonia', meaning 'union' or 'fitting together'. In abstract terms this is defined as "a correspondence and sympathetic resonance between two entities", for example as applied to the concept of agreeable artistic composition in music, or the visual arts. Elsewhere a major application in modern times is to achieving harmony in jazz music.

Rubin cannot identify one particular classical Hebrew word that can be equated fully with the concept of harmony. But he does identify three individual terms, which he studies in technical depth with the help of the Bible ('Tanach'), Midrash and the Talmud.

The three words that can help us formulate a Jewish understanding of 'harmony' are:

***Shalom* – the nearest English equivalent is 'Peace'. This denotes a state of perfection and wholeness, either in well-being (Genesis 37:14) or through coherence and agreement of conflicting forces (see Job 25:2, and Isaiah 45:7).**

***Yahad* – the nearest English equivalent is "Togetherness". It denotes a powerful unity between people. For example in Psalm 133:1 where yahad describes brothers dwelling together in social harmony. The word is also used in Job 38:7 to describe the harmonious singing of the morning stars.**

***Tifereth* – the nearest English equivalent is "Beauty" or "Splendour". This word can depict the beauty of harmonious balance. It aims to set forward the aesthetic appeal of harmonious states to those who have the wise eyes to behold and appreciate Godliness.**

Rubin devotes most of his attention to the idea of Shalom, in part because

this word appears more frequently and relevantly than the others, but mainly because he regards it as the primary idea for understanding Harmony. He argues that Shalom frequently entailed the introduction of a third element causing the opposing sides to blend and cooperate. This derived from a common sense of purpose, often portrayed as the desire to serve God. It required a degree of self-nullification that catalysed a blending between opposites. (Note the important practical lesson for all would-be peacemakers!). His examples:

Job 25:2 – Fire and water make peace in heaven.

Exodus 9: 24 – Fire flashes in the midst of hail, making peace within God’s will.

Ezekiel 1:10 – Buffalo and Lion are natural enemies, but make peace in the chariot of God.

R. Hirsch taught that true shalom / harmony between peoples is unachievable unless the parties are in harmony with God, with their differences dissolving through mutual self-abnegation to the ‘Significant Other’ of God. So God is at the core of successful harmony.

Rubin then proceeds to delve even deeper into what he labels “Cosmic Harmony”. He asserts that cosmic harmony between heaven and earth is an overriding theme of Genesis Chapters one and two. “Man was created as a product of both the celestial and sublunar spheres in order to ensure shalom / harmony in the cosmos (not just in the Garden of Eden!).as created to bring a harmony of shalom, yahad and tifereth by means of the physical body harmonising with a Godly soul! Isaiah has much to say about harmony, as evidenced in the peace, unity and beauty of creation living together as God intends, as well as humankind and God dwelling in such harmony. See 11: 6 – 9, 45:7, 60: 1 – 3, 65: 17 – 25. We will have opportunity to study these crucial texts in our discussions, if we wish. This harmony is good, and part of the

ultimate vision of the cosmos through the beneficent gifting of God. This is possible because harmony is an integral quality of the Divine. (Judith 6:24).

To delve a little deeper, into the mystical thought of the Kabbala, the prophet ‘Zohar’ identified three ‘bonds’ in the Godhead that harmonised polarities of deistic consciousness:

~ God’s **‘knowing’** – harmonising His wisdom and understanding of everything in existence;

~ God’s **‘truth’** – harmonising His loving-kindness and awesome, righteous moral strength;

~ God’s **‘shalom’** – harmonising His ultimate victory, His projection of self, and majesty.

Through his detailed discussion, Rubin concludes that the closest Hebrew word to Harmony is Shalom – a term which he associated earlier with Yahad and Tifereth. Shalom is fundamentally good, the blueprint of creation, the backbone of society, the essence of Scripture and one of the central names of God. We are called by God to live in harmony with God through harmonious expression of our devotion: socially, ecologically, in worship.

4) NEW TESTAMENT SOURCES – especially in the life of Jesus

Let us now turn to the resources of the New Testament – sadly with surprisingly little to help us from the sourcebook of “The Harmony Debates”. We shall have to undertake some hard work ourselves now and in our small groups as we study the life and teachings of Jesus and the early Church. I will begin with an exploration of the personal ‘charisma’ of Jesus in order to assess the extent to which he embodied Harmony in his relationships with his friends (and enemies), the natural world, and his Father God.

It is clear that Jesus had a very charismatic personality that

drew large numbers of people to follow him around Galilee and the surrounding area. In his encounters with individuals who were in any kind of need he was very sensitive to their needs, and frequently offered healing. A prime instance of this is in the story in John Chapter 4 of his conversation with a Samaritan Woman. It would be instructive to see the qualities of a harmonious relationship emerging through their encounter, or again the story of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in John Chapter 11. One of the fruits of a harmonious relationship is that this can provide an amplified context of love which will aid healing. Jesus as a renowned healer obviously was adept at rapidly establishing harmony with those he met ‘on the road’. See John Chapter 9.

Judging by his prayers Jesus was in a state of deep harmony with his Heavenly Father, who he called “Abba”. It is clear from what little evidence is provided by the Gospels that Jesus had an intimate relationship with God, and was constantly attesting to discover His Father’s will. A close study of the ‘Priestly Prayers’ of John Chapters 16 and 17 will reveal the strong sense of harmony between Jesus and His Father, energised crucially through the Holy Spirit.

1. **How does the Holy Spirit bring harmony into the life of Jesus, and help him to harmonise his life with that of His heavenly Father?**
2. **How can the Holy Spirit bring harmony into our inner being during times of uncertainty, anxiety and fear for the future?**
3. **How could the Holy Spirit bring harmony between “All Believers”?**
4. **How will this trajectory of spiritual harmony with God be completed when we come to ‘participate in the divine nature’? (2 Peter 1: 4)**

It is also worth considering the relationship that Jesus enjoyed with the natural world. He obviously enjoyed being out on Lake Galilee,

and I suspect he joined with the disciples in fishing whilst on the water! Jesus parables frequently drew upon agricultural life, and reveal a good understanding of the natural processes of fertility and infertility. He was in harmony with nature through his appreciative understanding of its application to the Kingdom, in for example the Parables of the Sower (Luke 8), the Weeds (Matthew 13), the Mustard Seed (Luke 13). Although he did curse a Fig Tree for failing to produce fruit (Mark 11: 13 & 14)!

However, having considered some of the evidence supporting the idea of Jesus as living in good harmony with others, himself and God, I think it is important to face another side to Jesus' personality. It would appear that Jesus did not live in harmony with everyone with whom he came into contact. The most obvious examples were the Pharisees and certain other religious leaders! Consider the following passages from the Gospels:

Matthew Chapter 23:

Verses 2 & 3: "The teachers of the religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the Scriptures. So practice and obey whatever they say to you but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they preach. They crush you with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to help ease the burden."

Verse 13: "How terrible it will be for you teachers of the religious law and you Pharisees! Hypocrites! For you won't let others enter the Kingdom of heaven, and you won't go in yourselves!" (The remainder of this Chapter, 38 verses, consists of further denunciations)

According to Jesus there are situations where it is morally and spiritually wrong to pretend to live in harmony with people, institutions and systems that are corrupt and hypocritical. True followers of Christ must be prepared to disrupt situations of false 'peace and harmony'. It would be valuable to debate when and where it is appropriate to provoke the possibility

of conflict in such situations of injustice, hypocrisy or corruption, in other words to provoke disharmony, for the longer-term objective of achieving the greater good for all.

Luke 12: 49 – 53:

"I have come to bring fire to the earth, and I wish my task was already completed! There is a terrible baptism ahead of me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished. Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I have come to bring strife and division! From now on families will be split apart!" (See similar teaching in Matthew 10: 34 – 39, eg Verse 36: "Your enemies will be right in your own household!")

Some might argue either that these are not so much Jesus' own words, but those of the early church under persecution and betrayal, or that he is speaking prophetically. But even if so, it is clear from these and other Gospel passages that Jesus saw the 'cosmic battle against evil' as an intrinsic part of his calling and mission. Another question is raised for our discussions: "Is the only route towards an ultimate cosmic harmony in certain situations by means of 'direct action' to stir up conflict and division in order that the underlying evil or malaise can be exposed, combatted and then in God's power defeated?"

Finally as we consider the ministry of Jesus, we must reflect upon the centrality for Christians of the Cross and Crucifixion of Christ. There are a variety of interpretations of Jesus' Passion, some of which can emphasise the spiritual harmony of Jesus in following God's will and bringing about a resolution of the problem of our defective world and our multiple failures. However, other theories of the "Atonement" place emphasis upon the battle that Jesus fought against the disharmonious powers of evil (Satan??). The "Christus Victor" theory is one of the most ancient interpretations of this existential battle – with an ultimate victory for the forces of goodness.

Paul writes in support of 'Christus Victor' theology, operating at a

cosmic level:

1. Colossians 2: 15: "Christ disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ".

He then exhorts Christians to do battle against these evil powers:

2. Ephesians 6: 12 "We are not fighting against people, but against the evil forces of the unseen world, who rule this world . . ."

He reasserts the dualism of darkness and light, evil and good:

3. 1 Thessalonians 5: "You are all children of the light – you don't belong to darkness. So protect yourself with the body armour of faith and love (Verse 8)".

To debate: In what situations does ultimate harmony have to be fought for. As we consider the many evils of this world, when must the seeking of harmony might have to take second place? Do we agree that at least in our present world there is a 'devilish' power of radical evil, darkness and disharmony at work (sometimes unseen) in the world? How might this affect our theology of "Harmony" and our role in bringing it about?

5) HOPE, HEALING, HARMONY – through the agency of the Holy Spirit

In this last section, I will attempt to link my talk more explicitly to the theme of the 2021 Summer School of "Hope, Healing, Harmony". I wish to explore the linkage between these three words, within the Christian tradition. I want to draw upon some of the teaching of Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest whose many writings are probably well known to you. I subscribe to his daily e mail "Reflections", and find them to be of enormous value in the development of my own spirituality. He has written extensively on the themes of Hope, Healing and Harmony, in for example

"The Divine Dance" – a book that sets forward a dynamic way of understanding the interplay of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. He gives special place to the role of the Holy Spirit in engendering within and between us: Hope, Healing and Harmony. Three more quotations to ponder and perhaps discuss later:

"The Holy Spirit shows herself as the central and healing power of absolute newness and healing in our relationship with everything else in the natural world" (page 186)

"The Spirit is the Great Connector – of very diverse things, keeping them in harmony and mutual deference – so there will be one Christ" (page 188)

"The Spirit is mostly an energetic presence – you can often tell when a person is in the Spirit because they are simultaneously unself-conscious and radiant in hope" (page 191)

At various 'high points' in St Paul's writings he presents a strong theology of the Holy Spirit as the person of the Godhead who mediates to us these precious gifts of Hope, Healing and Harmony, in a divine wholeness which spans the whole of Creation and indeed the Cosmos.

Romans 5: 5: "Hope does not

disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

1 Corinthians 12: 7, 9: "To each one a manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given . . . gifts of healing by that one Spirit."

Romans 12: 16: "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."

Question: As I read these texts I feel a sense of strong hope, expectation and joy arise in me! Why do Christians underplay the activity of the Spirit in achieving these outcomes?

Thus I contend that within the Christian tradition and teaching we have a very powerful theology that can link together hope, healing and harmony, with another "H" word – the Holy Spirit. This Spirit not only has the potential to connect humanity together in common bonds of mutually unconditional love, but to encompass the whole of creation. This Spirit was scripturally present at the creation of the world (see *Genesis 1:2* "The Spirit hovering over

the face of the earth") and remains active right through to the ultimate destiny of the world (see *Revelation 22: 17* ("The Spirit and the Bride say "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."))

This theology can stand up strongly alongside other 'perennial traditions' of all the world's religions, such as are referred to by Richard Rohr in "A Spring Within Us" (pages 37 – 38). He quotes of St Paul in *Romans 1: 19 – 20*. "The pattern of Divine self-revelation has been made available to all sincere seekers, from indigenous religions until now." We have in our souls the natural capacity, similarity and longing for Divine Reality. I believe it to be essential for the future of humanity and our planet's future existence, that we explore in every way possible the routes towards **harmonious** understanding, which can lead to a strong **healing** between ourselves and nature, which will again in turn yield solid **hope** that there is an assured future for us all on our precious and currently fragile, 'island home'.

Stephen Skinner is a parish priest in Ashwater & Black Torrington Benefice, West Devon



BETRAYED BY A CHURCH IN BONDAGE

David Rhodes

Big words give me a headache. I used to be a journalist and short words come more easily to me. So I'm embarrassed to say I can't think of a short, snappy way of saying that Jesus was an environmentalist.

Our environment is where we are and what's going on for us right now. If you think about it love is an environment word. When we say 'God loves the world' we mean God loves us where we are and cares about stuff that's happening in the here and now.

Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, hope for the oppressed, and escape from the burden of debt. Those were social facts in the real world and God wanted action on those practical issues.

Jesus was concerned about the social and political environment in which most people suffered. He wasn't bothered about the climate, carbon dioxide or plastic pollution because they weren't a problem in first century Palestine.

But what about the world today? And, more importantly, the world tomorrow?

If God is concerned about what's happening to vulnerable people here and now, that must include the climate crisis. How then can the impending catastrophe threatening life on earth *not* be our absolute priority?

So far the Church has expressed polite concern and pledged limited action on global warming. But, apart from public protests by courageous individuals and small groups like Christian Climate Action it has, in real terms, done very little.

It seems the Church worries far more about its own survival, trying to grow

new congregations, and figuring out where the money will come from to maintain its treasured buildings and traditions.

And the word 'treasure' is highly significant. Treasure is what we value above all else and want to keep. Think about the rich young man who came to Jesus seeking eternal life. Jesus told him he needed to give up all that he treasured. But the man couldn't bring himself to do that and went away disappointed.

Since most of us don't think of ourselves as being rich, we assume that story doesn't apply to us or to the Church. But it does. Like never before.

Right now we are confronted by a global catastrophe. The planet is on fire. The human race faces turmoil and war such as it has never known. Having abused God's creation we now face the consequent extinction of our species.

And the problem isn't that we lack technology. What we lack is the will to save ourselves and our children from disaster. A crisis of the human spirit.

The Church is failing to take effective action because it is held in bondage by a narrowly religious mind set. It is wedded to its possessions, its vested interests and the comfort blanket of its traditions, status and rituals. As with the rich man, the "ask" seems too great – even though the alternative will be catastrophic.

The world has not been abandoned by God. It has been betrayed by an inward-looking Church that (with the exception of people like Pope Francis) refuses to listen to Jesus.

But what might the Church do at this late stage? A lot if it had the courage.

Above all else, politicians and the

leaders of multinational corporations, including the media, enjoy power and they fight to protect it. But that power depends on the will of the people.

The planet has a population of roughly six billion. Of those more than two billion self-identify as Christians. That is a lot voters, consumers and shareholders. Acting politically and forcefully they could have a massive impact on decision makers.

The message in words they can understand would be: 'Shut down the polluters now. Avert climate disaster or kiss goodbye to your power and your profits.'

The COP26 climate conference is fast approaching but the bookmakers are not offering great odds on its outcome. And they've good reason to be cautious. What are the chances of the Church, putting aside its customary politeness and preoccupation with internal matters and uniting with others of good will to demand (with menaces) immediate and radical action?

COP26 is the most important gathering in human history. Many of us will not live to see the outcome but our children and grandchildren will.

And right now they're hoping we Christians will cut the religious crap, roll up our sleeves and fight tooth and nail to save them from the living nightmare that is fast approaching.



David Rhodes is a priest and writer.

LARAPINTA HYMN (TUNE - SLANE)

Chris Garland

Sun-speckled ridges, green, orange, and black,
Snake through the bush-land that stretches "outback".
Their shapes bring wonder and stories then spawn
Of kinship from dreaming in life's early dawn.

Learning from story how they may live well,
Arrernte people in tune with land dwell.
Here in the centre of vast-stretching land.
May all who will come here in harmony stand.

Word of Creator in each creature heard,
Each word's united in God's loving Word.
To all that is broken, rejected, and lost,
Christ came to bring healing and carry the cost.

We walkers who came here had much in "back-pack"
For justice and peace, we would follow the track,
Scrambling up paths that are rocky and steep,
Supported and guided, the right way we keep.

Vistas through valleys, horizons from hills
Each way the path turns brought fresh joys and thrills.
Sharing the challenge, together we knew
How we by walking in fellowship grew.

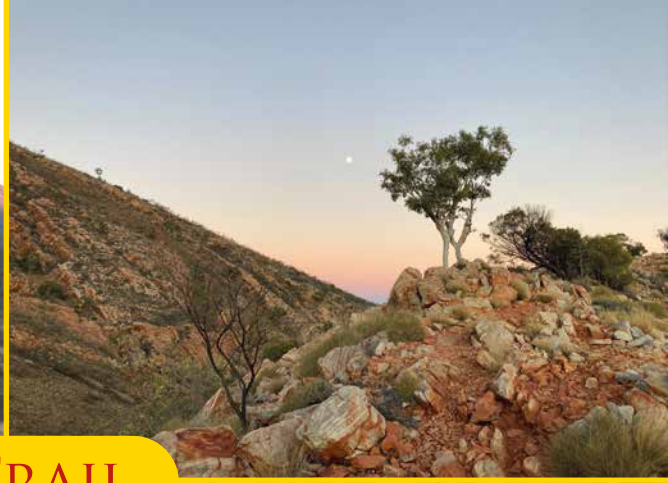
Scenes that we witnessed now linger in thought,
Blessings and questions together they brought.
How for this wide land should we better care
and how can all people its riches best share?

Chris recently walked the 223 kilometre Larapinta trail near Alice Springs. He was walking with a group from the Anglican Board of Mission-Australia. He writes:

'The trail was recently compiled by filling in gaps to link sections of track along the West MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs and is steeped in the culture of the local Arrernte first nations people. They tell totemistic stories to articulate

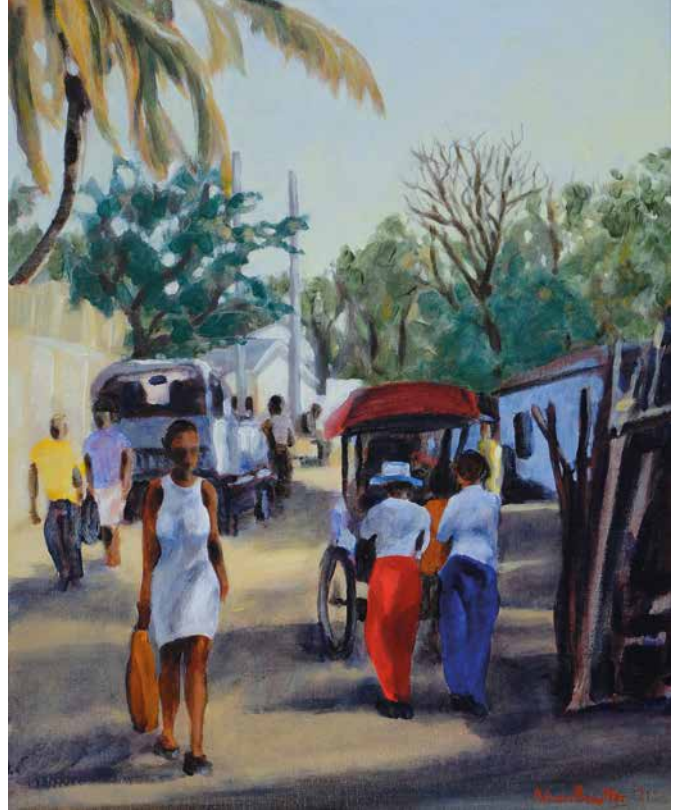
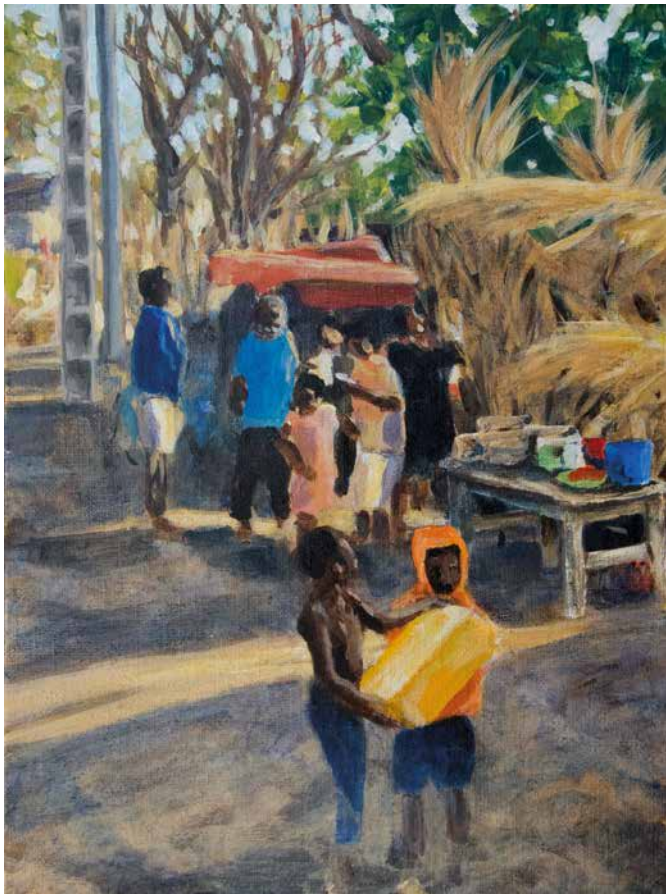
their relationship with the land and fellow cultures in a way that stresses their duty to the land and to each other. As preparation for the walk, we were encouraged to read "Dark Emu" by Bruce Pascoe. The book draws attention to research that has show that first nation (aboriginal) people used techniques of horticulture, cooking, fishing and house-building that were much more advanced than previously realized,

and being appropriate to the land were sustainable. So first nations people were not just nomads but actually settled the land. At times the book may overstate its case and be negative about contacts with European settlers but it has certainly stimulated debate. and backed up the claims of first nation people to land title.'



LARAPINTA TRAIL





PAINTINGS BY
ADAM BOULTER OF SCENES
IN MADAGASCAR



ACB31

THE BIBLE COLLEGE IN TOLIARA

Adam Boulter

2020 to 2021 has been a very difficult year for the Bible College, the Diocese of Toliara, and indeed Madagascar.

Madagascar entered a state of emergency in April 2021, owing to the combination of Covid19 variants, famine in the Toliara region, and worries about civil unrest. As a result there are no commercial flights in to the country, and even Malagasy nationals need a good reason to enter via government run repatriation flights. Travel inside the country has been very hard, and often completely prohibited.

Meanwhile, food has run out in many of the communities the diocese works in (and the students come from), and prices in Toliara town have gone up dramatically, leading to hunger and desperation. The increased death rate has also led to more disease in the region, which has been made worse by the international medical programmes being disrupted by Covid concerns and restrictions. All of this has had a knock-on effect on the

College, but we have managed to remain open for much of 2021 and have started the new academic year, with 18 returning students, working for the second year of their course.

For our family it has meant that we have not been able to get back to Madagascar since August 2020, and we are currently staying in a borrowed house lent to us by the local Catholic Church in Ruffec, France (where we lived before moving to Madagascar). This has meant relocation for all the family and for me learning how to work remotely via poor internet connections and communicating with bad I.T. equipment in Toliara. Nevertheless, we have delivered a full year of teaching and are intending to continue this year as well, by a mixture of local teachers, and myself writing and recording lectures to be translated, then taking Zoom seminars with the students via my translator. Our hope is to get back to visit and check on the projects in spring of 2022 if it is safe.



Adam with Geoff Weaver at a recent Christians Aware conference.

The education fund for Toliara is still open and contributions may be sent to Christians Aware, marked 'Toliara.' The priorities are:

- **Training new church leaders,**
- **education for church members,**
- **on-going training for existing church leaders,**
- **library and teaching resources.**

The paintings in the centre of the magazine are for sale. Money raised will go towards the education fund for Toliara. More paintings can be seen on Adam's website: www.adamboulter.co.uk

A REFLECTION ON PAINTING AND ETHICS

Adam Boulter

How is art a vehicle for healing and wholeness? The evidence is that it often is not. Looking at the lives of the great artists, or at the lives of lesser artists you might know it does not take long to realise that art does not inevitably lead to healing nor wholeness. Many artists' lives are marked by self obsession, and

destructive behaviours, and look like a mess. If anything, the dominant idea is that artists need to be dysfunctional to make good art. This idea is less true than it seems, but first notice that healing and wholeness do not automatically spring out of artistic practice, if they did art colleges and artists studios would be full of happy

functional people, and I can assure you they are not.

The truth is that along with all of humanity artists face a choice, and that choice has lasting impacts upon their psychological, social, and spiritual healing and wholeness. That choice is not a very fashionable one to

talk about these days, it is the choice of pursuing virtue or vice. That is a choice about the spirit in which we do things, relate to each other and exist. Art is one particularly powerful venue for playing out the consequences of that decision for virtue or vice.

Art is a set of processes in which we creatively engage in making new things. As such the practice of art is a sort of serious play. Art, like all play, helps make us more malleable, more open to change, and acts as a forum in which we can try out different ways of being and interrelating to each other. This malleability means we are much more open to new ways of being when we are making art. The safe forum to try out new ways of being and relating provides a wonderful opportunity to explore who we might become. However, the choices we make when playing are deadly serious, and have lasting consequences. Just observe a play ground in the Middle East, you will find you children playing aggressive turf wars over small patches of tarmac, trying to creatively process the wars they see their parents involved in. How those children play out those miniature conflicts sets the pattern for how they will continue or end those very wars they are playing out. In the same way, the way we make art changes us, it sets the tone for how we live. If we make art in a way that practises vice we will become vicious; making art for cultural status, or because we want to be special, making art to impress others, or to make money, all will undo us. If, on the other hand, we make art in a way that practises virtue we will be healed and give healing.

What then are those virtues and how can we practice them in the field of the arts? St Thomas Aquinas sets out the clearest expression of the Christian virtues, giving us four cardinal virtues drawn from the work of Aristotle, and three Theological virtues drawn from the teaching of Jesus. The cardinal virtues make the theological virtues possible to live out, but in themselves are not enough, they are: courage, justice,

temperance, and prudence. The theological virtues are: faith, hope, and love; with love, which is a very broad word in English, specifically being the kind of love that actively seeks the flourishing of the other. St Thomas's claim and my experience is that if by God's grace we can live these out and practice these virtues we will be made whole and healed, and what is more we will become agents of healing and wholeness. Art is simply a particularly good place to open ourselves to God's grace and practice this way of life.

Art then has been for me the place where I can explore and practice this new way of being. So let me talk you through how that works in my painting and drawing practice. We start where we will end with love, there is no point starting to work on drawing something, be it a person, a place, an idea, or a story, if you do not have at least a little love for it. We start with sensing that this thing we are looking at matters in its own right, not because it is of some use to me, nor because I can project my own identity onto it, but because it is itself. Everything is part of God's ongoing act of creation, so it all matters, we start with that love that comes out of sensing God's love for what God is making. Then we start. That takes courage, the blank white sheet has to be confronted, the subject has to be met, we have to set up our easel and begin to know it might all go wrong. So we have to learn courage, and we have to keep being courageous as we face the reality that much of what we make is wrong. That hand is not where I have drawn it and needs erasing and moving, that lovely face I have sketched is not their face but one I have remembered for a previous sitter, and so it goes on. We have to honestly face our work and find the courage to treat it with justice. We have to learn the virtue of justice not only in looking at what we are making, but also in judging the proportions and relationship in what we are looking at. How does the sitter relate to the background? This develops our sense of justice, but also a sense of temperance. We can

get overly concerned with getting things right, and start to try to be human machines accurately recording what we see, when we are called to be honest about our perceptions and responses. So we learn to keep in balance different ways of seeing. We also need to learn when to push on with a painting and when to stop, temperance teaches us that we can get unhealthily obsessed and need to leave things alone, but also that we can be lazy and just give up too easily. As we learn how and when to push on and when to hold back we learn temperance, and prudence. Prudence has got a bad press for the last few hundred years and has been rather forgotten about, but is absolutely key to making art. Prudence is the virtue of doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way. That requires appropriate attention to the right things, attention to what we are looking at and to our painting. That is very counter cultural in our world which is full of distractions. Prudence calls us to be here, now, and do what needs doing, now. Practising art is then a wonderful place to practice the cardinal virtues, which will make us more courageous, just, temperate, and prudent, those will make us more effective as human beings. However, these virtues alone will not make us good, for that we need to turn to the theological virtues.

Faith, hope, and love, are the great theological virtues, which Christians are all called to live out. **No painting can be made without hope.** When we are making anything new we doubt our own abilities, or despair of the mess we have made of the painting we are working on. Without hope we would simply give up, or worse still, never start in the first place, why risk ridicule or failure if you have no hope? Hope then is key in even starting and every creative act teaches us to hope, it is a small act of defiance against despair. Having started we have to continue and trust our skills, that takes faith, faith in our calling to what we are making, faith in God's grace at work in the world and in our work, faith that even if it all goes wrong it will help us grow

and develop. Faith and hope though are nothing, in fact it is all pointless, if we do not have love. The key virtue we are drawn to and are called to learn is to love. Not in the sense of thinking what we have made is great, nor in the sense of wishing to possess what we are looking at, but in the radical original sense of adoring things for themselves. That adoring of things leads to us desiring that they flourish, that they become what they are called to be. That then leads to us realising that everything is interconnected, there are no others, there is no separate me or you. There is only God's creative work on going and our co-operation or resistance to that work. That love is what we are called to develop, that deep love that draws us into God's work of creation.

All of that sounds very high minded, and maybe it is. However, do not be deceived, pursuing virtue through practising the arts, will not lead to better art, nor in my experience to worse art. Practising courage, justice, temperance, prudence, faith, hope, and love, will not make you into

a modern day Rembrandt, but it will lead to you living a better life. Practising these virtues will open you up to God's grace and so will start to heal you, your relationships, and slowly even the world. Virtues and vices spill over, they never stay contained within us, so how we are in ourselves changes and that slowly affects the world around us, it changes how we live and how we relate and so it changes us and the world. Practising virtue allows what we are in God's eyes to emerge from within us, it allows us to accept God's grace and so to truly flourish.

For further reading:

"The Nichomachean Ethics"
– Aristotle

"New Testament"

"The Summa Theologica"
– St Thomas Aquinas

"After Virtue" – Alistair MacIntyre

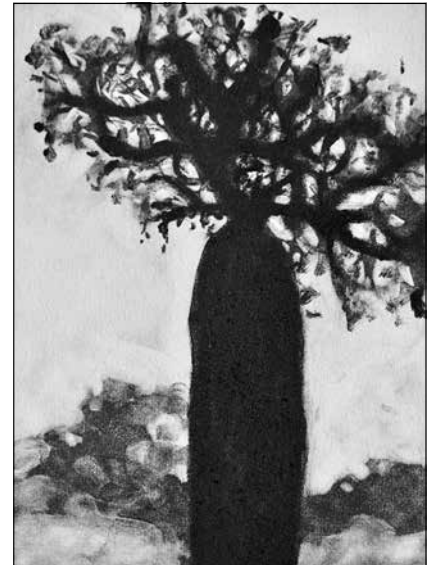
"The Creativity of God"
– Oliver Davies

"The River Within"
– Christopher Bryant

'No painting can be made without hope.'

'There is hope of a tree.'

Job 14



Two of Adam's paintings of trees.



Adam Boulter is an Anglican priest and also a painter.

He is Dean of Toliara in Madagascar.

PERMACULTURE WEEK AT OTHONA

Matthew King

Situated in a beautiful, tranquil and rural setting, Othona is a Christian community based next to one of the oldest Christian chapels in England. St Cedd founded St Peter's on the Wall in 654 AD on the site of a former Roman fort called Othona at a strategic point on the east coast of Essex.

During the week at Othona in August we covered a range of subjects related to Permaculture, wellbeing and community change. We had guest speakers interspersed with tours and practical activities at the Othona site.

Graham Burnett provided an overview of the history of **Permaculture**, helping to bring to life the key values: Fair Share; People Care; Earth Care. Permaculture is a toolkit for designing a way of living, both physical landscapes, relationships with others and the principles can be applied to ourselves as a guide for life. Whilst Permaculture was designed initially in the 1970s, the principles are increasingly relevant as an approach to life as we consider our response to the ecological and climate emergency as well as the mental health crisis that many face. 'Produce no waste', 'Use and Value Renewables', 'Catch and Store Energy' and 'Obtain a Yield' all underline the importance of considering our consumption, particularly as we look to go carbon neutral. Our understanding of ourselves and living alongside and celebrating others are emphasized by the principles of 'Using and Valuing Diversity' and 'Using Edges and Valuing the Marginal'. The positive, strengths-based approach advocated by Permaculture are not imposing, as they encourage observation, creatively responding to change, and using small and slow solutions. Imagine if



we had government and leadership that understood and applied Permaculture principles to policy, what a different world we would live in.

Kamil Pachalko talked about the concept of **Transition Towns**. This was an exciting idea when I helped co-found the Southend in Transition thirteen years ago, as it provides a positive vision for the future, with much less reliance on fossil fuels and a town in which people are working together for a green, collaborative future. Totnes and Brixton have become beacons of the approach, with local pounds helping money stay in the local economy. We discussed how the Transition Towns movement seems quieter than before, the main manifestation being a community allotment in Southend and networking drinks in a local pub. Extinction Rebellion and the more heightened climate emergency debate have taken prominence, but the Transition approach still has a lot to offer, particularly in offering a way of life that is positive and better than life today, rather than a doom and gloom scenario where we are

prevented from flying, driving, and consuming, which for many feels like a backward step in our continual drive for 'progress'.

Royston Kimberley, Mental Health Training Manager at Trust Links, gave a fulsome talk about the **neuroscience behind wellbeing**. Tips were given to manage our own wellbeing, including thinking about a 'stress bucket' – how it can get full, and sometimes we need to offload things from our stress bucket before it overflows. Our responses to stressful situations can be fight, flight and freeze: how are we dealing with the current climate emergency and societal churn as we recover from the COVID pandemic?

Rev Canon Imogen Nay from Chelmsford Cathedral hosted a session in the historic and atmospheric St Peter's Chapel, which was founded by St Cedd in 654 AD. The workshop helped the group explore **stories around climate change activism** around the world. We shared what concerned us about the global crisis, then we talked about our dreams for the future, and set some actions to help make a

difference to climate change.

Othona is off-grid and as such generates its own power. Over the last 2 years, thousands of pounds have been invested in a new system with a biomass boiler for heating the hot water, photovoltaic solar panels and a wind turbine. A diesel engine provides back up, should extra capacity be required; the community is seeking to raise £115,000 for a second and larger wind turbine, which would reduce carbon emissions further and harness the wind power that swirls around the coastal site.

A great way to learn is through doing. The day that the **Youth came from Trust Links**, we coppiced hazel in the woodland area, letting light in for other species and harvesting useful hazel poles for construction. We

also harvested damsons, tomatoes, and figs and toured the site, which is increasingly abundant with herbs, fruit and vegetables in an attempt to be self-sufficient and carbon net zero. The experience opened the eyes of the young people who are from urban Southend-on-Sea, giving them time away in a green Christian community – a world away from their daily lives.

The concept and lived experience of community is both a challenge and an opportunity as we emerge from a period of enforced isolation and disconnection from community due to the COVID pandemic. **Othona is a unique community.** The communal kitchen, dining area, living area and central quadrangle provides ample shared space for people to

be together and share living. In fact, there are few alternative catering options from these, short of walking to the pub half a mile away or escaping to the various other spaces around the grounds. This forces all of the people to come together three times each day, sharing a meal and a common experience. Prayers are said at each mealtime, offered up by a different person at each meal. You indicate that you want everyone to be quiet by raising your hand and being silent, then as others notice this they copy and very quickly everyone is quiet, awaiting the prayer and notices. We quickly adapted to the Othona rhythm, chatting to new people, engaging with the nature around us, having time for prayer, reflection, learning and being.





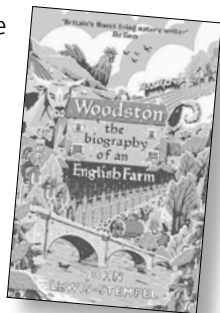
PERMACULTURE WEEK



SOME BOOK REVIEWS

'Woodston. The Biography of an English Farm,' by John Lewis Stempel. Published by Doubleday, 2021.

In this history of one English farm the author manages to encompass much of the history of English farming in an interesting, attractive and original way.



Woodston was the home of John Lewis Stempel's maternal grandparents so he knew it well as a child. It lies on the Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire border in the parish of Lindridge. His grandparents were hop farmers and though the hops have now gone. There is a very interesting section on hops, including their history, value and eventually their decline. Woodston is still a working mixed farm.

The author is himself an organic farmer on the Welsh borders. In this book he shares how he became an organic farmer. It was in 1999 when he was driving his tractor and suddenly realised that he was sealed into the cab and had no idea of the life or sounds of the field below him. He decided there and then that his farming future would be in working with nature as his grandfather had done at Woodston. He further came to see his farm animals as *'...creatures deserving of a good life and a good death...which should come only near the end of a natural lifespan.'* (Page 298.)

The author writes beautifully about

the English countryside. He loves to try out traditional ways of farming, even when they involve hard work. He writes that, *'The way to the future is the path to the past. It is called organic farming. We can have our cake and eat it, birds, beasts and humans all'*. (Page 215.)

He is committed to mixed farming, including the keeping of cows and sheep. He offers a challenge to those who suggest that in order to tackle climate change we should re-wild the countryside and reduce the national herds to a bare minimum. He believes that we can develop the woodlands and also keep the farm land and animals which make their own special contribution to the environment.

The history of farming methods over the centuries is described here in an engaging way, often from first hand experience, because the author has actually lived and worked in the style of the period he is writing about. For example, he builds a hedge in much the same way as Neolithic people, the first farmers, would have built it, a dry hedge of boughs and sticks. He even prepares a seed bed by clearing a piece of land using an antler. He makes 'tree hay' like the Saxons, he scythes hay like the Victorian farmers and he hunts for his food in the manner of Edwardian farmers. (Page 257.)

This book is a mine of information about the history of the English countryside, of farming methods, fashions and changes, of crops and trees. It is a book of hope for what can be done to ensure the future of farming but also the future of the planet.

'Bringing Back the Beaver: The Story of One Man's Quest to Rewild Britain's Waterways,' by Derek Gow. Published by Chelsea Green Publishing, 2020.

Bringing Back the Beaver is an accessible book, illustrated throughout with Derek's own distinctive line drawings. It delivers science, history and exciting tales in a style that



could only come from someone with deep personal experience and understanding. Weaving together amusing stories and facts, Gow tells us, without preaching, why the beaver (and its absence) is so important, and why beavers need to return to all our wetlands rather than a just a handful, carefully selected and controlled by us.

The subtitle of the book, *The Story of One Man's Quest to Rewild Britain's Waterways*, is a provocative one. 'Rewilding' is a controversial concept and means different things to different people. For some it is about setting aside 'wild' places to develop 'naturally', free from interfering humans. Others believe we cannot compartmentalise our planet and that 'the wild' needs to be returned to everywhere that it has been excluded from. Gow reminds us of how we once lived with the beaver and how the knowledge we now have, 'renders inconceivable the prospect that they were not at one time present in all our watercourses,

slowing flows, filtering silts and building soils. Ready the land for us. To use. To farm’.

Bringing Back the Beaver doesn’t tell farmers how a beaver-filled landscape would look on the ground or how we

can adapt our own use of land and water around them. Hopefully, there will be a future book.

AS I RODE OUT ONE MID-SUMMER MORNING... MY EXPERIENCE OF THE BIG RIDE FOR PALESTINE

Euan McPhee

The sun smiled on around 200 cyclists gathered on College Green in Bristol on Thursday 29 July 2021; another Big Ride for Palestine was about to get under way. Every summer for the last eight years, people of all ages and abilities have joined together to raise awareness of the plight of the Palestinian people and to raise money for children’s projects in Gaza.

This year’s ride from Bristol to London went via Swindon, Oxford and Luton before arriving into London on Sunday afternoon, 1 August. The MECA (Middle East Children’s Alliance) project being supported this year is the building of a recreational park in Rafah, to provide a safe place for children traumatised by bombing and siege to be able to take part in

cycling, football, basketball, tennis and walking. The emphasis is on providing activities for women and girls.

Shepherding over 200 cyclists through the centre of Bristol and out into the countryside was a challenge. The organisers had a good number of cyclists who acted as leaders and back markers as well as “human signposts” at tricky junctions, to make sure we did not lose anyone! There were also a number of dedicated cycle repair cyclists and first aiders to help out with punctures and other mishaps. Breaks were arranged for coffee, lunch and tea along the way, often provided by supportive local communities.

Each day’s ride was around 45 miles, and accommodation was arranged for us at Premier Inns or Travelodges

in each town. However, the meals were provided by local mosques in each community – and they were delicious! There was a rally on arrival in each town with local dignitaries or activists welcoming us and helping to spread the message of the need to bring about freedom, justice and equality for all in Israel-Palestine. For me, the more moving experience was to be enjoying the company of a several dozen Palestinians on the ride itself. The entry into Luton was amazing, as it seemed that every other car was sounding its horn in welcome as we rode in, and residents and shopkeepers stepped out of their doors to wave in greeting!

The Big Ride organisers are at pains to point out that they are not antisemitic but are simply anti the Israeli Government policies, including the illegal occupation of Palestine and annexation of East Jerusalem, settler colonies in occupied territories and discriminatory citizenship regarding Palestinian people. To quote the Big Ride’s own declaration:

“The Big Ride is opposed to all forms of racism including Islamophobia and Antisemitism. We welcome the 2021 Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism which makes clear that fighting for the rights of Palestinians, which will often involve criticism of Israel and its policies, is not antisemitic.”

As Desmond Tutu said: *“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”*. The 2018 Citizenship Law in Israel is effectively introducing



Euan (and friends Rogeer and Jane) ready for the off in Bristol.

a form of apartheid not dissimilar to that which once prevailed in South Africa.

So far, the amount raised for children's projects in Gaza stands at over £90,000, exceeding last year's total of £60,000.

The only downside of the whole trip was the fact I had to miss the final

rally at Mile End in London's East End; Peeling off at Barnet, three of us from Cornwall cycled to Paddington to be able to get the last through train to Cornwall at 17.00. Which meant missing hearing Alexi Sayle address the rally! But at least the trains were running on time and I was able to get home to my own bed by Sunday night, tired but triumphant from an

excellent ride for a worthy cause!

Next year? Hmm! We'll see!

If you would like to donate to the project to provide recreational equipment of the children of Gaza, please visit: <https://www.justgiving.com/team/TBR-2021>

EXERCISING SELF RESTRAINT AT NJPN

Martin Slater

"It is not nature that humans cannot command, but themselves, in all their insignificance and world-altering might."

Some words of Pope Francis as I begin to reflect on the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) conference which I attended in July. Their conference takes place at the Hayes in Swanwick, as does ours, and runs under much the same format. NJPN is predominantly a Roman Catholic organisation and this year the speakers were very much guided by Pope Francis' encyclical 'Laudato Si'. There were three main speakers, the Bishop of Salford celebrated Mass on the Saturday evening, and on the Sunday morning three young people had the opportunity to speak to us. There was a good choice of workshop groups and lively times of worship with excellent contemporary hymns and music. It was great to be back at the Hayes, although NJPN have the great advantage over Christians Aware in that Ordinary Time in July is much more conducive to chatting in the garden over coffee than Epiphany Time in January!

Our first speaker was Father Eamonn Mulcahy, currently a parish priest in Manchester and involved in education following much time spent in missionary work in parts

of Africa. He talked about how we have misunderstood our role in the creation story; to till means to serve not to dominate. We are to function as God does, humanely and intelligently. Father Eamonn talked about the Technocratic Paradigm. Compulsive consumption leading to massive indifference. The earth; is it a thing or a person? Father Eamonn ended by asking us to look at the person of the Good Samaritan. *"Who would you want to be the last person to pull you out of a ditch!"*

Our second speaker, Mark Rotherham, talked about capitalism as unlimited economic growth. Governments are keen to raise GDP, at which rate we would need two planets to supply our current level of consumption. In the afternoon Lorna Gold talked about the need for community conversion and for repentance, and that we all need to be mothers now. For me possibly the highlight was on the Sunday morning when three young people, men and women both at university and still at school talked down huge conglomerates like Dutch Shell, talked down populism as shown in a nationality and borders bill, and explained how they know about the climate crisis from what they are taught in the classroom but see quite another outside in practice.

On my way home from the conference, I called in to see Barbara who asked me what was the main impact that the conference had had on me. Without hesitation, I answered greed. It became clear to me that so much of the cause of our climate issues are caused by our greed, which sadly we have become blind to and so take for granted. It is said that in the UK 30% of all the food which we buy is thrown away. I subscribe to a charity which helps to feed the hungry from such waste from supermarkets. The workshop group which I chose on industrialised farming, animal welfare and biodiversity loss was lead by Chris Fegan, who is chief executive of Catholic Concern for Animals. This was a harsh eye opener over forty minutes, much of which involved looking at some very brutal photos. When we shop in the supermarket for meat (alright, some of us still do!) most of us are quite unaware of the cost to animal welfare and the planet to produce this. Chris has kindly agreed to talk to us at a CA conference one day. I noticed this morning, for instance, that I use far too much water when cleaning my teeth. There are times when it is blatantly obvious that one is being greedy but, it seems to me, that most of our greed has simply become part of our accepted way of

life. There seems to be little point at raging over coal fired power stations and other industrial excesses, when we are blindly content to consume the products and services that they produce. British holidaymakers have spent time over the pandemic railing that they cannot fly out on holiday as they are used to, to their favourite Costa del Pleasure; an extreme

example possibly, but we have become so used to taking 'stuff' for granted. As children we were taught to look and listen before we crossed the road. We need to teach ourselves and others to do this with respect to Mother Earth, which I am confident could do so much to assuage climate problems, possibly more than we can imagine.

Next year the NJPN conference is to be lead by members of the Methodist Church and Christians Aware, no less. Well, well!

NJPN – the National Justice and Peace Network.

Martin Slater is a Christians Aware trustee.

LISTEN TO AFRICA

*2021 saw the death of **Kenneth Kaunda** the founding president of Zambia. Eliam Ngoma has written an appreciation of 'KK.' Eliam, Office Manager for Christians Aware, was brought up in Zambia.*

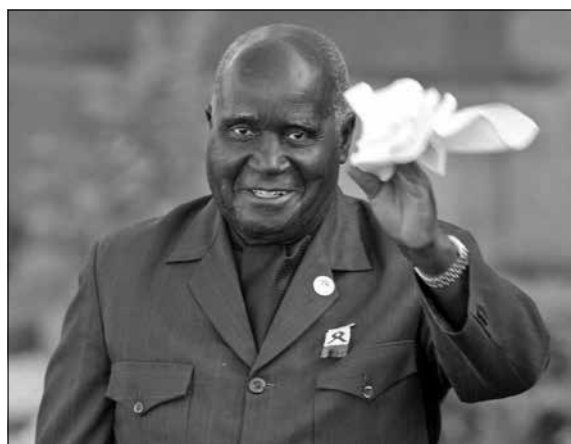
KENNETH KAUNDA: THE LAST GIANT OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENCE CAMPAIGNERS

Eliam Ngoma

In June this year Zambia and indeed Africa lost the last campaigner of African freedom. Kenneth Kaunda, the former president of Zambia, who died in hospital in the capital, Lusaka, at the age of 97, was the last of the giants of 20th century African nationalism.

He was also one of the few to leave office with his reputation still intact. The charismatic Kaunda won accolades for bowing out peacefully after losing the election to Frederick Chiluba in 1991. In a continent where most leaders are forced out of office through military coups or pressure from foreign forces, this was not a mean achievement for KK, as he was affectionately called by many in Zambia.

He conveyed an image of the benevolent monarch, a much-loved father to the people of Zambia, known for his charming safari suits, waving white handkerchiefs, ballroom dancing, singing his own songs while



cycling, and crying in public. Despite all that, there was also a hard edge to the politics and character of the man, whose powerful personality helped make Zambia a major player in Africa and the world for over 30 years.

Kenneth David Kaunda was born in Chinsali, Northern Zambia, in 1924. Just like so many of his generation of African liberation leaders, he came from a family of the mission-educated class. He was the youngest among eight children. His father was a Church Minister and teacher and his mother was one of the first

qualified African woman teachers in Zambia.

He followed his parents' teaching profession, first in Northern Rhodesia (Now Zambia), where he became a head teacher before his 21st birthday. He also taught in then Tanganyika (now Tanzania), where he became a lifelong admirer and friend of future president Julius Nyerere.

After returning to Zambia, Kaunda campaigned against the British plan for the federation of Rhodesia, (Zambia and Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (Malawi), which would increase the powers of white settlers. He took up politics full-time, learning the ropes through working for the liberal Legislative Council member Sir Stewart Gore-Browne. Soon after, as secretary general of the Northern Rhodesian African National Congress, he was imprisoned for two months with hard labour for distributing seditious material.

After his release he clashed with his organisation's president, Harry

Nkumbula, who took a more conciliatory approach to colonial rule. Kaunda led the breakaway Zambian African National Congress, which was promptly banned. He was jailed for nine months, further enhancing his reputation as a 'true' freedom fighter.

A new party, the United National Independence Party (UNIP), elected Kaunda as its leader soon after he was released from prison. He went to the United States of America and met Martin Luther King. Encouraged by King and Mahatma Gandhi's writings, he initiated the "Cha-cha-cha" civil disobedience campaign.

In 1962, encouraged by Kaunda's moves to give peace to white settlers, the British agreed to give Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) self-rule, followed by full independence in October 1964. KK emerged as the first Zambian president after his United National Independence Party (UNIP) won the election.

One challenge for the newly independent Zambia was the poor quality of education and lack of educated people to graduate level. Zambia had no university and fewer than half a percent of pupils completed primary school. Kaunda introduced a policy of free books and low fees. By 1966, Zambia had its first university. Kaunda became the first chancellor of the University of Zambia, (UNZA).

Like most anti-colonial leaders, Kenneth Kaunda viewed multi-party democracy as a western concept that provoked conflict and encouraged tribalism. This view was supported by the 1964 uprising of the Lumpa religious sect. For a man whose motto was 'One Zambia, One Nation', (which was a call to celebrating diversity in Zambia) maintaining peace among all tribes was very important. With that mind, in 1968 Kaunda banned all parties other than UNIP and Zambia officially became a one-party state a few years later.

As son of Africa, Kenneth Kaunda was not satisfied with the independence of Zambia at the time when most of Southern Africa was still in the shackles of colonialism and apartheid. Historians will always remember the support and protection that Kaunda and the loving people of Zambia gave to the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and the South West African Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO)

KK's UNIP led government became increasingly autocratic and intolerant of dissent, centred on his personality cult. That said, Kaunda will go down in history as a relatively benevolent autocrat who avoided the levels of repression and corruption of so many other one-party rulers in Africa.

Julius Nyerere, who retired in 1985, tried to persuade his friend to follow suit, but Kaunda pressed on. After surviving a coup attempt in 1990 and following food riots, he reluctantly acceded to the demand for a multi-party election in 1991. The trade union leader Frederick Chiluba won in a landslide victory. In retirement KK devoted himself to the grassroots development of the people often travelling to remote areas of the country to teach and share ideas.

Kenneth Kaunda was the first patron of the Stanley Nyahwa Foundation in partnership with '**Listen to Africa**,' which is a much-valued programme of Christians Aware.

9th October, 2021 saw the launch of Black History Month. In Leicester '**Listen to Africa**' has launched a new exhibition of African artefacts.



Our October 'Action Card' focuses on '**Black Lives matter**'.

We ask our readers to send in their own experiences of Black History Month.

ACTION CARD - OCTOBER 2021: BLACK LIVES MATTER

To understand the 'Black Lives Matter' movement it is helpful to read a book by a young black writer. The book is '**Why I am no longer talking to white people about race**'. The author is **Reni Eddo-Lodge**.

The author was brought up in the UK and now lives and works as a journalist in London. Her complaint, expressed strongly in the preface to



Reni Eddo-Lodge

her book, is that most white people see themselves and their experiences as the norm. They do not realise that they benefit from systemic privilege. They mostly take it for granted that white people, like them, are visible everywhere and in control.

When a Christians Aware group went to Kenya some years ago, it included a young British girl of Jamaican origin. We had hardly emerged from the

airport in Nairobi when she pointed to the advertisements in surprise and delight. All the people on the hoardings were black and this was a new experience for her. She delighted in being herself part of the norm.

The first chapter of Reni's book is entitled 'Histories,' and begins with the author's growing awareness, whilst at university, of the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, when roughly 11,000,000 African people were taken across the Atlantic and into slavery in America and the Caribbean. She wrote, '*Generation*

after generation of black lives stolen, families torn apart, communities split.' And she realised, '*Generation after generation of white wealth amassed from the profits of slavery.*'

The study of slavery led the author on naturally to the question of why there are black people in the UK and thus on to the study of colonialism, two world wars and growing anti-immigrant feeling leading to violence. Sadly, the UK today has not been transformed and many black people still do not feel part of normal life. We are all greatly challenged to listen,

learn and move forward together.

Some actions:

- Read: 'Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race,' by Reni Eddo-Lodge. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.
- Ask black people in your community how they feel about living in the UK.
- Perhaps create a multi-cultural group where you can create friendship and trust.

'ECO CHURCH' - GETTING STARTED

Maureen Edwards

Before I moved down to Cornwall in 2013, I had been a member of a church which won three awards as an 'Eco Church' under a Churches Together programme. This had included an in-depth study series, an audit of and resulting changes to the church lighting and use of water, solar panels on the church roof as well as encouraging everyone in the congregation to modify their personal lifestyles.

Since I have been living in Truro, I attended a series of lectures at the Cathedral on Eco-theology which inspired me to do something similar with my church study group (or 'house group'), so we embarked on an intensive series of studies focusing on Environment. As a result we then invited our minister to one of our meetings and through him challenged our Church to become an 'Eco Church'. Truro Methodist Church then adopted the 'a Rocha' programme and, as a consequence, ecological principles are now an integral part of our church policy. This means that when our plans for a 'Community Hub' begin to materialize it will be built and maintained on ecological principals. Already our church garden has become a wild garden and various adjustments have been put in place for the disposal of plastic and other materials. Since lockdown has prevented us from meeting in

our church building, we have as a house group added extra notes to the church weekly notices emailed to members, each one headed 'Eco thought for the week'. We want to keep our members aware of the issue and to challenge personal lifestyle. The following, for example, was added to our church notices for the 3rd week of May (and we have plenty more ideas to work on for the future!):

Christian Aid Week was important. Another recent notable week was **National Vegetarian Week**. So why all this talk about vegetarianism? We love our Sunday roast, but at what cost to the earth?

- Cattle burp methane and their manure decomposes into methane – one of the main causes of greenhouse gas. Beef and lamb cause the most emissions of all common food.

- Cheese, butter and pork are close runners-up.
- Chicken, eggs and fish are the lowest, but they still cause more emissions than most plant products!
- Even a glass of milk is twice as bad environmentally as a glass of wine! And even chickens – fed mostly on soya – contribute to the deforestation of the Amazon whose forests once absorbed most of these and other impurities for us.
- The global production of soya, for feeding animals, has been doubling approximately every 10 years. The largest soya producers are Brazil and Argentina who are the worst culprits for destroying the rainforest.

Have you tried at least some veggie foods?

- Vegetables use up less water than animals. Chicken, for example, takes 542 litres to produce – enough to fill a bath six and a half times!

- A veggie diet can be just as tasty! By replacing meat with vegetable proteins (nuts, seeds, beans, lentils...) we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Eating vegetarian food for a year, is equivalent to taking a small family car off the roads!

- Why not, for a start, try to alternate a more plant-based diet with your customary meat-based one? Have a look in your supermarket for ideas!

Boycott Amazonian produced food

Some supermarkets have recently declared that they are doing this. If yours is not included in this list (Aldi, the Co-op, Sainsburys...) then challenge them to do so!

AN AUGUST STORY

David Ward

We had a wonderful afternoon at the Promenade Concert in the Albert Hall and got the chance to meet Michael Morpurgo afterwards who was chatting outside after the concert.

Thirty years ago, when we lived in Central London, having lived in the countryside, our two youngest children attended what was All Souls Primary School at the back of what was the Middlesex Hospital. Lucy went on her school trip to a place called 'Treginnis', a farm on St David's Head, West Wales. It is one of the three farms that are run by 'Farms for City Kids'. We said to Michael Morpurgo the word 'Treginnis'. We went on to say, 'There is a young lady across the road who was at Treginnis thirty years

ago.' He wanted to know more, his eyes lit up and he insisted on coming across the road to meet Lucy.

The following year from Lucy's visit her brother went to Treginnis. He was the only European in his class and his best friend came from Nepal, Nursriha. The week before they embarked on the school trip, they had sung to HM Queen in the opening of the revamped Leicester Square as part of Westminster Schools Choir.

Their school trip was the following week and St David's Day and who was visiting St David's that day HRH Prince Charles and they got a big smile from him when they said to him, 'We saw your Mum last week in Leicester Square,' and he came across to talk to them.

Michael and Clare Morpurgo have written:

Since we started the charity in 1976 more than 100,000 children have been to one of our farms – Nethercott House in Devon, Lower Treginnis in Pembrokeshire, and Wick Court in Gloucestershire. But it should be millions. It's a visit that builds children's self-confidence and self-worth as they work as a team on the farm. A visit full of fun too, and for many, the most memorable time of their young lives.

For today's children who are ever more disconnected from the countryside, nature, and the source of the food they eat, spending time on the farms brings great joy, new discoveries, and the opportunity to reconnect with friends and teachers.

We hope to see you down on the farm or at one of our events very soon!

Clare Morpurgo & Michael Morpurgo



Children enjoying their time at Treginnis Farm.

HOW ENERGY COMPANIES PROTECT THEIR INTERESTS AND POTENTIALLY BLOCK CLIMATE CHANGE VIA CORPORATE COURTS

Alison Skinner, Global Justice Leicester

During the Big Green Week from September 18-26 2021 when many different organisations were highlighting many issues important to tackling climate change, Global Justice Now chose to concentrate its efforts on the potential influence of corporate courts in blocking positive policies that many different states might wish to introduce to reduce their carbon emissions. They brought their activists out for a day of action on the subject on Sept 18. This was not an easy option for their members doing street action who had about 10 seconds to explain an issue that most members of the public have never heard of and which sounds too outrageous to be true. Thankfully I have a little more time and space here! This article is based on a briefing paper produced by Global Justice Now and updated in September 2021: Corporate Courts v the Climate.

https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2021/09/GJN_CorporateCourtsVsClimateBriefing_Sept2021.pdf

When countries set up trade deals that can involve energy companies they will usually sign up to a process called the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) otherwise known as corporate courts.

These courts are not part of a country's own legal system, or a recognised international court such as that at the Hague. If an energy company operating in a state feels that its activities are, or could be, curtailed by a new law or policy introduced by that state, they have the right to sue the country for millions of dollars damages in

these courts, and if successful these judgements are legally binding in a way that country climate change pledges are not.

What will be set up is essentially a pop-up court to hear the case with a bench of one judge chosen by the country, one judge chosen by the company and the third judge mutually agreed by both sides.

They will hear the case argued by lawyers for both sides behind closed doors in a very secretive process, which can take years, which will focus purely on the details of the case without taking account of any wider environmental concerns or issues.

Corporate courts have enabled corporations to sue countries for doing almost anything they don't like – banning toxic chemicals, introducing a sugary drinks tax, anti-smoking policies, capping water rates, raising the minimum wage.. They have long been used to oppose environmental protections. Now we are seeing more governments around the world begin to take long needed action to tackle the climate crisis we are seeing more and more corporate cases challenging these actions

At present just 5 fossil fuel corporations are demanding over US\$18bn through corporate court tribunals from governments over climate policies. Behind the corporate court system are specialist investment law firms for whom the UK is a hub. Law firms, in the UK are representing the fossil fuel companies in these climate related courts. Most are being brought through a giant corporate court deal called the Energy Charter Treaty, to which Britain currently



belongs. The following are examples of legal actions currently being considered:–

- RWE a German company and Uniper are suing the Netherlands for US\$ 1,652,000,000 over coal power station phase out
- Rockhopper a UK company is suing Italy for US\$ 324, 500, 000 over a ban on offshore oil drilling close to the coast.
- Ascent Resources, also a UK company is suing Slovenia for US\$ 118, 000,000 for requiring an environmental impact assessment on fracking plans
- TC Energy is suing the US for US\$15,000,000,000 over the cancellation of the Keystone tar sands oil pipeline.

Notoriously when laws were passed against the slave trade in Britain it was slaveowners who were compensated not the people who had been enslaved. Today fossil fuel

companies are effectively asking for something similar – reparations for climate action which will curtail their activities when instead as polluters they should be paying to help fix problems they have caused.

Corporate courts can be used to undermine and vastly inflate the cost of climate action suing governments into a state of climate paralysis.

Global Justice Now is calling upon the government to exit the Energy Charter Treaty to ensure it has a free hand to develop any policy needed to address climate change without these financial threats hanging over it.

The government left corporate courts provision out of the new Australian trade deal because of questions being asked about these provisions and we are calling for them to be dropped from the UK-Canada trade deal as well and to stay out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership where they are already in force.

Across the world countries have been rejecting ISDS: South Africa, India, Ecuador, Tanzania, Indonesia and New Zealand have all taken steps to review, limit, or terminate existing ISDS deals and refuse to sign new ones. Some countries are also

refusing to pay the colossal sums demanded when judgement goes against them.

Please contact your MPs, especially Conservative ones, to highlight these outrageous demands by fossil fuel companies and demand that Britain does not endorse and protect these courts by signing up to them in its trade deals.

Follow the briefings and actions on this subject at

<https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/event/day-of-action-corporate-courts-vs-climate/>

BURMA UPDATE

Tony Fairman

It's rarely easy to find good news about Burma. But this year I can't find any.

The citizens of Burma lived under military rule from 1962 till 2015. Then Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing experimented with democracy, 75% for citizens, who elected Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD), and 25% for him to appoint military men to head the key ministries and MPs to block parliamentary actions he didn't like. But in November 2020 the citizens elected more NLD members in the second national election than in the first. So the Senior-General restored 100% military rule on 1 February 2021.

The Senior-General seems to have expected little resistance. Monks have been silent, but unarmed civilians of all ages protested throughout Burma. For the first time soldiers killed ethnic Burman civilians in urban areas in central Burma as freely as they had killed civilians in the smaller ethnic groups on the borders. By the end of August they had killed about 1000 civilians, including children – snipers shot some deliberately in



the head – and arrested uncounted more, including journalists and all NLD leaders. This time they didn't put Suu Kyi under house arrest, but in prison, charged with but not yet (Sept 1) tried for ten crimes. The six large ethnic groups – Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karen and Karennis – started fighting the army again, with

death, internal displacement and destruction of property, including churches. Meanwhile, c.1m Rohingya Muslims are still in camps in Bangladesh.

Civilians now rarely protest in the streets. They strike, especially civil servants, teachers and medics. So soldiers have put many of them in prison too and covid spreads unchecked. The Senior-General announced that he will restore democracy in 2023. But, with Russian and Chinese support, he has resumed the military's mission: to rule autocratically, like the three main Burmese warrior kings – Anawrahta (1044-77), Alaungpaya (1755-60) and Bodawpaya (1782-1819) – whose enormous statues dominate the central square in Naypyitaw, the capital.

The citizens of Burma also have a mission: to find the seeds of their cause in their history and culture and nourish them. 'We began this struggle', said one citizen. 'We must finish it'.

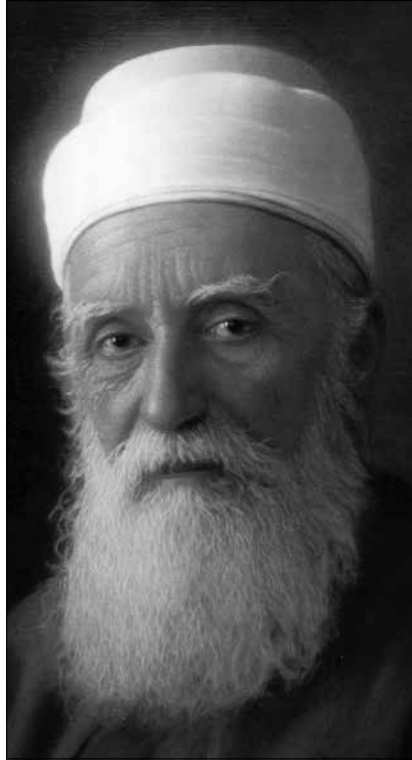
CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF ABDU'L BAHA

Kevin and Mina Beint

In November this year Baha'is across the world will commemorate the centenary of the passing of Abdu'l-Baha. He was the eldest son of the founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, and His name which He gave Himself means Servant of Baha.

Baha'u'llah claimed to have brought a new religion which taught that there is only one God, one religion which is progressively revealed, each religion being like a chapter in one book, and one mankind sharing the planet in equality. Baha'u'llah was imprisoned and banished from His native Tehran. Abdu'l-Baha was only eight years old when, with death of His father and family, he was exiled to Iraq and later underwent further exiles to Istanbul and Edirne in Turkey and finally Akka in the Holy Land. At times he was in prison and at times under strict house arrest. His father, Baha'u'llah, had passed away in 1892 and He made Abdu'l-Baha the Centre of His Covenant, His exemplar and the interpreter of His writings. In explaining His father's writings Abdu'l-Baha wrote copiously and Baha'is regard His writings as part of their scriptures.

A new chapter in His life occurred when in 1898 the first western pilgrims arrived in Akka. Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha had received Eastern pilgrims throughout their exiles despite great difficulties but as the Baha'i Faith spread to the west late in the nineteenth century pilgrims began to arrive from America and Europe despite the difficulties of travelling long distances by ship and train. Those first western pilgrims had to overcome the vicissitudes of Abdu'l-Baha still being carefully monitored by the authorities but in 1908 He received His freedom and



Abdu'l Baha.

He determined to visit the Baha'is in the west and proclaim His father's message.

In 1911, aged 67, Abdu'l-Baha arrived in London and His first talk was at the City Temple with over 2000 in the congregation. Next it was St Johns Smitwh Square followed by a string of speaking engagements. He stayed at the home of Baha'i, Lady Blomfield, and received a constant stream of visitors. The first Baha'i book published in the United Kingdom was 'Abdu'l-Baha in London', transcripts of His talks. From London he moved to Paris and His talks there were published as 'Paris Talks', still popular today. He travelled further to Germany, Austria and Hungary and after some months returned to the Middle East. However, a year later He embarked on a mammoth expedition to travel coast to coast in North America. He stayed 239 days and His talks there are published as

Promulgation of Universal Peace.

The Baha'is of the UK feel doubly blessed because He returned from America to dock at Liverpool where a group of early Baha'is met Him off the boat. On this journey He spent further time in London but visited Bristol, spoke at Manchester College, Oxford and made a remarkable visit to Edinburgh where He was the guest of Reverend and Mrs Whyte. Mrs Whyte had been on pilgrimage to Akka in 1906 and had extended Him an invitation. An added bonus for Baha'is is that the home of the Whytes became a National Trust property as an example of Edinburgh architecture at its finest and it includes panels on Abdu'l-Baha's visit. In the past there have been many books chronicling Abdu'l-Baha's interaction with pilgrims and His travels but as this is the year of the centenary of His passing there have been many detailed and informative books shedding yet more light on this remarkable man.

Kevin and Mina Beint are members of the Leicester Baha'I community. Mina is a member of the Faith Awareness Women's Interfaith Group.

2021 SUMMER SCHOOL: HOPE. HEALING. HARMONY.

Our world never needed hope, healing and harmony more than it does now. The fact that our summer school was held on the zoom platform was in itself indicative of the situation we are living in, when all our lives are more precarious and things change from day to day.

We were fortunate to have excellent speakers and a good gathering of our members, including **Anthony Das** in India and **Chris Garland** in Australia. We could also see Ruth and Subash's new baby, **Rajendra**. Together we shared a day of listening, learning, being challenged and also being refreshed.

Stephen Skinner was our first speaker on 'Harmony for the Future of the Earth.' He made it very clear that harmony involves wholeness, connection and relationship, all qualities of God who is pure love. Harmony however cannot be reached easily, we only have to look at the state of the earth to see that. Harmony has to be worked for in partnership with the great connector, the Holy Spirit.

Jenny Brown and Anne-Marie Ayyeman both work at **Christian Aid**. Their presentation included a video of **Amanda Gorman** reciting her poem 'Open Your Eyes.' We were asked if our planet was worth fighting for and surely we all agreed that it is even though in the climate crisis we face the biggest crisis ever. Jenny and Anne-Marie looked at what we can do including stopping the use of fossil fuels developing resilient crops, planting trees, caring for the Amazon and supporting young people in their campaigns. We plan to create educational and worship resources. There is poverty, inequality and fear, but yes, there is also hope.

Inderjit Bhogal has a long history of work with refugees which has given hope and a new life to many. He was a leader in the creation of cities of sanctuary and now challenges us all to create churches of sanctuary and hospitality. We must learn what it means to seek sanctuary, we must embed a welcome and the inclusion of refugees and other vulnerable people into our community lives, we must share our vision and what we

achieve as widely as we can. We are all members of the human race and must never forget it.

Adam Boulter is a painter and also an Anglican priest. He is a long-standing friend of Christians Aware and has been very kind in sharing his artworks. He is currently Dean of Toliara in Madagascar and we are learning about the people and communities there. He presented many of his own paintings at summer school and also, very generously, shared some of his working drawings with us. He said that artists are people who notice the world and artists of faith notice what God is doing in the world. He challenged everyone to draw and to write poems.

The presentations are available on our You Tube channel.

Our summer school next year will be from July 18 – 22, 2022 at Parcevall Hall in the Yorkshire Dales.



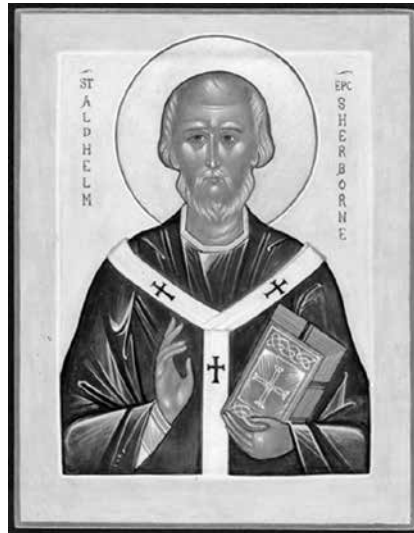
Amanda Gorman.

A GREENER FORM OF PILGRIMAGE?

Gerard Crawshaw

Pilgrimage, banned during the Reformation as far as Northern Europe was concerned, virtually disappeared as a form of religious practice thereafter. In recent decades, it has undergone a major revival. In 2019 around 300,000 pilgrims completed the Camino de Santiago in Spain. The BBC is currently filming a third series of "Pilgrimage" (this time set in the UK). Christians Aware has, over recent years, continued the tradition of travelling to places of spiritual significance, inspired by people of great faith such as Julian of Norwich.

The next Christians Aware pilgrimage, in May 2022, will be based in Somerset. We will be looking at St Aldhelm (c.640 – 709), patron saint of my new home town of Frome who is considered to be one of the pre-eminent scholars of his time. Many of his writings survive, including a collection of riddles on subjects as diverse as a cloud, the wind and even the elephant and we will have



Aldhelm as bishop of Sherborne.

some fun with these over our time together. He established a Benedictine monastery at Malmesbury and founded similar houses at Frome and Bradford-on-Avon. As Abbot, his life was most austere and it is recorded that he often recited the entire book of Psalms standing up to his neck in cold water!

Looking ahead, might it be possible to reduce the environmental impact

of pilgrimage and to promote environmental care as a religious responsibility? This could be by reducing the need for transport, protecting diversity along pilgrim routes and helping pilgrims to tread more lightly on the earth. To promote this aim the European Green Pilgrimage Network has been set up (greenpilgrimageeurope.net). Based in Canterbury, this is a multi-faith network of pilgrim places, pathways and cities in Europe and is committed to promoting environmentally-friendly pilgrimage. Its vision is that pilgrims leave a positive footprint on the earth and that pilgrim places become models of care for the environment.



The ruins of the monastery founded by Aldhelm at Malmesbury.

CALL FOR SYSTEM CHANGE AT COP26

Ellen Teague

“Ellen, Ellen!” My mum was calling me through the smog as I left my nursery school in West London. Children were trying to reunite with parents at the end of a school day in December 1962. Visibility was so poor I couldn't see my outstretched hand! No masks, but my scarf was up over my mouth and nose. I'm old enough to remember the smog of that year which killed 700 people.

The killing of thousands by multiple London smogs over decades led to the passing of the 1956 Clean Air Act. It restricted the burning of domestic fuels in urban areas with the introduction of smokeless zones. We stopped seeing the coalman with his horse and cart, delivering to the coal bunker under our stairs. And we stopped choking on air smelling of sulphur. Battersea Power Station was eventually closed.

It was structural change which ended the London smogs. And nothing less than structural change this time on a vaster global scale – is needed to address today's environmental crises. We are more aware of this after the devastating 9 August report from scientists of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It said warming to date has made changes to many of our planetary support systems and the consequences will continue to worsen. The report demonstrates that efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees, a key target of the Paris Agreement, will certainly fail unless drastic action is taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In this year of UK leadership of COP26 in Glasgow, the UK must take the lead. A huge discussion is going on regarding Individual Lifestyle Change versus 'System Change'. Both are important and linked, but I feel we in the Justice and Peace Network must particularly address System Change. It is a popular call at young people's climate strikes.

But what does 'System Change' mean?

Structural change is needed to drastically transition away from fossil fuels this decade. In the political world the UK is better on aspirational noises than action. Many UK government policies are taking us in the wrong direction – dithering over a new coal mine, scrapping over a billion in funding for energy efficiency, letting our banks fuel climate destruction across the world, slashing overseas aid. The negative impacts of industrial farming particularly animal farming with its production of methane are becoming more and more evident and must be addressed.

Action by the corporate world is crucial too. Just 100 companies have been the source of more than 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988, according to the Carbon Majors Report of 2017. Top of the list are fossil fuel producers. Despite all their “greenwash” they are continuing with business as usual. In July, Channel 4 revealed that fossil fuel companies – including BP, Shell and ExxonMobil – have lobbied the UK government ahead of COP26 for “greater recognition of the role of fossil gas” so that fossil fuels continue to be a “vital part of the solution”! Despite its net zero ‘ambitions’, BP has also lobbied the EU to support fossil gas. Another key issue picked up by Global Justice Now is corporate courts, giving fossil fuel companies the power to sue governments for taking action on climate.

The Conference of the Parties (COP26) to be held in Glasgow in November cannot afford to fail. Collective problems need collective solutions. A successful COP26 will be a success for the poor.

The Church is amplifying the demands of the poorest nations where climate impacts are most devastating. It is our moral duty to do this. Moreover, what may first become apparent amongst the most vulnerable will, in time, impact everyone.

We can all do something. While billionaires jostle to leave our devastated Earth, we can work for a stable climate and protection from destruction by industry, military or extreme weather events. Let's take inspiration from the Young Christian Climate Network's Relay to COP which has been making its way to Scotland since June, raising awareness along the route. The Camino to COP has now set off too. Let's support them. And look out for Operation Noah announcing the next tranche of divestment by religious groups on 25 October. And we must encourage governments to accept that their concept of national security, sustained by a military-industrial complex, is anachronistic and irrelevant to solving the current crisis.

Indigenous people look around eight generations ahead. Let us be hopeful, look to the long-term, act for justice and peace, live more sustainably and pray!

Ellen Teague is a member of the Columban Faith, Justice and Ecology Team.

PREJUDICE AND PRIVILEGE - THE EXPERIENCE OF INTER FAITH CONVERSATION

Anthony Gimpel

This is what I'm going to talk about – Friendship – two good friends of mine, David and Bob Singh in conversation



I'm a Jew and I'm a Quaker. I was born Jewish. 40 years ago I chose to be a Quaker. While I don't practise Judaism as a religion, I do practise Quakerism and I practise inter faith.

My parents were refugees and they were non-religious, so I was brought up as an atheist, only to discover I was Jewish when I was 12. Becoming a Quaker was a lot easier than being a Jew.

30 years ago my wife, Ann, and I moved to Loughborough where we found a thriving inter faith conversation. Each month we were welcomed by Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Brahma Kumaris, Baha'is, Spiritualists, Druids and Christians. Unfortunately, there weren't any Jews except me, although there are several other Jews in the town. Later on we welcomed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly called Mormons. In all sorts of temples and homes, I met people who were kind and understanding, with lively minds wanting to engage, to share and to listen.

To begin with I was a tourist. All the colours and lights, the sounds and smells and tastes. It was great to go from the array of gods in the Hindu temple to the plain carpet of

the mosque. I love listening to our differences, and realising how much we all have in common. It's a great adventure and it doesn't end.

There are three ways of putting faiths together, side by side. Exclusive, inclusive, pluralist.

The first: exclusive: my faith is always, unquestioned, better. There may be other ways but without hesitation mine is the Truth, the Way.

For several years there was a letter every week in the Loughborough Echo by a local vicar, who denounced homosexuals, Muslims and others in highly derogatory and bigoted language. He was decidedly provocative and the offence was always made worse if anyone dared to respond: The vicar merely added the responder to his weekly rant.

The second idea: inclusive: my faith is universal and though you might not know it, your way is included in mine. I've had direct experience of this too and I'm sorry to say it was at Woodbrooke when I heard a well-respected weighty Friend say that the salvation of Jesus Christ is given to all people in the world, whether those people believe in Jesus or not. I was horrified because one of those people is me. It sounds generous but effectively it means you can come under my umbrella but I still hold the handle. When Quakers talk about people out there who are undiscovered, natural Quakers, it's not very far removed. Our arrogance, proclaiming our uniqueness is breathtaking. In all my inter faith experience no-one has ever tried to convert me. But I have often heard my Quaker Friends engaging in what is very close to conversion.

The third idea: pluralism. But, beware, this is more than a simple

acceptance that there are different ways. At Quaker Summer Gathering in Loughborough in 2003, I led a session in which I invited a dozen people to come from different faith communities in the town to tell us about Light, the theme of the Gathering. I presented the evening by introducing these "my friends". I said tolerance is not enough. Tolerance means I will walk beside you: you go your way and I'll go mine and we'll get along fine. No, tolerance won't do. We must become friends. We must get to know each other. Trust. Even respect won't do. Respect is too much like tolerance. The way you respect a ticking time bomb is to stand well clear of it. Respect and tolerance leave spaces for prejudice and privilege to flourish. It's like a glass wall between you so that your voice is unheard and you don't hear her voice.

Pluralism means being committed to engagement – dialogue. Sadly, in some inter faith meetings, I am at a disadvantage being a Quaker with our lack of hierarchical structure. Most participants are present by virtue of leadership in their own communities. As such they are, or maybe they perceive they are, obliged to maintain the positions which they themselves encourage amongst their own communities. I prefer conversation, just talking and listening, one with another. Even better is to sit with companions breaking bread together at table. Every year (except of course this one) we have a Feast of Faiths in Loughborough. A hundred people of all sorts crowd into our main community centre. We have a quiz, a game, one year a pantomime, and then we sit down together at the tables to eat. Friendship. And yet. Yes, we enjoy ourselves. Yes, it is multi-faith. But it is still the white English

Christians in the majority using their privilege. Unwittingly, maybe. But it is there. And I am part of it.

Now: we each of us hold beliefs and attitudes, me included, which are fundamentally untenable. Not one of us has The Truth. All of us have some hint of truth but not one of us has it all. In a court of law I would shrink from swearing 'to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So help me God.' I know I will never be able to do such a thing. And yet how many times in our religious communities are we willing to sacrifice our integrity by doing exactly that. We will happily declare the Truth – capital T – as if there was nothing else. The ten commandments were given by God. Mohammed was the last messenger. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the World. All declared as convictions of truth. Every faith that I know of seems willing to utter statements about Reality with a capital R. We Quakers talk about silence as the only way or the best way to access the Divine. I find it hard to be comfortable with this pride. And even though I find it unacceptable I have heard myself speaking it.

I sincerely believe that I can discern the will of God by sitting quietly and waiting to hear His voice. (Yes, His, not Hers.) I maintain that I have experienced such hearing and indeed there is a whole body of Quaker testimony that describes such experiences and I use them to justify my experiences. It frequently leads to working for the good of humanity. It has led Quakers to pacifism, to a rejection of taking up arms, to working to improve the system of justice which discards people into prison. So I feel validated that the outcome of my hearing the will of God is proof that I did indeed hear it. But what sort of proof is it? For I and my fellow Quakers are not unique in opposing war nor in working for justice. So could our declarations that we listen to the Spirit be a form of prejudice? Our pride is certainly evident in our dialogue with people of other faiths.

What about privilege? At Yearly

Meeting in 2018 several Friends spoke about their privilege of belonging to the Religious Society of Friends. What is that about? For the vast majority of us, being a Quaker is a matter of individual conscience and choice. I love it when an Attender is accepted into membership. I value the commitment but I feel very uncomfortable when this is accompanied by comments that our Friend (Our friend?) has at last come to the Truth, has rejected the rituals and dogma of the Church of England or whichever faith group has been left.

The Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem goes to visit the Pope. On the big desk he sees a gold telephone. "What's that?" "Ah, that's my hot line to God. Would you like to try it?" "Oh, yes." As he puts the phone down, he says, "Marvellous. How much do I owe you?" "Oh, let's say 2000 Lire."

The following year the Pope visits the Chief Rabbi in Jerusalem. Sure enough, there on the desk is a gold telephone. "Aha, you have a hot line to God." "Indeed, would you like to try it?" The Pope talks to God and when he puts the phone down, "Oh, thank you. How much do I owe you?" "Oh, nothing. Local call!"

My participation in inter faith conversation is sometimes in Quaker mode, sometimes Jewish or a mixture of the two. Whichever it is, I hope I am building trust. Some years ago a dialogue was proposed to bring Muslims and Christians together. Ann and I were part of the group and we met in a small room in the YWCA. The Christians and me, Jewish, Quaker, on one side and the Muslims on the other side. For several weeks it was as if we were market traders shouting our wares at each other, each trying to outbid the other with the truth of our way. One evening we found ourselves locked out of the building. There was no-one around to let us in and we stood perplexed about what to do. Then Ann invited everyone to our home a few minutes' walk across the park. We crowded into our sitting room and began telling each other about our home, our mum and dad, and how we

had been brought up. Steadily we were talking about things that really mattered to each of us, the realities of our lives, and we began to become friends.

I love being a Quaker. I'm deeply committed to its way, its presumptions about how we can discern the truth, how we can hear God's word. And I treasure my Jewish inheritance. With snobby pride I tell you I don't know Hebrew, don't know when the holidays are until a friend sends me a happy Passover card. And when the rabbi in Leicester sends me a parcel of matzos to eat I know I am part of a great community and I love it.

But could it be that identity is the problem? I put a huge emphasis on my inheritance, the choices I've made to establish who I think I am. My culture, my taste, my language, the way I think, what I think about, what I buy, where I go, how I decorate my house, my life. And is that right or is it pathetic? Across the world there are houses, gardens, cars, smartphones, electricity, water, warmth, hospitals, schools. For everyone. What's so wonderful about being Jewish or a Quaker?

Sure, my identity gives me a key by which I belong to a community. But what happens when my identity is bound up with the history of the community I belong to? History is a selective process. I choose what my history is. So when I identify with my chosen community and merge my history with my right to belong to it, then, together with the others who say they belong, do we start to proclaim a joint history and do we find ourselves mouthing myths about who we are? And, without checking that the world has changed, is changing and will continue to change, will the myth end up indefensible? Here come the twins: prejudice and privilege.

I'll end with friendship.

Anthony Gimpel has written two books for Christians Aware: 'My Jewish Soul,' and 'Alfred'.

PUSH TO RESET THE WORLD

FAITH ● HOPE ● LOVE



Walking along, puzzling, impressing or inspiring “things” find me, such as this sticker on a traffic-light posts in Ghent, Belgium. The green arrow on the map shows you exactly where this magic spot is to be found. Unfortunately, the charm did not work. Probably our intention was not the right one or the moment wrong, but somebody else might succeed.

This was long before anyone in public, let alone in the west, seriously thought about pandemics. Last year in autumn this photo with its mysterious button found its way into a narrative print of mine. Dreaming it reappears in one’s mind. Awoken and sitting on the bed it leaves the question: Where was this place? Haze still clouding the head.

The print’s title is: Faith ● Hope ● Love. Thus hinting at those elements in life helping us to reset our own button and imprints we leave in the world. Like ripples on water they might move further and cause something good beyond our horizon.

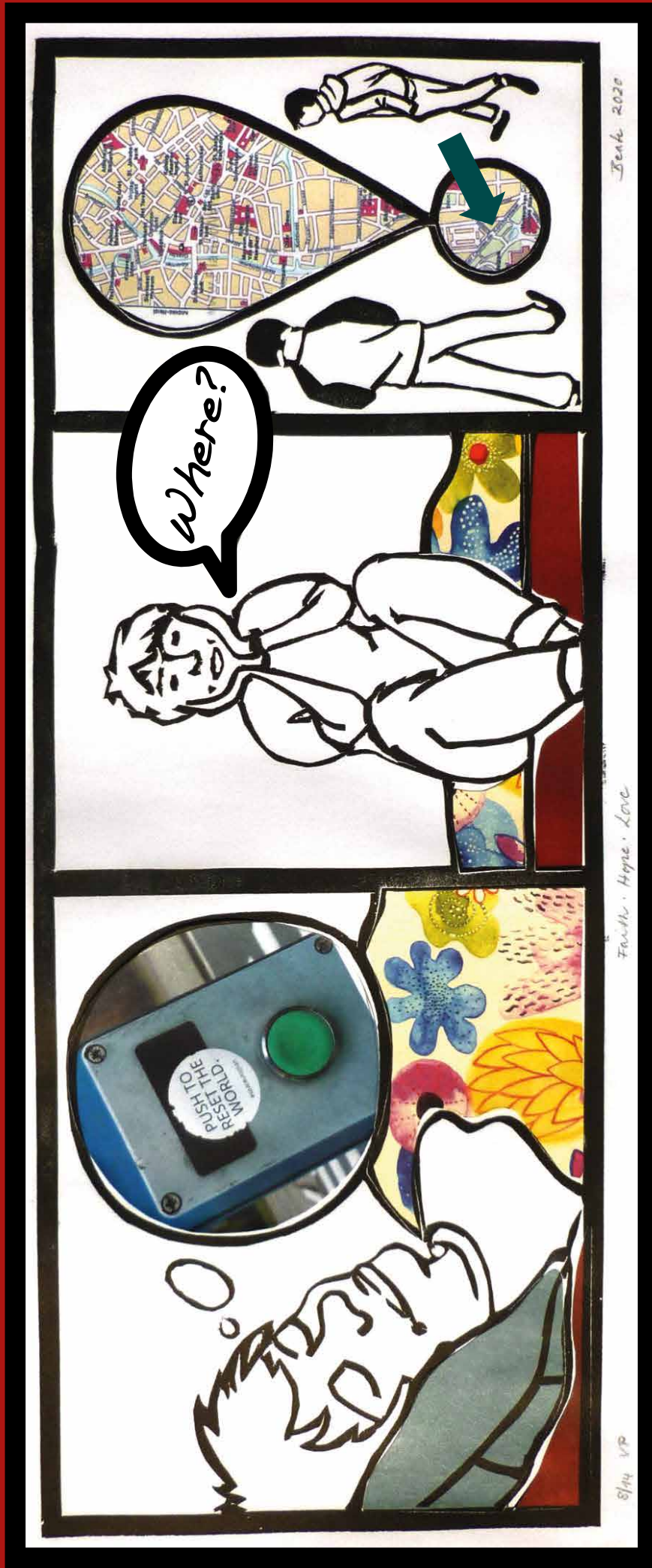
Resetting the world needs me and you — us! The responsibility lies in my hands, in yours — in ours. And there is much more out there awaiting us.

Who * If not me?
When * If not now?
Where * If not in my heart?
How * If not with mindfulness?

Beate Dehnen, August 2021

SOME DIARY DATES

2021	November 14 – 21	Interfaith Week
	November 17	At 7.00pm – a Christians Aware webinar will be given by Dr. Alan Race: ‘Momentum for change in the Christian understanding of its place in a world of many religions’
	December 16	At 7.00pm – a webinar by Dr. Clare Amos: ‘Approaching Christmas through Middle Eastern Eyes’
2022	January 14 – 16	Christians Aware Annual Conference – at the Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire – ‘Transcending Divisions in a World of Diversity’
	May 21 – 27	Somerset Pilgrimage – (There are a few places)
	July 18 – 22	Summer School – Parcevall Hall, Yorkshire Dales
2023	May 13 – 20	Lindisfarne Pilgrimage



*Who * If not me?*

*When * If not now?*

*Where * If not in my heart?*

*How * If not with mindfulness?*



Price: £1.50
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