

Christians Aware *Magazine*



Summer 2022



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SORROW AND JOY

Let us remember, reflect, rejoice,
Our memory employ
As we recall the times before,
Those days we could enjoy.

The days when happiness prevailed
And sadness had not come –
They give us cause to reminisce
Recalling joy and fun.

Those days have power to cheer us still
When sadder time arrives
And we reflect and contemplate
The meaning of our lives.

So let’s be glad for times before
And times to yet appear
And praise the Lord who gave us life
Though we may shed a tear.

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Front cover: pastel by Molly Verity.

Back cover: Anthea Dove’s books.



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EDITORIAL

Summer 2022

The Platinum Jubilee has been a wonderful affirmation of Queen Elizabeth.

I enjoyed many events, including a street party, village fair and church services. A special memory will be the London pageant, where dance, dress, music and colour exhibited our multi-cultural Britain and the Commonwealth and wider world. I was reminded of carnivals I had attended on Christians Aware visits to Barbados.

And there were the animals of Africa, lions, giraffes and flamingos. We see them all every time we go on our CA visits and work camps in Kenya.

It all made me think of the many times I have been with our groups to a little church which is perched on the hillside just south the Equator and the town of Nanyuki. It is at the foot of Mount Kenya and is visited regularly by climbers.



Naro Moru Church.

Inside the church there is a small plaque commemorating the visit made to the church by Princess Elizabeth just before she knew that she was queen.

Many things have changed in Kenya since then. Independence came in 1963 and the country became a republic within the Commonwealth a year later. Today we may visit a growing and modern country. There are problems of course – as there are everywhere in our world. But the people of Kenya are proud of their history, including the visit to their country of a future queen. The plaque remains in place and is a visual reminder of a strong and enduring link between two nations.

Christians Aware has a strong and enduring link with the Anglican Church in Kenya. Exchange visits have now taken place for over forty years.

We plan to publish a small book of the history of our link, hopefully this year. It is called **'Kusafiri Pamoja'. Christians Aware and Kayo celebrate a journey of friendship and of 'sharing ways and wisdoms'.**



A group taking part on a workcamp at Naro Moru.

Our link will go on. There will be visits and exchanged when our world returns to normal life, which we anticipate will be soon now.

We must think and pray for the bishops from Kenya and from all over the world who will come to Canterbury for the Lambeth conference this summer. Due to the still uncertain situation concerning the virus, they will not be encouraged to leave Canterbury to visit friends. The conference itself will be short.

Our link with Kenya will go on, together with our many other international links.

We look forward hopefully.

Barbara Butler

CHRISTIANS AWARE YOUTH CONNECTIONS

The aim of Christians Aware Youth is to build connections, friendships and shared understanding amongst young people across the world. The objective is to give the young people an insight into the lives and perspectives of others internationally, generating respect and building a generation focused on justice and peace. By linking them up and giving them a platform to think and work together on shared issues and questions, we will see where the young people take the opportunity to collaborate.

Young people aged 15 to 25 years old will sign up for the scheme. Zoom meetings will be set up monthly for 1½ hours to talk about an issue that is important to them. Young people will be grouped with others of a

similar age across the world, linking young people from the global North and South. One young person each time will choose the theme, and the others will consider a contribution, which may be a picture, poem, video,



Ayub Khan represents young people on the CA board of trustees.

brief story, statement or discussion point. The group will then get a chance to share their thoughts, ideas and reflections. This may lead to an action, campaign, fundraising, shared blog or vlog. It may not result in follow up action, which is fine too.

We will pilot the scheme with a group of 6 young people. It is hoped that if it is successful, further groups will be formed and meet separately, with shared learning and reflections being fed to a central point for collation.

The young people will feed back to the rest of Christians Aware by writing updates for the magazine and website, and by preparing a presentation for the Annual Conference.



Young people at the 2022 annual conference with + John Perumbalath and Revd. Rana Khan.

AFGHANISTAN UPDATE

David Page

With the world's media focussed on the war in Ukraine, Afghanistan has unfortunately dropped out of the headlines. But the situation in the country remains of great concern. There is no sign of any accommodation between the Taliban regime and the international community. The country's assets remain frozen, the banks are still not functioning, economic activity has declined alarmingly and there has been no positive movement in the Taliban's policy towards women or girls. If anything, they have become more conservative in their approach, increasing women's fears for their own future and that of their children.

On the positive side, there is relief in the humanitarian community that the country avoided famine and the

deaths of thousands of vulnerable families and young children during the harsh winter. This was in large

part due to the remarkable activity of UN agencies like the World Food Programme and the NGOs which work with them. The WFP and its partners provided 15 million people with food and nutritional support and its supplementary feeding programme reached a million and a half pregnant women, young mothers and children at risk of malnutrition.

Members of the public responded very generously to the dire situation they saw for themselves on their

TV screens and funds raised by those appeals helped agencies like Afghanaid to get targeted aid and support to vulnerable communities in remote places before the winter set in. But credit must also go to the Afghans themselves, who once again showed their remarkable resilience and their ability to cope with the most extraordinary challenges.

Unfortunately, there is little sign of the country's troubles or its vulnerability coming to an end. In fact, quite the opposite: 2022 is set to be more challenging than 2021. Food prices have risen dramatically over the past few months, making basic items of the Afghan diet, like flour, rice and sugar, even less affordable. The UN estimates that this year 24 million Afghans are facing severe food insecurity and 2 in 5 Afghan children are at risk of severe malnutrition. There is also mounting evidence that

the poor have run out of their normal coping mechanisms and are having to resort to dangerous expedients like selling their children or their organs.

The UN launched an appeal for \$4.4 billion dollars from member states for humanitarian aid for Afghanistan but by the end of March barely half had been committed. The Ukraine crisis is making enormous financial demands on the world community and Ukraine's grain exports, which have been a critical element in the World Food Programme's resources, are subject to a Russian blockade, which is having a serious impact on the global humanitarian effort. 'We truly are in an unprecedented crisis' the WFP Programme Director recently told the UN. 'Food pricing is our number one problem right now... But by 2023 there may well be a food availability problem. When a country like Ukraine that grows enough food for 400

million people is out of the market, it creates market volatility, which we are now seeing.'

Afghanaid remains committed to playing its part in responding to Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis and is launching an appeal on 30th June called *By Her Side*, which will raise funds to provide women in rural Afghanistan with the support, tools and training they need to feed their families and rebuild their lives. Afghanaid is very grateful for the support of Christians Aware and its readers for our work and we hope you will continue to remember Afghanistan in future.

David Page is a trustee of Afghanaid, a British charity which has been working in Afghanistan for nearly forty years. For more information about its work, go to Afghanaid.org.uk

THE LEGACY OF YORKSHIRE MONASTICISM CHRISTIANS AWARE SUMMER SCHOOL AT PARCEVALL HALL, YORKSHIRE DALES, JULY 18 - 22, 2022

The legacy of the Yorkshire monasteries is rich and continuing for the whole of the UK and beyond.



Middlesmoor.

For instance – the Cistercians of Rievaulx and Byland abbeys became famous as sheep farmers and sheep farming continues to flourish in

Yorkshire and all over the UK.

A current debate is whether sheep farming is of benefit or whether it would be better to abandon sheep and plant trees. Farming today will be a central part of our discussions at

the summer school and there will be a visit to a farm in Middlesmoor – a beautiful place above Patley Bridge.

One of the early Yorkshire monasteries grew at Whitby, where Abbess Hilda presided from 657 – 680 CE. Hilda made Whitby famous for its learning and one of the legacies of early monasticism we will explore will be education.



We are delighted that **Gervase Phinn** has agreed to join us and to give a presentation: **'Education – the Greatest Gift.'**

Some Books by Gervase Phinn



Our summer school will be set in a beautiful place at Parcevall Hall, where visitors come specially to see the fantastic gardens.

The hall is surrounded by the limestone countryside of the Dales where we can walk or enjoy the scenery as we drive out on the visits. We have chosen to go to Bolton Abbey on the River Wharfe, the place from which the Augustinian canons went out to minister to the people in the surrounding villages. Rural ministry will be on our agenda.

The full programme for the summer school and also the application form are included with the magazine. Participants are welcome for the full week or for part of it. Please ring the office up if you have questions or if you would like extra copies of the programme.



Parcevall Hall.



Bolton Abbey.

CHRISTIANS JOIN OPPOSITION TO “ANTI-REFUGEE LAWS”

Ellen Teague

On 2 May the Dioceses and Ethnic Chaplaincies of Southwark, Westminster and Brentwood celebrated the annual Catholic Mass for Migrants. The service at Westminster Cathedral was preceded by a colourful procession of banners from London’s diverse ethnic communities, parishes, chaplaincies

and civic organisations. For decades the Churches have welcomed people from many shores, and this Mass – celebrated the international diversity of Catholic congregations and their contributions to society. It also demonstrated a Christian commitment to welcoming strangers. Refugees abandon their homes to

escape war and persecution. They have to seek safety elsewhere. The right to do so, set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention of the United Nations, has protected millions worldwide for decades. Yet, today in the UK the anti-refugee laws are putting that basic right to a safe haven in the UK under threat. In April

2022 the Nationality and Borders Bill passed in Parliament, turning the anti-refugee Bill into the anti-refugee Laws. The Government chose to punish refugees rather than protect them.

Refugee groups described the passing of the government's Nationality and Borders Bill into law with no amendments as a "dark day for human rights and humanity." They have urged the government to embed principles of welcome, protection and integration into its asylum policy. The new Act does nothing for any of these values.

No one should have to risk their life in search of sanctuary, however many people don't have an option as the Nationality and Borders Act does not offer safe routes for some of the most vulnerable people who need protection. The government's plan to expand the number of immigration centres in the UK is also a cause for concern, as are plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda for processing, which is a punitive move for people who have already gone through so

much already. The passing of the Nationality and Borders Act denies people, who have often made a perilous journey to safety, equitable treatment on our shores.

At the heart of the Act is a matrix of measures to punish refugees for arriving spontaneously or travelling via other countries, including discrimination against recognised refugees on the basis of how they travelled, and criminal penalties for arriving without documents. This approach to irregular entry has been deemed illegal by numerous experts and criticised by the United Nations Humanitarian Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The Act also includes: a process for fast-tracking asylum appeals in detention. This resurrects a previous system of 'detention fast-track' that was so unfair it was ruled illegal by the courts; provisions to roll-out asylum accommodation centres, which are currently being trialled at the asylum camp at the former Napier barracks; and provisions that would make it harder for victims of

modern slavery to gain recognition and support.

The Act's cruel measures appear to be at odds with public sympathy towards refugees. For example, more than 200,000 people signed up to host refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine; and recent research from the British Red Cross shows that over 62% think that the UK should welcome refugees. "Asylum seekers and migrants seeking a safe or better life in the UK are to be treated like toxic waste to be dumped in foreign lands," according to Professor Ian Linden, a former director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations.

More than 250 organisations have now joined to defend the right to seek safety from war and persecution in the UK. They are committed to a compassionate approach that welcomes and supports refugees.

See: <https://fighttheantirefugeelaws.org/#thecampaign>

ACTION CARD JUNE 2022: EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

*If you are thinking a year ahead,
SOW a seed;
ten years, PLANT a tree;
a hundred years,
EDUCATE THE PEOPLE.*

It is vital for the future of our world that the learning process is a creative and happy experience. This is true for children of all ages and for adults. There is the need in teachers and learners for expressing feelings, tackling conflict, valuing colleagues as people, group development, building trust, Sharing responsibility. Above all learners and teachers of all backgrounds and gifts must work on real issues.

The school of Barbiana was founded



a very long time ago, in the 1950s by Don Lorenzo Milani. It was set in a remote region of Italy, about thirty miles from Florence and near to where the artist Giotto was born. It was for boys who had dropped out of school. Attendance was voluntary

and the pupils were asked what they needed to learn which would be useful to them in their adult lives. The school was a happy community and when its founder died the pupils took it over. In 1969 the school moved to Calenzano in Florence

where it continued its life and work and also then included adult learners. The school has made real links with the real world of poor people and its message is still needed in every community and country today and into the future.

The Young Men's Welfare Society in Kolkata has founded many schools for the poor children of all ages in the city. There are pavement schools and also night schools which make it possible for the poorest children

to grow up into life and work most suitable for their gifts. Crucially, the parents are involved in every stage of their children's education and opportunities are also offered for them to learn and grow.

Some Possible Actions

- Read 'Letter to a teacher from the school of Barbiana', Penguin Books, 1972.
- Read 'The Wrong Boy' by Willy Russell, Doubleday, 2000.

- **Make a list of your own educational needs for your life in our 21st Century world. Find a way of meeting a few of your most important needs. Find a way to help other people to do the same.**

- **Learn about a community school in the developing world.**

Christians Aware can offer links and resources:
barbarabutler@christiansaware.org.uk

CHRISTIAN TRUTH IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

David Peat

It is a commonplace to say that our world is changing rapidly, and that new knowledge is constantly being revealed. This applies particularly to the worlds of science, technology, and medicine, but it also applies to our own interactions and understandings with other people in very different social, national, and economic situations from our own. But it is also deep within the Christian tradition of Prayer, Worship and Daily Living that the Christian God is also one who constantly reveals himself in new ways, and shares with us amazing journeys of discovery. My own doctoral supervisor – who had no particular religious inclinations – used to say 'kindly remember that the Almighty still has a few cards up his sleeves'. Decades later I am still glad that he said that to me.

Fruitful sources of meditation for us are the two narratives of the Magi in Matthew's Gospel and the Shepherds in Luke's Gospel. Both are narratives of a group of people who undertake their searching as part of a group. They are not just random individuals seeking alone. They belong. And belonging is essential for personal believing and understanding. We think of John Donne's Meditation, in the year 1624, 'No man is an Island'. It is perhaps for us in the individualistic West to take note of the traditional African understanding 'I am because we are'. But there is a difference between the Shepherds and Magi narratives in that the shepherds are watching, waiting, and caring, whilst the Magi are looking at the outside world as represented by the star and interpreting it. Both

these narratives are necessary in the Christian tradition – Shepherds need the Magi and the Magi need the Shepherds. Personal caring goes hand in hand with understanding the external world, and both of these occur in the context of community sharing. In our rapidly changing world of today it is supremely important that concern about ecclesiastical structures does not distract the church from thinking creatively about the world.

It is also important to remember that the Magi bring gifts, and that one of these is money or gold. Money here is perceived as being a shared offering by the whole people on our journey to God. Money 'offered to God' means that it is shared together amongst God's people in whatever way seems appropriate.

Some of it may be shared through what we call public services such as medicine, teaching or social provision, or, particularly today, when we are concerned about global warming, in concern for the natural environment and the development of new sources of energy generation without the use of fossil fuels. All this involves a sense of mutual sacrifice, which we interpret as the gift of myrrh, but also concludes with the gift of incense rising to heaven in prayer and worship. Significantly a recent report in Britain by the Office for Budget Responsibility suggests that now we should be less focused on risks to the public finances and more focused on outcomes of public wellbeing. The Magi narrative has also often been interpreted in terms of "the three kings" tradition, seen as the coming together of three groups of people from Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Internationalism is a very significant part of the Magi tradition.

We can find more insight into these journey narratives from the account in Mark's gospel of three actions of Jesus described in sequence. Here Jesus feeds the Five Thousand, withdraws up the mountain where he can see the disciples in trouble on

the lake, and then enters and stills the storm. Jesus first shares in the community and begins by asking what there is there already – and that is the lad with the loaves and fishes. Jesus thus receives from the world. He then withdraws from the world, and this enables him to see, despite the fact that it is the darkest hour of the night. But this vision leads to conflict, powerfully expressed as the Stilling of the Storm. Here, the individual disciple is saved from drowning, but also the cause of the drowning is removed. In the contemporary world, salvation of each and every individual is dependent on the reform and salvation of the whole world. Contemplation, which is aloneness but not loneliness, must be the preparation for action and this action frequently requires entry into conflict. This significance of the threefold pattern of community, withdrawal, and action is further expressed in the gospel accounts of the Last Supper. After the meal of the breaking and sharing of the bread and wine Jesus withdraws ‘a stones throw’ from the disciples in preparation for the conflict he is about to endure following his arrest. But what has this to do with our contemporary world and how does it affect our preaching and pastoral work in the context of global warming, the Covid epidemic, and economic and social issues?

First, the danger of global warming requires co-operation and collaboration by all the nations of the world. Rising carbon emissions from one country affects all countries, and the problem has, of course, been brought about by greater emissions from the more industrialized nations. Poorer nations, such as those in Asia and Africa have contributed much less to the problem but will nevertheless suffer as much as the richer nations. This has been highlighted by the insensitivity of Britain reducing its financial contribution in the overseas financial aid budget. Second, during the Covid epidemic the provision of vaccines in less developed countries has been far less than in the wealthier countries. This has been partly brought about by the way

international patent rules operate. Third, for a variety of causes, some arising from the long term social and economic effects of global warming and the Covid pandemic, there has been a slowness in international awareness and unwillingness to take action.

But there is another part of the Christian tradition inherited from its origin in Judaism, and that is the part played by the Law and the Prophets. Jesus upholds the tradition of the Law and the Prophets. This is exemplified on the Mount of the Transfiguration before His Passion when he communes with Moses as the giver of the Law, and with Elijah the Prophet. In the past few years the Law and the Love of God have been expressed in the work of medical, teaching and social workers, and prophecy has been expressed in the work of scientists, technologists, environmentalists, and some, but not all economists. Sadly, too there have also been some false prophets, for example, climate change deniers. All this can be related to the old tradition of Crisis, seen not as a time of disaster, but rather a means of new and totally unexpected truth being revealed. We think of the words of Jesus ‘There will be signs in the sun and the moon and in the stars... peoples hearts failing them for fear... then lift up your heads for your redemption is drawing near... heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away’ and of course ‘you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’ Freedom and Truth will always interact with one another in countless ways, and some of those ways will require participation in the conflicts encountered in the search for them.



David with +John Flack.

It is here too that we bring to mind the Sacramental Tradition of Christian understanding. At Baptism, of a child perhaps, the child is both given an individual name but also welcomed into the Christian community of the local believers which in turn, is the expression of the universality of the whole church, living and departed. At every Eucharist we encounter the living and risen presence of Jesus through the receiving of bread and wine, the fruits of the earth from wheat and grapes and the work of human hands. Let us also bring to mind that the wheat and grapes depend on rain, soil and the sun which are themselves a consequence of thousands of millions of years of development, as also, of course is the star which, at a late stage in its evolutionary processes, led the Magi to Bethlehem. The Eucharist is the great Sacrament of the whole of Creation. God has not only created the universe but also created the laws by which that universe operates and invites us to share in these processes over the few years of our own lives.

Perhaps the most important conclusion we can draw from all this is that the corporate Church in its pastoral ministry, teaching, and preaching must always be aware of where people actually are, whether socially, economically, nationally, or internationally. This includes having some awareness of technical and scientific knowledge. We need to realize how much more God has to reveal to us through the operations of the natural laws that he has created, and that our understanding of these laws is a constantly developing process. Christians believe that God as Jesus enters deep into the world at His Incarnation. Here

Christians Aware can and is playing such an important part in the understanding of the controversies and conflicts of our contemporary world situations.

David Peat is both an Anglican priest and an astrophysicist.

WE GIVE THANKS

We give grateful thanks for friends who have died recently. They were all very special people and will be very sadly missed. It was a privilege to know them.

DAVID WARD

David had been a member of Christians Aware for a long time. We will always remember his support and enthusiasm for many aspects of our work. He joined pilgrimages, sometimes driving a mini-bus and sometimes walking along with us. He came to the annual conference and was invaluable as the 'travel manager.' He met people at the railway station and returned them there, no matter how difficult the timing was. He sometimes wrote interesting and unusual articles for the magazine.

The latest article, written for our very recent Spring 2022 magazine was entitled 'Arctic and Antarctic.'

AILSA MOORE

I met Ailsa when she was Director of the Ockenden Venture. I went to meet her to ask for help in writing a book about refugees. Ockenden had a special focus on refugees from Tibet and Vietnam. Ailsa was delighted to help and she lent me some wonderful photographs. She soon became a friend and joined the Christians Aware board of Trustees. She came to conferences and the summer school and she joined international visits, including one to Brasil and one to South Africa. She was co-editor of our popular travel book, 'Go to the People.'

JUDITH WOODHEAD

Judith came to many conferences and summer schools, she introduced me to the Bar Convent in York and joined a visit to Rome. She was someone who had a wonderful gift of giving support and sharing ideas generously.

THERE IS NO END

There is no end to frail life's uncertainty –
We are but human and must not forget
Life is a gift and not a right or burden,
A gracious treasure, not a weighty debt.

Jesus has warned us that our life is passing –
We should not love it more than we love Him.
We can enjoy the world where God has set us,
But never spoil it for each selfish whim.

Sadness and sorrow will of course assail us –
They are, with joy, the fabric of our life.
Quiet endurance and concerned endeavour
Will help us through the times of stress
and strife.

God, give us strength to cope through
all our struggles,
Christ, be our guide in happiness and fear,
Spirit, sustain us in true love of others,
That we may know Your presence ever near.

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IRAQ - SOME INSIGHTS

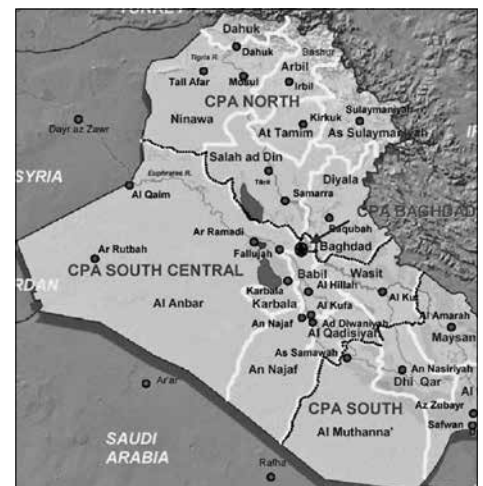
Chris Hewer

Iraq is like a multi-coloured jewel in which the three faiths that have a special place for Abraham in their systems have lived side by side for centuries.

Abraham was called from Ur of the Chaldeans, somewhere between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, to venture forth in faith and trust in God. The Jews were brought to this land in the sixth century BCE "Babylonian Exile" and lived, fully integrated into Arab society, until the 1930s and 40s. In the desert 150 kilometres from Karbala stand the remains of a church that probably dates to around 500 CE, which was the

centre of a Christian settlement in the time that rivers flowed in that place. For the past fourteen centuries, Iraq has been associated especially with Shi'a Islam, being the location of the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, great pilgrimage destinations and the location of renowned centres of learning.

Foremost for pilgrimage is Karbala,



Map of Iraq.

the burial place of Imam Husayn, to which millions flock during the month of Muharram, culminating in the Arbaeen Walk on the fortieth day after the martyrdom of Husayn, during which some twenty million pilgrims from all schools of Islam and from other religions, from all over the world, gather to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his companions. The golden dome of the shrine of Husayn dominates the centre of the city, and it is never quiet with a constant flow of pilgrims at all hours. Inside the shrine there are massive halls to accommodate those who come to pray, to pay their respects to the Imam and to ask him to lend his prayers to theirs. The internal decoration of glazed tiles, mirror work and gold leaf is awe-inspiring. Truly, this is a House of God, and so all who come in good faith, whatever their religion or stance for living, are welcome guests. The scholars are pleased to engage in sincere discussions and hold with respect Christians who have sought to acquire some knowledge of the Shi'a school of Islam.

The Guardians of the Shrine of Imam Husayn are responsible for a great many projects to improve the lives of people in Iraq and beyond. They run hospitals to care for the sick without charge and have state-of-the-art specialist medical research centres to take full advantage of the latest developments in hi-tec medicine. There are housing projects to ensure that people have the opportunity to live with dignity in appropriate accommodation. The shrine of Husayn and his half-brother Abbas, who lost his life in the battle as he valiantly strove to bring back water for the children suffering extreme thirst, both have conference facilities to host international gatherings to address some of the issues facing us today. Such work is supported by a dedicated Centre for Studies

and Research with a team of staff members and a multilingual library. In order to address some of the misconceptions about Shi'a Islam and to enrich the lives of people, there is a satellite and cable TV company supported by the shrine authorities. This has an English language sister station based in London. The millions of pilgrims who visit each year require hostels in which they can rest, eat and refresh themselves. There are commercial enterprises under the direction of the shrine to provide employment and socially orientated goods such as purified water and natural yoghurt.



Shrine of Hussayn, Karbala.

As we might expect, those most disadvantaged in society have a special place in the life of Karbala. The Qur'an calls for special care for widows and orphans; too often subject to neglect in traditional societies that rely on extended families to supply social security. They are catered for here with all the necessary supports to live a well-rounded life. Education plays an important part in the development of society. There are girls' and boys' schools to serve all ages. When it comes to higher education, Karbala is exemplary. Several universities and specialist colleges are provided and students can access free places and stipends for living if they are needed. There is a university focussed on the education of future religious leaders, with all necessary facilities and staff. Perhaps special mention should be

made of the latest university to be founded, just three years ago, which is exclusively for women wanting to study in the three faculties: English and Arabic language to translator level, medical technology and pharmacy. The buildings are exquisite and obviously cherished by those who use them. They are equipped with the most modern educational technology; one glance at the 3-D computer generated dissection facilities is enough to inspire awe. The standards are set by national criteria and male and female teaching staff are encouraged to engage in research and link with other

institutions internationally. Both staff and students have access to a crèche and kindergarten to ensure that they are supported in the twin roles of motherhood and academic work. To encounter the students, fully at ease in their surroundings and with determination to advance their academic careers gives the lie to any notion that Islam should not allow girls and women to be educated and enter into the professions.

There is much more to Iraq beyond the Holy City of Karbala but for students of religion, there is so much to admire and learn from on the spiritual level and also to see faith expressed in action in the many projects run here through the welfare payments and free will offerings of Shi'a Muslims worldwide. Here truly every aspect of life is integrated and imbued with the spirit and teachings of Islam.

Dr Chris Hewer comes from a background in Christian theology, education, Islamic studies and inter-faith studies and has worked in the field of Muslims in Britain and Christian-Muslim relations since 1986. He will give a webinar for Christians Aware at 7.00 pm on Wednesday, November 9th this year.

A PRECARIOUS LIVING

Neville Jacob

Picture the scene, a remote Hampshire lane surrounded by fields drenched by a grey persistent drizzle at the end of a January day with just an hour of daylight remaining. The map on the app I had been using had led me down a rough track through two deep pools of water that had made my car engine steam and smoke and hiss; then, just yards from the route's end the car grounded on the central bank created by two deep wheel ruts on either side, both as deep as a bath. I was stuck, my car was stuck, there was no GPS available and no houses around. There was only one option open to me, so I walked until I found help; my kind rescuer brought his truck and rope and promptly got stuck himself. However, he knew someone with a bigger truck and a thicker rope and with much scraping and grinding the car was finally dragged the last 50 metres to safety.



The reason I found myself in this predicament was because I work for a delivery company that I shall call Thames. Why am I calling it Thames? Well there is every chance that I could be prevented from working for them should adverse comments become known. The job I have is part of the gig economy and is sold on the basis that you can work when you want and for as long as you want with no strings attached. This suits me as I only want a second income to pay my weekly bills and to leave a little over to save. The arrangement gives me

the opportunity to manage my own time and follow my own interests knowing that there is potentially enough income to cover my costs. Personally, the most beneficial reason is that it gets me out of the house and to parts of Hampshire that I might not otherwise see. I have delivered to city centres, urban and suburban areas, villages and outer rural too. On a good day when the sun is shining and Hampshire thatched cottages are in bloom and people are friendly and security gates open as you approach, there is no

better job in the world.

I know that Christians Aware readers will be looking for a little more meat but I need to describe the routine working arrangements that Thames has established, because there are deeper issues beyond my transient moments of happiness and delusion.

The process of finding work on a given day is via the Thames app that promotes offers in the shape of blocks of time. Typically, you will be offered a 3 hour block for £39, that is the going rate. The block will average about 40 parcels to be delivered to an area that will only become apparent once you scan a code at the pickup station. You then set off and deliver your parcels following a route prepared by the app or you can follow your own route as you wish. If a parcel cannot be delivered because the customer is not at home and there are no neighbours available you must return it to the station for redelivery; so if you pick up a parcel in the New Forest, live in Southampton, but deliver around Portsmouth and have to return it, you need to drive all the way

back to the New Forest before you can make your way home. Out of the £39 you earn you must pay all your petrol, car insurance and mobile phone costs.

The kicker is that the parcels in a group may take longer to deliver than the allotted 3 hours and I have found that sometimes two additional hours work may be required to complete a given block. To be fair to Thames, that length of time is the exception rather than the rule; the financial rewards are not great, but surprisingly some

money is made. You can claim travel expenses through your tax return but 'Hire and Reward' car insurance comes in at a staggering £1700 pa. There are details that I have omitted for the sake of brevity, but in essence this is the system.

The day my car got stuck, I finally discovered what I meant to Thames as a parcel deliverer. Despite the poor to non-existent GPS signal in the area, there was a spot where I managed to ring through to Driver Support and describe to them the situation I was in. Thames are very good at responding quickly to such calls despite the fact that they are operating from the west coast of the United States. There is a fairly time-consuming formula that you have to go through when your call is taken, 'Are you currently pulled over?', 'Yes', 'What is your name?' and 'Thank you, how may I help you today?' Courtesy and politeness are heavily written into the script, yet all the while, on this day, the rain was flowing across my phone and down my neck. Having explained the fact that my car was completely stuck, the 'assistant' went off to talk to her boss, more time passed, and then she came back and asked me if I had rung the emergency services. Hearing that response, I wondered how quickly the emergency services would be likely to come to tow me out? After my car was eventually pulled free I did manage to complete my delivery but Thames never contacted me to find out how I was or if I was safe. Without a hint of irony, my call to Driver Support ended with the assistant assuring me that if I could not complete my delivery then I was free to return the parcels to the station. There was nothing I could say in reply. That night, I was sent the

prescribed follow-up email to my call requesting feedback on how helpful I had found Driver Support that day. I might start a competition on that one to find the pithiest reply.

So what has any of this got to do with Christians Aware? Readers will be aware of Supreme Court judgements against Uber on 25th March 2021 which found that drivers do indeed work for the company, a crucial advance in recognition of our status. Thames has not yet accorded its workers that distinction via a contract, although it has appeared to be more concerned with block timings and issues around safety. Drivers were recently offered a collapsible snow shovel, which I took, (well it was a free gift) but do they seriously think that I am going to be delivering parcels in conditions that require a snow shovel all for the grand sum of £40? None of this changes the fact that I am not an employee of Thames under any circumstances as arrangements currently stand. For those for whom this is their main income, parcel delivery is a truly precarious living for the cliff edge is always, literally, a day away.

It may be that serious issues around legal status, safety and workplace rights are principally matters for Parliament and the Law as the institutions where laws are framed; lobbying remains an important part of the process too. For Christians Aware, there are related social issues that fall heavily within its purview and which I hope it will consider. Thames is not unusual in having its key decision makers tucked safely away overseas and free from contact even by email. Emails that are sent to Thames, if not ignored,

are acknowledged with a formulaic response that may bear no relation to the original enquiry; these company strategies for communication are truly disheartening. At ground level, managers at the pickup station have no real authority to make changes according to local circumstances. All who work either as a driver or as a manager in the station are merely deliverers of distant policies planned by distant people. This is dehumanising, destabilising and isolating and a profound injury to everything that represents meaningful and purposeful work and makes (what sociologists describe as) a precariat of us all. The role that Christians Aware can play here is to raise voices in support of a political agenda for change, and most especially to continue doing what it has been doing for so long now, to purposefully and meaningfully support, encourage and create relational human activity, for that is at the centre of what we are, we are God's creation in relation. It is about the long-term, about creating ongoing foundations of confidence and trust and of just simply being together. In the desert of disconnection and disfunction where we all subscribe to communication shortcuts to human interaction, Christians Aware is a watering place that, I believe, offers refreshment, renewal and of course, hope.

In the meantime, my word of advice to all Christians Aware readers and car drivers everywhere is to absolutely and completely avoid driving down Garlick Lane in Ashley, because you will definitely get stuck.

Neville Jacob is a priest and writer. He was an early member of Christians Aware.



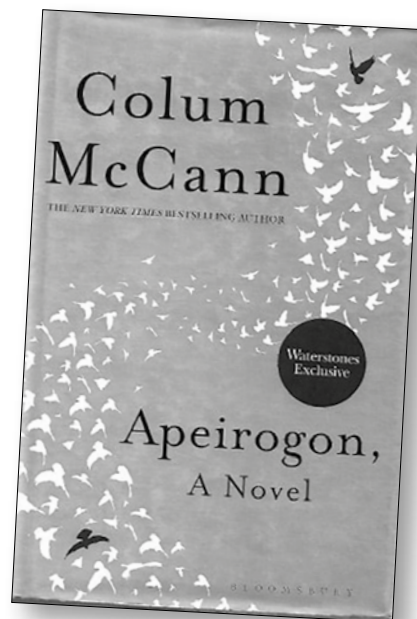
A BOOK REVIEW

by Claudine McCreadie

**Apeirogon (2020),
a novel by Colum McCann,
Bloomsbury, 2021**

Apeirogon, by the Irish American writer Colum McCann, is, in his words, “a hybrid novel with invention at its core” (p.461). ‘Apeirogon’ means “a shape with a countably infinite number of sides ... countably infinite being the simplest form of infinity” (p.82). The novel reflects this complexity, but it is a challenging, rather than a difficult, read and a rewarding one. Apeirogon is pre-eminently about suffering, but not without hope. I found it refreshing to read a contemporary novel written in English that addresses the impact of social and political distress on the individual, raising acutely the existential – and spiritual – question of – *how do you respond to your suffering?*

Apeirogon is set in Israel and Palestine in 2016. McCann’s two main protagonists/heroes are **real** people, alive to-day. Rami Elhanan is a “67 year old graphic designer, an Israeli, a Jew, a seventh generation Jerusalemite” (p.217). Bassam Aramin is “a Palestinian, a Muslim, an Arab, 48 years old” (p.231). Both men are married with children, Bassam to Salwa, and Rami to Nurit. They share a suffering that every parent dreads – the loss of a child. Bassam and Salwa’s daughter, Abir (Arabic for perfume, fragrance of a flower), was killed in East Jerusalem on Tuesday 16 January 2007 by a rubber bullet, shot by an unnamed Israeli soldier. She was ten years old. Rami and



Nurit’s daughter, Smadar (Hebrew for grapevine, opening of a flower), was killed in West Jerusalem on 4 September 1997, in an attack by three Palestinian suicide bombers. She was very nearly 14 years old.

The novel recounts imaginatively these events, ranging far in references that include migratory birds, the Irish explorer Christopher Costigin, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the death of Francois Mitterand, Theresienstadt concentration camp, the high-wire artist Philippe Petit and life in Bradford (to give a few examples). Suspiciously, I checked a number of these out on the internet and found them all accurate!

The structure of the novel is novel! It consists of 1001 sections (an allusion to the Arabian Nights) in two parts. Some sections are several paragraphs long, others are a few words and nine are photographs. Part 1 ends

with Section 500, extracts from actual interviews with Rami and Part 2 begins with Section 500, extracts from actual interviews with Bassam. In between is the one sentence Section 1001 – both an opening, a conclusion and an invitation:

Once upon a time, and not so long ago, and not so far away, Rami... travelled on his motorbike from the suburbs of Jerusalem to the Cremisan monastery in the mainly Christian town of Beit Jala near Bethlehem ... to meet with Bassam ... and (with) listeners gathered ... in the shadow of the Wall, having come from as far apart as Belfast and Kyushu, Paris and North Carolina, Santiago and Brooklyn, Copenhagen and Terezin, on an ordinary day at the end of October, foggy, tinged with cold, to listen to the stories of Bassam and Rami, and to find within their stories another story, a song of songs, discovering themselves – you and me – in the stone-tiled chapel where we sit for hours, eager, hopeless, buoyed, confused, cynical, complicit, silent, our memories imploding, our synapses skipping, in the gathering dark, remembering, while listening, all of those stories that are yet to be told.

Rami and Bassam came together through The Parents Circle -Families Forum (PCFF), a joint Israeli-Palestinian organisation of over 600 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member in the ongoing conflict. https://www.theparentscircle.org/en/about_eng/ The organisation has concluded that reconciliation between the nations is a prerequisite

to achieving a sustainable peace and utilises all resources available in education, public meetings and the media to spread these ideas.

How do we respond to the suffering imposed by conflict and injustice? Rami and Bassam have responded by participation in the PCFF, and McCann has responded by writing his novel about them. In his acknowledgements, he urges us to respond by supporting the PCFF – *“they really deserve all the support we can give”* (p.463). There is a London-based branch – <https://www.familiesforum.co.uk>

An article by Palestinian writer Susan Abulhawa for Al Jazeera (11 March 2020) argues that the novel *“mystifies the colonisation of Palestine as a ‘complicated conflict’ between two equal sides”*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/3/11/apeiogon-another-colonialist-misstep-in-commercial-publishing>. Abulhawa, who lives in exile, her family line in Palestine stretching back centuries argues with feeling that Apeiogon is misleading at a fundamental level:

“The compelling centre of every parent’s worst fear is threaded through (a) dizzying kaleidoscope ... functioning as linguistic smoke and mirrors, blurring what is truly the simplest, oldest story in human history: a powerful group of people stole a land, colonised it, and are going about obliterating its indigenous people”. I suspect (McCann) wrote this book with a sense of solidarity and a desire to foster “dialogue”. But it is possible to do great harm with the noblest of intentions. The rhetoric of dialogue can be alluring – the idea that talking to find common humanity is all it takes to dismantle structural racism and notions of ethnocentric supremacy. It can make all kinds of people, even victims themselves, become purveyors of injustice. Dialogue and negotiations – as Palestinians know well after nearly 30 years of doing exactly that – always works in favour of the powerful”.

I understand Awuhala’s case but what are the options? The *“enormous*

power disparities ... and ... structural oppression” to which she refers were captured for me in Bassam’s pain as well as in many other places in McCann’s book. Throughout I was **fearful** for Bassam, driving his old car to meetings on deeply pot-holed roads, being stopped at check-points, in physical pain with his injured leg. But how is he to live? And Rami, clearly privileged, and all too aware of his privilege, how is he to live? And how are we, the readers, the potential listeners of section 1001, to live? How do we all live with **to-day’s** suffering, **to-day’s** pain, **to-day’s** grief, in the place where we are **now**? And how do Bassam’s and Rami’s and our choices affect those around us? What difference do they make? I warmly recommend this novel to help us think – and to act – in faith.

Other web sites recommended by Colum McCann:

<https://cfpeace.org> – Combatants for Peace, founded in 2006, is a non-profit, volunteer organization of ex-combatant Israelis and Palestinians, men and women, who have laid down their weapons and rejected all means of violence. We are working together to end the occupation of Palestine, bring just peace to the land, and demonstrate that Israelis and Palestinians can work and live together. Our Ultimate Goal is to end the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders; two states living side by side in peace and cooperation or any other just solution agreed upon in negotiations.

<https://www.telosgroup.org> – While massive conflicts ravage the broader Middle East, we believe that resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains an essential moral and security imperative for the world. We believe that a viable two-state solution remains the solution to the conflict. Yet we also believe that any policy or outcome—whether one-state, two-states, multiple-states, or some other solution—must be measured by how well it maximizes

dignity, freedom, and security for both Israelis and Palestinians in equal measure. And we welcome anyone into our fold who shares our values, including our commitment to support non-violent means to end the conflict, regardless of politics. Ultimately, Palestinians and Israelis bear responsibility for waging and sustaining peace. Yet resolution of this conflict is an urgent American interest. And peace will remain elusive without strong, bipartisan encouragement and assistance from Americans. Unfortunately, while Americans – and especially Americans of faith – are among the most influential stakeholders in the region, most have never met either an Israeli or a Palestinian or seriously encountered both Palestinian and Israeli perspectives. On the contrary, important segments of American society, and often its Christian faith communities, persistently advocate for one-sided postures towards the conflict. Such advocacy educates the next generation in near complete isolation from the peoples and present realities of the region.

<https://narrative4.com> – **Narrative 4 (N4) is a global network of educators, students and artists who use art and storytelling to build empathy between students while equipping them to improve their communities and the world.**

Using our core methodology, the story exchange, we help students understand that their voices, stories, actions and lives matter, and that they have the power to change, rebuild and revolutionize systems. N4’s work focuses on the broad, yet intersecting, themes of faith, identity, immigration, violence, and the environment. N4 ambassadors around the world are creating tangible change with personal stories as their foundation. Today, Narrative 4 is working in four continents, sixteen countries, and eighteen US states. Our global headquarters are in New York City and our N4 Ireland global centre is located in Limerick, Ireland.

NOTES FROM AN ALLOTMENT

Mairead Moynihan

The National Garden Scheme brochure introduces our site as... "A hidden oasis. There are over 100 whole, half and quarter plots growing a wide variety of fruit, vegetables and flowers. Meadows, Anderson shelters and a composting toilet".

But what of the plot holders for whom the "oasis" is far from hidden? Besides us locals, we number folk from Afghanistan, Africa, the Baltic, Bangladesh, Eastern Europe, France, India, Ireland, the Philippines and West Indies. So where potatoes, cabbage and beans were once the staple, the menu now includes the likes of peppers, sweet corn, coriander and melons.

But why are we here? Besides the back-to-the-land ideal of growing-our-own, some fondly recall working the land as children with grandparents back home. Some love the social aspect of it all. Or appreciate just having something to do. Others fear looming political and eco-agricultural crises. However local it may seem, working a plot is something we *can* do for ourselves in the face of a sometimes overwhelming sense of global catastrophe.

Indeed! Plot work tends both physical and mental fitness. The virtue of a bit of manual labour for otherwise screen-bound employees has been long-clear. But, especially cued by Covid, living with more green-space has also become a default media prescription for minds troubled by the strangeness of the times.

Right at the start of Lockdown, Michael Gove famously singled out allotments as naturally socially distanced and thus ideal places to get away from home. So, as long as we wore our masks, we could continue to do what we did with entire legitimacy.

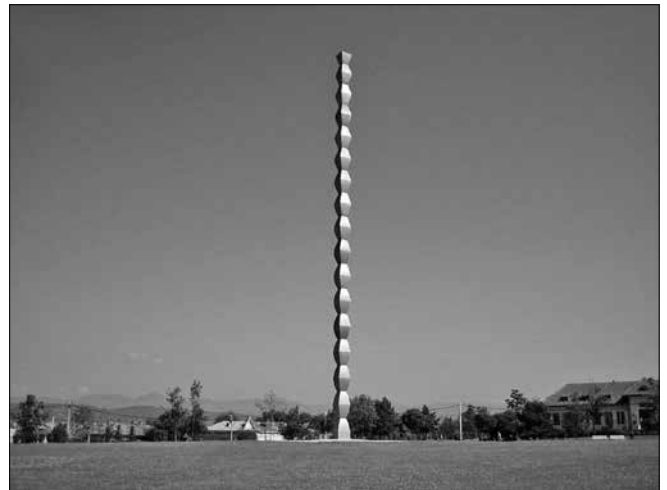
One unpredictable Covid bonus was having time and space to indulge dormant creativity. New scarecrows and decorated plot number-plates began to appear. One plotholder made a "Daily Corvid Briefing" tableau. "Caw, caw, caw". Three watering cans in a row, spout-noses



Caw, caw, caw.

down, one with a mat of unruly hair, intoning the latest stats and rules for all to obey.

Another rose to the Getty Museum's lockdown challenge to copy textbook works of art using stuff-to-hand. How to use a long metal crossbar from a runner bean frame? Also 40 big water-cooler bottles (now used as cloches)? Well? Why not make an 8th scale model of sculptor Brancusi's "Endless Column" war memorial in Romania? Oddly, it proved quite popular around the site.



Brancusi's "Endless Column", 1938.



Plotholder's "Infinite Bottle", 2021.

Children welcome! There's a well-signed "10 mph" speed limit for drivers using our "One-way for motors" loop-road. Bikes large and small ride both ways though. Wheelbarrow jaunts too. Dens come and go. One treehouse lasted until the original tenants left for uni. Even then, it only came down when its sycamore grew too big.

Two friends from the same Czech village, both with families, share a small lawn at the back of their plots for play and picnics. And one young mum was recently spotted hip-cradling her 3-month baby with one hand; planting

potatoes with the other.

Older children help. Watering. Barrowing bark-chip from communal bunkers. Ever-popular fruit-picking. One 6-year old grand-daughter, remembering last Autumn, was saddened by the lack of plums and apples when she visited again this May. Who'da thought Seasons could do that?



Wheelbarrowing.

Naturally, all Edens have issues. In our case un-tended plots. Perceived trespass. Occasional theft. However, there's an understanding that plotholders sort their own differences and we generally seem to. Hopefully gleaning scraps of new wisdom as we do.

Recently, there's been more serious debate about what to sell in the society's shop and whether or not to keep our sturdy old machines for communal use. On one hand "We've always done it this way". On the other "Duty of care". Committee members were resigning or refusing to sign up. Although touch-and-go at one stage, things have now settled down (with slightly less risk to assess) to most people's satisfaction.

Then there's badgers vs foxes. Both make their mark but the former particularly like sweetcorn. Perhaps fortunately, the two seem to be mutually exclusive. So when Brock moved in about 10 years ago, Reynard went elsewhere and many of us abandoned corn. Then, who knows why, the sett was vacated and foxes and sweet corn are back.

Other wildlife is more welcome. Surrounding trees and hedges host sparrows, blackbirds, woodpeckers, starlings and crows (and their corvid briefings). Ducks haunt the boundary brook. Herons, buzzards, kites and gulls fly overhead on missions of their own.

A 10 year old meadow on an unusable plot provides a

haven for insects. Getting an ideal blend of wild flowers and grass is taking time though. Happily, a member who learned to scythe when young, also well-qualified in plant biology, now maintains the sward with a determined brief for biodiversity.



Gathering.

Next to the meadow, hazel coppice provides more habitat on a plot once blighted by horse-tail. Just up from that, another horse-tail plot remains in hand, used by two members to grow produce for a local food bank.

Other volunteers clear and let vacant tenancies. Manage the shop. Collect rents. Keep the books and audit them at year's end. Organise records. Deal with emails. Carry out plot inspections (required by our site lease). Promote the NGS open day. Mend taps and fix leaks in the water supply. Make new paths. Convert half-plots to quarters. Paint signs and number plates. Build

communal bunkers for weeds and bark-chippings (freely delivered by local tree surgeons). Etc.

All great work! So a homage and thanks to everyone involved.



Even toddlers can help!

Mairead Moynihan wrote a chapter on allotments for our book 'Just Food? Food and Farming for a Sustainable Future'. It is available from the Christians Aware office.

MAKE FAIRTRADE FLOWERS BLOOM

This is the challenge given to us all by **the Fairtrade Foundation**. It was one of their fairtrade fortnight campaigns.

There are 67,000 workers in the flower industry in East Africa. Without fairtrade the workers have very few rights. They have low wages and poor conditions, including risks to their health. The environment is also threatened if there is no limitation on the use of pesticides and also water.

The Fairtrade foundation agreements with estates offers workers reasonable wages, linked to the world bank stipulation. Services are offered, including schooling for the children of workers. gender equality is essential as is environmental sustainability.

Results are dramatic including much lower greenhouse gas emissions, improved working conditions, contracts and dignity for all.

Panda Flowers in Naivasha, Kenya, are a good example.



What we can all do:

- Always buy fairly traded flowers. Many well-known companies now stock them and they are clearly labelled. There is a wide range of flowers.
- Introduce fairly traded flowers in our churches.
- Organise a fair trade flower festival.
- Write about fair trade flowers on special festivals like Mothering Sunday.
- Discuss possibilities with local florists.
- Visit county shows and introduce Fairtrade flowers.



Christians Aware has a link to the Fairtrade Foundation and to Traidcraft, where we place regular orders.

We also sell the Munguishi Coffee from Tanzania and Zaytoun olive oil from Palestine.

Please contact the office for supplies.

VISITS AND VISITORS IN MADAGASCAR

Bishop Hall Spears

Mahajanga city prides itself on being a tourist centre. The majority of the visitors are Malagasy from the capital but we also have a few very good luxury hotels catering for the international tourists, especially French and the much fewer Germans. This aspect of the city only impinges on me when I am at the Cathedral on a Sunday morning welcoming visitors or when I am in the happy position of going out for a meal. From now on as the weather in the capital gets cooler we will see more and more visitors enjoying our warmer and reliably dry climate.

This wedding took place on 7 May and the location of this photo is absolutely obligatory. It is under the iconic symbol of the city, a giant baobab tree beside the sea. The groom is a former Roman Catholic priest who now wishes to be ordained as an Anglican for obvious reasons.

It now seems a long time since Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter. On Palm Sunday the cathedral congregation assembled at Bishop's House for the blessing of the palms and processed to the cathedral. The younger scouts marshalled the procession and clearly loved their moment of authority as they stopped the traffic. However, for many of us the



events were overshadowed not only by war in Europe but also a local bereavement.

The Rev. Patrick is in charge of the parish of Maintirano, in the far south of the diocese and his mother came to visit him and her grandchildren. The Thursday before Palm Sunday she died suddenly. According to Malagasy tradition she had to be brought home to Mahajanga for

burial. The huge complication was that there is an absolute taboo in Maintirano on transporting corpses by boat and there are no roads going north from there towards Mahajanga. Thus the family had to hire a taxi and set out north east towards the capital. On the first night of the journey they were robbed. On the second day they were caught in violent rain and the taxi had to be pushed through deep mud. Then their driver decided he had had enough and they had to find another taxi for the next leg of the journey. This happened again. Meanwhile the corpse was on the roof in a rough plank coffin. They arrived a week later in Mahajanga on Maundy Thursday and I was among a large crowd awaiting for them. What they had been through showed on their faces and clothing.

The coffin was lowered off the roof and carried into the house. It was a hot day- almost 40C – and the stench was overpowering. The coffin was then opened to reveal a gruesome sight of the decayed body. I was full of admiration for the Mothers Union members as they fulfilled their obligation of taking the body and wrapping it in a shroud which they give to members.

As you can imagine all this added to one's reflections on death on Good Friday and the gift of eternal life celebrated on Easter day.

Easter Monday is a great holiday here and thousands take to the road to the beaches north of the city. Churches and organisations and extended families travel according to their means. For the majority this is a long walk setting off at or even before dawn. The cathedral had organised a taxi-which was insufficient for the numbers travelling and their luggage. A major part of the treat is a generous picnic and of course



at this temperature one needs lots of water. The cathedral youth (and not so youthful) cannot travel without a sound system so we also had to contend with huge amplifiers, batteries, etc.. Suffice it to say we eventually reached our destination, the "Petite Plage" where we had reserved a compound over the road from the beach. Immediately on arrival all tucked into



food. I had brought a large sandwich so I feasted on that. Various families offered me plates of spaghetti, etc. but I had more than I could manage.

Then the music centre was set up and all mingled and a few of the young ones went onto the beach where the tide was far out. I was astonished when a little over an hour later it was announced that it was lunchtime! I was even more astonished when the faithful Emilienne appeared with table cloth, china and enormous cooked lunch. Neighbours offered me duck and when I declined they were so sorry I didn't like duck – so I had just a little. I forget what came next. The group in front of me insisted I had a plate of their pasta and fish. When the meal was over several commented that they had not offered me salad as everyone knows the bishop doesn't eat lettuce. For a moment – but only a moment – I was tempted to add to the list. Overfed, exhausted by Holy Week and Easter I promptly went to

sleep in spite of being right next to the sound system. I woke up to find that many had done likewise or gone to the beach. At 4 pm it was time for the great trek home.

I didn't have long to wait for my next outing. On the Saturday morning I had to be at the cathedral by 5 am to set off with the Scouts to Marovoay where I was to inaugurate the celebrations marking the centenary of scouting in Madagascar which climaxed with the presentation of a new flag and the distribution of centenary scarves/neckers, one of which was solemnly placed around my neck. 'Am I the oldest person to receive their first item of scout uniform?' I asked the congregation. More singing, more dancing and more food. **You wouldn't think I am in a country with a famine in the south.**

The following weekend was the Youth of the South of the Diocese

meeting at St. James in the suburbs of the city so although I spent the full days with them I could commute home to bed and QUIET. On the Saturday morning there were supposed to be reports from the various groups. Nothing had been prepared and they were all very taken aback when I said, in no uncertain terms, that this was unacceptable, especially since this and the same silly

discussion had been an identical repeat of what has happened annually since I arrived in the diocese. Did they want me to deliver rules as to how to proceed or did they wish to sort themselves out – my preferred option. After a heated discussion they decided that they must take responsibility themselves. Interventions like this on my part I always imagine is going to drastically decrease my popularity but, in a way I don't understand, it does the opposite.

Back at Bishop's House when I should have been writing to you I was in something of a panic trying to organise our Archbishop's first "Pastoral visit" to the diocese. He is also Bishop of the Seychelles.

Thanks to everyone for concern and support.

Bishop Hall Spears is the bishop of Mahajanga Diocese in Madagascar



Christians Aware has a fund for the Diocese of Mahajanga.
Our fund for Toliara Diocese, in Madagascar, is also still open for contributions.

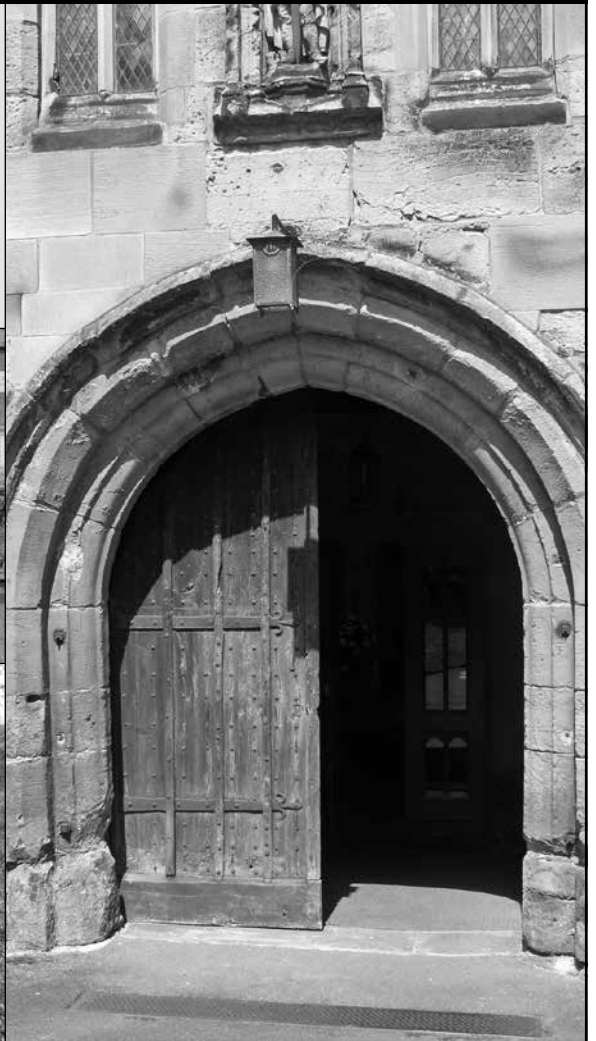


MAY 2022 PILGRIMAGE TO REPTON

St. Wystan's Church in Repton was founded in 653CE, when Repton was capital of Mercia and Penda was king. The Anglo-Saxon crypt survives. It was built over a spring and became the burial place of Mercian kings. It was an early place of pilgrimage.

**The crypt was described by Sir John Betjeman as
*'Holy air encased in stone.'***

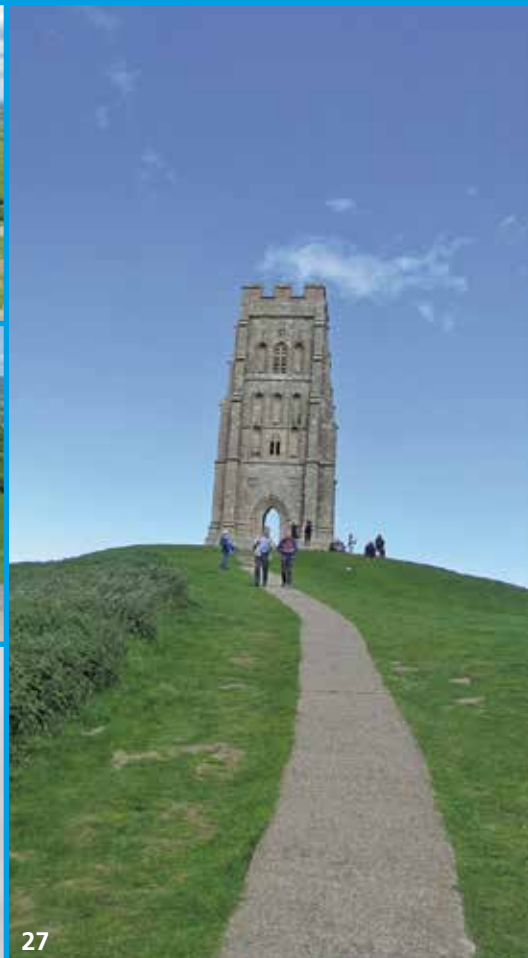
The CA pilgrimage was led by Rob Robinson. After the visit to the church and crypt, time was spent by the River Trent.





PILGRIMAGE IN SEARCH OF ALDHELM





ALDHELM PILGRIMAGE (CONTINUED)



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A KEY TO ALDHELM PILGRIMAGE PICTURES

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- 3 Gerard and Margaret Crawshaw
- 4 Bridge in Frome
- 5 Street in Frome
- 6 Encounter in Frome Parish Church
- 7 Mels Church
- 8 Grave of Siegfried Sassoon in
Mells Churchyard
- 9 Group on walk along Macmillan Way
- 10 Macmillan Way
- 11 Jane
- 12 Lunchtime prayers
- 13 Cider apple orchard
- 14 Macmillan Way
- 15 Macmillan plaque
- 16 Minibus at Castle Carey
Methodist Church
- 17 St. Margaret's Chapel, Glastonbury
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ANOTHER "ALDHELM" RIDDLE

Since Aldhelm's time, we've moved three centuries on
A long time, yes, but do please hear me out.

You find me here at Broad-Ford-on-Avon
The church much changed, both inly and without.

At Shaftesbury the Abbey rules supreme
And Aldhelm's former haunts are her domain.

To Shaston we now owe allegiance –
To Shaston we account for all our grain.

And Shaston has control of Broad Ford's hands
Each serf who shepherds, butchers, ploughs or scythes.

The task they've given me, as you might guess,
Is guarding all the grain that goes as tithes.

Dick Waller

26 YEARS OF CHRISTIANS AWARE PILGRIMAGES

1997 – North York Moors to Whitby (St. Hilda)

1999 – St. Cuthbert's Way (Melrose to Lindisfarne)

2002 – Pembrokeshire Coast Path & St Davids

2004 – West Highland Way (Milngavie to Tyndrum) & Iona

2005 – West Highland Way (Tyndrum to Fort William)

2006 – North Wales, Pennant Melangell to Holywell

2007 – North Norfolk Coast Path to Walsingham

2008 – Lindisfarne

2009 – North Downs Way to Canterbury

2010 – In the Wake of Margery Kempe

2011 – Hadrian's Wall & The Venerable Bede

2012 – A Cornish Pilgrimage

2013 – Ireland, The Wicklow Way to Glendalough

2014 – Lleyn Pilgrimage

2015 – St. Cuthbert's Way to Lindisfarne

2016 – An East Anglian Pilgrimage (Julian of Norwich)

2017 – North York Moors to Whitby (St. Hilda)

2018 – Compostella (Camino Ingles)

2019 – St. Cedd & St. Peter's Way

2022 – A Somerset Pilgrimage (St. Aldhelm)

2023 – A Lindisfarne Pilgrimage (St. Aidan & St. Cuthbert)

The list was prepared by John Goold

ST ALDHELM

Gerard Crawshaw

Aldhelm was born in Wessex in around 639 CE. When he was a young boy, he was sent to Canterbury to be educated under Adrian, Abbot of St Augustine's, and had soon impressed his teachers with his skill in the study of Latin and Greek literature.

Aldhelm returned to Wessex some years later and joined the community of monks in Malmesbury, Wiltshire. He embraced the monastic life and, in 680 CE, became the monks' teacher. His excellent reputation spread far and wide, and scholars from France and Scotland came to learn from him. By this time, Aldhelm is said to have spoken and written fluent Latin and Greek and was able to read the Old Testament in Hebrew. He wrote poetry, composed music and sang – King Alfred the Great placed him in the first rank of poets in the country and his ballads were popular even as late as the 12th Century CE. Aldhelm excelled at playing many different instruments, including the harp, fiddle and pipes.

In 683 CE Aldhelm was appointed Abbot of Malmesbury. Under his leadership, the abbey continued to be a seat of learning and was given many gifts from kings and nobles. Aldhelm enlarged the monastery at Malmesbury and built the Church of St Peter and St Paul. He founded monasteries in Frome and Bradford-on-Avon, where perhaps he also built St Laurence's Church which still stands today.

During his time as Abbot, Aldhelm noticed that instead of attending to the monks at Mass, the local people preferred to spend their time gossiping and could not be persuaded to listen to the preacher. So, one day, he stationed himself on a bridge, like a minstrel, and began to sing his ballads. The beauty of his verse attracted a huge crowd and, when he had caught their attention, he began to preach the Gospel.

The historian William of Malmesbury observed that if Aldhelm "had proceeded with severity ... he would have made no impression whatever upon them." But by seeking out to people where they were and speaking directly to them, Aldhelm had succeeded in "impressing on their minds a truer feeling of religious devotion."



*William of Malmesbury – 1090-1143 CE.
Historian and Librarian at Malmesbury
Abbey.*

In 705 CE, the Bishopric of Wessex was split into two dioceses and Aldhelm was made Bishop of Sherborne. In his time as bishop, he rebuilt the church at Sherborne and helped to establish a nunnery at

Wareham. He also built churches at Langton Matravers and the Royal Palace at Corfe.

In Aldhelm's time Wessex was on the "front line" between the Anglo-Saxon Roman Church and the Celtic model of

Christianity to the west. Aldhelm was deputed by a synod of the church to remonstrate with the Britons of Dumnonia (Devon and Cornwall) on the Easter controversy. British Celtic Christians followed a unique system of calculation for the date of Easter and monks also bore a distinctive tonsure. These customs are generally associated with Celtic Christian practice, which differed from the practice of the Roman Church. Aldhelm wrote a long and rather acrimonious letter to king Geraint of Dumnonia (Geruntius), achieving ultimate agreement with Rome.

On 25th May 709, just four years after his consecration, Aldhelm died at Doullting in Somerset. His funeral procession travelled 50 miles from Doullting to Malmesbury (and probably through Frome). Today we celebrate 25th May, the date of Aldhelm's death, as a feast day to remember the first Bishop of Sherborne – a true evangelist and an inspiring Saint.



*Statue of Aldhelm in
Sherborne Abbey.*

Gerard Crawshaw is a Christians Aware pilgrim leader. He lives with his wife Margaret in Frome and led the recent pilgrimage in search of Aldhelm.



Malmesbury Abbey.

IN SEARCH OF ALDHELM - A SOMERSET PILGRIMAGE, MAY 2022

Barbara Butler

The week began in the spirit of pilgrimage with worship in the Methodist Church in Frome. Gerard Crawshaw planned and led our week together. Our pilgrimage was in memory of Bryan Halson who created worship booklets for many of our pilgrimages. We were in the footsteps of Aldhelm. We went to places where he had founded early monasteries in Frome and Bradford on Avon. Our walk round Frome began a week of making connections between the time of Aldhelm and our own time.

Our first walk, through rich green fields, took us to Mells. We saw the grave of World War One poet Siegfried Sassoon in the churchyard.

Inside the church we saw a recent stained-glass window of St. Francis of Assisi.



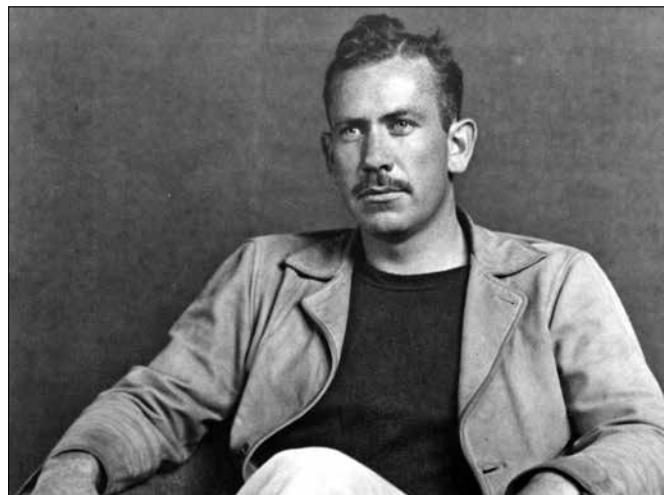
Francis of Assisi window.

We went to Bruton, a historic Somerset market town which had been the home, before the Reformation, of Augustinian canons. It is also the home of the 17th Century Sexy's alms-houses, which are still occupied. Bruton was more recently, in 1959, the home of the American writer John Steinbeck. He said that his time in Bruton was one of his happiest. He went there to write a new version of Mallory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur.' He is remembered



Siegfried Sassoon.

for so many other works, the most famous perhaps being his 1939 'Grapes of Wrath'. His empathy for the poor farmers of the great depression made a contribution to the American 'New Deal' which gave so much hope for the future.



John Steinbeck.

Our walk from Bruton to Castle Carey was along the Macmillan Way. The way is 290 miles long and lies between Boston on the Lincolnshire coast and Abbotsbury.

We walked along the way from Bruton to Castle Carey. It was a beautiful experience and in good weather. We walked through fields and along the edge of hillsides. We walked through cider apple orchards and a barley field. In Castle Carey we were welcomed into the Methodist Church there, with space for a rest, a warm drink and refreshment. The plaque to Douglas Macmillan was a reminder of why our path had been named, the Macmillan Way.



We began our visit to Glastonbury, joined by Bob Taylor, by spending time in St. Margaret's Chapel and the Royal Magdalene Almshouses. The buildings date back to 1250CE when they were established as a pilgrims' hospital. The gardens were beautiful and bright when we visited and the chapel was inspirational. For some of us this was a sad visit because we

remembered meeting iconographer John Coleman there. He often wrote his icons in the gardens and sometimes gave lessons. Now that 'Icon John' has died we do have his icons to enable our meditation and prayers.



Icon John.



One of John's icons.

David Ward wrote of John, 'He often said that prayer was central to writing an icon and often he could be found in a sacred place, church, or cathedral working on an Icon'.¹

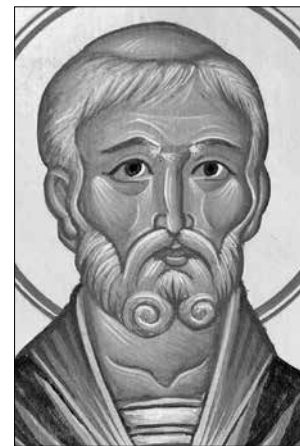
Most of our time in Glastonbury was spent in the abbey. We had an excellent leader for this visit, dressed as an Anglo-Saxon, he took us from place to place and talked about people and history. Glastonbury is a place of legends, including those of Joseph of Arimathea and King Arthur. There is evidence for a 7th Century CE foundation. Dunstan was abbot and between 940 and 963 CE he created a beautiful and wealthy place. He created a thriving community and introduced Benedictine monasticism. Some of us first visited Glastonbury

for the Dunstan pilgrimage in 1988 CE in memory of his death as Archbishop of Canterbury on May 19th, 988 CE.

Some of us climbed up the tor whilst we were in Glastonbury, others explored the town with its bright and varied new age culture. The tor is 158 metres high and can be seen for miles around. It is steep and has a monument on top. It is thought that it remained when the surrounding countryside eroded to form the Somerset levels.

The focus for the visit to Wells was naturally the cathedral. Aldhelm founded the first cathedral in 705 CE and the building we visited was built between the 12th and 14th centuries CE. The famous scissor arches were a safety measure created at the end of this period. The cathedral is surrounded by beautiful medieval buildings including the bishop's palace, two schools, a hospital and a chapel. A highlight of our visit was the opportunity to meet Mike and Janet Capel who travelled from their home in Dunster. They have led many of our visits to Zambia and the strong link they established will continue into the future.

We walked along the canal into Bradford on Avon. The Kennet and Avon canal runs from Bristol to Reading. We saw many barges along the way, some simple and some luxurious looking. We met the friends of Sabeel at the famous Saxon church of St. Lawrence, and we shared reflections and prayers for the Palestinian people.



St. Dunstan.

In normal times we have arranged many visits to Israel/Palestine and this was a wonderful opportunity to think about some of our friends there who live very challenging lives. We were invited to have lunch at the home of Judith, one of the friends of Sabeel. We were privileged to sit in a bright summer garden perched on the hillside overlooking the city. After lunch we went to a pilgrim chapel at the top of the hill overlooking Bradford on Avon and then we walked to a stunning tithe barn before returning to the Ammerdown Centre.

Our week was a true pilgrimage with lunch-time readings and evening prayers every day. Our home was the Ammerdown Centre with its peaceful chapel and gardens. We got to know each other on the way and also had an insight into local communities. Our pilgrim journey was life-giving – and it has only just begun.

¹ David Ward, who died recently, wrote a paper on Icon John which will be included in a future magazine.

REFLECTIONS ON A PILGRIMAGE

Lorna Brockett

This was my first pilgrimage with Christians Aware; I was part of a group of 13 people, many of whom had been on pilgrimages before. It was a welcoming and inclusive group. Reflecting on the experience, I thought of what we need as pilgrims, and what we received.

First of all, **hospitality on the journey**. We received this from the friendly and helpful staff at the Ammerdown Centre, in its lovely setting, and also from those who generously welcomed us during our daily journeys. On our first day, we shared in worship at Wesley Methodist church in Frome. The beautiful and prayerful service was led by the Rev. Margaret Crawshaw, the wife of our group leader, Gerard Crawshaw, and it was followed by a meeting with the congregation, where we shared tea, coffee, cake and conversation. On another day, after a walk through fields and orchards, we were warmly greeted with a welcome cup of tea at the Methodist church in Castle Cary.

Another memorable welcome, after a shared prayer time at midday with the Bradford on Avon Friends of Palestine, was given by Judith Hammond, who invited us into her beautiful house and garden, high on a hill overlooking Bradford on Avon, where we had our picnic lunch. Judith was preparing for a sponsored bike ride to raise funds to help communication between young

people in Bradford on Avon and in Tubas, in Palestine.

Pilgrims need **nourishment** on the journey; as well as the refreshments generously offered, we needed spiritual nourishment. This was provided by the midday thought, a reading which was shared in different places on our journey, usually in the open air, but once in the minibus. We were also nourished by our evening worship, with a wide range of readings and texts from different sources, that encouraged us to reflect on the meaning of our journey and led to sharing and conversation. An interesting daily challenge was a riddle written by St Aldhelm, which we managed to solve between us. And on several of our trips, we enjoyed the input of knowledgeable guides, who communicated their enthusiasm and their love of the places they talked about.

We also need **support from our fellow pilgrims**. As I was walking one day on a narrow track across a steep hillside, I realised that I could not have done this on my own. I kept going because of the people ahead of me and behind me. A smile, a word exchanged, a conversation, gave us energy and strengthened us on our journey.

Enjoyment and appreciation of the present moment is another important aspect of pilgrimage. There was the opportunity to admire the

scenery, to notice wildlife and plants, to be fully present to the world around us, as well as to enjoy one another's company.

We also need **hope**. We were well-provided for in every way, but an atmosphere of hope and expectation helped us to see the positive side of our travels.

And finally, **thanksgiving**. In spite of all the tragedy and difficulties engulfing our world, we have so much to be grateful for. On the final evening, we had the opportunity to express our gratitude to Geoff Manning, our kind, unflappable and expert driver, to Gerard for his careful planning, preparation and guiding, and to Norma Hayward for her help in the preparation and the financial aspect of our pilgrimage. It was also an opportunity to thank one another for the company, shared fellowship and inspiration we found in each another.

What we needed on the pilgrimage, we also need in the journey of our daily lives as Christians. I resolved to carry the learning from the pilgrimage into my daily life, and left encouraged and strengthened, with the words of Bunyan's hymn in my mind: 'I'll labour night and day to be a pilgrim'.

Lorna is a sister of the Sacred Heart Community



AN ECOLOGY GATHERING IN DURHAM CATHEDRAL

John Bennett

Just prior to the Glasgow UN Global Climate Summit, supporters of the Anglican Centre in Rome, in Yorkshire and the Durham areas held an ecology gathering in Durham Cathedral. It gave us the opportunity for ecumenical reflection, prayer and a focus on work for ecology and unity together.

Alongside our prayer, and our personal involvements in climate action and care for the environment, it provided a forum for further ideas and activities that could be taken up. We spoke of how we could make any investments we had more up to date in the light of ecological concerns. We spoke of ways in which energy could be saved in the home or office and recent advances in air-source heat pumps, that may help us save resources and avoid the use of fossil fuels.

The Anglican Centre in Rome

does not only have a purpose for ecumenical dialogue and unity work through the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox and Protestant Churches. It has also taken up issues of modern slavery, the migration crisis in Europe, inter-faith dialogue and an involvement in environmental issues. It has a close relationship with the Sant Egidio community of Catholic lay people, working in many cities across Europe, from Rome to London to serve the poor, refugees and prisoners.

Representatives of the Anglican Centre from Yorkshire and Durham saw they could work together to host an environmental gathering before the COP 26 Glasgow UN Climate Conference. We met in Durham, in the Prior's Hall, near to St Cuthbert's resting place in Durham Cathedral in October 2021. Cuthbert is one of



the North of England's best-loved saints whose story has a kinship with the natural world and a concern for its protection. At a time when their whole world was collapsing around them, 8th century Christians in these British islands kept their hopes alive, lit by the faith and the example of Saint Cuthbert. We considered a theme of " Shine a Light on Ecology and Unity " just prior to the Glasgow UN Conference.



COP 26 in Glasgow has seen representatives from almost two hundred countries agreeing finally, after considerable differences being

expressed between those of the first and third world,, to accelerate the fight against the climate crisis and to commit to tougher climate pledges. The two week conference made significant accomplishments, even at the last minute, including new pledges on methane pollution, deforestation, coal financing, as well as completion of long-awaited rules on carbon trading and a U.S. China deal. The summit also closed with calls on governments to return again to the table in 2022 with stronger pledges to slash greenhouse gas emissions and to provide more available funding for nations most vulnerable to a changing climate. The crucial and sometimes tense dialogue has left some despondent, arguing that it resulted in inadequate progress to address the severity of the climate crisis. A number of climate activists and campaigners sharply criticised the COP26 as a fortnight of talks that became a public relations exercise or in Greta Thunberg's words "blah blah blah" and greenwashing. It will of course be in the actions and practise of each individual country during 2022, whether COP 26 continues to have awakened a global response. The practical action will have a considerable effect on the next round of talks that are scheduled. Those

living in the most vulnerable and poorer places on the globe have the most to lose, but our integrity is also at stake here in the west.

One branch of the growing ecumenical dialogue across the Churches, the Anglican-Orthodox Church Dialogue in 2015 submitted a valuable contribution to our Christian ecumenical response to the environment. It was called **“In The Image and Likeness of God: A Hope-Filled Anthropology”**. This dialogue expressed something more of the Christian hope in ecological and theological terms and is worth reading along with Pope Francis encyclicals, **Laudato Si and Fratelli Tutti**. Christian hope needs to be retained in the face of the inevitable consequences of industrialised nations, including our own, who have since the 19th century, been ignoring the reality that climate change will happen. The Anglican-Orthodox Church dialogue saw that it is by the power of the Holy Spirit, humanity responds in praise to God’s gift of creation. As living beings that praise God together we participate in the divine life In 2 Pet 1. 3-4 the writer says *‘Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.’* It follows that the healing and restoration of creation by God, are reflected in Christ’s risen life and our following of him in constructive, active and hopeful grace .

So, as ecumenical Christians we invited the Catholic theologian **Dr Carmody Grey** from Durham University to address our gathering in Durham on the subject ‘Shining a Light on Ecology and Christians in Unity’.

She spoke from Berne in Switzerland indicating that Cop 26 was to be

a unique Kairos moment of great significance affecting the whole of humanity and creation. It was a very last opportunity, as irretrievable things were already happening to this planet, such as devastating flooding, wildfires and temperature changes, in an increasingly divided global community. She pointed to Irenaeus of Lyons vision of peace and unity describing how he combated Gnosticism in society which threatened the essence of the gospels. Gnosticism with its emphasis on two world orders, emphasised a divided, split humanity of two orders, the physical and the spiritual. Some religions have over many centuries a history of dualism. Fortunately there are instances today, where dialogue is forged, and listening can take place, across different world faiths and viewpoints. Irenaeus, Carmody Grey reminds us, stood for the Trinitarian God, undivided, and the Creator of all that is, finding fulfilment in Jesus Christ. This does not mean one way of thinking, or that all should believe the same. What it does mean is a dynamic in which we recognise that we walk together on this planet, and that we can listen, learn and contribute from our different perspectives as the persons of the Trinity, affirm and contribute to each other.

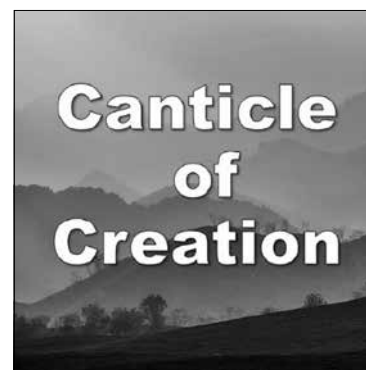
Carmody Grey argued, that In our various Christian communities, we can continue to pray for the ongoing outcomes of COP26, and also for unity in the human community over climate matters. We are fellow beings with all other living things, united at the level of God’s grace for all. She saw, in the ecumenical Christian community that we can work for the peaceful unity and harmony of human race, that can work for the common good. Listening, dialogue, openness to those different from ourselves is better than isolation, distancing ourselves or hostility.. Working for the unity of all those who call themselves Christians

to become a sign and sacrament of creation becomes a witness to God’s unconditional love for all that is made. Carmody indicated we need to take to ourselves that all creatures are objects of God’s unconditional love and purposes All of creation requires our respect and our desire to serve a more sustainable purpose, rather than just being there for our

use and exploitation, like a factory processing goods for consumption. St Paul describes the divine unity, where all things come together in Christ, in Colossians 1.15-17 and I Cor. 15.24-28



Dr. Carmody Grey.



Carmody Grey described how St. Francis in his **Canticle of Creation** has written *‘All Creatures praise God’* where the whole of life is one of praise in unity. The ultimate purpose of creatures, oceans, ecosystems and wild life of all descriptions is not to be found in us, but in God’s purpose for them directing them towards that fullness of being which is their final goal. Rev.21 5. tells us eternal life in this final book of the Scriptures will be a shared experience of awe and wonder in which each creature, including us will be resplendently transfigured. So these thoughts have consequences for us to seek three levels of Unity. These three levels are; working to be united with creation; working for the peaceful harmony across the human race; and working for the unity of those who call themselves Christian.

We went on to share practical ideas of how we were already and could work further, towards more

sustainability. We also shared in prayer with other visitors in the Cathedral at the burial place of St Cuthbert. We were led by the Revd Canon Bob Kelsey, author of "Praying for the Earth". His published book contains many short prayers on ecological themes.

At the burial site of St Cuthbert we remembered how for a number of years St Cuthbert lived on the Inner

Farne, the nearest of the islands off the Northumberland coast at Seahouses. The 'Vita Sancti Cuthberti' says of the creatures and birds of the northern islands, "*Such gracious gentleness have they learned from the holiness of the place, or rather from those who made the place holy by their way of living there, that they have no shrinking from the handling or the gaze of men*".

May the unity and breadth of the Christian hope be ours, in what we do for the climate this year.

John Bennett is Regional Representative for the Anglican Centre, Rome. Ripon, Yorkshire Support Group.

FIX THE FOOD SYSTEM

Ellen Teague

We have all noticed our food bills increasing all this year. Across Britain, food banks and community food hubs that helped struggling families, older people and the homeless during the pandemic are now seeing demand soar.

Elsewhere, the rising cost of food is causing desperation. A perfect storm of war, extreme weather and Covid is driving global food prices to levels that will cause social unrest in some parts of the world, according to the UN World Food Programme. We saw protests in May in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Sahelian Africa. In fact, according to the UN, a staggering 276 million people are at that critical level, including nearly 49 million people in 43 countries that are on the brink of famine.

It is timely then that CAFOD is running a 'Fix the Food System' campaign. It suggests that climate change, the Covid pandemic and the rising prices of food and agricultural products – such as fertilisers – as a result of the Ukraine crisis, have together revealed the fragility of our current global food system. Even deeper causes arise from the unequal concentration of power in the hands of a few huge agri-businesses acting in their own interests. Public and private money has flowed to large-scale commercial agriculture dominated by big business. Priority is



Sri Lanka suffers from drought.

given to profitable crops for exports primarily geared towards the needs of Western diets, not towards the livelihood or nutritional needs of the local populations from where these crops originate. For example, over 80% of the fruit and 50% of the vegetables that we eat come from other countries.

According to Columban eco-theologian Sean McDonagh, industrial agriculture takes a hidden toll on human health and on the environment. "Very seldom is the transport and greenhouse gas cost of our food properly accounted for" he says. Modern food processing encourages long distance transport of food across countries



Sean McDonagh.

and even across continents. In Britain, the distance milk is transported has increased 30 times in the past 40 years. Many feel that a radical change is needed in agricultural policy and practice in order to address hunger and poverty, social inequities and environmental sustainability questions. CAFOD suggests that

the business-as-usual scenario of industrial farming, input and energy intensiveness, and marginalisation of small-scale farmers, is no longer tenable.

CAFOD is calling to the UK Government to support small-scale farming which goes a

long way to reducing poverty as it is two to four times more effective

than other sectors in raising incomes among the poorest people. Small farmers are highly efficient too. They produce around 35% of global food production on just 12% of the land. They also usually produce a wider diversity of crops than larger farms. This contributes to a more nutritious diet, but also to ecological diversity which is so important for tackling the climate crisis.

Church agencies around the world are involved in supporting small scale agriculture very successfully. Caritas Bangladesh, for example, is helping develop local rice varieties and the Columban Missionary Society in the Philippines runs several organic farms. In Britain, we should review our food policies and make a commitment to change our lifestyle and food infrastructure in keeping with the carrying capacity of Earth and the protection of its climate.

Despite the transformational potential of agroecology to tackle the climate crisis and reduce poverty, it does not yet have a central place in UK international development policies nor in its climate strategy. But 2022

is a year of opportunity during which the UK government can support transformational action on food systems as it still holds the Climate Talks COP Presidency until the end of the year. Sustainable agriculture is beneficial to poor farmers, but it needs to be supported by the appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks.

Also, something fundamental is that both farmers and consumers need to be educated to value nature's intrinsic worth as a gift of God, rather than to consider it as simply a resource to be exploited just like any other commodity. We need more focus on local food production, and educational syllabuses to include teachings on values that promote a simple lifestyle and respect for the natural world. In my own home, this will mean less junk food, growing vegetables and fruit trees, alongside campaigning for food security for the world's poor.

In our Christian communities it is important to remember that the desire that everyone has 'daily bread' is mentioned in the Lord's prayer. In

the Eucharist, when we bring bread and wine to the altar we bring 'the fruits of the earth' and 'work of human hands' representing crops and vineyards, sunshine and rain, the God-given bounty of Earth, intended for all to share.

CAFOD food campaign plus a Leader's Guide for workshops

CAFOD's new food campaign is urging the UK government to keep the promises it made at the COP26 climate talks last year and support agricultural systems that tackle the climate crisis and support local communities first. The way we produce food is responsible for a third of all harmful greenhouse gas emissions and gives inadequate support to small farmers.

<https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Fix-the-food-system>

<https://shop.cafod.org.uk/collections/reclaim-our-common-home/products/fix-the-food-system-leaders-guide>

A REFLECTION FROM PAUL SOUTHGATE - CHAIR OF THE NATIONAL JUSTICE AND PEACE NETWORK

25 yrs ago I remember being full of hope. The world seemed to be coming together. There was a process of convergence. New Labour was elected – which in my case was hopeful. The new 'World Wide' Web came online. We looked forward and prepared for the new Millennium with hope, vision and ambition. Then, in the Noughties came the credit crunch, austerity, climate emergency, pandemic, wars, refugees. The process of convergence has stalled; a decoupling is underway. Where's the hope?

You all know of **Jane Goodall, the anthropologist. She published her book 'The Book of Hope' last October.** When she was interviewed

about it, the interviewer (Satish Kumar) asked:

"You have written this wonderful book, The Book of Hope. How do you

maintain hope? We are surrounded by all these big problems like the pandemic, climate change and poverty. You still maintain this deep hope in your heart. How do you do that?"

Jane replied:

"Well, first of all, let me explain what I mean by hope. Hope isn't something passive. I see us now as in a very dark tunnel, and at the end of this dark tunnel is a little star of light,

and that's hope. Well, we don't just sit at our end of the tunnel and hope that light will come to us. No. We have to roll up our sleeves and crawl under and climb over all the obstacles between us and that star of light. So hope is about action. If we lose hope, that's the big disaster. If we lose hope, why bother? When you have hope, you take action, and you see that you are making a difference..., and then other people get inspired, so it's a, sort of, outward spiral, gathering in more people as it goes."



Jane Goodall.

Well done, Jane. That's a very Christian view of what hope is. And that's what our next Conference is all about – Hope. The Ticket Office is open so make your booking for 22nd – 24th July. Our theme is 'Hope is a Verb with its sleeves rolled up'.

The 2021 Conference at Swanwick was attended by nearly 200 people. We took the theme, '2021: Moment of Truth – Action for Life on Earth'. Let's remind ourselves of some of the big messages from that brilliant weekend at Swanwick.

Fr Josh from the Vatican told NJPN that "you can count on the support of our Dicastery (a department of the Curia) as we work together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as families, parishes, communities, and institutions, to heal and protect mother Earth."

Mark Rotherham described the arms industry as "a huge shadow over our nation" and felt that "we need to withdraw legitimacy from this draw on global resources and energy."

Andy Atkins deplored the UK government's loss of credibility to deal with the crises facing us. "At a time when the government says it is leading the world it has cut its aid budget and has opened the door to further fossil fuel development, we

should be saying 'No More Fossil Fuel Exploitation' in this country!"

Lorna Gold applauded the role young people have played in stimulating climate action. "Young people have done more in two years than the rest of us have done over three decades" she said.

We were delighted to welcome many young people to the Conference. These university and school students told us bluntly that they would like "less of fossil fuel companies pretending to care and schools accepting money from them". They urged us to "challenge the increasingly hostile policy towards refugees, many of whom are victims of our UK actions in arms trading and raising global temperatures."

Following that, on 11th September our Network Day focused on Mental Health & Suicide Prevention. As a 'Northerner', I was very moved by this session. Northerners spent about 6 weeks longer in lockdowns, made poorer than the rest of England, were more likely to die, experienced a larger drop in mental wellbeing, more loneliness, more antidepressant prescriptions, more despair. Our speakers Holly and Joanne gave us a handle on the scope, scale and urgency of the massive challenge facing everyone.

Then on 13th November our Network Day digested COP 26 just the day after it finished. Was it a good COP or a bad COP? And we realised that it wasn't finished at all but that we had to redouble our efforts to avert an imminent climate catastrophe. The Day was an opportunity to reflect & respond to what happened at the COP in Glasgow, especially from the perspectives of those who actually took part in the pilgrimages and activities. We were inspired by the passion, energy and ambition of Chris & Clare Myers, Ellen Teague and Josh Evans. It has been said that 2% of people change the world, 8% watch it being changed, and 90% don't know it was changed.

Well, we do know.

On 2nd March the European Conference of Justice & Peace Commissions – there are about 30 Commissions and NJPN is now a fully paid up member – launched its Concerted Action 'Forging a New Culture of Peace'. In order to better discern the signs of the times we can take inspiration from Pope Francis' encyclical Fratelli Tutti on fraternity and social friendship: he describes war itself, and not only terrorist attacks, racial or religious persecution, as an affront to human dignity. That means that we have to forge the development of a new culture of peace which can be achieved only if we strive for justice through dialogue, pursuing reconciliation and mutual development.

Words of the 14th Dalai Lama:

**No matter what is going on
Never give up
Develop the heart
Too much energy in your country
Is spent developing the mind
Instead of the heart
Be compassionate
Not just to your friends
But to everyone
Be compassionate
Work for peace
In your heart and in the world
Work for peace
And I say again
Never give up
No matter what is going on
around you
Never give up**



The Dalai Lama, head of the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism.

44TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE, SWANWICK, 22-24 JULY 2022 - NATIONAL JUSTICE AND PEACE NETWORK

After months of sadness and uncertainty the NJPN Conference 'Hope! a verb with its sleeves rolled up' aims to inspire us to look for signs of hope in our communities and in our wider world.

Our hope is that, following the Conference we will all return to our communities with enthusiasm and increased commitment to work for a more just and peaceful world for all God's creation. We will consider, how, as activists and people of faith, we might support those in most need and enable them to envisage a more hopeful future. Over the weekend we will be identifying hopeful possibilities in our world.

We will listen to inspiring keynote speakers, take part in interactive workshops as well as in liturgical celebrations. There will be time to relax, enjoy meeting friends old and new. The peaceful atmosphere of the surroundings will provide a space for reflection and enjoyment.

Philip McDonagh will speak of a hope that requires courage – upright action for the sake of the future. Hope is rational – an escapist fantasy does not qualify as hope in action.

"Philip is co-author of the recently published work "On the Significance of Religion for Global Diplomacy" (Routledge 2021), Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Humanities at Dublin City University, and Director of the Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations.

As a serving Irish diplomat, as Political Counsellor in London, Philip played a part in the Northern Ireland peace process in the build-up to the Good Friday Agreement. He later served



as Head of Mission in India, the Holy See, Finland, Russia, and the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

Philip has published poetry and works for the theatre, including *The Song the Oriole Sang* (Dedalus Press, Dublin, 2010) and *Gondla, or the Salvation of the Wolves* (Arlen House 2016), a translation of Nikolai Gumilev's Irish-themed play written during WWI"

Fr. Patrick Devine, SMA, Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation which works to mitigate conflict and poverty in Africa. Fr. Devine serves as the organization's executive director, leading an international team of conflict resolution experts from various religious backgrounds and disciplines who are based in Kenya and neighbouring countries. In 2013, he was honoured with the International Caring Award, whose previous recipients include the Dalai Lama, Bill Clinton, and Mother Teresa.

Andy Flanagan Is the Executive Director of Christians in Politics, who believe that decisions are made by those who show up, striving to put kingdom before tribe and disagree well. Christians in Politics draws together Christians from across the political parties and beyond, and from across the breadth of the church.

Andy yearns to see a just rewiring of the global economic system. Andy juggles his political work with his career as a singer-songwriter and we hope to have the opportunity to listen to his music on Saturday evening. Andy is also author of *'Those who show up'* (Muddy Pearl, 2015). In the forward Archbishop Justin Welby writes "Andy is reaching out, inspiring and equipping us to become engaged with a system that affects us deeply, and through which we in turn can effect radical and transformational change across our society"

Conference Chair, Tim Livesey, CEO of Embrace the Middle East, which works with Christian partners in Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Syria and Iraq serving marginalised and excluded communities including refugees, people living with disabilities, vulnerable women and girls, very poor rural and urban slum communities. Previously Tim has worked as Director of Public Affairs for Dr Rowan Williams when he was Archbishop of Canterbury, and was Chief of Staff for Ed Milliband, Leader of the Labour Party. He had 19 years in a variety of roles in the Foreign Office and Downing Street, including four years running the UK's development programme in Nigeria.

A Just Fair will provide a marketplace for organisations wishing to share information and opportunity for action on a wide range of issues

Booking information:
<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/>

Christians Aware is a partner in this conference. Please apply to join the weekend through the office, where forms are available.

UNIVERSITY WINS NATIONAL AWARD FOR 'CHAPLAINCY SERVICE OF THE YEAR'

A boost in engagement and impact, most notably throughout the pandemic, has been rewarded with the national recognition of a Multi-Faith Chaplaincy in Lincoln.

Inclusive of a range of awards, the Central England Prestige Awards, launched to celebrate businesses and individuals that consistently offer excellent products and services to the community and its visitors alike, have awarded the University of Lincoln, UK, the award for Chaplaincy Service of the Year.

Students and staff from all over the world and from all religions benefit from a support network that offers a host of engagement initiatives.

The Chaplaincy has built a strong international community and hosts a range of regular cultural events and activities, including positive thinking, Ecumenical Communion service, Aarti Prayer, Catholic Mass, Orthodox Typica Prayer, Peace Garden and many more.

The Chaplaincy also works in the West End of Lincoln with the Centre for Reconciliation to connect students with the local community through a "Chat Café" and wellbeing gardening.

The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy's work increased substantially due to the pandemic. Food parcel deliveries to students were provided by faith communities in Lincoln, and students were also offered virtual events such as meditation and regular virtual meetings with the university team to stay in contact with their community.

The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy works with over 100 different nationalities and supports those who arrive in Lincoln by connecting them to their faith and cultural communities.

Celebrations and faith and cultural awareness trips are prioritized with festival celebrations taking place at the University including Diwali, which saw over 500 students attend on campus.

Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Coordinator Subash Chellaiah said:

"I am delighted the chaplaincy has won this award and gained national recognition.

"I am very proud of the Chaplaincy as part of the University, adding values and contributing to our one community. The University has built a trusting community with many students regularly attending each of the wide range of events on offer.

"Our team plays a vital role offering a wide range of support and I am grateful for all the Chaplains and Faith Advisors who give so much to the Chaplaincy, and as a result to our staff and the students."

Subash Chellaiah is Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Coordinator at the University of Lincoln. He is also a trustee of Christians Aware. Christians Aware regularly enables visits to world faiths' places of worship for Lincoln students.



Visit by Lincoln students to Leicester through Faith Awareness.

ACTION CARD MAY 2022: MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN

- **There are approximately 3 million Muslims in Britain and Islam is the fastest growing religion in the region.**
- **68% are of Asian descent.**
- **There are also Arab, Turkish and African Muslims.**
- **37% live in London.**

Some Muslims came to Britain in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Woking Mosque was established in 1889 and in 1914 the British Muslim Society was established. Muslims fought for Britain in the first and second world wars. Many came to Britain following the Partition of India in 1947 and a large number were from the Punjab, which suffered the most disturbance during the Partition. The building of the Mangla Dam in Pakistan displaced about 100,000 people, mainly from Mirpur, and some of them settled in Bradford and other British cities. Muslim families, following single male pioneers, generally settled in Britain

in the 1960s and it was then that their communities grew and many mosques, schools and shops followed. University students also came during those years.

Today Muslims living in Britain have the protection of the 1976 Race Relations Act, which was extended to include religion. Many are appreciated and well-established members of British society whilst others still struggle. In recent years the rise of Islamism has brought fear and isolation to some British Muslims, especially young men. The communities spend a lot of time helping their young people to conquer the fear of rejection and to go out into British society. Some Muslim women, who traditionally stay at home, also need encouragement to go out and to learn English.



Young Muslims at a conference in London.

Some Possible Actions:

- **Read 'Meeting Muslims' published by Christians Aware in 2012. The editors are Christopher Lamb and Ataullah Siddique.**
- **Meet Muslim people.**
- **Listen, learn and develop friendship.**
- **Perhaps form a regular group.**

THE RETURN OF FAITHS AWARENESS

George Merchant Ballentyne

Faiths Awareness is the inter faith education initiative of Christians Aware. For twenty years and more, our Faiths Awareness programme has helped make time and create space for people of different beliefs, practices and traditions to meet each other on equal terms, build friendly relations and lend their support to overcoming barriers, crossing boundaries and using religion

as something that brings people together for mutual benefit.

Faiths Awareness has helped many people not only discover harmony between their religions but also celebrate the diversity among them.

Faiths Awareness doesn't attempt to refute the unique characteristics, claims or contributions of each faith, religion or belief system. Nor does it seek to diminish the special value of each one to their

adherents, to their communities nor to world at large. This initiative opens a range of possibilities for positive encounters, learning and sharing in an atmosphere of mutual interest and respect. And in a super-diverse city such as Leicester, Faiths Awareness has led the way in giving opportunities for members of the public to take part in regular, frequent inter faith activities without being recognised as a "faith leader" or "community representative" or

being in receipt of an invitation to something taking place behind closed doors. Anyone could literally walk in off the streets to any of the Faiths Awareness sessions held on Monday evening in Christchurch Clarendon Park. The only qualifications required are a positive attitude and a willingness to share.

Those people attracted to Faiths Awareness often already have an interest in good relations among communities, a feel for the connection between relations and a taste for variety – after all, it's the "spice of life"!

Before the pandemic, Faiths Awareness developed an active social media presence, with a page on Facebook that has 188 followers (at the time of writing). Information about past activities remains on that page for visitors to check out. It receives a steady stream of visitors, who might view the page without formally signing up as followers. The number of followers tended to

increase every time a new activity was posted to the page. There's also a Twitter feed (@FaithsAwareness) which is relatively recent and is waiting to get off the ground as soon as activities are resumed.

We're glad to say that Christians Aware is in the process of bringing back our Faiths Awareness programme after the period of hibernation forced on us by the pandemic and its attendant lockdowns. Before too long, we hope to be able to resume our offer of courses, conferences, visits and publications. Our first steps (literally) will be a series of short walking pilgrimages to different places of worship and community centres in Leicester – one in each of the four seasons. Summer in Highfields; autumn, Belgrave; winter, West End; spring, Clarendon Park. These will take place on weekends, mid-morning till mid-afternoon. We'll be visiting four accessible venues each time, places associated with

a community identifying with a different religion or belief, with a stop for lunch in the middle. Walk leaders will have been trained by Leicester City Council's "Choose How You Move" team, who will also help promote the activities beyond our usual participants. Everything will be done within best practice, following sensible guidelines and whatever regulations may be in force at the time of each walk, so everyone can feel confident, safe and secure.

We hope to have an active presence in Inter Faith Week this year (Sunday 13 to Sunday 20 November), including our walk through the Belgrave district of the city. We're looking at possibilities for courses again too – either running over a series of evenings or on a series of single days. We're looking forward to getting Faiths Awareness up and running again and our advice to you would be: watch this space!

CTE FORUM 2022, THE HAYES, SWANWICK

The Churches Together in England Forum, the broadest ecumenical gathering in the country, ended on 16/3/22 with a renewed commitment that the church is ready to serve a 'broken world'.

More than 300 delegates from CTE's 52 national Member Churches, Bodies in Association and partner organisations met to discuss the theme 'Reconciling Hope: A broken church for a broken world' viewed through the lenses of racial justice and the climate emergency.

CTE President, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, spoke on reconciliation in a post-Covid world. He urged the church to embrace its diversity and, "where we disagree, we must learn to disagree well...look

outwards and respond to the crises that surround us, with the love of God that is within us, and with the unity that can be reached between us."

Tearfund Global Advocacy and Influencing Director, Canon Dr Ruth Valerio, addressed the question of reconciliation with the earth. She said facing the climate emergency is an integral part of the Christian faith: "We need to get hold of God's love for the world. In Genesis 1:31 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.'"

Professor Anthony Reddie and Rev Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson spoke on reconciling communities. Professor Reddie demanded that the church confront its collusion with the horrors of the transatlantic slave

trade. Dr Henry-Robinson challenged individuals to think where they found themselves – as oppressors or following Jesus's way of justice, hope and peace.

Orthodox theologian Dr Ralph Lee reminded delegates that, "as we seek to understand one another better, deep listening helps us overcome the difference in our language and traditions."

During the gathering the Forum attendees made two statements on Ukraine. The first, calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities and for churches everywhere to campaign for an end to the war in Ukraine. The second, appealing to the UK government to support the churches offering welcome and sanctuary to Ukrainian refugees.

As the Forum drew to a close the new General Secretary of Churches Together in England, Bishop Mike Royal, was commissioned into his role. He addressed Forum with his vision for the Church across England:

"We've got to build a bigger table to gather around and listen to the voices which are often not heard."

We need to raise a new generation of ecumenists and to be ready to respond practically and relevantly to the needs in the world that God has called us as church to serve."

CTE Forum takes place every three years. It was postponed from 2021 due the Coronavirus pandemic.

© Churches Together in England

Christians Aware is a member body of CTE and had a stand at the forum.

FINDING GRACE IN 1537

A reflection by John Bennett

I wish to transport you to 1537 and the beginnings of a deep relationship between Michelangelo Buonarroti and Vittoria Colonna. He was 61 and she was a widow of 46. Their letters, poems and drawings give us clues about the nature of their complex relationship and their dependence on divine grace in the face of official censure towards very early reformers in the Catholic faith. Thankfully now in the 21st century there is agreement between the Catholic and Lutheran Churches in their dialogue regarding justification by faith, but conflict and censorship of each other has been a legacy for over four hundred years.



Michaelangelo and Vittoria.

Vittoria Colonna was a young widow, when she met the artist Michelangelo in 1537. She had led a celebrity life as Marquise Pescara, from the wealthy Roman Colonna family. She lived after the Orsini and Colonna families had agreed to live in peace alongside each other and when her family could offer some protection to Rome's citizen's during the Sack of Rome in 1527.

Vittoria Colonna was the first female Italian poet as well as a friend of Michelangelo who she met when she was widowed. In 1509, she married Fernando di Avalos, the Marchese di Pescara from central Italy. She was just seventeen years old. He was a leading mercenary soldier, dying from wounds he received at the Battle of Pavia in 1525. Fernando, asked Vittoria to come to him in Milan, but he died while she was on the journey. His death left her inconsolable, so much did she love him. This loss and her faith in Christ, inspired all her poetry, but she was left singularly alone and unfulfilled. Whilst her early

life had been centred around the affluent social life of Renaissance gatherings, after her husband's death she wished to become a nun. This was prohibited by Pope Clement VII. Poetry became the outlet for her reflections and values. Many famous people congregated in her house in Rome. The most illustrious of her friends at home was Michelangelo who also wrote poems to her. Their letters, poems and drawings give us clues about the nature of their complex friendship. Michelangelo was also a rather fractured person, putting such a great deal of his unfulfilled emotion into his painting, drawing and sculpture.

Vittoria and Michelangelo had long conversations about art, poetry and faith. Michelangelo expressed his sorrow over distractions away from Jesus love and his fear of his own death. He found in this high and godly lady, so much understanding and reassurance, calling her 'the soul and the heart of my fragile life'. Vittoria was acquainted with early religious Catholic reformers, who spoke of living by grace alone found in Jesus Christ. These included the Spanish reformer, Juan de Valdes, Princess Renee from France, and Cardinal Gasparo Contarini who was desperately hoping for a reconciliation between Roman Catholics and the earliest Protestants. She also followed the Augustinian friar Peter Martyr Vermigli and Cardinal Reginald Pole the Archbishop of Canterbury from Britain, her last great inspiration. She was most of all impressed by Bernardino Ochine the Franciscan Capuchin friar who boldly preached the gospel of salvation by grace alone in Jesus Christ.

Here is the prayer Michelangelo wrote, fearful of dying but comforted in the assurance of God's gracious love of him, that he had re-discovered through Catholic reformers.

'Extend to me, my Lord, that chain to which every heavenly gift is tied, namely faith, to which I keenly hold, but, through my fault, I don't fully possess'.

Michelangelo was a major and acknowledged sculptor and painter by the time he met Vittoria. He had completed the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel for Julius II and was working on

the wall fresco of the Last Judgement. Originally it was to be a Resurrection scene for Clement VII. But the new popes, Paul III and then Julius III thought a more penitential theme was necessary. So it became a judgment theme. But at the same time, Michelangelo still included an image of Vittoria and Tommaso Cavalieri his male friend, on the wall fresco near to the likeness of Simon of Cyrene.. His own facial image he painted on the flayed skin of St Bartholemew. In his personal life, Michelangelo wanted to go further than his love of beauty. He sought an awareness of God's mercy, undeterred by ecclesiastical authorities. Michelangelo himself would often have worshipped in St Croce, the Franciscan church in Florence, and listened to the radical sermons of Savonarola the Dominican friar. He became aware of the dangers of making beauty an idol, blocking a person's way to repentance. He also found that beauty could be an entree to a person's awareness of divine love as he and Vittoria spoke and wrote of it.

The gospel message was evident in Vittoria's rhymes. She wrote this prayer:

*'Whene'er I look at my so great an error,
confused, to God the Father I can't raise
the unworthy face, but to You who for us died
upon the wood, I turn a faithful heart'.*

Vittoria's poems describe how she is no longer concerned with finding a way of being absolved from condemnation. She writes: *'Both worthy and righteous, He covers with his mantle, both my unworthy and unrighteous deeds, concealing me while showing his own works. To him I show my grief, to him I cry for my transgressions, armed not with good works but with faith's holy and victorious shield'.*

Michelangelo produced several drawings for Vittoria – "The Crucifixion"; a "Pieta" now in Boston USA; and "Christ and the Samaritan Woman ". He continued as a faithful Catholic, serving popes, Julius II, Paul III and Julius III. He was influenced also by the Catholic reformers who wanted to see the Church institution reformed from within.

Michelangelo wrote this madrigal for Vittoria,

*'Now on my right side, and then on my left,
I walk with unease, seeking salvation.
Torn between vice and virtue
My confused heart wearies and exhausts me
Like one who does not see the heavens,
And loses his way on every path.
I give to you a blank page
To fill with your sacred ink,
so that love will mislead me no longer, and truth prevail.
May my soul be liberated from itself
And fall not into further errors
In the short time that remains,
May I live less blind,
I ask you, my lady, high and divine
If a humble sinner has a lower place
In heaven than he who has done only good.'*

Vittoria wrote to Michelangelo 'their shared convictions that faith was not something that could be taught by the

Church, it needed to be experienced personally.'

Michelangelo sided with the early reformers as a single man. St Francis of Assisi and Erasmus, were part of his Christian journey urging the imitation of Christ in personal discipleship.

*'Both worthy and righteous, He covers with His mantle
both my unworthy and unrighteous deeds,
concealing me while showing his own works.
To Him I show my grief, to Him I cry
for my transgressions, armed not with good works
but with faith's holy and victorious shield.'*

Michelangelo was fearful of his mortal frailty. Alternative life styles could be lived out in Renaissance Florence and Rome, but there would be ecclesiastical disapproval towards anything not seen as the norm. Earlier in his life Michelangelo had a close friendship with the young courtier Tommaso Cavalieri. Whilst the friendship lasted for over thirty years until Michelangelo's death, he remained in emotional isolation, with his love not fully reciprocated by Tommaso as Michelangelo might have wished. Tommaso's own marriage to Lavinia della Valle in 1544 lasted until her death in 1553 and he raised two sons with her.

After the death of her husband, Vittoria Colonna was an independent woman. She could have remarried but chose to be single and independent of another husband. Her widow's wish to take the veil was prevented by Pope Clement VII who was relying upon her families support. He allowed her to have the Mass celebrated in her own home by a priest, but in the period she lived this became unworkable. So poetry became the outlet for her reflections and values. Letters, poems and drawings give us clues about the nature of a complex friendship between Vittoria and Michelangelo, both now living as single people. Vittoria managed to resist censorship and dodged accusations of heresy despite the belief she had of God's gift of grace. Nevertheless she sided with the reform theologians who opposed the tough scholasticism of the official church.

Michelangelo's relationship with Vittoria, shone a light on the value of divine grace in both their lives. In the face of official censure towards a growing Protestantism. The poetry they wrote for each other has much to give us, faced sometimes as we are with the judgemental behaviour and false assumptions of our own cancel culture. Here are Vittoria's words reflecting on the loss of her life's love, Fernando di Avolos, a soldier husband who was not always faithful to her. Now a widow, she wrote:

*'Oh when the tender breeze and my sweet light made
beautiful the day and pure and clear The air, by paths
secure in daring flight I sought to raise myself on wings
from here.'*

1542 was a difficult year for Vittoria, as Pope Paul III approved the reopening of the Roman Inquisition. This time the Inquisition was aimed specifically at Protestants and their sympathisers. Friar Ochino and Peter Martyr Vermigli left the country. Some church officials began to suspect Vittoria's involvement with these men who had supported

reformist doctrines. As late as 1983, researchers discovered in the Vatican Apostolic Archives, a file of Victoria's poems and letters collected by the officials of the Roman inquisition. They included letters describing her spiritual well being and notes from a censor of the Inquisition detailing 'questionable beliefs' he believed were found in the documents. But no case was ever brought during her life or after her death in February 1547. One of the later members of the family, Marcantonio II in 1571 led the papal fleet of oarsmen to battle against the Turkish fleet succeeding to dent the Ottoman advance. He was nominated as Viceroy of Sicily by Philip 11. This may have been a factor in the case of Vittoria being dropped? The council of Trent was in preparation in 1542, which shaped the Catholic Church for the next four hundred years; until the more enlightened period of Vatican II and the ecumenical movement today.

Vittoria was influenced by the theologian Bernardino Ochino. He had joined the Franciscan Order about 1504 but by 1534 he had become a member of the simpler Capuchin Order to be their vice general from 1538-42. He was given the job of refuting Protestant reformers work, but after meeting the Spanish writer Juan de Valdes in Naples in 1536 he became a supporter of religious reform. He hoped Italy would embrace reform, but the Roman inquisition summoned him instead. He fled to Geneva and then to England. Vittoria understood and took to herself his views on God's mercy and grace, as St Paul had interpreted it. She also loved the political literary writing of the Spanish humanist writer Juan de Valdes, who believed in a reformed church and left Spain for life in Naples. Cardinal Reginald Pole, the last Roman Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, who stood out against Henry VIII's divorce of Queen Catherine of Aragon was also a strong influence and a love in her life.

Michelangelo wrote some loving sonnets to Vittoria and was happy to spend hours in discussion with her. The sonnet below, one of four addressed to Vittoria whilst she was alive reads as:

*'To be more worthy of you, Lady, is
My sole desire. For all your kindnesses
I try to show, with all I have of art,
And courtesy, the gladness of my heart.'*

Questions for us today:

- How do I exercise grace in a critical, judgmental society and the Church? Am I more concerned for upright behaviour than mercy and new beginnings?
- Are people who have once been a risk to the vulnerable, always a risk?
- How do we continue to protect the vulnerable whilst at the same time exercising our belief in the transforming power of the Gospel? Or are we too afraid to believe it?

You may find some of St Paul's own words, written from Rome, to his young pastor friend Timothy helpful here?

'For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-control.' 2 Timothy 1. 7-14

Vittoria embodied her relationship to Christ. After her death, Michelangelo still wrote of his love for her:

*'When she who gave the source of all my sighs
Fled from the world, herself, my straining sight,
Nature who gave us that unique delight, was sunk in shame
and we had weeping eyes.'*

Vittoria influenced Michelangelo's view of faith, bringing him to depend essentially on God's grace. As he painted the Last Judgement over seven years she became a model for some of his work, She supported the House of Converters in Rome. That house hosted women of easy virtue who wished to atone for their lives without taking vows. She often mentioned Mary Magdalene in her writing. She served as one of Michelangelo's closest advisers. Michelangelo himself became a Catholic Franciscan tertiary. He belonged to the confraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, comforters of the condemned. If you closely examine the tomb that Michelangelo built for Pope Julius II, the figure left of Moses, also bears a strong resemblance to Vittoria Colonna. This could be where Michelangelo immortalised her, reverently pictured among prophets, her hands clasped together in prayer?

**The Revd John Bennett TSSF, Society of St Francis;
Area Minister, Yorkshire West, South and Craven;
Christians Aware trustee.**

ACTION CARD JULY 2021: THE DIGNITY OF WORK

Paulo Coelho tells the story of a shepherd boy called Santiago who went on a journey or pilgrimage, during which he stayed with a crystal merchant who was depressed. Santiago offered to clean and polish the dusty and neglected crystal glasses in exchange for food. Soon he worked full time for the merchant and as time went

by people began to buy the glasses. Santiago also offered tea in the glasses and many passers by were refreshed. The merchant gradually came out of his depression and his business flourished. When Santiago left him he was a new person fully committed to his work. Santiago was also enriched for his onward journey.

Dignity in work is only possible when people move away from feelings of deprivation and helplessness and towards self-respect. The challenge for people of faith is to be able to do what Santiago did and to make it possible for people to grow in confidence and to work with dignity. People



may also need help to find suitable work but there is always work to do, including voluntary work.

In a new book 'Love Work. Reflections and prayers for a world of work, the authors offer **ten commandments for work**. They are:

Be Diligent. Be Alert. Be Forgiving. Be Caring. Be Honest. Be Healthy. Be Prayerful. Be Gracious. Be Positive. Be Reliable.

Some Actions:

- Read 'Love Work. Reflections and Prayers for a World of Work,' by Phil Jump and John Weaver, published by DLT, 2021.
- Keep the 10 commandments in your workplace
- Enable others to have dignity in work
- Support 'The Big Issue,' which offers those who sell it work with dignity.

ON THE THRESHOLD

Peter Challen

We are here
on the threshold
of reclaiming the dream
of global consciousness
restoring the wisdom of enduring grace.

Now beyond tribal loyalties in nurture
we discern new, inclusive ways to mature
in awareness of how to save the planet.

There is a cosmic law,
both simple and profound,
offering transformation.

Ponder the deep mystery of Prior Unity,
original, abiding, inherent coherence.

Sense the sacred universe
that enfolds, births and preserves
our place in vibrant inter-being.

Within that, love God as all-inclusive truth
and love your neighbour as yourself.

Let our sense of inter-being define
the, moral, ethical, joyful pilgrim path
to Prior Unity stretching out ahead.

[Global Table 2010 revised 2021]



SOME DIARY DATES

2022

July 7	Webinar at 7.00 pm – Bishop Graham Kings – ‘Lambeth Conference 2022. Preparations and People.’ Graham is Research Associate at the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide.
July 18 – 22	CA Summer School at Parcevall Hall, Yorkshire Dales – ‘The Legacy of Yorkshire Monasticism.’ <i>There are a few places left.</i>
July 22 – 24	National Justice and Peace Network Conference – ‘Hope is a Verb with its Sleeves Rolled Up.’
July 27 – August 8	Lambeth Conference in Canterbury.
September 13	Webinar at 7.00 pm – Revd. Geoffrey O’Connor – ‘The Essence of Josefina Vaconcellos.’ She is recognised as a significant sculptress.
November 9	Webinar at 7.00 pm – Dr Chris Hewer – ‘Theological Reflections on Christian and Muslim Friendship and Working Together’.
November 13 – 20	Interfaith Week.
November 25 – 26	Trustees Residential Meeting.
December	Webinar by Bishop John Perumbalath on the nativity story. <i>Details later.</i>

2023

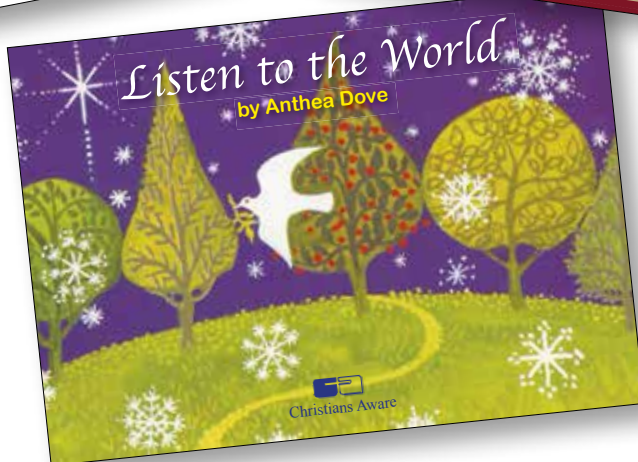
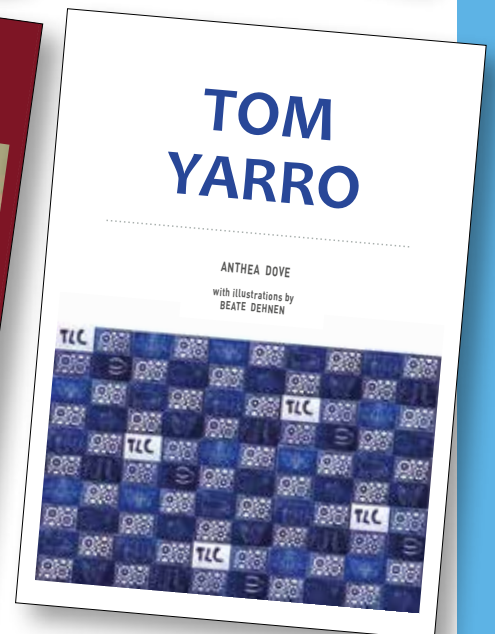
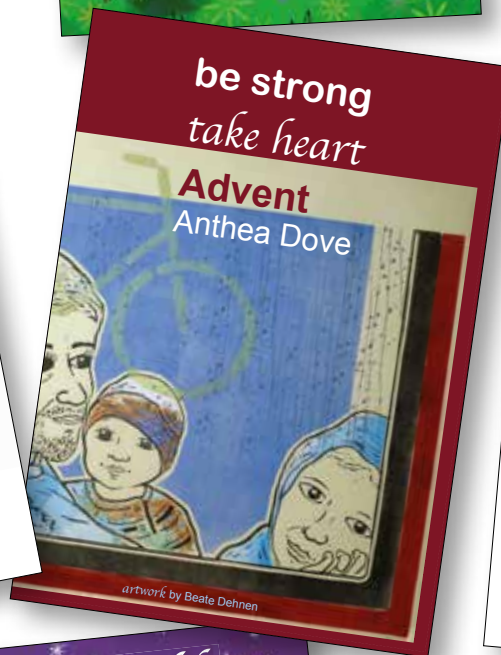
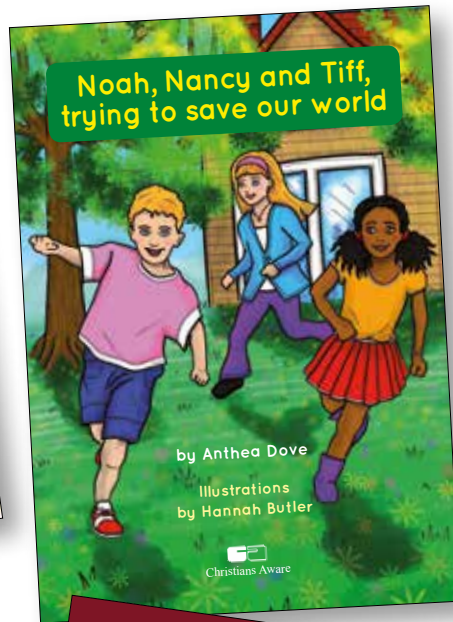
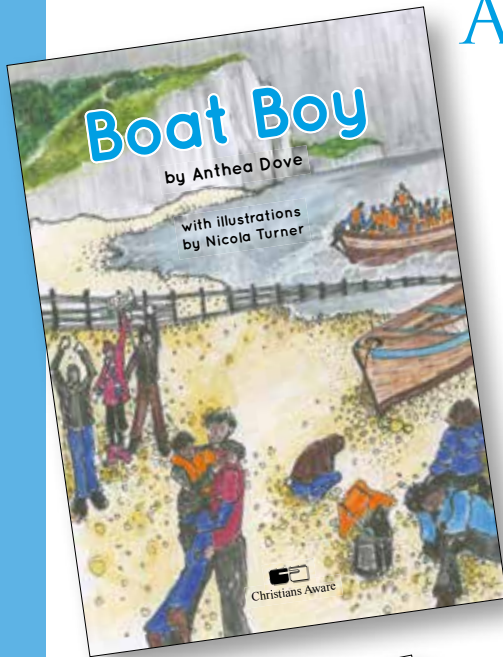
January 13 – 15	Christians Aware Annual Conference at the Hayes, Swanwick – ‘On Eagle’s Wings. Health and Healing Worldwide.’
May 13 – 20	Christians Aware pilgrimage – Lindisfarne.

The Faith Awareness Programme

There will be four interfaith walking pilgrimages in Leicester. They will be in the months of August 2022, November 2022, February 2023 and May 2023.

In Lincoln there will be a monthly Faith Awareness event. *Please offer to put on a Faith Awareness event in your region. We have good resources and are ready to help.*

CHRISTIANS AWARE BOOKS BY ANTHEA DOVE



Please contact the Christians Aware office for details of Anthea's books



Price: £1.50
Free to members