

Christward

The magazine of



November 3rd–January 12th
2019

~ The Lectern ~



A few weeks ago I was given an envelope which I think had been found with other papers in our old safe. The envelope contained two sheets of foolscap on which was written a justification for writing the inscription on the desk of our lectern in Greek. The justification was written by Eric Bray, our then minister, some 25 years ago and was I presume an article for Christward.

The Lectern and the Communion Table, are our only pieces 'of handcrafted furniture consciously built on contemporary beliefs in arts and craft'. The Lectern commemorates the life of Kathleen Johnson whilst the Communion Table that of her sister Dorothy. For those of us who knew them they were not only 'gentle friends' but also showed us the strength and beauty of lives 'lived quietly by the word of Jesus'

Why republish this article on 'The Lectern' now?

Well firstly because when we see beautiful objects day by day we quite often scarcely seem to notice them. Familiarity has dulled our delight in them and obscured their meaning. How many of us now really look at the lectern or reflect on the inscription? So it seems timely to read again why this artwork was important not simply to Eric but also to us.

Secondly, Points 7 and 8 in the article should resonate for us as a group of 2020's chapel people. What things about us in art and activity show that we are 'not running scared,not afraid of the present or the future'? How should we interact with those who flow in and out of our chapel on a daily basis?

Read on.

Alan Redhouse

**~Why I think this lectern is a brilliant thing
and why I want it to have as an inscription the
word "The Word"
and why I want those words to be in Greek.~**

1. "Word" says this is a piece of furniture to read from. It states the obvious but remains mysterious. It's ambiguous like all words including the word "word", the archetypal word connected with God's act of creation, "Let there be" He said, and then 'In the beginning was the Word'

2. It takes us to the Bible yet beyond the Bible to God's living Word. We cannot read from this lectern without being confronted with the fact that God speaks His Spirit, the living Word, to us, in us, through us and that there is no fixed word that we believe that stands outside all of us at worship.
3. The word "Word" links to lots of other things, "news", "good news", "sounds", "speech", "message", "sermon", "rumour".
4. It hints at a "cool" Christianity like that of St John the Evangelist who is both "cool" and passionate preferring as he does to begin his Gospel with the "Word" passage rather than the theatrical narratives of Shepherds, Manager, Stable, Virgin, Child.
5. It adds to the idea behind the title "Christward" TOWARDS Christ another directional sign. Nothing fixed or final, no creed or dogma. We are simply on the way, that's all. God cries out his word amongst us and becomes his word within and amongst us and we follow his constant surprise words.
6. But why in Greek ? λόγος
 - a. The Greek lettering is sinuous and graceful to look at.
 - b. The decorative arts are important and closer to ordinary people.
 - c. It ties in with using stylish lettering in modern life as design rather than using pictures.
 - d. It is the original written language of the Gospels.
 - e. It was the 'lingua franca' of the world Jesus lived in.
 - f. The "logos" concept was the first attempt to relate the meaning of Jesus to the thought forms of the then world.
 - g. It is a little "different" and distances things from us a bit so we don't think we have the gospel and its meaning and God himself in our pockets.

- h. It points us in the right direction whilst subverting the idea that we know it already.
 - i. It reminds us of two opposite but equally true things - We are close to Jesus and can even look at a word he would have known, that was used by the first to write about him and tell us what they believe he meant and how important he was - And at the same time it keeps us humble by reminding us how far away we are from him in time and culture, so far that we could not understand a word he ever said. Humility is not the strong suit of present day Christians.
 - j. If we had a painting or piece of music as a memorial we would find lots of different, helpful meanings in them which could all be “right”. Putting the word in Greek performs the same function, allows ambiguity, but keeps to ‘words’ with which we are more familiar than pictures in Protestant churches.
 - k. It links us to the old 19th Century Chapels which had texts up over the pulpit or the organ chamber.
 - l. I will be remembered for always insisting, at Christmas, on reading the great John 1 passage myself. A little share of me in this memorial would be nice especially if no one but you and me knew it!
7. The whole thing, including the Greek inscription, which will be discreet I know, says that as a group of 1990’s chapel people we are not running scared, we are not afraid of the present or the future. We don’t have to cling to the past. We don’t have to throw ourselves into the arms of fundamentalism in order to survive or slide into the graveyard of decline as so many have done, clinging to their chapels, their pew runners, their pitch pine, their annual Messiah. We have courage. We take risks. We believe in the future. This Lectern will probably be the only piece of handcrafted furniture consciously built on contemporary beliefs in art and craft. To put it poshly you will have to go a long way to have a bang up to date minimalist/functionalist piece in any other chapel

in England. It is a symbol to lift us into the future. It says “we are not going to court mediocrity. We are not philistines. We recognise the time we live in as well as the past. We believe in God, ourselves and the world.

8. We have inherited a building whose style is as commonplace as the suburban housing it lies amongst but it is now bright and airy and we of this generation will add something in a Post-modern mix. We have chosen a word, the word “Word” as our icon, as our interface with God, but turned the word into a kind of badge or shape or symbol that looks beautiful even to the eye of total incomprehension. Our chapel is now and we hope from now always will be full of people seven days a week, many of whom have only the faintest idea of what we are about or believe. If they want to know we will use this “sign”, this “word”, as a way in to explaining to them. And for the majority who won’t want an explanation we can let them see the design, give them the gift of tracing the outline of the word and feeling its meaning through their fingertips without explanation.
9. This is what “craftsmen’s art” does. The object is made with care and honesty, with respect for the materials, worked on in the best and most careful ways and this itself praises the Creator silently encouraging us all to do so. The object, in its functional simplicity, makes a platform for the word of God which he expresses and lets hang between material and ghostly form but never return to him void, without accomplishing his purposes.
10. The lectern is in memory of someone, the shape of whose soul will ever be graceful in our minds, who, without “side” or pretension,



lived quietly by the word of Jesus. Profoundly gentle but firm and strong she would never have “lifted her voice in the street” so her character is reflected in this simple object which has for function that it makes way modestly yet clearly for God’s Word.

11. Lastly I want it. And whether you understand or not please let me have the letters in Greek. It matters to me a very, very great deal.

Eric Bray

~Wandering Pew Returns North~

We are pleased to report that a pew from Union Chapel previously resident in London has returned closer to home and was sighted in September at the Manse of New North Road Baptist Church Huddersfield. Photographic evidence herewith.



We trust that the pew and its owners, Mark Janes and Trish Taylor-Janes, will swiftly feel at home in Huddersfield. We also hope that Mark and Trish will come to visit us before too long, although the pew may not feel up to much more travelling for a while.

Gwyneth & Steve

~ Union Chapel as a Gift ~

While our political representatives grapple with the future of our relationship with the EU, and young and old press for the actions needed to mitigate the climate crisis, Union Chapel as a church has been taking time to reflect on where we are, a small church near a busy corner in South Manchester. Linton House is down, and we have a large plot on our hands, neatly fenced and hedged; a fallow field in Fallowfield (crash on drum and cymbal... ba-dum-tish). So... over the last few months, our reflection has not focused on buildings, and there's been a certain sense of relief in that. What we don't yet have is a plan.

Meanwhile, the wider Union Chapel community feels strong – activities continue week to week in both buildings, and a recent Union Chapel community celebration was full of energy and animated conversation, to the sound of jazz, folk tunes and African drums. As a church, I think we see ourselves as part of the glue that holds the Union Chapel community together – and we are seen in that way by many of the individuals and groups involved. But I wonder if that does helpfully summarise who and what we are, or whether we need to think about it differently.

Suppose we think of Union Chapel as a gift. A gift is something that sits outside the relationships of trade and commodities; it isn't part of the market economy. Now in some ways Union Chapel is part of the market economy, paying for water and oil, making pension payments, paying for cleaning and care-taking and garden maintenance. Tutors and class leaders earn money through fees. The land we own has a market value, as does the property. Nevertheless, it is possible also to see Union Chapel as a gift. It's a gift to us – we didn't design it, or build it, either as a building or as a community. It lives now partly through financial gifts, from the membership of the church, and through the gifts of many people's time, care and organisation. The Food Bank runs on volunteers, and gifts of food; similar gifts underpin Open Tuesday, and O&A, and and and... At a time when a lot of shifts in society are towards marketisation (think of care of the elderly, or the provision of schooling through academy chains, or some parts of healthcare,

among many others), Union Chapel and many places like it work on a different basis, and certainly with a different balance.

I think there are some consequences to this, though I haven't thought them through properly. But here's a starter for ten... (five seems to be enough for now)...

A gift ceases to be a gift if it is not passed on. If it were to become simply 'ours', it would lose something essential. What does it mean for us to pass it on? What's involved?

Not all gifts are welcome; some should be refused. But we have welcomed Union Chapel as part of our lives, voluntarily accepted it. Do we still want it?

The giving of a gift creates a bond. What is the nature of those relationships, now, in Union Chapel? Who have we become linked to, from the past, and in the present day?

There are lots of stories about gifts, in the Old and New Testament. The woman who had 10 gold coins. Joseph and his coat. The Prodigal son. To name but three. What could we learn by reflecting on these? What is true of Union Chapel is just as true of where we live; Manchester, or Stockport, or the North West, or this little island nation, or this planet. We receive them as gifts. Does that change things?

I know we want answers – but not just any answers. Let's allow ourselves to think widely, as well as deeply, about where we are. Let's find ways to help ourselves do that. In the meantime, here's a link to poem by Simon Armitage, which is linked to the idea of the earth as gift, first read on Arnside Knott: <https://www.simonarmitage.com/wp-content/uploads/Fugitives.pdf> It might form part of a service near here sometime soon...

Andrew Howes

~ Snippets of Hebrew ~

The Banquet

It is often pointed out that the name of God does not appear in the book of Esther. And it has become a bit of a pub quiz type of question, "Which book in the Bible does not mention God?"

The holy name of God, the Tetragrammaton, or four letter name for God, commonly described in its corrupted form as Jehovah, is however contained in chapter 5 verse 4. It is found in the first letter of four consecutive words, which is of course only apparent in Hebrew. Esther invites the king and Haman the egotistical megalomaniac courtier, to a banquet.

Esther 5:4 reads

He will come, the king and Haman today

Interesting to note that she doesn't say to them in Hebrew:

You (singular) and Haman will come today, or

You (plural) will come today, or

The King and Haman will come today

But she says "He will come, the King and Haman today"

Rabbis like to point out that whenever there is a linguistic anomaly in the text, one should pay attention, because it is a signal that something interesting is just below the surface, and such an anomaly may just be it may just be because the text is poetic.

This turn of phrase is constructed so that the first letter of each of the four consecutive words which are translated "He will come, the King and Haman today" begin with Yod Hey Vav Hey. which is known as the sacred Tetragrammaton. It seems to be no accident. These letters approximate to the English letters YHVV. The sacred Tetragrammaton is concealed within the invitation for the King to come, with Haman, today.

The banquet was for the King and, although Haman was invited, it was not *for* Haman. And furthermore although Haman's name begins with a Hey, the Hey at the beginning of his name has been carefully sidestepped, so his name is excluded from forming one of the two Heys required in the Tetragrammaton. And the third letter which is a Vav is obtained from a conjunction attached to Haman's name. Haman might be seen to be reduced to the significance of a conjunction, in contrast to his own opinion of himself.



Esther accuses Haman before Ahasuerus at the banquet

The Y or the first letter is a masculine prefix to an Imperfect verb, which signifies an action which is not yet complete. But the verb specifically refers to the King. The second letter is H and is used in Hebrew as a definite article, the King. The final letter is also a Hey and is used as a prefix to the word day, to make it read today. This is like “God has chosen a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has chosen”. Of course when such a day is mentioned, once chosen, it becomes *the* day.

Haman represents the evil that will be destroyed, by the King and his bride. Given these aspects of the Esther story, it begins to look as if the book is about the eschaton, a Greek word meaning the end times. Such fervour for the Messiah was already hotting up and had reached fever pitch by the time of the New Testament.

Geoff Walker

~ Small is beautiful ~

Over the years Union Chapel has been responsible for a number of small initiatives which have a significant impact on the lives of people living our area and also beyond. OK the Linton House Project does not fit into the category of small but I am thinking of:

Our Residential Home for the Elderly, O&A, the Sunday Teas, the Playgroup(now Humpty Dumpty Club), Open Tuesday, & Food Bank. There are some things about these schemes which are worth noting:

- 1 The ideas for them all came from within the congregation not from a leader.
- 2 The whole congregation has never been involved in any of them. Only a few members take part usually different members for different schemes.
- 3 Some them failed. The Residential Home came up against legal constraints.
- 4 Some of them came to an end after a useful life. The Sunday Teas operated successfully for a number of years.
- 5 After the initial impetus from the church they are frequently taken over by other members of the community.
- 6 None of the ideas were put forward with the intention of increasing the size of the congregation of Union Chapel.

Too often we get into a mind set that because we are small or because we are getting smaller, or because we are getting older, or because sometimes jobs are not done as quickly or as efficiently as they could be, somehow we are slipping 'into the graveyard of decline as so many have done'.

This issue began with Eric's article about our Lectern which revealed us to be in the 90s a people who 'don't have to cling to the past.....We have courage. We take risks. We believe in the future.'

As we reflect on the present and plan for the future of Union Chapel perhaps the Lectern with its Greek inscription has something to say to us still.

Alan Redhouse

~ News of the Family ~

We were saddened to hear of the death of **David** Garner's mother recently. Our thoughts and prayers are with David and Margaret and the whole family at this time.

It was good to see **Gwen** Mattock with us last Sunday and to hear that she is making a good progress after her second knee operation

Belated congratulations to **Jess** Howes, whose GCSE results arrived just after the last issue of Christward had gone to press. Jess is now at Xaverian College studying courses in Health and Social Care.

~ Church Meeting held at Union Chapel on Sunday 20th October 2019 ~

Present: Margaret R, Alan R, Margaret E, Gwen M, Carole W, Geoff W, Brenda M, Andy H, Nicola H, Steve R, Gwyneth HR
Apologies: Enid W, Michael W, Beryl D, David G, Margaret G.

The Minutes of the September Meeting were approved.

There were no matters arising and no AOB was notified.

1. Gwyneth HR reported to the Meeting on correspondence we had received from the **BU Pension Scheme** and discussion followed. Full details of the discussion may be obtained by members on application to the Church Secretary
2. **The Church Social** on 12th October went very well, with about 80 people there from the Church and various user groups. Thanks were expressed to Brenda M and Leonie E for organising this. The Trad Jazz band, the Opanka dancers and the Drummers were all very good. Margaret R commented that buying food in was preferable to self-catering.

3. **Fabric** - Nicola H reported that a lot of work has been carried out at the Manse on Victoria Road, but more is still required. Floodlights have been installed at the Church and the Large Hall. The feeling of the Meeting was that a refit of the Church kitchen should go on the long-term list, as our future direction is uncertain. However, it was agreed that the stove is particularly bad. Deacons to investigate second-hand options to replace it.
4. Alan R gave a report about **Foodbank**. Although the initial impetus to establish the Fallowfield and Withington Foodbank came from within the congregation, it has evolved to become a charity in its own right, and has been adopted by the local community. Currently there are no members of Union Chapel on the Board of Trustees. We still provide storage space and a weekly collection point. The current volunteers are doing a really good job. Regrettably Foodbank is still being heavily used. There are a lot of problems with Universal Credit affecting people who are in work.
5. **Manchester City Council** have sent a letter to the Church in connection with a proposed Public Open Space Protection Order around the Marie Stopes Clinic on Wynnstay Grove. The Meeting unanimously supported the proposal and asked Nicola H to write to the Council accordingly. She will circulate a draft letter for approval before sending.
6. **Church Weekend 2020** – suggestions were invited for either a topic or the name of a possible external speaker. The Meeting did not feel that an external speaker was necessary in view of the high standard of the “in-house” weekends recently. Any ideas to Steve R or the other Deacons please.
7. **What are we thinking?** We agreed at the last Meeting that we would continue to reflect in an open way about where we are as a Church and how we see the future. Several people contributed to the conversation and, while there is a concern that we may become too inward-looking and need to ask others about new developments in other churches, people are generally happy with what happens on Sunday mornings and the worship being conducted by members of the congregation.

The Meeting closed with the Grace at 12.08pm.

~ from the **Christian Aid** web site ~

Christian Aid Christmas Appeal Empowering Women this Christmas

Women have the power to liberate themselves, their families and others from oppression. Through their God-given gifts, they could transform lives. But poverty, inequality, violence and injustice often denies women the opportunity to do so. For those who are also mothers, life is doubly difficult as they fight to protect and raise their children. This Christmas, we're highlighting the transformational change that women around the world, particularly mothers, can achieve if given the chance – even in the most desperate situations.

This Christmas, you could help create more life-changing opportunities for mothers like those described below

Conflict and drought in **Afghanistan** forced widow Bibi Aisha and her two children to flee their home. She managed to lead them to safety and find shelter through Christian Aid's local partner RAADA who gave the family a tent.

Bibi Aisha is still vulnerable as the sole breadwinner in a society badly affected by inequality, discrimination and exploitation. But she is determined that her children will prosper: "I want a bright future for my children," she says, "I want them to be educated."

Many women face discrimination in **Bangladesh**, especially those from ethnic minorities. This means they often cannot afford medical help in a crisis – like Amena. She planned to have her second baby at home but as she went into labour, she started bleeding profusely. Christian Aid's local partner PEPSEP gave Amena a health voucher so that she could attend hospital immediately and give birth safely.

In **India** Ranjita was forced into manual scavenging work at just nine years old. She earned just a few rupees and a piece of stale bread in

return for hours of degrading work cleaning human excrement by hand: 'They treated us worse than animals.' she recalled. Manual scavenging is reserved for the lowest caste in India who are known as Dalit.

Despite being outlawed, there are still around 1.2 million manual scavengers, of which 95% are women.

Now a mother to her own children, Ranjita was determined to build a better life for them. Through a community self-help group run by our partner ARUN, she learnt about her rights and felt empowered to apply for a government compensation grant. This then helped her start a tailoring business. Now Ranjita can provide for her family.

opportunities for mothers just like Geeta.

If you want to support Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal you can do so from their web site: www.christianaid.org.uk

Talking to Each Other ~


If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome.

Please send them by email to alan.redhouse@virgin.net or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.

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