

Christward

The magazine of



May – June 2023

~ Climate Change

A Time to Stand up and be Counted? ~

We see, hear and read a lot about Climate Change. Few people now refuse to believe that the global climate is changing and that humanity bears a significant responsibility for causing the change. There is a debate to be had as to the best method of persuading people and governments to deal with the crisis. One method is by direct action, a form of protest with a long and distinguished history - think of Gandhi and Indian independence, Suffragettes and electoral reform. Whatever you think about direct action in the Climate Change crisis we rarely get the opportunity to hear a detailed and personal exposition of why this is now the only way to make governments listen and people aware of the dangers ahead.

Jane Neece neé Land was asked to write for Christward about her reasons for supporting Extinction Rebellion & Just Stop Oil and her experiences of Direct Action. I am very grateful to her.

Alan Redhouse, Editor

My name is Jane, I am a radiographer working for the NHS and I have two teenage boys.

I managed to avoid learning much about the climate crisis until 2019. I kept reading worrying articles in the newspaper....but I gratefully accepted my husband's view that: "some clever people will sort it out". However, as I researched more and more, it became clear that that was not going to happen. When I finally realised the full extent of the trouble that we are in, I was absolutely distraught.

I still have moments when I think:" this cannot be happening"... but it is and once you know the full horror, you cannot go back. You cannot "un-know".

I couldn't bury it away.....but knowing about it was causing me huge pain and sorrow. I realised I had to do something, for my own mental health. Even more importantly, I had to do something so that I could look my two boys in the face in the future and say: "yes, I knew how bad it was going to get, and yes, I did all I could to try to save us".

I joined Extinction Rebellion (XR) in 2019 and could immediately tell that I had found a group of likeminded people. XR does many actions, always non-violent. A few of us regularly stand outside Barclays Bank in Nottingham, with banners and leaflets, informing people that Barclays is one of Europe's biggest investors in the fossil fuel industry, and encouraging people to move their money to a different bank/building society. Quite a few XR members are part of a group called Christian Climate Action, which is campaigning to get the Church of England to remove its investments from fossil fuel companies.



At first I did not do anything in actions to risk arrest because I was unsure of the implications for my job. As an “allied health professional” I am registered with the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) and losing my registration would mean losing my job.

I waited until two brave clinical psychologists (also registered with the HCPC) were arrested for sitting in the road, and were then subjected to the disciplinary process. After putting them through the mill, the HCPC found that their actions “did not affect their fitness to practice”. This gave me the courage to be arrested.

I believe that these desperate times call for desperate measures: everything else has been tried: asking nicely, talking to MPs, signing petitions, marches. Nothing has worked; now is the time for civil resistance.

Around March 2022, I started taking action with Just Stop Oil, another non-violent direct action group. The simplicity of the “demand” and the urgency of the actions appealed to me.

Last year I climbed on top of a tanker as part of a JSO campaign to temporarily disrupt the “flow” of oil – one of the fossil fuels that we are addicted to and which will ultimately overheat our planet and kill us, if we do not act **now**. Unfortunately, disrupting oil tankers generated very little publicity, whereas actions that “affect the public” generate much more. Publicity is essential so that people become more aware of the situation.

In October last year, I sat in a road in London, with other activists. I was arrested because I refused to move. I have just received a charge for this action. I will be pleading not guilty, so that means I will have to appear in court, probably in a few months’ time.

Transport for London (TfL) have also taken out an injunction to try to stop such protests. I have been named on this injunction, even though the road that I sat in was not injuncted at the time. At some

future date, TfL may try to seek costs from me to contribute to their legal fees incurred to take out the injunction. National Highways Limited (NHL) are doing this at the moment, and are pursuing Insulate Britain activists for costs. They are using an expensive legal means to do this and are seeking several thousand pounds from each person. Although the result of the case will be determined by the judge one judge has already allowed costs against people who broke the injunction. This involved about 30 people - costing £7,000 each – a clear attempt to dissuade people from protesting. This is an illustration of the “David versus Goliath” nature of what we are doing.

Taking part in climate actions is incredibly hard, but I feel I have no choice. How can I carry on living my comfortable, privileged life when I know that people on the other side of the world are already suffering terribly because of the climate crisis? And these are people who have done the least to cause it. Indigenous people are being killed so that their land can be grabbed and destroyed in the search for more oil – and make billions for the already obscenely rich.

Last summer we had the hottest day ever recorded in this country. There were fires which destroyed homes...in this country.

For most environmental campaigners, the world of police/arrests/courts/prison is so alien and never did we think that we would feel compelled to enter this world. I have experienced anger and verbal abuse from the public. Several times I have been told to: “get a ****ing job” and “haven’t you got anything better to do”. They don’t hang around to hear that I am using my precious annual leave to do this. I have experienced physical abuse from a member of the police force and the police have also lied to me and intimidated me. It is frightening, being locked up in a cell in the police station, even if it is only for a few hours. Having a court case hanging over you is not great – I manage to put it to the back of my mind most of the time.

For ages, I just couldn't understand why the government and fossil fuel executives are doing this, surely they realise that their children and grandchildren will be affected by the climate crisis? I now think that they are blinded by greed for money and power – their families will be cushioned from the worst effects for longer than the rest of us – but not forever.

A group of barristers and solicitors are showing solidarity with JSO, and are appalled that, recently, defendants in court have been forbidden to say what their motives were for breaking the law. This is a frightening development, which may have come about because juries have sometimes found activists not guilty, despite being directed to find them guilty by the judge.

Not hearing about the climate crisis and cost of living crisis and the need to insulate homes makes it harder for juries to make an informed, objective decision.

When one of my friends, a care worker, decided to mention his motives anyway, the judge jailed him for a few weeks for contempt of court. Other friends - all peaceful campaigners - have been fitted with ankle tags, so that they can be monitored at all times.

I am proud of what I have done. I am proud to be involved with such amazing, brave, strong, non-violent people.

These are people from all walks of life: teachers, care workers, social workers, barristers, ministers, doctors, nurses, shop assistants, scientists, electricians, builders, journalists, animators, students, university lecturers, vets. The community and the support are incredible.

I was asked to write this for the church magazine and if, after reading it, any of you feel that you want to do something (there are many, many roles behind the scenes that do not involve any chance of being arrested), please feel free to message me (Margaret or David Garner can give you my number) or look on the websites of XR or JSO.

On the 21st to 24th April, thousands of people gathered together in London (for an XR event known as “The Big One”) – it was supported by:

Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Earthday.org, Patagonia, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, Palestine Action, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, War on Want, CAFOD, Climate Justice Coalition, Ethical Consumer, Ecotricity, Ecosia, Quakers in Britain, Just Stop Oil, Mums for Lungs, Association of Clinical Psychologists, Green Christian, Unite the union, Humanist Climate Action, Landworkers Alliance, Tearfund, Rewilding Britain, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, and many more. It was an all-inclusive event, peaceful and non-arrestable.

Every single person makes us collectively more powerful, and makes our voices harder for the Government to ignore.

Other actions started after the event: JSO doing “slow marches” in London – causing disruption – uncomfortable and unpleasant but necessary because this is a desperate situation. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report is clear – this is our last chance.

Please join us to save the future for our children and grandchildren and our beautiful world and animals.

Thank you.

Jane Neece

~ Snippets of Hebrew - Coats ~

Winter is the time for coats. So is wet weather. But some coats are for all seasons!

Proverbs 8 v 5 mentions wisdom. It says “O ye simple, understand wisdom: and ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart”.

Proverbs uses the word wisdom rather a lot. But this time, it is not as simple as we think. The word translated as wisdom is Arum, and is the same word as was used in Genesis about the serpent. “Now

the serpent was more subtle (Arum) than any of the beasts of the field”.

Readers of this column may recall a discussion about the words for mercy and womb, being the same. This word for wisdom likewise has the identical letters but with a vowel change, just like the words for womb and mercy. Such words have a common concept underlying them. The word is Arum and is pronounced something like “A Room”, with the oo sound shortened, but not quite as short as “a rum”.

The serpent in Gen 3 v 1 was more Arum than any other beast of the field. Interestingly the King James version translates this as subtle. Other versions use crafty. (One question that arises, is how subtle were the other beasts of the field? Answers on a postcard!)

Since Proverbs 8 v 5 says “Understand, simple ones, wisdom (Arum)”, one wonders what the connection between wisdom and subtle might be. Even more difficult is the attempt to reconcile Adam and Eve knowing they were Arum (translated as naked) after they ate the fruit. That seems to be neither subtle nor wise, and especially not naked. None of these words seem to apply. Confusion reigns.

So the serpent is Arum, and Adam and Eve were Arums, plural because there were two of them. Well, who was crafty, naked or wise?

Since many verses in the book of Proverbs have two ways of saying the same thing in two different ways, might the second half of the verse give a clue?

Proverbs 8 v 5: O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.

Solomon’s warnings to his hearers, or readers, seems to be urging an understanding heart, and an awareness of the contrast between wisdom and folly, as well as an awareness of what mistakes to avoid. Perhaps this awareness is the key. Adam and Eve were very aware of their vulnerability after eating the fruit. Apparently, the serpent was very well aware of the existence of good and evil, because he spoke the truth when he said “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”.

It turned out to be a heightened self-awareness which included vulnerability of nakedness, and an awareness of something much wider, which was good and evil.

Solomon suggests that the simple can understand wisdom. But the word for wisdom, Arum, is spelled with the same letters in the same order, but with different vowels. So like the words for mercy and womb, discussed earlier, the same applies here. The underlying concept of both these words is the same. That concept is awareness. Wisdom then is a matter of being aware.

Consciousness of self, and how to behave are what Proverbs is concerned with. When Adam and Eve became aware, or arum, the text says they hid themselves, because they were self-conscious. And as if by way of explanation, it says “God made them coats of skin”, after they had covered themselves with fig leaves. Therefore coats were needed, not because they were cold or wet, but because they needed to be covered.

Garments of the soul are gratitude, love, kindness, openness, acceptance and agreeableness ... just as our body needs garments. Adam and Eve took fig leaves to hide their vulnerability, but then God gave them something more substantial. Our souls need something more substantial than the satisfaction of survival and ego living. Although dark chocolate takes some beating!

Geoff Walker

~ Easter Sunday at Union Chapel ~

After the service on Easter Sunday there was the usual chance to catch up with each other especially those who were visiting family for the holiday. Not only were there refreshments but also the

opportunity to sing Easter hymns. Carole Walker captured some of the moments on film.



Make a joyful noise unto the Lord....
Psalm 100: 1

...then our mouth was filled with
laughter.
Psalm 126: 2



Your solemn processions are
seen.....the singers in front, the
musicians last....

Psalm 68: 25



....talk ye of all his wondrous works

Psalm 105: 2



I will sing a new song unto thee...

Psalm 144: 9

~ Lent Meetings 2023: Wild Followers ~

We had a series of Lent reflections before Easter on the theme of Wild, Wildness and Wilderness. Printed below is the text of the session led by Geoff Walker on the theme 'Wild Followers'.

Introduction

I want to present two very different videos, each 8 minutes duration. They cover similar ground from different sides of the coin.

I am a wild follower. I have always been wild! It is a reaction against a rigid system in which I was never tamed.

When I was 4, my mother took me to a picnic in a local field. It was organised by the Christadelphians which my parents eventually joined. I had a great time until one of them stood up and read a chapter from the Bible. I instinctively knew what it was, and that it was weird. Afterwards, my mother said she thought it was very strange too, but that they were thinking of joining them. Since there was only a thought of joining them, I reasoned that after that weirdness, it probably would not happen. Oh dear!

They became very certain that they had found the one and only truth. Especially my father. My mother was much less convinced, initially. She later admitted she would have joined anyway to keep my father happy.

And so began the process of my moulding into a system. Despite the flaws, I eventually joined, in part, to get my father off my back. But none the less, I was in! I worked very hard to try to get to the essence of things. But anything that contradicted the Christadelphians intrigued me. I should be honest here and say it delighted me. I found there was something more going on beyond their narrow self-ploughed furrow.

In his novel, *Father and Son*, (which Eric recommended to me) Edmund Gosse relates that his stepmother said of his father, "His trumpet makes no uncertain sound". The father, Phillip Gosse was an early leader of the Plymouth Brethren. And whilst the faithful may have appreciated such clarity, the family did not. This was the essence of the narrative in the book. And neither did I appreciate the deafening trumpet.

Such a stifling background which I endured, made me more than ready to go wild. Exploring questioning, even to the point of asking other Christadelphians if they would ever contemplate leaving. The answer was always Yes! if they found anything better!

Despite conforming initially, I remained untamed and refused to turn the handle of their religious sausage machine, which only seems to

produce sausages of a certain size, and a very limited number of them, despite its promises of greater things. Church is relationship, communication and interaction. Many may well start with the sausage machine, but relationship emerges eventually. I too started to turn the sausage machine. I turned the handle clockwise, anticlockwise, fast and slow, all to no avail. I went to a few churches, only to find they had their own sausage machine, and after a few years left, thinking that I would never find a real church.

But by a strange combination of circumstances, I came here to Union Chapel. Twenty-Eight years later I am still here.

In the first video James Finley is reviewing a book entitled *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr who is a Catholic Franciscan priest, who founded the Centre for Action and Contemplation in New Mexico. James Finley was a Trappist Monk in Thomas Merton's monastery. He became a psychiatrist and now works with this organisation.

James had a violent alcoholic father. When he was a child at a Christmas service, he heard a baby crying and asked his mother if it was Jesus. She said "Yes". James sought solace in this idea, and would immerse himself in it, in order to blank out the horrors of home. Later, despite his father's threats to kill him and his mother if he left home, he did leave home, and went to Thomas Merton's monastery. There he told them that his parents had prayed for him to enter monastic life or the priesthood. This seemed to satisfy the monastery that he had not just run away from home, which he had, and they kept him!

James has been a wild follower and seems to have left no stone unturned as he pursued life and spirituality with vigour.

Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3ylwHgGaKE>

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

The second video is called The Beauty of Living

Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luL-l2L_8Rk

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Finally, we will hear as our closing prayer, the Taize chant
“Stay with us Lord Jesus Christ”

Taize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwkDADfZAow>

Stay with us Lord Jesus Christ
Night will soon fall
Then stay with us Lord Jesus Christ
Light in our darkness

POST SCRIPT

I always felt so empty in churches. No matter what I had to say, it was always wrong. I tried to tell one church leader in particular, that our emphasis was awry. He is now a vicar in the C of E and repudiates all his past views. I did make peace with him many years ago in Manchester where he happened to be speaking at a so-called Celebration Meeting in the Methodist Central Halls. I said to him that perhaps God had been trying to nudge us in a particular direction, but none of us knew just exactly what it was. Incidentally, his minder stepped in and tried to push me out of the way. He might have been thinking he was protecting the man of God! In those days, the 1980s, speakers were ushered off the platform during the closing prayer and escorted out of the building before the crowds could get to them.

It would be presumptuous to say I was proved right, but my point is merely that those who are most sure about things are just as vulnerable to changing their views as everyone else. Regardless of whether those views change from something that was wrong to something else or whose views were right but changed none the less.

Now that I am sick and fed up of strongly held opinions, and have no strong opinions of my own, it feels a big relief to leave such territory behind. Opinions have always been weaponised with words like heresy.

What a relief to leave the emotional blackmail behind.

Geoff Walker

~ News of the Family ~

Ted Land has been unwell with Covid. It was good to hear that he is now much better and back to attending the activities-quizzes etc.

David Garner continues to recover steadily from his sepsis and thanks everyone for their concern.

Jonathan and Hannah Garner are now the delighted parents of Millie Rose Garner who arrived on Sunday 16th April, 6 lb 8oz and Hannah and Millie were able to go home on the same day. All are well.



Her cousin Josh has been to say hello (quietly) and is now trying out future careers.

Bob the Builder and his Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat



The Enquiring Mind of a Future Botanist.

**MANCHESTER AND BOLTON PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY
NETWORKS**

ON STILL BEING 'HONEST TO GOD' 60 YEARS ON

A study day on John Robinson's classic 1963 book

with writer and facilitator: Ben Whitney

Saturday 20th May 2023

Grove Lane Baptist Church, Pingate Lane, Cheadle Hulme SK8 7NP

Each session will be a short talk highlighting key points from Robinson's book, followed by group discussion and questions. To receive a FREE copy of Ben's study booklet in advance of the event, send him your postal address via

www.ben-whitney.org.uk

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|--------------|---|
| 10.00 | Arrival and tea/coffee provided |
| 10.30 | Introduction and scene-setting: Mind Your Language! |
| 11.00 | SESSION 1: 'God' and Jesus re-imagined

'The End of Theism?' and 'The Ground of our Being'
(Chapters 1-3)

'The man for others' (Chapter 4) |
| 12.00 | SESSION 2: Personal Spirituality

'Worldly holiness' (Chapter 5)

'Seeing all life as prayer': Meditation/reflection |
| 12.45 | Lunch break (bring own lunch). Tea/coffee provided. |
| 1.15 | SESSION 3: Deciding on right and wrong

'The new morality' (Chapter 6) |
| 2.00 | SESSION 4: The Church and its mission today

'Recasting the mould' (Chapter 7)

'Where do I go from here?': Meditation/reflection |
| 3.00 | Close |


THERE IS NO CHARGE. DONATIONS WELCOME ON THE DAY.

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