

Christward

The magazine of



January 6th–February 24th
2013

~ From the Minister's Desk ~

Well, another Christmas and New Year have come and gone in the blink of an eye. I think they were good; that is to say that I had fun, and I think I spotted a fair number of other people smiling too! My writing for this edition is not particularly festive in nature, although it does perhaps resonate with the rather radical and uncomfortable characters that littered our Advent journey this year.

I have been mulling over the contents of an article entitled 'How middle class suburbia has dulled faith'; its opening gambit is as follows:

'In the suburbs of modernity many of the dramatic contours of Christian faith - death and resurrection, praise and lament, sin and grace - are eradicated, in favour of an ordered, attenuated religion that is no gospel at all'.

This is certainly not a new notion; in fact the idea seems to be aired with reasonable regularity (especially when someone has written a book about it, as in this case)! I for one, have a mixed response.

Like many in Union Chapel, I suspect that I cannot escape my middle-class, suburban identity. I might argue that I feel more like the product of working-class stock, but I suspect that has more to do with the general increase in living standards than it does an actual change in social status. I am aware of the instinct to apologise or to excuse my upbringing and current life choices, but that is certainly not required. What is useful however is an awareness of how the rest of our lives might influence the nature of our faith.

This particular article was making the point that 'whilst middle-class people can be as radical as anyone in their approach to life, the pressure towards social conformity and cultural homogeneity makes this difficult to discern'.

A link is then made between the Victorians (the supposed architects of Suburbia) and their more sentimental approach to Christianity which tended to make the religion tidy and respectable. So mystery

and paradox give way to explanation and order, exuberance and excess give way to politeness and moderation, and one's personal faith becomes an expression of one's culture and class.

Now of course this is a hugely generalised argument in which there are many flaws and exceptions. We might argue with the general correlation of the 'niceness' of Christianity to its suburban foundations, but I suspect there might be something to it. And we might baulk at the assertion that middle-class inhibitions and tendencies to conform might be robbing us of the 'rawness' of our faith, but I can see the possibility.

It also raises many interesting questions about how closely our personal context and our religion are related; is being a follower of Jesus even compatible with being middle-class and suburban? The answer has to be 'yes' of course, but the counter-question is 'how'?

So how do we at Union Chapel feel we are in addressing some of the identified 'dramatic contours of Christian faith' (death and resurrection, praise and lament, sin and grace)? Perhaps I must swiftly translate these concepts in to ones which we would more readily identify with! How does our shared life together touch on the darker areas of life like death and pain, do we express the extreme emotions of life as a group of people, and how does being together assist us in the forgiving of ourselves and others?

To an extent we do well. I have found myself speaking about death and sin during this year, funerals and illnesses are never far away, we sing hymns of praise and pray prayers of lament, and we use words and silences which allow for reconciliation of many kinds. A critic may still declare these to be relatively shallow and individualistic, someone more sympathetic may see them as appropriately sensitive and realistic. Some would say we should engage at a deeper relational level with one another, others would say that we all find self-made circles within which that occurs more naturally.

Perhaps it is enough for now to ensure that our collective faith sharpens our spiritual senses rather than dulls them. That our life in church is authentic and honest and that we do not shy away from

hard and thorny issues. There should be no apologies that we gather to celebrate life and to give thanks; our faith is surely a source of joy and hope, and often we find inspiration and challenge as together we remind ourselves of that. But this should never be a veneer which obscures the struggle and pain in our own lives, and in the world.

As always, much of this seems to be about our openness. Our openness to develop deeper relationships with those within and beyond our usual sphere of friends. Our openness to experiment with how we express and live out our faith together. Our openness to encounter new people and situations which might stretch our thinking on what 'gospel' really means. And if we are really lucky, we might even encounter circumstances this year which combine all of the above!

Before our minds leave 2012 completely, may I just offer a word of thanks to everyone who has given so generously of their time and energy during the last twelve months. To borrow a phrase that seems to have become prevalent this year; Union Chapel continues to 'punch well above its weight', and that is only possible because there are so many who contribute so much. May our continuing journey through 2013 bring inspiration and joy, challenge and growth, closeness and depth - heaven on Earth.

Ian Geere

~ Julian of Norwich ~

"All shall be well and all shall be well" These are words which are frequently quoted - particularly it seems when things are obviously "not well". They are associated with Julian of Norwich, but I had no idea who she was. So last year I went on a course to find out.

Julian was born in December 1342 - very little is known about her before she became an anchorite. Then she became known by the name Julian (which was not her real name) because she lived as an anchoress attached to St. Julian's Church in the middle of

Norwich. An anchorite lived permanently alone in a cell known as an “anchorhold” attached to a Church. There would have been a window opening into the church so that the anchorite could follow the mass, and a small window to the outside world. The anchorite followed a strict way of life, largely based on the Benedictine Rule, with seven set times of prayer each day and a routine of prayer, rest and manual labour such as needlework. Servants would have seen to their daily needs, and acted as a buffer between them and the rest of the world. Visitors were restricted and could only seek the advice of the anchorite through the window to the outside.

Anchorites were quite common in medieval times and were consulted for advice and spiritual counsel. They offered prayers for the community, for the dead, and for the release of souls from Purgatory. To become an anchorite, it was necessary to apply to the local Bishop, and to convince him that the calling was genuine and that there were sufficient funds to provide for material needs.

The formalities upon entering the cell included a funeral - type service in which the anchorite was seen as ‘dying’ to the earthly life and entering the tomb. But on the other hand the anchorhold was also seen as a ‘womb’ - a medieval handbook for anchorites called the ‘Ancrene Wisse’ describes the anchorite as sharing Mary’s womb with Jesus. In this way Christ was seen as coming to new birth in the anchoress and through her into the world.

“The anchoress is symbolically dead and buried, but also full alive and reborn”

So, of a large number of anchorites in Norwich and elsewhere, why have the words of Julian stayed with us?

The answer is that when she was thirty years old, she had an illness so serious that she thought she would die - maybe in modern terms she was delirious. During this illness she saw Christ on the cross, and shared in his suffering. Crucially at the point where it appeared that he was dying, he became full of joy and started to talk to her. Julian recovered from the illness, and meditated upon

the experience of Christ and wrote down an account of the whole happenings, including the spiritual insights gained through her own reflections. She wrote one version immediately after her recovery, and a second version - "Revelations of Divine Love" (Rev) about twenty years later. The first was probably Julians's immediate recording of the visions she experienced , and the second and longer version was the result of many prayers and reflections about the meaning of the visions.

Julian was most unusual amongst the women of her time in doing this - there were strong cultural imperatives against a woman writing about such matters. In some ways she appears apologetic about this - she refers to herself as "unlettered" and "simple". This may have been a way of playing down the audacious act of putting pen to paper, especially about spiritual matters, which were then exclusively the province of male clerics. Essentially she was a woman living in a sexist society and rebelling against it, but she was convinced of the importance of her spiritual experiences and compelled to share them.

There are many quotations from Julian -

about God she wrote

"God is the still point at the centre. There is no doer but he.'(Rev 11)

"And so I say full surely that before ever God made us, he loved us,
And this love was never quenched not ever shall be.
And in this love he has done all his works,
and in this love he has made all things profitable to us,
and in this love our life is everlasting.

In our making we had beginning,
but the love in which he made us was in him from without
beginning,
In which love we have our beginning. "(Rev 86)

“God is nearer to us than our own soul” (Rev 56)

about God as the “mother”

“The properties of natural motherhood are natural love, wisdom and knowledge, and this is God” (Rev 61)

about prayer

“ the best prayer is to rest in the goodness of God knowing that that goodness can reach right down to our lowest depths of need” (Rev 6)

She called prayer a “proper understanding of the fullness of joy that is to be,” (Rev 42).

So where does the quotation about all shall be well come into this? At the end of her visions, Julian heard the voice of God saying “All shall be well, and all shall be well”.

As I understand it , England in medieval times was not always a very happy place - there were many problems in society and ill health and unrest were obvious. So to hear the words “all shall be well” was at the least, very reassuring.

References

All Shall be Well - a retreat with Julian of Norwich at Swarthmore Hall 30/03/2012; led by Ginny Wall,(course leader and Woodbrooke tutor)

Julian of Norwich by Grace Jantzen, pub 2000, ISBN 0281-05261-1

Margaret Edmonds

~ Modern Magi ~

Ted Land spotted the following in The Guardian G2 of 3rd January in their Notes & Queries section:

“Who would the modern three wise men or women be and what gifts would they bring for the good of life on earth?”

Fr Alec Mitchell, Manchester replied:

I propose the wise and urbane Professor Jim Al-Khalili, Iraqi born physicist and newly-elected president of the British Humanist Association, and also the great-great-great-grandson of an ayatollah, if I'm not mistaken: a very wise man from the east! I would like Jim to introduce to us, and to each other, Ghada Karmi, the Jerusalem-born Palestinian doctor, author and academic, and Amos Oz, the Jerusalem-born Jewish author and academic. I believe that Al-Khalili, Oz and Karmi - AOK! - would, jointly, have wisdom enough to create the prospect of peace with justice in the land of the birth of the Prince of Peace.”

~ Nothing new under the sun? ~

A frequent criticism of the church in England is that it consists largely of the moderately well-to-do middle classes who are getting on in years and that, perhaps, a little less pride and bit more humility wouldn't come amiss, especially as we approach Lent. Apparently this was also the view of a fourth century Bishop of Barcelona about his congregation. In 380AD shocked by by their 'cheery comfort' he preached on their need for penance and self-abasement. How they responded was recorded in his writings and might have been written yesterday. They said,

“It is good that we are middling persons. It is not for us to live in houses sheathed in marble, to be weighed down with gold, in flowing silks and bright scarlet. But all the same we have our little places in gardens and by the sea-side. We have good quality wine, neat little banquets and all that goes with a sprightly old age.”

Alan Redhouse (Pensioner)

~ Chocolate Wars by Deborah Cadbury. ~

Our Book Group chose this book for discussion at its January meeting. I had only a slight acquaintance with the history of the industry and had a rather lukewarm approach to reading the book. However I found it a fascinating account of the work and history of the Quaker owned businesses in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Quakers were excluded from many professions including law and the armed forces and were not allowed to stand for Parliament. They therefore turned to setting up businesses such as banks, iron works, brass foundries, railway services and producing food.

Their high religious standards meant that all their dealings had to be honourable. Strict accounts had to be kept and they were not to fall into debt. Their lives were frugal and they wanted the profits which they made to be used for the good of the community.

By the early 19th century famous Quaker businesses included Cadburys, Rowntree, Terry, Fry and Sons, Wedgewood, Clarks Shoes, Huntley and Palmer and Bryant and May.

Cadburys had a very shaky start and it was only by the unremitting hard work and self denial of the brothers George and Richard Cadbury and their families that they began to make a profit and the corner was turned. Research into different ways of dealing with the cocoa beans, buying and building new equipment, experimenting with new products and resorting in the end to advertisements (not something which Quakers entered into lightly, thinking that products should speak for themselves) turned the small cocoa drink business into a large business with very many different products.

Competition in the chocolate field was plentiful and firms such as Frys, Terrys, and Rowntrees did battle for many years both with each other and with the many firms in Europe and America such as

van Houten, Milton Hershey, Lindt, Forrest Mars, Nestle, Kohl, Peter and Vervey.

The terrible conditions in which many workers in the industrial towns lived in horrified the Cadburys and by the mid 19th century their profits were great enough to build a village in the country near Birmingham for their workers. Each house was to have a garden large enough to support a vegetable patch and there were new large and airy factories, sports facilities, education facilities, free treatment by doctors and dentists, a hospital, sick benefits and a pension scheme.

George Cadbury in 1900 set up the Bournville Village Trust into which he put most of his money partly to stop his by now huge wealth from corrupting his offspring. They were each given a small amount as an insurance but were in agreement with their father as to this course of action. George also bought land in Birmingham for a playground, a house in the village as an invalid home in the winter and a holiday home for children in the summer, and another adapted to the needs of disabled children.

Rowntrees in York and Hershey in America also built villages for their workforce, as did other Quaker businesses abroad.

Quakers also faced ethical problems in connection with their businesses. For Cadburys there was a problem concerning the source of some of their cocoa beans. A scandal arose when they were accused of using beans grown with slave labour. The onset of the Boer War and the First World War brought problems concerning pacifism.

In 1962, in order to allow family members to sell their shares the Cadbury board agreed to go public and floated the "British Cocoa and Chocolate Company". This led eventually to all the company's fate being decided by the shareholders who were in it for short term profit. They were, in the main, people who "had not owned the company a few weeks earlier and had no intention of owning it a few weeks later."

In 2010 an unpleasant and hostile takeover bid from the American firm Kraft was finally successful and so ended 180 years of a beacon of good practice.

The book is an impressively thought provoking account of what can be achieved when wealthy people use their wealth and land to improve conditions for society at large.

Margaret Redhouse

~ The fabric committee has been future gazing ~

We've come up with a number of capital projects that seem to warrant the church's consideration. They could come up in the next few years. In the mean time the church meeting will discuss whether items should be included and in what order they should be approached. Most costs quoted are approximate and firm quotations will be obtained before the church is asked to take any final decision on carrying out the work.

- 1. Replace the carpet in the chapel and vestibule.** We would recommend a higher quality of tile such as those used in the small hall. We wonder why the carpet does not go up to the wall in the main chapel. Perhaps it should be extended. Possible cost £2-3,000
- 2. Double glaze the remaining windows.** Those in the two store rooms and the old porch would get an exterior glaze as has been done in the main chapel windows. The toilet windows, the passage window and the window in the small hall toilet lobby could be replaced with traditional PVC double glazing or given exterior double glaze. It was noted that, despite surface rot, the wood in the existing frames in the small hall had been in a remarkably good state.

- 3. Replace or recover the chapel chairs.** replace £3-4,000, recover ?
- 4. New roof for manse.** There have been minor leaks. Neighbouring houses of comparable age have almost all had their roofs replaced. Cost £4-5,000
- 5. Replace the present oil burning boiler with one fuelled by gas.** The cost of oil is a lot higher than that of gas. The present boiler has a life expectancy of 3-4 years. Running costs and danger of a failure suggest replacement in the next couple of years. NB should be planned ahead to be carried out in the summer. Needs a gas supply to the building which is the expensive bit. Very rough cost £10-20,000
- 6. Trees behind large hall need severe lopping or removing & possibly replacing.** Cost ca £1,000
- 7. Pointing of walls.** The walls facing Wellington Rd need pointing. Other walls need minor attention.
- 8. Access to small room in large hall.** We often find ourselves needing an additional small room. The room at the far side of the stage is rarely used. It could be reached by a path from the Linton House end of the car park, around the back of the hall to the access door. Cost for path £2- 3,000 , lighting £800.
- 9. Constructing a 'porch roof' outside the entrance doors.** (£3-4,000 pure guess)

Perhaps you'd like to think about the list and ask the fabric committee (Ian, Harry, Eileen, David & Michael) any questions or for any clarifications. Thanks.

Michael Welford

**~ Minutes of the Church Meeting
of Union Chapel Fallowfield (Baptist)
held on Sunday 18th November 2012
at 11.20am. ~**

Present: Margaret Garner (chair), David Garner, Gwen Mattock, Irene Roberts, Geoff Walker, Carole Walker, Andy Howes, Alan Dobbins, Rachel Scott, Leonie Earnshaw, Hilda Linton, Steve Roberts, Gwyneth Heritage Roberts, Ian Geere, Ted Land, Eileen Land, Michael Welford, Harry Fleming

Apologies: Sarah Geere, Alan Redhouse, Margaret Redhouse, Connie West, Margaret Edmonds, Beryl Dykes, Lorna Richardson, and Enid Welford and Carmen Bowman (with the children)

The Minutes of the last meeting (in November issue of Christward) were approved

Matters arising – Fabric – The Fabric Committee is working on a list of future projects which includes replacement of the carpet in the Chapel. Interference with microphones - the radio microphone is fine and two of the hand-held microphones are OK. We suspect that the third hand-held microphone has a channel overlap with the Indian Church and are working on a solution. It was reported that the loop system is not working properly.

Confirmation of Ceilidh date - Saturday 23rd Feb 2013 – same band and format (with catering) as last year. DNG recommended against use of Gift Aid for entrance charge.

Report re donations received & made - We have received £200 from the O & A summer programme and £100 from Mair Walch's family. We have also received 2 donations from users of the building, £10 in appreciation of the lunches and £50 in appreciation of one of the classes. The Deacons had a request from Rosemary Kidd on behalf of the Churches Refugee Network who had run into funding difficulties and requested a £50 donation towards the costs

of their conference. This was approved in October & sent and a letter of thanks has been received.

Church Weekend 2013 update – dates are 21st - 23rd June at Rydal Hall, Grasmere. To be led by Rev Mark Janes of Memorial Community Church Plaistow & his wife Debbie. Confirmation of dates for Church Weekend 2014 – 13th – 15th June 2014 at Thornleigh, Grange-over-Sands. DNG mentioned that we need to be thinking about the 2015 venue.

BU Assembly 2013 – 3rd – 6th May 2013, Blackpool. Ernie Whalley (formerly of Northern Baptist College) is incoming President. IG is unable to attend. GHR has further details if anyone interested.

Annual review of minister's stipend – Full details of the minute on this topic may be obtained on application to the Church Secretary.

Signage for Large Hall/Chapel Doors – the Fabric Committee and Publicity Group are arranging for a better arrow sign on the old front door pointing to the main entrance and for a “label” for the Large Hall – looking at how best to mount the sign. Proposed also to erect smaller signs by the entrance doors with more detailed information about the church. A mockup was displayed on an overhead and there is also a copy on the noticeboard. The cost is approx £450. There was some discussion as to whether the information on the draft was appropriate/sufficient. The meeting approved proceeding with the detailed signs up to a cost of approx £450. The content of the signs was referred back to the Publicity Group for decision.

Call for suggestions for Lent theme/topics (no new midweek meetings planned as these are difficult to arrange). There were no specific suggestions of topics in the meeting but there was some enthusiasm for the idea of another Awayday similar to last year and also for a continuity of theme in the second sessions during Lent. This was passed back to the Deacons for their decision.

Notification of Deacons' Agenda rotating topics for Dec & Jan – pastoral work (Dec) and midweek activities and plans for Spring

and Easter (Jan). Comments to Deacons on these topics invited. There is some feeling that the Deacons are not keeping the congregation informed about their discussions. Suggested that abridged Minutes could be displayed on the noticeboard in the Small Hall or a summary given in the Notices on the Sunday following a meeting. Deacons to discuss further.

Review of the current arrangements for Church meetings and whether meetings are properly fulfilling their purpose. (Linked to previous item.) Noted that this item did not arise until 11.55am by which time we are running out of time for discussion in any detail. Concern that people do not feel they are being given space to discuss issues and are being asked to make decisions too quickly. MW pointed out that most of the agenda items are business and they take a lot of time. We need time to discuss the life and mission of the Church which at present we are not getting. AJH noted that many of the business items were minor and felt that the agenda could be trimmed down significantly. GHR noted however that people often did not register information only available on paper. SAR felt that it is not clear who is to make decisions on matters. In principle the Church Meeting should decide everything unless it has been delegated to someone else. No enthusiasm for formally extending the length of meetings. MW suggested that we separate practical business issues from matters relating to church life and discuss them on different occasions. Referred back to the Deacons for further consideration.

Any Other Business

- a) Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Agreed to host a service on the date of the 2nd Sunday lunch, 13th January 2013, followed by singing session, and invite other local churches.
- b) The ramp by the back door of the Chapel has been partly cut away as it had become slippery. Access is not satisfactory without a ramp by this door. The Fabric Committee recommend replacing with angled flags. Work to be carried out over Christmas holiday period if possible. Approved by the meeting up to a cost of £500.

- c) Outside light on the Linton House side of the building also approved.
- d) Christmas Card – we have quotes from printers of £120 - £140 for 300 cards. Approved to proceed.

Date of Next Meeting – Sunday 20th January 2013

The meeting closed with the Grace at 12.28pm.

~ News of the Family ~

Quin Hamilton celebrated his first birthday last month. We send him our best wishes for many happy returns.

It was good to see **Rosie Roberts** over Christmas. She was back home from her first term at Bristol where she is enjoying her Maths course.

We were sorry to hear that **Alwyn Platt** has died. Alwyn worshipped with us until her final illness.

Marian Carter, a former student at NBC, who worked and worshipped with us is now in Australia attending her niece's wedding. Marion has had serious operations recently on her mouth and we send her our best wishes for full recovery. Marian will be spending a week visiting Frank Rees.

We have received a copy of the memoirs of a former minister of Union Chapel, the **Revd John Nicholson**. We have permission to print excerpts from these and they will appear in our next issue.

~ Anabaptist Network of Communities Day ~

A day of worship, workshops, shared food & general getting to know one another will take place at Didsbury Baptist Church on Saturday 9th February from 10.30am to 4.00pm. Topics for the workshops include 'Who educates our children?', 'Writing Preaching after

Christendom.' There will be a children's (up to 11 yrs) programme. Soup & buffet lunch. Donations to cover the cost welcome ~£5. Must register by 3rd February. For more information contact Ian Geere.

~ 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.

Alan Redhouse

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