

Christward

The magazine of



November 1st–December 27th
2015

~ From the Minister's Desk ~

During a recent visit to Waterstones in Manchester, I was reminded of the deeply conflicting feelings I encounter when wandering around any large bookshop. On the one hand it is an absolute pleasure; an Aladdin's Cave of ideas and possibilities, an atmosphere oozing with creativity calling me to pull up a chair and while away the day. On the other hand it is intensely frustrating; the realisation that I will only ever read such a miniscule proportion of what is on offer and the accompanying pressure not to make a wrong decision on where to devote my scarce time. Perhaps it is also because there are no places better than libraries and big bookshops to remind us how little we will ever know!

I am sure that I am not alone in this, and perhaps for many of us the partial answer is to rely on our friends and associates to weed out the dross for us. I have happily relied on the prolific reading of others for a long time, and thankfully there are plenty at Union Chapel who will suggest hidden gems that I might like to look at. *Sapiens* (by Yuval Noah Harari) was one of those suggestions, and although I'm not far enough through it yet to offer final judgement, the opening chapters have already offered plenty to reflect on.

There begins a very brief summary of how we, as Homo sapiens (or Sapiens), find ourselves as the dominant form of life on earth. This is quite a humbling exploration. For around two million years of our history we remained a relatively weak and marginal part of the world. Even when we learnt how to utilise fire for protection and cooking some three-hundred thousand years ago, our impact remained minimal. The first time our ancestors really began to look like us, around one-hundred and fifty thousand years ago, we were still minding our own business in a corner of Africa. Physically, we have not moved on much since then; 'if one of them turned up in a modern morgue, the local pathologist would notice nothing peculiar'. It was only seventy-thousand years ago when something remarkable happened, and Sapiens spread throughout the earth displacing everything in their path, including many of their fellow

human cousins. This is known by many as the Cognitive Revolution.

What caused this Cognitive Revolution is something no-one really knows. The sobering fact is that it was probably pure chance, some genetic mutation in our DNA that allowed us to think in unprecedented ways. The interesting bit is how this enabled us to conquer the world. Most agree that it has to do with language. Some point to the fact that the sophistication and suppleness of our communication about the world around us gave us a huge advantage. Others suggest that it was the ability to gossip which catapulted us to prominence; the understanding of social interaction and relationships meant increased cooperation on a larger scale. What makes Sapiens unique however is not our ability to talk about things which exist around us; it is our ability to communicate about things which do not exist at all. 'As far as we know, only Sapiens can talk about entire kinds of entities that they have never seen, touched or smelled'. Thus came the quantum leap from previous humans who shouted 'Careful! A lion!' to Sapiens who declared 'The lion is the guardian spirit of our tribe.'

Why is this so important? Because it enabled us to begin to imagine things collectively. We began to weave common myths and legends. These shared stories enabled us to cooperate with people far beyond the confines of our own family or tribe, and when you gain the ability to work with strangers you can organise society in almost limitless numbers. That made us unstoppable.

It's worth pausing for a moment to consider how this relates to church (there are later chapters on religion that I haven't read yet, so I'm winging it). In order to sustain a world religion, or indeed a large local church, the existence of strangers dictates that the shared story is of primary importance. When a group's number extends beyond the capacity for relational links then orthodoxy, or submission to a shared narrative, seems vital. That is not to say it is unimportant in smaller groups, or that relationships will not form in larger groups, but it would seem reasonable to assume that relational-sized communities would be freer to begin to tell their own stories. That seems important. Putting a numerical limit on such

communities is difficult, but studies have indicated that the maximum is around one-hundred and fifty, and the optimum lower still.

It is tempting to think that in our current world we no longer have need for shared stories about things beyond the physical universe and that we have moved beyond the spirits and sorcery of our primitive ancestors. What we often fail to appreciate is that our modern institutions work in almost exactly the same way! Take the existence of limited liability companies for example. They organise huge numbers of worldwide employees, produce goods and services, and generate vast revenue. Yet they are none of those things; if all the workers or products or money suddenly disappeared, the company name would go on and everything else could be replaced. It appears that a limited liability company is not a physical entity. The only thing which can destroy it is another thing which does not exist in the physical world – the law. A judge can dissolve the company as a legal entity, at which point it really does cease to exist in any form. Apparently lawyers refer to this as ‘legal fiction’ – a thing which has no physical manifestation and only exists in the eyes of the law. We all recognise them, they can open bank accounts and own property, they employ us and our friends, but only because we all agree that they are real. Limited liability companies are a huge part of our existence, and yet they remain so only because of our collective imagination.

How do people (who physically exist) create companies (which don't)? They tell stories which are good enough that people believe in them. In the same tradition of sorcerers and priests of our history, ‘if a certified lawyer followed all the proper liturgy and rituals, wrote all the required spells and oaths on a wonderfully decorated piece of paper, and affixed his ornate signature to the bottom of the document, then hocus pocus – a new company was incorporated.’ And suddenly millions of people around the world behave as if the company really exists. A very similar argument applies to countries. If the story is sufficiently persuasive, we believe, and our reality changes.

Imagined realities are as vital to our existence today as they ever were. They have terrible power, and history is littered with examples both constructive and destructive. The importance of telling stories powerful enough to make us believe – that will never diminish. It is important that we recognise this dual reality. The *objective* reality of rivers, trees and lions; and the *imagined* reality of gods, nations and corporations. It seems that we are at a crucial point in history; ‘as time went by, the imagined reality became ever more powerful, so that today the very survival of rivers, trees and lions depends on the grace of imagined entities such as the United States and Google.’

Many of us have talked about the church’s role in the telling of stories. Good stories. Stories of love and hope and cooperation. Stories of individuals who can’t find anyone else to listen. Dissenting stories of justice and protest. Even the optimistic amongst us can sometimes be tempted to see this story-telling as a marginal task, a reluctant compromise, somehow less important and less ‘real’ than other more tangible action. The understanding of our own human development however might convince us otherwise.

Ian Geere

~ Foreign films on Open Tuesdays ~

“Flowers from Another World” (Spanish)

Open Tuesdays boasts a wide selection of films, current, classic and foreign. Don’t let the subtitles put you off foreign films; they are always wonderful films, for direction, for acting and for tremendous stories.

On Tuesday 10th November we shall see a prize-winning Spanish film “Flores de otro mundo” (1999). Based on a true story, this story is about rural life in present-day Spain. A little village with no women and no future organizes a big bachelors’ party, to which all single women of the neighbourhood are invited. They arrive in the

chartered 'Bus of Hope', and what follows is laughter, tears and revelations.

Interesting footnote: although set in Spain, the theme reflects current worries about rural life in mid-Wales.

Megan Bennett

~ The Refugee Crisis ~

I remember when I was at school hearing a story, probably apocryphal, about a visit by King George V to a famous public school. He was there to open a new building and during his address to the school he asked that the pupils be granted a half-day holiday. It was with murmurs of regret that the Head Master had to point out that the school's Foundation Charter laid down that such holidays could only be sanctioned by a Bishop. The King graciously withdrew the request. The next day the Head Master received a letter signed by five Bishops requesting a half-day holiday to commemorate the King's visit. The holiday was duly granted.

It seems that in today's world a letter signed by eighty four Bishops to the Prime Minister concerning the plight of Syrian refugees and written at the start of September, does not even receive a response until it was made public through the media two weeks ago.

In their letter the Bishops applaud the government's financial contribution as one of the world's top international donors. However they thought that the UK should take at least 10,000 refugees a year for the next two years rising to a minimum of 50,000 by 2020 rather than the Government's proposed 20,000 by 2020. This would bring us more into line with other European countries.

They talk about a National Welcome and Resettlement Board drawing together civic, corporate and government leadership to respond to the current refugee crisis. They draw attention to the fact that in the crypt of Canterbury cathedral there is a 17th-century notice which pays tribute to "the large and liberal spirit of the

English church and the glorious asylum which England has in all times given to foreigners flying for refuge against oppression and tyranny”.

The Secretary General of the Baptist Union, Revd Lynn Green, supporting the Bishop’s letter said, "There are many churches that are already working with refugees and have been doing for some time. We're seeing churches coming forward offering foster placements, offering homes...people want to work with local government to enable refugees to come and find a home here. "I believe that our country has a moral right and duty to extend a welcome to refugees and many other countries around the world are giving so much and we could do more than what is currently being offered.”

The response to the letter when it came was given by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons. He said “ On the bishops no one has more respect for the bishops than me. But on this occasion, I think they are wrong and I will say so very frankly. I think the right thing to do is to take 20,000 refugees from the camps. If you become part of the mechanism distributing people around the EU you are encouraging people to make that dangerous journey.”

“I would now like to see the bishops make a very clear statement,which is Britain has fulfilled our moral obligations by making a promise to the poorest countries and the poorest people in the world of spending 0.7% of our gross national income on aid. How many other of the other big countries that made that promise have kept that promise. So let us hear an in-depth intervention from the bishops on that issue.”

[It should be noted that the bishops did not call on Britain to take part in the EU quota system, which would have obliged the UK to take 18,000 refugees on a rapid timetable. In September there were already 160,000 asylum seekers in the EU. The quotas introduced on 22nd September would see, initially, 66,000 people already in Greece and Italy relocated using a formula based on population,

GDP, previous asylum applications and unemployment. The first tranche would see Germany taking 25,799 and France taking 19,714.]

Somehow the Prime Minister's response seems very defensive. Most people in this country think that the Government reaching the target of spending 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid is a great achievement. The spending of £1 billion in aid to the Syrian refugees since 2012 is to be applauded. However that does not address the emergency which is happening at this moment and which is overwhelming some of our EU partners.

Of course one can have some sympathy with the PM: after all, like all political leaders, he has to keep his Party and the voters on board. You have only to look at the media to see that many think the UK is overcrowded and people often use the phrase 'charity begins at home' as an excuse for not responding to the needs of others. However the UK has been great at responding to DEC's Emergency Appeals and raising money through events like Red Nose Day.

Both the Bishops and the BU Secretary General spoke of churches coming forward offering homes, foster places etc and of wanting to work with local government on this matter. I am very ignorant about what is happening in our area to coordinate these offers. Has the North West Baptist Association compiled a list of churches prepared to help the refugees and to lobby the Government on their behalf? Is the local Churches Together group working in this area? Is it simply down to individual churches to sort something out?

Some of the churches in this area together with people of different faiths and no faith came together last year to start a Food Bank. Ought we to start thinking how, as a local community, we can make a coordinated contribution to helping in this current crisis?

(If you go to the Christian Aid web site www.christianaid.org.uk and follow the links to Refugee Crisis Appeal you can read about Christian Aid's work to help in the crisis. There is also a good three

minute video clip entitled 'Refugee Crisis: The Way Forward' which is worth watching.)

Alan Redhouse

~ Fallowfield & Withington Food Bank ~

A food bank thank you !

Thank you so very much for the very generous donations made to the food bank which have been all the more welcome given the ever increasing numbers of clients attending the food bank sessions.

We have been well blessed with Harvest donations from Heald Place Primary School and Holy Trinity Church Platt. Staff members from the Christie Hospital have also commenced a regular collection.

Food bank volunteers have been busy asking their employers for help. Dinesh, who is Manager at Tesco Express, organised a collection during freshers' week and £200 of food was collected. Aaron, who works at Sainsbury Local, has arranged a permanent collection point in store.

Jess did a cake bake which added another £30 to our funds.

Tesco collection 4th-5th December Tesco Burnage

We will be collecting at Tesco Burnage from 2pm -10.00pm on Friday 4 December and from 8am-10pm on Saturday 5th December. We will need lots of volunteers to make this the biggest collection yet and to ensure that we have additional items over the festive season.

We will also be Marking-up, Weighing, and sorting donations on Sunday 6th December 12.30pm at Withington Methodist Church. Why not join us and enjoy lunch as we start this mammoth. It's always fun.

Please contact Colin 07739571991 if you can help volunteer for any of the above.

Colin Marchbank Smith

~ The right to food? Beyond foodbanks?

Tackling the scandal of food poverty in 21st century Britain. ~

*Do you care passionately that no one in the UK should go hungry?
Do you think that Government could do more to tackle food
poverty? Do you want to be part of building a food justice
movement in the UK?*

Join us at a 'Right to Food' event

The explosion in food poverty and the huge numbers being forced to turn to food banks undermines the UK's commitment to ensuring that all its citizens have access to food – one of the most basic of all human rights.

Whilst hundreds of thousands of people have had to turn to Food Banks in recent years, emergency food aid cannot be a long-term solution. A growing list of organisations including Church Action on Poverty, Oxfam, the Sustainable Food Cities Network, Trussell Trust, the Feeding Britain Inquiry have all called for stronger and more coordinated national and local government to take action to reduce food poverty.

Church Action on Poverty is organising a series of events across the UK to start bringing together a broad range of groups across the country into a more powerful national campaign to end food poverty and hunger in the UK in 2016.

We invite you to join us at a 'Right to Food' event this November. Hear about the findings of the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty - due out at the end of October – and have your input into shaping the growing campaign to tackle food poverty and hunger in the UK.

We are in the process of organising events all over the country.

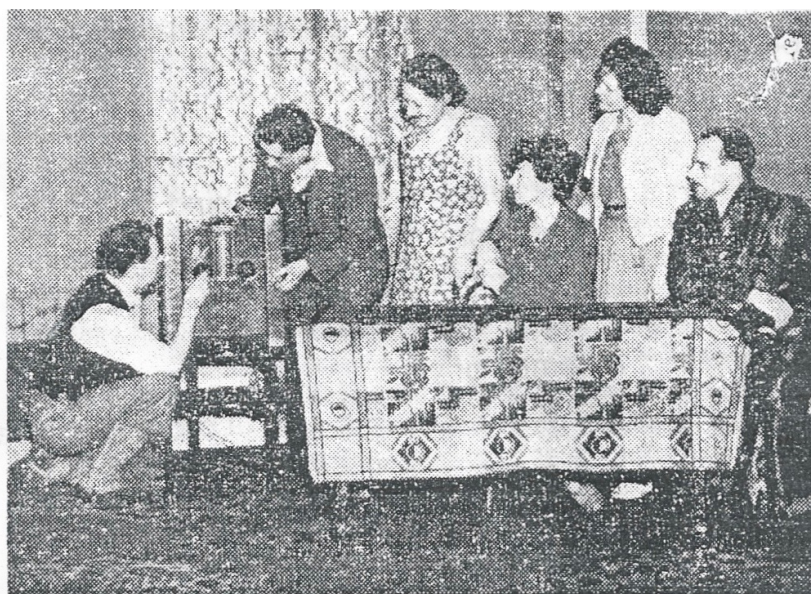
Our nearest event is:

Bridge 5 Mill, Manchester, 3:00–5:00pm, Monday 23 November

If you'd like to find out what's happening and book a place at an event please contact: www.church-poverty.org.uk/righttofood

~ From the Archive ~

Some of the older members of the congregation will remember Olga Heath. She was a Deacon, Church Secretary and National President of the Sons of Temperance. I suspect no one present will remember her as a leading member of Union Chapel Drama Society nor indeed remember the Drama Society itself. I am grateful



All eyes are focussed on the try-out of the old radio set by Samuel Burke (George Hewitt) and Syd Fish (Harold Crossley) in this scene from the Union Baptist Church, Fallowfield, production of "Painted Sparrows." Also on the picture are Ruth Bentley, Olga R. Heath, Betty McVittie and Frederick Stubbs.

to Eileen Land for this press cutting showing a production of 'Painted Sparrows' on the stage of the Large Hall.

~ News of the Family ~

Congratulations to **Margaret Garner** on her successful graduation from her Music Therapy course.

Congratulations to **Nathan Geere** who has been made a Sixer in his local Cub Pack.

We wish **Sarah Geere** all the best as she starts her new job in a week's time.

October Church Walk - Above Stalybridge



We set off in high spirits



We had every confidence that our leader knew the way



The views from on top were spectacular!

See you all on 7th November

**~ Minutes of the Church Meeting
of Union Chapel Fallowfield (Baptist)
held on Sunday 20th September 2015
at 11.20am.~**

Present: Ian Geere (chair), Gwyneth Heritage Roberts, David Garner, Margaret Garner, Andy Howes, Margaret Edmonds , Eileen Land, Ted Land, Gwen Mattock, Michael Welford, Leonie Earnshaw, Julie Bryce, Beryl Dykes, Steve Roberts, Margaret Redhouse, Colin Marchbank-Smith, Owen Roberts, Rose Bell, Irene Roberts, Rachel Adebago, Sarah Geere.

Apologies: Enid Welford and Alan Redhouse (with children)

The Minutes of the July 2015 Meeting (in current magazine) were approved.

Matters Arising and Notification of AOB for this meeting:

Harvest; start of new term for classes

1. Resignation:

Harry Fleming has resigned as a member of the Church. He has sent an email explaining his reasons to all members who have email. There was a time of reflection on what had been said and done in matters involving Harry over the last 18 months. There was a shared feeling of sadness and also of failures on both sides, but despite the efforts of a number of people, mutual understanding could not be achieved. Thanks were expressed by several people to those who had spent time trying to resolve Harry's issues. Ian G, Andy H, Michael W and Gwyneth HR are to liaise to respond to Harry's email on behalf of the Meeting. Michael W led the Meeting in prayer.

2. Linton House:

The University is using Linton House for student accommodation for the academic year 2015-16. This means that any decisions are less urgent. Further communication from the University is awaited.

3. Insurance Requirements update:

The new term has started and Michael W has been distributing updated documentation to the class leaders, including a revised version of the Notes for Tutors booklet. All groups whose

activities involve obvious risk are already insured indepently. We are trying to get all groups using the buildings to carry out risk assessments. Thanks were expressed to Leonie E and Michael W for their work on the risk assessments. A number of new policies which the Insurers require us to have, which deal with activities in the building, are being drafted. The Meeting delegated approval of the wording of these policies to the Deacons.

4. Junior Church:

We are trying to link Junior Church and senior Church more. A programme of creative activities for the children to do during Second Session has been put together. If any members of the congregation would like to participate, please speak to Lorna R or Sarah G.

5. NWBA:

Ian and Sarah G have been approached to become Co-Moderators (chairing the Trustee body) of NWBA. They have met the regional team and are happy to offer their services. This will involve a time commitment, both locally and representing the North-West on the national BU Council. This is still subject to further confirmations.

6. Harvest Service:

We were not planning to have a “traditional” harvest service this year as the form of service does not reflect our lives as a suburban church. Richard and Rosemary Kidd are coming to speak to us in October about the charitable project in India which they are involved in, which people may choose to donate to as the “cause” for the harvest season. We are, as always, collecting food regularly for Foodbank.

Other agenda items were deferred as the time was running on.

The Meeting closed with a song at 12.20pm

Date of Next Meeting: 15th November 2015

~ The Big Shift ~

Christian Aid is running a campaign on Climate Justice ahead of the UN Conference on Climate Change which takes place in Paris between 30th November and 11th December 2015. The campaign is called 'The Big Shift' and is lobbying the UK Government to:

1. publicly commit to abandoning support for coal extraction abroad through UK export finance.
2. make a clear commitment to phase out the burning of coal in the UK by 2023 – along with a concrete, published plan that sends a clear signal to industry and investors.
3. call on World Leaders to create a fair and ambitious global deal on climate change at the UN climate change talks in Paris in December.

You can add your name to an email to Amber Rudd, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change by going to www.act.christianaid.org.uk. There is also much more information on this site including a resources pack, ideas for worship and the science behind climate change. Just follow the links.

Marches are being planned ahead of the UN Conference. The People's Climate March 2015 will be held in Cardiff & Edinburgh on 28th November and in London & Belfast on the 29th November. So if you are in any of these cities on these dates you would be welcome to join in. You can register on the Christian Aid web site.

~ 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

Christward Number 478. Published 30th August 2015

The magazine of Union Chapel Fallowfield(Baptist),
2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield Manchester, M14 6EQ

Web Site: www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk

Editorial Group:

David Garner: e-mail: david.garner@mac.com

Steve Roberts: e-mail: steve.roberts@man.ac.uk

Alan Redhouse: ☎445-0020; e-mail: alan.redhouse@virgin.net

Minister: Revd Ian Geere. email: ian@unionchapelbaptist.org.uk

Mobile: Tel: 07552 788 733

Office ☎225-4226

Secretary: Gwyneth Heritage Roberts; ☎431 4446

Treasurer: Nicola Hamilton ☎270 0087

Users & Buildings Co-ordinator: Eileen Land. ☎445-7694

Deacons:, Leonie Earnshaw, David Garner, Nicola Hamilton, Gwyneth Heritage Roberts, Andy Howes, Eileen Land, Gwen Mattock, and Carole Walker.