



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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From the editors Jenny and Pat

We hope you enjoy this edition of Act Together- with articles from several members and associates sharing their passions and their projects. We would like this newsletter to be a place where we can get to know each other better, and perhaps challenge and support each other too. We would especially welcome contributions from people who are no longer able to join us at Community gatherings.

In this edition we have copied two Christmas letters from 2011 and 2012 from Donald and Jacqui Henderson who have moved to France to live sustainably - even if it means eating a sheep you have played music to! On the phone to ask their permission to reproduce the letters I asked Donald if they might be able to get to a Weekend, and he said that much though they would love to it will depend on there being a break in their year - in autumn between the chestnut and the plum harvests! He has exciting news of young people moving back into his village- of which I hope he will write more next time. If you haven't written before for Act Together before please do tell us something of your own story. Articles and photos will be needed by April 2014 - sent to Jenny at medhurst@phonecoop.coop or by post to Greystone, Carlton, Stockton-on-Tees TS21 1DR

An adapted Christmas Carol.....

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where
he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The next part of the story is not often told,
The cattle are filthy, the manger is cold.
Far out of their hometown, the young family
cowers,
Unsure of their future, and afraid of the
powers.

Why this way, Lord Jesus? Why not comfort
and bling?
Why not a grand entrance, as a rich ruling
king?
You could have had power, you could have
had wealth,
You'd have founded Your kingdom, with no
risk to Your health.

But Your way Lord Jesus, is affirming the
meek,
Provoking compassion, bias to the weak,
Reversal of order, reversal of worth,
The new Jesus kingdom, our heaven on earth!

Dedicated to Gillian Weeks who taught me to always
remain grounded. *Andrew Weeks*

Emily Innes remembered



Emily was a member of the Ashram Community from its earliest days. She had lived with Grace and John when she came to work as a Personnel Officer at Ferrantis in Withernshawe.

She bought a semi in Didbsury and had a succession of lodgers there, including Maria from Greece. Emily was godmother to Maria's twin sons and learned Greek for them, visiting many times.

St Aidan's URC was Emily's church and she was a faithful member until the dreaded migraines took over her life.

She was passionate about racial justice and taught English to many Asian women. Oxfam in Didsbury benefitted from her service, and she led many walking tours in this country and abroad for the Ramblers' Association.

She served as Convenor for the Community and during that time managed to visit all the branches and Houses, and was a valued member of the Manchester branch.

She will be remembered for her feisty self and commitment to many causes. She died at home peacefully this summer a few days after her 90th birthday. *Liz Turner*

My journey into Ashram and into Ministry

When our son was born in 1972 I assumed that my life would go on much as normal and that in time when he was old enough I would find some clerical work to keep me occupied to go along with the things I was doing in my local church through leading Brownies and other things. All this changed when, our 16 year old daughter told me that her boy friend's mother was giving up a part time post and wondered if I would be interested in going to work for a woman called Mary Cooper at the local Adult Education Centre. I went along and met Mary, a Marxist, feminist, sociologist who changed my life and made me the person I am now. I had left school with no O levels, learned to type, got married and became a mother exactly as my father had predicted.....Mary showed me that I was worth more than that. She encouraged me to begin to study with the Open University, and to get involved with not only the feminist movement but the peace movement and other radical activities as well. When I was challenged to become, first of all a broadcaster and then a preacher she boosted my confidence and was delighted eventually to come to my graduation, the first of her students to graduate she told me. When I was challenged to move forward to candidate for the ordained Ministry, Bob was to some extent influenced by his involvement in her classes that enabled him to take the risk of redundancy and to start a new life as a teacher and then to travel with me in the gypsy life of Ministry for the next twenty and more years.

If it had not been for Mary I would not even have become a local preacher let alone a Minister, and I thank God for putting her in my way, despite her opinion that she was a very strange disciple to be used in that way.

My knowledge of the work of Ashram began when I was working on the God Squad of Radio Tees. I was asked one

day to go to interview a person whom we all know now as Jenny Medhurst. She had just returned from Voluntary Service Overseas and was working as a home help in the area to be able to continue her service on the home front so to speak, what she told me that day and what I shared with Bob when I went home, made us want to know more. My life took me in a different direction, but Bob found a spiritual home within the community which he had not found in conventional church life, and his interest continues.

When we look back over the years we see God's Spirit at work in some strange and wonderful places in an unlikely saint like Mary Cooper who would never see herself as such, in putting a recording machine in the hands of an amateur broadcaster and in the friendships found through an organisation called the Ashram Community.

I thank God for them all as I offer the story to you.
Pat Billsborrow

More Than Just Coffee update

Traidcraft's new instant coffee, grown high up a Guatemalan volcano, is already making a huge difference to the coffee farmers there. They have been able to sell twice as much coffee this year, invite 15 more growers to join their co-operative, and most importantly get technical help to tackle the coffee rust which has devastated many other small scale farmers on the country's northern border.

Traidcraft targetted the poorest coffee farmers it could find, helped them to gain Fairtrade certification, got the coffee processed locally to add more benefit, and then bought the first container of their coffee. It is not something big companies can or would do, it is what makes our coffee More Than Just, and it is why your continued support for dedicated Fairtrade companies like Traidcraft is so important!
Jenny Medhurst

Environmental Nakba: Israeli environmental injustices in Palestine

Posted on [4 September, 2012](#) by [Eurig Scandrett](#)

For three days at the end of August, Friends of the Earth Scotland vice-chair Eurig Scandrett joined Bobby Peek from [Friends of the Earth South Africa \(groundWork\)](#) for a Friends of the Earth International delegation to the West Bank, Palestine. At the invitation of Friends of the Earth Palestine (PENGON), they were asked to witness and report on environmental violations in the West Bank caused by the Israeli occupation. This is part one of two of a reflection on this visit.

During our short visit, Bobby and I witnessed significant environmental problems. Untreated Israeli sewage and industrial waste is contaminating Palestinian land. Pollution from Israeli factories is damaging Palestinian lungs. Palestinian water is denied to Palestinians so that Israeli settlers can live profligately on Palestinian land. The problems are significant, although they are not unique. Throughout the world, people are having land and other resources stolen and exploited, having wastes dumped on them and fighting industrial pollution. What is distinctive here is that they all have a single cause: the Israeli occupation.

The Israeli expropriation of water is a major cause of conflict in the West Bank. Israel controls access to the aquifers and prevents development of water extraction. The result is that West Bank average water consumption is 73 litres per person per day, compared with WHO minimum requirement of 100. By contrast, the 580,000 settlers consume 369 litres per person per day.



In the agricultural village of Kafr Dik, in the region of Salfit, 80% of the land and two ground wells have been confiscated for three settlements and an industrial zone. More than 10,000 people receive 28 thousand litres of water per day, drawn from close to

the Israeli industrial zone, which must be rationed and supplemented with tankers. Salfit region is a strategically important area as Israel is seeking to expropriate a band of land from the Ariel settlement to the Jordan valley, splitting the West Bank into two, discontinuous parts and making a viable Palestinian state impossible.

The expropriation of water is also a major source of conflict in Om Elkheir, a village built by Bedouin on land bought in the South Hebron hills in the West



Bank after they had been forced from their land in the Negev once it had become Israel. Israeli residential settlements and poultry factory-farms now abut their village, and use 89% of their water, whilst the Palestinian Water Authority is prevented from developing water access by the Israeli military.

Why focus on the Israeli occupation? The West Bank comprises 21% of historical Palestine (most of the rest now being in Israel) and has been under military occupation by Israel since the invasion of 1967 (as was the Gaza strip until annexed by the elected Hamas government in 2007). The military occupation has made possible the development of over 120 illegal settlements, which can be residential, agricultural and industrial, and the separation wall which follows the Green Line (the *de facto* border), 85% of which is within the West Bank.

The Oslo Accord of 1993 divided the land in the West Bank into three zones, giving the Palestinian Authority control over 2.7% of it, within limits set by Israel, and partial control over 25%. Since 2002, a further 8.5% of the West Bank has been confiscated (including the most fertile land and water access points) in order to build the separation wall, which maintains an apartheid separation between Israel and Palestine. Essentially, nothing happens within the West Bank without Israeli permission – which means that nothing happens unless it is in the interests of Israel and the Israeli settlements.

Waste is another political tool used by the Israeli occupiers. The settlement of Ariel dumps liquid waste – sewage and industrial – onto Palestinian water-courses and agricultural land, making the contaminated and unworkable land easier to confiscate.

In Qalqilia we saw the great mound of solid waste from 20 years of unregulated dumping of Israeli industrial and chemical waste. We heard how the toxins from this waste are leaching into the water used by nearby Jayyous and Azzun, with the resultant risk to the health of their inhabitants.



Military zone

Qana is a beautiful, green valley with a series of permanent springs, which has been recognised for its conservation value by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It has been maintained for generations by local Palestinians who use it for livestock grazing, olive production and recreation. Israel declared the valley a military zone in 1979 and attempted to exclude Palestinians.

Following protests, the military designation was withdrawn in 1982, and the Israeli occupying authorities declared Wadi Qana a 'nature reserve' – which involves the exclusion of Palestinians! Between 1979 and 1982, nine settlements were built around the top of the valley, which pumped raw sewage into the wadi until a pipe was installed in 2005.

In Tulkarem, in northern West Bank, there is an industrial estate with eleven chemical factories built on confiscated Palestinian land behind the separation wall. In this 'seam zone' between the green line and the separation wall there are no controls, and no Palestinian authority can implement restrictions. The Israeli military controls who enters and leaves the factory, which guarantees low wages, poor health,

safety and environmental conditions. The industrial site was first established in 1984 when the Gishuri plastics recycling plant relocated from within Israel, where it was subject to legal action for pollution. Within the seam zone, it can pollute with immunity and has attracted other factories to the site.

An environmental Nakba

In all these cases what we have seen is environmental injustice perpetrated by Israel through its occupation. It is clear that the theft of resources and pollution of land and water are designed to serve one purpose: the ongoing apartheid separation of Palestine – an environmental Nakba.

Nakba is the Arabic word for catastrophe. To call the industrial pollution, unregulated waste dumping and expropriation of resources by the Israeli occupation a catastrophe is certainly a legitimate claim. However the Nakba has a particular significance in Palestine, as the catastrophe which befell the Palestinian people in 1947-9, with the brutal expulsion of 80% of the population by Zionist militias from the area of Palestine which became Israel.

The expulsion was accompanied by massacres, rapes, destruction of villages and the attempted erasure of a people who had lived there for generations, and resulted in the 1.5 million refugees currently unable to return home. It is in this context that it is possible to talk about an environmental Nakba – Israel is using environmental violations to make the land uninhabitable for Palestinians, to try to drive them from their land as the settlements expand.



The Zionist project, since its early days, has been oriented towards the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population to be replaced with an ethnically pure 'Jewish state'. Environmental injustices are one more weapon being waged in this colonial project.

Sheffield Pitsmoor Methodist Church Lunch Club 1976 - 2013

Our lunch club started on Tuesdays serving 40 people, referred to us by Social Services. It was run by a group of older ladies from church, my mother and auntie being two of them. A few years later Wednesday Lunch Club started, again serving 40 people each week. This was staffed by a lady from P.M.C. and several from the nearby Catholic Church. When Betty decided to study Home Economics the Community Worker from the Manpower Services scheme was left with the responsibility. He did his best but did not realise that gravy is not usually served with fish fingers. Then, we had free transport, run by the city council and a grant towards gas and electricity. Eventually the scheme folded and we had to plan how the Wednesday Club could continue!!

That's where I came in!! This was probably 1993, although I can't be sure. The scheme had run Wednesday Lunch Club and visited up to 400 older people in the area. Obviously there was no way we could continue visiting but, silly me, if you can cook for four you can cook for 40. Well it's not quite like that!! How do you pick up a piece of pastry to cover a meat and potato pie for 20 people, twice?? or boil frozen vegetables - it takes ages to come to the boil, but is by then nearly cooked. Now we cover it with boiling water and hope for the best.

Over the years helpers have come and gone and usually include at least one person with learning difficulties. For 2 or 3 years we had Clive, a professional cook, who could cook alone quite easily. Of course he had support in the kitchen and around the tables. Sadly he became ill and died. He had no close family in England, but did for a while start coming to services.

For a while we imported meals from a school kitchen and just needed to serve these. We ordered from a menu the previous week. At the time we had 3 vegetarians, I don't think the school cook had any idea of diets apart from the classical English dishes, and this in a multi-cultural area. She once questioned re-ordering 3 vegetarian meals along with the others, she said 'well don't they eat meat at all?'

About three and a half years ago I was the only one preparing food and peeled potatoes etc., at home, the day before and was really getting desperate for help. I was asked to take a lady with learning difficulties, 'fully supported' of course. I tried to refuse as it's not just a case of cooking but keeping an eye on other helpers and the folks we serve as well. I was stressed enough - too late Angela came and with 2 - 3 weeks Mark came

in unannounced, sent by Lunch Clubs and Age Well.

Now we have the 'A' team in the kitchen on Wednesdays. Angela peels potatoes, sets tables, makes good coffee and loves washing-up. Mark usually does a lot of this 'he is a workaholic'. If he has to be missing Angela loves to take charge. Bread and butter pudding is his job as is coring apples for baked apples as well as helping with whatever else we are cooking. We can't stop him - washing walls, cupboards and cleaning floors. 'I'm going to take him home one day'.



Mention must be made of Barbara who has been helping nearly as long as me. She came from the nearby Day Centre for folks with mental health problems and has hardly been missing since. She has had epilepsy since she was a child and we have had some hairy moments with her Petit Mal and once with a full blown fit. Now she is well controlled but she is partially sighted and has had a

stroke, but she loves to be part of the team and hates her brothers and sisters looking after her too well. Mary who is now 87 still comes and collects the money for us and helps to clear up.

Of course once the door is unlocked all sorts of folks come looking for the 'Vicar' or money or have been mugged. We are struggling at the moment to keep numbers up as if we fall below 10 we shall be classed as a group of friends and lose the grant. Why on earth so many lunch clubs are allowed to start seems ridiculous. I can't remember the last time anyone was referred to us by Social Services. Now transport for Wednesday has to be arranged through Community Transport. Its quite a commitment for the folk who need this, as it has to be booked weekly on the Wednesday for the following week or there is none left.

But we carry on. Some of our people are what I call professional lunch club goers, several days a week around the area. There's nothing wrong with that, but there must be dozens of people who won't or can't make the effort to come. They are missing out a good meal, a real change of scene and good company, all for £2.50.

We shall carry on whilst we can. After all our family would not know what to do if lunch clubs folded. My sister does the menu and shopping for Tuesday Lunch Club and my brother-in-law stands in for me when I'm on holiday.

Janice Gear

Holy Rood House, Thirsk, 23-30 August – a personal view

Let's get one thing out of the way to start with – Thirsk is known in some circles as “Herriot Country”, and the house next to the one we were staying in was originally lived in by a Miss Warner who bought the open land across the road so that her view could never be spoiled in the future. She appears in the books and television programmes under a different name, I am told.

None of the fifteen Ashram holidaymakers visited the Herriot Museum as far as I am aware, but we did lots of other things in the course of the week, or rather less than a week in some cases.

From the start, we found lots of Ashram connections with the area, particularly when the Medhursts visited us for the day on the Saturday and Frank realised that we were in the building for which he had designed the chapel extension when it was being adapted as a convent to house a community of nuns who had to move out of Middlesbrough some fifty years ago. Helen Davies visited former Ashram member Moira

Neish over the weekend and brought us a marrow from her garden. Several of us attended the local Sowerby Methodist Church on the Sunday morning, where the preacher was Geoffrey Bruce, father of another past member, Chris Bruce. A visit from Alan Powers and his wife one evening – they live not far away - led to a spirited theological discussion for a good hour after dinner, sparked off by Pippa Thompson, though the number round the table at the end was considerably smaller than the number that had partaken of the meal. Helen established that Holy Rood House Library had four books by John Vincent in their stock at the beginning of our stay. They probably have several more by now.

So what was there to do in North Yorkshire? Well, one or two went swimming in the handily-placed local pool; Grace Vincent did ten lengths at the first attempt. There was Thirsk itself to explore, with its cathedral-like parish church, its handsome Georgian houses, its busy market place, still with some independent local shops, its little river, the Cod Beck, that was going to be made navigable in

the eighteenth century; the required Act of Parliament was passed in 1763, but then they ran out of money. Thirsk has 15 information boards around the town full of interesting facts, such as that John Wesley paid several visits, though the first occasion was on some sort of public holiday, when the behaviour of the inhabitants was so disreputable that he left immediately. The town seemed very respectable today, though the residents spoke with a strong North Yorkshire accent so I could have missed some nuances.

But mainly there were ruins – the odd castle such as Helmsley, but mainly abbeys of one sort or another that Henry VIII had it in for. Bus services in the area were sparse, so we were grateful to those with cars for loading them up with the non-drivers, to deposit them somewhere for a walk or go together to some place of interest. Most of us saw Byland Abbey, some walked on to Rievaulx, and on the last day all seven of us visited Mount Grace Priory. The story was always the same: a new monastic order was founded

because the previous one was deemed to have become corrupt, but gradually the new one couldn't help but amass wealth of its own. The explanatory text at Rievaulx made it all seem very contemporary. The abbey's sheep produced more wool than they needed, so they began to trade with Italy. Such was their success that they started futures trading, but then the sheep were decimated by some sort of disease and the Abbey had twice to be bailed out by the Crown to avoid bankruptcy. Some of the group also visited Ampleforth Abbey earlier in the week, but that has a different story.

On the last day we combined a visit to the Priory with a walk along part of the Cleveland Way, with stunning views across the surrounding countryside, after which David Dale gave his passengers a helter-skelter ride back through the narrow lanes that formed the boundary of the national park. Our final meal was a masterpiece of ingenuity in using up left-overs.. If you speak to her nicely, Josie might give you the recipe for the extra-special All Bran pear crumble. As ever, thanks go to David Dale for making the holiday possible in the first place.

Linda Marshall



How I acquired a second family

(It was easy, honestly)

Winter 1979 and back at home with my parents after a failed marriage. No idea about what I would do regarding a holiday and, yes, I really needed a holiday. Then I read an article in the local paper which said that the Education Department at the Town Hall would be taking a group of 18—28 year olds to visit Kranj (I later found out that the j is silent), Oldham's twin town in Yugoslavia. All you had to pay was the fare. I didn't have much to spend on a holiday so I jumped at the chance.

August came and we embarked on the journey by train and boat. On arrival we were shown our accommodation in the Dijaski Dom (house of youth). We were all excited about visiting a communist country. Tito was still alive. We were also a little disappointed that it didn't appear to be that different from other European countries. The shops certainly sold a variety of goods, well at that time they did.

We were very well looked after by the Municipality of Kranj. Full board and all our excursions included. We were taken to numerous places of interest in the province of Yugoslavia named Slovenia. These included the Postojna Caves, a number of castles, lots of Partisan museums and many other places.



Gogi, Urša and Miša

The middle Sunday of the visit arrived. This was the day when each of us would be assigned to a local family who would entertain us for the day. We finished breakfast, collected the gift we had been advised to bring for “our family” and waited in the refectory. The Oldhamers stood at one side of the room and the residents of Kranj who were to be our hosts, stood opposite. All were a little nervous! Someone gave a speech (In Slovenia there is **always** a speech and it is usually lengthy.) At last the names were read out.....Josie Murphy and Marta Kovač. I was introduced to Marta's parents, Anica and Jerko, and to her boyfriend of a few weeks, Gogi, then I was taken to their house where a glass of schnapps was thrust into my hand and I was taught how to say “Cheers” in Slovene. This was at **10 am!**

They took me to Lake Bohinj. To this day I still say that it is one of the most beautiful places in the world. We climbed up to the waterfall, lunched in a restaurant, went up the mountain in a cable car to have coffee at the top. A wonderful day rounded off by a buffet meal back at their house.

The rest, as they say, is history. I was asked to call Marta by her pet name of Miša, we corresponded regularly and I began to visit. Our families met and got on well together. Miša and Gogi married. Their beautiful daughter, Urša, arrived 13 years later after much heartache as IVF failed amongst other problems. The first time I went after Urša's birth, Miša placed the baby in my arms and said, “She is your child too.” The memory of that moment still brings a tear to my eye.

As I got older Anica and Jerko stopped introducing me as their English daughter. Miša and I declared ourselves to be sisters in 1982, Yes I really am a member of their family. No big event is celebrated without my presence, zero birthdays, Silver and Golden Weddings. Best of all, I am Urša's auntie.

Since cessation in 1991, Slovenia has become an independent country and is in the Eurozone.

Winter reading

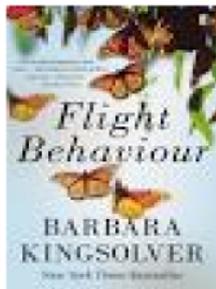
I go to a monthly book club in the Black Horse pub at the end of my road. There are 7-10 of us. It is very informal and often people haven't finished reading the book. We do though go through a series of the same questions for each book. Recently we have started to give the book an average score out of 10 and that together with a short comment about the book goes on the pub's Facebook page. We take it in turns to choose a book for the next month by bringing a few books/or reviews to the meeting and voting on which book to read.

Over the last 12 months we have read the following books:

- Jonas Jonasson: *The 100 year-old man who climbed out of the window and disappeared*. Not being able to face the celebrations for his 100 birthday, the book tells of his escapades and his former life as he around Sweden.
- Ransom Riggs: *Miss Peregrines home for peculiar children*. This is a story of an American teenager who travels to a remote Welsh island to discover the secrets of his grandfather's childhood.
- Shalom Auslander: *Hope: A Tragedy*. A bit hard going, but the reviews are good!
- Jonathan Gabay: *The Brand Messiah*. A book about being successful and then losing power and control. 'A modern day parable'
- Jonathan Lethem: *The Fortress of Solitude*. Set in the 1970's in America when the normal things of life are influenced by political, social and racial disaster.
- Erin Morgenstern: *The Night Circus*. A Circus comes to town with two magicians who both have different ideas on how to train an apprentice in the art of magic.
- Anthony Horowitz: *The House of Silk*. The new Sherlock Holmes novel. Written completely in the style of Conan Doyle. Worth reading.
- Shaffer & Barrows: *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*. Set in Guernsey, it tells what life was like under the German occupation.
- Gillian Flynn: *Gone Girl*. A Psychological thriller with an unexpected ending.
- Louis de Bernieres: *Senor Vivo and the Coca Lord*. A story set among the Columbian drug trade.

Not read at the book club, but if you are a fan of Ellis Peters and the Mediaeval 'detective' monk Cadfael, you may also like C.J. Sansom books written in the time of Henry V111 and Cromwell, involving the 'detective' lawyer Matthew Shardlake – *Dissolution, Dark Fire and Sovereign*.

Margaret Mackley



Flight Behaviour by Barbara Kingsolver

This is a brilliant novel which tackles poverty, class and climate change with humour and beautiful writing. Dellarobia, the main character, is a young mother in the Appalachian Mountains whose life is transformed by a seeming miracle when monarch butterflies overwinter on her mountain. The author is a trained biologist who has seen the effect of climate change on her farming neighbours and cares deeply about them and the future of our planet. The silent, breathtakingly beautiful butterflies break through the scientific, financial and psychological intricacies of climate change, and just as Dellarobia stretches her own wings we want the butterflies and all they represent to flourish too....

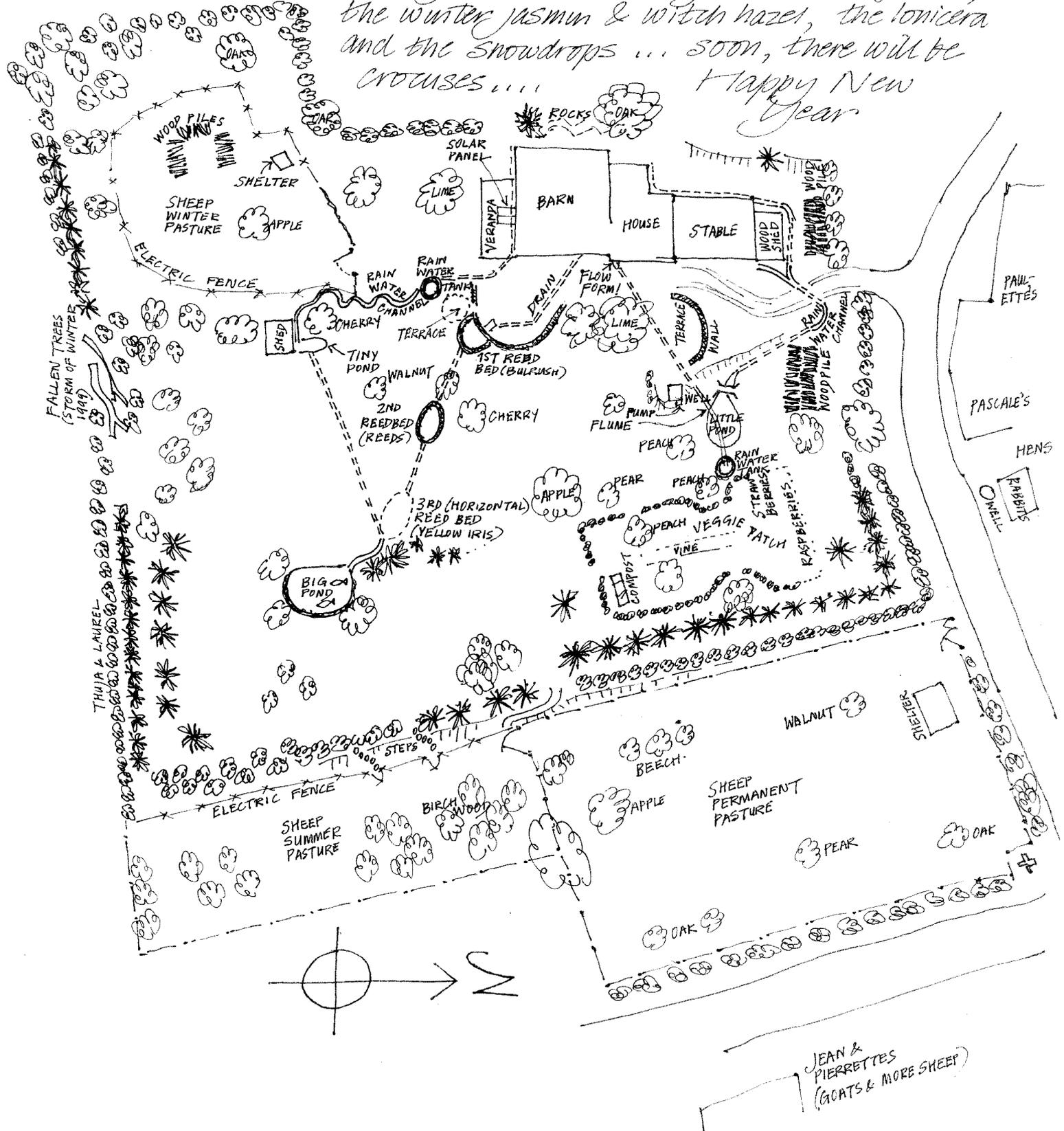
Jenny Medhurst

This is a picture of our project—kind of ecological & slightly crazy. It's to celebrate its near completion after 17 years! It may remind you who have visited of what it was like and give an idea of changes. It's also meant to thank those who have helped with the works, to say how grateful we are and how fortunate to have all this.

Underground water pipes are marked ===== They are for roof rainwater conservation except one which carries house grey waste water

The whole effect isn't that of an English garden —there are wild bits, swathes of grass left to grow long for hay and on the mowed bits, islands of wild flowers ... Just now the cyclamen is in flower, the winter jasmine & witch hazel, the lonicera and the snowdrops ... soon, there will be crocuses ...

Happy New Year



AS TIME GOES BY

ONCE there was a house. It was quite small and built on a rock. It had one room, a tiny window and a well. Times were rough and the door was held tight by a heavy beam. The spot where it sat can still be seen in the stonework. The family grew, the house was enlarged and new out buildings added. The new work was not exactly aligned with the old, and to this day the walls are neither straight nor parallel.

With more prosperous times a bread oven was built behind the fireplace. The stone arch of its mouth is still there.

A larger stable was built with a pretty hay loft and stalls for pigs.

A small dwelling was added with its own stone sink and fireplace. In turn the walls of this building were incorporated into a large barn.

A new entrance was built on the East side with a larger window.

The little old window was bricked up. The well, now inside the barn was filled in and a new one dug.

A lime tree was planted to ensure (as it is said) conjugal harmony.

Also a box tree. Sprigs from it, blessed at the Palm Sunday mass were hung in the barn to protect from harm.

The barn with the munching cattle was the most peaceful place in all Cabaniers we were told.

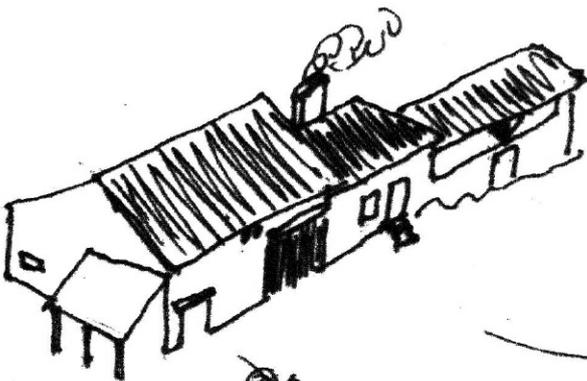
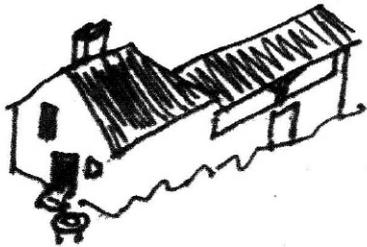
Now the last farmer has left. The cows and pigs have long gone.

The hayloft has become a bedroom. More windows now lighten the previous interior gloom.

There is running water, electricity, a solar panel, a satellite dish.

Yet though the cows have gone sheep have come ... and yes, sprigs of box are still hung in the barn.

Happy New Year!



Christian Viewpoint, by Richard Pater

So what does God think about us, then? Christians, like Jews, talk about God as Father. Indeed the most famous prayer of all – taught to us by Christ himself – starts with the words ‘Our Father’. So how does that work for you?

My father was a good man – a faithful Christian; frighteningly intelligent (at Cambridge he got first class exam results in History, French, and German in successive years!); and a conscientious parent. In public life his contribution to the creation of the National Health Service was sufficient to earn him a place in the Oxford National Dictionary of Biography. But I never really felt my relationship with him was one that by comparison made me feel close to God. I vividly remember seeing him shortly after he had died and saying in some surprise to my mother ‘I loved him’. Maybe there was a better analogy with the bond I had with my mother: but God as father?

And then I became a father myself. And that is when you learn what God’s love is worth.

The ridiculous, irrational, unprofitable, unlearned, unpremeditated love that almost all parents have for their children – that is what God’s love for us is like. It is the love which leads a parent to protect and care for their child despite its faults. The love which, whilst not blind to shortcomings, whilst hoping for successful, virtuous children of whom they can be proud, nevertheless allows those children to make their own decisions - and believes the best of them even when they fail.

Fatherhood from the point of view of the child looking at the father is not a particularly helpful model. But a God who looks on us as we look on our own children: that is a God worth knowing.

Richard Pater
Local Preacher, Stricklandgate Methodist Church, Kendal
published by the Westmorland Gazette, May 2012

Richard was a member of our Community, and its Membership Secretary for many years. He died on 17th May. Anne wrote an inspiring blog of their last few weeks together at whinfellview.simplesite.com and below is the message Andrew sent Anne from the Community before the Thanksgiving service for Richard's life.

Dear Anne,

Sorry that I won't be with you for Richard's memorial tomorrow. I know that there are a number of Ashram members coming, but there are many more of us who wish we could be with you and we all send our love.

We have all been so saddened by Richard's deteriorating health, especially

over the last few months. He has been a very important part of our community and we will all miss him greatly.

Some members particularly remember his role as membership secretary, especially the way that he brought his organisational and computer skills to the task. Others think particularly of the welcoming way in which you both opened up your house to the community and the role he played in making those events successful. Others saw him as a wise voice of reason in the community - often finding a way to break through rhetoric and to get straight to the point with practical, constructive comments. Mostly, however, members have been saying that they will simply miss his jovial enthusiasm, his love of life and his friendship.

Death is a process that every one of us will all face in due course. But in facing Richard's death you have both shown amazing courage and stoicism.

Your honesty, and the way in which you have both sought to retain your positive enthusiasm for life despite your uncertain futures has been inspirational.

Your example will help us all when we come to face the same journey.

I hope that tomorrow is a wonderful celebration of all that Richard has contributed. We will all be thinking of you.

With much love, Andrew



Richard gave us a lot of practical help and support when we were running the Ashram House in Stockton. He came 90 miles from Kendal with a warm loaf of bread to share for breakfast, and then went to the House and used his amazing DIY skills to build a counter and put up kitchen units for the Community Cafe there.

(And he and Frank managed to shift an ancient range which had been discovered behind the plaster in the kitchen. It was too heavy for the builders to shift but not too much for two determined (if not young!) Ashram members!)

He helped again when a needy Zimbabwean asylum seeker made requests I found hard to deny - insisting on sharing the cost, saying that it had been done on behalf of the Community. It made me feel wonderfully

supported at a very stressful time .

I love this picture of Richard in his garden - triumphant over slugs and butterflies and for a time - cancer. A hero and a wonderful friend.

Jenny Medhurst



ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

HOW IMPORTANT WERE THESE TO JESUS?

Nirmal Fernando

To me, the six commitments of our Community are increasingly becoming the sole precepts of intention, feeling and action. As we all know, the focus and following the 'truth as it is in Jesus' is the first of these, and certainly primary to me. To that end, the teachings of Jesus, in the words of Jesusⁱ, particularly spoken to his disciples are indeed my light and guide.

Annunciation

The solely Lukan opined narrative of the annunciation is not central to the one gospel (Gk: *euaggelion*) of Jesus. The narrative writer cannot relate it to the words of Jesus available to us. So, all we can infer is that Jesus didn't think it important if he ever knew about it? More importantly, it is a nonentity and clearly misfits in his sole gospel / mission statement, namely a call to change one's way of life and follow his path of community life in discipleship. However, it might certainly have been key to his mother Mary, having an indispensable and benign impact on her mothering of Jesus. Perhaps, without that, Jesus would have been unable to establish his mission?

Visitation

This again is only in the Lukan narrative, and similarly has little to do with Jesus' discipleship mission – he never speaks about it! More importantly, his one mission is an alternative, unlike the intra social reforms strongly advocated by John the Baptist who according to Luke, related to Jesus while both were in their mothers' wombs; the ethos of the annunciation! Sometimes, the alternative extra paradigm

arises because of the extant intra one; so, Jesus' call for an alternative 'kingdom' of community life in discipleship here and now on earth seems to have been ignited by John the Baptist's mission of reformation; having already rejected an empire (global) mission (revolutionary or otherwise) and also the path of institutional religious reform, as narrated in the temptations.

Nativity

Once again, there is not an iota of evidence that Jesus had the slightest interest in his birth or his birthday.

The word for Christmas in late Old English is *Cristes Maesse*, the Mass of [Christ](#), first found in 1038, and *Cristes-messe*, in 1131. Christmas was not among the earliest [festivals](#) of the [Church](#). [Irenaeus](#) and [Tertullian](#) omit it from their lists of [feasts](#); [Origen](#), glancing perhaps at the discreditable imperial *Natalitia*, asserts (in Lev. Hom. viii in [Migne](#), P.G., XII, 495) that in the [Scriptures](#) sinners alone, not [saints](#), celebrate their birthday; [Arnobius](#) (VII, 32 in P.L., V, 1264) can still ridicule the "birthdays" of the gods. (*Catholic Encyclopaedia*)

Even as far back as the second and third centuries, we know church leaders disagreed about the appropriateness of [birthday](#) celebrations within the Christian church. Some men like [Origen](#) felt birthdays were pagan rituals for pagan gods. Also, since the date of Christ's actual birth had not been recorded, these early

leaders speculated and argued about the date.

What was of Primary Importance to Jesus?

The Kingdom Community which Jesus started was 'different' and not reflections of contemporary society's own life (see *John Vincent, Discipleship, 2007/09, p.9*). It was an alternative way of life!

"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching (Gk: κηρύσσω; kēryssō; *to proclaim with authority, formally and openly: something to be done in obedience*), the gospel (Gk: εὐαγγέλιον; euaggelion; *the good news of that soon to be set up*) of the kingdom of God (Gk: βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ; basileia ... theos; *domain, sphere of godly or benign way of life on earth, not to be confused with a kingdom of state or governance*), And saying, The time is fulfilled (Gk: πληρῶω; plērōō; *complete to carry into effect*), and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye (Gk: μετανοέω; metanoēō; *marked change in mind, heart, and life*), and believe (Gk: πιστεύω; pisteuō; *place confidence in; to entrust*) the gospel."

- Mark 1.14-15

This is Jesus' mission statement, and therefore the primary task then and now for discipleship communities.

The Matthean writer clearly follows this first written Markan emphasis at Mt. 4.12 & 17. The usage of the phrase 'Kingdom of heaven' (Gk: οὐρανός, ouranos, *the seat of order of things eternal and exceptionally and accomplishedly perfect*), which is essentially the same as 'godly or benign life on earth'. Interestingly, the Johannine narrative (Jn.1.29) puts this to the lips of John the Baptist who defines Jesus' mission saying, "... Behold the Lamb (Gk: ἀμνός, amnos; *a lamb, likened to one set apart for the sole purpose of lovingly redeeming*) of God, which taketh away the sin (Gk: ἁμαρτία, hamartia; *the erring,*

mistaken, and those wandering away from the path of righteousness/nature) of the world (Gk: κόσμος, kosmos; *the ungodly multitude, worldly affairs, possessions, riches, etc.*)...". Perhaps, Jesus' unreserved commitment to lovingly redeem at whatever risk, is well seen in the Lukan text (Lk. 4.18) when at the beginning of his mission he even attempts to proclaim in his local synagogue by tactically reading Isaiah 61.1, seeking acceptance in context of believers in prophecy, which only resulted in him narrowly escaping death (Lk.4.28-30). That was the beginning of the religious establishment's rejection of Jesus, and paradoxically the beginning of him becoming the cornerstone of Kingdom Communities in homes and public places.

It is clear that the gospel (good news) was an exclusive, if not in the main the declaration of the Kingdom of God / Heaven, and an obvious call to live its right way of life on earth, not anywhere else. (See *Matthew 4, 23; 9, 35; 24, 14; MK 1, 14; 1, 15*). In implied justification of this position, is the fact that such Kingdom is never described as any other, although referred to some 29 times by Matthew, 15 in Mark, over 35 in Luke, and 5 times in John.

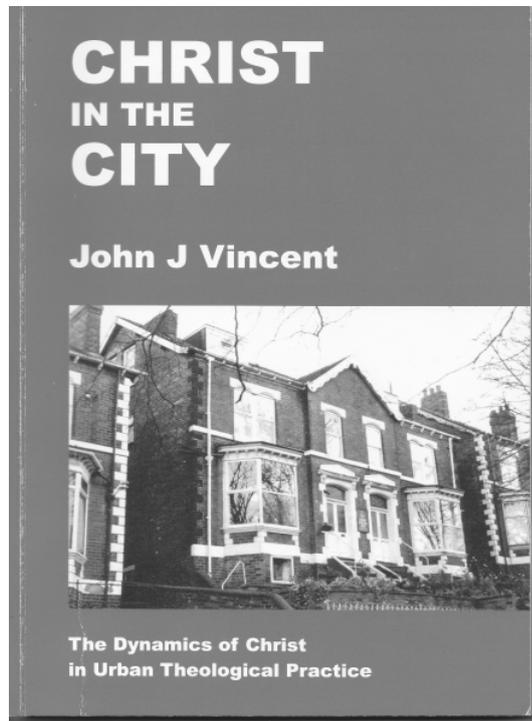
The 'One Gospel' of Jesus has no Celebration in the Church Calendar?

As one who is somewhat familiar with both the Temporal Cycle (The Proper of Seasons) and Sanctoral Cycle (The Proper of Saints), I have yet to find a stipulated reading, let alone a service, feast, celebration or mass in memory of Jesus' one and only Gospel or *euaggelion*.

Revised and adapted from a presentation made at the Quaker Meeting House, Sheffield, and a sharing at London Ashram Group's Agape on Saturday 15 December 2012 at the home of Liz Urben
Ipsissima verba literally means "exact words," whereas ipsissima vox means "exact voice" or the presence of Jesus' teaching.

Book Review. CHRIST IN THE CITY

by John J. Vincent



The sub-title, 'The Dynamics of Christ in Urban Theological Practice' concisely sums the content. The framework is that garland of humanity; the rise of civilisation with its promise of community and equality. In the earliest cities this was the genesis of the social environment in the absence of war, but as the urban areas grew so did the corrupting influence of power and greed. The distinction became one of rulers and vassals leading to excesses of wealth and poverty; a social structure exacerbated throughout history with a global emphasis in the last 200 years of industrialisation.

John Vincent understood this moral descent at the beginning of his working life. Forty years ago, arising from his theological beliefs he founded the Urban Theological Unit in Sheffield, not only to work among the dispossessed in that city but to seek to understand why that inequality had arisen and to work with the city authorities, academics and politicians to eradicate it. John's life has been to seek an order of society of virtually 'Christ in the City'; of a balanced society where poverty, like slavery, is history. This is a lifetime's work, not yet achieved, but his energies are undiminished.

The detail of this, explained in the book, is exhaustive. There is the cultural encounter where the 'Orientation of thinking and action around the culture and customs of post-Christian Britain' - - 'provide a practical and theoretical workshop for urban contemporary, cultural and community studies and experiments' - 'urban was stated as a new concept of Theology'. The public of this is the 'underprivileged, the disadvantaged, the deprived,' including 'immigrants, nomads, vagrants, unmarried mothers, flat dwellers, drop-outs, unemployed teenagers' - - 'those at the bottom of society, who face the complex issues and challenges of urban life with least preparedness' concerning 'not merely those who live at the 'grass roots' of society but those at the 'withered roots'.

John's purpose is to rescue theology from its suburban, ecclesiastical and academic captivities and to restore it to Christianity as the 'second step' behind 'Christian discipleship, practice and experience'. The approach has been through 'Contextual, Urban and Liberation Theologies'. The aspect of liberation theology should be to see the world 'as constructed from myriad tiny blocks that can be mixed, shifted and reconstituted', for the

theologian 'must be seen as an integral part of the community' to contribute to the 'emergence of historical projects within a neighbourhood, a region, a nation and even the globe', with the presence of many faiths and spiritualities making 'Post -secular Cities'.

This is a book that should not be confined to the realm of theology, it should be part of the studies of planners, urban sociologists and geographers, philosophers and others concerned with the social environment of the city with the 'power to persuade that vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values, that our very solitudes and distresses are credible, in so far as they. too, are an earnest of our veritable human being'. It is a book that seeks and to some extent directs us to the missing element of the spirit of the humane city. Its realisation is vital.

Franklin Medhurst

For Church and Nation : British Liberation Theology

Eds.: Chris Rowland and John Vincent.

Reaching out to the dispossessed, helping to give a voice to the voiceless and working with them to bring radical change. These are the ambitions of liberation theology and this book looks over the history and practice of liberation theology in Britain. The collection of essays offers a variety of perspectives – here you will find a brief foundational statement about British liberation theology, a brief account of its origins in Latin America, an overview of its development here and a collection of varied responses to its continued development.

In the first chapter John Vincent provides the necessary grounding for liberation theology in the New Testament. From this foundation the first section of the book moves on to the pre-history of this theology in Latin America. While this is of some interest it is not central to understanding the way in which liberation theology has developed in Britain. The socio economic and ecclesiastical contexts are so different that a comparison and the implications would have been more useful

The second part of the book explores the way that liberation theology has worked into the practice of the church. So the chapters deal in turn with ministry and education. It is helpful to have the basic conditions necessary for the working of liberation theology outlined together with the necessity for the oppressed to be involved in the process clearly emphasised. What is missing is any experiential material where the authors give us the benefit of their attempts to put it into practice in a British church setting.

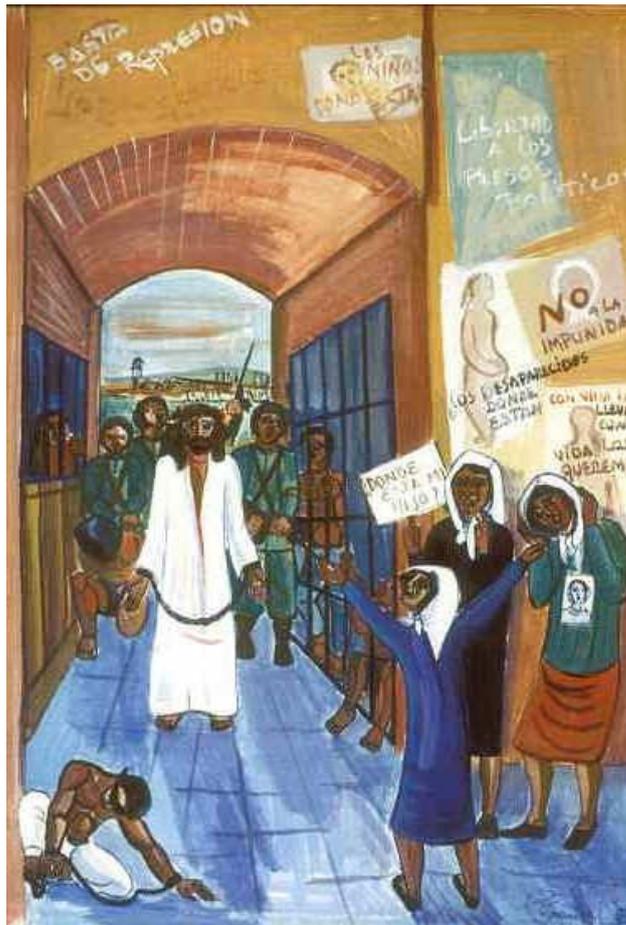
The third section of the collection is the most interesting. Here the various authors seek to relate the practice of liberation theology to several contemporary issues. Easily the best example of what we can call a worked example of liberation theology is the account of Somewhere Else. This is the story, and a reflection on the story, of a group of

people in Liverpool who meet to bake bread. In this section theology comes alive and the reader gets a sense of how it informs and enriches the lives of those involved.

The chapter on The Big Society gives a good summary account of the social policy implications of this vision of the future from the current Tory leadership. Alan Billings provides us with a critique of socialism and the means to remedy the shortcomings of capitalism, all in the space of twelve

pages. The result of this is to make it more provocative than analytical and leaves the reader puzzling about its relevance to liberation theology.

The aim of liberation theology is to be 'transformative through participation in collective struggle and engagement.' (p.32) What the book offers are statements and restatements of the principles of liberation theology together with some analysis of the current situation. What is missing is an account of that engagement with scripture and the oppressed that this theology claims can bring into the light the controlling powers of the world that need to be challenged. In fact there is no engagement with the question of who the oppressed might be in today's Britain.



To assert that liberation theology is an effective way of engaging with the world is not enough after forty years of practice. The examples that we need to tell and show how it is done are missing. If we want to develop a real indigenous theology we might do better to look to the work of Ted Wickham and Neville Black for experiences that we can build on. Their work in engaging with the marginalised and seeking to give them a voice has a pragmatic and common sense quality that points towards a real British theology.

David Jones, April 2013

NEW ROOTS is a volunteer-run shop located on Glossop Road, the profits of which go to projects that support vulnerable people within Sheffield.



Volunteers have renovated the "Speakeasy" which is now back in use, so whether you would like to play the piano, curl up with a hot drink and a good book or attend one of the seminars which are held there, please feel welcome to pop in.

The room can also be booked by groups who would like to meet there for free and if you would like to do so, just ask a volunteer in the shop.

Take life easy in the Speakeasy!

The shop tries to operate as ethically as possible by selling local and fairly traded goods and encouraging groups and other charities to use our window as a campaigning space. There is also a notice board in the shop where information regarding events and services in the local area is displayed. If you can think of any further way New Roots could have a positive impact on Broomhall or if you might be interested in volunteering, please do get in touch.

broomhallnews Feb 2013

Cafe Church

a cafe, on Sundays, for a couple of hours, from 12.30-2.00.
 Burngreave Ashram, 86 Spital Hill.
 wholefood snacks and drinks.
 meeting, talking, sharing, from about 1.00 to 2.00.

The first Sunday of each month

6 Oct ISLAM ADNAN
 3 Nov SYRIA BASLAN
 1 Dec PALESTINE NIATI
 4 Jan ISRAEL PATSY

Faith
 Politics
 Environment
 Social awareness
 Justice and Peace
 Equality and Diversity

"The Big Questions"

for more details ring
 John Vincent on 0114 243 6688



For Christian life and
 action in the world
 Charity Number 1099164
 Company Number 04779914

SEPT.OCT.NOV. 2013
 86 Spital Hill Sheffield S4 7LG
 Tel: 0114 2700972

BURNGREAVE BANQUET
FREE MEALS
 EVERY WEDNESDAY 6-6:30PM
 EVERYBODY WELCOME
 Anyone in need is welcome to come.
 People, who are able - a donation is appreciated

FRIDAYS
 IN THE CAFÉ ROOM
 12 - 1 pm - FALAFELS & PASTIES
 Vegetarian & Vegan Lunches
 10:30am - 12:30pm - Art Group
 1 - 3 pm - Knit & Natter Group
 (Pitsmoor Surgery)

In MULTIFAITH CHAPEL & LIBRARY

INTERFAITH EVENTS
Monthly on First Mondays
 12 Noon - Meditation/Prayer
 12:30pm - Vegetarian Curry
 1:15 - 2:30 - Seminar
 Sept 3rd - Faiths & Meditation
 Oct 7th - Faiths - Angels & Devils
 Nov 4th - Faiths - Creation & Destruction
 Dec 2nd - Faith - in What?
 Contact: Nirmal Fernando
curlsu@hotmail.com
 07932 017 929

COMMUNITY REFLECTIONS
Monthly on Second Thursdays
 7pm - Contemplative Reflections
 8 - Bring & Share Meal
THE INNER LIFE
 Sept 12th - Catholic - Brian Clewes
 Oct 10th - Puritan - James Bullock
 Nov 14th - Sufi - Adnan Khalid
 Dec 12th - Judaism -
 Patsy Cunningham
 Contact: Brian Clewes -
brian.clewes@btinternet.com
 07745 387 191

JESUS & CHRISTIANITY
Monthly on First Saturdays
 12:30pm - Lunches available
 1:30 - Seminar led by John Vincent
 on *Discipleship in Mark*
 3:30 - Tea break
 Sept 14th, Oct 5th, Nov 2nd, Dec 7th
 A Sheffield U3A Group
 Contact: John Vincent
 0114 243 6688

ALSO...
 ●SPACE TO HIRE
 for Meetings, Parties, Activities
 ●RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION
 for Refugees & Asylum Seekers
 ●COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES
 for Volunteers
 Contact: Tamara Donaldson
 07910 922 462

Summer In Sheffield 2014

For the last three years we have had "Work, Pray, Study, Play " 5 -day weeks for visitors. We have been very grateful for the help of Ashram members and others. The last week for the present is Nov 1-6.

In 2014 we invite visitors to share in two special 3-4 days. The first repeats our first retreat of June 2013, the second is a new idea.

Inner City Retreat

Thursday 5 June to Sunday 8 June

A Lenten Retreat. following Jesus into Jerusalem, creating and discovering spirituality in his footsteps today.

Summer School

Monday 4 August to Wednesday 6 August

Programme of seminars, talks, and projects, arranged by the Ashram Study and Research group

Please book the dates. Details will be circulated late

John Vincent



DATES

1-7 Nov Sheffield Ashram Week

2014

22 Feb General Meeting, Sheffield

9-11 May Community Weekend, Castleton

5-8 June Inner City Retreat, Sheffield

12-19 July Ashram Holiday, Lyme Regis

26 July General Meeting

3-5 October Community Weekend Unstone Grange

COMMUNITY

Community Office:

178 Abbeyfield Road, Sheffield S4 7AY

Tel: 0114 243 6688/244 7278

Ashram Press: As above

See Website www.ashram.org.uk for Publications

Ashram Community Trust is a Registered Charity

Registered Charity No: 1099164

Charitable Company No: 477991

HOUSES AND PROJECTS

Burngreave Ashram: 80-86 Spital Hill
Sheffield S4 7LG – Tel: 0114 270 0972

Ashram Centre/New Roots Shop:
347 Glossop Rd Sheffield S10 2HP
Tel: 0114 272 1971

Community Houses: 77 and 79 Rock St
Sheffield S3 9JB – Tel: 0114 272 7144
6 Andover Street Sheffield S3 9EG

BRANCHES

All Members and Associates are attached to one of five Regional Branches. Please contact Secretaries if you would like to know more about meeting or events. The Branch Secretaries are the local contact points for the Community.

SECRETARIES

Midlands – Chris & Lorraine Smedley
Tel: 0115 9288430 – Monthly Meetings

London – Linda Marshall –01784456474
Saturday Meetings – Monthly

North-West – Josie Smith – 01706841532
Meetings as arranged.

Sheffield – Grace Vincent – 01142436688
Gatherings fortnightly – Mon, 7 – 9:30pm

North-East – Jenny Medhurst
Tel: 01740630475 – Meetings as arranged