



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

Issue 96

Autumn 2023

Ashram Community Trust is a Registered Charity – Charitable Co. No: 1099164 www.ashram.org.uk



May Weekend 2023 at Cliff College

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Something very human and distinctively holy

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At the time of writing this, it's the morning after Donald Trump surrendered himself on election interference charges and I have just come in through my front door after spending a little time with 'Stephen' who lives opposite me.

Stephen is in his mid-seventies, a bachelor who lives on his own. He is a quiet person, a little reserved mixed with a bit of shyness, always polite, considerate and courteous. These past nine to ten months have been most difficult for Stephen. Three times an ambulance has taken him to hospital as an emergency with blood clots on his lung, heart failure plus other complications. On one of those occasions, Stephen ended up prostrate on the floor in his bathroom and after two ambulance crews failed in their bid to move him, it took four firemen to manhandle Stephen to his hospital bed situated in his living room. To say Stephen's excessive weight is a hindrance is definitely an understatement and to say that Stephen due to his circumstances has been exposed physically in all manner of situations, is likewise an understatement.

But Stephen has made great strides over these last couple of months albeit very slowly. In the in-between times of the regular visits of the district nurses and carers, Stephen has begun sorting out his home and slowly yet diligently getting his personal affects in order besides managing his own health and welfare. His first outside-his-home adventure was just the other week, when I accompanied him to the dentist and since then he has driven his car with me as the passenger for the first time in over a year. But this morning saw poor Stephen in difficulty again. The technical term is: obstructed defecation syndrome, in other words constipation. But it's what it does to you or rather; the very sad precarious situation it can put you in as I witnessed this morning on entering via Stephen's kitchen, and to see him in such a precarious state is upsetting to say the least.

But this past year has been a real privilege for me. I have discovered someone who is not only nice, a gentleman and a pleasure to spend time with, but one of the most affable, selfless, appreciative people

I know. Naturally, I have grown fond of Stephen and discovered a personality and character that is graciousness itself. And then I returned home from Stephen's a couple of hours ago to something that was the complete opposite - Donald Trump's latest tirade and fiasco.

This time it's all about his jail mugshot, his total self-obsession, his abominable and disreputable way of dominating news coverage around the world with headlines like: "Trump's jail spectacle is historic, but won't harm him politically." From one man across the road despite what he has gone through, yet shows all the dignity and humility in the world, to news headline grabber Trump who is as pathetic and as lamentable a person as you could ever know. And yet, there are Christian churches in America who depict Trump in the image of a 'saviour' and more so by those who count themselves his followers.

I've no idea what Stephen's thoughts are about being a Christian as I'm not aware either over the ten years we've been neighbours whether Stephen has gone to church or not, but here is definitely a person who shows all the positive qualities of Christ's teaching in the way he lives his life, conducts his relationships and conveys his character. All reminiscent of these words from the Book of Micah: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God;" and I expect Stephen would be shocked if I told him that those words and their inference reminds me of him.

You can do all the genuflecting in the world, go through every ecclesiastical ritual, observe every liturgical office, bible bash 'til the cows come home, sing and dance your love to Jesus, spend every moment converting others to the cause in order to show Christian-ness, or just be like Stephen. It certainly makes me think and I count it my blessing to wander over to Stephen's every time I hear something about Trump, and know I will be drawn into the real world of human friendship and something distinctively holy.

David Bown



Co-op frankenchicken protest

I decided to join the protest outside the Coop in Manchester on August 19th about Frankenchickens for several reasons. There is a campaign which is calling on all the major supermarkets to commit to a specific set of standards known as the Better Chicken Commitment. This was created by animal welfare experts to address some of the worst forms of suffering that chickens are put through by the meat industry. So far only Waitrose and Marks and Spencer have signed up to it. I am shocked that the Coop which professes high ethical standards continues to refuse to outlaw this outrageous practice, despite the wishes of members which were made clear at their AGM earlier in the year. Part of the protest was about this refusal to listen to members, of whom I am one.

Also I have long been concerned at the huge numbers of chickens eaten after being kept in appalling conditions where the word 'cruel' is absolutely true. There are of course other serious environmental impacts because soya feedstock is often grown in the Amazon region so linked to the deforestation going on there. We also are now aware of the waste produced on factory farms reaching and polluting nearby rivers.

However on hearing of the extreme cruelty in the Frankenchicken breeding where birds are bred to grow past their usual size to the point they cannot walk, as well as all the other miseries of factory farming, I felt I should join the protest. Like many there I am vegetarian so do not eat chicken but this is about more than a personal ethical stance. Supermarkets can outlaw this extreme form of the industrialisation of animal farming.

We were asked to make our own placards and mine has on it chicken feathers which belong to a beautiful Polish hen which lives in the Animal sanctuary where one of my grandchildren helps. She knows I really love this hen and when it moulted collected the unusual and beautiful feathers. I have used them now in several ways but this seemed a way of communicating my concern that hens are living creatures with real characters and need to be treated with respect and not treated callously as industrial products.

Chris Packham who is strongly supporting the campaign said this: *As a bird lover, I despair at the thought of these gentle, intelligent, and sensitive animals forced to endure such suffering.*

I totally agree. If you wish to add your name to the petition and have not already done so you can do so on line at:

<https://www.change.org/p/supermarkets-stop-selling-suffering>.



Change.org

Sandra Dutson

[Chickens are reared to reach their slaughter weight, 2.2kg, in just 35 days- the equivalent of a human baby reaching adult tiger weight in 2 months – Ed]

The Big Ride For Palestine, 3-6 August 2023

As some of you know, I took part in this year's Big Ride For Palestine which seeks to draw attention to the plight of the Palestinian people. These include the ongoing blockade of Gaza, the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and the discriminatory Israeli Government policy towards Palestinian people. The Big Ride organisation believes that peace and a resolution to the situation in Israel/Palestine is not possible until Israel's apartheid system is dismantled and there is equality for all.

Riders also raised money to support children's work in Gaza by establishing sports facilities for children living in what is often referred to as the world's largest prisoner of war camp. The UN estimates that up to 300,000 children in Gaza show signs of severe psychological stress. Establishing sports facilities for these children will help them deal with such stress and give them a taste of normal childhood.

The itinerary was as follows:

Day 1 Swansea-Cardiff Day 2 Cardiff-Newport Day 3 Newport-Bristol
Day 4 Ride around Bristol

This year there were 300 riders from 22 months of age to 84 years – so I wasn't the oldest cyclist! There were people of all faiths and none, all walks of life and especially a good number of Palestinian people. It was encouraging to have a number of Jewish people who expressed their abhorrence at what the Israeli Government have been doing. The ride was positive and uplifting – and was at all times courteous and respectful of people we encountered on the way. Lovely meals were served by sympathetic local groups – one night it was the local mosque, another it was the Bangladeshi community.

The ride was reasonably easy as much of it followed the coast or used cycleways on disused railways or next to canals. The weather was reasonable for the first two days, but the third day when we started from Newport, everyone was well soaked even before we set off from the Chartist Memorial! High winds were predicted which was a worry as we approached the Severn Bridge – however, someone was smiling on us as the wind dropped and the clouds parted as we spun across the Severn estuary and on to Bristol.

If you want to know more, check out the Big Ride For Palestine website at: [The Big Ride 2023 \(thebigride4palestine.com\)](https://thebigride4palestine.com)

Euan McPhee, Falmouth, Cornwall



The two recipients of this ride's fund-raising are

MECA - to give traumatised Palestinian children in refugee camps (after 75yrs of occupation and displacement) the opportunity to cycle and play and have a taste of childhood

www.justgiving.com/team/tbr2023-meca

and the **Gaza Sunbirds Paracycling club** . The inspiring story of the first Gaza Sunbird whose leg was amputated after a sniper attack is told in the short video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27rf_rSSAOw

Cycling Under Siege in Gaza is the story of a young Palestinian athlete who persevered through the trauma of losing his leg while facing the daily struggles of life under occupation. Alaa al-Dali, 23, lives in Gaza and was once one of the fastest Palestinian road cyclists. Despite training up and down on that road every day for years, he was always refused permission to travel when selected to compete in international competitions. The road where Alaa and his local team train is the longest of the besieged enclave. The 36 km path is hemmed in by the Eretz wall in the north (Israeli border) and by the Rafah crossing (Egypt border) in the south.

Alaa says he was peacefully watching The Great March of Return protests close to the Israel-Gaza border fence 3

when he was shot in his right leg by an Israeli sniper. What followed was a journey of a young man trying to come to terms with a life-altering injury while keeping his life-long ambition of representing Palestine on the world stage alive. This documentary follows Alaa's new struggle to be a para-cyclist under the crushing conditions of the Israeli blockade of Gaza and his determination to persevere and hope.

(Of the 5703 Palestinians injured in the Great March of Return almost half had lower body injuries leading to amputation. 50% of the 1.8m population of Gaza are children, unemployment runs at 40% and 80% of the population are dependent on humanitarian aid to survive.)



<https://www.amostrust.org/palestine-justice/gaza/gaza-sunbirds/>

Jenny Medhurst

Joliba Appeal

At the end of June I received an urgent appeal from Joliba, which supports grassroots organisations in Mali. In a once fertile area destroyed by cotton farming, they have an ambitious tree planting project to revive the land so that people can grow food again and there is significant income for women as it is a wonderful area for fruit growing. Seven months of preparation had gone into the project with 200,000 tree saplings grown from seed and compost pockets dug, and 8,000 volunteers trained *and* there was a forecast of exceptionally good rains for July/August – when the funding collapsed!

The July Community meeting agreed to give £1000 immediately to help the planting to go ahead. The trees will provide fruit, nuts, oil and green manure, protect the land from wind and water erosion and enable food crops to be grown through agroforestry. The whole population -150,000 people - will benefit from reduced flooding and locally grown food, especially the mangoes they were once famous for. As desertification is reversed, young people will no longer have to leave to look for work to enable their families to survive.



Tree nursery at Fousseyi



Glicidia- the leaves make green manure, and the flowers provide food for bees

Thanks to the Community for its gift to this project, bringing a message of hope to communities on the frontline of the climate crisis.

Jenny Medhurst

Cerys and Jenny's food discussion continued

July 18 Cerys sent the following link to an article debunking arguments in favour of meat eating

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/19/why-you-should-go-animal-free-arguments-in-favour-of-meat-eating-debunked-plant-based?CMP=share_btn_link

There is plenty of to and fro in food related discussions. I hope to go to the Sutherland Agricultural Show on Saturday, which was founded in 1951. I shall be there to listen and observe. There is a lot of livestock farming up here, and most people in their 70s, 80s & 90s eat a meat, egg and dairy diet in this area. The dairy and dairy farming in and around Dornoch stopped quite a long time ago, and the slaughterhouse is now disused, possibly to be reused by a whisky producer. Vegan food is easy to come by now in the far north Highlands. I order organic Oatly 1 litre cartons from an Asda a number of miles to the south and organic olive oil, very different to the milk and butter fat which was and is more usually consumed up here. Margarine being an ultra processed food is far too alien for well being. I am reading *Ultra Processed People*, by Dr Chris van Tulleken. It has persuaded me to avoid vegan breakfast burger rolls and vegan sandwiches when out.

As the lesser of ills rather than the greater of goods, I now tend to eat vegan Quorn sausages and vegan Quorn nuggets when out in Inverness. In an uncertain world, where war disruption is occurring, local food has become more of a focus for many people. Oats are grown in Scotland and Northern Europe. Imported grains and soya for animal feeds to produce eggs, chickens, beef and milk is very problematic. A wild chicken is thin, with little meat on it, and lives like a robin on small grubs and insects, laying only a few eggs per year. Enormous quantities of imported grains are used to feed almost all the chickens to produce meat and eggs. Pigs are originally a forest animal, with a short round snout for sniffing out tasty roots and very sharp teeth, to pull them out, and go through the tough fibres. More feed goes to them from imports. Plant protein needs less water, and

less inputs than producing most of the animal foods now sold to vast urban populations. Fairtrade is essential. I suppose each of us considers the food environment we are in, and within the limitations of budget, circumstances, energy levels, and factors such as food deserts, exposure to fast and junk food advertising and so on selects the foods and drinks we buy. I value your contributions especially on Fairtrade. There is so little Fairtrade.

Greetings from Cerys

August 28

Hi Cerys, I was really interested to read of the change in farming in the Dornoch area (I wonder why dairy farming has gone?) and that you are reading the Van Tulleken book on Ultra Processed food. I've heard him on the radio making a lot of sense, and would like to read it too.

Yet another report has come out this morning about the harm to our health from UP foods- but the Govt is in the pay of the big food companies and self regulation won't answer the looming health crisis. Drugs for obesity just make profits for Big Pharma - we need affordable healthy food, and the UK to fund fruit and vegetable growing and stop subsidising intensive arable and livestock farming. That way fruit and vegetables could become affordable for people struggling with the cost of living. (They'd need to put domestic science classes back into schools too, so that people who've only ever bought ready meals learn how to cook.)

I've been concerned about people becoming vegan but eating ultra processed food and it's good to know that you aren't. I've just been to lunch with a friend who helped develop Quorn back in the day..We had home made sauerkraut (he's really into fermented foods), bread made with ancient wheats from a local supplier, sprouted beans, homegrown tomatoes and basil, lettuce and my Palestinian almond and blackcurrant cake.

I'm following Prof Tim Spectre's advice in his weekly Zoe project email- trying to eat thirty different plants a week, always wholefood 5

grains, and as highly coloured plants as possible (at the moment that's a lot of beetroot, tomatoes and brambles!) He's written a number of books- I have his 'Spoon Fed - why almost everything we've been told about food is wrong')

The Guardian article you sent the link to is interesting- but isn't life complicated -I was also convinced by The Meat Paradox....! So I've reduced dairy a lot and eat the odd Fish4ever tinned sardine for brain food. I don't live near anyone producing meat in a way that would make it OK to eat again- even if I could do that after 40yrs....!

In 1972 I went to visit an old lady on a farm outside Newcastle, and she killed one of her chickens to make dinner. It's meat was brown, as it had been running round the yard. And I've long been troubled by the year round availability of eggs, as they should be seasonal..A friend was horrified to learn that even organic hens don't live more than 18 months - hers live 6-10yrs.

Jenny

Cerys Contd Aug 29

My blood pressure was measured at the GP practice, and after the anxiety had eased off the second reading was fine. Radio Scotland was discussing the ultra processed studies that show just how health wrecking they are. Discussing ham with someone from Health Scotland, they said that even a pure ham, or an ultra processed reconstituted ham, both are detrimental to health, red meats and ultra processed meats are raising the risk of colorectal cancer, and that has been known for years. The Guardian newspaper today led with, "Ultra-processed foods causing a "tidal wave of harm", say experts". New research revealing health risks described as a global wake-up call. Andrew Gregory Health editor Ultra-processed food significantly raises the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, heart attacks, and strokes, according to two major studies that experts say should serve as a " wake-up call ". My vegan meal this morning included 2 dried apricots, 2 medjool dates, a few raisins, plenty of tiny tomatoes, 6 sprigs of purple sprouting broccoli and some Clearspring organic tofu. After boiling and simmering I used dried sage sprinkled on the food, and added organic olive oil. So vegans can avoid ultra processed foods for much of the time. It was cooked on a very low usage of electricity, counter-top one place

induction hob, in a stainless steel pan with a base suitable for induction hobs.

The scrawny yard chicken would provide healthier meat than intensive grain fed concentration hut chickens, who are using vast quantities of world grain. Venison from culls being a wild meat is healthier and the premium price limits excess meat consumption. The average consumption of processed food is 55% in British diets, but rising to 80% or more in some people's diets. Viva, the vegan campaigning organisation based in Bristol, does undercover videoing of intensive food production, in chicken sheds and dairy farms. It recently put on displays outside Costa coffee shops on a Saturday, pointing out the cruelty involved in obtaining milk.

I have milked a goat in a Lancashire community, which yielded 50% of a cup for 6 people. For most people crammed by necessity in densely populated towns and cities, there is no possibility of cruelty free milk, cow, or goat. The organic Oatly I have now is 10% oats, water and a little salt. It is not as processed as many vegan milk substitutes. Plenish also makes a very simple almond liquid. These are expensive, but that limits excess consumption. Wetherspoon pubs offer oat liquid in sachets for those who want to avoid cows milk. I usually have black espresso just as it comes, when wanting coffee in such places, at low cost comparatively, £1.45 for a mug and refills at no extra cost. I am drinking rosehip and hibiscus tea with a little Oatly, now.

Greetings from Cerys

Palestinian almond harvest



Haj Rafeeq Hussein harvesting his rain-fed almond crop near Jenin, Palestine in August. He and his family start work early, as the temperature now can reach 42°C by midday. His biggest other concern is to get the harvest in before it is eaten by the wild boar which have been released in the area, and are increasing in numbers. His Fairtrade almonds raw or roasted – smoked, caramelised or chilli are available from Zaytoun.

Fairtrade News

The real difference a Fairtrade partnership makes

The latest news from the Chair of JTS which imports our amazing Kilombero rice, is of how its partnership with the Malawian rice farmers is enabling them to survive E. Africa's crippling drought.

The Karonga area of Northern Malawi has experienced a severe drought over the current growing season and the government is supplying maize to feed the population through an emergency scheme.

For the Kilombero rice farmers the drought has meant that yields are down and farmers are suffering. Rice is a cash crop for them- their livelihood - rather than a subsistence crop such as maize and cassava which they grow to eat. They tell us that it is very important that we continue to support them by buying their rice and thereby providing money for them to buy necessities such as secondary education, farming equipment, medicines etc. It is also important that foreign currency such as that generated through the export of rice continues to flow into Malawi to enable the country to function.

So, buying rice is important, but there is more that we are doing. Sometime ago we raised money through the Balmore Trust to buy pumps to assist irrigation of the paddy in dry years. This year these pumps have proved invaluable to the farmers who can access them. We have now been asked by the farmers' association if we could supply the funds to purchase another 20 petrol driven irrigation pumps which will be used by a further 200 farmers. These pumps will be used, if needed, from November onwards to help next year's rice crop, but in the meantime as soon as they are installed, they will assist farmers in growing crops that they will harvest and eat within their community.



It is crucial that we are pro-active in helping the farmers combat climate change to help secure their future. Acting on the farmers requests for us to purchase rice and to support them through this time of huge hardship illustrates the importance of the partnership between the Kilombero rice farmers, JTS and the Balmore Trust.

The Grocer magazine on International Coffee Day (Oct 1st) had a headline from the conclusion of the recent in depth “2023 Coffee Barometer” report

“The Coffee Sector is in Crisis”

Smallholders produce 75% of the world's coffee, but at the end of long supply chains don't have negotiating power. The average non-Fairtrade coffee farmer earns as little as £1.37 a day, making it incredibly difficult to escape poverty and build resilience to threats like the climate crisis.

Coffee farmers continue to sound the alarm about how climate change is disrupting coffee production. Temperature rises of just 1.5°C–2°C could see the land highly suitable for growing coffee slashed by over half.

Fairtrade supports farmers facing these threats, and recently raised the minimum price paid to farmers,(to protect them from huge swings in the world price). It is good to learn that UK Fairtrade coffee sales rose 3% in 2022, and in 2021 global sales of Fairtrade coffee generated more than \$85m in additional premium funds that farmers can invest in business and community projects of their choice.

But still only 7% of coffee bought in the UK is sold on Fairtrade terms (of 98 million cups of coffee drunk each day). Shockingly only 26% of certified (Fairtrade, organic, RFA etc) coffee was bought by coffee companies - the rest had to be sold at the market price – so all the effort, expense and reward of gaining certification was lost.

Choosing Fairtrade coffee when we shop or asking for it when we are out helps safeguard farmers' livelihoods, and our future coffee supplies. And it's a proper response to the deep injustices in global trade – that leave farmers without fair prices or the power to transform their futures. Ensuring they get a fair reward for their skill and hard work is surely the least we can do as we enjoy their wonderful coffee.



Transform Trade's participatory grant making-

a really important change in approach in its development work, ensuring it is led by those who know the issues best- the farmers, workers and organisations experiencing injustice in trade.

Read more at

www.transform-trade/blog/participatorygrants



Cadair Idris at the back dominating the Mawddach estuary and railway bridge. PM

Holiday highlights

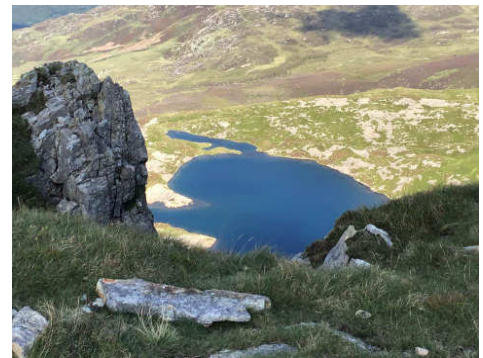
When I looked on a map to see where this year's Ashram holiday was going to be, almost the first thing I noticed was the proximity of Cadair Idris, one of the highest mountains in Wales. It is comparable in height to the highest fells in Cumbria (i.e. around 3,000 feet). I had been that high on my home turf, but not for a few years, and I wondered if I was still physically up to it.

On the first day of the holiday, conditions were ideal: hardly any wind, excellent visibility and no rain. So there was no excuse not to try. Jenny and Chris both wanted to come with me, but even without companions from the holiday, I would not have been alone, as there were so many other people following the same route. The path starts through a little wood alongside a babbling brook, but soon emerges into the open hillside.



Every step took us higher with amazing views opening up across the Snowdonia National Park. We stopped for coffee, and contemplated the path ahead going diagonally up the steepest part of the hillside, and clearly delineated by the line of walkers ahead of us. We reached the top of the ridge at its lowest point between Cadair Idris and the next peak in the chain, and found a quiet spot a little way off the path for lunch. Then it was decision time. Jenny decided to retrace our steps in her own time back to the car park, while Chris and I turned left for the long slog up the back of the ridge, with not very inspiring views.

All that changed when we reached the edge of the almost sheer cliffs above Llyn y Gadair, a lake which is almost 1700 feet above sea level, approximately the height we had reached at lunchtime. The views here were spectacular: we could see right back to Barmouth and just pick out the railway viaduct crossing the estuary. Despite the fact that the air temperature must have dropped as we gained height, the absence of wind and the strong sunshine meant that the extra layers of clothing we had stuffed into our packs were not needed. The last section of the climb is a rocky scramble, which we negotiated with great care. Both literally and metaphorically, reaching the summit of Cadair Idris was the high point of the holiday for me.



Ian Parker

The highlight of the holiday for me has been the ascent of Cader Idris, all 893m of it or roughly 2700 feet. The route up was quite challenging in places, especially just below the summit which entailed scrambling up a rocky gully and having to use arms as well as legs. However it was worth



it for the stunning views all around once I got to the top. Whilst sat at the foot of the triangulation point a woman commented that I was the best dressed climber she had seen all day!

Descending a mountain can often be trickier than going up, especially when walking over loose stones. I was also suffering from periodic cramp and was somewhat relieved to see the farmhouse come into view again, it being the starting point of the climb. A popular destination, there was no end of people (and a few dogs) ascending and descending. On the way down Ian and I met a chap carrying his bike up. He told us he had already cycled 70km that day.

Chris Bullock

My favourite memories of this year's Ashram holiday - as ever organised so efficiently and considerably by David Dale - were the things that went wrong, so here's the first one.

The luxury accommodation on Barmouth seafront was booked from Friday 1st till Friday 8th September and we booked the tickets for our rail journey in good time, only to discover nearer the time, that there would be no trains on 1st September. Nothing for it but to delay the journey till the Saturday. Fortunately the staff at the various railway and underground stations were happy to open the gates for us on a day for which they were technically not valid. So far, so good. We left at about 9.15 am, for the train to London and got to Euston in plenty of time for the next one, to Birmingham International, where we had over an hour to eat our packed lunches and walk around to admire the views.

The Aberystwyth train departed on time but when we got to Shrewsbury we were de-trained and sent to a different platform. Fortunately we only had about 15 minutes to wait for a train to Machynlleth, where a large coach was waiting for passengers to complete their journeys to all the stations further down the line, because that section of the track had been closed on Friday night for repair work to be started on a viaduct across the estuary to Barmouth.

So why is this one of my favourite memories? Well, the coach was quite luxurious - not at all like the rail replacement buses we get from Staines to Hounslow; the driver insisted on putting our bags in the luggage compartment, and we and just two others got onto the bus for a journey of about an hour and a half in comfortable seats with spectacular views of the scenery - hills, mountains, forests, rivers, eventually the estuary as we

approached our destination. The coach was from a company based in the Lake District and the driver clearly had plenty of experience with roads in this sort of environment. With so few passengers it felt like a private booking for which, as I told him when we arrived a few minutes walk from the place where we would be staying, I would have happily paid extra - and we arrived just in time for the evening meal!

So what else went wrong? Well one or two of us were looking forward to swimming in the sea, particularly as we were staying right opposite the promenade, so we could just put on our swimming costumes at home and step over a few sand dunes to reach the water, which we had planned to venture into around high tide, when it would be deep enough for swimming. The weather had been exceedingly warm and sunny ever since we arrived in Wales, so all being well the water would be too. About 1pm Ian led the way into the waves and Helen and I followed, and for a while we either



enjoyed the splashing waves as they crashed around us.... and what then?

There was some sort of whistle or hooter directed at us and two young people in high viz jackets waved at us to come back to the beach immediately, because the tide was going out and the wind was blowing in the same direction so there was a danger of us being swept out to sea. 9

9Not surprisingly, we obeyed, and still felt satisfied that we had indeed been in the sea (we saw) whenever we looked out of the bay windows - and we were back inside in time for lunch.

On Friday morning, Peter and I set off to catch the rail-replacement coach outside the station in Barmouth at 10.24. It arrived on time and we boarded with a rather larger number of passengers than last time, but just as comfortable, and giving us a view of all the scenery from the opposite direction, arriving at Machynlleth Station for the train to Wolverhampton. It was already on the platform, but all the existing passengers were leaving the train and being directed out of the station - and why? Apparently some sort of bridge on or over the line had been run into and until it could be confirmed that it was still safe for trains to go through or over it, no more trains would be running. So what next? Well of course it needed a bus, and amazingly in a few minutes, with a bottle of water to keep us cool, a huge modern-looking double-decker bus drove into the forecourt, going to Shrewsbury, and all of those who could progress from that station to the rest of the world were invited on. Somehow they managed to fit in the majority of the waiting passengers and their luggage and pushchairs and such like and we were back on the road, with a warning that it would take another hour and a half to get to Shrewsbury.. Peter and I got seats upstairs and were able to survey even more of the Welsh countryside whilst enjoying the cooling breeze that was possible as the bus had windows that could be opened. We arrived at Shrewsbury in time for the bus to Wolverhampton and beyond and in due course found the Reading train that would take us slowly to Staines, filling up with interestingly dressed

passengers at Ascot station – an exciting but scarcely relaxing way to spend the final 8½ hours of our holiday!

Linda Marshall

Peter adds

We had a very hot and crowded bus journey to Shrewsbury via all the stops on the line. Wedged with our luggage into a seat on the top deck of a double-decker TFW conjured up from the bus company with a large yard opposite the station, who must do a great deal of business with them. The bus arrived in Shrewsbury well over an hour later than the train should have done, but fortunately we managed to squeeze onto a crowded train where Linda was able to practice her Italian and we arrived at Wolverhampton in time to catch the next service to Reading exactly an hour after we should have done. Which was also very crowded. We had to change seats three times because of reservations, but didn't have to stand. And as usual our train drew into Reading at exactly the minute a train to Staines pulled out five platforms away on the other side of the station... We got the next train which was civilised until we got to Ascot when it was swamped by drunken race-goers.

I've applied for a delay refund which was a complicated process with TFW, but better than with East Midland Trains for our journey earlier in August where after around an hour going round in circles I eventually gave up.

[Ed: - My car journey home to Stockton through two sets of road works took slightly longer, but I did stop for coffee and brambles on the shores of Lake Bala]

On Tuesday, I was with the group for an afternoon visit to Harlech Castle. It recalled for me summer holidays with ones families, in different generations. The castle is the same, what is new is the extensive use of nearby buildings for visitors, including students. The large-ish number of these with church connections mean we are unlikely to utilise it. But the visitors will doubtless continue.

John Vincent

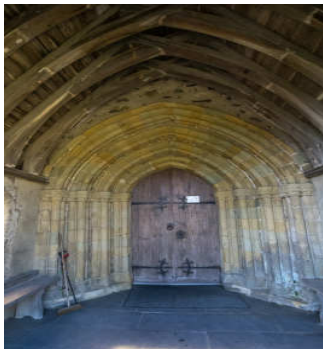
...and the food! A very varied vegetarian menu (except for its quality, which was uniformly good), accompanied (and for some, followed by) a glass of red wine, eight different sorts of cheese, homemade jams, marmalade and chutneys, rather

a lot of ice cream (indoors and out) and the opportunity to carry out a comparison of the local bara brith with Lincolnshire plumbread and traditional West Cumberland teabread. Chris Bullock's renowned bread and butter pudding rounded off the week and our figures.

Helen Davies



Some of Peter Marshall's Barmouth photos
which he has chosen not to caption!





On reaching 70

Last November I hit seventy running. Physically I was in better shape than I had been for some years. Having been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes at the beginning of the year I had decided to become more active and it was doing me good. I had lost a few pounds and could, by then, walk up our moorland hills without getting too out of breath. Going back through my maternal line I was the first woman to hit seventy, so yes, life was good.

Eight days later my world came tumbling down around me. Quite literally as I fell from top to bottom of my stairs. It hurt. A lot! Being the independent soul that I am I struggled and struggled to get up. It took a long time as I had to break through the pain barrier. Should I get help? Decided I just had a bad whiplash injury and would probably feel a bit better in the morning so I went back upstairs, washed my face because it was covered in blood and went to bed. Needless to say, I didn't sleep. Next morning, I didn't feel any better so I rang 111. They said it would be a minimum of five and a half hours wait for an ambulance and it would be better to find a different way of getting to the hospital. I rang my sister-in-law and she said that she and my brother would set off immediately to take me to the hospital.

I went upstairs again and this time, because my hair was matted with blood, got under the shower. Bernard and Sally arrived and, as I was able to walk around, decided that it was safe to drive me to the hospital. Alarm bells rang with the hospital staff and in no time, I'd had my bloods taken, been wheeled into Majors and had a neck brace fitted. I didn't wait long for a CT scan.

Once I was back in A&E the doctor came to tell me that I had a broken neck! I was shocked. Even though I had walked into the hospital I still wiggled my toes and my fingers, just in case. To begin with I was on a trolley in a corridor but the care I received was good. As soon as they could, they found a cubicle for me. My memory of the day is a little hazy as I was on a lot of morphine and nil by mouth as they were unsure as to whether I would be transferred to the Spinal Unit at Salford Royal Hospital in order to undergo a surgical procedure. At about 9pm I was

transferred to the orthopaedic ward in Oldham hospital.

Over the following days I got to know more about my injuries – three broken vertebrae and a cracked skull. I had never broken a bone previously, so obviously, I had decided to do it in style. The trauma consultant was amazed that I was alive considering all the moving around that I had done after my fall.

I cannot fault the care that I received in the hospital, well apart from the food. I was so helpless, so dependent on others. I had to be washed and fed, which was embarrassing. I was in a small bay with only three other patients so it was fairly quiet.

People started coming in to visit, friends, Ashram family and church family. About ten days after my admission it was time to start mobilising. Oh, that was so painful. They gave me a Zimmer frame to use and all I could think was that I was too young to have a Zimmer.

A few days later I was transferred to Butler Green NHS rehabilitation centre. It all happened very quickly. Butler Green is the continuing care centre that everyone wants to go to as it has such an excellent reputation. There I had my own room, but not my own loo. I soon found out why getting a place in Butler Green was like finding hen's teeth.

A few days later a doctor came to my room and introduced himself to me.... As a geriatrician! I'm too young for a geriatrician. First a Zimmer, now a geriatrician, I'm not old enough for all this.

After six weeks I was discharged home under the care of the spinal team at Salford Royal. My social worker organised the smooth transfer home, putting in place the support that I needed, carers each day for about three weeks and an old woman watch ie a personal alarm to wear around my wrist. Sally calls it my not very FitBit. So

now I have had a Zimmer for a few days, a visit from a geriatrician and an old woman's watch, AND I'M NOT OLD ENOUGH!!

It's now over nine months since my fall and I am healing, but very slowly as age and diabetes slow down the healing process. None of the vertebrae has healed fully yet. The bone in my neck has not healed at all, however a fibrous union has been formed and at present this is holding everything in alignment. I have to have regular visits to my consultant so that my neck can be x-rayed. If at some point things start to go out of line, then I will need surgery.

What I would like to say to everyone is please, please, please fight as hard as you can to keep the NHS in public ownership and free at the point of delivery. Fight also to take back into common ownership those parts of the NHS that have been sold off to Tory and Blairite friends. Staff in the NHS are undervalued, underpaid and overworked.

Staff are leaving in droves. The staff who cared for me were overworked but not one of them allowed it to affect the care they delivered to me and those around me.

I want to say thank you to all my Ashram family who have supported me in many ways over these last months. Cards, phone calls, presents and visits have all been more than welcome. It was so good to know that you were all thinking about me and hoping for my recovery. Extra special thanks to the members in the greater Manchester area and to David Dale.

The really good news is that I can now drive again, though only short distances.

Josie Smith

Adieu! Merci Gérard!

About seven years ago Donald Henderson in France visited TO7, a Protestant charity in Toulouse, some distance south of where he and Jacquie live out in the countryside, and he sent me a copy of the latest issue of their quarterly newsletter. I found it so interesting and inspiring that I took out a subscription and have been following it ever since. I even copied a little diagram from an article based on research into the effect of screen time on small children's development and showed it to the staff at the local Family Support Centre here in Staines when I was accompanying a mother with a pair of autistic twins who always ran away in opposite directions, and they asked if I could let them have a copy to use with the parents they supported. Of course I could, and I used my best French (I hope) to email our thanks to TO7.

The March 2023 issue begins with an article with the title I have given to this contribution to ACT Together, in commemoration of their founder, Gérard Gougne, who died early this year, and here's my attempt at a translation of the article, which tells the story of how the organisation came into being.

The story of TO7 began just over forty years ago, although it really started ten years earlier, within a group that was inspired by the minister Jacques Bernard, which had adopted the title "The church

on the move". This is the framework within which the TO7 project was developed:

- *How do we get the church outside of its walls to give a living testimony?*
- *How do we give a voice to those who are without one?*
- *Would we be able to hear them?*
- *Would we be able to offer them a space where they would feel able to open up about themselves?*

For ten years we worked with all the 'experts': sociologists, town planners, geographers, trade unions, theologians, people involved in similar projects..... and of course with representatives of people with different levels of income.

We mustn't forget that the seventies were punctuated with serious economic crises which resulted in a very high level of unemployment. The question about 'the meaning of work' came up, and particularly 'the purpose of production'.

Alongside this was all the negotiating with the hierarchy of the French Protestant Church to have a paid post created. When we had the

green light to recruit a minister we knew that the person in post would be paid but we didn't know where this new activity would be based.

Gérard took care of everything: searching for a suitable locality, getting the council flat we were renting in Mirail brought up to standard..... and even proposing the name we were going to give the organisation: TO7.

TO is Toulouse Ouverture (=Toulouse opening up), that speaks for itself. That same year a computer was launched in France called the TO7, and we had a flat granted to us by the local authority which was number 777 in the development of the estate: 777 Cheminement Glück.

At the very beginning TO7 had focussed on unemployment and the social struggles resulting from that.... Over the years the activities changed substantially, but Gérard still used the same words to define TO7:

“It’s a place for nothing”

This definition made our social partners turn pale. Behind this statement you had to discover what was unusual, original, unique in an encounter with the other. After that, the rest would follow of its own accord, each person taking what they needed from it.

Gérard stopped giving out food and clothing: “people don’t look you in the eye when they collect a parcel...”

These two references allow me to confirm today

that TO7 gave back to the people who spent time here the ability and the strength to keep going. Thank you Gérard!

As the writer of the article says, things changed considerably over the years, to respond to the changes in the district of Mirail where they are based. It was originally planned in the 1960s as a sort of ‘new town’ area like Bracknell or Milton Keynes, but later a substantial amount of the planned funding was withdrawn and things went downhill. The nature of the population changed, with more diversity, far more people from abroad, many needing help with their French and with literacy. Interestingly, just recently when there were violent protests in France, Mirail was one of the areas that the BBC reported from. But TO7 seems to be going from strength to strength as it approaches its fortieth anniversary celebrations on 30th September this year. I only wish I could attend one of their Thursday lunchtime “Repas Débats” which seem to have been going for most of TO7’s lifetime.

Even if you don’t speak much French it’s well worth looking at their website <https://tomirail.net> to get a picture of what is going on in this organisation founded by a French Protestant minister in 1983 (and if you watch the YouTube video you will see that they did go back to giving out food for a while recently, but only with deliveries during the Covid lockdown!).

Linda Marshall

Greenbelt...

... is a festival of arts, faith and justice held annually in England since 1974. It has grown out of an evangelical Christian music festival with an audience of 12,000 young people.

A weekend we as a family attended several times when our two daughters Clare and Kathryn were youngsters. Now years later they give their perspectives on this 50th Anniversary event.

Okay Clare, you’re just back from Greenbelt, give me just six bullet points:

- It’s an inclusive Christian festival where everyone is welcomed.
- It’s an opportunity to reconnect or establish new connections with people old and new.
- There’s a sense of community and belonging as everyone shares the same fundamental values and respects the variety of opinions.
- It gives the opportunity to attend a wide range of talks lead by so many influential speakers that inspires and energises the listeners.
- You have the chance to get lost in live music; Taize chants, gospel songs, hip hop, rap, folk or pop and be swept away with beats and sounds around the world.

- The communion service on the Sunday morning is a culmination of all that's been discussed, share and focussed on over the weekend with 12,000 people all sharing in the bread and wine.

And your six, Kathryn and Richard:

- Our overriding experience was being amongst people who were able to freely be the person they want to be without feeling judged or ridiculed, all in a welcoming and diverse community setting.
- Being amongst others who have a spirituality that can be expressed through quiet Taize worship or jovial hymn singing whilst holding your pint or singing gospel songs, even during a morning yoga session.
- As parents of teenage children, Greenbelt is an amazing safe place to be in, with a dedicated youth space and activities, but also with all of the other accessible pursuits.
- There's amazing variety of food stalls representing ethnicity and cultures from around the world, besides the United Reformed Church tent with their amazing tasty food that would normally go to waste.
- Greenbelt doesn't shy away from difficult and hard hitting issues, with speakers talking about the terrible situation in Palestine, Climate change, Poverty, Refugees and death and dying to name just a few. Not always with solutions but always giving insight and suggestions on how and what we can do to make a difference and act responsibly.
- A very thought-provoking weekend which was our first family Greenbelt and straight away booked for Greenbelt 2024, that's really something from two Librans who's default is to procrastinate!

And from Tina Lamb via a write-up in the 'I' newspaper:

- It's good to know that Yasmin Alibhai-Brown was encouraged by her visit to Greenbelt. It was as she says, originally a Christian festival, but it hasn't stopped being Christian because it's become more radical and inclusive. Many Christians aim to being just that – being radical and inclusive like their founder and that is what gives them hope.

David Bown



Failure is a part of Success

How do you feel about failure?

We all fail at some things at some

times. How do you assess when you have failed? If it's something like an exam or a driving test there are clear criteria for passing, either reaching a required number of marks or carrying out certain manoeuvres correctly. But if you make a cake that doesn't turn out quite like the picture in the recipe book but it tastes delicious have you failed? Even if you take the line

that you failed to produce what you'd hoped for, you will probably have learned from the experience what to do differently next time such as adding more or less flour or baking it for a little longer.

So failure can be a chance to learn. Thomas Edison is reputed to have said "Failure teaches you that something can't be done that way. I have not failed 1,000 times, I have successfully shown 1,000 ways that do not work."

Earlier this year, some of us joined in a series of zoom meetings for lent based on a book by Emma Ineson entitled *“Failure: What Jesus said about, sin, mistakes and messing stuff up”*. The writer considers various 16 questions about the concept of failure. Including is the church failing? What does the bible say about failure? Did Jesus experience failure?

Jesus knew that people sometimes fail. When he sent the disciples out to preach his message he told them what to do if the people of a town did not welcome them, and he told the parable of The Sower illustrating that there would definitely not be 100% success every time. So he expected them to fail sometimes. Christian teaching usually takes the view that Jesus experienced everything that humans experience and therefore understands what it is like for us. We are often told that Jesus was tempted and yet did not sin because he was perfect. So did he experience failure? If so does that make him less than perfect? And if he didn't experience failure then can he fully understand the feeling of failure? Certainly when he was on the cross, it must have felt like failure – he must have wondered why God was permitting him to endure such pain. Is that why he felt as if he had been abandoned and uttered the cry “My God why have you forsaken me”? To those watching it must have seemed like failure, hence the jeers “He saved others but he can't save himself!”. Yet, for us, who can view the events of Good Friday in the light of Easter Sunday, we can see that this was not a failure but was a necessary part of the plan.

Of course, some failures can have very bad consequences and can cause harm to ourselves or to others or even lead to death. These should not be made light of and people need to be held accountable. However, when we're talking about failure in other less critical ways, it's important to keep it in perspective.

I can recall experiences at primary school such as always being last in the races on School Sports Day and crying with the shame and humiliation. Another time, in a sewing class, I had misunderstood what was required and the teacher ridiculed me in front of the class and sent me off to “do it properly”. What major harm was there in coming last in a race (someone has to) and not making a nicely embroidered place mat wasn't the end of the world.

I have always tried to live up to (what I perceive as) others' expectations and have felt inadequate when things haven't gone right, generally assuming that

other people are thinking “she's no good at this job/task/activity, we shouldn't have asked her to do it”, whereas in reality most of the time they aren't thinking that at all. I still lack confidence in my ability and often avoid trying new things because I expect not to be any good at it. If my husband, attempts something and it doesn't go well, he will seek to learn from it and will keep trying until he can do it better. My response is usually to conclude that “I'm no good at this” and I often won't try again for fear of failing, so I never learn to do it better.

However, I am trying to have more confidence and to remind myself that it doesn't really matter if things don't go perfectly. People are not always as judgmental as I think they are, some people are but it doesn't actually mean they are right – perhaps they have unreasonable expectations. And (unless they are judges in a competition or an exam) is their opinion that important?

Failure does not mean the end. The small child learning to walk falls many times, yet does not decide “I'll never be able to walk” but continues to try and eventually masters it. The child's parents do not ridicule the “failure” but praise and encourage because they know that the unsuccessful attempts are part of the learning process.

Some of the most important inventions have reputedly come about by accident, including Penicillin, Smoke Detectors, Velcro, Warfarin (a blood thinning medication), microwave ovens, post-it notes, superglue, dry-cleaning and champagne!

So don't let fear of failure stop you from trying something new or from making several (maybe many) attempts. Don't judge yourself by others standards either. One of the lessons from my Sunday School days which has always stayed with me was “God wants you to be the best you can be. If you become a brain surgeon, be the best brain surgeon you can, if you become a road-sweeper, be the best road-sweeper you can. Don't look at other brain surgeons or road-sweepers and feel inadequate, just be the best that **you** can”.

Edison also reputedly said “Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.” So go ahead – try, fail, learn. It's part of life. And who knows – you may discover something completely unexpected.

Lorraine Jones



*Wedding day, 3rd Jan 1981,
Pitsmoor Methodist*

Margaret Raw née Davison

17 September 1953 – 27 July 2023

Margaret was a former member of the Ashram Community and at one time lived in an Ashram house in Sheffield. More recently she made a reconnection in a small way and joined the North West group meetings on occasion.

Margaret, and her husband, Steve, continued to live a life rooted in Ashram theology. Their home was warm, open and welcoming and their hospitality was second to none. She lived a life of speaking truth to power. Margaret went on many demonstrations over the years. The last big one that she was on was with XR last year, outside Downing Street. She helped to run Refugee Aid in Chorlton-cum-Hardy and was a regular volunteer with Together Dementia Support. In addition she was involved with the Amos Trust and had visited Palestine with them.

At church she will not only be remembered for all of the above, but also for her exceptional pastoral care, most of which was done very quietly in the background. She instinctively knew just what to do for people and how best to do it. On New Year's Day, this year, she and Steve came to visit me in the NHS rehab unit. By then I had been in NHS care for a month. We sat round a table and Margaret started to unpack her bag. Oh what joy as she brought out a small, insulated cafetière and a bag of Fairtrade coffee, amongst a number of other things. NHS coffee is disgusting and I had not had a cup of coffee for a month. That was the sort of special touch that Margaret brought to pastoral care.

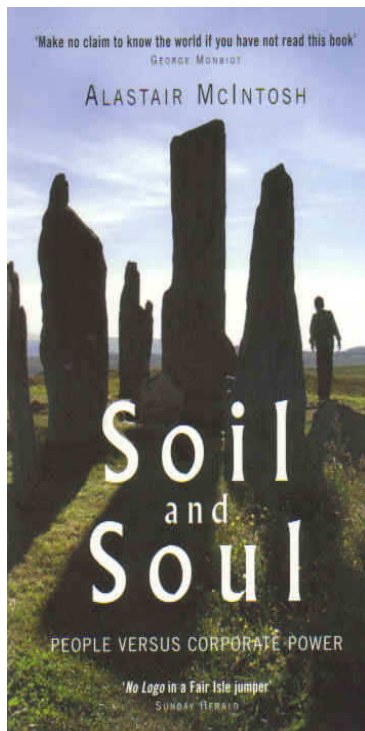
On 2 September a service was held to celebrate Margaret's life. It was held in a large Methodist church and well before the service commenced, there was standing room only. I looked around and thought about the number of lives she had touched, the number of people she had loved and who, in return, had loved her. The service was led by Rev Carmel Murphy, a young Baptist minister who is a member of Chorlton Central Church, the church where Margaret and her family had worshipped for many years.

A trio of young musicians from Chorlton Central played before, during and after the service. We sang Love Divine all Loves Excelling, One More Step Along the World I Go and We Shall Go Out With Hope of Resurrection. Steve gave a most wonderful eulogy and I suspect many of us learned things about Margaret that we had not known previously.

To Margaret, family was everything. She leaves behind three children Lydia, Matt and Ben and three grandchildren Timothé, Esther and Townes. Please hold them all, along with Steve in your thoughts. Margaret has left a big hole in many peoples' lives, but most especially the lives of her beloved family.

One last thing. Margaret did not get to do one thing that she fervently wanted to do. That was to join an Amos Trust rebuilding programme on the West Bank. Steve will be going in her memory next April.

J Smith



Soil and Soul - People versus Corporate Power

by *Alastair McIntosh*

Aurum Press revised paperback edition 2004; ISBN 978 1 85410 942 2

Although the first edition of this book was published in 2001, neither the book, nor the author were known to me, until I heard him speak at the Maryport Literary Festival earlier this year. I was also hardly aware of the momentous events in the 1990s, and early 2000s, which the book documents; no doubt because in that period I was living in Southeast England, where there is little interest in matters north of Birmingham, let alone matters north of the border.

The book which is both highly detailed and very well written, is in two parts.

Part one is entitled 'Indigenous Childhood; Colonial World.' It is mainly autobiographical, but McIntosh re-evaluates his idyllic childhood and youth in the Outer Hebrides, in the light of his conscientisation by travels around the world and academic study. His father was a GP on the Isle of Lewis, and he grew up with a foot in two social worlds. He went to school with the

children of crofters, fishermen and merchant seamen, but his family were also frequent guests in the homes of the Lairds (landowners). His holiday job as a teenager and student was helping the gamekeepers on the estate, who looked after the rich people who visited in the summer to fish for salmon and shoot deer. Growing up, he accepted this as the way the world worked, under the influence of his Conservative parents, and his school teachers who emphasised respect for authority. But later on, when he learned the history of Scottish land ownership in the Highlands and Islands, and the way in which power over the local community, and the church of Scotland, was grabbed by the ruling class in the 17th and 18th centuries, he drew a parallel between that process, and the relationship between colonising Europeans and indigenous people and cultures of the global South in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The second part of the book is entitled 'The French Revolution on Eigg and the Gravel-pit of Europe.' It recounts McIntosh's involvement in two campaigns of grass-roots people against powerful interests. One was against the individual power of various owners of the island of Eigg, who were non-Scottish, and partly non-resident, yet had absolute control over most aspects of the lives of the people who lived on the island. McIntosh only reluctantly agreed to become involved with those who were seeking to reclaim the ownership of the island for its people, because he had no personal connection with it. The other campaign was against a large corporation, which wished to convert an entire mountain on the Isle of Lewis into a super quarry to remedy a perceived shortage of aggregates for road and house building in Southeast England. This was much closer to home, as it was where McIntosh had grown up, and he was keen to become involved because of his realisation of the spiritual significance of the mountain that was to be destroyed.

The unusual, and possibly unique, feature of McIntosh's ideas is his belief that spirituality, poetry and religion are an essential part of campaigns for human community and environmental protection. As an academic in the Centre for Human Ecology at Edinburgh University (until his activism upset too many powerful interests with financial leverage over university governance), and a poet, McIntosh makes links between Gaelic bards, shamans from indigenous religions around the world and Old Testament prophets. He achieved fame, or notoriety, by bringing a native American holy man from Canada, complete with feathered headdress, to testify at the planning inquiry into the application for permission to go ahead with the super quarry. He also called as a witness a theologian from the Free Church of Scotland.

McIntosh's synthesis of many different disciplines and demolition of silo thinking means he is hard to categorise and unlikely to have many followers. By setting light to conventional religiosity and St Paul's obsession with sin and salvation, and embracing many ideas from pre-Christian religion, he is likely to 19

make many conventionally religious people uncomfortable. By asserting that poetry and religion are an essential part of protecting the natural world, he is likely to discomfort environmentalists whose campaigning is based purely in scientific pragmatism.

But both the campaigns he describes were ultimately successful. The high profile of the campaign to buy Eigg eventually meant that no prospective private owner was prepared to outbid the residents, whose campaign had attracted thousands of donations from around the world. And by the time the planning enquiry into the super quarry published its report, the company that wished to build it had been taken over by a European firm that was keen to emphasise its green credentials.

On the cover of the paperback edition of *Soil and Soul*, there is a quotation from the forward by George Monbiot: "Make no claim to know the world if you have not read this book." I'm not sure that I would go quite as far as that, but it taught me a lot I didn't know about Scottish history and the culture of the Highlands and Islands, and I would certainly recommend it as a stimulating read.

Ian Parker

Feral

by George Monbiot, Penguin Books

First published in 2013 this is a plea for large-scale rewilding of Britain's landscape. The author bemoans the fact that so much of the countryside has been given over to monoculture. This is particularly the case with the upland regions which are largely dominated by sheep grazing and grouse shooting moors. He argues passionately and persuasively for re-introducing certain species into the British countryside, animals which once roamed here until they were wiped out by hunting eg the beaver, wild boar, wolf and lynx. Indeed both the beaver and wild boar have been released into specific locations and are now thriving. It has been shown that where beavers are active there is less likelihood of flooding and erosion further downstream and also other species eg water voles and otters increase in number.

The case for re-introducing say the wolf in Britain is more controversial and would need widespread consultation with landowners and other responsible bodies. Wolves have been brought back into Yellowstone national park in the States and have had a major positive impact on the landscape,. By keeping the deer population in check they have helped forests regenerate and encouraged a more diverse landscape.

Monbiot seems to be very pro-tree and anti-sheep. Indeed in one of the chapters is entitled "Sheepwrecked"! he says that over-grazing by sheep is the problem "Sheep farming in this country is a slow burning ecological disaster, which has done more damage to the living systems of this country and with climate change or the industrial pollution". One knock-on effect of over grazing is the decline in population of birds like curlew and lapwing which nest in upland areas. He mentions successful rewilding projects in central Europe but also disasters like the Highland Clearances. He argues that too often there is an inclination to control and manage the countryside. We need to let it run its course sometimes.

A truly stimulating read. I strongly recommend it.

Chris Bullock

[I was amazed to learn from Feral of river gravels under Trafalgar Square crammed with hippopotamus bones from 100,000 years ago. Until I heard that the evidence of the most northerly hippo ever found was a 125,000 years old molar found in a gravel pit a mile from my home!]

My ideas of conservation were challenged for ever by Monbiot's outrage on finding more biodiversity on the verges of a fenced flagship nature reserve in the Cambrian mountains than in the reserve. He said that visitors from abroad were astonished that many of our national parks are little more than sheep ranches. I've learned to look at the landscape with new eyes- unlearning I hope ecological illiteracy which doesn't see missing biodiversity. Jenny]

THE ATTITUDES OF ‘RELIGIOUS’ FOUNDERS TO INSULTS

Sri Lankan media and social media have recently focussed much on “insulting the Buddha”. I will not rehearse the legitimate reactions made by various religious leaders and others, as they are well known. However I write for the benefit of many who try to adhere to the way of life advocated by the Buddha to his followers, and to those who similarly relate to Hindu, Muslim, and Christian traditions. I do so, by sharing what I consistently do; that is always looking back to the attitude of the founders I follow. The long experience of doing so enables me to continue with a mind calm and collected, without which I cannot be well and happy.

I refer to the first collated discourse in the collection of long discourses (Dīgha Nikāya) of the Pāli Tipiṭaka, namely, what is commonly called the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, meaning “all embracing net of views”. There, in the face of both adverse criticism and praise of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, the Buddha teaches his followers that they should not feel insulted, or have animosity, since anger or being troubled would only be creating an obstacle for themselves, since it affects the right understanding as to whether the adverse statements were rightly or wrongly spoken. The Buddha taught further, that his followers should unravel what is false and point it out as false. Similarly, the Buddha related that to situations of praise of the Buddha, Dhamma, or Sangha, advising that his followers should not give way to attitudes of jubilation, joy, and exultation toward such praise, for if they were to become so in such a situation, they would only be creating an obstacle to acknowledge what is fact as fact, and reject any undue praise for that which is not fact.

Following that teaching of the Buddha, I analysed one negative assertions made against the Buddha and ‘Buddhists’ recently reported in the press. This was: “in a Buddhist’s mind, they never hear the love of Buddha as their focus is enlightenment”. Now, that is necessarily said by a voice guided by a grossly ignorant mind, as to that statement at the very least. One has only to look at the numerous references to universal, unconditional, selfless love (*mettā*) in the Pāli Tipiṭaka, and the *Karaṇīyamettā Sutta*, 1.8 of the *Sutta Nipāta* in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* in the said canon, which are also easily accessible via the internet, to understand the immaculate quality of that type of love and its boundless quantity, and that the practice of it is indispensable in the path toward Enlightenment.

Turning to the Vedic Hindu tradition, it is said that one who bears criticism is a *vitandam*, or *nindanam*, and given the person’s serenity of mind in such situations, is regarded as a *panditam* (wise person). Giving, accepting as well as understanding criticism was considered to be the hallmark of learning, civility, dignity as well as wisdom, in Vedic India. (See: <https://www.vedic-management.com/the-vedic-perspective-on-criticism/>).

Although I am uncertain of its authenticity, the Islamic tradition, has a story of an old woman who abused Prophet Muhammad. One day when Prophet Muhammad was walking, he saw an elderly woman carrying a heavy load. So, the Prophet asked if she needed help, for which the woman was very grateful. However, as they were walking together, the woman continuously talked badly of Prophet Muhammad, but the Prophet remained silent and did what he was doing, carrying her load. When they reached the woman’s home, and the Prophet put down the load he was carrying, the woman inquired who he was. The Prophet merely said that he was Muhammad, the very one she was insulting.

As for Jesus, he said to his followers: “You have heard that it has been said, you shalt love thy neighbour, and hate your enemy; but I say to you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ...” (Matthew 5:43–44; see also Luke 6: 26 –29).

I end by stating that the modern scientific view is that “ego” is that part of the self, which apart from other things, has the incessant need to be seen in a positive light, and hence detests adverse criticism, and thrives on praise, be it rightly or wrongly expressed (see: humanistic psychologist Scott Barry Kaufman, Ph.D. “The Pressing Need for Everyone to Quiet Their Egos: Why quieting the ego strengthens your best self”. *Scientific American*. 21 May 2018).

for ACT Together Autumn 2023.



URBAN THEOLOGY UNION

Session Dates

- 9 & 23 October
- 6 & 20 November
- 4 December
- 15 & 29 January
- 12 & 26 February
- 11 March
- 29 April
- 13 May
- 3 & 17 June
- 1 July

Daily 12-3pm

Announcing the 23-24 Certificate in Theology & Discipleship for Mission

Join our 23-24 Cohort for the CTDM to participate in

- scholarly readings of Mark's Jesus movement led by the founder of UTU, Rev'd Dr. John Vincent
- sharing of stories in faith journey, evolution, change and discovery
- perspective building through liberation theologians, including Black liberation and Indigenous theologians.
- gain insight from guest speakers who are embedded in mission provide practical insight into what works, how to adapt, and how to flourish as a Kingdom Community. *Boader, Rev'd Dr. Robert Hoag.*
- Our 15-sessions culminate in student led plans for local mission.

How long are sessions? We meet by Zoom about twice a month between October and July. Sessions last for 3-hours and include a mid-session break.

What's the style? Classes are highly relational, with brief presentations from guests/course leader, but dialogue based.

How are students assessed? We do not "assess" work in the traditional sense, but encourage and facilitate dialogue, personal, spiritual, and intellectual growth.

What is the work load? Fortnightly assignments (about 1 or 2 pages of A4, double spaced).



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Sheffield, S1 2JB



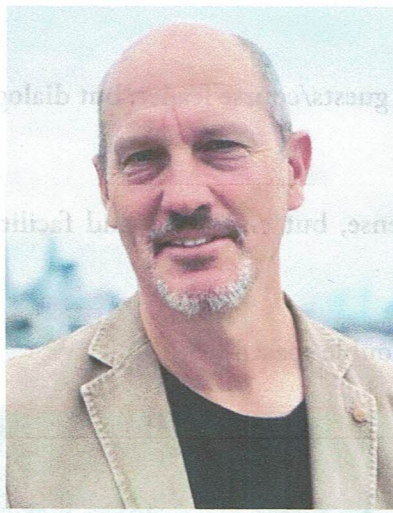
Course Details

In response to the proclamation of the Good News of God in Jesus of Nazareth, UTU exists to promote the Kingdom of God through a community of learning focussed on radical contextuality, analysis, theological reflection and action . . . the CTDM contributes to UTU's mission through 15-sessions which include:

- scholarly readings of Mark that are aimed at orientating learners to the radical mission of Jesus' preaching and practice.
- explorations of who we are through our respective stories, which are shared in a spirit of hospitality and welcome;
- we drill deeper using lenses of liberation theologians, including Black liberation and Indigenous theologians.
- As we listen to guests who live out the good news of Jesus of Nazareth in diverse mission settings, we gain practical insight into what works, how to adapt, and how to flourish as a Kingdom Community.
- Our 15-sessions culminate in student led plans for local mission.

We meet about twice a month for a 3-hour session with a mid-session break. Classes are highly relational. We do not "assess" work but encourage and facilitate dialogue, personal and intellectual growth through fortnightly assignments (about 1 or 2 pages of A4, double spaced).

COURSE LEADER



UTU's Director of Theological Exploration, Rev'd Dr. Rob Hoch, serves as the lead instructor for the CTDM. He brings extensive experience as a theologian and pastoral leader in urban settings, including organising social justice movements. As a lineal descendent of a First Nations People (Athabaskan, enrolled with Eyak Village of Cordova, Alaska, USA), he brings a unique perspective to questions of mission. His publications include *Blueprint for a Church in Exile* (Fortress Press, 2013) and, forthcoming, *Living With the Sermon: Signposts on the Footpath of the Preaching Life* (Wipf and Stock, autumn 2023).

CERTIFICATE IN THEOLOGY
AND DISCIPLESHIP FOR MISSION

October 2023–July 2024

REGISTRATION FORM

(may request a electronic copy from office@utusheffield.org.uk)

Title & Name:

Address:

Email:

Nationality:

Religious Affiliation:

Home tel:

Mobile:

Personal/Educational Background:

Employment/Voluntary Work

Future Plans, Dreams, Ambitions

Course cost: £225.00, includes course resources *Ashram Community has paid Scholarship for Members*
(& UTU membership £45 full /£16.50 low-income-not obligatory)

Financial support may be obtainable from your church or other sources. UTU has limited bursary funds that may be offered on application to the office. Payments in installments can also be arranged.

I include payment in full/first installment of £75
Membership of £45/£16.50/No membership required

Signature:

Date:

Urban Theology Union, Victoria Hall Methodist Church, Norfolk Street, Sheffield, S1 2JB
www.utusheffield.org.uk / office@utusheffield.org.uk / tel:0114 2709907



Members and Associates

We invite anyone interested to request details about becoming a Member or Associate from the membership secretary, Sandra Dutson: smdutson@btinternet.com
Members and Associates are listed in the 7-day cycle Community Prayers

Projects and Commitments associated with the Community

Ashram Press – Radical Christianity, Gospel Study, Discipleship, Community Study and Research- projects on Community and related issues
Homeless and Asylum Seekers - Residence and Community for people in need
Multi-faith - mutual activities and projects open to all faiths

DATES

2024

3-5 May 2024 – The Hayes Christian Conference Centre, Swanwick, Alfreton, Derbyshire DE55 1AU.

HOUSES AND PROJECTS

For current information about Houses and Projects in Sheffield please contact

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Ashram Community Trust is a Registered Charity
Registered Charity No: 1099164
Charitable Company No: 4779914

Website www.ashram.org.uk

Act Together editor: Jenny Medhurst
medhurst@phonecoop.coop

Articles for the Spring 2024 edition needed by April 7th
Contributions from members / associates who do not attend national Community events are especially welcome!

MEETINGS/ZOOM GROUPS

Please contact the convenors if you would like to know more about meeting or events. They are the local contact points for the Community.

Convenors

London – Linda Marshall – 01784 456 474
Saturday Meetings – Monthly on Zoom or in person

North-West – Sandra Dutson
smdutson@btinternet.com
Meetings bi-monthly on Zoom or in person

Community Zoom meetings fortnightly – Pippa Thompson – 07918 757068.