



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust Issue 97 Spring 2024

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October Weekend 2023 at Frodsham

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AMNESTY TALK ON GENOCIDE

I joined the Amnesty talk given on February 12th, the full transcript of which can be viewed immediately below. The speaker was Peter Weatherby, a human rights lawyer with experience in the UK in disaster inquiries on behalf of bereaved families and also in a number of international courts.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/manchester/text-talk-given-pete-weatherby-kc-our-february-12th-group-meeting>

What now follows is an attempt to highlight some of the key points along with a few of my own reflections in the light of more recent events but I do recommend reading the full transcript. In addition to what I summarise there are other interesting reflections eg on Hamas.

As part of the talk the speaker used the definition of Genociden as set out in 1951 as the Genocide Convention. Israel is a signatory. The recent case has helped many people understand that genocide is more than mass murder or mass killings. In essence it contains two things: a list of forbidden, heinous acts perpetrated against a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, and a specific intention to destroy the group or a part of the group.

So in terms of acts it prohibits:

- 1 Killing members of the group
- 2 Causing serious physical or mental harm to members of the group
- 3 Deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction of the group or part of it
- 4 Imposing measures to prevent births within the group
- 5 Forcibly transferring children from the group to another group

Once the physical acts are determined, the specific intent to destroy the group, at least in part, must be established

Genocide is not completely straightforward therefore, and in the real world, intent is the most difficult to establish in court proceedings, and that is why cases of genocide are comparatively rare: and regrettably not

because we live in a peaceful world. Genocide cases are rare therefore because as an international crime it was defined extremely narrowly, and will catch only the worst atrocities.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) was the UN body making the judgement. It is the top judicial body of the UN, its jurisdiction is to determine disputes between nations. (Not to be confused with the International Criminal Court, the ICC which is a separate body and indicts, prosecutes, and punishes individuals) Israel is bound by its decisions. Israel sent a strong legal team to oppose the case. The panel of 15 judges represented a wide range of international legal systems, with judges from nations more or less friendly with Israel and South Africa. To those judges were added one from Israel and one from South Africa. In summary the Court did not make a full, final determination but found that there is a plausible case against Israel for the ultimate international crime. The massive majorities on the ruling: all by 15-2 or 16-1, were also telling as it cannot be argued that the judges voted according to their own countries' diplomatic positions.

The talk had started with some appalling figures about the numbers killed and injured in Gaza. The figures also make clear which significant groups have been caught up and even targeted in the attacks by Israel. Throughout the speaker made clear some of the facts which give substance to the charge. 340 health workers have been killed and 99 arrested. 123 ambulances destroyed. 85 journalists killed and others injured or arrested. 154 UN workers killed. As well as residential homes, hundreds of educational establishments, places of worship destroyed. In W Bank since Oct 7th 6490 Palestinians arrested, many held in administrative detention, and hundreds killed.

More recent numbers of those killed and injured are now much higher including thousands of children and women so the first 2 parts of the definition have clearly been met. Gaza has been blockaded since 2007 and after Oct 7th 2023 Israel tightened the siege with electricity, water and aid cut off or

repeatedly restricted. There has been flooding of some tunnels by sea water with potential of long term damage to freshwater. So the impact on living conditions and the dire consequences is also clear. With destruction of so many hospitals and health care facilities and deaths of health workers lack of healthcare for pregnant women and babies, the fourth part of the definition is also evidenced.

Establishing intent to destroy can be found in statements made by Israeli politicians and officials. These have been documented. Some might be disputed though still unpleasant, dehumanising and appearing to be applied to all Palestinian people but there are many of them and some from the far right are totally clear.

One significant part of the Convention on Genocide is; ‘ apart from the prohibition of genocide, **the Convention parties, including Israel, the US, the UK, S Africa, and the other 146 State parties, have an obligation to do everything they reasonably can to prevent genocide both within AND outside of their own territory. In legal terms this means that all Convention parties have standing to take a case against another to prevent or stop a genocide. So, this provides a proper legal** basis upon which South Africa has taken Israel to the ICJ. It also seems to me to mean those countries supplying weapons to Israel are complicit in the Genocide.

One final point the lawyer made was that there are real difficulties in substantiating evidence when Israel has not allowed foreign journalists free access to give independent reports. He goes further and says he feels sceptical of some allegations made by Israel because of known past behaviour. He is particularly concerned that the allegations against some of the UNWRA staff made by Israel were made on the day the ICJ gave its judgement.

On March 25th a Ceasefire resolution was finally passed at the UN Security council but is being disregarded. Netanyahu clearly is dismissive of UN judgements and agencies and personnel.

Peter Weatherby said this in the conclusion of his talk. ‘I have practiced human rights law

domestically and on the international stage. I have a commitment to the rule of law. The law is important. But it is important not to put it on a pedestal. Firstly, because it is possible to have laws which protect all manner of inhumanity. You need look no further than nazi Germany or apartheid South Africa for that. But secondly, and most particularly in international humanitarian and human rights law, as I have depressingly illustrated, we are still in the age where might trumps right, where international law and binding court orders are ignored with impunity.

He did however think for all the limitations of Law, and possible abuses of the law, it was right to use the ICJ orders to challenge our own government’s support for Israel and in particular the morality and legality of arms exports and to call for the restoration of support for Aid for Gaza.

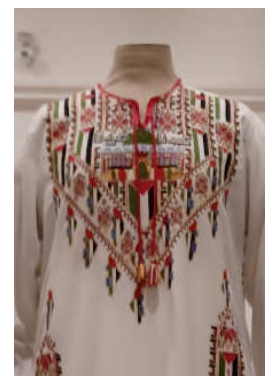
It was also vital he said to work to win the public debate via protests, campaigning, petitions, and challenging our democratic representatives.

For ourselves I think we need to continue to work on all those. And also to understand better international laws and the work of the UN which seems to me vital when just about all our major problems are global.

Sandra Dutson



*Whitworth Gallery -
Material Power:
Exhibition of Palestinian
embroidery. N.W.Ashram
visit Feb 22nd*



Intifada Dress - Josie

On Gaza and the Protests

Over the last six months much of the new work that I've done has been covering protests over the Israeli attacks on Gaza, though I've been unable to work since around March 20th with an infection which left me weak - from which I've now more or less recovered.

I've also had more time to reflect on the media coverage of what is happening in Palestine, and how it is beginning to change, particularly on the BBC. And although the BBC have some fine reporters and have carried a number of interviews from people on the ground in Gaza, the news is still highly managed by Israel with foreign journalists being kept out or taken on limited conducted tours by the IDF. But the deliberate targeting and killing of foreign aid workers has begun to change things - while the killing of over a hundred Palestinian aid workers was brushed over.

Al Jazeera remains the most reliable news channel on events across the Middle East - and has covered many events which have not made UK media. And of course there is social media, full of conspiracy theories, put out by many sources including both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli sources. Even official lies from Israel, many of which are quietly corrected several days later once they have done their job.

I used to say that probably about 30% of things we are told are conspiracy theories are actually true, but I think that figure may now be higher. Sometimes we find out years later, but others the truth never becomes clear. Wikileaks revealed quite a few by its release of official documents - and as I write we are still waiting for the decision on Assange's fate.

Many of the stories we are still being told by the media are untrue too; much of what was and is reported about October 7th is challenged by reports including the 'forensic analysis' of the Al Jazeera video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0atzea-mPY October 7th or the report of Palestinian researcher Dr Ibrahim Hamami which you can read on Middle East Monitor. But the even the more obvious fabrications that have been exposed are still widely repeated and repeatedly used to justify the destruction of Gaza.

What is absolutely clear is that the BBC (and other UK media) have failed to reflect the depth of feeling among people in this country over the

killing of Palestinians and children in particular, and have failed to report in any depth on the huge protests I have seen and photographed. Their coverage has largely been of government condemnations rather than the protests, and they have encouraged and amplified the largely unjustified fears of Jewish people in the UK. There has been an increase of attacks on both Jewish people and Muslims since the Hamas attack on October 7th but there is certainly nothing for them to fear from the protests calling for a ceasefire. Even those who have tried to incite protesters by waving Israeli flags and GB News presenters making inflammatory statements have been ignored.

And the national protests have been huge, together with many local protests, a few of which I've also covered - some days there have been 70 of them around the country, though the most I managed on a single day was I think four in Southwark, Whitechapel, Lewisham and Redbridge. Too many happen at about the same time to get around more. The Redbridge event was a vigil for the children of Palestine, with many school age children taking part and the light was fading fast around sunset on one of the shortest days of the year and was one of the more moving events. One woman present, now in a wheelchair, had been forced out of her home as a child in the 1948 Nakba.

Photographing the protests I've come across many Jewish protesters, with some large Jewish blocks on some as well as many individuals spread throughout the marchers. Singularly lacking have been anti-Semitic posters or chants. These have not been anti-Jewish protests but protests against the action of the Israeli state and the indiscriminate bombing and shelling of the Palestinian people.

Perhaps the only exception to this was a protest by Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain I photographed in November, taking place at the Egyptian Embassy at the same time but entirely separate from the national march calling for a ceasefire. Hizb ut-Tahrir were not calling for a ceasefire but urging the armies of Muslim countries to attack Israel and rescue Palestine from 75 years of occupation, brutal oppression, sieges, kidnapping and murder.

The BBC joined with other news media in deliberately conflating the two events, smearing the entirely peaceful march. I first photographed Hizb ut-Tahrir twenty years ago and have always

regarded them as an unpleasant extremist group, though the government decision to proscribe them from January 2024 was clearly a mistake. The UK organisation is a non-violent one and as has been pointed out the ban is likely to be counterproductive.

I thought for some time about which pictures to

send with this, as I've taken so many. A few have been published here and there, but there are hundreds in my Facebook albums at https://www.facebook.com/peter.marshall.712/photos_albums. In the end I have made a fairly random selection from one of the large marches, on 9th December 2023.

Peter Marshall



Interfaith Peace Conference

Towards the end of January there was an item in our church notices (Staines Methodist Church) advertising an exhibition about the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the Thorpe Village Community Centre, just three or four miles away from Staines, on the other side of the river. It was on for several days and I was intrigued to find out why it was happening in our area, which is still not very multicultural, so I managed to find a slot on the Thursday afternoon to get on my bike and go to investigate.

When I arrived there was only one other visitor but two or three members of the group keen to show us round and answer any questions we might have. I guess it was of particular interest to me since we now have a daughter-in-law from a Muslim family and I often speak on the phone to her mother in Cambridge, who is fasting for Ramadan as I write this piece. The exhibition was very professional-looking, with plenty of booklets about the origin and current work of this denomination of Islam, established in 1889, with branches in more than 207 countries, but what impressed me most was one of the placards on display which could have been written by CND!

As I left I was urged to come back on Sunday afternoon when they were holding an Interfaith Peace Conference followed by a meal. I tried to make an excuse that as it was on Sunday there would be things going on at church, but he said there would be time for those before the early evening! As there had been so few visitors when I attended the exhibition I felt I might end up being one of a very small number of guests and overwhelmed by the actual members of the community. As it happens, there was a World Day of Prayer service on the Friday evening at our church and I mentioned the exhibition and peace conference when chatting with others after the service and two other members of Staines Methodist Church said they would be interested to go to the conference and even better, to stay for the meal. It also meant that I wouldn't have to cycle there in the dark as we could all go together in a car!

So what was the outcome of that decision? I don't think I can do any better than to copy here the article one of them, Avril, wrote for our church newsletter (with one or two additions from me for readers who are not members of Staines Methodist Church):

On Sunday 3rd February, three of us from church attended an Interfaith Peace Conference hosted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association Middlesex.

We were warmly greeted as we arrived at Thorpe Village Hall. We were shown to our seats and immediately introduced to the other people on our table, which included an Iman and two Councillors. We spent a fascinating evening listening to excellent speakers. We then enjoyed informal chats over a most delicious home made, three course meal.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's strapline is: LoveForAllHatredForNone. These words acted as the backdrop for the whole event. We were introduced to the speakers who came from a range of faith backgrounds, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and Sikh. They all spoke with authenticity about their own faith, their community, their work and peace.

The guest speaker, Dr Sir Iftikhar Ayaz Sahib, has been awarded the Queen's Medal for humanitarian service. He was recognised as dedicatedly serving humanity for many years. He served the UN Human Rights Council in various capacities and was a member of the UN Workshop on the Rights of Minorities for many years. Now, he is a prominent participant in UN Forums on fundamental human rights, freedom of religion and religious persecution. He has also been actively working with international organisations for the alleviation of poverty, the rights of women and the implementation of the UNESCO Education for All Programme.

I felt very privileged to be sitting in this little village hall listening to such an inspiring man who works on the international stage. He spoke about our deep human need for personal peace and how we need such peace in ourselves to be able to bring peace to our communities. He also talked about our longing for a relationship with a creator God. He explored how various faiths lead us to this place and as long as that faith advocates peace and love for our fellow human, we can learn from each other and work together. He explained that the Arabic root of the word Islam is peace. He made clear that anyone calling themselves part of Islam, must have peace at their heart. I'm sure we can agree that is at the heart of Christianity too.

All three of us left that little village hall feeling we had seen a glimpse of how our world could and should be. We are all different but in a space that allows us to speak openly but with respect and peace in our heart, we can break down barriers, division and build friendships and cohesion.

On Saturday 9th March, Imam Rana, whom we met at the event, visited our church. I (Avril) was able to show him around Messy Church and introduce him to Kofi (our Minister - Kofi Tekiy Ansah, originally from Ghana) He then joined us for our coffee morning and had some interesting conversations with those there. He thanked us for the most warm welcome and would like to join us for one of our services on another occasion.

From a personal perspective, I see a world that is broken where words of division, mistrust even hate are commonplace. We need to find a new way and this Interfaith Peace Conference left me feeling a sense of hope rather than despair. Avril

There is much more to learn about this denomination of Islam, whose mosque in Morden, Surrey, is the largest in Western Europe, and whose focus is on peace and internationalism. If you would like to see more about their activities you can follow the link below to their recent National Peace Symposium – Building a Sustainable Peace, which was the culmination of the local Pathway to Peace conference that we had attended. There are excellent speeches from the two recipients of the peace prizes given out. There are also speeches from Dame Siobhain McDonagh MP, Jonathan Lord MP and Sir Ed Davy MP. The keynote speaker is Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim community: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmEaQQFkqUM>

Linda Marshall

Coat of Hopes



at Yarm Methodist Church



Maureen, Stockton Fairtrade Chair, presents the Fairtrade Mark to be added to the Coat

The Coat of Hopes is a patchwork pilgrim coat on an ongoing walk through Britain. It was made, worn and walked by many hundreds of people during the pilgrimage on which it was created - from the south coast of England to the gates of COP 26, the UN climate summit, in Glasgow autumn 2021. People worked their griefs, remembrances, prayers and hopes for the place they call home onto the pieces of blanket of which it is made.

It is now travelling south, and I wore it when it came to Yarm. I felt all the love that had gone into its creation and the promise that we all belong together. Its weight (9Kg) symbolises our responsibility to respond together to the climate and ecological emergencies. The invitation to wear the Coat as it is walked through the country will continue until all are united in committing to the future of life on Earth. (www.coatofhopes.uk)

Jenny Medhurst



Vigil for Climate Justice

On 17th February, Elspeth and I joined the ten day Vigil for Climate Justice, "No Faith in Fossil Fuels" outside the Houses of Parliament for just one hour. I informed our MP, Navendu Mishra and urged him to champion bold climate action in parliament.

An initiative of Christian Aid, CAFOD, A Rocha, Christian Climate Action, Green Christian, Operation Noah, The Salvation Army and Tearfund: Starting on Ash Wednesday people from across the UK held a vigil for environmental and climate justice outside UK Parliament around the clock for 10 days. Together they prayed, reflected and acted for climate justice.

Here are the Prayers prepared by Christian Aid

1. to marvel:

Creator God, You with unlimited imagination
We celebrate all of creation, from the greatest mountain to the smallest grain of sand
We celebrate the great diversity of people you have brought forth.
We thank you for the earth and the great eco-system we are part of.
We thank you for those that care and protect our environment.
May we all respond to your calling to look after all you have given us, Amen

2. to lament

We lament that this year climate breakdown has destroyed lives around the world,
Communities suffer floods, fires and drought. People lose their homes, livelihoods and loved ones.
We grieve their losses.
We recognise and repent of our broken humanity that has embedded patterns of inequality.
We bear witness to the vast profits of fossil fuel giants who push us deeper into climate chaos
We bow our heads. Amen

3. in hope

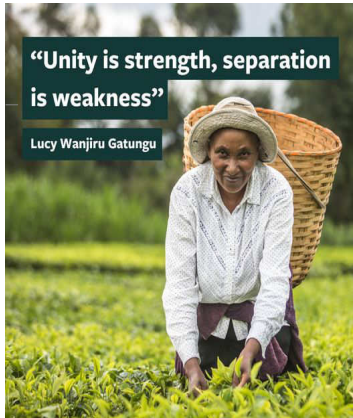
God of hope, you sent Jesus so that all may have life, life in all its fullness.
We see the thief of injustice kill, steal and destroy - the loss and damage of the climate crisis, the scandal of poverty.
Help us be part of your vision for all creation, set your hope deep in our hearts.
Keep us steady in solidarity, remembering always our global neighbours.
May all live life in all its fullness. Amen

4. to transform

Great Redeemer,
you journeyed to the Cross, meeting us in our weakness.
Ready and waiting to transform us by your Spirit while we were still far off,
you sought us out. Great Redeemer,
who in Spirit groans with all creation
for the redemption and renewal of all things, redeem us from our destructive ways, deepen in us the longing for renewal, transform us and the world around us. Amen

Pat Hamilton

Fair Trade News



“Unity is strength, separation is weakness”

Lucy Wanjiru Gatungu

Success for Transform Trade!

Lucy Wanjiru Gatungu supports her two children by growing tea on just half an acre of land in Kenya. But despite a successful farm and good harvests, she struggles to make ends meet, as an unfair pricing cap restricts the

profits of smallholder farmers in her region making life really difficult.

But she is a member of the Nyeri tea growers' association, which with support from Transform Trade (which campaigns for trade that values people over profit), recently took the Kenyan tea authority to court aiming to secure a minimum price for their green leaves and fight unfair price fixing. This was a lengthy and complicated process... but in the end they won. They secured a promise of a 25% increase in the price of green leaf tea – not just for their group but for every smallholder tea grower in Kenya. A truly remarkable result!

Lucy said "There's a Swahili proverb that says unity is strength, separation is weakness. I have realised that as a collective, we have the power to push for better terms - KTDA (The Kenyan Tea Authority) will listen to us because we have one voice."

She expresses what we all know to be true - collective

action changes things for the better. When we work together we can take on the strongest forces and prevail.

Life Changing Community Shops



“I am also well compensated for my hard work, which is a new experience.”

Sriti Rani, community shop manager

Transform Trade have also helped to set up **women-run community owned shops** in rural Bangladesh. Thirty families invest their time, money and hard work into each shop, and for the first time women can now buy their own hygiene and birth control products. "Now the thirty women can call themselves shop owners, not a small feat in a low income area, and they can feel extremely proud of their accomplishment."

The shops' successes are showing that when women are able to work outside the home the whole community benefits.

Coffee and Cocoa News

The climate emergency is having a devastating effect on cocoa and coffee prices, with this year's harvest severely affected, prompting speculators to push up prices on the 'futures' market.

Coffee

Vietnam and Brazil - both big coffee producers - have been affected by drought and floods respectively making the world price very volatile, while farmers are struggling with inflation, sky-rocketing input costs, and a reduced harvest. Many are abandoning their farms and young people struggle to see a future in coffee farming.

The committee that fixes the Fairtrade Minimum price (half of whose members are farmers/workers) has increased the price for Arabica coffee by 29% and the organic and Fairtrade premiums too.

Small holder farmers produce 60% of the world's

coffee, but nearly half are living in poverty and a quarter in extreme poverty. They get just 1% of the price of a retail cup of coffee.... Such hardships put the future of coffee at risk - it is not acceptable that they subsidise a multi-billion coffee industry *and* have to fund the hard work of climate adaptation.

Cocoa

Most of the world's cocoa is grown in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, which have had the four successive year of crop failures - in Ghana caused by rapidly spreading disease (the swollen shoot virus), climate change and rampant illegal gold mining.. The price of cocoa on the futures market has rocketed but the farmers sold their cocoa last October, and currently only get 6% of the price of a chocolate bar.

What all the farmers who grow our favourite foods need is a stable fair price so that they can plan, protect their crops, support their families and defend our planet.

Jenny Medhurst

Towards a sustainable planet and climate

"Peace with the Wild" is a company online that sells sustainable compostable vegan and sometimes Fair Trade items. They sell vegan cosmetics and kitchen+ cleaning products. The 1st item I bought from them was a concealer in a bamboo sustainable compostable casing for times when my facial skin becomes too red, a sort of rosea skin condition. I have used it a few times. Today I ordered Fair Trade vegan rubber gloves made in Sri Lanka in a large size, 3 of them, since the postage and packing by UK post is £3.60/£3.95. The total together was over £18. So someone on Universal Credit could not afford this. Do look on their website and depending on surplus income depends on whether people can afford a few items occasionally. I am poor pensioner, but try to do my best towards a better planet and climate.

George Monbiot in his book "Regenesis" pub. Penguin Books 2022 on page 196 " Generic white protein is not a difficult product to make. Quorn, for example, manufactures a version from fungal mycelium, which involves no animal suffering"

Tim Spector in his book "Food For Life" pub. Vintage, pback 2024 page 438 looks at the average UK diet eaten now and compares that with what people need to eat for greater sustainability. One meat protein meal a week, all other meals each week of plant protein. Dairy consumption needs reducing to 80% of present levels. Violife cheese substitute, Alpro soya yoghurts and Oatly oat liquid, or Alpro OAT liquid to fill the gap. Wholegrains need increasing to 9 times the present levels on average,so supermarket white sliced loaves need to be consumed at only 10% of present levels.Vegetables need to be consumed at 33% above present average levels. Fruits need consuming at double the present average level. Starchy vegetables need reducing for most people to 20% of the present average levels. So having chips, potato wedges or potatoes with most main meals needs to be replaced with only 1 main meal in 5 having those starchy vegetables. I am aware that those on ultra low incomes or with a disability that reduces motivation, energy and concentration, cannot be expected to even try to move towards this more sustainable diet. Some vegan products from Lidl are much more affordable than Oatly, Alpro and Violife products.

From the same book page 439---Environmental impact of different types of milk per 100 ml glass. Dairy milk is the most detrimental milk in the environment by a long way. At much lower impacts are plant milks. Almond milk is 2nd, rice milk is 3rd, oat milk is 4th, and soya milk has the least impact on the environment according to his sources. I drink and use Oatly myself.

Greetings from Cerys.

Thanks Cerys- it's always good to hear from you.

Well done for buying natural rubber gloves, giving a a fair price to Sri Lankan rubber tappers (esp. now when the country is experiencing financial meltdown) I sell them, and so (I discovered yesterday) does the Co-op but only in medium size I'm afraid.

I'm also reading Tim Spector's book and it's made me change quite a lot of my diet. At the end of each chapter he gives summary tips - here's a few from the end of the book NOT in order

- Understand that food is medicine and that the right diet can be as effective as many drugs.
- Don't use supplements unless you are ill or pregnant.
- Try to eat up to thirty plant varieties a week, including nuts, seeds and spices,
- Ignore calorie counts and seek out the higher nutritional quality of foods of the same calorific value.
- Eat fungi regularly
- If eating convenience foods chose the least processed ones with the fewest ingredients.
- Sleep well and exercise regularly
- Always opt for real food when you have a choice
- Eat something fermented every day and learn how to ferment foods
- Don't follow blindly what someone else says is good for them - no-one is average.
- Eat fruit and vegetables high in polyphenols and fibre
- Eat less but higher quality meat and fish
- Cook for yourself when you can
- Experiment and try something new!

Jenny Medhurst

Wincobank Chapel Hall and House

On behalf of the trustees of Wincobank Chapel I thank the members of Ashram Community Trust for the generous contribution from funds and by individuals towards the renovation of Wincobank Chapel House. This is one of the oldest and best loved buildings in the area. It has an interesting past and an important future.

In 1817 a chapel and a Sunday school were established in outbuildings at Wincobank Hall, a Georgian Mansion dating back to at least 1714. Joseph Read, a senior partner in the family's precious metal refinery, had moved his family to rural Wincobank from industrial Attercliffe where they had been active members of Zion Congregational Church. Joseph and his wife Elizabeth felt that the Wincobank villagers should have their own local chapel and their five daughters supported the project enthusiastically, teaching in both Wincobank and Attercliffe Sunday schools.

Wincobank Hall soon became a stopping-off place for touring speakers and missionaries. Visitors included William Wilberforce and Robert Moffat. After Joseph Read had suffered a financial crisis brought on by an economic downturn and his insistence on helping his in-laws out of their own financial disaster, the Hall was put up for sale but was bought by his eldest daughter, Mary Anne Rawson (nee Read), who had been widowed with a small baby. She lived there for the rest of her life with her daughter, her mother and her sister Emily Read. It became a centre for radical ideas and campaigns where friends gathered to meet speakers such as Alessandro Gavazzi, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass.

In 1841 a new school building was built at the edge of the Wincobank Hall grounds. This development was part-funded by a grant from the British and Foreign Schools Society. James Montgomery wrote a special hymn for its opening service. Mrs Rawson raised additional funding for a school-teacher's house by a public appeal and by selling her own silver wedding gifts.



April 13th, 1841.

In 1880 a charitable trust was set up. The indenture specified that the buildings and land were to be maintained and used for the benefit of the neighbourhood. If used as a place of worship this was to be in the form of "the simple preaching of Christ's gospel without sectarian bias".

In 1887 Mrs Rawson died, having outlived her immediate family. Her daughter Lizzie Rawson had died in 1862. The only surviving descendants of the Read family were the children of her sister Eliza who had married William Wilson from Nottingham. Eliza had died at the age of 48 having given birth to eight children. Her husband moved to Sheffield and took over the family refinery which he renamed as The Sheffield Smelting Company. This firm continued trading as Thessco until 2023 when it was put into liquidation 263 years after it had been founded by Mary Anne's grandfather. Generations of this family became influential Liberal and Labour politicians, and continued campaigning for social reform into the 20th century.

Eliza's granddaughter, Dr Helen Mary Wilson, was the first woman doctor in Sheffield, the first woman magistrate and President of the Sheffield Suffrage Society. She set up a settlement based at Rutland Hall encouraging medical students to work with poor families in Neepsend. Helen Wilson was a trustee of Wincobank Chapel for 50 years.

When she died, Mary Anne Rawson was in debt to the family firm and to her nephews, having used her own funds to support the Wincobank school and several other charitable causes including the Sheffield Ladies Association for the Universal Abolition of Slavery which she had founded in 1835 and a teacher training college in Jamaica. With her daughter Lizzie she had also founded of a Protestant girls' school in Italy. The only bequest that was honoured was a legacy of £400 to the trustees of the charitable trust which was to be ethically invested and the interest used to fund the maintenance of the school buildings.

When the building was no longer required as a school it was renamed by the trustees as Upper Wincobank Undenominational Chapel. A porch and vestry were added to the building. One schoolroom was extended as the main chapel and the other room was used as a community space and for the Sunday School.

Mrs Rawson had intended that the sale of Wincobank Hall would raise sufficient money to fund a lifetime stipend for the school master and pastor who she planned would live rent free in the School House, but the Hall was so



run down it could not be sold. In 1901 it became a Salvation Army Industrial Home for Women in Distress, then became a children's home. In 1925 it was demolished and the land used for the final phase of the Flower Estate. At the time her nephew John Wycliffe Wilson was Chair of the Sheffield Housing Committee.

Pastor John Graves, moved to Liverpool and the Chapel House was returned to the trustees and rented out to provide an income to maintain the Chapel. In 1925 the house was extended as a hall to provide extra space for the thriving Sunday School. It was used as a concert hall, an education institute, the base for a dramatic society, a dance school and sports club as well as a community space for the active chapel congregation.

By 1980 the surrounding housing had fallen into poor repair. Many social problems and resulted in vandalism to the Chapel buildings. The estate was designated for demolition and the remaining trustees lost heart and resigned. At this point Reverend John Vincent was asked if he could help support the remaining congregation and Sunday School. He agreed on the condition that the congregation took responsibility. Consequently, members of the congregation became the trustees, the chapel and Sunday School combined forces and the Chapel became a member of the Sheffield Inner City Mission (SICEM).

It was agreed that the concert hall should be demolished as it was beyond repair. Under the leadership of Keith Lemm who was then working for the Manpower Services Commission, a mezzanine floor was added to the school room in the chapel creating an upper hall.

Keith and his wife Gill became mainstays, running the Sunday school and popular Monday club that enthused a new generation of energetic young people who still occasionally attend the chapel with their own children. Some are now trustees. The camping trips, "flat" walks, and trips to the Lake District are legendary. Each year a May Queen and Captain were selected from the Sunday school and crowned with ceremony until 2010 when the youngest child had grown up.

The Chapel House has had various uses: as a hostel for theology students studying with the Urban Theology Unit, as an Institute and as the base for the Dream Scheme, an innovative children's project started in 1995 by Kate and Jeff King. For twenty years it was home to one of the families who had previously lived on the nearby Flower Estate before it was demolished. This family made many of their own modifications to the house but over time the condition deteriorated.



In about 2000, Reverend Inderjit Bhogal, with support from local MP David Blunkett, raised funds to restore the chapel which had been badly vandalised. The roof was replaced and insulated, the damaged windows and rotten flooring were repaired. The building was replastered and redecorated, with the congregation helping wherever they could. The Chapel re-opened in 2005 with a modest fete.

It was this little event that drew me into the building and changed my life. A stranger to the city and living alone, I felt immediately at home and was honoured when asked to crown the next year's May Queen. I asked how I could help and the young people replied that they would like to restart their youth club. I helped them plan their own activity programme and raise funds to continue making the chapel fit for the 21st century.

Eventually a new heating system was installed, the kitchen and toilets were upgraded and the garden rediscovered and enclosed. The next stage of the plan was to repair the Chapel House although it was not clear how this could be achieved. There was support for this from a number of partner organisations interested in the history of the building and the local heritage, and in 2012 students from the University of Sheffield Department of

Architecture carried out a six week “Live Project” and produced imaginative proposals to develop the chapel building and house as Heritage Learning Centre which unfortunately were rather too ambitious so were shelved. The house was vacated in March 2020 just before the first national Covid Lockdown. In July 2020, the trustees and congregation agreed to apply for funds to repair and restore Chapel House as community resource.

After much bid writing, nail-biting, many meetings and negotiations with contractors, work on the house finally started in May 2022. An offshot bathroom was demolished to make way for an access ramp and the roof was stripped to the rafters and completely replaced, along with guttering and fall pipes. Seventeen new double glazed windows were installed and also an accessible WC.



July 2020 : before renovation

After delays due to Covid, Brexit, rising prices and unforeseen structural problems, an Open Day was held in December 2023 to mark the completion of Phase One. Seventy people gathered to celebrate the occasion including David Blunkett, now Lord Brightside, and the current MP, Gill Furniss.



December 2023 Completion of Phase 1

The building has been completely rewired, nine fire doors have been installed and the ground floor rooms have now been insulated, fire-lined and replastered and are ready for community use for activities, counselling, therapy and heritage research. The next phase will see the refurbishment of the upper rooms so that they can be let out as offices to generate an income which will help sustain both chapel and house into the coming years.

We are still a small congregation, but we regularly welcome newcomers whom we try to support. Between us, we run a parent and toddler group, holiday activities for school children, exercise classes and coffee mornings for older people as well as Sunday Worship. The new spaces in the house will

complement the facilities in the main chapel building and enable the provision of services for groups we do not currently cater for: young people, adults aged 20 - 50 and newcomers to the area including refugees.

Although I currently reside in Liverpool, I continue to support my community in Sheffield in person and by Zoom. I am thankful to be part of the wider Ashram Community. I am a trustee of the Charity of Mary Anne Rawson for Wincobank School, I take my turn to lead Sunday services and I help raise funds and organise children’s holiday activities.

By the grace of God, the legacy of Mary Anne Rawson and her family will continue to be honoured and our community will grow.

Penny Rea 11/04/2024

Thoughts from New Zealand



*Jesus in Maori costume appearing
to walk on Lake Rotorua*

(window in St Faith's Church)

In 1992, I landed in Istanbul during a binmen's strike.

My visit to my daughter in New Zealand earlier this year coincided with a major bust up over the Treaty of Waitangi. This treaty was signed in February 1840 by a representative of the British Crown and Māori chiefs from the North Island. It preceded the declaration of British sovereignty over New Zealand in May 1840. You might expect the Māori to oppose this treaty. In fact, this year's heated political debate has been provoked by right wing politicians who want to remove the protected status of the Māori people under the treaty in the name of equal treatment for all. The government has said that services should be provided on the basis of need, not race, and has announced that it will repeal or review at least a dozen policies that provide for Māori, including rolling back initiatives designed to improve Māori health outcomes, stopping 'race-based' policies and minimising Māori language use in public services.

I visited the Anglican church on the banks of Lake Rotorua in the centre of the geothermal area of North Island. The namesake of my home church of St Faiths in Lincoln stands next to Te Papaouru Marae, the Māori meeting house, on land that the burial ground of Māori ancestors makes sacred. I assumed that Victorian Christian missionaries had usurped this holiness for their own religion, as Christmas was imposed on the winter solstice. In fact, the first Christian ministers came in 1831 at the invitation of the local Māori chief, who saw how missionaries had brought benefits to other areas. They put the Māori language into written form for the first time and taught literacy, which helped to disseminate the gospel but also facilitated commercial enterprise. A Māori man Ihaia Te Ahu became the first vicar and speaking Māori has been a requirement for all vicars there since.

Thirty years ago, in Istanbul, I was amazed to find many depictions of the human form embellishing Hagia Sophia, a mosque in the centre of the city. I learnt that these had been preserved when the former church was converted to a mosque following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

I find myself pondering:

Is treating everyone the same treating people equally?

Who are the experts by experience who might invite us into situations of injustice?

What is the appropriate response to the present day consequences of historic oppression and the differing starting points created?

In the drive for integration and inclusion, what riches of diversity need preserving?

Answers on a postcard, please!



Helen Davies

*Bust of Queen Victoria in steam from
geothermal activity*

Snippets from the life of a City Centre Church



A food voucher was given to person who is now around in the city after an absence. Then asked to leave as was aggressive.

No-one has recently been sleeping behind the bins. One person sleeping on the ramp.

New problems of young men waiting on the church steps for their drug supplier. Police informed

Bin men damaged the padlock near the bins

Taking a long time to get back to pre- covid level takings in the café.

5 Star food hygiene rating given to the café

Church doors been left open overnight – CCTV not helpful

Decided to change the doors into the church and café to electrically opening ones.

Café closing for a day to deep clean and paint a wall.

Student placements taking place in the café and community shop.

If a dog from the AA group strays into the church again, pets will be banned

Easter activities for children arranged in the cafe

The church has been awarded a bronze certificate as an Eco church. User groups to be encouraged to do more in their waste disposal

Trying to find which water meters serve which parts of the buildings.

Leases taking a long time to sort out. Liaison between solicitor and the Methodist side slow. Total of 5 leases. Need a surveyor to agree one rent.

Usual discussion on Circuit assessment. Now 40% of income.

Annual Report ready for distribution.

Put Christian Aid and other posters in the room used by AA to offset AA publicity.

Chasing up rent and utility arrears from some tenants.

Heavy rain showed up where all the places the buildings are not waterproof.

Able bodied people using the indoor disabled toilet - no way of sorting that one out

Broken handrail on stairs due to heavy usage by some groups.

Problems with changing over phone supplier. They wanted us to change the number.

Church finances are dire – lost thousands from non group hire after Covid

Need to revisit the recommendations from the 5-year review.

Now that an afternoon church, who opposed same sex marriages, has stopped using the premises, the way is now clear for the church to start to start to have conversations.



The church membership has dropped but church attendance is increasing

Talks in the Chapel, 6.15pm -7.15pm to recommence, followed by snacks at an Italian cafe

Cell group reading Discovering God in Mark by Rowan Williams. Once a month, 12-1pm

No Safeguarding issues recently.

Local worship arrangements once a month – a wide range of people involved. Trying to keep services to 4 hymns and under the hour.

The church will be at the Christmas lights switch on, giving out glow sticks and a card from the church.

Advent meal after the Sunday service with pizza from the local shop.

White board taken out to Town Hall Square. Has a theme and minister asks people to write a word on the board connected to the theme.

Margaret Mackley



Zoom Gathering

This group, of about 10 of us, continue to meet online on Tuesday evenings, usually fortnightly. If you would like to join us please email me, pippah52@gmail.com

We have covered quite an eclectic group of subjects in the past few months. We started with Christian Anarchists before Christmas and followed the Christian Aid Lent Course “Act on Poverty” through to Easter. The Lent course is still available here [Act on Poverty - Christian Aid](#). As a result of this course our next group of sessions we intend to look at and develop ways Ashram as a Community can Act on Poverty. In between we had an extremely interesting talk led by Penny Rea on Wincobank Chapel and Jenny updated us on concerns about Palestine.

Anarchists explored were -

Helen – the Anabaptists

Josie – Jesus

Ian - Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, French philosopher -biography follows

Euan – Jacques Ellul -biography follows

Penny – Leo Tolstoy 1828 - 1910.

Leo Tolstoy is perhaps best known as the author of War & Peace and Anna Karenina. A fervent anarchist and Christian, he also wrote a number of theological works which were banned in Russia but read throughout the rest of the world. After becoming a devout Christian he renounced organised religion accusing church leaders of corrupting Christ's message of peace and was excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church of which he was a harsh critic. His faith was based on the teachings of Jesus rather than his miracles or divinity. He believed conscription was immoral and also resistance to evil by force. He corresponded with Mahatma Ghandi who sought his advice after reading his work. His essay 'On Anarchy' follows.

Pippa

Leo Tolstoy On Anarchy



At the opening of the library of the Moscow society of literacy in the village of Yasna Polyana. 31 January 1910

The Anarchists are right in everything; in the negation of the existing order and in the assertion that, without Authority there could not be worse violence than that of Authority under existing conditions. **They are mistaken only in thinking that anarchy can be instituted by a violent revolution.** But it will be instituted only by there being more and more people who do not require the protection of governmental power and by there being more and more people who will be ashamed of applying this power.

“The capitalistic organization will pass into the hands of workers, and then there will be no more oppression of these workers, and no unequal distribution of earnings.” [Marxist]

“But who will establish the works; who will administer them?” [Anarchist]

“It will go on of its own accord; the workmen themselves will arrange everything.” [Marxist]

“But the capitalistic organization was established just because, for every practical affair, there is need for administrators furnished with power. If there be work, there will be leadership, administrators with power. And when there is power, there will be abuse of it — the very thing against which you are now striving.” [Anarchist]

* * *

To the question, how to be without a State, without courts, armies, and so on, an answer cannot be given, because the question is badly formulated. The problem is not how to arrange a State after the pattern of today, or after a new pattern. Neither I, nor any of us, is appointed to settle that question.

But, though voluntarily, yet inevitably must we answer the question, how shall I act faced with the problem which ever arises before me? Am I to submit my conscience to the acts taking place around me, am I to proclaim myself in agreement with the Government, which hangs erring men, sends soldiers to murder, demoralizes nations with opium and spirits, and so on, or am I to submit my actions to conscience, i.e., not participate in Government, the actions of which are contrary to reason?

What will be the outcome of this, what kind of a Government there will be — of all this I know nothing; not that I don't wish to know; but that I cannot. I only know that nothing evil can result from my following the higher guidance of wisdom and love, or wise love, which is implanted in me, just as nothing evil comes of the bee following the instinct implanted in her, and flying out of the hive with the swarm, we should say, to ruin.^[1] But, I repeat, I do not wish to and cannot judge about this.

In this precisely consists the power of Christ's teaching and that not because Christ is God or a great man, but because His teaching is irrefutable. The merit of His teaching consists in the fact that it transferred the matter from the domain of eternal doubt and conjecture on to the ground of certainty. You are a man, a being rational and kind, and you know that today or tomorrow you will die, disappear. If there be a God then you will go to Him and He will ask of you an account of your actions, whether you have acted in accordance with His law, or, at least, with the higher qualities implanted in you. If there be no God, you regard reason and love as the highest qualities, and

must submit to them your other inclinations, and not let them submit to your animal nature — to the cares about the commodities of life, to the fear of annoyance and material calamities.

The question is not, I repeat, which community will be the more secure, the better — the one which is defended by arms, cannons, gallows or the one that is not so safeguarded. But there is only one question for a man, and on it is impossible to evade: “Will you, a rational and good being, having for a moment appeared in this world, and at any moment liable to disappear — will you take part in the murder of erring men or men of a different race, will you participate in the extermination of whole nations of so-called savages, will you participate in the artificial deterioration of generations of men by means of opium and spirits for the sake of profit, will you participate in all these actions, or even be in agreement with those who permit them, or will you not?”

And there can be but one answer to this question for those to whom it has presented itself. As to what the outcome will be of it, I don't know, because it is not given to me to know. But what should be done, I do unmistakably know. And if you ask: “What will happen?”, then I reply that good will certainly happen; because, acting in the way indicated by reason and love, I am acting in accordance with the highest law known to me. The situation of the majority of men, enlightened by true brotherly enlightenment, at present crushed by the deceit and cunning of usurpers, who are forcing them to ruin their own lives — this situation is terrible and appears hopeless.

Only two issues present themselves, and both are closed. One is to destroy violence by violence, by terrorism, dynamite bombs and daggers as our Nihilists and Anarchists have attempted to do, to destroy this conspiracy of Governments against nations, from without; the other is to come to an agreement with the Government, making concessions to it, participating in it, in order gradually to disentangle the net which is binding the people, and to set them free. Both these issues are closed. Dynamite and the dagger, as experience has already shown, only cause reaction, and destroy the most valuable power, the only one at our command, that of public opinion.

The other issue is closed, because Governments have already learnt how far they may allow the participation of men wishing to reform them. They admit only that which does not infringe, which is non-essential; and they are very sensitive concerning things harmful to them — sensitive because the matter concerns their own existence. They admit men who do not share their views, and who desire reform, not only in order to satisfy the demands of these men, but also in their own interest, in that of the Government. These men are dangerous to the Governments if they remain outside them and revolt against them — opposing to the Governments the only effective instrument the Governments possess — public opinion; they must therefore render these men harmless, attracting them by means of concessions, in order to render them innocuous (like cultivated microbes), and then make them serve the aims of the Governments, i.e., oppress and exploit the masses.

Both these issues being firmly closed and impregnable, what remains to be done?

To use violence is impossible; it would only cause reaction. To join the ranks of the Government is also impossible — one would only become its instrument. One course therefore remains — to fight the Government by means of thought, speech, actions, life, neither yielding to Government nor joining its ranks and thereby increasing its power.

This alone is needed, will certainly be successful.

And this is the will of God, the teaching of Christ. **There can be only one permanent revolution — a moral one: the regeneration of the inner man.**

How is this revolution to take place? Nobody knows how it will take place in humanity, but every man feels it clearly in himself. **And yet in our world everybody thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself.**

LeoTolstoy 1900



Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809 - 1865)

Proudhon was the daddy of all anarchists; at least he was the first person to call himself an anarchist. Some of his ideas were anticipated by English Romantics, like William Godwin and Percy Bysshe Shelley, but there is no evidence that Proudhon was aware of them or their ideas.

Origins.

He was from a humble and poverty-stricken background, which he never forgot. At an early age, he showed signs of intellectual brilliance and won a scholarship to a college at Besançon. Despite being ridiculed for his peasant dress, he developed a taste for learning. A family financial disaster meant that he had to drop out of formal education. He became an apprentice printer, compositor, and proof reader. He was exceptionally gifted in this latter role; much of the work that was published at that stage was religious, and to aid his proof reading, he taught himself Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He also became involved with local Liberals and Socialists.

Ideas

Proudhon developed his political, social and philosophical ideas in his writings. They were often hard to understand, but also came with controversial slogans, the most famous being “property is theft” His first serious book was published in 1840 with the title ‘What is property?’ Proudhon was not opposed to all forms of private ownership. He was in favour of peasants owning their land, and artisans owning their workshops and tools. What he was against was the property that enables one human being to own another human being’s work. He was very critical of nation states and governments, and indeed any form of centralisation. In this respect, he differed from the Jacobins who were great centralisers. He believed that factories could be operated by associations of workers. A key idea of his was non-violence. He believed that change could be brought about by economic actions.

Activities.

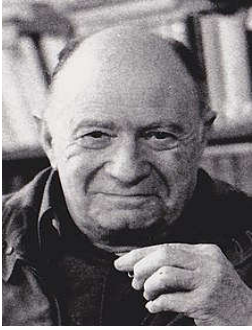
Proudhon was into what we now know as *Praxis*. While he was working in the printing trade, he tried to set up his own press, but the business failed. It is not clear whether that was because of his bad management. He took a minor part in the 1848 revolution in France, and was elected to the constituent assembly that followed it. He tried to establish a People’s Bank based on mutual credit (a forerunner of credit unions?); this also failed.

He spoke truth to power, particularly after 1848, when Napoleon the third set up his dictatorship. He was put on trial on a number of occasions for his radical views; the first time he was acquitted, because the jury were unable to understand his writings, and so could not determine whether they were subversive or not! However, he did serve several terms of imprisonment and also a period of enforced exile from France.

Legacy.

He corresponded with and eventually met and fell out with Karl Marx over the latter’s centralising and authoritarian ideas. The dispute between the two men prevented any agreement at the first Socialist International and led to the division into on the one hand, libertarian socialists who followed Proudhon, and on the other hand authoritarian socialists who followed Marx. In later years these two groups became the Anarchists and the Marxists. Well into the 20th century Proudhon was far more influential in France and some other European countries than Marx.

Ian Parker



Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) – the Life of a Christian Anarchist

Brief Biography

Jacques Ellul was born in Bordeaux, France in 1912, to Marthe Mendes (Protestant; French-Portuguese) and Joseph Ellul (initially an [Eastern Orthodox Christian](#), but then

a [Voltarian deist](#) by conviction; born in Malta of an Italo-Maltese father and Serb mother). As a teenager he wanted to be a naval officer but his father made him study law. He married Yvette Lensvelt in 1937; they had four children.

Ellul was educated at the universities of [Bordeaux](#) and [Paris](#). In [World War II](#), he was a leader in the [French resistance](#). For his efforts to save Jews he was awarded the title [Righteous among the Nations](#) by [Yad Vashem](#) in 2001. He was a layman in the [Reformed Church of France](#) (the predominant Protestant Church in France) and attained a high position within it as part of the National Council.

His academic career from 1946 to 1980 was at the University of Bordeaux where he served as Professor of the History and Sociology of Institutions in the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences. He also held a chair in the Institute for Political Studies.

As well as his work in history and sociology, he was well-educated in theology and biblical studies, having completed the seminary training course (bar the final assessment) at the University of Strasbourg whilst it was displaced to southern France during the Nazi occupation.

He was not simply a distinguished academic or professional advisor to the Reformed Church, but also served as teacher, preacher, worship leader and pastor/mentor in the local community of Pessac. He also served as Deputy Mayor of Bordeaux (1944-5), an experience which only seemed to reinforce his belief that social change was not to be found in the formal hierarchical structures of modern political life.

Ellul was a prolific writer and published fifty books, thirty of which have been translated into English. His best known and most influential book is *The Technological Society* (1954), a historical and sociological exploration of the impact of technology on human life. Aldous Huxley praised Ellul for "making the case I tried to make in *Brave New World*."

Ellul was best friends with Bernard Charbonneau, who was also a writer and a protagonist of the French personalism movement. They met through

the Protestant Student Federation during the academic school year of 1929–1930. Both men acknowledged the great influence each had on the other.

By the early 1930s, Ellul's three primary sources of inspiration were Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth. Ellul was first introduced to the ideas of Karl Marx during an economics lecture course taught by Joseph Benzacar in 1929–30; Ellul studied Marx and became a prolific exegete of his theories. During this same period, he also came across the Christian existentialism of Kierkegaard. According to Ellul, Marx and Kierkegaard were his two greatest influences, and the only two authors whose work he read in its entirety. Also, he considered Karl Barth, who was a leader of the resistance against the German state church in World War II, the greatest theologian of the 20th century.^[10] In addition to these intellectual influences, Ellul also said that his father played a great role in his life and considered him his role model.

Although Ellul identified as a Protestant, he was critical of church authority in general because he believed the church dogmas did not place enough emphasis on the teachings of Jesus or Christian scripture.^[16]

Ellul was also prominent in the worldwide ecumenical movement, and was one of the original members of the World Council of Churches. Ellul's revolutionary zeal is reflected in his comment: "I said to myself that if there are any people capable of changing the society they live in, then it would be the Christians. I had my Christian reasons for transforming this society - why not work with other Christians? Why could I not get the church to change and become the salt of the earth, a leaven, a force that would change society?" However, he later became sharply critical of the ecumenical movement for what he felt were indiscriminate endorsements of political establishments and left the World Council of Churches.

Ellul came to like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who convinced him that the creation of new institutions from the grass roots level was the best way to create an anarchist society. He stated his view is close to that of anarch-syndicalism; however, the kind of change Ellul wanted was an evolutionary approach by means of a "... Proudhonian socialism ... by transforming the press, the media, and the economic structures ... by means of a federative cooperative approach" that would lead to an Anarchist society based on federation and the

Mutualist economics of Proudhon. In regards to Jesus and Anarchism he believed Jesus was not merely a socialist but anarchist and that "anarchism is the fullest and most serious form of socialism".

The 'book' which is Ellul's corpus has a carefully planned dialectical structure arising from his youthful encounters with Marx and Christ. It forms what he called 'a composition in counterpoint' comprising sociological 'chapters' which study the structure of the modern world under the influence of Marx and, in dialogue with this, theological 'chapters' which, under the witness of revelation, reflect upon Christian faith and practice in that world. A proper recognition and appreciation of this basic structure and distinction is vital and it is misunderstandings here which often lead many to ignore, dismiss or distort Ellul's thought. Each strand of his work must therefore be treated on its own terms before an overview and assessment of the corpus as a whole can be offered

An assessment of the place of Ellul's theology in the world today: "In the presence of the sterility and impotence of much of the theological left and the idolatry and betrayal of much of the theological right, Ellul introduces a cross-cutting, third way that is deeply grounded in and creatively inspired by the Word in Jesus Christ and Scripture." (David Gill, new preface to *Anarchy & Christianity*, 2011)

Ellul has been credited with coining the phrase, "Think globally, act locally." He often said that he was born in Bordeaux by chance, but that it was by choice that he spent almost all his academic career there.

Anarchy

Ellul states in *The Subversion of Christianity* (1984) that he thinks "that the biblical teaching is clear. It always contests political power. It incites to 'counterpower,' to 'positive' criticism, to an irreducible dialogue (like that between king and prophet in Israel), to antistatism, to a decentralizing of the relation, to an extreme relativizing of everything political, to an anti-ideology, to a questioning of all that claims either power or dominion (in other words, of all things political), and finally, if we may use a modern term, to a kind of "anarchism" (so long as we do not relate the term to the anarchist teaching of the nineteenth century)."

In *The Ethics of Freedom* (1976), Ellul says:

"... Jesus Christ has not come to establish social justice any more than he has come to establish the power of the state or the reign of money or art. Jesus Christ has come to save men, and all that matters is that men may come to know him. We are adept at finding reasons—good theological, political,

or practical reasons, for camouflaging this. But the real reason is that we let ourselves be impressed and dominated by the forces of the world, by the press, by public opinion, by the political game, by appeals to justice, liberty, peace, the poverty of the third world, and the Christian civilization of the west, all of which play on our inclinations and weaknesses. Modern protestants are in the main prepared to be all things to all men, like St. Paul, but unfortunately this is not in order that they may save some but in order that they may be like all men."

One particular theological movement that aroused his ire was death of God theology. Some within this movement held the conviction that the traditional Christian conceptions of God and humanity arise from a primitive consciousness, one that most civilized people have quite overcome. This line of thought affirmed the ethical teachings of Jesus but rejected the idea that he represented anything more than a highly accomplished human being. Ellul attacked this school, and practitioners of it such as Harvey Cox, as out of accord not with Christian doctrinal traditions, but reality itself, namely what he perceived as the irreducible religiosity of the human race, a devotion that has worshiped idols such as rulers, nations, and in more recent times, materialism, scientism, technology and economics. To Ellul, people use such fallen images, or powers, as a substitute for God, and are, in turn, used by them, with no possible appeal to innocence or neutrality, which, although possible theoretically, does not in fact exist. Ellul thus renovates in a non-legalistic manner the traditional Christian understanding of original sin and espouses a thoroughgoing pessimism about human capabilities, a view most sharply evidenced in his *The Meaning of the City* (1951).

[Where is the city's foundation? All mythologies speak of an original garden, returning to which is man's only desire. The city is the world of humanity: his creation (made in his image) and his pride because it reflects his culture and his civilization. It is also a place of absurdity, of chaos, and of humanity's power over Nature and humankind, a place of slavery par excellence. Ellul recounts, through the course of the Bible, the city's origins. God places humans in a garden because this is their natural place, the place to which they are best adapted. But humans wished to separate from God and determine their own destiny. All mythologies herald humanity's return to nature, a return to the original state. Inversely, the Bible anticipates a perfect city, the New Jerusalem. "This shows that, out of love, God revises his own plans, taking into account the history of men, including their maddest revolts." Thus, from Genesis to Revelation,

Ellul brings to life the rhythm of the city and unmasks the illusions thence attached, navigating within the Christian dialectic between the fall of man and redemption in order to give meaning to the present situation of people, who depend on the big city for everything they do.]

In talking about Christianity and war, Ellul says: "I have never understood how the religion whose heart is that God is love and that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves can give rise to wars that are absolutely unjustifiable and unacceptable relative to the revelation of Jesus." (A&C,p.26)

"What do we mean when we talk about Christian truth? The central text is the saying of Jesus: 'I am the truth.' Contrary to what might have been said and done later, the truth is not a collection of dogmas, or conciliar or papal decisions. It is not doctrine. It is not even the Bible considered as a book. The truth is a person, It is a question of trusting in a person who speaks to us. Christian truth can be grasped, heard, and received only in and by faith. But faith cannot be forced. The Bible tells us that. So does common sense.....In church history, then, there has been constant vacillation between the truth without love (compulsion, etc.) and stressing love but completely neglecting the simple Gospels" (A&C,p.26)

Ellul questions the common image of God as King or Lord and commends that we look at other images:

"I contend that the Bible in reality gives us a very different image of God.....though the Biblical God is the Almighty, in practice he does not make use of his omnipotence in his dealings with us except in particular instances which are recorded precisely because they are abnormal (eg the Flood, the Tower of Babel, or Sodom and Gomorrah). God's is a self-limited omnipotence, not through caprice or fancy, but because anything else would be in contradiction with his very being. For beyond power, the dominant and conditioning fact is that the being of God is love. It is not merely Jesus who teaches this. The whole Hebrew Bible does so, at least if we read it attentively" (A&C,p.33).

From the chapter entitled *The Bible as the Source of Anarchy*, Ellul refers to the story from Mark 12 about "Rendering to Caesar":

"But what really belongs to Caesar? The excellent example used by Jesus makes this plain: whatever bears his mark! Here is the basis and limit of his power. But where is this mark? On coins, on public monuments, and on certain altars. That is all.....On the other hand, whatever does not bear Caesar's

mark does not belong to him. It all belongs to God.....Caesar has no right of life and death. Caesar has no right to plunge people into war. Caesar has no right to devastate and ruin a country. Caesar's domain is very limited. We may oppose most of his pretensions in the name of God." (A&C,p.60).

In Matthew 20, we read the story of James and John's mother's attempt to have Jesus grant her sons privilege and position in the Kingdom that Jesus has talked about, which leads Jesus to highlight the different nature of God's Kingdom. Ellul comments:

"He thus said to them first that they had no understanding. He concluded with a statement that is relevant for us: 'You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and those in high position enslave them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be the servant.' Note that he makes no distinction or reservation. All national rulers, no matter what the nation or the political regime, lord it over their subjects. There can be no political power without tyranny."

Ellul then goes on to suggest how Christians should respond to such earthly powers:

"...do not be so concerned about fighting kings. Let them be. Set up a marginal society which will not be interested in such things, in which there will be no power, authority, or hierarchy" (A&C,p.61).

Final Comment

"Having said all this, I make no pretence at all of having convinced my readers. My only effort has been to put the questions better so that those who claim to be atheists or agnostics may do so for good reasons and not for reasons that are false or fanciful. When I used to teach an annual course on Marx and Marxism (1947-1979), I always told my students that I was trying to be as honest as possible, that I was not seeking to convince them one way or the other, that what I wanted was that when they decided either to be for Marxism or against it they should not do so out of emotion or with vague ideas or because of a certain background, but with a precise knowledge and for good reasons. I would say the same here and now." (A&C,p.43).

Anarchy and Christianity, 1991 Jacques Ellul legacy Series, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon

Euan McPhee

Issues to raise with politicians and candidates

Act on Poverty

With a General Election just around the corner, this is the time to speak out as a church and to make sure our voice is heard. Poverty is not inevitable, or a choice made by people experiencing it - it's the result of decisions made by people with power and privilege, and perpetuated through unjust attitudes, structures, policies and systems.

Together we can make poverty a priority in the General Election and for the next Government. We need to speak up with a concerted voice to call on all candidates and parties to commit to this goal. **The time is now.**

What should we be asking politicians and candidates?

Ask them to Act on Poverty globally by using their power. Specifically, ask them, if elected to: **Commit to meeting with you or your church in the first hundred days of the new Parliament, to outline their plans to tackle the structural causes of global poverty.**

Actions that Christian Aid are calling for include:

- Legislation to facilitate debt relief for lower income countries.
- Significantly increasing funding (in the form of grants, not loans) to support climate vulnerable countries, in addition to existing UK aid.
- Taxing the profits of fossil fuel companies to help pay for climate finance.
- Halting all new oil and gas developments in the UK, and investing in pathways to good quality, secure green jobs.

You can find detailed information on topics you can ask about here: caid.org.uk/whattoask

The Let's End Poverty movement are calling on all political leaders in the UK to make ending UK poverty a core priority by:

- **Committing to urgent action to stop rising poverty in the UK;**
- **Developing a coordinated, long-term plan to end UK poverty in collaboration with people with direct experience of poverty.**

Ask your candidate or MP how they will take action to ensure these two things happen if they are elected at the next election. Find out more here: letsendpoverty.co.uk

There are specific actions that political leaders can take that will support these urgent and long term changes.

The Trussell Trust are calling for UK political party leaders to make sure Universal Credit protects people from going without the essentials. trusselltrust.org/church-petition

The St Vincent de Paul Society are calling for political commitments to protect the right to claim asylum in the UK: act.svp.org.uk/petition

A wake for my mother, Rosaleen Sutherland-Waite

As my mother died in 2020, aged 99, during the first lockdown, I was not able to have a wake for her after the funeral. So it was in February 2023 that, at last, I was able to celebrate her life.

Over 50 of her family and friends came, including people from my church and where I used to work. London Ashram members who came were Linda from Staines and Liz and Jonathan from London.

The wake was held in a lovely hotel on the edge of Leatherhead, where I live. The hotel did a lovely afternoon tea. They catered for vegetarians and others with special diets. One of my Mum's yoga students is a professional cake maker who baked a celebration cake.

As part of the celebration some of my Mum's friends and neighbours shared memories of her. I had provided photos from her life including her wedding photo. People appreciated this opportunity to remember my Mum.

*Paul Sutherland-Waite
London Ashram*

Convenor's report

As I come to the end of my stint as convenor I would like to thank you all for the support given to me during this time. We have covered some ground in the past 2 years and made some difficult and sometimes painful decisions. I believe friends are realistic about the burden that needs to be carried by some and that we have to reduce this.

Decisions have been made about the way forward as a community and the need to wind up the Charity arm, sell properties, and dispose of our finances in appropriate ways. All decisions have been made with prayer and thought for our members affected by them. You will find all the detail in the minutes of Community meetings. Thank you.

Pippa Thompson

A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless us with **discomfort** at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with **anger** at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with **tears** to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough **foolishness** to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen



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

4-6 October Community Weekend, Foxhill, Frodsham, Cheshire

COMMUNITY

Community Office: John Vincent
7 College Court, Sheffield S4 7FN
T: 0114 243 6688
E: ashramcommunity@hotmail.com

Ashram Press: 7 College Court
See Website www.ashram.org.uk for publications

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Act Together editor: Jenny Medhurst
medhurst@phonecoop.coop

Articles for the Autumn 2024 edition needed by Sep tember7th
Contributions from members / associates who do not attend national Community events are especially welcome!

HOUSES AND PROJECTS

For current information about Houses and Projects in Sheffield please contact

John Vincent
T: 0114 243 6688
E: ashramcommunity@hotmail.com

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.