

Journey



BITE BACK AT
HUNGER

The continuing story

of

The Church at Carrs Lane

May 2013

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Minister's Letter

Dear friends,

With my annual retreat beckoning, I read with interest an essay which appeared in 'The Independent' recently; written by Diarmaid MacCulloch, it looked at different understandings of silence in the Church.

Understandably, it touched on the self-evident 'dark silences' of Christian history – the author spoke of 'silences of shame' – but much of the article was concerned with more conventional understandings of religious silence. Much was written about 'space for revelation' and 'the monastery's profound calm'.

For whatever reason, many Christians continue to struggle with silence, whether within worship (however carefully 'defined') and in their own lives, both designated 'quiet times' and life in general. Against this background, there was much of value in the essay. John Fenton – a New Testament scholar who taught me at university – was quoted as saying: *'The most obvious characteristic of God is his silence. He does not cough or mutter or shuffle his feet to reassure us that he is there'*. Diarmaid noted the following in response to this quotation: *'Many words from the Christian past simply don't work anymore: dogmas, stridency, anathemas, the shoutily confident din of religious fundamentalism. Strip them away, and what might you find? Maybe you might hear the divine wild-track: the voice of God'*. I warm towards this: those who struggle with faith do well to invest more time in silence, not least because they have long-since recognised that words alone cannot contain the answers which they seek.

I am not afraid of silence and find it invaluable in my devotional life; certainly, the idea of silent retreat is not scary...indeed, I probably approach it with a sense of relief! The author articulated some of the dynamics of silence better than I ever could, however; *'...every silence is different and distinctive. Each is charged with the murmurs of the landscape around it, with the personalities of those who have entered it and remain present, together with the memories of conversations which have come and gone'*. For me, this is wondrous rather than potentially tedious; Father Martin Laird, a priest-monk, has said that, *'silence has no opposite and is the ground of both sound and the opposite of sound'*. It embraces and should in turn be embraced; it is probably richer with possibilities for communication than any conversation, because there are no words to confuse or distract.

Christians do well to harness the growing appetite for silence which is all around us, in part a reaction to the scarily noise-filled world in which we live. Again, the essay notes, *'It is easy for Christians to sneer at the bulging shelves on 'spirituality' in bookshops throughout the Western world. They would do better to be grateful for the countless searches for seriousness and silence that these represent'*. Indeed. These are times of opportunity, not threat; sadly, Christians have not always been adept at recognising the opportunities which have come their way.

With much love in Christ,
Your friend and pastor,



Sunday Worship during May

Sunday 5 May

10.30am Morning Worship led by Revd Andrew Brazier

Morning worship will be followed by First Sunday Lunch – to which all are invited – and the monthly lunchtime concert – details elsewhere

Sunday 12 May

10.30am Morning worship led by Neil Riches. Key passage: John 17.20 - 26

Morning worship will be followed by a church meeting at 12 noon, all invited

2.45pm for 3.00pm Kidz Aloud, A Children's Church. Theme: the healing at the pool

Sunday 19 May

10.30am Morning Worship led by Neil Johnson

Sunday 26 May Trinity Sunday

10.30am Morning worship led by Neil Riches. All-age. Key passage: John 16.12 – 15

6.00pm Radical worship based on the film 'Au Hasard Balthazar' (PG) - subtitled

Groups for children and young people are offered every Sunday, other than the fourth Sunday of the month, when worship is all-age



Sunday Events

Once again we had a most enjoyable interlude on Sunday 6 April with the talented trio Romanesca Tre playing recorder music from various eras and composers. But I do agree with Gill Barfield that it is regrettable that our shared lunch has to be so rushed in order to get back into the church on time for the recital. There is very little time for us 'singles' to spend with our friends and acquaintances. This was agreed after a discussion at the April Church Meeting. Tim has already planned the musical events up till September. It was proposed that the lunch get-together continues as before until then. Afterwards people agreed the two events should happen on different Sundays, this giving us two occasions to look forward to each month.

Pat Davies

Notices

Sunday 12 May 7.30pm at Carrs Lane, Central England Ensemble - 'Strings in the Springtime'. Associate Conductor : Lee Armstrong, Soloist : Tom McMahon, Leader : Anna Downes. *Lekeu*. Symphony for Strings (arr. Armstrong), *Tchaikovsky*: Andante Cantabile, *Dvorak*. Serenade for Strings. Tickets £10/£8 available from ceemusic@hotmail.com or by calling 07734256268 or on the door.

Help needed during Christian Aid Week 13-18 May

We were very grateful last year for all the help we received for our Christian Aid Collection in the Cathedral Precincts from members of the Church at Carrs Lane. Could we appeal again for your support? Email enquiries@birminghamcathedral.com giving us some idea of when you might be available and we will get back to you. It is a great way not only to raise money for a charity which bears our name but also to bear witness to that same faith in the city where we worship. 20,000 people a day cross the Square and each year we collect in excess of £3000. However that figure could be higher with more collectors. Contact John Craig at Carrs Lane.

Also help needed at Snow Hill train station. Each year we arrange to do a bucket collection at Snow Hill train station. We need 3 or 4 people to help out on Mon 13, Wed 15 and Fri 17 May from 7am-9am and/or 4pm-6pm. Contact Vicki Burn, Christian Aid Events Fundraising Officer Central England, 01509 754766.



The Free Churches in Hall Green present
a musical by Roger Jones
Saturday 25th May at 7pm

at Hall Green Methodist Church/Sparkhill United Church
(corner of Reddings Lane and York Road)

No admission charge

retiring offering for Christian Aid and Christian Music Ministries
Refreshments available following the production

Jubilee Bee Garden Opening

Birmingham Friends of the Earth are pleased to announce the opening of the Jubilee Bee Garden on Saturday 18 May, and we want you to join us.

The first of three bee-friendly wildflower planting projects funded by last year's comedy gig, *There's Something Funny in the Honey*, the Bee Garden has been created in the existing Jubilee Garden by the Balsall Heath Green Team. Local MP Roger Godsiff and some buzzing bees are joining us, and the event includes a Bee Walk along the River Rea as well as the opportunities to find out more about bees and what you can do to help them. The event starts at 2.30pm in the Jubilee Bee Garden, finished by 3.45pm. The Jubilee Garden is on the corner of Longmore Street, Balsall Heath, on the Rea Valley Cycle Route and near the no.35 bus route.

The event is one of many across the country as part of the National Day of Action for Friends of the Earth's Bee Cause. The Bee Cause aims to halt the decline in UK bee populations, through local action and calling for a national Bee Action Plan. For more information check out the Bee Cause on the Friends of the Earth Website. If you'd like any more information about the event email info@birminghamfoe.org.uk



Annual Retreat 2013

I will be on retreat from 18th – 25th May and, as ever, I will be delighted to take prayer requests away with me; this year, I am seeing if I am disciplined enough to cope with a near-week of self-imposed silence, whilst following Benedictine rule for the week, focused on four short acts of worship each day. Rather than stay with the Sisters of the Order of the Holy Paraclete – with whom I have stayed for a good many years now – I am going it alone at Cilybebyll in South Wales (which gives me the opportunity to see my family for a day before I embark on silence!). As ever, the week will centre on reading, worship, prayer, silence and some fresh air; I undertake to incorporate prayer requests into the cycle of worship...and, during the week, I will write to all those who have asked me to pray, whether for themselves or for others.

Neil

Christian Hospitality

By the time that you read this, I will have spoken at a London gathering of the Progressive Christian Network, looking at factors for growth in open, affirming churches; interestingly, one key factor is the provision of, and attitudes towards hospitality...and my experiences on the Wednesday before the conference reinforced the words which I delivered!



Wednesday morning started with a breakfast for BB chaplains in the Birmingham area, held at Carrs Lane; an early start to ensure that the sausages were cooked properly. Very little was left over – though one attendee's dog benefited to the extent of one sausage! – but some fruit later winged its way to another BB meeting (the Business Group for Birmingham, meeting in Hatchett Street) and two halve loaves surfaced again at Carrs Lane on Wednesday evening, this time at the meal shared together by members of the central house group. I then managed a food-free zone for a couple of hours, before taking a piece of fruit from the lunch provided by the retail chaplain for members of her volunteer team; thus fortified, I made my way to the lunchtime service, where bread and wine were shared...and also a cuppa afterwards (and many of those attending the service brought out their packed lunches). Some of those at this service were back to share in cheese, onion and potato pie in the same room a few hours later...together with the bread left over from breakfast time. I lost track of the number of meals eaten in Lounge on this particular Wednesday, but I like the idea that breakfast, communion, lunch and evening meal were all offered in the same physical space.

Neil

Carrs Lane Counselling Centre

Carrs Lane Counselling Centre Limited Report to church congregation 14/4/2013

We have had a very busy time at the agency in the last twelve months. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) has renewed our Service Accreditation for another five years and we continually strive to become a more professional service for our clients.

In 2011 Cheryl Livesey took over the role as Head of Service and kept the centre running in a professional manner. However, she has now left to start a family and I have taken over this again with the support of a strong management team. Several people at the centre are working towards BACP counsellor/supervisor accreditation – which is a qualification BACP demand for this position so we hope to recruit a new younger Head of Service within the next two years. Two people have come forward to join Management and Trustees and a counsellor who works in the mental health field is helping with clinical assessments. Jay, our treasurer, continues to raise funds at a quite astonishing level given the current economic climate and we are very grateful for the work he puts in besides his counselling commitments.

There is a continuous turnover of counsellors as most of them join us to gain experience whilst they are on a course. 14 counsellors have left but we have recruited a further 10 making 29 counsellors currently seeing clients. A new induction course currently running will introduce a further 8 later in the year. Three new supervisors have been recruited and we now have 10 supervision teams. We do have a core of volunteers who are dedicated to the agency, some of whom have been here for over 20 years. It can be very rewarding for the counsellor to see people arrive in distress and after exploring painful issues, leave much stronger and able to face life and reality in a better frame of mind.

We have completed 2079 counselling hours, seeing 226 new clients as well as ongoing work. Statistics can be dry but are sometimes necessary to show how the agency conforms to the criteria expected for service accreditation. We were asked by BACP to show how our intake of clients matched the demographic profile of our catchment area. After some research and comparing figures with the Birmingham city council's figures for 2011/2012 we could show that two thirds of the city's population and two thirds of our clients are white British. Cultural diversity in the city shows the remaining one third is made up of non-white, with Pakistani being the largest minority group, followed by black Caribbean and black British. Again our statistics match this. Age groups presenting at counselling also follow the adult population of Birmingham with three quarters equally divided between the 26-35 years old, 36-45 years old followed by the 46-55 years old. Fewer people seek counselling over this age. Whilst gender is fairly evenly split across the population, female clients do use counselling more with only a quarter of male adults making up attendance at the centre.

Why do people seek counselling? They are men and women who are suffering from emotional distress due, for example, to bereavement, loss of job, physical, verbal

and sexual abuse, relationship breakdown, poor early parenting, and lack of social skills. Many have no support from family or friends. Most are given the label of depression and we are seeing more and more referred by psychiatrists and mental health teams. So how can we help them?

I was at a Church service here some weeks ago when the theme of the sermon was our relationships with other and the word 'love'. A strange word to apply to one's client but without 'tender loving care' people cannot flourish. Also mentioned was how difficult it was to challenge the people we love – family, friends, and this can also be difficult for counsellors when working with vulnerable people who need to change their way of seeing themselves in order to achieve more balanced relationships with others. The counsellor has to challenge the client at some stage in the relationship. We have to be 'as if' and look through a frame to the client's life whilst retaining a degree of objectivity in order to challenge and give a sense of reality to people who cannot see anything but their own despair. The challenge is to help the client to lay the past to rest and to move on. Counsellors also need to challenge themselves on whether they have the competency and resilience to stay with clients on their painful journey.

A counsellor needs a great deal of emotional and mental strength to sit and listen to the things clients tell us. But I believe that without love and compassion being shown to a client no progress will be made.

So what is expected of the counsellor in the counselling situations I have described? BACP lists the ethical principles required and these outline the good practice we should develop. Among them are –

- Strive to ensure that client's expectations are the ones that have reasonable prospects of being met.
- Respect confidentiality and the right for the client to be self-governing
- Be committed to promote the client's well-being
- A commitment to avoid harm to the client
- Be fair and impartial in all treatment of clients and the provision of services.

BACP expect the agency to competently deliver services that meet the clients' needs. The client is the most important person here and is supported by their counsellor who is expected to be in training. They in turn are supported by the supervisor, the administrator, trainers and head of service. The management committee comprises 2 supervisors, a counsellor, the treasurer and head of service. The trustees retain an overview and ultimate responsibility. In all I am pleased to say we have a very professional and ethical service. This is acknowledged by others in the therapeutic world by two eminent psychotherapists – Michael Jacobs who has become our patron, and Roger Casemore our supervisory consultant and mentor. We are also, of course, supported by your Church members and staff who take a lively interest in what goes on 'down below'.

However, now there is more paperwork, more need for a permanent member of staff in the office. All counsellors, supervisors and management are volunteers and do not

want payment. But I feel it is time we think about recruiting a paid centre manager to see that BACP criteria for the day to day management of the centre is met. The voluntary Head of Service can then concentrate on the clinical work. Security is also a worry for me. When only the part-time administrator is here or only a counsellor when she is not working, who ensures safety when no one else is on hand. Management and trustees are discussing this issue and how to fund such a change.

Another issue is that we are fast becoming a litigious society and need to make sure that our prospective clients fully understand what they can expect from the service and that counsellors can deliver this appropriately. We are planning a change in the in-take process and assessment procedure. Our supervisors need to balance in each situation the desire of the counsellor to help the vulnerable person against the competency of the counsellor and what this agency offers.

We are continually changing to meet professional standards but we still remain true to the Church's original plans to help general members of the public in distress and attempt to make the lives better.

I hope I have delivered to you a sense of the work carried out by the service and the structure in place to ensure best practice.

Jean Tuby, Head of Service

Recycling Collection

Recycle and turn your unwanted items into a donation for Traidcraft Exchange.



We have come up with a simple way for you to help boost our funds and benefit your environment. We are running a Recycling Collection. Please donate your unwanted jewellery, gold, silver, costume jewellery, watches, old & new foreign & UK coins/notes and mobile phones. Pick up an envelope to fill and pop into our recycling box located in the Church Room. If you can, please ask your friends, family and colleagues to participate.

Thank you very much for your support.
08006335323



Cambodia's poorest Christians live on water but stand firm on the Bible.



Vibol lives with her husband Tin and three children in a floating house, on the flood plains of rural Cambodia. Two years ago, she became a Christian and is now part of the fastest growing church in the world.

Around 44 people are coming to faith every day but many are living in desperate poverty with no hope of ever affording a Bible of their own. When Bible Society visited their village, Vibol and Tin received a Bible. Now it's their most treasured possession.

£6 could put the Bible into hands of someone like Vibol

£14 could give someone a Bible and teach them how to read it

£42 could provide a Bible and literacy lessons to three new believers and change their lives forever

By giving today, you can provide Bibles to more new believers like Vibol and teach them to read it as part of the fastest growing church in the world.

With every blessing
Lorraine Kingsley
Bible Society Supporter

Penny for your thoughts ...

Did you spot the mistake on page 22 of our last edition? The article was describing the 'new' penny, not Britannia with her shield! Ed

Where are we going?



...and, no, this is not a typical 'Neil' title for a church magazine article! It is actually the title of a paper written by Rev. W.E.Harding in the late 1940s or early 1950s, and carries the sub-title, 'Congregational policy in the New Birmingham'. I came across it recently and read it with great interest; it seeks to explore the opportunities offered to, and the responsibilities carried by, the Congregational churches of the city as war damage was rectified, new housing estates planned and the civic planners entertained visions which had not been possible for earlier generations. The time between the paper and the present is, of course, now history...and it is fascinating to compare the difference between the vision of the churches 65 years ago and the realities which came to be: in particular, it might be useful for us to consider why the evident difference is as great as it is!

The vision was one for the planting of *many* new churches (a vision also embraced by the Presbyterians). The author writes, *'We visualise three, and possibly four City Missions, to serve in the proposed new Neighbourhood Centres of Ladywood, Summer Lane, and Duddleston and Nechells, and the development area in and around Watery Lane...In addition, six new Causes are either projected or in hand, in and around the city, namely Banners Gate...New Oscott, Yardley Fields, Shard End, Hobs Moat...and Lode Lane'*. Clearly, some of these 'came to be', and continue to offer worship, witness and service...but not all. Why? The paper itself offers some answers – some predictable (issues over suitable sites and finance), others remarkably honest! Perhaps the most helpful comment notes, *'We have no clear idea of the kind of work required to integrate the life of a Church into a new Community'*. Church-planting has almost (but not quite) disappeared in the URC; the above comment points directly to the kind of skills and knowledge which the new breed of 'pioneer' ministers need.

Much of the report has a surprisingly contemporary ring and flags continuing issues and lack of necessary awareness. The emergence of secularism is noted – and the author quotes from Ronald Allen's book, 'Christians and the City Plan': *'As the secular community takes shape the Church will seem more and more irrelevant. Starved of manpower and money it will succumb to a pernicious anaemia'*. You can put your own spin on the last two words! Allen was highly critical of the Church's seeming inability to acknowledge, explore and respond to secular civic thinking: *'While every other aspect of the plan (sc. for the city – Manchester in this case) is pregnant with new ideas the Churches apparently stay unchanged as a survival from the past'*.

The paper acknowledges the power of Allen's observations – and suggests a clear and practical way forward: the Church needs to ditch its preoccupation with buildings that it finances and owns and controls...and work *with* local authorities in the creation

of community 'hubs' which host a whole range of activities, including the overtly spiritual/Christian. The author asks the following question: *'Should we resent this (proposal), and aim to continue our social activities as though Community Centres did not exist, or should we co-operate with them, seeking to site our Churches alongside Community Centres, and encouraging Church Members and our Young People to permeate the life of the Centre, while at the same time providing a spiritual home for those who are engaged in the Social leadership of the area?'* Well, the answer given is now history... By and large, the churches' preoccupation with the way in which things had been done, prevented them from benefiting fully from post-war developments in Birmingham.

Neil



Commitment for Life

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

From Moving Stories 158, a rather disturbing piece by Maureen Jack, who is serving on the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). These views are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of her employer (QPSW) or the World Council of Churches.

I wrote in my previous post about the non-violent demonstrations in Izbat at Tabib. I wouldn't have thought that these demonstrations would bother the Israeli authorities. Until last Sunday evening.

We got a call just after 9.30pm to say that a thirteen-year-old boy had been arrested in Izbat at Tabib and that in the process Israeli soldiers had assaulted him and he had fallen to the ground. Two of us went there with our driver. We saw two Israeli military jeeps outside the entrance to the village. Just at the entrance there was a small group of adults, including the mayor, Baian. It emerged that it was his son, Othman, who had been arrested. An Israeli soldier told Baian that Othman was being taken to a nearby Israeli settlement. We went there with Baian but he was not allowed to see Othman. We passed on to Baian the number of a Palestinian lawyer with Addameer, an organisation that supports Palestinian prisoners (please see www.addameer.org) and the lawyer promised to make some calls. Having failed to get permission to see his son, Baian decided to return to the village.

So, at about 11pm we were sitting in the community's tent, when Baian took a call on his mobile. Our driver translated for us Baian's account of the call. He said that an Israeli officer had phoned Baian to say that, if he would put a stop to Izbat at Tabib's demonstrations, Othman would be released. Baian said that he couldn't do that. Fortunately, despite his father's refusal, Othman was released in the early hours of Monday morning and taken to hospital in Qalqilya, where he was held for observation for twelve hours. A couple of us visited him at home a few hours after his

return. He had a small tear in his jeans, a couple of scabs on one leg, and some facial swelling around his mouth and left eye. He told us that the soldiers had accused him of throwing stones, which he denied; when we had asked the Israeli soldiers at the settlement what the problem was they told us that he had had a fake ID.

It's really important not just to take someone's story and then walk away. So I was in Izbat at Tabib again six days after Othman was arrested to see how he was doing. He'd gone back to school; indeed, he'd been one of only a third of his class there – the others had been put off attending by the heavy rain. As we drank tea in his home he told his story to a representative of Defence for Children International – Palestine. After a bit, he became tearful.

This is not the first time I have heard an allegation of children being used as some kind of bargaining chip. Two of our trusted contacts have independently given me consistent accounts of why the villagers of Jayyus ended their once frequent demonstrations against the route of the separation barrier, which separates the villagers from about three quarters of their land; many men had been arrested in these demonstrations. They both told me that the Israeli military had threatened them that if the demonstrations continued they would not arrest the men who took part, but instead would come to arrest their sons and demolish their homes. The demonstrations stopped.

Let's consider how international humanitarian law in the form of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) might apply in Othman's case, while acknowledging that Israel does not accept that the Fourth Geneva Convention applies in the West Bank as it does not accept that its involvement in the West Bank is an 'occupation' in terms of the Convention. Article 27 states, 'Protected persons . . . shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof . . .'; the injuries to Othman, though not serious, would seem to be a breach of this article. Article 3 (b) of the Convention prohibits the 'taking of hostages'.

As we sat drinking tea, I asked Baian whether he thought that Othman's arrest was connected to his position as mayor. He was very clear that his being mayor was the reason for his son's arrest. If that is the case, then it is very troubling. Othman may or may not have been taken as a hostage for his father's and his village's compliance – but perhaps the Israeli officer was attempting to use him as such.

A View of Life in East Jerusalem (*from Moving Stories 159*)

Marmot is the leader of an all day kindergarten situated in the grounds of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. The majority of the twenty three children who attend, come from the ex pat community. Their parents have good jobs in areas such as the diplomatic service. Originally they provided places for local Palestinian children but, because of the worsening economic situation, found fee paying became sporadic. The Church has little usable money so had to open the doors of the kindergarten to those who could pay. Marmot would dearly like to get

back to helping the local Palestinian children but realises the kindergarten is now in a Muslim area and parents would prefer to send their children to a Muslim playschool.

This kindergarten is, in many ways, very similar to those we would find in the UK. Parents' newsletters are produced each month talking about the current topic. This term's theme was 'Citrus' so the walls were adorned with work using oranges and lemons, all of which grow naturally in this area. They even managed to arrange a trip to Jericho to see farmers there.

A housing project, in the grounds of the cathedral, has been a long term vision of the Church but they have been waiting for a building permission permit for at least 10 years. A school was also included and therefore better facilities for the kindergarten. Marmot told us how settlers who moved into the area only a few years ago were able to get planning permission and started building last year. The buildings are almost finished and she remarked, "The inequality is painful."

Marmot lives in occupied East Jerusalem and pays all her municipal tax and energy bills. She has a permanent ID card but no full passport. Those coming into Israel to live permanently, get an ID card and, within 6 months, a full Israeli passport. She has taken 2 jobs to pay for these taxes and bills.

Her son loves to go out but she worries about him as there have been recent attacks on Arab boys (both Muslim and Christian) by conservative Jews. Her son doesn't want to stay but needs permission to leave as he has Jerusalem ID.

Young people also have to pay taxes which means they have to work. If a young person is unemployed and living in Jerusalem or Israel and has paid their taxes they will get unemployment benefit. If they do not pay taxes, goods can be removed and their bank accounts taken over. Although this is harsh she thinks this is good. She acknowledged that the Palestinian Authority does not have good social services and wishes they had the same type of system.

Even getting to study is a daily struggle. Her daughter used to take 30 minutes to get to Bizet University but now, with all the checkpoints and settler only roads, it takes at least one and a half hours.

There are less than 1 % of Christians in Jerusalem now. Marmot said, "Here we have to struggle to come through. God will give us strength to continue. We live with the Lord's strength. The political situation makes you very depressed."

Marmot is proud she has some Israeli friends. She feels that it is the politicians who make the divisions. She spoke of the 'Bridges of love needed.' Peace would come if they give us our rights and we have a two state solution. She also feels that those living in the West Bank think they are lucky because they have freedom to go places but they do not. Economic and administrative restrictions mean our lives are without freedom. "We feel that we are in a jail too, like a cage."

Contributed by Wendy Firmin

On this day

From the Carrs Lane Journal [and L.M.S.] Missionary Chronicle May 1913

A view of medicine in a Mission in India a century ago. It touches on some of the dilemmas that can be seen in our own health service, currently very much under scrutiny, and certainly reminds us that for very many people in the world today the negative situations here depicted are still only too close to reality. The piece is written by Miss J.W. Inglis, a New Zealander who has worked in the Mission in Erode since 1904. A lady doctor was being sought at the time to work in the same Mission.

The Drama of the Medicine Bottle

Scene 1: “Even one little bottle of medicine, Amma,” said the pleading voice. I shook my head sorrowfully but firmly. “No, I really cannot. I don’t know what to give you.”

“Give me what you gave last year, Amma; such beautiful medicine it was. Don’t you remember me? They thought I was dying; I could not move; you gave me medicine and made me well.”

“Yes, I remember you very well. But you know it was not / who gave you the medicine. It was the doctor, Amma.”

“Yes, but the illness is coming back again. Give me some of *that* medicine. It is the same colour as the one I has before.”

“No, I am afraid that if I gave you that it would make you worse rather than better.”

“Give me anything, Amma. All your medicines are good.”

“I am very sorry, but I’m afraid I can’t. Yours is a bad illness, and I don’t know what to do for it.”

She looked at me wistfully for signs of relenting. How had this thing come about? Here was the same room with its well-remembered rows of bottles. Here was the Amma who had spoken so kindly before; and now she refused to give anything. True, it may have been the other Amma who gave the medicine, but what difference did that make? Why should this one say she did not know? Did not the white ladies know everything? No, she must be offended at something. There is nothing to be done, no one else to go to.

“Salaam, Amma!” she says resignedly. She bears no malice. She is only puzzled and hurt, and she goes sorrowfully away.

Scene 2: A girl mother and her blind baby. It was all right when it was born, but within a few weeks it developed signs of disease in one eye. I begged them to take it at once to the Eye Hospital in Madras, that at least the remaining eye might be saved.

“Can’t you give it some medicine?” in a voice that said, “You could if you would.”

“I am very sorry, but this is too serious for me to do anything.”

But Madras was far away, and the perils of an unknown city loomed large in their imaginations. The mother must go with the child, and the mother-in-law must go to look after the daughter-in-law, and the father-in-law must go to look after both, and the expense would be great. I offered to help with the expenses, but they hesitated and made excuses, and while they hesitated the other eye was attacked.

“It is the will of God,” they said, with true Oriental fatalism. “What is the good of taking that long journey when it is not His wish that the child should be cured?” So they gave up the idea, and now the little child is totally blind.

Scene 3: “But you cured my sister’s son of fever. Amma, why will you not cure my daughter? See how she suffers.”

The speaker, a middle-aged woman, looked anxiously at me.

“Yes, I know she is very ill, and I would gladly help her if I could. But I only know about little illnesses, like fevers and sores. This is a big illness, and I do not know what to give for it.”

“Well, when is the other Amma coming, who does know about big sicknesses? There is no one to care for us poor people.”

“I hope she will come soon,” I said, as hopefully as I could.

“Will she come next month?”

“Not *next* month, I’m afraid,” I said.

Scene 4: Another child with ophthalmia, a dear little fellow of two or three, evidently the pride of the home. He is the only son of an only son, and his father and grandfather, wealthy Hindu farmers, look anxiously for our verdict. The child’s eyes are hideous to look at. He lies moaning, with his face on his mother’s shoulder, his little bare legs with the pretty silver anklets hanging out from under her cloth

“We can do nothing for him,” we say. “The only thing you can do is to take him at once to Madras. His life may depend on it. Do not lose a single day.” But alas, there is an invincible obstacle. There is no lack of money here, but the mother obstinately refuses to go to “that far country.” She is like so many mothers in India – ignorant, patient, uncomplaining and utterly devoted, ready to do anything for her child, anything but the one thing necessary to save it.

“But your son may die,” I say at last, in exasperation to the father. “You must just make your wife go.”

“What can I do?” he says patiently. “If she won’t go, she won’t.”

both men look anxiously on while I make another attempt to persuade her, but it is quite useless, and at last the sad little party goes off, the men in front, and the poor ignorant mother behind, with the little limp figure hanging over her shoulder.

Scene 5: A young Christian mother and her newborn child. Unkempt, unwashed, tossing in burning fever on a hard cot, with no one but an ignorant old woman to help. No sunlight, no fresh air, dingy dark walls, and a mingled smell of disinfectant and bad drains.

“Next time, Gnanamma,” I said, “you shall come to our Mission Hospital, where everything will be nice and bright and clean, and you will have pictures to look at, and the nurses will know how to relieve your pain.”

“But what is the good of the hospital with no one to look after it? When is the new doctor coming?” she said fretfully.

“We have not heard of anyone yet,” I said.

“Do you think one will come *soon*?”

“Not *very* soon, I am afraid,” I said gently.

From the Carrs Lane Journal – May 1963

As a student I failed to get to grips with this book, although I found it an excellent cure for non-existent insomnia! What strikes me on reading this article by Philip Lee-Woolf is how much of it could have been written much more recently about a more contemporary publication. The basic psychology remains very much the same.

Honest to God – John A.T. Robinson

Many have heard of the book “Honest to God”, but few so far have read it. Not having read it has not prevented some prominent men from pronouncing violent judgments about it: one very distinguished person lost the copy sent him unread, but proceeded to speak superciliously about it. As a result many people have been misled into supposing it blasphemous or heretical.

The truth is that you cannot find one such statement in the book. The author, Dr. John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, is one of the leading New Testament scholars in the country. He was born in the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral, brought up at the heart of the religious establishment, and for years taught theology at Wells Theological College and Cambridge University. No word of his suggests, as cartoons and letters to the press allege, that he desires to dispense with faith in God. The exact opposite is the case. He believes in “the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity”, and intends to worship him in that language. He believes that Jesus Christ is the one in whom is bodied forth without reserve the life of God and believes him risen from the dead. He writes urgently about prayer and the moral direction of the Christian life.

It is not even true that what he says is offensive by its novelty. You might criticise the book by saying that it is too much a treasury of quotations: from Dietrich Bonhoeffer especially, who sealed his testimony with his blood, but from a whole range of others also: Paul Tillich, the great German theologian resident in the United States, George MacLeod, John MacMurray, Daniel Jenkins. The stir created by this book took the publishers by surprise – 6,000 copies printed where 60,000 could have been sold at once – because substantially the same view as is here put by Dr. Robinson has been expressed for years in other books by greatly respected men. Dr. Robinson’s achievement is to put in terms sharp enough to rouse a passionate reaction the conviction that the traditional mould of faith in God must be recast if the faith itself is to make its way with men today.

On the face of it, that is a conviction that anyone concerned for the future impact of the Gospel must applaud. The pictures, metaphors and similes through which the religious man has perceived his faith in God, and which therefore bear with him a weight of glory, have lost their power to speak to the minds and spirits of many men today, not least some of the most alert and sensitive. The missionary is prepared to recast the mould and language in which he has himself received the Gospel, and every fresh translation of the Bible tries to find contemporary words and concepts in which the historic message can be more vividly expressed today. Mental images (e.g. of a Being “seated above the stars”) are no more sacred in themselves than

graven images: to treat them so and to be in principle unwilling to melt them down when they no longer mediate God Himself – this is idolatry.

Dr. Robinson has done no more than to identify with unblinking candour certain points at which the received “image” or “picture” of God and of the religious life troubles his mind as a twentieth century man, and, as he believes, obstructs the progress of the Gospel.

It is easy to see why Dr. Robinson wrote as he did: he is both honest and missionary-minded. More difficult is the question why the reaction was so startled and in some cases so unworthy. The Christian community today is a small minority in a secular society: its privileges, its sense of its own power and its social prestige are diminished. Is it part of the defensiveness of such a community, unaccustomed to its new situation, that some of its members pour scorn on a book, often without having read it, because it is reported as questioning the form of certain beliefs? It is psychologically well known that often a man who shouts the loudest in defence of some inherited conviction does so to deafen himself to certain whispers of doubt beginning to sound in his own inner ear. The man who is sure does not need to make so shrill a noise: and it seems to me that the reaction shows not that Dr. Robinson is wicked or even off the main Christian line, but that some people, though devout, are afraid about the Christian future.

The reaction, however, also shows a vast and unexpected public interest in a man speaking about God with courage and transparent honesty. He is prepared to admit the doubts and difficulties which others keep hidden in some cupboard at the back of their minds and to wrestle ceaselessly for a faith relevant to daily thought and life. And as he does so, innumerable people within the Church sigh with relief that having such problems does not disqualify their discipleship and here is a man who will help them with them. At the same time people outside the Church discover something they can begin to understand – a man’s barber talks to him about it – and something that provides a common language in which they can begin to converse about God and Jesus Christ and Prayer and the obligations of daily life. This is indeed a rare achievement for which, even if we do not agree with every word of his, we should be grateful to Dr. Robinson. I hope his book will be widely read.

Contributed by Wendy Firmin

Please send your contribution for next month’s Journey to the Editor,
Mrs. Pat Davies, Carrs Lane URC, Carrs Lane, Birmingham, B4 7SX
or by email to office@carrslane.co.uk.

Room Hire at Carrs Lane

Carrs Lane Church Centre is in Birmingham city centre and within a few minutes walk of New Street and Moor Street train Stations and the National Express Coach Station. Public car parking and bus stops are also nearby.

The Conference Rooms on offer at Carrs Lane are of several sizes and situated on three floors. We can support most types of events. Rooms can accommodate from 6 up to 350 delegates. You will find that our prices are very competitive. Our staff will be pleased to discuss ideas for your event with you and advise on the suitability of our facilities.

Hot and cold drinks can be supplied in the meeting rooms as often as required. Buffet meals can be pre-ordered. These range from a simple sandwich menu to a full buffet

Full details and prices are available on our website, www.carrslane.co.uk, or you may call the conference team on 0121 643 6151 if you have any questions or email booking@carrslane.co.uk.



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www.carrslane.co.uk



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Carrs Lane Regular Activities

SUNDAYS

Morning Worship	Every Sunday at 10.30am with Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month
Children's Church	Second Sunday at 2.30pm
Radical Worship	Fourth Sunday at 6.00pm
First Sunday Lunch	First Sunday each month at 12.30pm
Church Meeting	Second Sunday at 12 noon
Singing Group	Third Sunday 9.45 – 10.15am

WEEK DAYS

Lunchtime Healing Service	Every Wednesday 1.15pm
Prayer Group	First Wednesday at 7.00 pm
Discussion Group	First Thursday at 10.15 am
Harborne House Group	Third Tuesdays 2.00pm (various locations)
Central House Group at Carrs Lane	Third Wednesdays at 6.00pm
Carrs Lane Choir Practice	Fridays at 7.00pm
Carrs Lane Players (drama group)	Fridays at 7.45 pm
Charity Knitting Circle	First Tuesday 10.00 am - 1.00 pm
Fair Trade Shop	First and Third Sunday after morning worship and Tuesday - Saturday 10.30 am - 2.30 pm
Counselling Centre	Monday - Friday 11.00 am - 1.30 pm and Monday to Wednesday evenings 7.00 - 9.00 pm

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