

END PIECE: Hopes for an Obama Presidency.

Kathleen LaCamera writes..

My hope for an Obama Presidency is that he will help people, religious or not, to find a constructive way of addressing the moral dimension of America's public life. I agree with *Time* magazine editor Nancy Gibbs who comments that, if President Obama can succeed in this challenge, "he will indeed have written a new chapter in a long American story".



Theological certainty has dominated the tone of America's religion and politics for a long time with disastrous results around the globe. In the 1980s, more moderate mainline Christians found themselves increasingly outside the sphere of presidential political influence as the alliance of the Religious Right and President Ronald Reagan grew. In this relationship, theological certainty and politics of "triumphalism" came together, leaving mainstream Christians, with their more inclusive approach, labelled "suspect" if not downright "unpatriotic". American journalist Ray Waddle observes that moderate Christians were confused and outraged, feeling 'this isn't about Jesus'. But by then it was too late. Religion and national triumphalism had become intertwined; they stayed that way for a very long time.

During the past eight years, President Bush has not been one for encouraging debate or engaging people who disagreed with him. In the run up to the Iraq War, bishops from the American Methodist Church (of which he is a member) repeatedly asked for a meeting with the President. The denomination officially opposed the war. Those requests were ignored.

Obama's faith outreach team, formed during the campaign, has already created links with a range of religious groups. Some hold convictions directly opposed to Obama's views. The team is led by a 26 year old Pentecostal minister called Josiah Dubois. I believe that an Obama administration will have the confidence and ability to embrace a far more inquiring and inclusive approach than we've seen before. I hope President Obama will employ the listening style used so effectively in the campaign, to build common ground between people of diverse religious and political beliefs.

I look forward to seeing how President Obama builds on this moment of global good will towards America. Many say he won't have the resources to do much good. But, whether markets are up or down, setting an enquiring and inclusive tone at the White House will be a major accomplishment.

Kathleen LaCamera is a Manchester-based American journalist and minister with standing in both the US and British Methodist churches. She has lived in the UK for the past 17yrs. (A shorter version of this article appeared in the Methodist Recorder: on 22-01-09)

ST MARK'S CENTRE FOR RADICAL CHRISTIANITY

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CRC on Facebook.

Jonny Wood writes

At CRC events, people always appreciate a chance to talk together, share news and perspectives and get a sense of the 'bigger picture'. But there's only so much you can do at a conference.

To increase and improve the flow of communication, CRC has now opened its own Facebook group. Facebook is one of the best known 'social networking' sites on the web and is a popular and easy means of keeping in touch with both individuals and interest groups. Web-based 'communities' are increasingly influential so it is important and exciting for CRC to participate. CRC's venture is experimental; it depends on people getting involved.

The 'Facebook' group will be complementary to CRC's existing communications - the website and the newsletter. Whilst it will promote and highlight CRC events and ventures, it will also provide a forum for CRC members and supporters to contribute news, views and concerns. It will be great if newsletter items inspire comments in the Facebook group. How about engaging in discussion around the Spring Conference? Although contributions will be moderated to ensure that content is appropriate, it will not prevent lively and constructive engagement!

The first step is to obtain a 'Facebook' profile. Go to www.facebook.com and look for Start-up; then follow the steps (there's no charge). Once accepted, type 'St. Mark's Centre for Radical Christianity' into the 'search' box and it'll bring you to us. All are welcome, including those not (yet) CRC members who might be sympathetic to our aims or interested in getting involved. Please contact Jonny at jonnywood@googlegmail.com if you have any questions.

Greetings from Leeds!

Adrian Alker writes...

Four months have passed since Christine and I left St Mark's, Broomhill and I took up the new role of Director of Mission Resourcing in the Anglican Diocese of Ripon and Leeds. We very much miss all our friends in Sheffield and will treasure the many gifts, cards and photos for years to come. However, fresh challenges have prevented our wallowing in nostalgia!



Getting to grips with my job in the diocese has reminded me of how many opportunities there are to share a more radical understanding of matters of faith with people across this large and diverse diocese from inner city Leeds to the beautiful Yorkshire Dales. I have already had the privilege of giving a talk to the Bishop's Council about what is our *passion* as Christians? What are we passionate about?

Christine has been appointed Administrator for the Modern Churchpeople's Union (MCU), the oldest liberal organisation in the Church of England. Together with being administrator for CRC, she has feet in both camps - a good job they are singing from the same open-minded hymn-sheet!

Copies of *Together in Hope* continue to sell well, we reckon over 1000 copies have now gone out to people all over the UK (and a few abroad!) That collaborative venture has strengthened my resolve to encourage various organisations like CRC, MCU and PCN Britain to work more closely together, to pool resources and to produce more much needed study material. Both PCN Britain and MCU have major planning weekends this Spring and hopefully we will see the development of more joint ventures.

In the meantime we prepare for our April conference. Even more poignantly shall we be discussing the threats facing our world and how we best respond to issues of terrorism and violence. The tragic loss of life in Gaza and Israel is a reminder of the futility of armed conflict and the ongoing need for people of all faiths to return to the roots of their religion and seek to find a common global ethic. There are few better speakers to help and inspire us than Paul Rogers and I hope that you have booked your place at the conference.

Finally a word of thanks to CRC chair Helen Fisher and all the council who are ensuring that the vital work which CRC undertakes goes from strength to strength. I hope that mini CRC's can be spawned in this part of the world too!

Robin Story was elected to CRC Council in November 2007. He hopes to convince more people that what we do is more significant than what we believe. CRC has a vital role in achieving this aim.

David Thorpe has been a member of the CRC since it was formed. He is a member of St Mark's and has recently agreed to set up and maintain a CRC archive.

John Vaughan has been a member of CRC council for several years. He is a retired priest, interested in links between art and religion and in 'Encounters with the Sacred'.

Anne Wood (co-opted) worships at St Mark's and has been on council since its inception. Anne was a clergy wife in two inner city parishes and a rural one. She is eager to further the cause of progressive theology. She has continued to read, question and study.

Jonny Wood grew up in Sheffield. A former teacher, he was from 2003 a member of the Scargill Community in the Yorkshire Dales. He is now studying full-time for an MA in Religious Studies at Lancaster University. He is setting up a 'Facebook' CRC group .

Read more about us on the website!

New Vicar for St Mark's

Rev. Dr. Ian Wallis, Principal of the Northern Ordination Course, has been appointed to be the next incumbent of St Mark's parish.

- a note from Jane Padget and David Price:
Ian's reasons for wanting to come to St. Mark's so inspired and impressed us that we wanted to share this with you in Ian's own words.



Here is a quote from Ian's covering letter:

"Fortuitously, my earliest memory of a church interior is of St. Mark's occasioned by junior school carol services. I can still remember being awed by the stained glass and sheer scale of it all. Since then, this church has come to occupy a special place in my affections and I have followed with keen interest its growth and blossoming ... Nostalgia, though, is not my reason for applying. Rather, St. Mark's is living proof that a liberal-critical approach to Christian believing can yield a vibrant community of faith which is grounded in the ministry of Jesus, delights in human diversity, embraces intellectual inquiry and is open to what God is doing in the world in, through and beyond the church.

"I support the work of St Mark's Centre for Radical Christianity, having been a member and attended various conferences, and would be keen to champion its causes and contribute to its development in the future."



Welcome to the new CRC Council

Tanya Ralph, the new Secretary, writes

“I am looking forward to serving St Marks CRC as the secretary. I am fully aware of the fabulous team which supports the officers, not to mention the excellent administrative support that Christine Alker gives to the council. For myself, I've gained immensely from being part of this enlightened team which has greatly helped me on my personal faith journey”.

At the CRC Annual General Meeting last Autumn, twelve members were elected to the Council for the coming year.

Helen Fisher, Chair, has another year left to run in her term as Chair of CRC. She attends St Mark's Church and has been on the council since CRC's inception.

Anne Padget became the Vice Chair of CRC two years ago, having joined the council the previous year. For Anne, the appeal of the CRC is the space it allows for people to explore, question and doubt without judgement.

Tanya Ralph is in her first year as Honorary Secretary. She is a member of St Mark's congregation and has been on CRC Council since its inception in 2003. She helped develop and maintain the website and has recently helped to organise conferences.

Robin Saunders has been CRC's Honorary Treasurer since it's inception in 2003. He is a retired academic, grandfather, amateur musician and long-time member of St Mark's Church congregation and PCC.

Russell Hand will be taking the lead in the redevelopment of the CRC website over the coming year. He, too, is a member of the congregation at St Mark's.

Sue Hobley (co-opted) is assistant priest at St Mark's. She says “My faith journey has always been a struggle for integrity, between a rational intellectual understanding and the mystery of love which seems to be at the heart of things.”

Pauline Miller has served on the Council since it was set up. “I am very committed to the CRC mission. At St Mark's we belong to an open and inclusive church community. We have a real job to do in offering a similar community to people who cannot find it in their local churches.”

Jane Padget was the first Chair of CRC which she felt would be a voice for people who were affected by prejudice or pressure to conform within their church, or who wanted to explore what their faith meant for them.

John Simmonds has recently become newsletter editor. He is keen to see CRC develop educational programmes which challenge exclusivity in church and society. John is a retired Methodist Minister.

Books and Other Resources to look out for.....

New books on radical Christianity and related subjects are always coming out of publishing houses and the CRC library cannot stock them all, even though we do our best. Recently there have been a number of titles, which you might want to follow up on Amazon, AbeBooks or other such sites.

Richard Holloway's latest book has the challenging title *Between the Monster and the Saint*, whilst veteran writer **John Hick** has written *Who or What is God?*

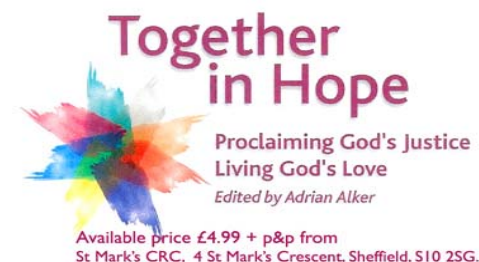
Keith Ward is at it again(!), his latest book is entitled *The Big Questions in Science and Religion*. **Giles Goddard**, chair of Inclusive Church has written a book entitled *Space for Grace, Creating Inclusive Churches* and on the same theme comes **Steven Shakespeare's** *Prayers for an Inclusive Church*.

On the wider front **Mark Chapman** has written, *Doing God : Religion and Public Policy in Brown's Britain* and **Alan Billings** has produced *God and Community Cohesion*.

New titles keep appearing from **Living the Questions**, the American DVD study course, one of the latest being *First Light: Jesus and the Kingdom of God* featuring our friends John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg. For more information on these resources go to www.livingthequestions.com

Please commend **Together in Hope** to your friends (and foes!). Try and get copies on to your church bookstall or into house groups. Let people know of alternative ways into the Christian story.

Finally have a look at this website www.spiritualjourneys.com. Any comments?



It would be good to have some short reviews or comments about any of the above books or other books which have inspired and informed you. Send them to Newsletter editor, John Simmonds at jc@simmonds4041.fsnet.co.uk.

Recordings of the Don Cupitt Conference

Don Cupitt very kindly agreed that the conference addresses and plenary discussion be recorded and distributed to members of St Marks CRC. Consequently, we can now offer a set of 2 CD's at a price of £4 plus £1 for p and p. Cheques should be made out to St Marks CRC. CD's will be available at St Mark's Church or you may complete the order form enclosed with this newsletter.

News from the CRC Library

Peter Fisher writes ...

I have decided because of health problems to draw back somewhat from the library, but will continue to deal with suggestions for new books and reviews. **Maureen Bownas** has kindly offered to place orders with Amazon, and payment will continue to be made by **Robin Saunders**. When Maureen has processed the new purchases, she will pass the details on to Tanya for inclusion on the CRC Website.

I will continue to organise the Sunday duty rota. We welcome **Alison Tolson** to the team - and will be delighted to receive further offers of help.

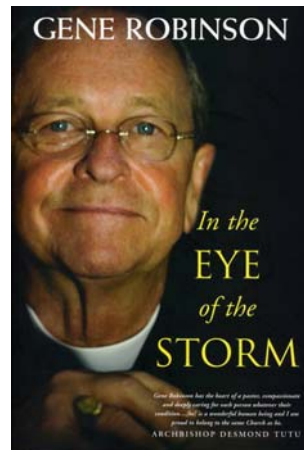
We have been considering the suggestion that we should have a '**Book Club**' now and then on a weekday, giving opportunity to look at the library and discuss our reading with each other. **Maureen Bownas** has offered to set this in motion in an informal way - if you are interested please contact Maureen (Tel: 0114 230 2757, email: mbownas@hotmail.com). A list of current library books is enclosed with this newsletter. These are available to borrow by members on Sunday mornings, at conferences and by arrangement with the CRC office: 0845 6434694.

If you have any suggestions about the Library, or are interested in coming on the team, please put a note in my pigeon hole at St Mark's. My thanks to all of you who use and support the CRC Library - it is a precious asset - especially in what seems sometimes like the onset of a new 'Dark Age' in matters of religion.

(CRC owes an enormous debt to Peter for his remarkable achievement in establishing and sustaining the CRC Library. We wish him well for all that lies ahead.)

Some recent acquisitions for the CRC Library

- David Boulton - *Who on Earth was Jesus?*
- Hans Kung - *Disputed Truth: Memoirs Vol.2*
- John Shelby Spong - *The Future of the Christian Tradition*
- David Kinnaman - *Unchristian: What a generation really thinks about Christianity and why it matters.*
- Ian. S. Markham - *Why Liberal Churches are growing - (Christianity and Contemporary Culture)*
- Gene Robinson - *In the Eye of the Storm*
- Peter J. Gomes - *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*
- Nick Spencer and Robert White - *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*
- The Jesus Seminar - *The Future of the Christian Tradition*
- Jo Ind - *Memories of Bliss - God, Sex and Us*



Don Cupitt at CRC last November

Peter Fisher writes ...

Our speaker was Don Cupitt - to my mind the most original and courageous religious writer in Britain for several generations. About 150 people attended - many from other parts of the country.

Don's theme was *Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God*. Taking a similar line to the *Jesus Seminar*, Don sees the Kingdom as being all about this world, bringing hope to suffering humanity. The way to the spiritual freedom and new life promised by the Bible is through facing up to there being only one world, with nothing 'heavenly' outside it. To live religiously is to live intensely, living life to the full. Don calls this '*Solar Living*' - "We should live as the sun does...it simply expends itself gloriously, and in doing so gives life to us all".

Everyone was keen to join discussion groups and to ask questions. Many seemed to accept Don's point that coming up against ideas that one cannot accept is, after all, probably the best way to learn and grow in understanding. Don had been an engaging speaker with a gentle sense of humour, and warm applause showed everyone's appreciation.



See details of Conference CDs on previous page of this newsletter)

CRC Spring Conference...Sat 25 April '09 at St Mark's.

The World To Come?..Global Responses to Global Threats

This conference addresses some of the major threats we face as global citizens. How can people of faith respond to the challenges posed by some of the root causes of conflict and insecurity in our contemporary society?

The day will look at interrelating issues around militarisation in the face of terrorism, financial insecurity and competition over resources. Can the major world religions offer positive ways forward? How does a radical understanding of the Christian faith bear upon these global issues? How can we bring about change?

Contributors include:

Paul Rogers, Simon Barrow and Philip Austin

**Full details and booking form on www.stmarkscrc.co.uk
Or ring: 0845 6434694**