

End piece

Robin Story reflects on a recent CRC Library Evening

Sin Thesis

Has sin gone out of fashion? What are contemporary ideas about sin? This was the topic of discussion at the latest Library Evening of St Mark's CRC held last October.

Sue Hobley, Vicar of Wath-on-Dearne, conducts "Ask the Vicar" sessions in the local comprehensive for Year 10 pupils. That morning one boy had asked, "What is sin?". Suspecting that underlying the question was an aspect of sex, she probed further, only to discover that it was the Ten Commandments he had in mind. This seemed to reflect a residual awareness in secular society of what sin is. Another phenomenon, Sue went on to tell us, is the need of most parents wanting their new-born babies to be 'done', i.e., baptised. What is their motive? In preparing parents and godparents who are not familiar and may not understand the liturgical language used in the service and moreover are unlikely to set foot in church again phrases like "renouncing sin and evil" presented a difficulty. She pointed out that from earliest times up to the 16th Century Prayer Book a formula for exorcising an infant was an important component of the baptismal rite. "Conceived in sin" was the basis for this and explains why it was so essential to early Christians for Jesus to have a virgin mother.

Ian Wallis, Vicar of St Mark's, asked if it was possible to sin alone: surely it was something that needed a relationship between a transgressor and the transgressed? The ideas of Rev. Professor John Macquarrie threw light on the matter. He propounded an existentialist theology: the state of the world was hopeless, irretrievably bad to the point of absurdity. The only solution was to do something totally different to find "Grace". In brief: "Sin is disabling: grace is enabling."

In the lively discussion that followed, we asked, 'Do we give sufficient emphasis to sins of omission.' "We have left undone those things we ought to have done" precedes "and we have done those things we ought not to have done.". Confession of failure puts the past behind us thus allowing us to make a fresh start. Sin and its deserved punishment still make Heaven and Hell real places for some Christians. In the Gospels it is clear that Jesus' acts of forgiveness were not condemnatory, but liberating releasing people from bondage and providing them with healing. As usual when time ran out, we had not finished the debate.

Thanks to Maureen Bownas for arranging these Library evenings where the presentation and lively discussion are followed by the chance to browse and borrow the books in both the CRC and church libraries.

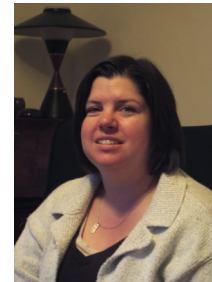
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ST MARK'S CENTRE FOR RADICAL CHRISTIANITY

Newsletter No 19
Winter 2011



Greetings from Tanya Ralph: CRC Secretary to all CRC members, especially those who have recently joined.

I write at the start of what promises to be an exciting and busy year for the CRC to let you know what plans the Council have to further the liberal radical message. I hope those of you who came to the Nicola Slee and Eley McAinsh conferences in 2010 found them as interesting and challenging as we did.

The 2010 Autumn conference on the theme of 'Mysticism and Contemporary Spirituality', held jointly by St Mark's Centre for Radical Christianity and the Living Spirituality Network, led by LSN Director Eley McAinsh, went very well; we hope to build on this collaboration. The day was well attended with enthusiastic participation by all, both listening, talking, and being silent. For me the highlights of the day were two periods of guided silence, led by Jenny Sandler. As a novice in meditation, my eyes and ears were opened to a way of being quiet and listening. Eley's St Mark's Sunday morning sermon, "Where the Spirit Meets the Bone", is available to download at: www.ctbi.org.uk/CGFC/310

The CRC has several events planned for 2011; the fliers are included in this mailing. The first is on **March 19th** when Revd Richard Stott (a Methodist Minister and Art Psychotherapist) will seek to stimulate our artistic natures with a workshop looking at the relationship between creativity and spirituality. The day will include opportunities to get involved in various activities of contemplative meditation and art making (no previous experience or artistic talent is necessary!). Due to the nature of this event the numbers for this will be limited so please book early. If it proves popular, we will repeat the day either later in the year or in 2012.

Our second event will be on 16th April, a library event based on the book 'The Spirit Level', developing the theme 'Why equality is better for everyone'. Further details available in the flier. There will be several themed library evenings throughout the year so keep an eye on the website and in future newsletters for more details.

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Greetings from Tanya Ralph - continued

Our major event will be the long awaited return of Marcus Borg to Sheffield to lead our Autumn conference, **11-13 November 2011**. The title for the weekend is 'Reclaiming the Inheritance of Jesus' and will start with a Friday night lecture, 'Speaking Christian: Reclaiming Christian Language', followed by a day conference on Saturday, 'Being Christian: Reclaiming the God of Jesus', and Marcus will also preach at the morning service on Sunday 13th November at St Mark's Church, Broomhill.

The CRC council is having a planning day this month to look at the future direction of CRC, including collaborative work with like-minded organisations such as *PCN Britain*, *Free to Believe* and *Modern Church*. This collaboration is already yielding fruit with a series of study booklets. The first of these was written by CRC council member John Simmonds and is entitled "*Walk the Jesus Walk*". This is now available to purchase from CRC costing £2.95 or £3.50 including postage (see elsewhere this newsletter). The overall series is called the "Together in Hope Series"; various other books will follow.

If anyone still would like a copy of the original *Together in Hope* book, we are now offering it free but asking people to pay postage. Please contact Anne Padget in the CRC office or you can also get it from PCN via the online bookshop at www.pcnbritain.org.uk

Lastly, over to the membership – what can you do? CRC is open to all, so if you would like to contribute to future newsletters or have items posted on the website, just e-mail us your article/letter/etc. Please look at the website now and again and let us know if we can improve it in any way. Also, please engage with our Facebook page - it could do with more action and blogging if you are up for a challenge and have five minutes to spare!

CRC Day Conference: Saturday March 19th 2011 Theme: Creativity and Spirituality



with painter and sculptor, Rev Richard Stott, Methodist Minister and Creative Arts Co-ordinator for the Sheffield Methodist District, currently working in Sheffield exploring new ways of being church based around creative arts.

Richard will explore the relationship between creativity and spirituality. After exploring some of the background ideas, there will be plenty of time for participants to engage in various activities of contemplative meditation and art making. No previous artistic experience or skill is necessary! 'All are welcome to come and engage in the risky and life giving adventure as we journey together with the creative spirit of God.'

At St Mark's Church, Broomhill: 19th March: 10am - 3pm

Charge for the day - £6 (£5 for members).

For more information and booking, contact: Tel: 0114 266 3613 ; e: info@stmarkscrc.co.uk.

Also www.stmarkscrc.co.uk.

Putting Away Childish Things – A Tale of Modern Faith. Marcus J Borg.
Pub. Harper One 2010

Marcus Borg's first novel is the story of Kate – a popular professor of religion at a liberal arts college in a small Midwestern town in the USA. She thinks her life is on the right track but life takes an unexpected turn and she has to meet many challenges in her private life and in her classroom. Karen Armstrong recommends this book, "As we follow Kate's journey we become aware of the paradoxes and difficulties of faith in the modern world and appreciate the way these affect our spiritual, intellectual and professional aspirations at every level.

Conversations With Scripture: The Gospel of St Mark. Marcus J Borg
pub. Morehouse Publishing 2009

Most Christians are familiar with the story told in Mark's gospel – from the fishermen leaving their nets, to the miracles of the loaves and fishes, to the political rumblings and the growing conflicts. But who was Mark – and why was this gospel written? Noted Jesus scholar Marcus Borg reckons that reading Mark is like "meeting Jesus again for the first time."

'CAN THESE BONES LIVE?' – READING THE BIBLE TODAY

***Modern Church Annual Conference: 12 – 15 July 2011**
at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts.

2011 is the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Bible, or 'Authorised Version'. *Modern Church* believes that knowing *how to read* the Bible is just as important as knowing what is in it. So the 2011 conference focuses upon how Christians in the present are to be imaginative, faithful readers of the scriptures, seeking new ways to engage with the Bible and letting it engage with us.

Contributors

The Revd. Prof. John Barton	Dr. Susannah Cornwall
The Revd. Dr. Maggi Dawn	Prof. Gerard Loughlin
Dr. Alison Milbank	Dr. Francesca Stavropoulou
Prof. Christopher Rowland	Prof. Adrian Thatcher

(read about each contributor's topic on MCU website)

A variety of sessions

Built into some of the sessions will be time for viewing pictures, watching film, studying TV programme clips, doing contextual Bible reading together, analyzing short pieces of literary texts, with theological reflection in small groups, in a cafe-style conference setting. Other sessions will be more conventional lectures with opportunities for questions.

Further information from the conference secretary:

Tel: 0161 633 3132 or Email: conference@modernchurch.org.uk

Or see the website: www.modernchurch.org.uk

(**Modern Church* was formerly known as the *Modern Churchpeople's Union*)

Myth, Poetry and Literalism.

Peter Fisher writes

Fifty years ago C.P.Snow gave a lecture about two cultures - Science on the one hand and the Arts on the other - and about the growing gulf between them. It stirred up quite a debate at the time.

It seems to me that in the matter of religion we are also caught between two cultures. On the one hand, there is the scientific world view which dominates almost every area of human life. On the other, there is the way of thinking which embraces myth. These views need not be mutually exclusive but they too often are. In her helpful book *'The Battle for God'*, Karen Armstrong emphasises the importance of 'mythos' for the people of the past: the stories and poems were concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence.

The world of 'logos', on the other hand, was the dimension of reason, of practical, this worldly common sense. Out of this dimension came the eventual explosion of scientific exploration which took off following the Renaissance.

This is the culture we have inherited and its language is mathematics and hard-edged objective fact. The trouble comes when we tackle religious faith with this mind set and language. We either treat the myths and stories of religion literally - which is what fundamentalists do - or we think we have no option but to dismiss them as of little significance for us moderns.

One way out of this dilemma is to give life to the mythic mindset by seeing it essentially as poetry, understanding that the myths can be seen as metaphorical ways of doing some sort of justice to profound areas of human experience.

Poetry, music and the Arts in general leave gaps in meaning for fresh air to come in from our wider experience and from our subconscious. They can deliver us from the prisons of literalism and shine a new light into faith.

Recent library additions

Maureen Bownas writes

Re-enchanting Christianity Dave Tomlinson. Canterbury Press 2008

In this book, Dave Tomlinson argues that "a disconnect has occurred between religion and spirituality..... Many people long to connect with the sacred mystery of life, but they don't see Church or religion as a way of achieving this. This book is written for people both within and beyond the Church who would like to discover fresh ways to think and feel about the Christian faith, and who wish to connect it with other aspects of their life and experience.

Dave Tomlinson with his wife Pat, founded "Holy Joes", meeting in a pub and exploring with others why regular church-going had become boring or unfulfilling. He is now the vicar of a thriving parish in North London.

TOGETHER IN HOPE SERIES

An exciting new series of resource books

St Mark's CRC is working alongside the *Progressive Christianity Network - Britain, Free to Believe* and *Modern Church* to produce this new series, the first of which appears in this month.

The aim of the series is to encourage people who are seeking a credible Christian faith for the 21st century. We hope that these books will help individuals and groups in many contexts who are exploring matters of faith and belief.



The first book in the series is

Walk the Jesus Walk

by John Simmonds

A six part programme for those who wish to explore what it means to Live in the Way of Jesus. Ideal for group discussion.

A note from the author of the first book - John Simmonds:

This little book is an attempt to introduce people to the Way of Jesus - Jesus of Nazareth, who has meant so much to so many people throughout the past two millennia.

My conviction is that the real Jesus has been taken away from us, so that we rarely catch a glimpse of the charismatic teacher and prophet who lived in Palestine about two thousand years ago. The Jesus Christ of the Church often bears little resemblance to its founder. Is it possible to discover Jesus as he was before the Church got its hands on him? Maybe it's impossible, but one has to try. Here is my attempt to seek out the first Jesus.

Many people have inspired my search, including scholars, poets, artists, actors and movie-makers. Above all, conversations with countless numbers of people in hundreds of settings have encouraged and informed me.

I have written this material because people, who cannot cope with the traditional teachings of the church, say they are still eager to explore the life and ministry of Jesus so that they might find in him an inspiration for contemporary living. This is my contribution. I hope that people will find that the Way of Jesus inspires them to live life to the full.

A companion volume, *Jesus - then and now*, will follow in a couple months.

Available from St Mark's CRC,

4 St Mark's Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2SG. Tel: 0114 266 3613;
E-mail: info@stmarkscrc.co.uk. Website: www.stmarkscrc.co.uk.

Price: £3.50 including p & p (cheques to St Mark's CRC);

A discount can be offered on bulk orders.

Further enquiries from togetherinhope.editor@gmail.com



DAVID THORPE: 15 July 1954 -12 November 2010

Helen Fisher writes this tribute

It is with great sadness that we report David's untimely death. Many in CRC will have known him well; others will remember him at conferences encouraging us to form local groups; he helped set up groups which are still flourishing in Sheffield and Chesterfield. He also helped to create CRC's constitution.

David was very committed to CRC and, in spite of years of ill health, he served on the CRC council from the beginning. If he was too unwell to attend a meeting, he would always call next morning to ask, 'What news on the Rialto?'

David had an enormous enthusiasm for life. He never complained about his ill health or the relentless treatment which he had to endure but bore it all with humour and grace.

His memorial service on Nov.27th was filled with loving tributes, illustrated by a beautiful series of photographs compiled by David's brother Alistair and accompanied by some of David's favourite jazz. It concluded with photographs of David and Ann's wedding day in July when they were both so wonderfully happy.

David chose the poem 'Ithaka' by C.P.Cavafy to be read at the service - such a perfect choice which completely fitted with how he had chosen to live his life.

*"When you set out for Ithaka
Ask that your way be long
Full of adventure, full of instruction."*

*"Ithaka has given you the splendid voyage
Without her you would never have set out.
But she has nothing more to give you.
And if you find her poor,
Ithaka has not deceived you.
So wise have you become, of such experience,
That already you will have understood
What these Ithakas mean."*



David lived his life wisely and well. He was much loved and he will be greatly missed.



PCN Britain secures Dominic Crossan for September '11.

Dominic Crossan, international New Testament Scholar, returns to the UK

to the PCN Conference in Leeds: 16-18 September 2011.
At St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Leeds.
More information on www.pcnbritain.org.uk

Sheffield Jesus Seminar

Saturday 29 January 2011, 9.30 am – 12.30 pm. at St Mark's, S10 2SE
Jesus' Mission Strategy – An Inductive Approach.

Exploring Jesus' mission strategy through the memories of encounters recorded in the Gospels. Participants can select a 'witness' from the list below and come prepared to relate what their encounter/s with Jesus, as described in the relevant biblical texts, discloses of his approach to mission.

Witnesses

John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, Pontius Pilate, a Gentile (eg Syrophenician woman; Roman centurion), a Pharisee, a Sadducee, a Samaritan, a member of Jesus' family, one of the disciples, a child, a tax collector, a sinner, a leper, blind Bartimaeus, one of the 5000, the wealthy inquirer after eternal life, Paul the Apostle, James (Jesus' brother?) - author of Epistle, the Beloved Disciple.

Please let Ian Wallis know asap if you are able to attend and, if so, which 'witnesses' (please select three, to avoid duplication and ensure representation, or volunteer your own) you are willing to be. He will then be in touch again nearer the time to confirm who's being who (so to speak) and to offer more information about input and process of our time together. In the meantime, please tell whoever else might be interested.

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tel: 0114 267 0362 - mob: 07717 417760. e: ian@stmarkssheffield.co.uk

CRC Autumn 2011 Conference: November 11-13.

Reclaiming The Inheritance of Jesus, with Marcus Borg



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|----------|---|
| Friday | Speaking Christian: Reclaiming Christian Language |
| Saturday | Being Christian: Reclaiming the God of Jesus |
| 1 | God and Atheism, recent reverberations |
| 2 | God and Jesus, original impulse |
| 3 | God and Jesus, contemporary resonances |
| Sunday | Marcus will preach at St Mark's morning service |

Cost £20 / £18 for the Saturday and £10 / £8 for the Friday night.

For more information and booking form, contact: Tel: 0114 266 3613 ;
info@stmarkscrc.co.uk www.stmarkscrc.co.uk