



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

Issue 100 Autumn 2025

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



May Weekend 2025 at Swanick

Contents

Page 1. Stop the Genocide, Stop Arming Israel and Arms Fair protest London photos...	Peter Marshall
Page 2. Letter from France.....	Donald Henderson
Page 4. Manchester Amnesty vigils.....	Sandra Dutson
Page 5. Falmouth Vigil for the Holy Land prayer.....	Euan McPhee
Page 6. News from farmers in the Occupied West Bank.....	Zaytoun
Page 7. Battery Expo at Birmingham NEC report July 2025.....	Sandra Dutson
Page 9. Cucumber nutrition, Cows Milk and Neo-liberal capitalism.....	Cerys Brangwyn
Page 11. A Place For All.....	Lorraine Jones
Page 12. Teesside to Tirana- we pitch our tent at the heart of greatest need.....	MWL/Hilary Cashman
Page 15. Brew It Fair	Jenny Medhurst
Page 16. The Wilberforce Way.....	Linda Marshall
Page 17. Upper Wincobank Chapel update.....	Penny Rea
Page 18. Goodbye to N.E. Ashram @Greystone.....	Jenny Medhurst
Page 19. Markan Discipleship in Urban Practice (pt 1).....	John Vincent
Page 22. Joliba Update.....	Joliba Trust
Page 22. Community contacts	



Above and bottom right from End the Genocide, Stop Arming Israel March, London, 6th September 2025. Below from Refugees Welcome, 13th September 2025



Above both images from Mass Protest as DSEI Arms Fair Opens, Excel Centre, Newham, London, 9th September 2025

Peter Marshall



RURALE TECHNOLOGY VIOLINS

Last week on French radio Jacques & I listened to a series of programmes about Jacques Ellul, his Christian anarchism, his conviction that technology has an essentially destructive dynamic.

Here we are experiencing the effects of our technological energy greedy society in the driest & hottest summer yet.

During our 25 years here Jacques & I with friends & family have planted masses of trees & hedges for birds to feed & nest in, dug ponds (for ducks?) & water channels. The trees now quite hide the house but this year the meadow we sowed where the brambles once grew is dry as dust. The well is empty. Trees & bushes are dying back or dead. French farmers are in crisis. They have a technological answer, building giant reservoirs, pumping water from aquifers in winter to irrigate summer crops, consequently drying up surface streams & ponds. Protests against the reservoirs are violently suppressed by the Gendarmery, armed to the teeth.

There is so little to eat the sheep wandered off & disappeared (eating our neighbour's roses on the way). We made 'lost sheep' notices to hand out at market but the next morning to our great surprise & joy, they reappeared! We are now buying in hay & barley for them. Both very local.

Though we well know that technology & its emissions are major cause of the change we are powerless because it so fascinates us & speeds us up. Ivan Ulich somewhere suggested a speed limit of 15 m.p.h. Sounds drastic & would be ruinous for the Tour de France! In the old rural life that was about the fastest you would go but society was then in energetic equilibrium. Simon Fairley in the Land Magazine points out that you can feed a horse on 1 hectare. You could also grow enough biofuel for a tractor on 1 ha but at the end of its life the tractor would require an energy greedy industry to replace it.

ÉGARÉS!

NEUF MOUTONS NAINS

de race Chessant (8 noirs, 1 blanc)

Ils sont partis de CABANIER le 29 juillet

Appelez svp Jacques et Donald 07 57 18 11 42
merci!

whereas the horse (or donkey?) would reproduce itself. Donkeys are stubborn. Our neighbour Paulette's donkey once took her to the village although she didn't want to go there. After the Wednesday market in the village there was always a ball that lasted until the early hours, so they say. The people would get into their carts drunk as lords & their donkey would take them home. Then they bought motorcars & found the car wouldn't take them home & so the ball died.

Perhaps the invention of the motor car was a mistake. The invention of the aeroplane, internet & now A.I. could be an ecological disaster. But mastering technology isn't about living rural & wearing wellies. Rather it is to do with what Pierre Rabhi called 'la sobriété heureuse' & what the French call 'décroissance' (Does that translate as 'degrowth'?) Jacques Ellul advocates contemplation. Perhaps to be closer to creation & to God. On our church door there was a notice. "This is the House of God, if you go inside you may hear his voice speaking to you. It is unlikely he will call you on your mobile phone so please switch it off."

A couple of weeks ago in a village nearby there was a 'Concert for Peace'. It was given by a Russian violinist who had fled his country & war. He played Carpathian folk music & constantly moved round the stage barefoot playing with fantastic verve like Nigel Kennedy (though he wore fancy boots). There were two standing ovations. Jacques & I thanked him for reminding us of happier times in Russia before the catastrophe. Of our helping in the special school Kovchek where the music teacher, Jules Yulevich, played his violin in the corridors calling the children to the assembly hall for folk dances & singing. The Russian put his hands on his heart. We were all touched. A moment of peace & hope?

I fell off my bike once too often & Jacques insisted we get a trike (electric). It has a big basket behind for hay or a bucket of barley. The sheep run behind bleating, anticipating a meal. We hardly ever go faster than 15 m.p.h.!

Donald Henderson

MANCHESTER AMNESTY VIGILS

Over the years I have read many words in books and articles about Palestine/Israel and listened to several Ecumenical Accompanists about their experiences. I receive weekly bulletins from Jerusalem called Waves of prayer from Friends of Sabeel and try to increase my understanding of the history and current situation in Palestine. This does not limit my focus to Palestinian views and I recognise the trauma of centuries of anti-semitism and the horrors of the holocaust. I also know Jewish views are diverse and certainly it is naïve to confuse present Israeli policy with the views of many Jews.

Elizabeth, the editor of our Manchester and Warrington Area Newsletter, invited me to contribute to the last newsletter, along with several other people, by writing my response to her own article about Gaza. In many ways I did not want to add yet more words, though appreciated the thoughtful words of those who did, but to focus on actions and in particular my participation in the vigil organised by Amnesty. (There are still quite a lot of words!).

It is nearly 2 years since the horrific attack by Hamas on October 7th. Almost immediately Manchester Amnesty started what has become a weekly vigil for the people of Palestine and all those suffering in the present situation, including the hostages. October 24th marks the 100th such vigil. It is held each Friday in front of the Library in St Peters Square in Manchester from 5-6pm.

I have attended most of the vigils and though numbers attending are fewer than in the early days there are usually around 40 people.

It is held largely in silence. The placards and now a long banner are generated by Amnesty with clear messages. The banner has these 4 statements:



CEASEFIRE NOW. STOP THE GENOCIDE. HUMANITARIAN AID NOW. STOP ARMS SALES

Individual placards include: 'RELEASE HOSTAGES', PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS and generally affirm the importance of International Law.

I find it allows expression of my wish to take some sort of action in a situation where feelings of helplessness and hopelessness can so easily prevail. Israeli policy of establishing 'facts on the ground' now includes reducing large areas of Gaza to rubble, traumatising a further whole generation of children if they survive, continuing to flout international law including with yet more settlements in the West bank. Genocide is always recognised far too late and actions even statements which might have made some difference avoided for far too long by our own and other governments. The vigil achieves several things in my view:

- It is an act of witness against injustice and cruelty and affirming international law. It continues to generate a lot of interest, mostly supportive.
- It has an element of solidarity with all those suffering. I know any discomfort I feel comes to an end after 1 hour of standing but it brings home there are those who live in continuous fear and hunger and thirst and so many Palestinians are being forced to move time and time again however weak, exhausted or ill they are.
- It provides an opportunity to reflect silently on the situation but also to give an opportunity to remember other conflicts.
- For me it has enabled an understanding of prayer as the point at which it is impossible to see what actions might make a real difference but there is a longing that the concern, the anger, the grief and all the complex grappling with possible solutions are not lost but find some sort of continuing expression.

I do of course take other actions as I have done for years. These include letters to MPs, in ministry and conversation and buying of Palestinian goods, artwork, embroidery, Hebron glass and dates, olive oil and soap from Zaytoun.

My motivation is strengthened by being with others who find this action has meaning. Somehow the normality of people going about their lives in safety, the buskers and the group who regularly turn up on the other side of St Peters Square to distribute food and drink to those on the streets with need of such ministry are comforting. They also heighten the imperative to find actions which might enable the recognition in all conflicts of our common humanity and increase the determination to work for a world of justice and peace.

Sandra Dutson

A prayer for the Israeli and Palestinian people

Lord God,

It is with shock and horror we witness the devastating violence and loss of life in Israel-Palestine over recent days.

We come to you as the source of all comfort
asking that you send your Spirit to surround and uphold all those who are grieving,
all those who are suffering, all those in fear,
and all those in captivity.

May the arms of comfort and compassion, overwhelm the arms of war.

We come to you as the source of all peace
asking that you send your Spirit to
strengthen and uphold those pursuing an end to violence, embolden those with a heart for truth and justice,
and amplify voices of wisdom and restraint.
May the light of peace and reconciliation, overwhelm the darkness of destruction.

We come to you as the source of all hope,
asking that you send your Spirit to bring about a future,
where neighbours embrace despite their differences,
where love conquers hate, humility surpasses pride, and where forgiveness is treasured as a fundamental strength.
May the hope of a day when weapons of conflict will be transformed into tools of reconciliation be realised soon,
so there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away.

Amen.

From a leaflet handed out at a Silent Vigil for the Holy Land held in the centre of Falmouth on Tuesday Oct 7th by Nona and Euan



Olive Harvest 2025: a season of hope, struggle, and solidarity

October 2, 2025

As the olive harvest commences this month, the outlook is grim. A number of forces are converging in real time: a poor harvest, soaring local prices, and a fragile economy already on the brink, all dealing a harsh blow to farmers who are contending with so much.

At the same time, farmers are being blocked from accessing their groves by the occupation military or the threat of settler violence. Many have found their groves vandalised and thousands of olive trees uprooted before they could even begin the harvest.

In Al-Mughayyir, a village near Ramallah, more than 3,000 olive trees were bulldozed by Israeli forces, part of a broader pattern of destruction. Similarly, Deir Ballout has been targeted once again. It's where, in 2021, Zaytoun customers helped plant 2,000 olive trees with the Palestine Fair Trade Association to replace those previously destroyed by Israeli forces.

And in Sanour, home to Haj Bashir, the chairman of the Palestine Fair Trade Association whose story we've shared in past newsletters, the encroachment is growing. After years of being spared, settler activity is now on the rise in the area around his village.

Across the West Bank, an increasing number of olive groves are now inaccessible, cut off by expanding settlements, military checkpoints, and gates erected to block entry and exit.

In this climate, your support matters more than ever.

The olive tree is Palestine's ancient lifeline, and your solidarity helps keep it alive.

The Medjoul date harvest in the Jordan valley has begun!

September 4, 2025

For Palestinian farmers, this is the most important time of year, and the result of months of hard work caring for the palms in tough conditions. The valley was once full of citrus, bananas and other fruit orchards. Today, those are hard to come by, as water has been redirected to nearby settlements and the Ein al-Auja spring, which used to irrigate large areas of farmland, has almost dried up. Date palms are one of the few crops that can still grow here with the limited, and often saline, water available.



This year, the backdrop to the harvest is particularly difficult. Families near Ein al-Auja are regularly harassed and have their sheep and goats taken from them in raids involving settlers, police and soldiers. One of our suppliers is based near these communities and tells us how earlier this summer, Bedouin families who had lived there for decades were forced to dismantle their own homes and leave under threat from new settler outposts.

On top of this, harvest time brings in seasonal workers from across the West Bank, as the Medjoul sector has become a backbone of the Palestinian economy and a vital source of employment. But travel for these workers is often hampered by checkpoints, closures and permit restrictions, making daily journeys unpredictable and exhausting at the very moment when every pair of hands is needed in the groves.

And still, the harvest goes ahead. The heatwave in August, while testing for those living and working there, has helped the fruit ripen to perfection – giving us the soft, fudgy Medjouns we know and love. These dates will soon be on their way to the UK, a reminder of what can still flourish in the hardest conditions.

How the food we eat can shape a better world: Organic and Fairtrade farming.

For farmers in Palestine, these values are lived every day. Organic practices – caring for the soil, protecting biodiversity, and passing on traditional knowledge – have been part of their way of life for generations. And fair trade principles – fair prices, dignified work, and community investment – are vital lifelines in an economy made fragile by occupation.

This year, the security situation, made worse by army incursions, siege and settler attacks, has meant certifiers have been unable to visit. As a result, our olive oil cannot currently carry organic or Fairtrade certification. The good news is that a missing label doesn't mean a missing commitment. The farmers, their wellbeing, the exceptional quality of their produce and our promise to trade with transparency all remain unchanged.

We will continue to support Palestinian producers through every possible channel, and we invite you to stand with them too. Your purchases sustain livelihoods, protect heritage foods, and keep hope rooted in the soil of Palestine.

Let's remember that behind every product is a farmer, a family, and a future worth supporting.

Report on Expo at NEC Birmingham July 9th -10th 2025

You might wonder at my attendance at this event. It is because batteries, like many commonly used items in the modern world are so little understood by many of us. We are ignorant of the growing demand for them for the green transition but also for weaponry, space exploration and other often more questionable uses.. Increasing awareness of the mined materials in batteries, hence electric cars amongst many other things, is important.

Please do read on

Since 2022 I have attended this event, held annually. It is billed as ONE EVENT. FOUR CONNECTED INDUSTRIES. These are advanced material, advanced ceramics, battery cells and systems and vehicle electrification.

I heard initially of the Expo via a promotion notice in an on line newsletter 'Plugged in' produced by my electricity supplier 'Good energy'. I was interested as it related to my involvement in the Conflict Minerals Campaign and also more widely in environmental concerns. Although it is intended mainly for academics, business people and people in relevant industries including start up companies, I go as a Quaker and tick a box about my interest as 'supply chain'. So far I have not incurred any costs to going and feel free to ask questions at the Panel events and of the individual exhibitors.

This year in addition to the 2 days of the EXPO there was an opportunity the day before to visit and be shown around the Battery Britain Midlands Showcase at Coventry and hear several speakers involved in setting this up.

In all, as well as the visit to Battery Britain, I went to around 8 of the Panel discussions. At any one time in the huge space at the NEC there can be around 4 or 5 panel and speaker events. I also visited several of the small exhibition stands (of which there were around 300 in all).

I will not give a full account of every session but try to distil some key messages that emerged for me. I emphasise I am not an expert and some sessions were highly technical so this record may contain some inaccuracies.

Collaboration

There is a big emphasis on this. The event is understood as a major networking event to share thinking and ideas. At the visit to the Battery Britain event at Coventry it was stressed that the centre in Coventry had originally involved both Labour and Conservative councillors working together. There is a strong conviction there is need for a UK Battery business and this means bringing together politicians, academics, investors and businesses. The big question seemed to be around whether some sort of Chinese connection was helpful and though some were supportive of links many not.

Demand for batteries

- There is undoubtedly huge and growing demand for batteries globally. This is in part related to green transition technology but also robotics, drones and defence demands.
- China dominates the market.

Uk battery industry issues

UK is attempting to develop its own Industry and a major issue is how to gain control of whole supply chain.

- In terms of minerals the plan seems to become self sufficient in minerals by 2050. This requires some mining, especially for lithium, in UK and then recycling or reusing existing minerals in finished products. It was acknowledged that the Auto industry is largely ignorant of the Mining industry.
- This in turn requires emphasis on circular economy, designing for sustainability so repair and 2nd life are fundamental.

- At present some parts of recycling processes are not possible in the UK

Importance of industrial strategy, including critical mineral strategy

- There is now a UK Industrial strategy and batteries are one of priorities.
- Government policies and regulation are vital for consumer confidence and investors.
- Investment is particularly needed at the scaling up stage of development. It is harder to obtain than at innovation stage.
- Coventry could be scaled up to giga standards as one of a few other development hubs following example of China.

Regulation

Though there may be too many and proliferating regulations they are generally vital for safety, fairness and sustainability reasons.

The European Battery Passport which will be in place by Feb 2027 will ensure the following are documented:

- Carbon footprint.
- Sourcing of materials
- Recyclability
- Performance.

It is not clear whether this will apply to batteries made in the UK but there seemed some consensus about aligning with the EU.

Higher standards re labour costs and materials mean higher costs.

Miscellaneous issues re evs (Chinese call them 'new energy vehicles').

Demand issues.

- Cost and purchase model (ownership or lease)
- Owners of fleets want reassurance comprehensive charging infrastructure.
- Only 60% of UK homes have their own driveway (so providing household charging facilities not possible)
- Cost of energy.
- Availability of steel.
- Some changes in lifestyle may be off- putting.

Impact of Tariffs. Encouragement of local may be good?

Space exploration and satellite use

I just went to part of a session on this but feel important to be aware

239 launches of just one rocket during course of year is increasingly likely and mean more satellites may be in orbit as launching them becomes cheaper.

Interactive sessions

These were held in separate area and I attended one, 'How do we build a supply chain that's future proof and competitive?'

I had to book to attend this and was very disappointed by low numbers interested. I did meet three interesting people all from an organisation called CRU: www.crugroup.com

Some of what they shared on basis of research claimed to be independent:

- recycling of all minerals possible by 2045.
- 80% batteries in China no longer contain cobalt (of interest as high percentage of cobalt mined in DRC)

- Copper is vital
- Cost of recycling is still very great.

We did talk around my concerns re DRC and queries re whether huge demand is really justified. They were interested and seemed to suggest should be some focus on processing element of supply chain, mostly even almost exclusively done in China.

Display stand for Cawleys lithium battery recycling solutions

Interesting conversation with one of people at the stand. Very knowledgeable about the shredding deconstruction and segregation of fractions. Still some fractions sent elsewhere for final part of process.

Generally there seemed more focus on recycling than re-use.

However I listened to a recording once home of one session entitled '2nd Life solutions. Designing for waste reduction and designing for waste reduction and component reuse'.

In terms of EV batteries nearing their end of 1st life. There are not huge numbers at present but in a few years many more will reach end of 1st life so preparation needs to be made and indeed is. Main problem lies in original design so that can be disassembled more easily. Adhesives and foams used at present often make taking packs apart difficult. So need for better adhesives.

Main policy issues which need addressing relate to warranties and need for kind of passport information as re-certification of some kind important for consumer confidence.

Safety and cost issues involved in disassembling. At present reliance on robotics and AI so minerals and water implications?.

Companies are working on a data set outlining different steps needed to disassemble. There are many different kinds of batteries and different data sets are needed for each battery. I think 300 steps were mentioned.

I think if batteries recycled no obligation to share information on previous life history. I think is with repurposed ones.

Question re the Workshop is 'it seems mining can be reduced but do we still want all the gadgets etc enabled by re-use and recycling' and implications of water, chemicals and indeed minerals needed for processes.

Sandra Dutson

Cucumber nutrition, Cows Milk and Neo-liberal capitalism –

from Cerys, with a thought from Donald

Cucumbers are very low in calories but plentiful in water, fibre and beneficial nutrients like vitamin K, potassium and magnesium. A single cup of cucumber slices provides water for hydration plus antioxidants-flavonoids and polyphenols that protect body cells and reduce cellular disease and irregularity. Vitamin K: Supports bones and blood clotting. Potassium: Important for cardiac well being and function+ may assist in lowering cholesterol and blood pressure. Magnesium: Essential for muscle function and nerve well being. Well being. Antioxidant Protection: Compounds like polyphenols and flavonoids tend to neutralise free radicals, reducing oxidative stress and cellular defects. Digestion: Fibre in cucumbers supports a well 9 functioning digestive system. Potential cell protection, Cucumbers contain plant compounds including cucurbitacins that may protect against disease. Blood Sugar Regulation: low glycemic index of cucumbers is unlikely to cause spikes in blood sugar levels.

From Jenny

I've been enjoying a monster home grown cucumber from my farm shop - now it will be with extra relish!

Cerys

I am glad that wonderful cucumber shall be enjoyed even more knowing details about its nutritional content, and the protective nutrients for the body.

Cows milk and other animal milks-----

Human beings began to use animal milks to survive in areas like the Gobi desert, high plateau areas of Tibet, and in Northern Europe during the last Ice Age. These areas could not support sufficient crop growing to sustain human populations. There is no necessity now for consuming milk and dairy products in most parts of the world. Especially in our society, Northern Europe and North America.

There is no fibre in animal milks and dairy products and sufficient fibre is necessary for our well being. A recent study in Sweden found that galactose is elevated in cows milk which causes premature accelerated aging, especially in women, so bone fractures, cardiac problems and early mortality are much more likely. This is especially true for women over 50. Men seemed to deal with galactose more effectively, so the adverse effects did not show up in them. However other factors tend to increase mortality in men so they usually die before women. Liquid cows milk raised the risk in women, but cheese and yoghurt did not. The scientist who conducted the study said that there is still much that is not understood about milk. Animal milks contain a lot of protein, to accelerate growth of infant animals. This is not necessary for us.

In an era of global warming, dairy farming uses too much water, too much land and emits methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, and is not necessary, so it is better to select non-dairy liquids, vegan cheeses and soya yoghurts to reduce our contribution to global warming. Dairy farming is a cruel exploitation of cows and other animals.

From Donald Henderson

Should we really keep sheep? They're very free range and also we've told them to ruminate as little as they can to keep their methane emissions down. They never eat soya.

Three pages from my notebook about **neoliberal capitalism**.

George Monbiot - By contrast to laissez-faire economics, neoliberalism demands active government : to tear up the democratic social contract, privatise public assets and public services, dissolve the welfare state, curtail trade unions and protests and exploit or create crises to impose unpopular policies. It provides an infrastructure of justification to make this shift seem as if it is the only rational option for society. Neoliberalism is a doctrine that insists we should resolve our problems not through politics but through a mechanism it calls "the market" : one of its many confusing terms.

Adam Kotso- Why Political Theology?

Neoliberalism is more than simply a formula for economic policy. It aspires to be a complete way of life and a holistic world-view, in a way that previous models of capitalism did not. It is this combination of policy agenda and general ethos that can lead to the term neoliberalism as a form of political theology. Neoliberal ideology is a form of theology- a perception that aims to reform the world. He lists the sociological study by Will Davies- "The Limits of Neoliberalism", but stresses that he does not agree with the views in this book.

From his "The Political Theology of Late Capital" -Neoliberalism likes to conceal. It cannot be assumed that the educated public is knowledgeable about this force that has deeply formed public policy and economic outcomes for a generation or more in big Western nations and much of the developing world.

Economic ideologists had set out the foundations for neoliberal capitalism in 1951 and before. The difficulties governments were experiencing in the 1970s was the opportunity for these ideas to be implemented and embedded institutionally into many societies. It began around 1980, the era of Thatcherism, Reaganism and General Pinochet. So 45 years of this society eroding total system, with younger generations knowing nothing about previous economics and governments.

In Scotland Scottish Water is a not for profit water company, so no shareholders to satisfy. Water bills are paid with the council tax, from the council. No separate bills from privatised water companies in Scotland. Scotland has resisted that aspect of neoliberal capitalism.

How Today's America Came About Paul Starr

When Bob Kuttner, Bob Reich, and I founded *The American Prospect* in 1990, we were aiming to promote ideas for America's future , as the magazines name indicates. That future hasn't worked out the way we wanted, to put it mildly. Thirty five years later, two of us have written new books with different stories about the path the country followed. Reich's is an autobiography. *Coming up Short. A Memoir of my America*, while mine is a social political history, *American Contradictions: Revolution and Revenge from the 1950s to Now*.

In *Coming Up Short*, Bob uses his experience of being bullied because of his height (four feet eleven) to frame contemporary politics. He sees America as having devolved into a struggle between the bullies and the bullied, the rich and powerful vs, the working majority – and the bullies winning. As the book ends, he admits that, at least 10

personally, he hasn't succeeded at the "short game", but is no less committed to a "long game" that he believes he can win.

Born in 1946 – the same year he points out, as Donald Trump, George W Bush, and Bill Clinton – Bob grew up in hardworking middle class family amid broadly shared prosperity of the post world war two eras. Then came the "giant U-turn" towards inequality in 1980s under Ronald Reagan and the battle that Bob waged as secretary of labour in Bill Clinton's first term, a section of the book that he calls "Failure".

For that failure, Bob draws a straight line to Trump. He recalls a speech that he gave after Newt Gingrich and the Republicans won control of Congress in 1994, when he said "we are on the way to becoming a two tiered society composed of a few winners and a larger group of Americans left behind whose anger and disillusionment are easily manipulated. Once unbottled, mass resentment can poison the very fabric of society" to which he now adds "I wish I had been less prescient".

Why did things turn out so badly? While pointing primarily to the bullies, Bob also blames Clinton and Barack Obama and their dependence on "big money" to please Wall Street. "Both Clinton and Obama" he writes, "stood by as corporations busted trade unions and the backbone of the working class". Since then "anti-establishment fury at a rigged system" has become the driving force in politics. Bob's hero now is Bernie Sanders. Because Democrats have not embraced economic populism, the only populist version available to voters without college degrees has been the Republican cultural one". And that cultural populism is "entirely bogus" a ruse used by Trump and others to distract from the true, economic stakes.

Cerys Brangwyn

A Place For All

I'm still watching the re-runs on BBC i-player of the sitcom *Rev.* (about which which I've written before) about Adam Smallbone, vicar of a run-down parish church in East London, and the struggles he faces regarding his ministry, his faith and his marriage. The episode I've just watched features stories about several of the main characters, running in parallel.

There's Adam and his wife Alex who are facing a difficult time in their marriage because Alex feels all of Adam's time is taken up with his parishioners. She goes away on a walking holiday with friends and the implication is that she may not want to return to the marriage afterwards.

Robert the Archdeacon is interviewed for a possible promotion to Bishop but when asked a crucial question he admits he is living in a same-sex relationship, which ruins his chances of (ever) being a bishop.

Lay Reader Nigel desperately wants to be a priest but is rejected as not suitable and becomes suicidal. Adam has to persuade him to come down off the church roof from which he is threatening to jump.

Colin, unemployed most of the time, being over-fond of alcohol and other substances and frequently being involved in non-legal activities, having finally obtained job as a pizza delivery courier, is sacked.

Adam has to deal with all of these people's crises at the same time as his own.

At the end of the programme, Alex returns from her holiday, seeks Adam out in the church and admits that she wants to be with him. The couple sit, holding hands, in a pew while Adam plays a CD given to him by an elderly parishioner. As the music plays, one by one the others walk silently into the church and sit in various pews. The camera focuses in turn on each of the people gathered there: Adam and Alex, who show they are willing to work through their difficulties together. Robert, who gave up the opportunity of being a Bishop rather than deny the person he says he "loves more than life itself"; Nigel who is trying to accept that God has a different way for him to serve; Colin who, despite the disappointment of losing his first job in ages, seeks meaning and purpose in his life through the church.

Each person dealing with their personal issues finds sanctuary and peace. The church is shown as a place for the flawed and broken – those the world would label as failures.

I know that, sadly, for many of us this has not been the case, but it is what every church or Christian community (not least Ashram) should aspire to.

Lorraine Jones



“ We Pitch Our Tent at the Heart of Greatest Need” **Teesside to Tirana**

Mary Ward (born 1585) faced illness, persecution and prison in her mission to educate and empower girls and young women in war-torn Europe. Today, Mary Ward sisters have equally astonishing stories to tell. 78-year-old Sister Imelda Poole, MBE, has faced people-traffickers and gangsters in Albania, in her mission to empower girls and women and eradicate modern slavery – but before then she worked in Teesside.

After decades in schools and youth development work, she arrived with her colleague Sister Philippa Green in Port Clarence one of the most deprived towns in north east England. Situated on the River Tees, it had served the coal, iron, steel and chemical industries. Once they declined, it became a “ghost town,” isolated from local services and surrounded by derelict areas. This is what drew Imelda and Philippa to start their mission there in 1986, to serve where the need was greatest. Deprivation, in terms of low levels of education, lack of jobs, poor health, high mortality rates, minimal medical, transport and shopping facilities, as well as drug and alcohol abuse, and a high crime rate among young people, had devastated this community.

The sisters took their time in building on the strengths of the people to create a confident community, where all were welcome. From the start people were listened to, their grievances addressed, and, through a slow process of empowerment, they were encouraged to confront the injustices visited upon them. The local health authority was shamed into providing a weekly clinic and other services. A “Healthy Eating” cafe was established and the council was persuaded to provide recreation facilities for young people.

The next stage of Imelda's journey was even more demanding. In 2002 the IBVM (Mary Ward) sisters launched their “Courage to Move” initiative, rediscovering the fearless, inspired example of their foundress. “Courage to Move” called upon provinces to establish new missions in countries in need of healing and hope, moving beyond established boundaries to engage with new cultures and communities. The English Province discerned a crying need in Albania.

Teesside to Tirana

What drew the Sisters to choose Albania, with its almost impossibly difficult language and its legacy of intractable problems? History has been very cruel to Albania, producing a society plagued by trauma, mistrust, civic failure and corruption. Large NGOs have been driven to despair, so what could one elderly woman and (later) her small team bring to the table?

It is easy for Western Europeans, with their long-established democracies, to sneer at Albania. Where civic society has been comprehensively undermined and destroyed over centuries, it cannot be instantly recreated. Corruption, violence, control of human beings by slavery and labour abuse, develop in the vacuum. Frontier countries, victims of history, need solidarity not condemnation. But where to start?

Locally, says Imelda. Where large schemes and multi-million dollar NGOs struggle to make an impact, the mission Mary Ward Loreto (MWL), founded by Imelda, works from the ground up, building local networks and empowering local communities to develop their own resilience and initiatives. Stronger, better-informed communities are less vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers.

For her model of the system she wished to develop, Imelda thought of the Citizens Advice Bureaux in the UK, with their history of democratic information-sharing and openness to all citizens – a neutral resource towards which vulnerable people could turn without being stigmatised. particularly wanted to embed the CABs' exemplary standards of confidentiality, data protection and safeguarding in her new system. In 2016 she sought help from CABs in the North-east of England, and several responded generously, offering training to Irena Kraja, a young community worker and psychotherapist who now supervises the highly respected network of Advice and Service Centres set up by MWL. They offer not just advice and information, but access to medical and dental services, emergency housing, counselling and advocacy, plus the pathway to employment with freedom, with dignity and respect.

Beyond this network, MWL also responds flexibly to new needs as the occasion arises. Take the example of Shendelli, a small community in southern Albania. In 2014, MWL was called in to help with the problem of desperately poor people who had left their remote mountain villages and lives of scratching a living from the soil,

and migrated to Shendelli, but struggled to find ways of making a living there. Women were trapped in their homes by the patriarchal culture, their talents wasted. They did not dare to venture to the small centre which MWL set up to offer assistance. So the MWL psychologist went to them instead, going from house to house, listening, relating to the people she met with respect, gentleness and empathy. Gradually the women developed confidence to come to groups, and discover their skills. MWL helped over 50 of them to develop marketable skills, using local produce such as flowers and goat's milk. The nearby market town of Butrint offered selling opportunities, and many of the women found jobs there. Those women became independent and strong. All the families are now employed and integrated, and have produced their own community leaders. The community has developed its own independence and achieved its own success. MWL's work is done, and it has moved on to deal with the next need. But MWL, says Imelda, stays close to Shendelli in friendship.

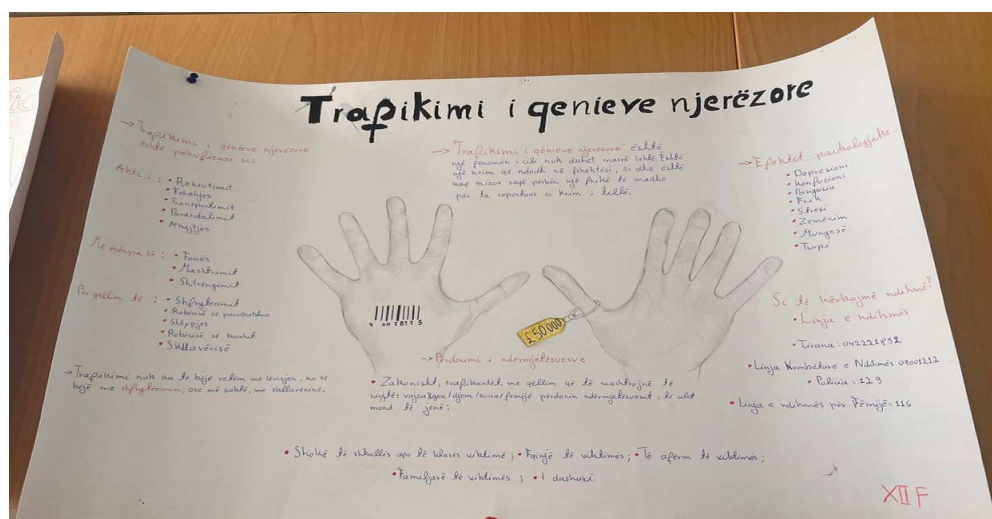
MWL addresses some of the deep causes of gender-based violence and inequality. In the town of Tropoja in north-eastern Albania, some families had arrived from very isolated villages in the mountains. As in Shendelli, patriarchal culture encouraged domestic violence and repression of women and girls. MWL's innovative Men's Project invited local men to discuss problems of violence, and the use of drink and drugs to address their own problems, and this inclusive approach came to inform all MWL's future projects. Meanwhile, the women formed skills groups, developing employment skills such as budgeting, marketing and finance. Eventually they opened a shop to sell their own produce. MWL sponsored some of their girls to university. Those women are now a force to be reckoned with. "They are a joy to be with" says Imelda. "They have power, and confidence and respect. They no longer need MWL, but we stay close to them in friendship."

What does MWL do to spark energy, commitment and success in the local communities they work with? "It all begins with friendship" says Imelda. You meet people where they are; it's an evolutionary, organic process, whereby people build relationships and trust, and realise their own strength and potential. She emphasises that the Mary Ward charism, essential to all their work, is key to a better future for Albania. "Mary Ward's vision of the just soul seems to be very effective in healing people who have suffered trauma."

Prevention

Young people are the key to protecting themselves and others from lying promises that lure them into modern slavery abroad. MWL works in schools to promote awareness of the dangers, and empower young people to keep themselves and their fellow students safe from such traps. Classroom discussions, art projects and information sessions arm young people with the knowledge they need. Students and staff have responded enthusiastically. Here is some feedback from 16-17 year old students who attended a training session in the town of Lezhe in 2024:

- "We can be agents that contribute to make our world a better place"
- "Addressing Human Trafficking is a matter that should concern us all."



A staff member at that session commented -

"It is the most fulfilling duty, to support youth to grow in a healthy environment, and learn how to void risky behaviours."

School students produced this striking image of people-trafficking

Albania as a destination – for tourists and vulnerable workers

Their local, collaborative approach means that MWL is responsive to new and emerging needs. In recent years Albania has become a country of destination as well as a country of origin for migration. Albania is increasingly attractive to foreign tourists, with a pleasant climate, stunning scenery and welcoming people. Hopefully tourism

will be an important element in future prosperity. But there is a darker side to this. With locals leaving in high numbers to seek better prospects in other parts of Europe, foreign workers have been invited to fill low-paid hospitality jobs. Workers from Africa, Indonesia and the Philippines have flocked to Albania. Exploitation is rife, modern slavery conditions common. Many vulnerable workers have turned to MWL for help, and it has responded by seeking funding for a Foreign Nationals Centre, based on the ASC model, where immigrants can find advice and help. This has proved successful and this centre will be opened by Christmas. MWL is grateful for such an immediate response to a growing and essential need in these times of massive mobility throughout the world.

Research

All of MWL's action is informed by research. For example, the Foreign Nationals Centre, when it starts to operate, will be studied by a local researcher to see what lessons can be learned, and this research will form the basis for future provision for vulnerable workers. MWL leads the way in collecting and analysing data from the grassroots, as their work develops. They were partners in an important study of perceived corruption in the education system, and the effects on the lives and prospects of young people. This led to their work on democratisation of schools, training of young leaders, and service learning.

Keeping it local – and international

Just as Imelda and Philippa moved into Port Clarence and lived there for 16 years, patiently and respectfully working with the community, so Imelda and her staff have embedded the ideas of local autonomy, confident and collaborative local leadership across Albania, responding wherever the need is greatest. MWL's unique and patient approach has brought together civic, commercial, and social leaders, in collaboration with religious congregations, to engender systemic change to bring an end to the brutality and injustice of trafficking. In 2010 Imelda co-founded 'Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation' (RENATE), an NGO of European women religious from 30 countries.

Her dedication and impact were recognised by HM Queen Elizabeth II in 2018 when Imelda was made an MBE. In 2021, she received the Trafficking in Persons - TIP Hero Award from the US State Department. On 26 July 2024 Liverpool Hope University conferred an honorary doctorate on Imelda in recognition of her work.

"Becoming one," and new perspectives for MWL

This is a crucial moment for Mary Ward's women. Imelda's order, the IBVM, will cease to exist on 4th November. As Mary Ward's institute grew in numbers and spread across the globe over the centuries it divided into smaller institutes influenced by the local bishop, politics, geography, poor communications and the need to compromise. Now at last the Congregation of Jesus and the IBVM sisters have completed the long task of uniting their two orders into one, which will bear the name sought by Mary Ward and her companions, the Congregation of Jesus. This reflects their inspiration from the Jesuit charism, and Jesus's words "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full."

This enlarged order includes congregations in Eastern European post-Communist countries. Their ideas and experience have the potential to bring fresh energy to the work now unfolding in Albania. In "Becoming One," the Mary Ward sisters bring a new and wider vision to all their work, confronting difficulties and opportunities with faith and joy, as they have for the last 400 years.

Hilary Cashman

There's a 2022 BBC World Service programme on Imelda's work "Saving Albania's trafficked victims" at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct40sd>

It is a great privilege to call Imelda a friend, and I thought this account of her work where the need is greatest and inspired by the teachings of Jesus, would interest Ashram members.

On a recent visit to Darlington she spoke of standing in a church service next to an African man who was visibly shaking. She found out he'd been lured to Albania with the false promise of a job as a hotel manager and had left behind a wife and four children. The MWL lawyer was able to get through to the Albanian Govt. dept. to regularise his position in the country, and he got a job washing dishes in a hotel- where he was known as the best dishwasher ever! He has post graduate qualifications and Imelda is hoping that soon the mission will be able to employ him to use his skills in their work.

Jenny Medhurst

Brew It Fair!

I love my cuppa- but only if I know that the person who picked the tea has earned enough to feed their family and send their children to school. Fortunately I've met some of the people behind Fairtrade tea which is why I can enjoy my Fairtrade brew.

Sadly this isn't true of other teas. We've got used to tea being cheap – just 2-3p per teabag, of which only 5% goes to the tea estate to pay its workers- and the people behind our daily cuppa face poverty, unsafe working conditions, and the mounting threat of climate change -leaving them unable to plan for their future.

250 farmers in Kenya, where most of our tea in the UK comes from, have written.

“The price we earn today for the hard work behind your favourite drink is just too low. As this continues to drop, our outgoings are rising, and this simply cannot continue.”

You can read the letter here at

<https://www.fairtrade.net/content/dam/fairtrade/fairtrade-uk/do-it-fair/>

A-LETTER-FROM-OVER-250-PEOPLE-IN-KENYA-WHO-GROW-THE-TEA-YOU-DRINK.pdf?

The farmers go on “As tea drinkers you have the power to change lives alongside the people behind your favourite brew. Will you use your power for good?- by signing the petition at

<https://action.fairtrade.org.uk/page/171071/petition/>

What tea farmers are calling for:

- Protect human rights** (Icon: Scales of justice)
- Support us to respond to the impacts of climate change** (Icon: Earth globe)
- Work with us for a better future for tea growers and workers everywhere.** (Icon: Person holding a sign)

The interesting Brew It Fair report is at <https://www.fairtrade.net/content/dam/fairtrade/fairtrade-uk/resource-library/fairtrade-fortnight-2025/fairtrade-brew-it-fair-digital-report.pdf>

UNWIND WITH ELEANOR HARRISON AND NANCY GITHAIGA OVER A CUPPA

High Tea Online Talk 25 September 6pm on Zoom

SIGN UP NOW HEAR THE REAL STORIES BEHIND YOUR BREW

During Fairtrade Fortnight a Kenyan tea farmer and tea factory manager visited the UK and as well as talking to the Dept. for Trade and Industry and Taylors the owners of Yorkshire tea which dominates UK tea sales, she had a High Tea chat with Fairtrade's CEO and there's a recording at <https://vimeo.com/1122225410>.

Nancy talks about how they have used the Fairtrade premium to improve gender equality and climate resilience- and mentions that just before coming to the UK there was a rare hailstorm – which would affect leaf production, and pickers' income, for four months....

Fairtrade tea currently accounts for just 7-10% of sales in the UK. Help us spread the stories behind the tea - of premiums providing

leech repellent, school buses, tree nurseries and the raising of women's voices - to scale up those sales, and show the Government and the tea companies that we care about the people behind our tea and its future.

Jenny Medhurst



1794 painting by Anton Hickel

As someone who was brought up in Kingston-upon-Hull I always feel proud when anything to do with the anti-slave-trade campaign in the

18th century comes up in the news today. My childhood bank holiday outing was often a visit to Wilberforce House in the city centre, where William Wilberforce was born and lived for most of his life. All the other museums in Hull had been bombed out of existence during the war, so my brother and I were treated to pictures of slaves squeezed into the base of the ships carrying them across the ocean, and posters with the prices of slaves that were up for sale in their country of destination. (I think we were probably also treated to an ice-cream as part of the outing.)

I was also very excited to find that our new minister came to this country from Freetown (Sierra Leone), which was founded in the late 18th century as a place where former slaves could be settled. Freetown is, for obvious reasons, I guess, twinned with Hull, so another Wilberforce connection. There's also a Methodist connection here, because I discovered a few years ago from a plaque when I was out on a country walk, that the last letter John Wesley wrote on his death bed, was to William Wilberforce, wishing him success in his anti-slavery campaign.

So what about the Wilberforce Way? This takes us to the latest edition of the Methodist Church quarterly journal, *The Connexion*, with a very inspiring article by Inderjit Bhogal in Sheffield on pilgrimages of all shapes and sizes, including routes he had worked with others to design, one of these being the Wilberforce Way. It starts in the home town of Wilberforce and makes its way to York, via various locations with a Wilberforce connection, such as the place where he was sent to school. The route does now appear on the OS Explorer maps of the area but Peter and I thought we wouldn't need this on our recent brief holiday in Hull because we knew it followed the River Hull at the first stage, so we took a bus to Beverley to admire the beautifully preserved Minster and

The Wilberforce Way

then made our way to the riverbank to walk back to Hull city centre. Unfortunately we set off on a path on the west bank, where we were when we got off the bus, but after a mile or so it was overwhelmed with nettles and brambles and then took us so close to the river's edge that it tried hard to deposit us into the muddy water - so we arrived back at the hotel eventually with our trousers covered in Hull clay, and not much time for pilgrimage meditation

If you would like to hear about a much better attempt at a pilgrimage you can hear Inderjit Bhogal walking the Wilberforce Way with Clare Balding on BBC sounds a few years ago. Here's the link:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000fpbq>

Apart from the background to the walk itself you will hear the fascinating circumstances that led Inderjit from being a Sikh teenager to becoming in due course President of the Methodist Conference.

Linda Marshall

[A really interesting radio programme-particularly describing his experience of walking in the countryside as a person of colour.]

I learned about Wilberforce in school, but not about the courageous resistance by enslaved people themselves, from small acts of sabotage to full-scale rebellion, which countered the slave owners' portrayal of their victims as "docile" or even "happy" in their enslavement, and helped the abolitionist movement gain momentum. I didn't learn till much later of vital campaigns by formerly enslaved Africans in Britain, such as Olaudah Equiano.

Nor did I learn that the slavery was only outlawed in 1833 on the condition that slave owners were paid compensation by the taxpayer for the loss of their 'property' (800,000 men, women and children) - costing £20 million (£16billion today); and that "freed" slaves were required to work for their former masters, unpaid, for 45 hours a week for four more years.

Thanks to historians like Dr David Olusoga we know so much more of our history today.

Jenny Medhurst

Upper Wincobank Chapel Update



We are delighted that, as a result of the generous grant from Ashram Community Trust, we have been able to appoint Alison Webster to add capacity to our work engaging with the local community. Alison will work on a freelance basis, equivalent to one day a week to build community links and possibly establish a long-planned new drop-in session for adults at the Chapel House. Alison is of Methodist heritage, and was born in Rotherham and spent some of her childhood in Ecclesfield. She has recently returned to Sheffield after a career working in Christian Social Justice in various parts of the UK. Amongst other things, Alison has worked for the Student Christian Movement, the Christian Socialist Movement, and as Social Justice Adviser to the dioceses of Worcester and Oxford.

Alison is currently the General Secretary of Modern Church, and Mission Theologian in Residence at Citizens UK, the Community Organising Charity. She says, 'I am delighted to be back in Sheffield, touching base again with places that are in my blood from childhood, but also discovering them anew. I am fascinated and inspired by the history of Wincobank, and impressed by the way that the Chapel and the Chapel House have been brought back to life through years of careful, faithful and persistent work. The Trustees and Chapel congregation are the beating heart of the place, and my first task is to listen carefully to the gifts and passions of all those involved, whilst also doing the same with those living in the immediate area. In recent years I have worked with Community Organisers all over the UK and will seek to deploy this methodology in Wincobank. This means, above all, being relational, going where the energy is, and bringing people together to weave trust across difference, and work together for common aims. This is an exciting time for Sheffield, as other faith-based institutions are also committing to faith-rooted organising in the city. Wincobank Chapel has many strengths to build on, with an already enviable heritage of community outreach that goes back nearly two centuries! I think we have a lot to offer.'

Many thanks to ACT for giving us this opportunity to bring new energy to our work and worship. We are all looking forward to the new developments Alison may bring.

Penny Rea

Goodbye to N.E. Ashram @ Greystone *(missing from ACT 99)*



Breakfast agape



"Annual" Breakfast agape 1995

Planning the Journey Course Feb 2001



Farewell to Ian July 1995



*Sep 2005 Frances and Bill brought dinner
after we both had surgery*

and lots of friends
came to stay



The booklet “Markan Discipleship in Urban Practice” by John Vincent was started by him in 2019, when I used to visit him weekly to type it up. It got scuppered by lockdown and progressed no further. The completed booklet was intended for a UTU course. Unfortunately John is not in a position to continue with his writing, nor would I be able to decipher it!! It is a shame for it to be sitting unread on my computer so I have taken the decision to publish it in parts, Dickens style, in ACT Together. Here is part 1; the next will be in May.

Phillippa Thompson

MARKAN DISCIPLESHIP IN URBAN PRACTICE- by John Vincent 2020

1. BECOMING A DISCIPLE

I came into Christianity because, somehow or other, from an early age, I came to feel that the figure of Jesus was a significant one, and that I would like to become a disciple of his, if that were possible. I tried out a role of Christian leadership, first at school and then in national service, and at nineteen offered myself for full time ministry, as I thought this would mean being a fulltime disciple. Two years of serving in the R.A.M.C. confirmed my call to ministry, for which I was accepted in July 1950 at the age of twenty. I recall standing at the RAMC barracks and sitting in my office at Waringfield Military Hospital in Moira, County Down, reading and noting Thomas a Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ*, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Wesley’s *Journal*, and whatever else I could find.

I was doing what I wanted to do, and searching for supportive models and guides for being a disciple. When in 1951, I arrived at Richmond Methodist Theological College; I had little more than this simple “calling” to be a disciple. I was astonished to find that the London University BD honours course meant little time was spent on Jesus, and much time was spent on Old Testament Hebrew, New Testament Greek, St Paul, Church History, and the History of Doctrine - besides Ethics, Psychology of Religion, and World Religions: everything but Discipleship and Jesus! So I persuaded the college to give me an STM year at Drew Theological Seminary, where I wrote papers for all my classes and seminars on Jesus and Discipleship. My New Testament teachers at Drew were Howard Clark Kee, William R. Farmer, Henry J. Cadbury, Carl Nicholson and Paul Lehmann, Prof. Oscar Cullmann came to lecture, and was interested in my “line”, and persuaded Drew to give me a further year’s study at Basel to commence the D.Theol; process, which I did in 1955-56.

I became convinced that if Jesus was central, and if discipleship was the proper response to this, then a Jesus disciple student must in some ways be like his claimed Master. This seemed to me to imply that the disciple should try to surround himself with aspects of life similar to the ones that the Master had chosen. So I asked myself where in the modern world someone would be found who was known as a friend of the poor, of publicans and sinners, and who ministered to the marginalised. My conclusion was that the urban world, and especially the inner city, shares similar social, educational, economic and political conditions as like people in Jesus stories. So I became an urban missionary in Wythenshawe, Rochdale and Inner City Sheffield – where I have lived ever since 1970. The biblical warrant for this was Jesus and the disciples in Mark’s Gospel, which I had studied for my doctorate. But the experience itself of urban ministry on the model of Jesus was the contemporary call to be a disciple of Jesus in the City.¹

In the years of ministry in Wythenshawe (1956-1962) and Rochdale (1962-69), I kept up my fascination for Gospel studies, and wrote papers on Jesus and Discipleship.² I was in 1962 elected a member of the international Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, the Academy of accepted New Testament scholars and teachers I also lectured in University Extra-Mural Departments in Manchester and Leeds, and delivered papers at the New Testament Congress meetings at Oxford University (1957,1961,1965), with publications in the lecture collections.

From 1957 I returned to Basel each year until May 1960, when I finally completed my doctoral dissertation, which was revised and published in 1976, and was available at New Testament conferences which I could get to.³ A larger volume covering the same ground as the doctoral dissertation, but much transformed by a lifetime of trying to live by it will appear in the future.

¹ John and Grace Vincent, *Inner City Testament; Changing the World from the Bottom*. Sheffield: Ashram Press. 2017. pp.28-69.

² My earliest published pieces were “The Evangelism of Jesus”, *Journal of Bible and Religion*, USA. October 1956 and “The” Mystery of Discipleship”, *Movement*, Student Christian Movement. March 1956

³ John J. Vincent, *Disciple and Lord: the Historical and Theological Significance of Discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels*. Sheffield, Academy Press, 1976:

2. SECULAR DISCIPLESHIP

In *Secular Christ*⁴, I attempted to take on the Christian radicalism of the 1960s – “Rocking the Radical Boat; too”, a review by John Robinson called it. In answer to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s “Who is Christ for Us Today?”, I sought to answer that Jesus was essentially Secular, that is, someone concerned for the world, doing what he did for the sake of the world, and that Christians had desecularised this and turned it into a religion. But, I argued, Jesus was still the heart of Christianity. He was secular, but still the Christ, a Messiah. And he called disciples to follow him in this new understanding of God-with-us in the secular. To all this was what he called his disciples. A contemporary Jesus-centred Christianity committed to this world- radicalism is the outcome.

Much of the writing about this was done in specific areas - the nuclear arms controversy,⁵ the question about ministry,⁶ and the ecumenical debate about racism.⁷ I was continuing my Gospel studies at the point of their modern contemporary implications for discipleship, as I reflected on my own personal engagement on Christian practice related to strategic issues in contemporary society.

Following “*Secular Christ*”, in the Rall Lecture 1969 at Garrett Theological Seminary, USA on “The Dynamics of Christ” I developed Part 3 of *Secular Christ*.⁸ I have continued to use and develop the concept, but have yet to conclude a systematic presentation.⁹

Meantime, the secular continued to be the place which called forth and promoted development for my New Testament studies, initially in relation to issues of war, and in terms of Jesus as Unilateral Initiative.¹⁰ The nuclear disarmament debate proved to be the context in which the Gospel story of the ministry of Jesus “came alive” and “worked itself out” under the notion of Unilateral Initiative.

The whole of the New Testament is concerned with the problem of God’s getting people to do what is good (expedient) for them. The method tried was that of living witness (incarnation), coupled with the power for people to be taken into that witness in mind and deed (faith). The whole incarnation, ministry, healing, example, teaching, passion and resurrection becomes the means whereby a “breakthrough” is made and also the method whereby others may share in the breakthrough. By one Man, resurrection for all has come. By one Man, new life is available for all. Through the faithfulness of the One, many are brought to faith. Christ is the Prototype. He is the Person and the Way and the “Technique”, whereby blessing comes to the Many.¹¹

The conclusion is that Jesus “suffers and redeems unilaterally, so that multilateral blessings may come.” This divine “risk” is the technique which disciples can also take in their areas of conflict.

The concept of Unilateral Initiative is essential in the initial stages of any Movement. In 1957, I had got a few friends together, concerned with nuclear disarmament, and we started having open out meetings in the Wythenshawe shopping centres, which were reported in the *Manchester Evening News*. Then in April 1958, Alistair Hetherington, editor of the *Guardian*, got Lord Simon of Wythenshawe to invite Donald Pennington of Manchester University and myself to Lord Simon’s home in Didsbury. Out of that meeting the North West Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was born, initially consisting of four people who felt “called” to act.

This experience was the personal background for myself for the piece in “Getting a Movement Going” in *Mark at Work*. Someone has to have a sense of need, a vision. But once a beginning has been made and the unilateral initiative embarked on, other factors occur. This is the model of Mark 1.11-20¹²

- Conscientization - Getting to see things as they really are
- Launch - Finding the right occasion and time
- Dedication - Pointing to clear opportunity for change
- Total View - Outlining trust in the new non-post-imperial world
- Campaign - Inviting people to come and follow
- Movement - Leaving behind the present positions and policies

Each are elements in Mark in 1. 14-20 and in the beginnings of CND¹³

⁴ John J. Vincent, *Secular Christ A Contemporary Interpretation of Jesus*. London: Lutterworth Press. Nashville, TN Abingdon Press, 1968

⁵ John J. Vincent, *Christ in a Nuclear World*. Manchester: Crux Press, 19 John J. Vincent, *Christian Nuclear Perspective*. London: Epworth Press. 1964, p.21.

⁶ John J. Vincent, *The Working Christ*. London: Epworth Press, 1968

⁷ John J. Vincent, *The Race Race*. London SCM press, 1969

⁸ Cf articles on the Dynamics of Christ, in *The Christian Century*. “Christocentric Radicalism” (8 May 1968), “God in the Christian Sense” (10 Sept 1969,) “Christianity as Secular Dynamic” (24 March 1971)

⁹ John J. Vincent, *Christ in the City*, pp. 47-75 for the gospel beginnings

¹⁰ John J. Vincent, *Christ in a Nuclear World* Manchester: Crux Press, 1962

¹¹ John J. Vincent, *Christian Nuclear Perspective* London: Epworth Press. 1964 p.21

¹² John D. Davies and John J. Vincent, *Mark at Work*. London: Bible Reading Fellowship, 1986 p.21

¹³ Adapted from *Mark at Work* pp.22-23

3. URBAN THEOLOGY

Being posted by the Methodist Church to Sheffield against my will in September 1970 was a severe test to my discipleship and ministry. But in the end it was the discipleship that saved me. I was disciplined to one whose practice, at least, in Phil. 2. 6-8 seems to have been a progressive decline! Following someone involved in incarnation, I had to learn, carries very distinctive implications.

Incarnation means digging in, becoming one with a certain place and certain people, staying there, becoming limited by the limitations there, disciplined by the disciplines there. It may mean, as with Jesus, hidden years, or rejection through over familiarity, or wilderness. It certainly means losing friends everywhere to have some special friends somewhere. Incarnation means self-limitation, restriction, enclosure. It means accepting a strait-jacket. It means accepting that you don't belong, but that you have to learn to belong.¹⁴

The Urban Theology Unit which I set up in Sheffield in 1970-72, and the Sheffield Inner City Ecumenical mission which started in 1971 were designed to fulfil the two vocations I was living with – the first to be a New Testament Theologian, and the second to be an Urban Missioner. I therefore conceived the notion of creating an environment consistent with Jesus's within which we could study together what the work and mission of Jesus actually was in his own time and context, and then work at similar ways for our own work of mission in our time and context. The focus was the context of the urban. The concept was a contemporary Jesus. The method was creating a mini seminary of the streets.¹⁵

The model of a Master sitting down surrounded by the circle of his disciples was in itself a determinative factor. In December 1973, UTU moved into 210 Abbeyfield Road, a large 5 bed-roomed Edwardian house. We instinctively put 15 to 20 chairs around the four walls of the front room. The teacher sat surrounded by the students, all facing inwards. The teacher thus came to see her/ his contributions as what they were throwing into the common pool of the total group, sharing their contributions to build up a total shared understanding and a supportive context within which each person was dealing with their own discipleship and vocational issues. Each week we would study together a key passage in Mark's story of Jesus and his disciples.

Our existence as an Alternative Theological Seminary or a Seminary of the Streets was helped by all of us, teachers and students, living alongside each other and local people, in the same inner city area. We sometimes had 5 student community houses beside the Ashram Community House, sometimes meeting in the houses of friends and supporters. 75-year old Vera Plant, who lived at 240, called it "My University" and hosted Maxwell Lungu from South Africa as a paying guest, very like the women who supported Jesus out of their substance and in their homes, as Vera rightly discerned. From early days, friends offered to come and teach for us. Pauline Webb for several years served us teaching Feminist Theology. Two other scholars were Alan T. Dale and John D Davies. Alan was the author of a greatly admired contemporary biblical translation *Winding Quest* and *New World*. John was Principal of the College of the Ascension at Selly Oak in Birmingham. The three of us developed a working project on the Gospel based on working out from Markan narratives which could be translated or which transfer themselves into our own contexts.¹⁶

After some years of work, John Davies and I (Alan had unfortunately died) published the results of much work with different groups in different locations. We produced a threefold process. "Snap" (Where have I got this gospel story?). "Study" (What does the gospel story really contain?), and "Spin-off" (What can I do with the process?)¹⁷

First we use our imagination to see connections between our situations and experiences and those in the Gospel (Snaps); then we think objectively about the meaning of the text (Studies), then we move forward towards the future and discover the decisions which are suggested for our future work in the light of our study.

4. A PATTERN FOR MINISTRY

Pursuing this model for myself and others, and also reflecting on the first twelve years of ministry in inner city Sheffield, I recalled how much the pattern and even the temporal succession of that ministry had been determined by the conviction that my call to be a contemporary disciple of Jesus meant for me the Jesus of

¹⁴ *Into the City*, p.16

¹⁵ *Christ in the City*, pp.17-22

¹⁶ *Search for Gospel*, New City 6, Sheffield: Urban Theology Unit, 1974

¹⁷ *Mark at Work* 1986

Mark's Gospel, which sustained and informed the work I was trying to do. I discerned eight stages and modes of Jesus's life and ministry which would determine our ministry.¹⁸

1. *Incarnation*. Jesus begins as incarnate in his own native or chosen places, as I am committed to the disciplines of subjection to the limitations, issues - and possible prospects of my particular place. And inner city Sheffield feels so like urban rural Galilee.

2. *Healing*. As with Jesus, I am sent to heal and to exorcise. To heal means to deal with people as they are, and try to help them. To exorcise means to discover society's demonic powers and seek to cast them out.

3. *Parables*. Jesus conveys and reveals what he wishes to say by means of stories about familiar features in people and the environment, and uses them to explain how his hidden Kingdom operates.

4. *Acted Parables*. Jesus acts out aspects of his vocation, and inspires and facilitates similar actions in his disciples.

5. *Disciple Groups*. Jesus spends much time with those whom he chooses to be with him. They, in return, become his companions, ask questions of him, and work with him.

6. *Crucifixion*. Jesus embodies a new humanity as Son of Man, and sees this as leading eventually to being taken away and destroyed. He warns disciples that they must be prepared also for violent conflict.

7. *Resurrection*. Jesus reverses the human verdict of condemnation upon him and restarts the ministry with his disciples in Galilee

8. *Finality*. Jesus is the figure who sums up all things, and ultimately succeeds. Disciples can be with him.

Each of these Christological moments is also a Discipleship moment. The Disciple follows the Master at each stage and demonstrates this in ministry. This pattern of Jesus's activities became the framework for policy. The eight moments indicate what and who we need as disciples for it all.

1. **Incarnation**. We need to confirm ourselves in the areas of need: if we are not there a few of us need to move there. 2. **Healing**. We need people on the ground who express love and compassion in the face of obvious injustice and victimisation. 3. **Parables**. We need people, preferably locals, who will take up the gut-level happenings of an area on hold them up for others to see. 4. **Acted Parables**. We need visible examples, prophetic signs, acted prophecies, proleptic instances of what we want, set up for all to see. 5. **Disciple-Group**. We need people really committed to each other, to the place and to the disciplines necessary for acting. 6. **Crucifixion**. We need to be at places where the oppression of the powers, is really encountered and felt, so that we can be borne down by it, as others are borne down by it. 7. **Resurrection**. We need to be around when old things are raised up, when old things get started again, when the commitments crucified by the enemies are brought to life again. 8. **Finality**. We need to be backyard visionaries, plucking from the future the things that all humanity seeks and digging in bits of them in city backyards.¹⁹

2. This eight-fold gospel pattern was developed later as a theological "Systematics" 20. In the pattern itself the stories of the first four, incarnation, healing, parables, and active parables - are records of events in Sheffield which reflect events in Jesus's work in the gospel.

In the next two sections, two particular gospel elements which recurred in our practice - or were discovered as relevant for our situation, will be described - Disciple Groups, and then one particular aspect of Jesus's Disciple Group, that of Learning Community, which we followed in the Study Year.²⁰

¹⁸ *Into the City* 1982

¹⁹ *Into the City* p.136

²⁰ *Christ in the City*. pp. 47-75



Joliba Trust update

A huge 'thank you' to everyone who supported our campaign for tree planting at the end of April. In the recent rainy season from July-September 1220 acres of orchards have been planted by 425 young men and women. They consist of cashew, grafted mango, orange, jujube, papaya, sugar apple, guava, lemon, moringa and tamarind saplings. The rainy season has been good and the trees are growing well. The orchards, each of which has a hand-dug well built by the volunteer, are used initially for market gardening between the young trees whilst they are growing, will provide a secure income for young people and their families, improve the land, and prevent the need for migration.



DATES

2026

1-3rd May Community Weekend at Foxhill ,
Frodhsam, Cheshire

COMMUNITY

Community Office: John Vincent
7 College Court, Sheffield S4 7FN

Enquiries

ashram community@hotmail.com

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

Website www.ashram.org.uk

Act Together editor: Jenny

Medhurst medhurst@phonecoop.coop

Articles for the Spring 2026 edition needed by
April 6th

Contributions from members / associates who do
not attend national Community events are
especially welcome!

MEETINGS/ZOOM GROUPS

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

Convenors

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

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

Community Zoom meetings fortnightly – Pippa
Thompson – 07918 757068.