



plus

CHRISTIANS on AGEING

a Christian voice for older people

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Quarterly Magazine of
Christians on Ageing

Christians on Ageing – a Christian voice for older people

We work for a society in which older people are heard, supported and valued.

Our activities aim to:

- Collaborate with Christian and other agencies with similar visions
- Inform and facilitate debate on issues of concern for older people
- Celebrate the gifts and potential of later life
- Influence policy makers, service providers, paid carers and practitioners

We deliver these activities through conferences, publications, commentaries and informational resources, focusing on faith, spirituality and flourishing in later life.

Current prime areas of interest and action:

- **‘Cherished not forgotten’** – activities that relate to excluded older people for whom the church can play a role, such as in illness & disability; in hospital, nursing or residential care; those living with dementia and their carers; the digitally, socially or economically disadvantaged; isolated & lonely older people and older prisoners.
- **Mission & ministry in later life** – activities that inform & support lay and ordained, by sharing information and good practice, and promoting training and vocation related to ministry with older people.
- **Later life discipleship** – activities that contribute to understanding older people’s spiritual growth and faith development; promoting a positive image of older Christians’ spiritual roles as elders & mentors; encouraging intergenerational learning.

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Editorial

Welcome to our Summer issue, prepared in the heat of May and June. It is perhaps then fitting that our latest international contribution concerns climate change. H.R. Moody is a well-known American scholar and author who has studied 'aging' (as they spell it) for many decades. Now in his 70s, his interest has turned to climate awareness among older people, and how they can get involved. Do let me know if you or your church have 'green' interests or activities.

I'm pleased to be able to feature an abridged account of Debbie Thrower's inspiring speech, given to our AGM in April. She explored the idea that later life can sometimes engender a decline in 'trust' in life and confidence about ourselves. She then identifies sources of trust that we can draw on, giving lovely examples on the way. The value of her Anna Chaplaincy experience and skills is clear to see in the way she gathers and presents the material she has to share.

When you see publications that are aimed at older readers, do you wonder what thinking and planning went into producing them? I asked Eley McAinsh, the editor of the

Bible Reading Fellowship's recent series on *Bible Reflections for Older People*, to explain how it came about and what ideas lay behind their publication design and content. She has done so with clarity and reflection on the series' development; for instance, the use of 'Older People' in the title. I hope you find the insight into the process interesting.

David Jolley, COA's chairman, has provided an engaging review article of a book he has enjoyed on a history of non-conformism in Yorkshire – his roots are in Methodism and in the North. I found it challenging to think that organisational 'expressions' of faith can grow, age and diminish over time as cultures and economies change. So we need not be alarmed, but be on the look-out for the new thing that God is doing.

We are pleased to announce some initiatives we hope will enable members of COA to feel more in touch with each other. Trustee Marion Shoard describes these for us and invites your response. We look forward to hearing from you.

Joanna Walker, Editor



Photo: Centre for Better Ageing

Bible Reflections for Older People

Eley McAinsh, Bible Reading Fellowship

Launched in November 2016, *Bible Reflections for Older People* is the baby of the BRF family of Bible reading notes. The most popular of these notes, *New Daylight*, traces its roots back to the very beginning of the charity in 1922 and others such as *Guidelines*, *Day by Day with God* and *The Upper Room* have emerged over the years in response to particular needs.

Bible Reflections has also been developed in response to a particular pastoral need. As the ministry founded by Debbie Thrower – first called The Gift of Years and now known as Anna Chaplaincy for Older People – was brought into the BRF family in early 2014, it was already clear that a series of Bible notes tailored specifically to the needs of older people would be a welcome pastoral resource.

Olivia Warburton, BRF's head of content creation, was involved from the beginning: *'Although we offered a large format version of New Daylight, we wanted to offer a more tailored resource for people who might now find reading and concentration harder, or need notes to be read to them, with a reduced amount of content and space to read and reread, recognising potential memory issues.'*

Experienced writer and contextual theologian Tricia Williams was invited to develop the concept with Debbie Thrower and a pilot issue was published late in 2014 with

reflections by David Winter and Lin Ball, and an interview with Debbie Thrower. One of the leading figures in the field, and former pastoral director of MHA, Albert Jewell, wrote about the booklet in the *Methodist Recorder*: *'When I served as pastoral director of Methodist Homes, I became aware of the lack of devotional materials for use with older people: it is good to see older people, who make up the great majority of church attenders, provided with such a resource.'*



Bible reflections for older people

These Bible reflections, especially developed for older people, are part of BRF's The Gift of Years ministry, led by Debbie Thrower. Inside you'll find...

- 20 daily Bible reflections. Themes include:
 - Hope is the Promise—David Winter; Of Life and Loss—Lin Ball
- Prayer suggestions for every day
- An interview with Debbie Thrower about her life, faith and ministry.
Debbie Thrower is Team Leader of BRF's The Gift of Years ministry and is also an Anna Chaplain.

Albert captures, in essence, what the creators of *Bible Reflections* hoped to achieve. Tricia writes: *'As editor, I had experience in developing other daily Bible guides. This*

gave me background in bringing forward a new guide for those wanting to read the Bible regularly. My other experience has involved lots of thinking about how we read the Bible and what to consider when aiming to reach a particular audience.'

'My own experience with older people (and myself!) made me aware of differences between a younger adult audience and those who were entering a later stage of life. For example: significant health issues, lessening concentration, importance of memory, social issues (retired, not working, family, older age singleness, impact of less mobility), life experience, changing experience of church, relational and emotional issues (friendship, encouragement, fear and anxieties).'

'Some guides for younger adults require concentrated focus on longer extracts of Bible text. Bible Reflections uses shorter passages, and – whilst being faithful editorially to text and interpretation – recognises shorter concentration spans, the gentler aim, perhaps, of keeping in touch with God, and the different life issues which people are facing at this stage of life. Such issues include not just the 'feel good' ones such as family members and memories, but also touch realistically on issues of concern for this age group in particular illness, sadness and forgiveness. In it all there is an assumption that the reader lives in relationship with a loving God whatever their own Christian experience or denomination.'

In addition to the editorial philosophy which shaped the publication, practical accessibility details were also important, as Olivia explains: 'We went for a larger format

of A5 as opposed to pocket-sized larger type, more space on the page, shorter extent, and cover images intended to be attractive and soothing so that just looking at them could itself be uplifting and helpful for meditation and prayer. Crucially, we decided on forty undated reflections in each issue, rather than four months' worth of daily readings, to remove any sense of pressure to read every day.'

Another important decision was to seek older writers or at least those with ministry experience with older Christians. As 'Tricia says, 'we wanted the reader to feel that writers understood their life situations, Christian experience and could 'walk with them'.'

The pilot issue was well-received and the decision was made to launch the series, beginning with the January-April 2016 issue, with a change of name from *The Gift of Years* to *Bible Reflections for Older People*. 'Tricia was a passionate and committed editor but after two issues her own doctoral studies in the experience of living with dementia meant that she had to pass on the *Bible Reflections* baton. I was the lucky recipient.

We met in person at the formal launch of the publication, kindly hosted by the then Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, Martyn Percy, in the magnificent deanery drawing room. I'm glad to say that by the end of the evening 'Tricia confided that she felt her baby was in safe hands. Despite the pressures of her thesis, she gave me a huge amount of support in my early days as editor and is now a regular and valued contributor.

Any changes since those early editions of *Bible Reflections* have been subtle and gradual. Inevitably some contributors have sadly had to stop writing through ill health and changing circumstances – David Winter is particularly missed – but I'm delighted that some of the original writers continue, including the poet Ann Lewin. I've made a point of encouraging new writers and it's been a delight to welcome Martin and Margot Hodson, Lynn Goslin, Derek Morgan and several others to the team.

One of the things that has changed over the years is the range of themes: after a couple of years it became clear that we were coming back too often to the same predictable aspects of ageing. But while it's important to us to be honest and realistic about the challenges that come with age, that is by no means the whole story: there are also joys, riches, insights and comforts that come as we grow older and so now the brief is wider. As long as the reflections connect warmly and empathetically with the life experience of the readers there are few subjects which couldn't be tackled, so, we have, for example, 'The birds and the bees', 'Creepy crawlies' and 'Fun and games' alongside 'Conversations with Jesus', 'Forgiveness...' and 'Do not be afraid'.

Perhaps the biggest question is the use of the words 'older people' in the title. In an age when one of our recent contributors celebrated his 80th birthday by skydiving and another by walking the Camino, the term is problematic. These reflections are intended for people who are becoming more frail, physically or cognitively, often in care homes or being looked after in the community. They may be able to read the notes independently, or they may

need help. Whatever their circumstances, our readers are loved, respected and valued, and whatever issues there may be with the title, it's clear from the feedback we get that *Bible Reflections for Older People* is meeting a real need and is deeply appreciated:

'I love that these notes are written by older people who know the challenges of ageing.'

'I am finding it perfect for my needs. It is deep enough to make one think about what they have read but not too deep.'

And most touching of all:

'My friend with Alzheimer's very much appreciated her copy and we read one of the meditations together. For her it is good she doesn't have to look up the Bible verse which she finds quite hard now. Also good that the dates aren't used. My friend and I wrote the date on the one we did and ticked it so she knew from where to continue.'

To find out more about *Bible Reflections for Older People*, and to subscribe go to:

<https://www.brfoonline.org.uk/products/bible-reflections-for-older-people-subscription>

There is a 10% discount on an annual subscription for readers of *Plus* magazine from 1 July to 31 August. Enter the discount code **BROPLUS10** at checkout.

To find out more about Anna Chaplaincy for Older People go to: <https://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk/>

Better care really is everyone's business

Stephen Burke, CEO Hallmark Foundation

*In a guest blog for **The International Longevity Centre (ILC-UK)** in February, Stephen Burke argued that instead of levelling down social care we need to be raising our ambitions to get care fixed now and in the future – for all our sakes. He has kindly given permission for 'plus' to reproduce his article:*

When the ILC-UK reviewed the last twenty-five years of progress on the ageing agenda at its recent annual Future of Ageing conference, there was a short session on social care. Care appears to be levelling down rapidly. There was unanimous agreement therefore that we have to do better, a lot better, over the next twenty-five years.

As someone whose approach to life is glass half full, I think there are many reasons why positive change will happen: from our ageing population who have higher expectations and are more likely to vote, to their families who are finding it harder to balance work and caring responsibilities, to the moral imperative for looking after each other as reflected in January's Archbishops' *Reimagining Care Commission* report.

Better care really is everybody's business. All of us need to get care fixed, now and in the future, because it affects us all. There are only four kinds of people in the world: those

who have been caregivers; those who are currently caregivers; those who will be caregivers; and those who will need a caregiver.

Part of the problem is that the way care is funded, commissioned, delivered and provided is fragmented, with multiple different interests. We need to unite because care is everybody's business, not particular vested interests. In doing so, we must start and finish with people's experiences, lives and well-being in shaping overarching principles. We all have more than one perspective and should use the different hats we all wear as relatives, friends, carers, providers, investors and people drawing on care to co-produce better care.

From my perspective, a new care system must be based on five principles. It must be fair, simple, sustainable, personal and universal. Currently it is none of these. Some people have suggested that care needs a 1948 moment. For the NHS, everyone knows that the fundamental principle is that access to healthcare is free at the point of need and use. We require a similar form of words for care and support – to be there when and where we need it so everyone can live life to the full.

Social Care Future, and others, have articulated this in a way that we can all get behind (see www.socialcarefuture.org.uk). We must think big, be ambitious and build on the best of what's currently happening here and abroad.

Making this happen will require some key steps forward:

- national leadership – providing bold, strategic direction, coordination and resources
- a cost benefit analysis of universal care – measuring the social and economic benefits of investing in vital infrastructure
- promoting prevention/early intervention – moving beyond crisis services e.g. reimagining care homes as community hubs, supporting the wider community
- joining up care, health, housing, but also transport and community networks
- making better use of resources – offering universal advice, moving from gatekeeping to helping earlier, using people's and communities' strengths and assets, supporting family carers, harnessing technology
- promoting care positively – as a career, reaching young people early with schools
- starting and ending with wellbeing, with better care being key to living the life we all want.

The next three years are critical. Reforming care must be high up on the agenda in the lead up to the next election, in all parties' manifestos, and then central to the first year of the next government.

Stephen Burke is CEO of the Hallmark Foundation which focuses on ageing well and improving care, and is currently funding the ILC-UK's Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index programme.

Trust in Old Age – What part faith can play in affirming one's identity

Debbie Thrower, Pioneer, Anna Chaplaincy for Older People, BRF

I'd like to explore the degree to which there has been an erosion of self-belief in our later years in more recent times. We'll also look at what part faith can play in affirming our identity - and our God-given future - in the face of the inevitable changes that old age brings. As an Anna Chaplain, I've spent many hours listening to older people, and we now help others to discern their own vocation to this ministry. In many different contexts – In town, suburbs, villages, we are helping older men and women navigate the choppy waters of growing older in the 21st century.

In 2023, we're in new territory when it comes to ageing. Extreme longevity is not unusual and there are now more people aged 60 and above in the UK than there are under 18, for the first time (UK Office for National Statistics). Sometimes it might feel like an ambiguous gift. Ann Morisy, community theologian and writer, found that older people sometimes felt crushed by what she called 'multiple overwhelms' (Morisy, 2016). She also noted that '*those of us in the older generations are 'pioneers', 'exploring new terrain with an out-of-date map.'*

We seem to have lost sight of our part in the natural or 'grand' scheme of things. We have become a more cynical, less trusting society; generally, suspicious of

institutions and in some cases with good cause. But Jesus taught that in God's good kingdom we are invited to take inspired risks. This is the adventure of faith and, as the distinguished Christian thinker Dallas Willard said, for the follower of Jesus, *'life is supposed to be interesting.'*

Discerning how to trust

One way to recover a sense of trust and hopefulness in our older age may be to *remind* oneself that we are part of the natural life cycle of all created things, that we are made in the image of God. I suspect our forebears understood this link better, because there was so much more death in evidence, and the rituals surrounding death and mourning were integral to everyday society.

Another contributing factor to our lack of trust, once the ageing process becomes more apparent, is fear - the apprehension of what lurks ahead. We fear losing our autonomy almost more than anything else. The prospect of being a 'burden' on others is a frightening and almost intolerable thought for many of us. And more so, when we see the lack of care and interest shown by some families for their own relatives, let alone the plight of strangers, when they become frail.

Pope Francis in his 2020 book *Let Us Dream* declared, *'one sad sign of our times is the exclusion and isolation of the elderly The abandonment of the elderly is an enormous injustice.'* This is not just sad for older people left sidelined, but for society as a whole.

Yet, Pope Francis has also said: *'Old people lose some sight, but their inner gaze becomes more penetrating. They*

become capable of seeing things that previously escaped them. The Lord does not give his talents only to the young and the strong. He has talents for everyone, made to fit each person.' What a hopeful message that is. Older people, themselves, ourselves... also need to rise to the challenge of recognising such gifts, and indeed cultivating them!

Learning to appreciate ourselves

So, how much do we value ourselves as we age? The writer, Frits de Lange says of getting older: *'learning to love your aged self is one of the greatest tasks of old age.'* When it comes to ageing in the 21st century: *'Caring about oneself... is especially relevant for the elderly, who are caught up in self-negligence or even self-hatred.'* These are strong words.

One way of counteracting self-denigration is touched on in the work of Franciscan writer and priest Richard Rohr, particularly in his book *Falling Upward - A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. He has written movingly of the way in which, in the second half of life, we have to fall into loss before we can rise above it.

He is saying that we have to experience loss in life to come closer to God and start the real spiritual journey. If only we could see and appreciate for ourselves that our lowest times might actually be the most beneficial for us... in the long run! We need to hang on and trust that God is still with us in this process.

How might we appreciate the beauty and compensations of old age and cultivate more of a spirit of hopefulness in

ourselves and others? We could recognise the stories of resilience featured in so many people's lives around us, and then, by implication, in our own lives. Also attending to the needs of others may produce some balm for own souls.

Spiritual needs?

What do people need most as they age? Here are some suggestions based on recurring themes that emerge when you really listen to people navigating old age. Many hours of sensitive chaplaincy conversations among older people reveal that these are: *recognition (not to be invisible to others); a sense of self-worth; mutually supportive relationships; opportunities to contribute.*



Photos p16 & 18: Debbie Thrower, with permission

I suspect that those 'pioneers' who best navigate this new territory of longer lives might have begun the necessary work early. We need to sow the seeds in childhood of a spirit of hopefulness and a developing internal life. However, some of our most important character building work – such as fortitude and endurance – may be done in our later years. Our resilience is tested as we age, perhaps

surprising us with our will thrive spiritually. The significance of living 'in the moment', and being 'in the present', is another spiritual grace.

The centenarian Ronald Blythe, who died earlier this year, spoke of how *'The present is the most exciting part of life... this is the enormous gift we possess these days...'* He continued, at his after-lunch talk at the 'Oldie' magazine's literary lunch, in 2014: *'And we're kept alive by faith, by intelligence, by culture, by travel and, most of all by love and friendship, because these things don't cease when we retire.'*

Preparing to trust

If we are to see a spiritual dividend in the huge rise in people living to one hundred or more, I'm sure there is work for each of us to do, on ourselves! There are said to be certain 'tasks' associated with ageing that we can undertake both for ourselves and the sake of those around us. We can prepare for a long period of retirement and become more of a blessing to others. Here is what Australian researcher Elizabeth MacKinlay has identified as the key tasks of ageing:

- To transcend difficulty, disability and loss
- To search for final meanings
- To find intimacy with God
- To have hope

The epistle writer James wrote, *'Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is*

fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.' James 1: 2-4

Acting on trust

A person who represented spiritual capital to those around him lived in the town of Alton, in Hampshire, where Anna Chaplaincy began. I was the first Anna Chaplain starting in 2010. Bob was then a mere 102. Bob was a fine example of someone who cultivated wisdom and modelled his trust in God. How? By pursuing lifelong leisure interests; by remaining curious about life and other people; making prayerfulness a priority; honing his listening skills and practising hospitality.

So, being hopeful and trustful in older age involves a conscious decision and adopting an attitude of mind. Can we trust in our own old age? Even the writers of the psalms had to learn to trust, as Alison Morgan reminds us in her new book *World Turned Upside Down – The Psalms and the Spirituality of Pain*, just published by BRF. Fortunately, we inherit the psalmists' guiding words and images.



Jesus didn't live into old age to show us the way to be in our later years. But he did enter the final phase of his life, his Passion leading to the cross, willingly; surrendering himself to what became inevitable. He is a paradigm for ageing. We know the story didn't end with his death. Neither will our story, as post-resurrection people.

Ask yourself, then, how much your local church values the oldest people in its midst – both in church and in the wider community? And, when did you last hear a sermon about what we can expect of life after death – of what that eternal life might entail? I can recommend Dallas Willard, again, notably in his book *The Divine Conspiracy* (1998) on this subject. You might also be interested in what the organisation The Art of Dying Well has to say about preparing for a good death, helping those who are grieving, and how to accompany others as they near the end of life? See <https://www.artofdyingwell.org>

When I wobble, in any way, I turn to a writer such as Michael Mayne, a former Dean of Westminster Abbey. He once said: *'Faith is not absolute certainty, but a readiness to explore the mystery. It is not a method of finding all the answers, but of living with the questions. Like hope it is an attitude of mind, an orientation of the spirit.'* (Mayne 1999)

Keeping on keeping on

Keeping one's eyes open, being attentive, noticing how we take our place in the cycle of life with its continual change and understanding that the essential 'me'/'us' that's changing is infinitely precious in the eyes of our creator... is key to our level of trust in older age. As we

become more aware of ageing, we can help ourselves by what we read and think about, focusing on what is good and builds up resilience. We may also seek the sort of spiritual accompaniment offered by Anna Chaplains and other skilled pastoral visitors.

'The journey into old age gives us the opportunity to deepen our faith and relationship with God through our awakening senses and simplifying our lives. This is what we would say ageing is for. It is a blessing, a privilege and a responsibility.' (H. and D. Mowat 2018)

Are we up for the challenge of taking on that responsibility, enjoying the blessing and privilege that a long life represents?

Anna Chaplaincy www.annachaplaincy.org.uk

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Climate Change: What is to be Done?

Harry R. Moody, editor '*Climate Change in an Aging Society*'

A few years ago, at a senior centre in Connecticut I gave a talk on global warming. I thought it went well, and afterwards as I stood by the exit an older woman came by and congratulated me on the presentation: 'Oh, Dr. Moody, what you said was so powerful. I'm just glad I won't be there to see it.'

I was taken aback by her comment but didn't know what to say. Since that day, I've thought about the conversation and realised I could have said to her, 'No, you will live to see it. You have lived to see it. It's already here, all around us.' I could have gone further and been more critical. Should any of us really be happy at the prospect of not seeing what we have left to those who come afterwards?

Climate change is already here, and it's affecting you. And there are things we can do about it, both to reduce its impact and to adapt to it as we grow older. Both mitigation - preventing it from getting worse - and adaptation - coping with climate change as it comes - are part of the story.

We can debate whether that climate change is 'the only story that matters'. But for those of us now growing older, climate change has turned out to be the big story of our own old age, even if we never expected it be. And not only

for us: it will be the big story for our children, and their children, and so on.

Climate change is happening at the same historical time when the population of America, Europe and Japan is going through the unprecedented transition of population ageing. On a global basis, by 2018 the world reached a point where, for the first time in history, there were more people over 65 than children under five years of age. The Age Wave is upon us.

So we have two big stories — population aging and climate change — both happening at the same time in history.

Climate change is not a happy subject. Neither is ageing often seen as positive. It's not surprising that we often try to avoid both. On an individual and corporate level, lots of energy goes into delaying ageing: cosmetics, plastic surgery, diets, exercise at the gym and all the rest. But most of us recognize that we can't avoid growing older. Or put it differently: we know it but we don't face it. I've worked in the field of ageing for 50 years, and on my 77th birthday I received as a gift a sweatshirt saying *'I thought growing old would take longer.'* I was obviously mistaken.

Denial is deep, and ageing takes place without our noticing it: just like climate change. As for climate change, we often think maybe it's something for the future, or perhaps for people in some vulnerable places on earth. Or maybe it will happen in the future, but not too soon. Just like my sweatshirt about growing older, we can say *'I thought climate change would take longer.'*

However, short-term thinking is a barrier to climate response: that is, until your own house (almost) burns down, as Californians in increasingly wildfire-prone areas are experiencing. *'The violent crackling is what global warming sounds like, and the odor of the noxious smoke is what it smells like, when you're close to it.'*

My message can be summed up in four words: YOU, HERE, NOW, HOPE. It's about YOU, whatever your age today, if you hope to grow older. Climate change is not some distant threat; it's already HERE, it's NOW, already affecting you and friends and family, everyone you know and everyone you don't know. The last word is HOPE. So where will you find it? Not by looking away or by denial.

That woman at the senior center who told me she expected to die before climate change happened was not in denial. She heard my message loud and clear. That's why she was relieved to know that she would be gone before seeing it: that's the opposite of denial. She was expressing something else: not denial, but despair, the belief that nothing could be done. Call it complacency, passivity, paralysis: these amount to the opposite of hope. My other mistake in the talk that I gave was to present such a negative picture that her response of despair was only reinforced. It's the same mistake that many environmental advocates have made in talking about climate change. Scare people and maybe they'll change. But that's not an approach which works.

It's true that we still have climate deniers among us, but their number has dwindled, according to the most reliable surveys. Extreme weather events have helped with

persuasion and the recognition of climate change all around. My message is not written for climate deniers - that is, those who don't face what's already happening around us: fire, flood, drought and heat waves.

My message is based on HOPE, the last of those four words. We can do something to reduce the speed of global warming (mitigation) and we can cope with the impact of what happens to us (adaptation). That's why we have hope. It's about doing and about coping. It's about action. As environmentalist David Orr put it: *'Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.'*

Websites to see, if you'd like to know more.

First, from the US (don't forget US spelling 'aging'):

www.climateandaging.org

www.grayisgreen.org

www.cccearth.org

www.climateactionnow.com

And from UK:

www.ecochurch.arochoa.org

www.ageingbetter.org.uk/older-and-greener

www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/22/move-over-millennials-boomers-are-uks-greenest-generation

Christians on Ageing Needs You!

Over the next few months, Christians on Ageing will be offering three brand-new activities for our members.

Meet The Members

Many members are busy with all manner of activities involving the church and older people in their local communities and indeed on a larger stage of which most fellow-members including trustees are oblivious. To find out more, in September we are launching *Meet The Members* – a short piece (100–200 words) written by a different member on each occasion about their background and current activities relating to older people and the church.

So, please! Put pen to paper, ideally by August 25th, in time for the first issue in early September. We will circulate a different contribution every two months by email or, for non-digital members, by post. In doing this, we hope to foster a sense of community amongst our members and also obtain vital information about your hopes and concerns. We will not share your contact details with anybody else, but, if you are willing to do so, please say – it may be that other members in your vicinity or with similar interests would like to get in touch.

The Older Person Who Has Inspired Me

In similar vein, we ask you to contribute up to 200 words, also to be shared bi-monthly via email and post, entitled *The Older Person Who Has Inspired Me*. Your grandfather? The manager of a particular care home? David Attenborough? In time, we might publish a volume bringing together these little essays, with contributors' consent.

Culture Club

Members can of course continue to participate in our regular Zoom Conference Calls, advertised on our website, about the subjects which form a core part of our vision and mission and which are open to members and non-members alike. But we are also introducing a members-only Culture Club. This will be a bi-monthly Zoom event at which we discuss a recently-released film, book, TV or radio programme or work of art which relates to our interests and concerns in an interesting and provocative way. We may invite an expert to inform our discussions, but essentially Culture Club provides an opportunity for members widely scattered geographically to come together in relatively light-hearted discussion.

The newly-released film *Hallelujah* starring Judi Dench will be the topic at our first Culture Club, to be held on Zoom on September 8th. Catherine Shoard, the film editor at The Guardian, who visited filming on-set where she talked to its director and stars, will be taking part. If you would like to join the discussion, email me at info@marionshoard.co.uk so I can send you a Zoom link.

If you would like further information about any of these new ventures, please email me or write to me at Marion Shoard, P O Box 195, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 9EF. Thank you.

Marion Shoard is a trustee of Christians on Ageing and author of 'How to Handle Later Life'.

Review Article

Valley of a Hundred Chapels: Yorkshire Non-Conformists' lives and legacies. Amy Binns. Grace Judson Press, Heptonstall 2013. Paperback 96 pages. £12.95

Dr Amy Binns is a senior lecturer at The University of Central Lancashire. She is secretary of the Heptonstall Methodist Sunday School Steering Group, and planning consultant to Blackburn and Darwen Council Conservation Area.

She presents the results of a careful and sympathetic study of the buildings and people which were and are the fabric of life in and from chapels in one geographical area in northern England. The study benefits from a wealth of photographs which show us some of the buildings and some of the people.

This was a world which had been neglected by the Church of England. People were spread across the valley working as weavers in their homes and farms. The nearest vicar was in Halifax; less than one in ten had a relationship with the church. Most were unable to read the bible for themselves.

The Uniformity Act of 1662 alienated many preachers, who valued their freedom. Some became travelling evangelists and began to visit the valley, sharing the poverty of the of the people but receiving their support as they preached and taught, often with lengthy sermons. Some lay preachers had no qualifications other than their passion

and love for the word of the Lord. They addressed *'crowds of weeping and roaring sinners, trembling at the wrath of God.'*

The Act of Tolerance 1689 allowed dissenters to build chapels under licence, and so the movement began to have premises for their activities. Early buildings were functional, without altars: seating was pews or benches. For lack of flooring, people brought mats. Into this growing establishment, the Wesleys first came in 1747, sometimes preaching in a chapel, but often preferring the open air.

Fierce adherence to particular views spawned the creation of more and more chapels – according to your belief in infant or adult baptism, the use of an organ to provide music, or the employment of a paid minister. There was immense vitality, pride and confidence: *'the working classes were masters of their own meeting houses and schools, learning to read, to make up their own minds and act on their conviction.'*

Ten chapels opened in the Upper Calder Valley 1694-1764. A further 30 were built in the next 70 years. They provided a base for worship, but also for political organisation for The Chartists, education via Sunday Schools for children and adults, and a safe social space for women.

The introduction of water-powered mills drew population from the hills to the valleys, increasing the growth of chapels in number and size. These were funded by money-raising events, teas, treats, bazaars, entertainment, as well as donations and pew rents. A life full of friendship and

controversy: a sharp contrast to the monotony of the working week in the mill.

Previously wild and lawless people engaged in education, sport, social improvements of all kinds. A 'People's College' in Todmorden taught grammar, history, physiology, phrenology and more. There were organised hikes to the countryside, fashion events, music and choirs. Members looked after each other with Benevolent Societies, Funeral Societies and The Band of Hope.

The chapels shared a 'homely spirituality' with their own prayers, class meetings, testimonies and 'love feasts'. Emphasis was on teaching rather than ritual. While most preachers were men, women began to contribute. The growth of the movement and the building of chapels continued until the beginning of the twentieth century. The last chapel was built at Hebden Bridge 1904.

Then came the First World War. Men and boys were taken away, some never returned. Many social events and fund-raising activities ceased. The war was a sobering experience for the nation and was followed by a determination to improve matters for ordinary people.

State education became available for all, reducing the need for Sunday Schools, housing was built, cinemas and cheap travel opened affordable and easily accessed alternative entertainment. Universal Suffrage was adopted, trade unions were created and saw improved working conditions. Mills closed and the influence of mill owners faded. Many of the objectives which had driven the devotion and enthusiasm of the nonconformist, Chartist

movement were accepted and were being implemented with little reference to the church or chapels.

Congregations dwindled and it became clear that there were too many chapels in the valley for the fewer adherents to the faith. Most vulnerable were the largest chapels – often sponsored jointly as ‘vanity projects’ by people with means and mill owners. They may have been too big from the start. They were costly to maintain and soon closed, to be demolished or adapted to commercial use.

Reflection: We see here in miniature the rise and fall of ‘Zion’ from pre-industrial to industrial and post-industrial times. We can see the shared elements which made for a close community to be uplifted and carried by shared beliefs, founded in bible teaching and at odds with an establishment which did not value ordinary people. The application of unified determination and mutual generosity achieved miracles of social cohesion and progress.

The ‘Fall of Zion’ is attributed to the impact of World War 1, followed by political change and by progress in education and inventions which meant that many of the material aims of the nonconformist movement were achieved: a secular society had adopted the Chartist's beliefs – but without their Christian roots.

We might see the continued decline in Christian adherence, both conformist and nonconformist, up to this present day as simply an extrapolation of the changes which began from 1914. The Covid Pandemic, like the First World War, has had a terrible impact on populations and

has changed patterns of social interaction to reduce further attendance at church and chapel activities - losing people, losing money and wondering what the future can be.

We can surely learn that too many large and ornate buildings are not necessary and would be a burden for the future. The essential ingredient has to be the teachings provided in the bible and amplified by wise, learned and devoted people over the centuries. We must rejoice that secular society has accepted and interpreted most of the key principles of living for the benefit of the whole population, though we could do so much better. Working to complement the best aspects of this, but adding the unique dimension of spiritual learning to underpin an understanding of life remains the domain of Christian service. This is where we should focus our energies.

We can be grateful to Dr Binns for opening our eyes through history on our doorstep – which might just help us for the future. These lessons, drawn from a geography and population which is near to us in the north of England, may have application elsewhere. I think this little book deserves a wide readership for its tidy and engaging review of the time and manner of the nonconformist movement's genesis, and the learning which can give us some confidence for our futures.

David Jolley is Chair of Christians on Ageing

Obituary

It is with sadness that I report **Rev'd Roy Allison** died on 6th March. He was aged 82. He suffered from a rare, progressive atypical Parkinsonism, although this was only specifically diagnosed quite recently after a long period of illness. His cremation took place on 22nd of March.

Those who, like me, served on the Executive Committee in the 1990's will remember Roy as a caring and committed Chairman of CCOA as it was known then, from 1998 to 2004. We worked together on several projects, including visits to various agencies. One of his great loves was swimming. After our meetings and at every other opportunity he visited the nearest swimming pool to enjoy a welcome dip. We have kept in touch ever since.

In addition to his wife Frances, Roy leaves two sons, Paul who lives in the USA and Tim in Scotland. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

This obituary was provided by Dr Mike Lewis, who was a member of COA's Executive Committee for many years and provided leadership for the organisation's then Research Group.



Photo: Saad Chaudhry on Unsplash

Film Review:



Allelujah (2023) directed by Richard Eyre,
based on Alan Bennett's play *Allelujah*

Allelujah, the film, came to Altrincham. We went as a family of three and found ourselves within a family of familiar people from TV: Judi Dench, Julia McKenzie, David Bradley, Russell Tovey, Derek Jacobi and Jennifer Saunders. This brought it very close. We did not know the younger players but Bally Gill spoke exactly as so many lovely Indian doctors we have known, and Jesse Akele is the perfect caring, unassumingly carefree, hands-on nurse.

Both Alan Bennett and Richard Eyre have supported their mothers through years of frailty to death in care. They have known the strengths and weaknesses of the NHS and care system, and seen the undermining of principles in the name of efficiency and modern ways.

We were drawn to have affection for The Beth, the traditional small hospital in Yorkshire which offered care and treatment to old people in their times of crisis. Rough and ready in many ways, basic in its furnishings and equipment, modest in its ambition, though ludicrous in the pomposity of the Chairman of the Board – it had been earmarked for closure.

For me the most powerful story was that of Joe (David Bradley) and his son Colin (Russell Tovey). Joe, an ex-miner, had come to The Beth from a care home – 'A shit-hole' – and felt OK at The Beth. Colin had gone to London to seek

his fortune and had become a senior advisor to a minister in the Department of Health. It was the advice of Colin and his minister which would see the closure of The Beth.

'Small is loved, but small is expensive, inefficient and cannot give you the best of modern medicine. Care can be given in social settings.'

Joe and Colin do not see eye to eye. For Joe, Colin's life style is an embarrassment as much as a source of pride. For Colin, he searches to find a way of showing his affection and respect for this grizzled old wreck. They both miss 'Mum'. But in his visits, Colin finds his eyes opened – to dad and to the ways of The Beth. They have their good points. He takes this back to his minister and their committee. They are incredulous of Colin's conversion.

This is huge: it lays bare what has been done to our welfare state, against the wishes and the best judgement of ordinary (small) people. Ricardo Semler, in 'Maverick' ridicules the blind folly and arrogance of management theory which worships big and modern. 'We could count everything, but knew nothing.' 'Allelujah' is Alan Bennett speaking up for us. Speaking truth. I hope we will be heard.

David Jolley

David says: this review was developed from blogs shared via **Dementia Pathfinders** and an article in **G2 of the Guardian** February 10th, drawing attention to the film based on Alan Bennett's play 'Allelujah'. The article was entitled: *'We fetishised being young – it's just stupid!': Judi Dench*

and Richard Eyre on ageing, Covid and saving the NHS | Film | The Guardian by Catherine Shoard. In the article, Catherine drew on remarks made to her, or within her hearing, by the famous older actors who form the cast of the film. They explore matters relevant to older people in this country and beyond, relating to health care, social care, the impact of Covid-19 and lockdowns, and attitudes toward ageing and older people.

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Save the date: Christians on Ageing Annual Conference is to be on 20th September 2023,

held online, to enable maximum attendance. A programme involving speakers, groups and our famous lunch-time interactive session is being planned. Further details and an invitation to book will be available soon.



Photo: Centre for Ageing Better

Do join us online in September!

Faiths and Dementia Conference Report

A conference was organised by Liverpool Dementia Action Alliance (LDAA) in conjunction with Christians On Ageing and took place in St Margaret Clitherow Centre, Liverpool, on May 17th. It was attended by just under 100 people, including carers, volunteers and professionals.

The aims of the event were to -

- attract the attendance of members and leaders of a wide range of Faith communities
- provide information about the nature of dementia and living with the condition
- learn from representatives of Faith communities who have successfully engaged with dementia issues locally
- share diverse perspectives on dementia and the role of Faith communities and leaders.

In addition to presentations and table discussions, the day included an optional Dementia Friends awareness session and opportunities to visit the award-winning House of Memories immersive exhibition. Participants commented on the value of the multi-faith nature of the event and the benefit of learning about how places of worship were working towards becoming dementia-friendly. Commitments to address the issues within faith communities were expressed, including specific initiatives which could be taken.

This abridged account is based on a report provided by Jack Coufts, Chair, Liverpool Dementia Action Alliance

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