

NEWCASTLE READER



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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

Seeking.
Sharing.
Sending.



In this issue...

THE CODEX SINAITICUS AND THE LINSIFARNE GOSPELS.

In this final part of his paper Revd. Dr David Bryan compares the two works and outlines their impact

ALSO

A GREETING FROM THE WARDEN, JUST A SEC,
COMINGS, GOINGS AND CELEBRATIONS, LAST WRITES
AND MORE!

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EDITORIAL

Greetings from the Communications Group. We are:



Gloria Bryant,
Editor and
Chair



**Chris
Hudson**



**Gwyn
McKenzie**



**Louisa
Fox**



**Olwyn
Black**



**Frances
Stride**

In this edition, Frances Stride introduces herself with her first Just a Sec article as Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Readers' Board. We are also pleased to hear from our Warden, Bishop Mark Wroe, and from the Revd. Stephen Tranter, Diocesan Director of Ordinands and Vocations.

As is customary, there is no theme in the contents of this edition, merely a collection of items which we hope will interest our readers. However, as promised, we include the third and final part of the Revd. Dr David Bryan's paper on the Codex Sinaiticus and the Lindisfarne Gospels. We are grateful to him for giving us access to such an interesting and thought-provoking piece of work. The British Library will be receiving copies of David's paper and the three magazines in which it has appeared.

For personal reasons the Communications Group has not had a face-to-face meeting so far this year, though we intend to meet soon for at least a half day with the purpose of doing some serious planning for editions 24 and 25 which we anticipate will appear in December 2024 and Spring 2025 respectively. We would be helped in this planning by comments and contributions

from our readership, so please contact me at gcadman054@gmail.com or, if you know them better, any member of the group.

One impending change is that we will be extending the distribution of the magazine. It has been customary to send one copy of the magazine to active clergy of the diocese and to send two copies to every Reader (those in training, the licensed Readers, the Readers with PTO), so that they have a copy for themselves and a copy which may be placed in their parish church, with the agreement of their incumbent. Readers Emeritus also receive a single copy. This will continue whilst a single copy will be sent also to all Authorised Ministers.

The magazine could not be produced without the support, generosity and skills of a number of people: our printers at Shiremoor Press, the staff at Church House, who assist with distribution, and our designer Jon Alsancak, who makes the magazine so attractive to look at. Many thanks, also, to Bishop Helen-Ann, our Warden Bishop Mark, and to the Revd. Stephen Tranter DDOV for their support.

A GREETING FROM THE WARDEN

THE RIGHT REVEREND MARK WROE IS BISHOP OF BERWICK AND WARDEN OF READERS



Just after Easter I had the privilege of taking my Aunt Evelyn's funeral. Although she had suffered significant ill-health in her later years, the service was a joyful witness to her Christian faith and service.

Evelyn served as a missionary in Japan with the Church Mission Society, working as a teacher and evangelist. A single woman, she had a huge wealth of companions, colleagues and dear friends across the world and the years, many of whom joined in the funeral online. I was deeply struck by these myriad companions (every one of them captured in her volumes of photo albums meticulously annotated) who witnessed with her to her friend and saviour Jesus Christ.

Taking the funeral in Easter Week, I couldn't help but draw the comparison with the companions recorded in our biblical Easter narratives. Various partnerships drawn together by their common relationship with Jesus: Joseph and Nicodemus taking down Jesus' body from the cross; the Marys and Salome going to the tomb to anoint the body; Clopas and his companion travelling in grief back to Emmaus; Peter and the disciples wondering what to do and going out to fish; amongst others.

I have always believed partnership is crucial to Christian ministry. We are all companions on a journey: travelling together from the empty tomb to witness to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ in a world hungry for hope and thirsty for living water. As we grow into our diocesan values of seeking, sharing, sending, we need to ask ourselves: Who are we sent with in mission? Who are we sharing with in ministry as we seek signs of resurrection and look for where God is at work? Or, to put it another way, how is your life and ministry positively answering the question asked at your licensing:

For all of us in ministry there is a core commitment to partnership with one another. But within these

Will you work closely with your colleagues in ministry and encourage the gifts of others?

partnerships is our prior relationship with Jesus Christ. At the heart of our Confirmation Service our name is said and then this wonderful declaration is spoken over every candidate: '...God has called you by name and made you his own.'

God calling us by name is at the heart of every vocation and must be the heart of all our relating and our relationships. Whenever I find faith a struggle, I find a renewed sense of who I am, what I am for, and who I am with, as I stand at the empty tomb and, like Mary Magdalene, hear 'the gardener' call my name and draw me back into his love. This ultimate relationship is formed on the cross and by the empty tomb; it is also what compels us outwards with good news!

As Warden of Readers, I am thankful to God for you and for our partnership in the gospel. There is much to do: a world in need, a church to serve and a Saviour to follow. I look forward to forthcoming opportunities we will have to encourage one another as we journey together from the empty tomb, bursting with good news, into the world.

'BACK TO BERWICK'

THE REVEREND STEPHEN TRANTER IS DIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF ORDINANDS AND VOCATIONS.



On Sunday 21st April, I preached for Vocations Sunday at the northernmost parish church in England, Holy Trinity Berwick-on-Tweed.

It has been a long time since I worshipped there last – when my wife and I were training for medical missionary service at what was the Northumbria Bible College in the town. We had been on a vocational journey already to arrive there in 1990, and have been on quite a journey ever since as well. For me that has meant being a nurse, midwife, leprosy missionary, curate and vicar, hospital chaplain, and now supporter of vocations, and maybe I will still have one or two more new things to come after I start drawing my pension!

Sometimes the leading into those things has been very matter-of-fact, very slow and steady and one foot after another, and at others it has been more sudden and dramatic. In Holy Week this year I shared in the life and worship of the 'Ain and Coastland' group of churches, and I spoke to them of my vocational journey being like the moves of different pieces on a chess board. What did I mean by that? Most of the time it has been a lot like the humble pawn, plodding along one square by one square, just being and doing what I found in front of me as faithfully as I can. Just occasionally it has been more like the castle or rook, when I have experienced a very clear sense of calling to something new, a door has opened to it and it has been 'full steam ahead'. And perhaps even more often like the knight – moving one step forwards and two sideways, setting off in obedience and trust, yet not quite knowing where it will finally end up.

I don't know about your experience, perhaps you have had more flashing lights and straight roads than me, or maybe more nudges and corners and unexpected turns. But whichever it has been, the promise of scripture is that if we will 'trust and obey' as we walk with him, our loving Lord will surely guide us and guard our steps: 'The Lord is my shepherd... he leads me beside quiet waters... He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.'

If that is true of us as individual Christians, it is also true for us as local churches and as teams of ministers. Recently I was privileged to attend on behalf of our Diocese the annual meeting of the national church's Central Readers' Council in London. Representatives were there of Readers and Diocesan groups from across England and Wales, so it was a great opportunity for me to hear the news and feel the 'mood' across the country, in what was the first 'in-person' meeting since the pandemic.

The forty odd delegates were addressed by the (new in 2023) Director of Ministry for the Church of England, Rev Nick McKee. He had been asked to speak about 'our vision and strategy for the 2020's', and to consider where Reader/LLM ministry fits within this. In a positive but challenging presentation, Rev McKee spoke about what he saw as three national priorities: becoming a church of missionary disciples, becoming a church where 'mixed ecology' is the norm, and becoming a church that is younger and more diverse. Then against these priorities he mapped the Reader Council's vision of Readers teaching the faith, enabling mission in the everyday, and providing leadership in church and society.

As you can imagine, with forty Readers in the room there was plenty of lively questioning and debate! It was good to hear how all this related to the lived experience and concerns of the Readers 'on the ground' that the delegates were representing, just as I was reflecting on the opportunities and challenges in our own Diocese.

Over the next few months, I am looking forward to sharing with our Warden of Readers, Bishop Mark, in a number of 'Mini-Conferences' for Readers in deaneries and groups of deaneries. We will be seeking to do something similar: to share a vision for enabling and supporting Reader ministry in the life and mission of our Diocese, to get to know each other, and to hear about the hopes and dreams, obstacles and concerns of lay ministers 'on the ground.' I hope I will see you there, and hear your voice, and perhaps begin to take some of those new vocational steps forward together.

JUST A SEC

FRANCES STRIDE IS A READER
AT HEXHAM ABBEY



I started reflecting on and writing this page during Holy Week, examining what has been on my heart since taking up the role of your new Honorary Secretary. At the Chrism Eucharist Service on Maundy Thursday when renewing our commitment to ministry we declared we would:

. . . be faithful in prayer and by word and example to minister to those for whom Christ died . . . and . . . we will do all that is in our power to witness to God's love for his people.

What then, can help and sustain us, as we live out this commitment in our distinctive ministries together, and as we walk along the narrow path?

Luke's Gospel, read at the evening Service for Easter Sunday, tells us of the road to Emmaus [Luke 24:13-35]. This 'walk' is one of the most familiar and beautiful stories in the New Testament. What starts as a stroll with a stranger, ends with a miracle affirming the Resurrection.

As they were walking along the road the two disciples were weighed down by despair, defeat, and dejection. The last thing they expected to see was the risen Jesus. And so, they don't see him, at first. Later on, in the evening, when sat down together at the table, Jesus suddenly wakes the disciples to hope through the breaking of the bread. So, in this gospel story, the gloriously risen Saviour does not intrude. He modestly joins the disciples in conversation. They set the pace on the road they have chosen. He listens, wanting to know what is important to them. He obviously cares. He did then . . . He does now. He wants to hear from us today: to bring him our troubles, to give voice to our fears and frustration. What matters to us, matters to him.

As we have learned over and over, in Christ, we may not always get the answer we want, but we always get the answer we need. Could this gospel be any clearer? The risen Christ is with us always, all through our days and nights, in every one we meet. But, too often, he goes unrecognised, maybe a Sunday presence at best - here for the breaking of the bread and then ignored in our self-absorption. This is not God's way for us. We are meant to live in the risen Christ, continually, not haphazardly, actively, not abstractly. He is here now;

but too often, like the disciples walking to Emmaus, we just don't see him. For us to see Jesus, to recognize him, we need to engage. It's not a painful, or even a particularly difficult task. But it takes practice. It takes a daily, conscious effort to connect with Him, and to stay connected throughout the day, looking for opportunities to share his love. The formula for this is simple: it's called prayer. Part of it is spoken. Most of it is lived. By welcoming in our day with Jesus, giving him our concerns and anxieties, sharing our joys with him, asking him to help work out our resentments and to forgive our lapses. The more we are aware of Jesus, the more we are spiritually recharged, and the brighter our light shines.

It is not enough, though, that we are alert to Christ in our midst, that we recognize him, that we look for Christ in others. We must show the world that the risen Christ lives in us too. Significantly, in this gospel reading, the disciples recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. For over two-thousand years the Eucharist has been our portal for communion with the risen Christ. In it we consume in microcosm the entire mystery of the redemption - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In it we are joined not in a metaphorical Body of Christ, but in a palpable presence. Jesus is with us. Jesus is in us.

How then are we to look for him, to see him, recognize him, and to welcome him? For many, these are the questions that define our lives. They are built reflexively into our day. For others they are unfamiliar, awkward, uncomfortable. But for all us there is one simple constant: Jesus is in our midst.

True to the Father and true to the promise he has made to us, we need only look for him, and to engage: He is in our midst, in love, in peace, in power, only a prayer away. As we thank God for guiding us, in helping us to live out our ministries as Readers, when we join together in worship and fellowship, let us acknowledge that none of us could have made it this far without that guiding, loving presence, who appeared on the road to Emmaus.

Wherever each of our life's roads may lead from here, we ask you, Lord Jesus, to guide us home, to walk with us and show us the way.

Alleluia . . . He is risen . . .

COMINGS AND GOINGS AND CELEBRATIONS.

Andy Lie: congratulations to Andy who celebrated 30 years as a Reader on Sunday 11 February 2024 at the Evensong Service at Saints James and Basil Church Fenham in Newcastle.

Christine Stevenson: congratulations to Christine who was licensed by Bishop Helen-Ann on 16 February 2024 in her role as Chaplain to HM Prison Northumberland.



Sadly, three of our Readers have died since the last edition of Newcastle Reader:

Derek Burton, a Reader with PTO at St Mary's Monkseaton, died on 11 January 2024, aged 92 years. Derek had celebrated 40 years' service in October 2021. His passion for communicating the gospel inspired him to write two collections of his sermons in his later years: *A Light to My Path*, published in 2020, and *New Creation*, published in 2021.

Josephine Kulke, a Reader with PTO at St Cuthbert's Blyth. Josephine was a retired history teacher and had been a Reader for almost 19 years. She had occupied many leadership roles at St Cuthbert's Blyth and was a committed member of the church choir. She was a dedicated supporter and promoter

of the Mothers' Union. At the time of her death on 18th March, she was Bedlington Mothers' Union Deanery Leader. The attendance at her funeral at St Cuthbert's on 17th April was a measure of her contribution to church and community.

Bill Callaghan, an Australian by birth. He was licensed as a Reader in the diocese of Southwick in 1970. He returned to Australia where he taught mathematics and continued his ministry as a Reader. In 1989, Bill and his wife returned to Britain, settling in Alnwick, where he served as a Reader at St Michael's Church until 2016. In 2016, he became Reader Emeritus. Bill died in April and his funeral was on 23rd April.

May they rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CODEX SINAITICUS AND THE LINDISFARNE GOSPELS, PART 3.



THE REVD DR DAVID BRYAN IS PRINCIPAL OF LINDISFARNE COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY.

Comparing the Lindisfarne Gospels with Codex Sinaiticus. In this third excerpt from his 2022 talk on the Codex and the Lindisfarne Gospels, Dr Bryan outlines the nature and impact of the two works.

In part 1 I described the Codex Sinaiticus as a de-luxe book. In some respects, the Lindisfarne Gospels is a more modest book, containing the four gospels, Jerome's letter to Damasus and guidance in respect of the use of the gospels. Nonetheless it too is made from parchment. As Backhouse notes, to make a book out of 247 leaves implies that a large herd of calves was needed! However, the inclusion of elaborate illustrations and a bejewelled cover certainly take this to another level.

The Lindisfarne Gospels includes five highly elaborate full-page carpet pages, so-called because of their resemblance to carpets from the eastern Mediterranean. The Lindisfarne Gospels also famously includes full-page images of the four Evangelists.

Right is the carpet-page introducing Jerome's letter to Pope Damasus, who commissioned him in the 4th century to work on a standard Latin text of the Bible, The Vulgate.¹

Jerome's original letter was written around 376/377 CE. The Vulgate became the Authorized Version of the Church's Bible across Europe. It was the version that was used by scribes who wrote the Lindisfarne Gospels.



Matthew is portrayed as seated and still busy writing his gospel.² He is in Latin – imago hominis, the human face among the gospels. An angel who carries a green book seems to trumpet the Greek Title of the Gospel – The Holy Matthew but using a mixture of alphabets! The theological message is clear, 'This is a book from heaven.' A saintly figure peers from behind a curtain holding a similar green book to the angel. The best guess for the identity of this man is that it is Moses, suggesting that in Jesus the Old Testament finds its fulfilment.

¹ Image of Folio 3 from <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels> (from the archive of the British Library)

² Image of Folio 26b from <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels> (from the archive of the British Library)

Mark, imago leonis, is the lion among the gospels. He also is seated and busy, except that he appears to have completed his book and is writing on an additional sheet, perhaps a letter.³ As with Matthew, the Title of the Gospel is in Greek with some Roman letters.

The winged lion carries a green book, which underlines the heavenly source of the gospel. The lion has the appearance of a female lion with a kind of mane. You get the distinct impression that the artist had only a limited idea of what a lion might look like. Unlike Matthew, whose eyes are focused on his book, Mark seems to stare at the viewer, as does the lion, leaving you feeling challenged!



Luke is imago vituli, the ox among the gospels.⁴ He too is seated and busy but seems to be writing on something that looks like a scroll rather than a book.

The winged ox does not have a trumpet, but does carry a green heavenly book between its front legs!

The Title – The Holy Luke – is also written in a mix of Greek and Roman letters. Luke and his ox are staring at the viewer.

John is imago aquilae, the eagle among the gospels.⁵ The Holy John is also seated. But he alone of the four evangelists has completed his work. He too fixes a startling stare on the reader or viewer. His gospel is an open scroll.

As with Luke there is no trumpet in the mouth of the heavenly creature who bears a holy book, which in this case is red. Given that the Gospel of John was placed in Cuthbert's coffin and travelled with his mortal remains, the emphasis here reflects the possibility that John was his favourite gospel.



³ Image of Folio 94b from <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels> (from the archive of the British Library)

⁴ Image of Folio 137b from <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels> (from the archive of the British Library)

⁵ Image of Folio 209b, from <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels> (from the archive of the British Library)



There are also elaborately decorated pages that mark the beginning of each Gospel, and Matthew has a second such page to mark the beginning of the Christmas story which is left. Note how it includes an illuminated Chi-Rho, and the letters of Christ's name are abbreviated and written in Greek as XPI.⁶ **The text reads:**

Christi autem generatio sic erat cum esset desponsata mater eius Maria Ioseph (antequam convenirent inventa est in utero habens de Spiritu Sancto)

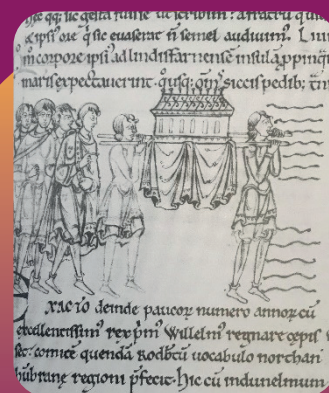
ET: The birth of Christ was in this manner. When his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, (before they came together, she was found with child, of the Holy Spirit).

The tradition of illustrating of illuminating the Bible with images and decorative letters may reflect an innovation to facilitate the missional impact of those seeking to bring the Christian faith to the kingdoms of England following the demise of Roman Britannia. Christopher de Hamel writes:

It was evidently very important that right from the onset the monks should exhibit a visual image of the new religion which could be seen and wondered over even before they began explaining the message of Scripture.... Christianity is a religion of the book and its message goes with literacy, a concept new to many of its British converts. Missionaries, then as now, could face sceptical audiences with the Gospels under their arms - a specific manual for salvation in debate against a religion based on oral tradition - and the scarcely literate are quite rightly impressed by the written word.⁷

Although the Lindisfarne Gospels themselves were unlikely to have functioned as a manual to be taken on preaching tours, the emergence of illuminated texts seems to me to be connected to this need for something visual to accompany the text when evangelising the non-literate peoples of these islands. Finally, comment is needed on the bejewelled cover of the Lindisfarne Gospels. Clearly this has something to do with the creation of a book to honour a newly recognised saint in Cuthbert. But we should also take note of de Hamel's comment on the significance of the bejewelled covers of these new de-luxe books. 'Gemstones and semi-precious crystals not only had rarity and beauty: they were understood in the Middle Ages to have spiritual and therapeutic properties.'⁸ These had the effect of transforming the Book into something akin to a sacred object

or relic with healing properties. This would also play a part in making Cuthbert's body and the accompanying holy objects the equivalent of a Christian Ark of the Covenant, especially when these were carried from place to place in the centuries that followed.⁹



⁶ Image of Folio 29, from <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels> (from the archive of the British Library)

⁷ Christopher de Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), p. 14.

⁸ Christopher de Hamel, *The Manuscripts Club* (Milton Keynes: Penguin-Random House, 2022), pp.62-63.

⁹ Image from Bede's *Life of St Cuthbert*, University College Oxford, MS 165, p. 159.

Comparing Mark in Codex Sinaiticus and in the Lindisfarne Gospels

In drawing this discussion to a close, I would like to offer some tentative reflections on the different way in which Mark reads in the Lindisfarne Gospels as compared with Codex Sinaiticus. Above I suggested that the Codex preserves in its beginning and ending the disruptive and challenging portrait of Jesus that I consider to

be part of Mark's original intentions. He wanted us to discover that Jesus is the Son of God at his baptism and to trace his challenging journey to the point where the first human to realise this truth unaided was the Roman Centurion who observed the manner of Jesus' death at Golgotha (15:39). Mark then leaves his story unfinished with the hint that we like the women followers, and the disciples need to go looking for the risen Jesus in Galilee.

The Mark of the Lindisfarne Gospels is represented by the *imago leonis*, the image of the lion. In many ways this is an apt way to represent his most challenging of gospels. However, the text, which follows Jerome's Vulgate, could be said to tame the lion. The beginning and the ending are tidied up.



Left, the initial illuminated page of Mark.¹⁰

The text reads:

Initium evangelii Iesu Christi Filii Dei sicut scriptum est

in Esaia propheta ...

ET: The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is in Isaiah the prophet...

“

The tradition of illustrating of illuminating the Bible with images and decorative letters may reflect an innovation to facilitate the missional impact...

”

“

The Mark of the Lindisfarne Gospels is represented by the *imago leonis*, the image of the lion. In many ways this is an apt way to represent his most challenging of gospels.

”

¹⁰ Image of Folio 95 from <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lindisfarne-gospels> (from the archive of the British Library)

Right, part of Mark 16 in the Lindisfarne Gospels.¹¹

The text reads:

**(at illae exeuntes fugerunt de monumento)
invaserat enim eas tremor et pavor et nemini
quicquam dixerunt timebant enim surgens autem
mane prima sabbati apparuit primo Mariae
Magdalenae de qua eiecerat septem daemonia
illa vadens nuntiavit his qui cum eo fuerant
lugentibus et flentibus**

ET:

(... going out they fled from the sepulchre:) for a trembling and fear had seized them. And they said nothing to any man: for they were afraid. But, rising early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalen; out of whom he had cast seven devils. She went and told them that had been with him, who were mourning and weeping.

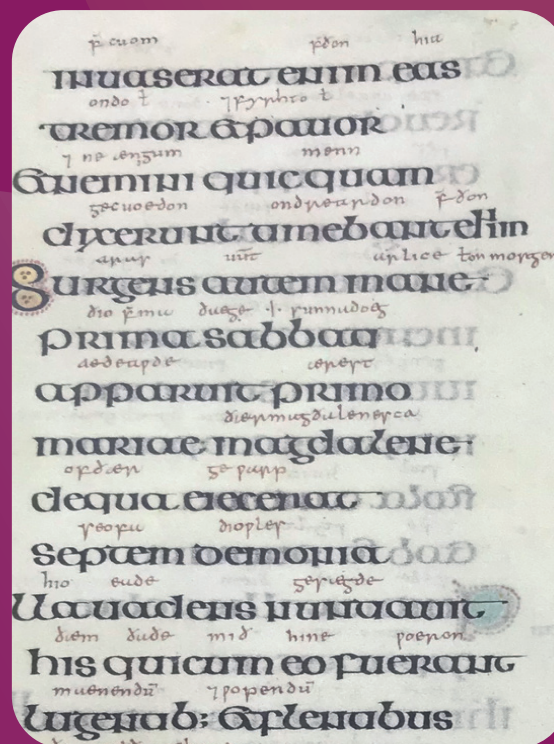
So, the title of Mark has the phrase 'Son of God'. There is a no hint of adoptionism here! And the ending continues in accordance with the longer ending of Mark. There is no ambiguity here whatsoever about how, where and who encountered the risen Lord.

Thus, I find myself thinking that the Gospel of Mark in the Lindisfarne Gospels reflects both an honouring of the Lion and, also, a taming of the Lion. While this was a process that began before the Latin Vulgate was written and long before it came to the shores of Britain, and while there is undoubted beauty in the Mark of Lindisfarne Gospels, his Gospel has become more orthodox, but at the price of being made into an altogether safer text.

“

And they said nothing to any man: for they were afraid. But, rising early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalen; out of whom he had cast seven devils.

”



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TRANSFORMING WORSHIP NORTH 'INSPIRED BY CREATION' ENVIRONMENTAL WORSHIP STUDY DAY

CE PACITTI IS A READER AT GOSFORTH ST NICHOLAS AND CMF OFFICER IN THE DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

On Saturday 27th April 2024, some forty of us gathered at St. Oswin's, Wylam, from across the dioceses of Newcastle, Durham and Carlisle for an inspiring day with Revd. Helen Bent (Transforming Worship), Revd. Tim Mayfield (Bishop's Advisor for the Environment, Newcastle Diocese) and Revd. Tom Birch (Vicar of St. Oswin's, Wylam and St. Mary's, Ovingham).

The joint initiative between Transforming Worship North and Newcastle Diocese CMF welcomed laity and clergy and we had a good range of people attend, from vicars and church wardens to parish eco-champions, authorised lay ministers and Readers/LLMs.

Newcastle Readers were particularly well represented with nine of us participating.



Following an excellent introduction from Helen, setting the tone and possibilities of the time together, we broke into three workshop spaces making the most of the church building, the hall, and the bell-tent in the grounds. We were treated to practical advice on pitching tents and the use of tech for worship outdoors, experienced a range of musical choices appropriate to environmental worship, and explored the range of prayer and liturgy resources available.

After an excellent lunch provided by the good folk of St. Oswin's we spent some time crafting our own intercessions, Benedicite and prayers of lament and thanksgiving for use in the collective worship which closed the day.

It was a joy to work together and share resources in this way – many thanks to everyone involved in making it such a success.



YOU CAN'T SAY THAT.'

CHRIS HUDSON IS A LICENSED READER IN THE
DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

Heresy! That's a word you don't often hear nowadays. It describes a belief going beyond the norm, twisting the essentials out of all character to the original, changing them beyond recognition. Or (depending how you look at it), 'heresy' could simply be an expression of an unpopular belief.

There's a popular idea working its way through modern society, voiced simply as 'I'm an adult, so I should be free to say and do what I like'. It can relate to any personal lifestyle issue involving money, possessions, sex, power or relationships in general, and basically means we can all make up our own rules for life as we go along. 'To thine own self be true', were Polonius' pompous, hypocritical, and empty words in 'Hamlet' before he came to a bad end, and interestingly, these words now adorn the main hall of London's Conway Hall, a Humanist centre. A child of 7 could tell you what's wrong: that not everything we want to do, is right or good! But as doctrines go, it's attractive and popular because it espouses individual freedom as

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an absolute value, a Very Big Thing in our modern Western society. (The occultist Aleister Crowley put it more starkly: 'Do as thou wilt'. He did.) Any generation can fall for this line, but it's the young and vulnerable who generally pay the price in loneliness, pain and distress when everyone is told it's OK to Go Your Own Way, usually by the powerful who have the most to gain from it.

We sometimes hear a version of that doctrine in Church too. It sounds like this:

'The Good News of Jesus Christ is amazing! It says God loves us, just the way we are, and we don't need to change anything!'

I first heard this spoken by an excited young Christian minister interviewed after a church event, but bless her, it she wasn't describing Christianity.

Yes, we can all slip into being Judgemental of

Others, but claiming God doesn't judge human behaviour, twists the Gospel into something that approves almost anything people want to say and do- and it's a lie. Jesus never said it, and neither should we. We need to remember three things. Firstly, Jesus challenged the lifestyles and beliefs of nearly everyone he met in his earthly ministry, which is why he encountered so much opposition. 'Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand' isn't meant to be a soothing message.

Secondly, a faith journey with God necessarily involves change and personal transformation. Paul expanded on this in Romans 12:2: 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's

will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.' This kind of non-conformity always comes at a cost. Thirdly, we can underestimate the effects of 'Sin.' Whether read as literal history, myth, or symbolic narrative, the message of Genesis 2-3 is the same: that the basic human desires to cross boundaries, shrug off restrictions and become 'like God' are all inevitably destructive for ourselves, those close to us and (interestingly) our environment. However we try to dress them up, we can't remove the

basic fear, sense of nakedness and vulnerability that come with Sin. We miss the target, and all need to regularly repent and receive the reconciliation with God that Christ offers at the Cross. Talk of 'Original Sin' isn't popular nowadays, smacking of authoritarianism, domination and control- but it's a fundamental Christian idea that churches avoid at their peril.

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When we take the dangerous path of leading, teaching and preaching, Licensed Readers face a hard choice. Our culture (like many others in the world) says there are places where we should not go when discussing God's call on our individual or shared lives- and breaking that taboo (even in church) can be considered hateful, antisocial, cruel- and potentially illegal. But love sometimes demands we speak of the Truth that sets us free and offers everyone a new identity as children of God.

Jesus said, 'Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand.' It's dangerous. Yes, we have to be sensitive and kind- but remembering what he said, I wonder if we are up for sharing that challenge?

WALKING AND WORKING TOGETHER

Walking together in a manner worthy of our calling . . . with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love . . . (Ephesians 4:1-2)

FRANCES STRIDE IS A READER AT HEXHAM ABBEY.
GWYN MCKENZIE IS A READER WITH PTO AT RIDING MILL ST JAMES



"We have a very relaxed and informal gathering, getting to know each other, finding out what is important as Readers, and supporting each other in fellowship and prayer."

"We are excited about the future and what sharing God's love with everyone will mean for us."

Looking back, the covid pandemic was a lonely experience from a Reader point of view. So, it was such a joyful day when we gathered together for the AGM and Annual Service at Newcastle Cathedral on Saturday 30 October 2021, giving us all the opportunity at last to meet with other Readers.

Everyone was very welcoming, and enjoying meeting face to face after such a long time, and the day did not disappoint. I had many enjoyable conversations but it was when I met Gwyn McKenzie and Jane Algar that it hit home to all three of us that, as Readers, we had all felt isolated and cut off. We were very passionate about what



we could do to help and support each other and other Readers in what we now call the West Northumberland Readers' Group covering the Hexham, Corbridge and Bellingham Deaneries.

The upshot of this discussion was to arrange a further meeting to plan what this help and support group would initially look like and the practicalities of making our vision happen. Gwyn and I relied quite heavily to begin with on Ce Pacitti and Nic Denyer for practical help and support and we reached out to the Readers in our three Deaneries for their thoughts and reactions. The response was so positive that we decided to start by holding a Readers' Meeting once every three months offering friendship, fellowship, training and development concerns, and upholding each other in our ministries. We started out with twelve readers and have committed to meeting at Hexham Abbey, at the kind invitation of the Rector, Revd. David Glover. After eighteen months we are now sixteen Readers in total.

We have a very relaxed and informal gathering, getting to know each other, finding out what is important as Readers, and supporting each other in fellowship and prayer. We invite a speaker, and have spent time listening to and discussing issues

with Ce Pacitti, Nic Denyer, and Revd. Martin Naylor. In addition to our quarterly meetings, in 2023 we organized an annual dinner at the Beaumont Hotel in Hexham, a Readers' Service of Celebration at St Andrew's Church, Bywell, and went on a two-night retreat to Ampleforth Abbey.

Already in 2024, we have had our annual dinner and much enjoyed meeting Bishop Mark and Revd. Stephen Tranter, DDOV, at our Reader Mini Conference. For our discussions we had prepared a working document of concerns raised over the last eighteen months, and possible ways forward. Our schedule for the rest of the year includes a visit to St Augustine's Church at Alston, a Readers' Service of Celebration at St John Lee, our annual Retreat, and annual dinner for January 2025.

We are excited about the future and what sharing God's love with everyone will mean for us.

It is a privilege to be invited to share our small local initiative with you all, and hope that you may also find ways of setting up networks to support and help each other fulfil all the challenging and varied ministries as Readers in the Newcastle Diocese. If we can help you in any way, please let us know, we are very happy to support you.

LAST WRITES

● GLORIA BRYANT IS A READER WITH PTO AT ST FRANCIS NEWCASTLE AND EDITOR OF THIS MAGAZINE.



was an age of triumph for the Christian Church, an international institution in which men could rise from obscurity to wield enormous power. It was, however, in Clark's words, an age of 'tugging' or of 'pulling everything to pieces.' He finds an example of this in Peter Abelard who in 1130 in Paris challenged the teaching of Anselm. Anselm taught that one must believe in order to understand, whereas Abelard said one must understand

Civilisation: A Personal View by Kenneth Clark. Where were the women?

It is not often that reading the TV schedules brings a smile to my face, but that is what happened recently when I discovered that Sir Kenneth Clark's series *Civilisation*, made in 1969, was to be re-run on BBC4. I remember watching *Civilisation* as a young history graduate. Then the first two episodes reminded me of my first year at university and tutorials on European history in the aftermath of the collapse of the Roman Empire in Western Europe. Watching the first two episodes again, now an old history graduate, has had much the same effect, and I am no less impressed by Clark's command of his subject and his fluency as a presenter. However, television has changed since the late sixties: Clark speaks with the cut glass accent, which was still *de rigueur* for TV presenters in the 1960s. Also, throughout he is dressed formally in three-piece suit and tie, even in the summer heat of Pisa or when climbing the incredibly dangerous steps up from the sea to Skellig Michael. However, more seriously, one cannot imagine that a series entitled *Civilisation* would be made for TV in the same way now. Though there are passing references to other parts of the world and their contribution to 'civilisation', Clark's focus is entirely on Europe, which, I suppose, is a reflection on his expertise (the sub-title of the book is 'A Personal View'). There is, however, another matter, specifically in episode two (entitled *The Great Thaw*), on which as an old history graduate, I am less impressed than I once was.

The *Great Thaw* focuses on the twelfth century, one of the three or four occasions in history, according to Clark, when humankind (mankind to him) made a great leap forward. The century witnessed 'a great outpouring of energy' with larger-than-life kings, philosophers, theologians, architects, and master masons. In France alone, numerous great churches and monasteries were built, including the great abbey at Cluny, where the first translation of the Qur'an from Arabic was made. The twelfth century

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before one could believe: for Abelard doubt and questioning led to truth. Abelard suffered for his boldness, though his banishment to a monastery had as much to do with his relationship with Eloise as with his unorthodox beliefs.

As one might expect, Clark draws particular attention to the leading figure of the twelfth century: Bernard of Clairvaux, a great reformer of the 12th century church. Bernard loathed the excessive ornamentation of the monastic chapel at Cluny (imitated by the builders of many other churches and Cathedrals throughout Europe). In the reformed Benedictine rule of his Cistercian monasteries, simplicity was the order of the day. Bernard of Clairvaux also preached the First Crusade and was co-founder of the Knights Templar. Clark's breadth and depth of knowledge is majestic, and he certainly explores the 'tugging' going on in the twelfth century in detail, but something is missing: where are the women? There are passing references to some, but a glaring omission in my view is Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard – prophetess, visionary, writer, poet, natural scientist, composer, campaigner for church reform, an early eco-warrior and proto-feminist, in whom there was clearly 'a



great outpouring of energy' and a willingness 'to pull everything to pieces.' Hildegard was born in 1098 in Bermesheim, near Mainz in Germany, the youngest of 10 children to parents who were minor nobility. At about 8 years of age, she was entrusted to the care of Jutta, the daughter of a nobleman who knew her father. When Hildegard was 14, she and Jutta entered the Benedictine monastery at Mount St Disibode on November 1 1112. The monastery was in the Celtic tradition, and housed both men and women in separate quarters. Jutta eventually became superior of the community of women, and Hildegard remained under Jutta's direction until Jutta's death in 1136. Hildegard then became superior, by which time the numbers of women in the monastery had increased. Hildegard decided to move her nuns to a new monastery near Bingen, which would be for women only.¹

Hildegard received three visions that urged her to write. The result was her first book, *Scivias*, or *Know the Ways*, which took her 10 years to write and which includes many paintings and ends with an opera! Her second work, *Book of the Rewards of Life*, focuses on morality and psychology. In her third visionary book, *Book of Divine Works*, she presents 10 visions devoted to creation and salvation, including an exegesis of the First Letter of John and Revelation. She also wrote books on medicine, which deal with the workings of the human body and the properties of various herbs. These books were not based on her visions but on observations she and others made. Her statements on the medicinal value of certain plants are still being investigated by modern researchers. She also wrote commentaries on the Rule of St Benedict and the Athanasian Creed, and a Commentary on the Gospels, along with 300 letters. She even invented her own language and wrote the first fully developed morality play. Matthew Fox has written: 'If Hildegard had been a man, she would be well known as one of the greatest artists and intellectuals the world has ever seen.'²

Hildegard courted controversy in matters theological, social, and political. She declared that redemption occurs through the incarnation, not just through the crucifixion. She constantly urged the papacy to pursue justice and wrote that popes surrounded themselves with corrupt men, four centuries before Martin Luther's protest sparked the Reformation. She condemned patriarchy in the Church and spoke of Christ and the "Word" as head of the Church, not the pope. She spoke out for women and the poor. Hildegard never hesitated to say what she thought needed to be said, or to do what she thought needed to be done, simply because she was a woman. When Pope or Holy Roman Emperor needed to be chastised, she chastised them, travelling the length and breadth

of the Holy Roman Empire at the age of sixty. However, she did not live in an age well-disposed towards women. It is somewhat surprising that she reached the age of 80 before she was placed under an interdict; this meant that she and all the nuns in her care were excommunicated and denied the sacraments. She won the argument with the archbishop of Mainz over the burial of a young man's body within the abbey grounds, but the interdict was lifted only six months before she died in 1179.

So, why did Kenneth Clark not give Hildegard even a mention? It would be easy to attribute the omission (and, also, that of Artemesia Gentileschi from the episode on the Renaissance) to misogyny. However, in 1969, women's history was in its infancy, and Clark was simply behaving like a man of his time, whilst being true to the ages he was discussing which also ignored women's achievements. St Bernard played a leading role in the reform of the 12th century church, reform that included an end to women deacons in the church in the West mainly due to a change in the definition of ordination. As Gary Macy has pointed out, for the first 1000 years a Christian was ordained to perform a specific ministry to answer a need in the community. In the 12th century ordination came to mean specifically the setting apart of certain individuals with the power to consecrate bread and wine. Ordination was confined to ministries that involved service at the altar and that ruled out women, in part because of their biology.³ It is worth noting, however, that Peter Abelard and Eloise always referred to Eloise as a deacon. Clark refers to St Bernard's devotion to Christ's mother - the cult of the Virgin, according to Clark, captured the minds of the faithful only from the 12th century, so that after the building of Chartres Cathedral, every great church in France was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Perhaps Bernard's promotion of the Virgin was in part his way of offering some consolation to women who would be marginalized for the next 800 years!



Hildegard and her nuns (Courtesy of Wikipedia: this image is in the public domain)

¹ The following books contain a wealth of information by Hildegard and about Hildegard: *Hildegard of Bingen: The Woman of Her Age* by Fiona Maddocks, Faber and Faber 2013 + *Selected Writings: Hildegard of Bingen* by Hildegard of Bingen and Oliver Davies, Penguin Classics 2001 + *Hildegard of Bingen: A Saint for Our Times* by Matthew Fox, Namaste Publishing 2012. ² *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen with commentary* by Matthew Fox, Bear and Company, 2003. ³ See *Women Deacons Past, Present, Future* by Gary Macy, William T Ditewig, Phyllis Zagano, Paulist Press 2012.

