

NEWCASTLE READER

ISSUE 24 Autumn/Winter 2024

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

Seeking.
Sharing.
Sending.



In this issue...

A REFLECTION FROM THE WARDEN OF READERS

'I still haven't found what I'm looking for...'

ALSO

JUST A SEC | READER NEWS - COMINGS AND GOINGS | THE ADVENT OLD TESTAMENT READINGS AT THE EUCHARIST IN THE YEAR OF LUKE | JOHN THE BAPTIST, A POEM | MINISTERING AT A DROP-IN CENTRE | AN INTERVIEW WITH CYNTHIA WOOD | LAST WRITES: HUMANKIND AND NATURE

Front cover: The Right Reverend Mark Wroe with the new Readers and their incumbents. From left to right: Revd Ian Hennerbry, Joe Lawrie, Revd Tim Sanderson, Alison Edwards, Fiona Boyd, Revd Simon White, Ian Beale, Father Paul Baker

Newcastle Reader: a magazine produced by Readers in the Diocese of Newcastle with the valued support of others, in prayer, partnership and peace.

DESIGN: Jon Alsancak

CONTENTS

3

EDITORIAL

4

THE WARDEN'S REFLECTION

5

JUST A SEC - FRANCES STRIDE

7

READER NEWS IN COMINGS AND GOINGS

11

THE ADVENT OLD TESTAMENT READINGS AT THE EUCHARIST IN THE YEAR OF LUKE – CANON RICHARD BRYANT

13

JOHN THE BAPTIST, A POEM – HILARY ELDER

14

MINISTERING AT A DROP-IN CENTRE – PAT BOND

16

AN INTERVIEW WITH CYNTHIA WOOD – MARJORIE WOOD

18

LAST WRITES: HUMANKIND AND NATURE - GLORIA BRYANT

EDITORIAL

Greetings from the Communications Group. We are:



Gloria Bryant,
Editor and
Chair



**Louisa
Fox**



**Olwyn
Black**



**Gwyn
McKenzie**

Greetings from the Communications Group. Gloria Bryant, Olwyn Black, Gwyn McKenzie, Louisa Fox and Frances Stride (ex officio) remain as members, and we are delighted to welcome to the group Annie Newlands and Joseph Lawrie. We are sorry to have lost Chris Hudson, who has retired from Readership due to ill health. We thank him for the significant contribution he has made over the years and wish him and his family every blessing.

In Issue 24 we hear from the Warden, who invites us to join in a 'Year of Seeking' as the diocese turns outwards in mission. We hear from the Secretary about the importance of resting. We have included a commentary on the Advent Old Testament readings at the Eucharist in Year C, which may be helpful for those of us who find ourselves preaching during the season. There is much else, including plentiful news about Readers. We hope that there is something of interest for all our Readers and readers.

The communications group met in July to do some planning for this issue and some forward planning for the next, which will be distributed in spring 2025. Some articles have already been commissioned; however, if you have something you would like us to print, please, as usual, send

it to me at gcadman054@gmail.com or contact another member of the group. We continue to be grateful to all who make this magazine possible: for the support of Bishop Helen-Ann and our Warden Bishop Mark, for the work of our designer Jon Alsancak, for the assistance of staff at Church House and of printnortheast.

Finally, some important information. Should you wish to contact the Warden, please do so via his PA at elenarose.crawford@newcastle.org During Bishop Marks's sabbatical, you may also contact the Revd Stephen Tranter at DDO@newcastle.anglican.org Should you wish to contact the Secretary, please use the following email address: newcastle.diocese@cofeportal.org

N.B. The Annual Meeting and Licensing will take place on

18th October 2025
10th October 2026
9th October 2027

Gloria Bryant, Editor

A REFLECTION FROM THE WARDEN OF READERS

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



'I still haven't found what I'm looking for...'

You may be familiar with these lyrics from U2's 1980s rock anthem, belted out by Irish Rock Star Bono. 'I still haven't found what I'm looking for...' Thinking back, it was all about a dissatisfaction with the way things were in the world: poverty and injustice, greed and materialism, and perhaps the slowly dawning realisation that the rockstar lifestyle wasn't providing all the answers. At the time there was some mild controversy that a Christian might sing about dissatisfaction, because surely, we have found what we need in our faith! Today, we can still sing, 'I still haven't found what I'm looking for...' The issues and challenges haven't gone away, more likely they have grown exponentially. Yet I fear that in response we may not be looking as hard as we once did.

I hope you know that as a diocese we are beginning to engage in a 'Year of Seeking' as part of seeking, sharing, sending and our diocesan invitation to turn outwards in mission. This 'Year of Seeking' recognises that we still haven't found what we're looking for as we follow Jesus' command to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6.33). At the heart of the 'Year of Seeking' we are being invited to share together in prayer that helps us notice where God is working and to celebrate and amplify what we notice along the way. Rather than to focus on what we think we 'should' be doing, it is an invitation to turn together regularly in prayer to discern where God is working in our midst and to continue to seek to clarify the signs of God's kingdom and how we might join in.

My hope is that as Readers in the diocese you might join in this 'Year of Seeking' and see this as part of the vocation 'to help the whole Church to participate in God's mission to the world.' Supporting individuals, parishes, chaplaincies, deaneries to take time to notice where the Spirit

is at work, to discern where new life might be emerging, to look out for signs of hope, and to recognise where the good news is transforming lives. We may be dissatisfied with many things in life or ministry, but I hope they won't mask our holy dissatisfaction that the world is not as God intended. Because our dissatisfaction is a good thing when it leads to change, to growth and to new understanding, when it is a yearning for the peace which the world cannot give. We are called to join in God's work of reconciliation by loving service and hopeful witness to Jesus Christ and by seeking his kingdom in us and among us.

The rich young man who encounters Jesus in the gospels still hasn't found what he's looking for despite youth, wealth, and keeping the rules. 'You lack one thing...' Jesus says to him (Mark 10.21). What might we need to give up, may be including our dissatisfactions, for the sake of knowing the peace that passes all understanding. The parables of buried treasure and the pearl of great price (Matthew 13.44-46) all suggest something must be given up in our seeking of God's kingdom. How will we pray for and serve our congregations in their discipleship and seeking of the kingdom? How will we model that to them in our own ministry and mission?

'We still haven't found what we're looking for...' Not just a 1980s' rock anthem but also our searching prayer for ourselves and for our 'Year of Seeking' as we help the whole Church to participate in God's mission of reconciliation to a world in desperate need of his justice and peace.

Please also use this Collect for the Year of Seeking, and encourage others in praying it too:

**Almighty God,
in your Son, Jesus Christ, you meet us
and call us to seek your kingdom above all else:
grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit,
we may be sustained and strengthened in our
common task of seeking your will and your way;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.**

JUST A SEC

FRANCES STRIDE IS A READER
AT HEXHAM ABBEY



In September a group of us from the West Northumberland Readers Group went on a local one-day retreat, which happened somehow to coincide with the start of the National Retreat Week - renew:all 21-28 September [www.renewall.org.uk].

We used their DIY retreat resources to help us set aside all the busyness of life to simply be in God's presence. Our focus being on encountering God through scripture, music, and prayer - ideally as a group, but also allowing time for individual reflection too.

Our day was based around Paul's Epistle to the Romans 12:2-13:

² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (NRSVUE)

So how can we do this? One way which comes to mind is through resting. As Christians we should be the most rested individuals on earth. Jesus said, 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30, NRSVUE).

Rest? Is that something that we truly possess as Readers? Or do we run around always in a hurry but never finding our destination. We may say, "I can't rest" but we cannot afford not to find rest. Jesus demonstrated this in his own life. In Mark's gospel (Mark 6:30-31 NRSVUE), after Jesus had sent the apostles out into the community to preach and to heal people, Mark tells us:

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

This was an exciting time! The apostles had been out in villages, talking to people, and surely they had a lot of stories to share with each other - who they had talked with and who were willing to listen to them. And they had cast out demons, and healed people! Then Jesus said, "Come away by yourselves and rest awhile" Surely, at least one apostle must have said, "Jesus, we can't stop now. Lots of good things are happening. We need to keep the momentum going. Let's keep on doing what we've been doing." But Jesus knew they needed to rest. He wasn't telling them to stop working but he knew that before they continued to do any more work, they needed to rest.

It's worth us noting that God didn't say, "Don't work on the Sabbath". He said to "rest" on the Sabbath.



There are lessons here that we need to learn from Jesus calling his apostles away to rest. He is not against work, but against work consuming our lives, against finding our significance and self-worth in our work, filling our lives so full of work that we don't have time for him or for other people. He is against us working so hard and so long that we wear ourselves out physically, emotionally and spiritually.

It's worth us noting that God didn't say, "Don't work on the Sabbath". He said to "rest" on the Sabbath. There are many of us, myself included, who need to learn the importance of rest. Busyness has become the hallmark of our modern world. We neglect our mental, physical and spiritual health all in the name of getting more done. But, we will never accomplish enough or accumulate enough to feel satisfied, we will only become more tired. It's not wrong to work hard, or to achieve great things. It's wrong to allow our work to become all-consuming. Being caught up in working harder and harder, to achieve more and more, only takes us further and further away from God.

Henri Nouwen, the Dutch theologian and writer, often made the point that there are three movements to the spiritual life:

**first solitude,
then community,
and then service or ministry**

He based this on Jesus' practice in Luke 6, where Jesus first went up on the mountain to pray. Then after that (v13-16), he formed a community of followers. And then, (v17-19), he went out into society to serve others. Nouwen says that all three of these stages or movements need to appear in the life of a Christian, in that same order. Jesus spent the night in solitude with God. In the morning, he gathered his apostles around him and formed community. In the afternoon, with his apostles, he went out and preached the Word and healed the sick. The night is for solitude; the morning for community; the afternoon for ministry.

This helps to put things in the proper perspective. Our culture glorifies a 24/7 kind of life. Going and doing are what's important; resting, not so much. But, the evening comes before the morning. And so we rest. Not to be lazy, not to avoid the work that God has called us to do, but to better prepare ourselves for that work. If we choose to neglect that rest, we may never be able to accomplish all that God intends for us to do.

COMINGS AND GOINGS.

CONGRATULATIONS AND A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW READERS

CONGRATULATIONS AND A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW READERS

FIONA BOYD

(The Benefice of Morpeth)

NICK BEALE

(The Parish of St Nicholas Gosforth)

ALISON EDWARDS

(The Parish of Holy Trinity Jesmond)

JOSEPH LAWRIE

(The Benefice of Bedlington, Camois and Sleekburn)

The above were licensed by the right Reverend Mark Wroe, Bishop Berwick and Warden of Readers, on 12th October 2024 at the Cathedral Church of St Nicholas

OTHER NEWS

At the Annual Meeting, held on Saturday 12th October 2024, the following announcements were made:

Bishop Helen-Ann has granted Chris Bryars, Vic Spong and Chris Sayers the title of Emeritus.

Chris Hudson and Maureen Bushnell have retired due to illness.

Bishop Helen-Ann has granted Permission to Officiate to Jane Clark.

Julie Barham has been licensed to the Diocese of Newcastle and is serving as a Reader at Hexham Abbey. We welcome her from the Diocese of Derby.

Several anniversaries were noted:

Chris Sayers 45 years,

Pat Bond and Jennifer Brown 35 years

Julie Barham, Anne Horne and Andy Lie 30 years

Paul Kidd, Stephen McCormack and Barry Stewart 25 years

Dorothy Dryden, Carol Field, and Jan Porter 20 years

Val Cowan and Lynne Craggs 15 years

Sara Bedwell, Pat Bragg, Janet Hedley and Phil Rowett 10 years

MANY CONGRATULATIONS TO THEM ALL.

Special mention was made of Mari Mander (37 years), David Carey (21 Years) and Sarah Mitchell (46 years)



IN MEMORIAM:

Since the 2023 Annual Meeting, four of our Readers have died:

Derek Burton, Bill Callaghan, Cynthia Wood (all Emeritus) and Josephine Kulke (Reader with PTO). Details about Derek, Bill and Josephine were included in the previous edition of the magazine. Cynthia was one of the first women to become a Reader in the Diocese of Newcastle (see page 16 & 17 where an edited

version of an interview with Cynthia in Newcastle Reader, edition 16, 2020, has been reprinted.) Cynthia, surrounded by family, died on 17th September 2024 after a short illness, aged 99 years. Her funeral was held at St James Parish Church, Riding Mill.

May Bill, Cynthia, Derek and Josephine rest in peace and rise in glory. AMEN.

NEWCASTLE'S NEW READERS INTRODUCE THEMSELVES



NICK BEALE

Hi, my name is Nick and I am a newly licensed Reader serving in Gosforth Parish Church of St Nicholas. Originally from London I have spent much of my adult life in Newcastle where I am married to Kathryn who works in the bishop's office. I have three children, one in teacher training, one at university and one just started in the sixth form. In my day job I work as an adviser to the quarrying industry.

I have been a committed Anglican all my life. Over time I started serving in my church, as a crucifer, intercessor and communion assistant. I felt God's call to take things further and to become a full member of the lay ministry team. Little did I know how exhausting Reader training would be!

During my training I spent time with the Willington team of parishes in a very different social context to my home suburb. There I saw practical mission in action, helping those who have been marginalised and saw a template that I want to bring to Gosforth – a place more economically mixed than is generally imagined. I enjoy

“

I have been a committed Anglican all my life. Over time I started serving in my church, as a crucifer, intercessor and communion assistant. ”

”

preaching and leading evening groups and want to drive our church's mission to help all in need and to live the life that Jesus taught us. I don't know what I will achieve but I am here and will serve wherever that may lead.



ALISON EDWARDS

My name is Alison and I am a newly licensed Reader serving in Holy Trinity Jesmond. I was brought up on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, leaving the island in 1983 to train as a Physiotherapist in Edinburgh.

I moved to Newcastle in 1986 to take up a job at the Freeman Hospital, thinking I would stay for a couple of years and then move back north. Thirty-six years later, I'm still here! I am married to Jonathan and have two grown up sons who live in London.

Currently, I work as part of the Staff Team at Holy Trinity in Jesmond. My initial role was Administrator but over time, I found myself helping to plan and lead services, occasionally preaching, as well as helping deliver Lent courses and various missional and outreach events. Perhaps it is my Baptist roots, but I have always been passionate about lay ministry.

I believe, that as the people of God, we each have a role to play in building God's kingdom. We are all called to reflect God's kingdom values and to bear witness to the good news of the gospel in our networks and communities, living out our faith in our everyday lives. Holy Trinity has always been a church that celebrates and encourages different ministries and I am so grateful for the opportunity I have had to develop my gifts and explore my calling.

During lockdown, I began to sense a desire to formalise and consolidate this calling. This led me to embark on a three-year course at Lindisfarne College of Theology to train as a Reader. The course was demanding, but I loved being part of the Lindisfarne community, and I have learned so much during my time there. I now looking forward to putting some of that learning into practice by encouraging others to develop their gifts and calling. I am excited to discern, along with my church family, what God might have in store for us next.



JOSEPH LAWRIE

As I become a licensed Reader/LLM I have been asked to describe myself. Well, my name is Joseph (Lawrie). I am to serve in the benefice of Bedlington St Cuthbert's, Sleekburn St John's and Cambois St Andrew's

Bedlington has been my home since a small child, my mother's family are from the town and aside from a short 5-year stint in Brunei in the early 80s I have lived in the area my whole life. I married my wonderful and supportive wife Claire during the Covid Pandemic after we met at church. Sadly, we have never been blessed with children but find comfort in the work we are able to do to help in our community.

Unlike many Readers I am a relatively recent church attendee. Though when I look back and reflect, I realise this was because God was preparing me for ministry several years before I went to church regularly. Once I did start going to church, I quickly became confirmed, began reading the scriptures and leading intercessions in church, was a Crucifer and then became a Churchwarden. Through all of this I felt that I was being called further than this and eventually, after a year of reflection and prayer, plucked the courage to speak to my Incumbent Ian about becoming a Reader.

I am not really sure where my calling is taking me overall, but I do feel that there is a strong calling towards a more pastoral ministry. To that end, I already have taken up voluntary chaplaincy at the Wansbeck hospital with the Northumbria NHS trust. Doing so during Reader training really helped with becoming a Reader/LLM and I have and will continue to volunteer in hospital as I can really see the benefits it has on people, even those of little or no faith.

“ Unlike many Readers I am a relatively recent church attendee. Though when I look back and reflect, I realise this was because God was preparing me for ministry several years before I went to church regularly. ”

PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE ADVENT OLD TESTAMENT READINGS AT THE EUCHARIST IN THE YEAR OF LUKE



REVD CANON RICHARD BRYANT IS A RETIRED PRIEST AND FORMER TUTOR AND DIRECTOR OF STUDIES WITH LINDISFARNE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

Only the reading for Advent 4 is associated readily with Christmas, Mic 5:2-5a. Mal 3:1-4 fits with a focus on John the Baptist on Advent 2, but the other two, Jer 33:14-16 and Zeph 3:14-end do not stand out as obvious Advent readings.

Nevertheless, the four selections embrace the range of prophetic contexts, from the 8th century BCE with Micah through the 6th with Jeremiah and Zephaniah, and into the 5th- 4th centuries BCE with Malachi. I have drawn attention to matters of historical and theological significance, but always with a mind towards how these selections may be helpful in our preaching.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

This passage is unusual in that it is part of one of two sections of the book which do not appear in the Septuagint, leading some commentators to speculate that it was composed very late, ie after the Septuagint was written in the 3rd century BCE. This is not necessarily the case, and it forms an integral part of ch 33, expanding on the promise issued already at 23:5-6.

Ch 23 functioned as a rehearsal for the later treatment of the restoration, which the prophet foresaw for the people of Judah and Israel, similar to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones and its aftermath in Ezek 37. In spite of personal provocations and national disasters, Jeremiah urges the people to pray for their oppressors in Babylon (ch 29) and then assures them again that fortunes will be restored in chs 30-33. These chapters, known as the Book of Consolation, include the evocative passage on the new covenant (31:31-36), which forms an inclusio with 33:19-26, thus binding together chs 32 and 33. In ch 32 Jeremiah determined to buy property in his home town of Anathoth, and in ch 33 he builds on that statement of trust by describing the new age of prosperity and security.

33:14 establishes, by way of an oracle, that the LORD will fulfil his promise to the people of Israel and Judah, and 33:15 highlights the shoot from the line of David who will be the agent of this new era. He will rule with justice and righteousness, as, with a small variation from, 23:5. 33:16 claims, with a parallelism we associate with Hebrew poetry,

that Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. As a result, the city will be given the title which at 23:6 belonged to the LORD, the LORD our righteousness.

Both 23:5-6 and 33:14-16 are mistaken in thinking that a new Davidic king would arise, although the later governor, Zerubbabel, did have Davidic blood in him. Christians associate the righteousness and justice mentioned here with Jesus. However, Jesus was not a king, in the conventional sense, and Jeremiah was writing for the people of his time, not some unspecified period in the future. Better, to note the passage's commitment to the vision of a new age, eked out of the political and international pains and turmoils of the time, through the LORD's compassion and forgiveness.

Malachi 3:1-4

The name 'Malachi' means 'my messenger/angel', which is the term used at 1:1, 3:1. The actual identity of the messenger is open to interpretation: it might be the prophet himself, a representative of the prophetic line, an idealised prophet, a periphrasis for the LORD, Elijah (as in 4:5). Whoever it is, the messenger seems particularly exercised by the behaviour of the priests, although the book is critical at times of the people as a whole, eg 3:5. It is difficult to date the book with certainty, but thematic links with Ezra-Nehemiah and use of loan words from Persia (eg 'governor' at 1:8) suggest a post-exilic date, with some commentators opting for a 6th century BCE and some a 5th century BCE date. Commentators have also noted the rare expression at the book's introduction: An oracle, the word of the LORD to Israel by the hand of Malachi is strikingly similar to the introduction to the two sections which conclude the book of Zechariah (Zech 9:1, 12:1).

3:1-4 is actually part of the section 2:17-3:5, which functions as a way of responding to the denunciation of Israel's faithlessness at 2:10-16. 3:1-4 illustrate the LORD's response to claims of his injustice at 2:17, and 3:5 serves as a warning not to rest complacently on the declaration of divine grace in 3:1-4. At 3:1 the LORD promises that he and his messenger (is this two persons or one?) will come to the temple, and 3:2-4 clarify that the impurities, which have polluted the priests'

offerings and the people's lives in chs 1-2, will now be cleansed, and offerings will once again be pleasing to the LORD. The notion of pleasure at both 3:1 and 3:4 may be worth considering homiletically, especially in the light of Ps 16:11. The links between 3:1-4 and Is 40:3-5 would also be worth exploring.

Other sidelines include, first, the reference to covenant in connection with the messenger: is this the covenant of Sinai, the covenant with Levi at 2:10 or the new covenant mentioned at Jer 31:31? Secondly, the word translated 'endure' at 3:2 comes from the Hebrew word *cool*, from whose participle (*calcool*) we get our word 'calculate'. Thirdly, fire is often associated with the LORD's presence, as at Ex 3:2, Mic 1:4, Nah 1:6.

The Synoptic evangelists will make particular play with Mal 3-4 in highlighting the ministry of John the Baptist and his relationship to the coming of Jesus.

Zephaniah 3:14-end

This song is a bit of a turn-up after the unrelieved judgments of the preceding two and a half chapters. Westermann calls it one of the 'eschatological Songs of Praise', alongside passages such as Is 12:4-6, 52:9-10, Jer 20:13, 31:7, Joel 2:21, Zech 9:9-10, and some have questioned whether it could have been part of the original text, because it is so different from what has preceded it. We have no way of knowing, with confidence, and judgments sit beside paeans of hope in other prophetic writings, so why not in Zephaniah? This may be a fruitful line of enquiry for preachers: how do we hold together two very different views of the world, and how can we be both critical and hopeful? From 1:1 we can see that the book is set in the time of Josiah (640-609 BCE), though whether it was written in those years or a little or much later is another matter. The name means 'Yahweh is hiding', but it can also mean 'Zaphon is Yahweh' (Zaphon being a Canaanite deity associated with the north of Israel). Commentators link the book with his contemporary prophets, Nahum and Jeremiah.

The song's form is that of an enthronement song, and it may have been used liturgically in the Autumn, to proclaim the kingship of Israel's God. Twice (3:19, 20) the LORD assures Judah and Jerusalem that he would give them 'a praise and a name' ('praise and renown' in the NRSV), which is perhaps the inspiration for Is 56:5, in which the prophet promises to give to eunuchs of faith 'a monument and a name' (in Hebrew *yad vashem*, which is the name of the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem). The song celebrates the redemptive grace of the LORD, who will save the outcasts and the shamed.

In v 17 the NRSV has the LORD 'renewing you in his love', which is the Septuagint reading, made possible by changing the Hebrew 'r' into a 'd',

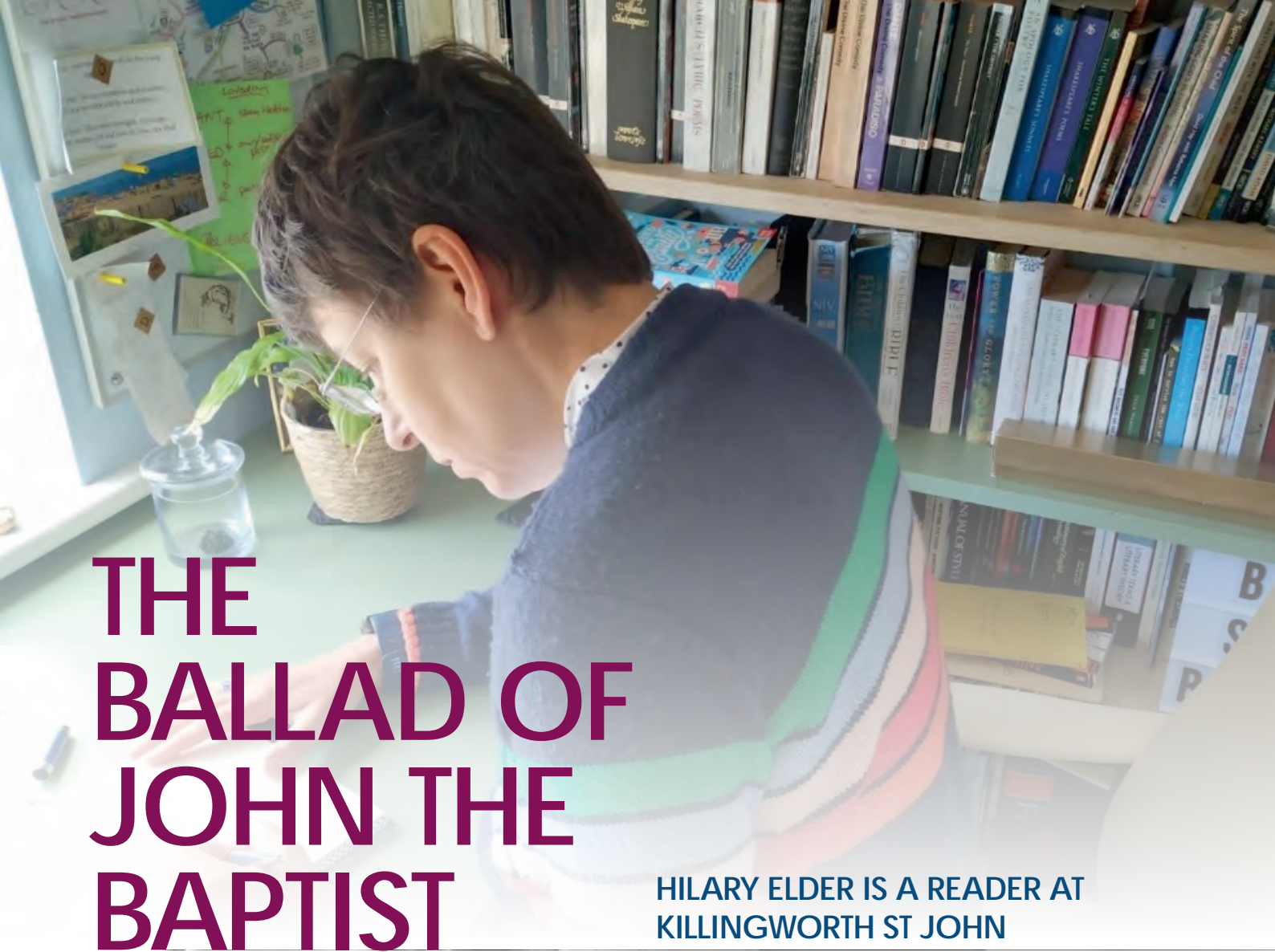
which are very similar in shape. Another possibility is to invert the first two consonants of the Hebrew word, so that it will mean 'overflow' rather than 'engrave' or 'be silent'! I mention this, because it is typical of the Greek translators and later scribes, when they came across words or phrases which mystified them. In v 18 the prophet plays on a verb which he had used at 1:2: in the earlier verse the prophet announces the LORD's intention to sweep everything from the face of the earth, but at 3:18 he will sweep away all who had been harassing Judah. This incidence makes an evocative and positive bookend.

Micah 5:2-5a

With this passage and its timing, on Advent 4, we come close to Christmas, and I will explore Mt 2:6's citation of it below. Micah's name means: 'Who is like the LORD?'. His prophecies are set in the 2nd half of the 8th century BCE, roughly contemporaneous with Amos and Isaiah. There is some evidence of post-exilic editing, but there is also a consistent thread of judgment and hope. The book as a whole is best read through the lens of its division into prophecies of judgment (chs 1-3), of hope (4-5) and of judgment and hope juxtaposed (6-7). The prophet himself has laid down his own markers, as 1:2, 3:1, 6:1 all begin with the same summons 'Listen'.

Although the selected passage begins at 5:2, we make best sense of it by starting with 5:1, which sets the prophecy within the context of Judah's current sorry plight. The prophecy then offers hope into this perilous experience. There are links here with Is 7:14, in that in both passages a woman is to give birth to a ruler, who will offer the prospect of liberation from the oppressor. In our passage the new-born child is to be called 'one who is to rule': intriguingly, the Hebrew participle used here, *mosheyl*, can also mean 'one who speaks in parables and riddles'!

From a Christian perspective, the importance of the passage lies in its appearance at Mt 2:6, but Matthew has altered the verse, even from its Septuagint form, so that it reads: 'And you, Bethlehem, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah'. While Matthew has negated the original Hebrew and Greek texts, his meaning is the same: both he and Micah are trying to affirm the importance of Bethlehem, Micah by stressing its apparent insignificance and Matthew its prowess.



THE BALLAD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

HILARY ELDER IS A READER AT
KILLINGWORTH ST JOHN

'Bloody hell!' I told them, 'Bloody,
'Fiery hell, with leaping tongues
'And deep red rivers bubbling fast,
'And red steam rising, blanching with
'The white-hot butchering knives of flame
'Which will ever be hot and never burn out:
'This is what you can't escape,
'You vile and hopeless wrongdoers,
'You weeping, purple sores – unless you
'Repent! Repent! And be baptized.

'Repent! And be baptized today!
'Be born to life and die to sin!
'Too late tomorrow, too late tonight!
'Be baptized now – unless you crave
'Burning and bleeding without rest
'In the Lord's unquenchable bonfire!' I
said, and many came.

But some
Were yellow-livered hypocrites,
And so, I told them, 'One is coming
'After me, but soon, who will
'Look into you like knife cuts flesh –

'All instantly exposed; those who
'He sees are good he'll gather up
'Into his barn – the cankerous,
'However, he'll fling from himself
'Into the fastness of the bonfire,
'Always hotter; never spent.'

Just as I spoke, he cussed the hill.
'Now you will see!' I shouted, thrown
Down onto the ground, 'Here is the one
'Who is to judge us all, and now
'The time is come, and we shall see
'The blood and flames.'

He came to me
And cupped my chin, lifted my head.
I looked into his face; he was
So bright; such fearsome gentleness,
Such terrible compassion shone
Out of him and assaulted me,
I feared to look, but could not turn.

What is this monster you have made, Lord?
What is this new life I've been birthed to?

ASYLUM AND MIGRATION – HOT TOPICS

PAT BOND IS A VOLUNTEER WITH 'NEW TO UK', A DROP-IN FOR THOSE WHO HAVE COME TO THIS COUNTRY FROM ANOTHER, AND A READER WITH PTO AT ST PAUL'S WHITLEY BAY



“We don’t feel valuable here.” This comment has stuck in my memory for 50 years. It was made by a schoolgirl who was one of the many Asians who had been expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin.

Her family found themselves in a tenement flat in Glasgow, experiencing a lifestyle very different from the successful and affluent one they had left in Uganda. She was probably my first encounter with a refugee, although my family had had long connections with people whose origins were in countries whose cultures were different from my own. My grandmother was born of missionary parents in India, and I and other relatives have lived and worked abroad.

Valuing the person we meet.

So how does a Christian value someone who finds themselves embedded, willingly or otherwise, in an alien culture or country? What is equality and diversity all about? We all have to go on courses about it (though Myra Khan¹ is one who points out that working with diversity is misleading – we should be aware of working within diversity – a stance which recognises that diversity does not reside solely in the other, but in ourselves too). Many asylum seekers have fled from oppressive regimes. Fostering anti-oppressive attitudes in the British Christian community is a must.

The Bible's values, albeit diminishing in influence, have historically shaped much of the British legal system. They include treating the alien and the

stranger, the poor and the sick with fairness and generosity, reminding us that our blessings all come from God's grace so there is no room for feeling superior. Accordingly, the response of many British people to those in any kind of need – not just those in the asylum system - is one of tolerance, generosity and care. As a nation we are well renowned for charitable work, and Britain actually has a better reputation for welcoming asylum seekers than some places. However, economic pressures have increased criticism of perceived generosity to 'foreigners' who are 'prioritised for getting stuff we want – housing, jobs etc'. Even in the past year we have seen and heard increasingly negative comments about migrants and asylum seekers and even hideous examples of violence. Much of the hype is not actually true but how many people check the facts, or better still actually meet asylum seekers and talk with them?

Meeting and listening to the 'alien and the stranger'

'Myth Busters' – a small leaflet which scotched disinformation seekers was at one time distributed by those of us who were involved in supporting asylum seekers. It covered beliefs such as 'net migration figures represent hordes of asylum seekers flooding Britain' (abuse of statistics – asylum seekers account for only 7% of immigration²), provision of leather jackets and mobile phones by the State (false), 'taking our jobs' (asylum seekers are not been permitted to work, though recent shortage occupations have


opened the door to a few), getting preference for housing (I know someone who resorted to sleeping in a phone box when he fell between cracks in the system, just as can happen to British people who find themselves homeless), and 'should be sent home' (to imprisonment, torture, death or destitution?)

One common myth, often encouraged by the media, is that being an asylum seeker makes a person 'illegal'. Absolutely untrue, under international law. Allied to this myth is that asylum seekers are all economic migrants. Some are, but most of the ones I meet – and I have met many – are not. Like the Ugandan Asian girl, many individuals and families have had a far better lifestyle than they can expect here. Meet my friend who is a businessman, an army officer, a dentist, a successful farmer, a vet, a teacher, a quantity surveyor, a sculptor, a musician, an IT consultant, a shepherd, a printer, a chef, an engineer, a writer. Many must spend years in this country before they have sufficient language or local qualifications to resume their careers, if ever.

Another accusation that is heard is that in order to be granted asylum, people lie. Undoubtedly some do, but do we not hear the same accusation about some British people claiming benefits? Of course, there are bad apples – we live in a fallen world, and Christians are called to uphold justice, just as long as it is real justice, not pre-judice.

Vulnerability

All of us as Readers have to renew our safeguarding leadership training regularly, and the current training emphasises recognition of vulnerabilities which are not always the first issues people think of. While safeguarding is vital, keeping people safe is only part of it. Another element is enabling people who are vulnerable in whichever way, to achieve their God-given potential. I remember a friend in my church in Liverpool. She was a highly skilled computer programmer and wheelchair user. The latter was obvious and she moved to our church after she had suffered too much from the kindly meant but very patronising 'does (s/he) take sugar' fussy focus on her disability in another church. She said with enthusiasm one day "Here in this church, everyone has a peculiarity – not just me! I feel so much better!" I give God thanks that it seems we were doing something right. I believe that we need to resist the temptation to dive in and decide for asylum seekers which of their vulnerabilities we can fix for them. Better by far is that we get to know what they might be finding difficult about their situation, and invite them to consider ways in which they or we together



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might enhance their autonomy, self-respect, and enable them to recover some of that sense of value of which they had been robbed. There is sometimes nothing we CAN do, such as influence the incredibly long waits (often years) for a Home Office decision on their claims. That is one of the biggest challenges to our own need to feel useful.

The project I have been involved in for the past 13 years or so, "New to the UK", is under the umbrella of Churches Together in North Shields and thus overtly committed to a Christian ethos. Out of respect we do not aim to be proactively evangelistic, though will answer questions if asked. We have an understanding that many asylum seekers are near the start of a journey to recover from profound trauma, and are not helped by pressures to change their beliefs until God draws them to seek. So, our purpose is just to welcome, befriend, signpost where knowledge of specialist local facilities is needed and help in ways that we can, as long as it does not diminish the capabilities of those helped.

Most of the volunteers would say that we gain far more than we give to the project users. Most of us are beyond the age to do a great deal of travelling, so how wonderful it is meeting people from many corners of the globe, make friends (often involving tasting food from their countries!), laughing and crying together in recognising our shared humanity. It is all about love really, isn't it?

¹ Myira Khan (2023) Working Within Diversity: A Reflective Guide to Anti-Oppressive Practice in Counselling and Therapy. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

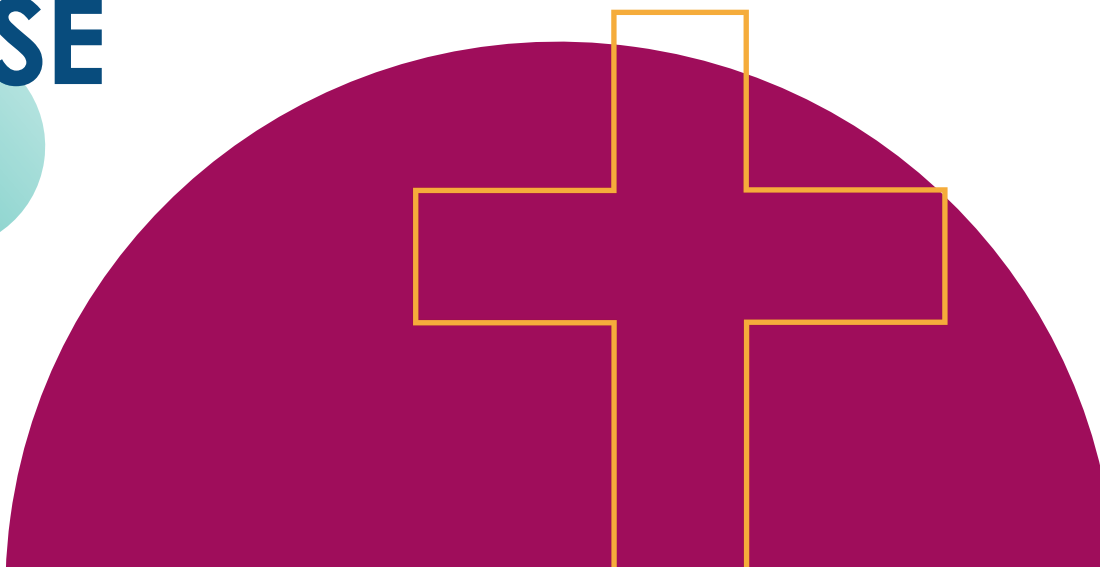
² <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migration-to-the-uk-asylum/>

Following the death of Cynthia Wood, a group of Readers who knew Cynthia asked the editor to reprint what was first printed in Newcastle Reader in 2020. Below is an extract from the piece which looked, by means of a conversation with Cynthia, at two of the first women Readers in Newcastle Diocese (the other was the late Margaret Temple) and considered how male Readers reacted to the change. Present during the conversation were Canon Ron Black, Olwyn Black and Marjorie Wood. Marjorie wrote what is below.



A YEAR TO CELEBRATE 50 YEARS

OF WOMEN BEING READERS IN NEWCASTLE DIOCESE



In 2019, we celebrated 50 years of women being licensed as Readers. Amongst the first of many women to be licensed were Margaret Temple, Esther Hamilton, Cynthia Wood and Mary Gill (who later became ordained).

With the exception of Cynthia all are now deceased. Cynthia had readily agreed to answer questions about her long and fulfilling years as a Reader. Together with Olwyn and Ron Black we spent an enthralling two hours hearing Cynthia's experiences of being a Reader. Cynthia lives alone in Riding Mill, with her cat Sheba.

For those who have never encountered Cynthia, expect to be entertained by a 93- year- old. She is modest about her ministry, has a very sharp mind and a ready sense of humour. When asked when she first felt called to Reader ministry, Cynthia told us that, although she already was deeply involved in the life of the church at St Peter's Bywell and St John's Stocksfield, as a Sunday School teacher, Churchwarden, later on Deanery Synod and eventually on Diocesan Synod, it was her vicar who suggested her going forward for Reader training. This was in the 1970s.

Several times during our conversations, with Cynthia, she continually emphasised the importance of the empowerment of the laity and that it is as important now as it was when she first began her training. Referring to Reader ministry she stated "We should be a bridge between the laity and the clergy". Cynthia had also resisted the idea of ordination, believing that her role was the encouragement of the laity. Cynthia felt that people were more inclined to respond to those believers in the pew, rather than those in Holy Orders. She emphatically stated "I believe in Christianity not Churchianity"! Asked how she felt when preaching her first sermon the response was "B.....y terrified"! But Cynthia modestly acknowledged "the Vicar was very encouraging". Asked if she had ever experienced any opposition to being a woman Reader, she only ever had had one woman who refused to take the reserved sacrament from her hand.

Cynthia went on to share other views: Academic people were not necessarily good communicators; she felt that women were more spiritual than men, men having difficulty in believing in anything that can't be proved! The female psyche was much more spiritual than that of the male. Today Cynthia felt that there was an increasing bias towards women. Perhaps the pendulum had swung too far the other way.

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We should be a bridge between the laity and the clergy

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During her years of ministry as a Reader, Cynthia had experienced five interregna, one scandal and one heart attack and funerals too many to mention! However, Cynthia believes that the struggle still goes on. The challenge of the Church today is the absence of young people in many churches. "We have to make the Church somewhere where all people feel welcome". Perhaps one of Cynthia's greatest assets is her voice. This is not the voice of a tremulous old lady; this is the voice of a resolute lady with valuable opinions and many years of experience. Yes, she acknowledges wisdom can come with old age. But she also acknowledged she is not always right! Cynthia had once given up for Lent 'Being always right' - she admitted she found this very difficult! Yet another facet to Cynthia's character is her resolute belief in meditation, beginning with the emptying and stilling of the mind. Asked where she thought Readers Ministry was today the response was, "The Church was trying to make Reader Ministry into minor clergy instead of empowering lay people".

Thank you, Cynthia, for giving us the time to have these conversations with you - and thank you Tom for giving us an insight into the late Margaret Temple's ministry. Bishop Martyn wrote 'the origin of the word amateur lies in the Latin verb 'to love'. What a fitting label to all Readers male and female - amateurs - literally one who loves what they're doing.

MARJORIE WOOD IS A READER EMERITUS.

LAST WRITES



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

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'¹

I wrote Last Writes following the feast day of St Francis and a holiday in Central Scotland. As for St Francis, when one thinks about his life, it is impossible not to wonder at his empathy with the natural world and his understanding of animals and birds. As for the area we recently visited in Scotland, it was impossible to be unmoved by the magnificence of the natural world: the early autumn breathtaking beauty of lochs and trees and mountain tops. I took two recently-published books to Scotland: **The Story of Nature by Jeremy Mynott** and **Raising Hare by Chloe Dalton**² Both books have made me think deeply about the natural world. Most British people, and indeed most people who live in the developed world, live in urban environments. Our contact with wildlife, if we are lucky, is limited to seeing the common garden birds and insects that visit or live in our gardens. Sadly, British builders nowadays tend to make the gardens in their new housing estates ever smaller. Also, little is done to prevent the occupants of these estates from concreting or paving over their gardens, the focus being on creating a leisure facility rather than a space to support nature. It seems to me misguided that the new Labour government has expressed its intention to build on the green belt.

Mynott's book covers the story of human involvement with nature from prehistoric times to the present and deals with the work of naturalists and the thoughts of philosophers from Aristotle to Nietzsche. In the first chapter, Mynott, who is a

classicist, philosopher and naturalist, argues that in prehistoric times humans regarded themselves as part of nature, not above or outside it. That changed during the first agricultural revolution when humankind ceased being hunter-gatherers and

instead farmed the land and domesticated certain animals who could be useful to them, a period which includes the stories we encounter in Genesis. Mynott is even-handed, seeing the pros and cons of human activity, but he agrees with the opinion of most present-day commentators which is that what separated humankind from nature was agriculture: Mynott quotes the anthropologist Jared Diamond who sees agriculture as 'the worst mistake in the history of the human race.'³

Well, be that as it may, there is no going back unless humankind wishes to revert to a stone age existence. Farming, particularly modern farming, with its vast fields unsheltered by hedgerows and its use of pesticides and heavy machinery, is indeed responsible for the decline and extinction of certain species. There are, however, other factors involved, among them natural selection, predation, hunting for pleasure rather than survival, pollution, exploration/tourism, the importation of foreign species, industrialisation, population growth and climate change – the hand of humankind is very evident in that list.⁴ Worldwide, the statistics for the extinction or near extinction of animals, birds, insects and plants just in the last century make for depressing reading. Sadly, Britain leads the field in the degradation of nature in Europe. This is evident, to give but a few examples, in the decline in the numbers of peregrine falcons, turtle doves, hedgehogs and hares. A report in 2022 claims that between 30% and 75% of rural hedgehogs have been lost since 2000, while the hare population has fallen by 80% in the last 100 years.⁵

This brings me to my second book: *Raising Hare*. It is the uplifting account of how one woman, Chloe Dalton, living in her country cottage during the pandemic lockdowns, reluctantly rescued a one-day old leveret from a muddy farm track, where it would almost certainly have been killed either by traffic or predators. This is not a mawkish, sentimental account; Dalton does not treat the animal as a pet, never gives it a name and

¹ Genesis 1:26 RNSV (see also Genesis 1:28) ² *The Story of Nature* by Jeremy Mynott, Yale University Press, 2024. ISBN 978-0-300-24565-3. *Raising Hare* by Chloe Dalton, Canongate Books Ltd, 2024. ISBN 978 1 80530 271 1 ³ *The Story of Nature* by Jeremy Mynott, pages 60 & 203 ⁴ In 1300 the population of Britain was estimated to be 3,000,000 with most people living in rural areas. (Mynott, page 110). By the time of the 2021 Census, Britain's population was said to number around 68,000,000 people living in mainly urban areas. The Times recently carried an advertisement from a travel company announcing a holiday in Finland's wilderness – it won't be a wilderness much longer! ⁵ Dalton, *Raising Hare*, page 57. See also 2022 report by the People's Trust for Endangered Species

enables it to return to a life in the wild and all the dangers it will encounter there. At the time of publication, Hare was not only still alive but has had two litters, one born in the cottage's garden, the other inside the cottage. Such is the trust the hare has for Dalton that she returns occasionally to the cottage just to have a snooze during daylight hours, but she always returns at dusk to where nature calls her to be. Raising Hare is the story of one woman's care for a tiny creature which gives it life and at the same time transforms her own life. It is a story of human reverence for nature.

And so to Genesis 1: 26 and 1: 28 and the way in which understanding of these verses has influenced the thinking of humankind across millennia. Genesis probably reached its final form at some point between the 10th century and the 4th century BCE, though some parts may have been written earlier. The text is sacred for Jews and Christians. Muslims respect the Genesis creation story, though they have their own account in the Quran. These three faiths account for most of the world's population, so Genesis 1:26 and 1:28 have been very influential. Both verses do refer to human dominion but the nature of that dominion needs to be seen in the light of God's care for his creation at every stage in every way. However, some have taken the word 'dominion' as an invitation to humankind to stand outside nature. This allows humankind, the most intelligent of the species, to do with the natural world what it likes; we are nature's masters. This has been catastrophic. If we reflect on what Jesus said about nature, he talked about it a lot in his teaching, always with respect, reverence and empathy. 'His followers down the ages, including the Early Fathers of the Church and some influential saints have followed suit. St Ambrose (c.339-397) wrote a commentary on the Genesis creation story and, in his sermons, he urged his largely uneducated congregation to remember the Creator when they looked upon even the humblest of plants. St Augustine (354-430) understood Psalm 148 as a command to praise God by studying what he had made and to value other creatures for their own sake and not for the way in which they might be used by humans. According to Hildegard (1098-1179), humans can only find salvation in harmony with nature. Julian of Norwich (c.1343-c.1423) gave us the image of the hazelnut in the palm of her hand to symbolise our physical connection with all creation. Then, there is Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). Francis is especially remembered for his gentleness and love of creation; he related to all animals and called them brothers and sisters. In November

1979, Pope John Paul II by means of a papal bull declared Francis the Patron Saint of Ecology, a modern word, not found in the Bible. It was the present pope, however, who honoured St Francis by adopting Francis as his papal name and who, in a landmark encyclical of 2015, stated that a literal interpretation of Gen 1:26 and 1: 28 is wrong. Pope Francis took as the title for his encyclical the words **Laudato si (Praise be to you)**, the words of a canticle written by St Francis in an Umbrian dialect. The encyclical honours what is implicit in the way St Francis lived his life: 'That God valued the natural world for its own sake and had not created it just for human use.'⁷

Happily, not everything is doom and gloom, in Britain at least. Water companies have rightly come under scrutiny for discharging sewage into places like Lake Windermere. In the Tove Valley in Northamptonshire an 18-mile mega hedge has been planted to link seven farms, creating a wildlife corridor.⁸ In the Yorkshire Dales National Park, work is taking place to restore the peatlands, home to many endangered birds, including the peregrine falcon.⁹ Red kites have been successfully restored to parts of Buckinghamshire and the North-East. Beavers have been re-introduced. And, of particular interest to Christians, the Church of England has come under pressure from Chris Packham, the nature photographer and TV presenter to re-wild 30% of its land by 2030. A petition has been presented containing 100,000 signatures, among them the signature of the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Williams, and a demonstration was held on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral on Sunday 6th October this year. The penultimate sentence in Jeremy Mynott's book is 'We must strive to be good actors in the story of nature for as long as we remain part of it.' People of faith have a particular responsibility because we believe nature is a gift from God. In Coleridge's long poem *The Ancient Mariner*, the old sailor is distraught that he has killed the albatross. He repents his carelessness with God's creation and suggests how humankind might avoid his error in the verse below:

**'He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear Lord who loveth us,
He made and loveth all'**

⁶ Obvious examples are Matthew 6: 28-30, Luke 12: 27, Matthew 10:29, Luke 12:6. ⁷ Mynott, *The Story of Nature*, page 113. An excellent video with audio in English, available on YouTube, makes available what Pope Francis stated in the encyclical. ⁸ Reported in *The Times*, 15th October 2024. ⁹ Report by G Bryant for *Roots*, the magazine of the Alderson Family History Society, edition 119, October 2023.

