

Reflection of the Month: Lent: An Orthodox Perspective

Gillian Crow writes:

This year, Western and Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter on the same date; so we are making our Lenten journey together. For us it is a joyful if arduous path – Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in his book 'Great Lent' [1] describes it as 'bright sadness' – during which, in this tithing of the year, we seek to draw ever closer to God, with our hearts and minds and physical strength.



Lent is not a time for giving up, but for taking on: a new lifestyle, when the complete person, body and soul together, seeks to lose the physical and spiritual flab that so often pulls us down to earth. We all know the heavy, dozy feeling we have when we have over-eaten. So we return to the simpler, lighter vegan diet of the time before Noah – our pancakes really do finish up the eggs and milk.

This new lightness equips us better for prayer and action. For we lengthen our prayer time and attend church more often, where the long, slow services give us the opportunity to let go of the world outside and focus more closely on God. In this spiritual spring-clean we strive to let go of all the ways that prevent us from following God's intentions for us. It is a time to take to heart, and to act upon, Isaiah's words on fasting: 'to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free . . . to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him'.

We turn away from the worldliness to which we are so readily attuned, and turn back towards God – a real metanoia, or repentance, a deeper reflection on the state of our inner selves and the determination to follow Christ more closely. Lent is the Church's gift of time to us – something we so often lack.

Orthodox Lent will begin this year on the Sunday evening before Ash Wednesday – we calculate the 40 days in a slightly different way – when, in a Rite of Forgiveness, we come up in turn to ask forgiveness of the clergy, and then individual members of the congregation. That sets us on the Lenten journey that will lead us out of our habitual spiritual twilight and ultimately into the glorious light of the Resurrection.

There are stepping stones of encouragement along the way, as each Lenten Sunday is dedicated to the commemoration of a specific event or saint. Finally, we reach the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday, and then come face to face with the Passion and Crucifixion in Holy Week. We are made aware that we cannot experience the exulting

joy of the Resurrection on Easter night unless we have stood at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday. This road has no short cuts.

A feature of Orthodox services is the sense of participation in the events we commemorate. We are not on the outside looking in. 'Today' we sing on Good Friday 'the Maker of all things is given up to the cross'. On Holy Saturday we sing, 'Today a tomb holds Him who holds the creation in the hollow of His hand; a stone covers Him who covered the heavens with glory'. We stand around the life-sized crucifix in the centre of the church and we come face to face today with the enormity of God's love for us in the face of human treachery or indifference. It is not possible to be a bystander; we are caught up in the dread of the events, just as we will be caught up in the light and joy of Christ's Resurrection in our midnight Easter service.

With God's grace, we will not have 'given up' anything for Lent; but, as lighter, fitter, more Christ-centred people, we will have grown. We will finish our journey aglow. That is why the traditional greeting as we start out on the way is: have a joyful Lent!

[1] 'Great Lent' by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, SVS Press.

Gillian Crow is an Orthodox writer from the Exarchate of Parishes of Russian Tradition (Ecumenical Patriarchate)

Respond to the Reformation

Churches Together in England is organising a major conference this autumn to commemorate the Reformation.

Structured around the [Presidents' Five 'R's](#), the conference is open to Ecumenical Officers and all those working ecumenically beyond the local level.



Speakers confirmed so far include Mark Chapman, Professor of the History of Modern Theology at Oxford University, Jeremy Worthen, Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Theology of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity and Jan McFarlane, Bishop of Repton.

Responding to the Reformation takes place from lunchtime on Monday 16 to lunchtime on Wednesday 18 October 2017 at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

- [Book now for a subsidised place](#)
- [Delay and the cost increases](#)
- [Find more information about the conference](#)

Pledge to Pray

The team at *Thy Kingdom Come* have written:

Please take a look at this brand new and inspirational video Archbishop Justin released:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m9h3FoeXNA>



Would you be willing to share ++Justin's post on social media, and perhaps add a small message of your own to encourage others to join you and #Pledge2Pray. Here are the links:

<https://www.facebook.com/archbishopofcanterbury/videos/1220226384698172/>

<https://twitter.com/justinwelby/status/828941848756572160?refsrc=email&s=11>

Churches and individuals are being invited to join in with this global wave of prayer via www.thykingdomcome.global, and Pledge2Pray individually, as a family, as a church or to run an event. Over 10 days (25th May-4th June), people around the world will be coming together to discover new ways of praying that their friends, family and neighbours come to know Jesus Christ.



Please forward this email on, and encourage others to get involved!
[More information on the CTE webpage re ecumenical involvement](#)

Link to sign up and Pledge to Pray: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

Visit Rome with the Focolare Movement

Travelling Together, 9-13 May 2017, Castelgandolfo, Rome, will be an international event for people of all ages, churches and backgrounds who are interested in seeking Christian unity. It is being organised by the Focolare Movement. About 500 people from all over the world are expected to attend.



It will be held at the Focolare's International Conference Centre called Centro Mariapoli, in Castelgandolfo, which overlooks Lake Albano, just outside Rome in the famous and beautiful area known as Castelli Romani.

You are kindly requested to organise your own travel to Italy and back.
Travel dates: Out Monday 8th May, Return Saturday 13th May after lunch

Accommodation is provided in nearby hostels and small hotels, in rooms with two or three beds. You will be able to specify on the booking form if you would like to share with a particular person or people. Transport is provided to and from the hotels each day and is included in the basic price. A participation fee of £20 (sterling) should be sent as a deposit with your booking form. Booking forms can be obtained by contacting one of the following:

Travelling Together, Focolare Centre for Unity, 69 Parkway, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL8 6JG or Telephone 01707 332950 or Email ecumenism@focolare.org.uk

Focolare is a Body in Association of Churches Together in England

More details: http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/492692/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Visit_Rome_with.aspx

David Evans will be the new Salvation Army Territorial Ecumenical Officer



It has been announced that Major David Evans will move from leadership of the Worthing Corps to become The Salvation Army's Territorial Ecumenical Officer on 20 July. He will succeed Lieut-Colonel Jonathan Roberts whose new role will be in The Salvation Army's Publishing Department.

In making this announcement, Jonathan Roberts, who will have been in post for just a year, points out that Salvation Army officers 'receive' appointments rather than 'apply' for them. He speaks warmly of David Evans, testifying to his 'good ecumenical experience in England and Wales'. David, for his part, promises to 'endeavour to follow Jonathan with the same passion for ecumenism'.

[Read more about David](#)

New ecumenical vision and web page for The Salvation Army



The Salvation Army has a new [ecumenical and interfaith web page](#). There is also a new Salvation Army Territorial Ecumenical Vision and Strategy:

Vision

To express our unity with other churches in harmonious relations and in sharing in the life and witness of the Body of Christ 'so that the world may believe' (John 17:21).

Strategy

The strategy has three main objectives:

1. Deliver Effective Communication
2. Provide Helpful Resources
3. Enable Missional Partnerships

A number of action steps are associated with each objective.

Visit the Salvation Army new [ecumenical and interfaith web page](#).

New URC Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

Philip Brooks will succeed David Tatem as Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations for the United Reformed Church. Philip takes up his post on 1 July, giving a month's handover period before David retires.

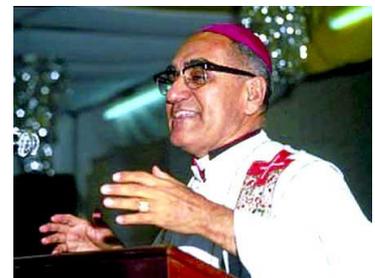


Philip is a URC minister of word and sacraments, serving two busy URC/Methodist LEPs in Bolton and Salford. He comes with broad experience in ecumenical and interfaith matters, both at local and synod level – serving for example in the Bolton Christian Community Cohesion Project, in Greater Manchester Churches Together, on the Bolton Faith Leaders' Forum, Greater Manchester Industrial Mission and as Ecumenical Officer for the Central Area of NW Synod.

Philip has been Town Centre Chaplain for Bolton and was very involved in *Passion for Bolton*, which put on several very successful passion plays. Philip is passionate about mission, ecumenical and interfaith relations, and about working in a team.

Oscar Romero centenary celebrations

2017 is the centenary of the birth of Oscar Romero, the martyred archbishop of San Salvador. Each year there are celebrations and commemorations in the week of the anniversary of his martyrdom. In this centenary year, there will also be a National Ecumenical Service which Churches Together in England is delighted to co-sponsor. More information:



- [Romero Week lectures](#)
- [National Ecumenical Service](#) in St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square, London, at 11.00 am on Saturday 25 March.

Brief news from Taizé in Birmingham

So far, just over 300 participants, from 17 different countries have signed up for the young adult Weekend Meeting in Birmingham, 28 April – 1 May. The most exotic registration has come from a youth group in Kuusamo, a small town in northern Finland, on the edge of the Arctic Circle. If you have not yet registered and are intending to come (or encourage someone else to come), then it is time to do so!



An article on Changing Tunes – musical work with prisoners that changes people's lives – has just been published on the Taizé website. During the Hidden Treasure weekend in Birmingham, this group will be participating in both the main workshops and the Saturday programme for teenagers. In London, during the Lent Prayer on Friday 10 March, 7:15 pm, in the Church of St James Piccadilly, the Rev. Lucy Winkett, rector of the church, will give a meditation as an introduction to the prayer around the cross.

In Taizé itself, among the new groups we look forward to welcoming this summer is the ecumenical schools pilgrimage from the Anglican and Catholic dioceses of Liverpool which will be here for the first week in July.

Visit the Taizé Birmingham website for more information.

Church Support Worker x2

The Congregational Federation invite applications from across the member churches of Churches Together in England to apply for one of their two posts attracting a salary of £25,000 for 37.5 hours per week.



'We are seeking to appoint 2 highly motivated Christians (with a strong commitment to the ethos and principles of Congregationalism) who will have the responsibility for offering practical, hands on support to all Congregational Federation Churches'.

More information in the attached advert and www.congregational.org.uk/vacancies

Closing date 5pm on Friday 17th March 2017

Interview date: Thursday 13th April 2017

[Download a PDF advert](#)

Church Leaders denounce suspension of 'Dubs' policy

Joint Public Issues Team

[View this email in your browser](#)



In a joint letter to the Home Secretary, the leaders of five Churches have expressed their concern at the Government's announcement that it intends to suspend the programme for the safe re-settlement of unaccompanied minors seeking refuge in the United Kingdom.

STATEMENT

We are dismayed to hear, through the announcement from the Immigration Minister this week, of our Government's intention to suspend its programme of resettling unaccompanied minors in March 2017. We urge the Government to reconsider this decision and to recognise the potential harm that this policy might cause.

Throughout the United Kingdom, our churches have sought to offer welcome and practical support to refugees and asylum seekers of all ages, often working in partnership with other faith and community groups. It is disappointing your consideration of provision is restricted to the perceived capacity of Local Authorities. This approach is devoid of ambition and lacks creativity. We would encourage an approach to refugee re-settlement that actively includes and engages those community groups and agencies, who offer the potential of raising our existing capacity.

There is compelling evidence that many young people have "disappeared" from temporary camps. If this disturbing trend is to be avoided in future, it is vital that they have the confidence to present themselves to the relevant authorities at their earliest opportunity. This will only happen if they know that in so doing, they will be cared for and given safe passage. The current policy announcement risks sending out a message that will further discourage this, and thus significantly increase the risk of harm to these children.

As the minister rightly asserted, the UK can be proud of its record in welcoming refugee children, which now extends back for over half a century. We believe that this should continue to be the case and would urge the abandonment of any policy that gives any impression to the contrary.

As a nation we have a rigorous approach to safeguarding, reflecting a strong commitment to the wellbeing of children and vulnerable citizens. We do not believe that this commitment should be limited by political borders.

We urge you therefore to adopt a policy that places the wellbeing and safety of children above every other consideration. Not only do we commend this as representing our own Christian values, but it is what we believe the overwhelming majority of UK citizens would believe to be right and just.

Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain
Rt Rev Dr Russell Barr, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland
Revd Kevin Watson, General Assembly Moderator of the United Reformed Church
Mr Alan Yates, General Assembly Moderator of the United Reformed Church
Revd Dr Roger Walton, President of the Methodist Conference
Ms Rachel Lampard, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference
Mr Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain

Paradox in the Gospel:

some reflections for evangelisation today - a discussion paper

Jim Currin is a staff member of Churches Together in England with a brief for Evangelisation, Mission and Media. During an agreed sabbatical study leave, Jim revisited a Grovebook in the Evangelism series he had written 10 years previously, called *Paradox in the Gospel?*



Now, removing the question mark, Jim explores the biblical material and many examples of the 'principle of paradox' including 25 from the Gospel of Matthew. With quotes and illustrations from a wide variety of books on the topic, collated in to a single study, here is a discussion paper with some reflections and questions for evangelisation and how we share the gospel message today:

1. Paradox and personal faith
2. Stages of faith
3. Leaving church and 'giving up' on God
4. Implications for sharing the gospel
5. Holistic gospel

This is a discussion paper and not a position paper of CTE. It is here available for general circulation and further discussion, individually or in groups.

[Download PDF: Paradox in the Gospel](#)

[Contact Jim Currin](#)

The original Grovebook is still available from www.grovebooks.co.uk.

Report from the Churches Rural Group



Churches Rural Group

The CRG brings together representatives of Christian denominations with a significant rural presence and other groups and organisations concerned with rural life and ministry to discuss issues of common interest on behalf of Churches Together in England. At the meeting in January 2017, we welcomed two new members – Ron Foster (representing the Methodist / URC Rural Strategy Group) and Richard Kirlaw (the new Chair of the Agricultural Chaplains Association). Discussion included:

'Thy Kingdom Come. ' Global Wave of Prayer, 25 May – 5 June 2017. This is an ecumenical, world-wide initiative, with a range of helpful resources for churches and individuals which can be used in a variety of contexts including small and rural settings. For more details, see <http://www.thykingdom.co.uk/>

News from Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre. The new website has been launched, with a new design, resources for church life, mission and training and a



more powerful search engine. Do have a look! <http://germinate.net> Many of the courses and programmes offered can be delivered locally at low cost.

Germinate 'Listening event.' A 'Listening Event' is held in alternate years to identify what God is saying to the rural churches and feed into the Germinate Conference theme and programme. The CRG meeting reviewed the action points from the 2015 listening event, and found encouragement in what has already been achieved – although there is always more that could be done! Plans for the 2017 event are now in hand.

Farming issues. Jerry Marshall attended and contributed to the recent farming conferences in Oxford. Presentations and stories from Oxford Farming Conference and Oxford Real Farming Conference can be found at <https://www.ofc.org.uk/> and <http://orfc.org.uk/blog/> A day conference at the ARC on 30 March will look at the impact of Brexit on rural communities. For more details, contact elizabethc@germinate.net Booking via www.eventbrite.co.uk/myevent?eid=31595253253

Framework for local unity in mission. Members of the CRG approved the new draft framework as a useful and helpful document for ecumenical working. It suggests three levels of working arrangements as appropriate for context and time - a simple agreement, partnership or covenant. www.cte.org.uk/NewFramework

Other matters discussed:

- Jerry reported on administrative changes at IRCA (International Rural Churches Association) and plans for the next conference to be held in New Zealand in April 2018.
- The Rural Officers Gathering at Ampleforth Abbey in November 2016 was a good opportunity to share ideas and experiences of rural mission and ministry. Discussions were wide-ranging, and included involvement in agricultural shows, building community, and issues that could be addressed in proposed ARC training packages for rural clergy.
- Updates from the organisations and denominations represented were also given.
- 'Presence: a workbook to help promote and sustain and effective Christian presence in villages' has been substantially re-written and updated, with a proposed publication date in June 2017. Look out for more information in the Spring.

Present: Jerry Marshall (Chair & ARC), Robert Barlow (Rural Theology Assn), Elizabeth Clark (ARC / Methodist / URC) Jim Currin (CTE), Ron Foster (Methodist / URC), Jill Hopkinson (ARC / C of E / Fresh Expressions Rural Hub), Richard Kirlew (Agricultural Chaplains Assn), Barry Osbourne (Smaller Free Churches Group / REN), Ann Wright (C of E / IRCA Europe).

And finally ...

1. **WCC staff conference.** The World Council of Churches staff have had a 4-day conference and report on the question they considered, 'What can we contribute as a world-wide fellowship?' <http://bit.ly/2ITDIzL>

2. **Bible Book Club.** The Bible Society is a Body in Association of Churches Together in England and have launched a new initiative called the Bible Book Club. Just like any other Book Club where a group of people read and then discuss, BS has a series of resource leaflets for each book in the Bible for such a group. More information: <http://bit.ly/2mNXp0b>

3. **EA IDEA magazine on Unity.** Unity is the theme of the current edition of the Evangelical Alliance IDEA magazine, including articles 'Does Unity mean Conformity?' and 'Protestant Reformation and Unity' as well as an interview with Graham Hutchinson on leading a unity movement etc. There is also advance notice of a forthcoming book by the General Director Steve Clifford, One: Unity in Diversity: <http://bit.ly/2lws9IN>.



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