

Books for Christmas

Forgiveness; Breaking the Chain of Hate by Michael Henderson.

True stories of people who have broken the chain of hate and the hold of history.

Price £11.50 plus postage £1.

Faith in Diplomacy by Archie Mackenzie.

A diplomat who applied his faith in international affairs.

Price £9.95 plus postage £1.

Hope for Today

A selection of daily readings compiled by Peter Marsh and Hugh Elliott.

Price £6 plus postage £1.

* * * * *

Three children's books all illustrated by W. Cameron Johnson:

Boy on a Bus. Story and pictures by W. Cameron Johnson.

How to turn a bully into a friend. For ages 6 to 8.

Price £2.50 plus 50p postage.

Chico, the Street Boy by Evelyn Puig. An adventure story from Brazil. For ages 8-11.

Price £5 plus postage 75p. Hardback edition.

Return of the Indian Spirit edited by Phyllis Johnson.

A young boy's search for his identity. For ages 10 upwards.

Price £4.95 plus postage 50p.

All books available from Grosvenor Books, 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD

The Barnabas Charitable Trust

is now based at 2 Pythouse, Tisbury, Salisbury, SP3 6PB. This is also the new address of Mrs Jeanne Faber, Secretary of the Trust.

Tel: 01747 870 332

24 Greencoat Place

Greencoat Forum

Tuesday, November 26

6.30pm for 7pm.

Reconstructing Afghanistan: the vital role of education.

Felicity Hill, Director of *Learning for Life*. Talk with colour slides.

Friends of Westminster Productions

Saturday, December 7, 3pm

A Celebration of Christmas with the Kingdom Choir, followed by tea.

Winter Conference at Caux

December 26 – January 2

Open homes, listening hearts

"We all belong to a family. We shall discuss the things that enrich or endanger family life."

Reply by November 25 to: Caux Sekretariat, PO Box 4419, CH-6002, Luzern, Switzerland.

This issue was edited by Ann Carpenter and Dron Hore-Ruthven, with lay-out by Blair Cummock. Please send material for the next issue by November 25 to Janet Paine, 7 Lindow Road, Old Trafford, Manchester, M16 ODP. Tel: 0161 881 6674.

Email: <mjpaine@compuserve.com>



Initiatives of Change

NEWSLETTERuk

Issue No 179 November 2002

24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD Tel: 020 7798 6000

THE COURAGE TO PRAY FOR A JUST AND LASTING PEACE

Extracts from the address given by Rajmohan Gandhi, Indian writer and academic and a member of the Initiatives of Change International Council, at the University of Illinois, USA, September 11 2002.

My own fellow-feeling for America, following the enormity of 9/11, was, I think, sharpened by experiences that many like me, in different parts of the world, have had. Among friends of mine killed in violence linked to terrorism are – or were, I should say – Ahmed Gooru and Hirday Nath Wanchoo of Kashmir, the first a Muslim and the second a Hindu, Lala Jagat Narain and Romesh Chunder of Punjab, Prime Minister Prema Dasa and Amirthalingam of Sri Lanka, the first a Sinhalese and the second a Tamil, Lungshim Shaiza of Nagaland, and, only a few months ago, Ehsan Jaffery of Gujarat and Abdul Ghani Lone of Kashmir. I had known most of these friends in their homes, and have some idea of the impact on families and communities of the sudden and heartless extinction of human life.

Today, on American soil, let me reaffirm that terrorism can never be accepted or tolerated as a response to perceived injustice. Our responsibility for our individual actions is a condition of our being that we cannot escape from, whether we are Indian, Arab, Israeli, Kashmiri, Chinese, American, or whatever.

Similarly, may I affirm that the existence of terrorism does not eliminate justice as a value. The need to strive for justice is also, perhaps, a condition of our being as humans. And the need to be wise in this striving, the need to adopt right means, may be a condition of our survival as humans.

Clash of civilizations

I refer to the thesis, offered on both sides of an obvious divide, of the inevitability of a clash of civilizations. We hear, on the one hand, of some allegedly innate flaw of Islam, apparently a flaw that would, on the one hand, guarantee a clash of civilizations, and on the other disqualify every Muslim prayer.

After hearing this argument a few times, I have often asked myself, when looking at a Muslim bent in prayer, or when looking at a picture of a million Muslims kneeling and pleading in prayer, whether I could believe that for some compelling reason these prayers that I was observing were doomed before they were uttered. I could not, and do not, believe that. And I remain uncon-

vinced that almost all modern violence and terrorism, especially that in which Muslims seem to be involved, can be traced back to some Koranic verses removed from their context.

On the other side of the divide, we hear, loudly and pervasively, of the wickedness of the USA. What blindness and rage it must be, or what sordid motive, that can produce such an outlook, which only adds to the tragedies of the lands that foster it, and alienates those lands from a country that contains the world's greatest resources for freedom and justice.

Dialogue of Muslims and non-Muslims

At a dialogue I attended in Switzerland in July, influential Muslims from a variety of countries and non-Muslims of standing held an honest conversation on peace, justice and faith. All agreed that terrorism was anathema; that justice had to be pursued nonetheless; that Muslim lands should know of the values honoured in the non-Muslim world; that Islam should be better expressed in non-Muslim lands; and that democracy should be promoted everywhere, including in Muslim countries.

Recalling 9/11, we think – with anguish, respect, warmth and prayer – of the thousands directly affected in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington DC, and of the even larger number indirectly hurt in America. Yet, if healing and hope are to enter the world, then we must think also of the reconstruction of a county like Afghanistan – a reconstruction of homes, schools, and

roads, a healing of traumatized Afghans, a reconciliation among Afghanistan's divided ethnicities, and a restoration of trust and friendship between Afghans and Americans.

'To bind up the nation's wounds'

I have been puzzled that so few have publicly asked whether Abraham Lincoln might not have some relevance to these times. Referring to the two sides in the Civil War, Lincoln said in his Second Inaugural Address:

'Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged.'

In the final sentence he spoke of the need for healing. 'To bind up the nation's wounds' was his phrase. And in the very last words of that address he spoke of the need 'to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.'

In some of our world's recent confrontations, both sides have again prayed to the same God, each invoking His aid against the other; and men have dared to ask a just God's assistance in wreaking destruction. And, if this return of 9/11 sends our thoughts also to the Middle East, perhaps we should have the courage, with Lincoln, to pray for a just and lasting peace there, with the involvement, perhaps, of ourselves and all nations.

FELLOWSHIP & TEAMWORK – the roots and the fruits.

Towards celebrating diversity and rediscovering unity – a blueprint for the world?

Twenty-one of us, ranging in age from 20 to 80, met at Tirley Garth from October 11-13. We were joined by two professional facilitators, Philip Joseph and Lin Grist, to explore the nature of fellowship and teamwork in Initiatives of Change.

Monica Spooner, wrote afterwards: *"At times the process was hard, very hard... And yet, having dared to express our difficulties and disagreements within a safe open space, we found we could reassert our calling to God's guidance, the quiet time, to radical, infectious life-changing, to feeding the spiritual poverty in our nation, especially in young people.*

Perhaps what impressed me most were the comments by the facilitators, one of whom was so struck by the description of a quiet time that he will try this out. The other said with great emotion, 'You have no idea how extraordinary you are. Continue to share your value system with the world!' I saw tears running down the cheeks of one of them.

We are left with a lot of points to look at in our communal life, not least that sharing the thoughts which come in our quiet times has slipped off the agenda. Helping each other to change is often what means most. There is a desire to continue this conversation, for instance at the next National Forum."

A full report is being prepared by

Philip and Lin, and it promises to be a thought-provoking read. It will describe how the weekend unfolded and why 'sustaining the passion in MRA/IC' became the over-arching theme on the Sunday. It will include the names and addresses of those who felt passionately about particular issues and who convened small group meetings. Anyone who wishes to can widen the conversation on such topics as 'heightening the vision, deepening the life' and 'celebrating diversity while preserving what is special and challenging about MRA/IC'.

The report will be available from Bernice Ingham, 24 Greencoat Place, SW1P 1RD, 020 7798 6000.

Alan Channer and Mary Winstanley
Channer

TAXI TALKS

When booking a minicab for Heathrow I said to the Muslim taxi company proprietor, "I like the verse in the Koran, 'The devil is a whisperer, who whispers evil in the hearts of men, but withdraws from his whispering evil in our hearts when we remember Allah.'" I added, "The devil has whispered a lot to me. Every day I have to push him aside. Jesus Christ said, 'The devil is a liar, the father of lies and there is no truth in him.'" One of the drivers joined in, "That's right, we have to stop him. He's always telling us lies." At this the proprietor exclaimed, "That's his job!"

Richard Channer

stemmed. A group of us wanted to offer a similar opportunity to our colleagues who are connected with IC. We've found a team of spiritual directors who will act as prayer companions for a three-week programme of 'Walking with God in daily life' based at 24 Greencoat Place. They will meet one to one with any who want to take part, twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, from January 9 to January 27. It's open to anyone within reach of London, and more information is available from Elizabeth Locke, Dron Hore-Ruthven, Elisabeth Peters or me at 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD.

Both poems © Mary Lean

FUTURE OF FOR A CHANGE

All 117 issues of *For A Change*, since its launch 15 years ago, were laid out on the floor as 19 of us met to review the future of the magazine. "It makes me want to read them all," commented our new marketing manager Fabiola Benavente. Nearly all the messages we received from around the world urged us to continue publication.

We decided there was a continuing need for an international English-language publication that would aim to express the stories of faith, the philosophy, and changes in people that IC stands for. We agreed that our primary purpose is to serve the international fellowship of IC by providing an outreach tool clearly linked to it, written and presented in a style accessible to all.

We decided that, while continuing to serve its existing readers, the magazine should maximise its appeal to the 18-35 age group. This requires a fundamental design review and we

aim to have a new look launched next year. Fabiola presented several marketing strategies and will conduct market research over the next months to help us produce the magazine people will want to use. We aim to agree targets for the number of subscriptions sold country by country and to increase the number of subscribers from 3,000 to 4,000 as an immediate target. Some subscribers might choose to pay for someone in a developing country with currency restrictions.

We editors see our priority now as laying the groundwork for the magazine's future leadership. We need to find two new editors within the next two or three years. We hope that one might be found from North America. There will also be a continuing opportunity for a trainee journalist. Mike is stepping back from the day to day editing, whilst remaining on the management board and continuing to write. Ken and Mary will remain in the driving seat until new editors are trained in.

Mary Lean, Ken Noble, Mike Smith

CLOSELY LINKED TO THE WORLD

Originally from the Isle of Man, I have worked abroad with IC for the last 25 years. Returning to Britain is proving a fascinating experience. Birmingham could not be more closely linked with the world scene – there are 250,000 Muslims, 15,000 Sikhs, 10,000 Hindus, 5,000 Buddhists and every other conceivable race – all with the richest Birmingham accent!

Recently I heard a Swiss professor speaking on the radio about his 17 years in Birmingham. "It was there," he said, "that I learned to marry conviction with tolerance. I also learned how God uses other faiths." Here was a man passing on what he had found to be a key to integration.

A special joy has been to stay with one of my earliest IC friends, with whom I had been at college. Recently 22 neighbours gathered in her home to hear a fourth generation UK Muslim, Mrs Khan, speak about Muslim Women in this City. "Since September 11 2001 we have been badly misunderstood," she said. "We are the only Muslims in our cul-de-sac and we became totally isolated. My husband and I decided to invite all the neighbours from the road into our home and we took the time to explain our faith and to answer their questions. What a difference this has made."

Mrs Khan's outgoing warmth and initiative in the face of such hurtful exclusion made us thoughtful and aware of quite new possibilities.

Joyce Kneale

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

After studying visual arts for four years in Canberra it was time for something new. I was praying for a change and within one week of arriving in Melbourne I had met MRA/IC and had signed up to take part in a short course called *Life Matters*. I was hooked and had the strong ambition to join the training programme *Action for Life (AfL)*.

Although not quite sure where this new path was leading I knew that it was right. Travelling through Asia for 10 months completely changed all my ideas and gave me the beginning of a new faith. I began to see the difference between theory and practice and to develop my understanding of what God wants rather than relying on other people's faith.

After *AfL* I came to Britain to learn more about how the MRA/IC fellowship functions and to receive more training. I am working on *Global Express* in Oxford. This is a magazine aimed to help young people believe in themselves and to make a difference.

The affluence in Britain was a culture shock. Seeing beggars in Oxford was more disturbing than seeing them in India. Challenges arise wherever we are and keep my mind from settling down too much. I am grateful for the opportunities afforded me and I have been made to feel at home amongst friends.

Nigel Heywood

SOME REFLECTIONS

by Mary Lean

If my life was neatly packaged, with a label for each day,
I'd know each parcel's contents, and I couldn't lose my way.
No more waking in the morning, with a pressure to decide,
If my life was neatly packaged, and each item strongly tied.

And the fears that often flood me, of a life that's lived alone,
With no certain path before me, and no one to call my own;
They'd not be in the parcels, that I'd prepared with care,
And I'd know what I was doing, and the future would be fair.

If my life was neatly packaged, with no room for doubt or fear,
Would I know what I was missing, as I went from year to year?
The unexpected wonder, God's moment taking wing,
Would I see the golden thread, in the midst of all that string?

I threw away the wrappings, and I let the future free.
I thought I'd lose the treasures that were hoarded there for me;
But his sun lit up my darkness and it showed me through my tears,
That my treasure was but ashes, but his gold will last my years.

I wrote this at the age of 23 while working with MRA in South Africa. It was a great help to me at an insecure time in my life, when I didn't really know what my future held. But in some ways, over the years, it has been more of an aspiration than an experience. Although I have always had a sense of God's love, for a lot of my life I've been very aware of the treasures that I don't have and not all that certain about the gold.

This has begun to change, quite fundamentally, in the last couple of years. One factor was taking part in a 'week of accompanied prayer' organised by the churches in Oxted three years ago.

The idea was that you committed yourself to spend half an hour in prayer once a day, and then met for half an hour a day with a trained prayer companion to talk about your prayer life. It was an opportunity to try out different ways of praying and to find out what it was like to have a spiritual director.

The beauty of the week was that it met you where you were, and you could take it as far as you liked. For me, it was the beginning of a journey towards falling in love with God and Jesus – and discovering the extent of their love for me. At the time I felt as if I was on the edge of a precipice, of whether I would really let down my protective barriers and trust God. My

companion that week has since become my spiritual director. She introduced me to one of the ways of praying taught by St Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits in the 17th century, where you use your imagination to put yourself into a Bible story as if you are taking part in it. It helped me to get closer to Jesus in his humanity, as a real person with feelings and reactions and struggles, who has been through everything that we have to face. It also led me to deeper insights about myself. In the process, I found myself writing poems again. One refers to the passage in the Bible where Peter tries to walk on water:

This is just what I was afraid of.
That, carried away by enthusiasm,
I would leap out of the boat
and run towards you –
forgetting that walking on water
is not something I do –
and come up spitting lake water and weed,
feeling the fool I fear I am.

What I did not realise was that as I sank
you would put out your hand.
Disappointed, maybe that I didn't make it –
Delighted, anyway, that I tried.
Perhaps, going under doesn't matter that much.
I am never out of your depth
or beyond your reach.

In which case there doesn't seem
to be all that much point
in sitting in the boat, taking care of myself,
when I could be out there with you
learning to walk on water.

At the beginning of this year, I attended the 'Hoho' at the IC centre in India. We spent one morning in silence and I found myself sitting in the garden piling up a little heap of stones, representing all my responsibilities, burdens, things that I sometimes feel crushed by, and sometimes protected by. In the centre was a very fragile chip of stone which represented the inner me, which I get afraid will be destroyed by all the pressures and demands that come upon me. And I felt God telling me that this chip was even more precious to him than it was to me, and that I could trust him to look after it.

I am so grateful for the week of accompanied prayer from which all this