

October 2016.

The Crime that is Aleppo. Some thoughts from Father Charles:

Ancient City transformed to Modern Ruin

Aleppo is one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities. From early mentions in Egyptian texts in the 20th Century BC to the present, the city has been inhabited. It is a city that has flourished because of its trading location and tradition, and its strategically defensive position. It has, of course, suffered and benefited from the natural rhythm of history. Flourishing in the Hellenistic period as a key trading post and maintaining this when absorbed into the Roman Empire and similarly continuing under Byzantine rule. Conquered and sacked by Arab Muslims, brought low through a devastating period with the Great Plague, and sacked again by Timur in his huge military campaigns. Aleppo even survived the limitations placed upon the region in the 18th Century with the agreements between France and Great Britain that put 'lines on maps'.

However, Aleppo, the 'Jewel of Syria', a city designated as a World Heritage site (in 2006) has been a key battle ground in Syria since 2012. In the last month we have read about the Syrian Government's push to destroy the besieged rebel-held sector of Aleppo. This includes intensive saturation bombing of an already ruined city, of which the rebel-held sector contains more than quarter of a million civilians (just more than half the size of Bristol) and served by only 30 doctors.

Why Aleppo?

Aleppo may not be the goal of the Syrian Government. The city does not really represent a territorial gain of any consequence. What it probably does provide is control of supply lines required now in the conflict and in the future (oil). A victory for the Syrian regime would also provide a military and psychological lift to the 'legitimacy' of the Syrian Government's demands. Essentially, victory in Aleppo would put the Assad regime into a strong position before fresh negotiations bring a conflict, that cannot be won through arms, to temporary conclusion. And, to make matters worse, the conflict in Aleppo matters on the world stage. Without Assad, Russia has limited impact in the Middle East; a relationship is thus born out of necessity. This relationship of need puts the two major powers, Russia and the USA, in a conflict of purpose, and consequently limits any effective response that might be made by the UN or any other power.

We, the West, find ourselves 'stuck' between ethics and realism. On the one hand we can express outrage at the brutality of the regime and its current actions with its allies, yet on the other we find ourselves unable to act in any decisive way. In the end we tinker around the edges with sanctions and negotiations; these, instead of bringing a conflict to a close, are only prolonging a desperate situation.

Why am I talking about this now?

Syria was the very heartland of early Christianity. Damascus was one of the first regions to which Peter brought the Gospel. The Apostle Paul himself was converted on the road to Damascus and there are some parts of Syria in which Aramaic is still spoken. Modern Aleppo had the largest population of Christians living within Syria. However, the Christian communities within Syria are now greatly reduced, from about 30% last century to less than 10% now. The Patriarch Gregorios stated in April that there is no safe place in Syria, he said *“the future of Christians in Syria is threatened not by Muslims but by chaos and the infiltration of uncontrollable fanatical, fundamentalist groups”*.

This is why I bring this to the front of our minds now. Because it raises questions about how we, as Christians in the West, respond to what’s happening in part of the world close to us and in front of our eyes. Not only on issues relating to what’s happening to our brother and sister Christians who live there; but also because of what’s happening to the people who live in a major world heritage city (with a population and demography pretty similar to Paris).

A Christian Response

In the knowledge there is no single act that any one of us can perform that would resolve the issue, what is it that we can do?

My thoughts are drawn to this question again when I looked at this month’s lectionary and noted that Monday, 3 October, is the day on which we remember Bishop George Bell. His tireless representation of the rights of interned enemy aliens and, in particular, the criminality of ‘area bombing’ (saturation or terror bombing) made him unpopular during the Second World War. An unpopularity to which his public criticism of Churchill and Arthur (Bomber) Harris significantly added. However, and of real importance to Bell, over and above generalizations or lofty rhetoric, was the importance of understanding the intricate facts that lie behind all complicated issues. He believed that in a world of propaganda and confrontation *‘credibility and influence grow, above all, out of exactitude.’*

Perhaps the **first Christian response** is pointed out here by Bell. This is to ensure that we properly inform ourselves of the details behind the news so that we are not swayed by popular thought or the statements of any particular interest group. This knowledge and a better understanding give our voice greater power. And perhaps **our second response** is to use our voice to greater effect, whether it’s ‘correcting’ the statements of those around us, or making more open public statements and risking the attention that these acts often gather.

There’s a **third response**, and this relates to the refugee and humanitarian crisis. This is huge. Looking at it in round figures, an estimated 11 million Syrians have fled their homes during the conflict, 6 million are displaced in Syria and 5 million on the move as refugees in neighbouring countries. Of this latter group, about a million are looking for asylum in Europe. Our response to the refugee and humanitarian crisis comes again through building our own understanding and also influencing others to shift attitudes towards migrants and refugees; it also comes through our direct support of relief and

humanitarian agencies. There are many opportunities to engage in this response through volunteering, donating and other forms of support – in this particular crisis, such acts can be confined to Bristol as well as having a more distant reach toward Syria itself.

Finally, a **fourth response**, which is really the most important. Prayer. Prayer and worship provide foundations to our faith and it is from this that our actions spring. The following prayer is the Church of England's prayer for 'Peace in Syria'. During this month of October try adding it occasionally within your own cycle of prayers, or perhaps creating your own as you meditate on the shocking situation that is the Crime of Aleppo.

How long oh Lord? How long?

We have been crying to you for peace in Syria; for an end to killing and despair, an end to hostilities on all sides. We pray that a cessation of hostilities may be found soon that will turn into a long lasting peace.

We cry to you for humanitarian aid to reach those most in need.

We beseech you for the rebuilding of ruined homes, businesses and communities.

We long for the repairing of the breach and the restoration of streets where your children may dwell in harmony.

We cry out that justice, truth and love may prevail for all the people of Syria.

We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

With blessings and prayers to you and our brothers and sisters in Syria,



The
HEAVENS
 declare the
 glory of God;
 the **Skies**
 proclaim the work
 of his **HANDS**

Psalm 19:1

'Psalms Central'

The Book of Psalms will be the focus of the autumn bible study, 'Psalms Central'. We use psalms in our worship and prayers, and have a central position in the tradition of the church.

The purpose of this bible study is to build a greater understanding of the power and depth of these 'writings' or 'praises'.

To enrich worship and prayer.

Psalms Central: A practical exploration of the Psalms in prayer, worship and understanding

One: Book of Poetry

A book of poetry, with structure and purpose

Two: Beyond Words

Understanding and interpreting the Psalms. Themes and messages

Three and Four: Psalm Focus

Selecting Psalms and exploring more deeply

Five: Proclaiming the Psalms

Using the Psalms in worship

Six: Shared Understanding

Psalms are also an essential part of Jewish worship. With Rabbi Monique Mayer

How To Choose:

If you want to join one of the Bible Study groups, select the best time for you, sign up in the Atrium and then attend **Session One**.

Following sessions will be agreed during the first meeting.

Session One:

Wednesday 5 October

- 10.30 am at the Vicarage
- 8.00 pm at 2 Pembroke Vale

Thursday 6 October

- 2.00pm at the Vicarage

It's Time For Christians To Go To War On Antisemitism

Thank you Christian Today 29 September 2016 and author Andy Walton for this article

Reuters: Antisemitic graffiti near Krakow in Poland, 2010 Check the calendar. It's 2016 still, right? Yet we're still debating antisemitism.

Nearly 80 years on from Kristallnacht, the infamous day when the outright persecution of Jews became commonplace in Nazi Germany, for some reason we are still discussing how to deal with antisemitism online, in person, even in major political parties.

It seems that in spite of its idiocy, we can't rid ourselves of the pernicious virus of antisemitism. Is it because, in fact, this ancient prejudice is somehow baked into Western culture?

When a debate on anti-Semitism is held on the fringe of the Labour Party conference, one might expect universal condemnation of this horrific racism aimed at a minority. Instead, rambling, incoherent bilge is spewed by an academic. Despite clear examples of antisemitism in Labour, the row within the party was described as "a monstrous soufflé of moral panic being whipped up". The speaker making this claim went on to say: "We need to ask about this soufflé, who the cooks are? Where's the kitchen? What are the implements? How's it been done?"

What on earth is this supposed to mean? How can such absurd sentiments be considered part of public debate in the 21st century?

When the Archbishop of Canterbury himself feels moved to write an essay on the evils of antisemitism, you know there's a problem. Justin Welby said antisemitism "is not a problem for one political party, one community or one sector of our society" but instead it "permeates and pervades all that it touches when it is swept under the carpet, denied and not confronted head-on".

Why are we still having this conversation? As Welby argues, the Church has to take much of the blame. "[The] habits of antisemitism have been burrowing into European and British culture for as long as we can remember," he argued, "It is a shameful truth that, through its theological teachings, the Church, which should have offered an antidote, compounded the spread of this virus."

In this, Welby puts his finger on the deep-seated root of the problem of antisemitism. From relatively early in the history of the Church, the treatment of Jews was chequered at best. In the early Church, many of the believers were of course Jewish. As the message spread, the number of ethnic Jews in the Church became fewer.



The idea of Jews as "Christ Killers" began. As Giles Fraser has argued, "Christianity bears primary responsibility for historic

antisemitism. Few ideas can have been as poisonous as, and inspired more murderousness than, the idea that Jews were the Christ-killers."

By the time of St John Chrysostom in the 4th century, Christianity had gone from persecuted minority to being the official religion of the Roman Empire. Chrysostom spoke in uncompromising terminology about Jews.

Much has been written about his motivation for writing *Eight Homilies Against The Jews*. What is clear is that Chrysostom's sentiments were deeply unhelpful in ongoing relations. Michael Walzer argues: "Chrysostom... was such a violent opponent of 'the Jews' that earnest scholars have assumed that Judaism must have posed a clear and present danger to Christianity in his time. In fact... if Saint John feared the Jews, "it was because his theology had taught him to view other dangers in Jewish terms".

Chrysostom was not alone. Other Church Fathers showed hostility to Jews. Walzer says: "By the time of writers like Eusebius, Ambrose, and Augustine, the Jews had been... 'a twice-defeated people' – first militarily by the Romans and then religiously by the imperial establishment of Christianity."

This stain of the early Church was carried on through the Crusades, where Jews were killed by Christians, into the Reformation. Martin Luther's

antisemitism was discussed by Mark Woods, in a piece for Christian Today earlier this year. He said, "the charges of antisemitism are absolutely true. In his book *On the Jews and their Lies*, he describes Jews as 'venomous beasts, vipers, disgusting scum' and 'devils incarnate'."

Luther went further than just writing, though. "He called for their them to be expelled from their homes, saying: 'Their private houses must be destroyed and devastated, they could be lodged in stables. Let the magistrates burn their synagogues and let whatever escapes be covered with sand and mud.'

A full history of the Church and antisemitism is more than I have space for here. But given the crucial role of Christianity in the development of Western thought, it is not hard to see why it continues to this day. Into the modern era, via warning events such as the Dreyfus Affair, antisemitism reached its cataclysmic nadir during the Holocaust. Six million Jews were slaughtered by a supposedly Christian country.

Surely this horrific suffering endured by the Jewish people would finally shake western people, influenced still by Christian culture, even if they weren't Christians, from the grip of antisemitism.

Sadly, not yet. Christians continue to recycle the outrageous 'Christ killer' trope. Antisemitism is rife on social media – with a few clicks I have been able to find Nazis sympathizers happily posting away without censorship. It isn't just words. Antisemitic violence and killing continue to this day in Western Europe.

As we mark 80 years this week since the people of east London – Jews and gentiles – stood together proudly to oppose fascism at The Battle of Cable Street, now is the perfect time for us to renew our commitment to fighting antisemitism.

It seems appalling that we should need to restate this in 2016, yet here we are. There is no justification for antisemitism whatsoever. Christianity has been guilty of stoking the fires of hatred of Jews for far too long and we must have zero tolerance for this despicable attitude whenever it rears its head in our communities.

We must accept our share of the blame, make every physical and online

space totally safe for Jewish people and clamp down heavily on those who perpetrate this despicable hatred. Anything less and we are complicit in an ancient and hateful crime.

Follow Andy Walton on Twitter @waltonandy

HARVEST CHARITY 2016

A DAM THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Our harvest charity this year will support Christian Aid Harvest Appeal 'A dam that makes a difference'.

Three-quarters of the population of Kenya is dependent on agriculture. But changing weather patterns and more erratic rainfall mean droughts happen more often and last longer. Access to water gets harder, crops fail, and vulnerable communities don't have enough to eat.

Many families have to carry heavy cans of water for miles in order to get a good harvest from their dry land.

ADSE(a branch of the Anglican church in Kenya) have enabled local communities to build sand dams which provides water near to their farms. ADSE also provides drought resistant seeds and trains farmers in ways to manage their land in the changing climate.

This improvement in farming conditions means the farmers can sell their produce, employ casual labourers and send their children to school. Keeping water close by has allowed villages to set up new businesses and has transformed community life.

As we celebrate harvest at All Saints let us remind ourselves that our food does not start out in a tin but in the earth.

Church Crawl

four South Wales churches

15th October 2016

- St Theodore, Port Talbot (J L Pearson 1897) *coffee*
- Abbey Church St Mary the Virgin, Margam (Cistercian foundation founded 1147. Current church 19th century. Ruins of old abbey surround) *BYO picnic lunch*
- Eweny Priory (dedication St Michael the Archangel. Founded in the twelfth century. A remarkable example of pure Norman work throughout, the presbytery roof having Romanesque vaulting)
- Llancarfan (dedicated to St Cadoc who founded a monastery here in the sixth century. Mediaeval wall paintings rediscovered as recently as 2013 lurking beneath twenty layers of lime wash)
cream tea available at extra cost

Cost £15 (dependent on numbers)

Time: Coach leaving All Saints' Pembroke Road Clifton
9.15am, returning approximately 6.30pm

For further details and booking, contact Garfield Griffiths
garfield.griffiths@gmail.com or telephone 0117 9441035

IN THIS MONTH ... OCTOBER 1897

Two letters to the Editors from the Correspondence Page

Firstly, from Agnes C Wollaston of College Road, Clifton:

Dear Sirs,

It is just a year since, through the Parish Magazine, I appealed for help for the violet growers at Porlock Weir, an appeal which was most kindly met at the time. This Autumn the violets seem likely to be fine and plentiful, but owing to the enormous foreign competition it is impossible to get regular orders from the florists. At a time when the winter prospects for the poor are not too cheerful, money brought in by these small industries will be most helpful, in addition to the uncertain earnings of the cottagers. Will no one give a standing order for weekly boxes at one shilling and upwards? Orders over five shillings would be sent post free, the number of flowers varying with the market price. The violets are freshly picked, and packed immediately, thus retaining the freshness and delicious scent, in which the foreign flowers are unavoidably wanting. Orders sent will be immediately and carefully attended to, and any enquiries promptly answered.

Secondly, from "Veritas":

Dear Sirs,

As a visitor to Clifton and an attendant at your beautiful church, may I call your attention to a fact by which I, as well as others, have suffered?

The Churchwardens have thoughtfully placed at the bottom of the church a stand for umbrellas; but, unfortunately, when once placed there they are not always to be found again. I was the loser a fortnight ago of a valued one, and although I expected last Sunday to see it returned by the person who *unwittingly* took it, I have been disappointed. I know others have suffered in the same way. It is not pleasant to place dripping umbrellas at our feet. Is there no alternative to ensure their safety?

From the Bishop

This month, the Bishop's Letter is an address given at the recent Diocesan Synod.

This morning I would love to take you through the history of the Church of England's involvement with education since 1811 and how it is that 20% of all schools and over 850 000 children attend schools with a Church of England foundation.

I would love to guide you through the past 6 years of seismic change in education which began with the introduction of academies – first for failing schools, then for the most capable schools, and now – whether they wish to or not – effectively for the vast majority of schools. I would love to speak about further and higher education, and the C of E's involvement in this.

I would love to – but I cannot given the constraints of an address like this. So what I want to focus on are some of the challenges and opportunities that the process of academisation in schools currently holds for the Diocese of Bristol, and particularly in relation to our vision for Creating Connections. I want to do this under the following headings: Foundation and Inheritance, Foundation versus Fortress, Foundation and Future.

First, **Foundation and Inheritance**. Twenty-six percent of all primary schools in England and 6% of secondary schools carry our ‘brand’ and are designated Voluntary Controlled (VC) or Voluntary Aided (VA), C of E schools, the majority being VC. In general, C of E schools are held in high regard by parents and the local communities. In contrast to the suggestion in the title, the Governing Body of a VC school has a lower representation of Foundation governors than a VA school. More significantly, the Christian identity and culture running through a church school can be very deep or hardly noticeable and no different from one without a church affiliation.

The rise of Multi-Academy Trusts (or MATs) and the shrinkage of Local Authorities has focused attention on the implications of having a Church foundation – not only for local schools, but for dioceses and the National Society which is the Church of England body overseeing their governance. Despite the reservations of many in the Church of England around academisation, the National Society and dioceses have decided to respond positively to the challenge and make it an opportunity. The latest expression of the reasoning behind this and the vision set before us is articulated in a July 2016 paper entitled ‘Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good’. In essence it reaffirms our historic commitment to the education of all children, regardless of their background – including in relation to religious convictions. This vision is underpinned and suffused with a Christian understanding of what ‘life in all its fullness’ might mean and how it is nurtured in our complex societal dynamic.

The sea change of academisation requires dioceses to take responsibility for education in all its parts – in other words running schools and being totally accountable for their performance. This is what our Diocese now does through DBAT (Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust). Centrally, the Church of England has committed itself to establishing a Foundation for Educational Leadership which is based on its biblically and theologically grounded Vision for Education described earlier. The Foundation is in essence an Institute or College for providing high quality training and development; supporting and promoting excellence in what is, and will be, a continually evolving landscape.

With this background in mind we turn to the second strand: **Foundation versus Fortress**. Away from the centre and out towards the periphery – one might say the chalk-face – of the dioceses and their local schools, Governing Bodies and DBEs (Diocesan Boards of Education) are waking up to the implications of foundation status in relation to the options before them. With respect to church schools (the great majority of which are VC in Bristol diocese) a key question has been around choice. Can church schools join a Multi-Academy Trust other than DBAT, or form a MAT of their own with other schools? The former has been a critical issue for our own DBE to think through and has necessitated many hours of navigation, investigation, and discussion – the latter often robust and extended.

What is remarkable is that the Board, with all its diversity of experience and perspective, reached a consensus on the inadvisability of Church foundation schools becoming part of non-church MATs. Time does not allow me to elaborate on all the reasons behind the decision, but the reaction to it has been mixed. Some schools in the diocese now feel protected, others that they have been constrained. The fact that other dioceses have reached different decisions has led to the Board (and hence the diocese) being accused of having a 'fortress' mentality, which I can understand. However, the Board's judgement accords with the latest guidance coming from the National Society. The Board has just begun exploring another request over choice which turns out to be much more complicated than it appears.

Complexity around many of the issues does not make for simple communication and, speaking for myself and my colleagues, we are learning from our mistakes and acknowledging them. Sadly, some members of Synod will be aware of how easy it can be for the Diocese to be misrepresented in such matters, which is of reputational concern. In relation to church schools, chiefly VC schools, academisation is a process which tends to either weaken or strengthen links with a diocese. The Board is looking to do the latter and DBAT is working with schools to provide the maximum degree of freedom given an agreed foundation.

Finally, **Foundation and Future**. There are those who have asked whether a Diocese should be running schools at all and whether this is truly our mission. Others ask whether our inheritance is now becoming a drain on energy and resources, rather than an asset and multiplier. These are important questions which Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod have acknowledged yet remain committed to making the most of this testing educational landscape. DBAT has a growing reputation for competence and quality which is recognised within the higher echelons of the educational establishment as well as in Church of England circles. Our success in making bids for new schools both reflects and reinforces this. Despite some of the challenges academisation has brought, we are already seeing how DBAT is 'Creating Connections' which are building on, and deepening, those we have already established across the Diocesan network of schools.

As we think and pray into our Diocesan vision and aims, let's consciously ensure we, as Synod Members, and our PCCs, widen our view to include our church schools, remembering they are one of the most significant environments for 'Engaging Younger Generations'.

'Growing Leaders' has clear resonance with what the national Foundation for Educational Leadership is looking to provide and will be resourcing high quality development for many teaching staff associated with our churches, and perhaps a number outside. There will be learning – practical and theological – which can be passed on and shared more widely in churches as well as schools. We do not know whether children educated in a C of E school are more likely to become practicing Christians than others – that is not the aim of our engagement – but there are associations linking their overall wellbeing as adults with such a foundation.

The nation as well as the Church has been given a rich inheritance in our church schools

which we have often taken for granted. A challenge for us is that this inheritance requires renewed investment at a time when most dioceses are feeling quite stretched. This sounds like a recipe for potential disaster or the kind of combination which the Spirit of God prefers in order to do new things among his people. Let's pray that it is the latter!

+Lee

PARISH RETREAT 2017

Friday 3 – Sunday 5 February

**Conductor: The Rt Revd John Armes,
Bishop of Edinburgh**

The Retreat would start from 5pm on Friday 3 February and would finish with tea at 4pm on Sunday 5 February. This will give us time for reflection after lunch on Sunday. Silence would start at 8pm on Friday and finish after lunch on Sunday.

There is also the availability for some of us to arrive on the Thursday evening and stay until 10am on the Monday. This would have to be paid for separately and if anyone is interested I will get forms for you to fill in.

This is advance notice and later I will put a notice up in the porch for people to sign, when I have more details.

Liz Badman