



Reflection of the Month: Light in the midst of darkness

Paul Rochester writes:

We are children of light living in a world of darkness. The darkness of the world can be staggering, to the point of discouragement. Signs of that darkness are seen in humanity's propensity for evil, ignorance about the true reality of life and existential questions and society's disregard of our loving God. Despite that God's people are called to let their light shine. St Matthew 5:16 states: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."



In the natural world, light is essential to life and the ability to see. The oxygen we breath is a result of light and the photosynthesis process whereby energy in the atmosphere and environment supports the development of living things. Life and light are inextricably linked. Jesus in declaring himself to be the way, the truth, and the life brings together the fact that he is the source of life and He gives direction to living a fulfilled life (St John 14:6).

We know that in Scripture light is used, amongst other things, to describe knowledge. Many are living in darkness or to more precise, in ignorance of the life of God and the incarnate Christ. It is only the light of Jesus Christ which can dispel that darkness. The Bible tells us that God's words give light and understanding to the simple (Psalms 119:130). This focus on spiritual darkness, and the need for light is at the heart of the story about Jesus. There is little merit in seeking to explain away this darkness or to seek for the answer through social constructs, despite that many will continue to try.

Spiritual light is the answer to the malaise of humanity. If we are truthful, we will acknowledge that there is a great deal of suffering and bewilderment all around, affecting the lives of many. People are desperate for answers. The people of God should be confident that they are part of the answer because Jesus who is the answer lives within us. It's important to not underestimate our worth in Christ but with boldness and sensitivity, in the love of God, challenge the darkness by being the light of Jesus Christ.

We are in the last quarter of the calendar year and soon we will begin Christmas festivities. Jesus was born to be that light in a world of darkness. It so important that the people of God do not lose faith and become disturbed by what they see happening in the world. We are to guard against the spirit of discouragement and, I think, that we do that best in community. We do that by encouraging and supporting one another.

Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17). This community is at the heart of ecumenical work and calls us to learn to walk together, to share the blessing of Christ's kingdom.

I believe that as we look forward to Christmas it would be good to take time to think again about what Christ's coming really means for humanity. There is now a way for us to come to God and receive light, that we can be light in a world of darkness. Without Jesus Christ who is the light of the world, we are still in darkness. Jesus Christ alone is the answer to all of life's ills and therefore the light to dispel all darkness.

My heart, despite the brokenness and challenges I see in the world, is still moved with great excitement when I think about Jesus Christ. I am excited because of the hope Jesus brings to humanity, what His coming means for me but also, just as importantly, what it means for all who look to Him. When Luke spoke of the birth of Christ, he was very clear that it is a blessing to all (St Luke 2:10). He is the light for the whole of creation. Through Jesus Christ we no longer need to stumble in the darkness but walk in the light.

Rev'd Paul Rochester is General Secretary of the [Free Churches Group](#)

The CTE General Secretary's vision for the future



Paul Goodliff, General Secretary of Churches Together in England, addressed the Enabling Group at its meeting in November 2018. In this address he stated a new vision for CTE and plans for the future:

"As we begin a new chapter in CTE's life, with the implementation of the 2017 Theos report our priority, what will be our vision for the life of CTE, and, indeed, the life of the churches together in England in uncertain — perhaps, perilous — times?

First and foremost, we must develop our renewed ecumenical identity with greater focus upon our common witness and collaboration in mission. The churches in membership with CTE have identified and called for this, and the challenge of the times demands it. Not that CTE is called to become another mission agency, but rather, an ecumenical space where greater collaboration in mission becomes possible, and even inevitable — a broad tent under which we can gather and share life. The growing ecumenical character of the Archbishop of Canterbury's initiative, Thy Kingdom Come reflects such a move. The broad tent resembles, more accurately, a marquee, with the sides wide open to receive the breeze of God's Spirit and enable ready access to the world beyond. At its very centre is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the body, pointing us to the Father through the Spirit, present within and also beyond those gathered under the shelter of the canvas. The very first direction of our gaze must always be the triune God, even as he then calls us to join with him in looking to the whole of creation and the world he creates, sustains and loves. ... "

[To read the full statement click here.](#)

100 Cities Summit Unity Movements

A report from Jim Currin:

Over 200 network leaders of city unity movements from around the world gathered in Washington DC from 27th-29th November 2018 for the [100 Cities Summit](#), organised by [Movement Day](#). This was an invitation event and included a delegation of about more than a dozen from England, in the [Gather Network](#), facilitated by Roger Sutton.



Roger is well known to many in Churches Together in England and as a staff team we were pleased to keep working closely with the new 130 'Gather' unity groups in England. I was therefore grateful to be part of the delegation representing CTE. This then is a report of that gathering.

The world gathering met in the newly opened [Museum of the Bible](#), coordinated by the network of 'Movement Day', which brings together 'gospel unity movements for city transformation'. Some readers may remember CTE was a partner in Gather/Movement Day last year when 1000 people gathered in London and the CTE Presidents led prayer in our own Parliament Square.

Reporting now on the world gathering this week, here are a few reflections.

First, is to note the gathering of momentum in England. Since working closely with Roger, the number of networks he quotes of new unity movements has risen in England from 100 to 130. There is a new network in Teesside for example, that has just produced a new video '[Transforming Teesside Together](#)'.

Second, in many parts of the world and in many major cities, church 'unity' is relatively new. It is very easy to take this for granted given the long CTE history. Thank God for the network leaders - often local pastors - who take the initiative to network through prayer and growing relationships, so the churches can together serve their place praying for transformation.

Third, as in England, there is a coming together of different streams. The new movements may be led by the church, and evangelical churches in particular, but the networks of prayer and action now include Christian business leaders, secular Service Providers, and community groups, as well as in the arts, education streams, all praying for mission as 'transformation'.

Fourth, sharing lessons is key to building relationships. The first session happened to start with Roger and colleagues from England. They shared stories of prayer and unity networks re Salford and the regeneration; Reading and the churches community action; '[Together 4 Bristol](#)' that brings together intercessors, social action, Evangelical Alliance and Churches Together networks. We also heard about the Liverpool Pastor, offered a 5-acre public park for community use. In response we heard of new inspirational stories from other parts of the world including India, Malaysia, Africa, Australia, where again churches are uniting in prayer for city transformation.

Fifth, although not linked in any formal way, I can't help but think this is all in line with other developments over recent years. Notably, [Thy Kingdom Come](#) as a catalyst for unity and transformation (praying for the kingdom to come transforms our society), but also the individual denominations collectively making mission a priority, as reflected in the [CTE Theos report](#). Prayer, unity and mission is what we are doing more and more, perhaps even without realising it is a new movement!

Sixth, although the emphasis of Movement Day and especially the 100 Cities Summit this past week is deliberately focussed on 'city movements' there is much to be gleaned from 'praying together' and 'city transformation' that translates directly to our towns and villages. '[Pray for Schools](#)' is a good example when 3 or more Christians meet regularly in a village to pray for their school. Another example is [Faith and Police](#) as it starts to develop many new prayer networks for our rural as well as urban neighbourhoods.

Seventh, we need to recognise that these new 'gospel networks for city transformation' around the world (the 100 Cities was only a sample of many more examples) are led by evangelicals. This is to be celebrated as a gift to the wider church, as unity movements are, by definition, embracing all traditions. A repeated phrase from the summit has stuck with me about this re who gets involved with the open agenda question: 'Do you love Jesus; do you love your city; are you praying for transformation? If you are, then we want to work with you'. This seems a good set 3 simple questions to include Christians of all traditions.

Eighth, although the 100 Cities Summit was designed for leaders of networks, it was striking that little central reference was made to national and regional church leaders. There were plenty of stories shared that illustrated how regional church leaders were involved but not at the 100 Cities Summit itself. The real positive of this is that networks probably work best when everyone in the network share ownership in a 'flat' structure, but there is a great deal many of our area and national church leaders are doing to facilitate 'prayer and transformation' and I think they need involving and encouraging too.

Ninth - and I realise that I am heading for a ten-point list - is the link between 'transformation' and 'coming Kingdom'. Personally, I think we need to explore further and ask the question, 'When we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come" what does it look like?' There were many illustrations of that in the stories from the 100 Cities Summit, from regeneration projects, crime reduction, education for the poorest transforming individual lives, but what, I wonder might be other signs, and how can 'prayer and transformation' be measured?

Tenth, are the questions that remain. 'What am I praying for, and how does that relate to the prayers of my other Christian brothers and sisters in the place we serve?' The most inspirational aspect of the 100 Cities Summit was the repeated story of some phenomenal and unexpected outcomes, sometimes on a huge scale, related in a variety of ways to Christians praying in unity. Partnerships with business, social services, education, civic authorities, community and faith groups were part of the story but often the story started with Christians praying together and seeking God's purpose for their place.

If anyone would like to know more contact [Jim Currin](#).

Student Sunday Resources Available



The Universal Day of Prayer for Students is on the 17th of February 2019. This annual event has been celebrated since 1898, making it one of the oldest ecumenical days of prayer.

The Student Christian Movement, one of our [Bodies in Association](#), has produced a number of resources to [download](#) encouraging churches to mark the occasion.

SCM hopes churches across the nation will spend this day praying for students alongside other churches throughout the world.

For more information see SCM's [website](#).

CAFOD appoints Christine Allen as next Director



The Catholic aid charity [Cafod](#) has appointed Christine Allen as its next director – almost 30 years after she first worked for the charity.

Allen, who was campaigns coordinator at Cafod between 1989 and 1991, will join in the spring from [Christian Aid](#), where she has been director of policy and public affairs since 2012. Before joining Christian Aid, Allen spent 11 years as executive director of the Catholic development charity Progressio, which closed last year. She has also worked at the social landlord umbrella body the [National Housing Federation](#) and the children's hospice charity [Chas](#).

Cafod said in a statement today that Allen had "lobbied and influenced political and private sector leaders on significant policy changes on tax justice and climate justice". She said in a statement that taking up the role "feels like coming home". She said: "Working for Cafod as a young campaigner, I discovered Catholic social teaching and was hugely inspired and influenced by a church that took action for peace and justice. "The need for global solidarity today is as great as ever. I am immensely proud of Cafod, its work and its role in the global Catholic family, and I feel humbled to lead such an important agency of the church."

Bishop John Arnold, chair of Cafod, said of Allen: "She is a strategic leader whose vision, energy, and deep-rooted faith and commitment to Catholic values make her specially placed to lead Cafod's journey in the coming years."

Bain said in May that he would retire in December after 15 years in post, but Cafod said today that he would delay his retirement until Allen takes up the role.

CAFOD is an [agency of CTE](#)

Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism awarded.

On November 14th, the Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism was awarded to the Rt Revd Stephen Platten at the Anglican Centre in Rome.

A former Bishop of Wakefield, he steps down as chair of governors of the Anglican Centre in Rome at the end of the year. He was awarded the cross by Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi, in recognition of his involvement "at a deep level with ecumenical relations during his long ministry, alongside his significant and important ministry within the Church of England."



Bishop Platten, who has served at the Centre for three decades — and as chair of governors for 15 years — is also a former Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs and co-secretary of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

"I have been committed to the unity of our Churches throughout my life, and I am utterly committed to the work of the Centre," he said. "My hope is that it [the award] might further raise the profile of the Centre as it develops and prospers in the future."

Original article and full list of recent Archbishop awards from the [Church Times](#).
Photo credit Anglican Centre in Rome.

Christmas Alone 2018

Premier writes:

We believe that no one should have to spend Christmas Alone if they don't want to, and for the 6th year running, we're aiming to help people across the UK to go to places so that they can spend their Christmas with others. Once again we'll be creating an [interactive map of all the Christmas Day events happening across the UK](#).



Christmas should be one of the happiest times of the year for everyone; yet for millions of people across the UK it can be the loneliest. While most people are occupied amidst the festivities of the day with their families and friends, some people feel that they have no place to go and no one to talk to.

We'd like to invite you to share our vision by hosting a Christmas day event for your community. In previous years, people have held events which have varied from having a Christmas meal, a sing along, and even a gathering of people to watch the Christmas specials on TV. Whatever you have in mind, we'd love to hear about it.

If you're already planning an event for Christmas Day then [make sure you register it](#) and it will appear on our searchable map on premier.org.uk/christmasalone

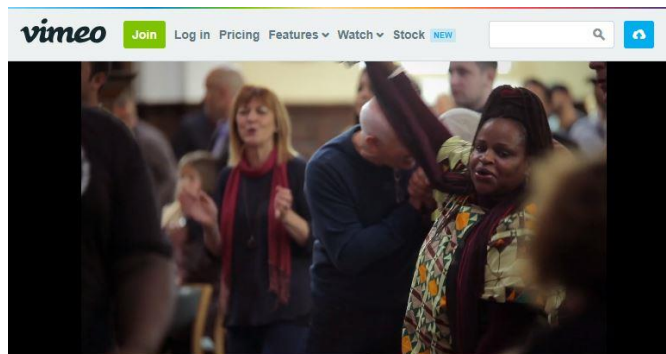
We have also produced a special Christmas Pack that includes all the key information and answer questions to help you plan your event effortlessly. [Click here and download your free pack!](#)

Premier Christian Radio is a [Body in Association](#) of Churches Together in England

Transforming Teesside Together video

As mentioned in the 100 Cities Summit report mentioned above, a video has just been made about the churches working together in Teesside. Called 'let me tell you about my church' it illustrates lots of different churches and styles/activities, making the point that there is a 'campus of my church near you'.

<https://vimeo.com/303250409>



Let Me Tell You About My Church

And finally ...

Just a note that the CTE office will be closed from Friday 21st December and reopen on Wednesday 2nd January.

All at Churches Together in England with Happy Christmas and many blessings for the New Year ahead.

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This mailing is from Churches Together in England and is sent once a month
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