



Reflection of the Month: 'Tear down the barriers!'

Revd Dr David Cornick writes:

Five hundred years ago an Augustinian monk who was also a professor of theology in an upstart new university in Saxony unwittingly changed the world.

Martin Luther was a complicated man, a passionately devout monk; a perceptive, original and courageous theologian unafraid to stand up for what he considered the truth even though the church and the world stood against him; a foul-mouthed reactionary polemicist who actively encouraged the slaughter of the peasants who dared rebel against the state in 1524; a devoted husband to Kate and in that sense a pioneer of the Protestant family; a skilled linguist whose gave German speakers a peerless vernacular Bible, and an innovator whose command of the new media (in his case print and pamphlets) would have trumped President-Elect Trump.



The legacy of Luther's quest for the peace of God and his 're-discovery' of justification by faith led to the invention of Protestantism, the division of Europe into religious blocs, and a consequent series of religious wars which wrecked and scarred almost every European nation for the next century and a half. He could never have foreseen those unintended consequences, nor can he be blamed for them. However, half a millennium on, we are the inheritors of that ambiguous legacy.

Its appropriate therefore, that the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity material, which we will begin to use next week (18-25 January) was prepared by the German churches. Germany was permanently scarred by the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), one of the unintended consequences of Luther's reformation. The armies of Europe marauded across the states of Germany for thirty years bringing terror and plague in their wake. So deep was the scar that Albert Speer, Hitler's Armaments Minister, explained their capitulation in 1945 as preventing the decimation of Germany from reaching that scale again.[1]

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Germany knew the pain of religious division as large swathes of the population had to move into either Catholic or Protestant territories. That movement of peoples was echoed in the long wake of the Second World War. The division of Germany into East and West, and the erection of the Berlin Wall, ushered in a new politics of division, symbolised by a literal, physical barrier that ran the length of Berlin, until it fell, extraordinarily and dramatically, in 1989, paving the way for re-unification in 1990.

Speaking out of that unique, terrible, pain-ridden history, the German churches call us to reconciliation. As they considered how they should celebrate the 500th anniversary of the promulgation of Luther's 95 Theses in October 1517, they decided on a 'Christusfest' – a celebration of Christ. They took inspiration from Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium*. He reminded us that 'unity prevails over conflict', for '...Christ has made all things one in himself; heaven and earth, God and man, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society'.

The sign of that unity is peace, a peace that is only possible in Christ's victory. As Pope Francis reflects on that peace, he argues that its locus is first of all within us, for '...if hearts are shattered in thousands of pieces, it is not easy to create authentic peace in society.' This isn't about negotiation, but about the work of the Spirit who '...can harmonise every diversity' and bring from that conflict a new synthesis, full of new possibilities.[2] Should we wish to see proof of that, we could do no better than look to the experience of the German churches, who out of a cruel, long and deep history of division, call us now to break down barriers. Christ has broken the ultimate barrier, the barrier of death through his death. As we all share in that death, so we all share in his life, the new creation, his reconciliation of all things to himself. Our unity resides in him, and he gives us that ministry of reconciliation.

This Week of Prayer, we need to re-dedicate ourselves to that costly ministry. This year Christians will also commemorate the centenary of the birth of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, one of ten modern martyrs commemorated in stone on the front of Westminster Abbey. Romero was remarkably talented priest. Ordained in 1942, he had obtained a doctorate from the Gregorian by the age of 26, and seemed set for an exemplary career. After twenty years of admirable parish work, he became a seminary Rector and then the Secretary of Bishops' Conference for El Salvador before being raised to the episcopate. In 1977 he became Archbishop of San Salvador. The government were delighted, left-wing priests disappointed, for he was a judicious conservative. A close friend, a Jesuit priest, Rutilio Grande, was assassinated a month later for his work amongst the poor. Romero was deeply moved – '...I thought, if they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.'

The El Salvadorian government must have felt like Henry II when he appointed Thomas Becket as Archbishop of Canterbury – that they had the church sorted. Like Henry II, they were wrong, for as the Revolutionary Junta came to power in 1979 with the backing of Carter's America, they found in their Archbishop a determined champion of the rights of the poor. In less than three years, six priests were murdered, more than fifty attacked and calumniated, and thousands of ordinary worshippers were threatened, tortured or 'disappeared'.

It was but a matter of time, and on 24th March 1980, Romero was shot down whilst celebrating mass in the chapel of the Divine Providence cancer hospital where he lived. The week before he died, Romero preached on the same texts chosen by the German churches for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – 2 Cor 5 and Luke 15:11-32 (the prodigal son). Look at the ways, he said, in which left condemns right, and right left. Look at the hatred and the violence – 'So many people are members of different groups and they are polarised and perhaps members of the same group do not love one another because in reality love cannot exist when there is so much polarisation and hatred. We need to tear down the barriers! We need to realise that there is one Father who loves everyone and awaits us all!....I am not able to speak about reconciliation with any other words except by saying that we must be united with

Christ....God is in Christ reconciling all things to himself.'[3]

We too are called to that costly ministry in our deeply divided nation and world. May God grant us the grace, insight and courage that he gave to those two remarkable servants of his whom we commemorate this year – Martin Luther and Oscar Romero.

The Revd Dr David Cornick is General Secretary of Churches Together in England.

[1] Neil MacGregor Germany: memories of a nation (London, Allen Lane, 2014) p.xxxiv

[2] Evangelii gaudium paras 226-30

[3] Oscar Romero 'Reconciliation in Christ, true liberation'

www.romerotrue.org.uk/sites/default/files/homilies/reconciliation_christ_true_liberation.pdf. Accessed 13.01.17

New Evangelism Website Hub Launched

Several churches in England are working with the Evangelical Alliance as they launch the Great Commission website to help Christians talk about their faith in Jesus.

Lucy Olofinjana from the EA writes:

Greatcommission.co.uk is designed to inspire greater passion for evangelism and empower churches and individuals to be talking about Jesus in their communities.



The site brings together more than 150 tools and resources, as well as written reflections on evangelism and personal stories from Christians across the UK. This includes a variety of stories about people who have come to faith in Jesus, as well as stories of different ways Christians are sharing their faith in their everyday lives.

Gavin Calver, director of mission at the Evangelical Alliance, said: "We are passionate about seeing every person in the UK given an opportunity to follow Jesus.

"That's why we've created the Great Commission website with stories, reflections and resources designed to inspire, equip and empower every individual Christian, and every church, to be able to reach out to their community with the good news of Jesus Christ. Let's together make Jesus known."

[Balbinder's story](#) is one of the weekly videos – a new one released each Monday morning – showing the power of the good news of Jesus. She says: "Because I had been a Sikh for more than 50 years, when I turned to Christianity, my daughter sort of retaliated. She started going to the Gurdwara, which she never did before, just to annoy me. It used to upset me and then God spoke to me that I have to show her love. If I get angry, that's not showing her [love], so I used to say 'okay', but I continued to pray for her.

"Secretly she was reading the Bible on her phone and the verse that came to her was about Nicodemus talking to Jesus, and when Jesus said you have to be born again. She said it would not go from the app on her phone and it spoke to her and she was ready to give her life to Jesus."

Lynn Green, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, has shared her excitement about this new online resource: "We need to equip one another to share our faith and to be witnesses wherever we are. I'm really excited about the Great Commission website.

"It's wonderful to see all the resources that are available there; things to watch, things to read, practical things to do – I love practical things! We want to equip every Christian and churches in their witness, increase their confidence and help them."

Donald Bolt, administrative bishop of the New Testament Church of God, said: "The Great Commission excites me in that we have an opportunity as Christians to be co-workers with God in the ministry of reconciliation.

"Helping to share with humanity that they have a way back to their heavenly Father, their creator and that broken relationship can be mended."

Visit Greatcommission.co.uk to:

Watch stories of lives changed by Jesus throughout the UK, and hear about how others are sharing their faith. A new story is available each week to share and freely download, reminding us that God is at work in our land.

Read reflections that will encourage and stimulate you as you think, dream, pray and plan about what evangelism could look like in your place. These reflections come from Christians across the diversity of the UK Church, sharing the lessons they've learnt from their context.

Find **prayer** reflections and resources to inspire you in prayerful outreach.

Be equipped to **act** through quickly and easily searching the wide range of evangelism tools and resources already out there. More than 150 resources and tools have been categorised according to who you want to reach, what type of activity you're interested in, or what time of year.

You can also easily share what you've found on the site by creating **boards** to save the stories, reflections and resources you'd like to show others. You can then give chosen individuals access to view these boards – whether that's friends, members of your PCC, or your youth team.

Visit the website today at greatcommission.co.uk and keep up-to-date with the latest content via [Facebook](#) and on [Twitter](#).

Free Resources for Student Sunday 2017

On 19 February 2017, student groups, churches and other Christian communities will come together to celebrate Student Sunday and pray for students around the world. The theme next year is 'All Are Welcome', and we would love to have your church or community involved!



About Student Sunday 2017

In an increasingly hostile world, it's more important than ever to create spaces that are generous, hospitable and welcoming for all. Spaces to think, reflect and act; spaces to be ourselves, as God made us. For students who are exploring their identity and vocation – and sometimes struggling to be heard and recognised – a truly welcoming community can make all the difference.

That's why we're inviting churches and groups to join with our movement on Student Sunday next February, as we pray and work to create a welcome for all – changing lives and empowering young people in faith.

[Find out more about Student Sunday here.](#)

Student Christian Movement is a [CTE Body in Association](#).

Resources from 'Germinate!' 2016 conference

The Germinate conference in October 2016 was warmly received. We were especially encouraged by comment at the close which summed up the day:

"I'm an ordinand, I'm studying and all I hear is how hard rural ministry is... and to come here today and hear so many inspiring stories, and how positive and how wonderful and how alive Christ is in the rural life of Britain, has totally energised me and enthused me and to go back to college with that is wonderful"

If you missed out, the good news is that some of the material was recorded. Here are the links;

[-Video summary of the day \(4 mins\)](#)

[-Audio summary \(7 mins\)](#)



Partners Supporting Germinate



[-Keynote from Rev Dr Roger Walton, President of the Methodist conference, on vocational discipleship \(33 mins\)](#)

[-Keynote from Pete Atkins, Team Co-ordinator for Fresh Expressions \(21 mins\) Enjoy!](#)

Affordable Rural Learning Communities video

We have been piloting the Germinate Groups rural learning communities with the Diocese of Worcester and they have produced a [short \(3 minute\) film which can be viewed here](#)

Another pilot is with the (ecumenical) Eastern Region Training Partnership; from this the material is now available to be delivered at low cost on a 'DIY' basis with our support and facilitator training.

[Take a look at the brochure for details](#)

[Report from the Churches Rural Group meeting of 15th October:](#)

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/285707/Home/Resources/Rural/The_Churches_Rural/Summary_of_CRG/Summary_of_CRG.aspx

2017 Calendar Dates

With thanks to the [Joint Public Issues Team](#):

Baptists Together, The Methodist Church, Church of Scotland and United Reformed Church for collating and providing the following list.

Please note some dates are To Be Confirmed (tbc).

Please check relevant website for the latest information, changes and updates:

18 - 25 January Week of Prayer for Christian Unity www.ctbi.org.uk

22 January Homeless Sunday www.homeless-sunday.uk

27 January Holocaust Memorial Day www.holocaustmemorialday.gov.uk

29 January World Leprosy Day www.leprosymission.org.uk

12 February Racial Justice Sunday <https://ctbi.org.uk>

26 February Poverty Action Sunday www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday

27 Feb - 12 March Fairtrade Fortnight www.fairtrade.org.uk

3 March Women's World Day of Prayer www.wwdp.org.uk www.wdpScotland.org.uk

5 March Tear Fund Sunday www.tearfund.org

?? March *tbc* Climate Week www.climateweek.com

8 March International Women's Day www.internationalwomensday.com

25 March UN International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and Transatlantic Slave Trade www.un.org/en/events/slaveryremembranceday/

9 April Deir Yasin Day www.sabeel.org

28 April International Workers' Memorial Day www.hazards.org/wmd

14 - 20 May Christian Aid Week www.christianaid.org.uk

4 June Environment Sunday www.arocha.org.uk

19 - 25 June Refugee Week (England and Wales) www.refugeeweek.org.uk
to be confirmed Refugee Festival Scotland
www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/news_and_events/refugee_festival_scotland

26 June International Day in Support of Victims of Torture www.fiacat.org/-international-day-in-support-of-victims-of-torture.449-

9 July Sea Sunday www.seasunday.org

16 July *tbc* Disability Sunday www.churchesforall.org.uk/disability-sunday

23 August UNESCO International Day for Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/srd/

1 Sept - 4 Oct Creation Time www.ctbi.org.uk www.ecen.org

10 September Education Sunday (England and Wales) www.cte.org.uk/Groups/234838/Home/Resources/Education_Sunday/Education_Sunday.aspx

17-23 September World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel www.worldweekforpeace.org

17 September Peacemaking Sunday (UN International Day of Peace - 21 Sept)

15 - 22 October Week of Prayer for World Peace www.weekofprayerforworldpeace.com

15 October Freedom Sunday www.stopthetraffik.org/campaign/freedomsunday

8-14 October Prisons Week (England and Wales) www.prisonsworldweek.org

23 - 29 October One World Week www.oneworldweek.org

24 October United Nations Day www.un.org/en/events/unday

tbc Good Money Week <http://goodmoneyweek.com>

12 November Remembrance Sunday www.ctbi.org.uk

12 - 19 Nov *tbc* Interfaith Week www.interfaithweek.org

19 November World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims www.roadpeace.org

19 November International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians www.csw.org.uk

19 - 26 Nov *tbc* Prisoners Week Scotland www.prisonersweek.org.uk

25 Nov - 10 Dec 18 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence

1 December World Aids Day www.worldaidsday.org

10 December Human Rights Day www.un.org/events/humanrights
[Download Word version of this list from JPIT](#)

CTE 2017 Leaflet: Extra paper copies printed and bulk copies available by post on request

The 2017 leaflet about Churches Together in England is now available. The leaflet includes:

- A selection of highlights from 2016, including the Presidents' statement about *Thy Kingdom Come*.
- Some of our key priorities for 2017, including a major consultation among the member churches conducted by Theos.
- A list of member churches, including those who have joined CTE membership in 2016.
- Information and contact details for CTE staff.



Print copies of the leaflet are available, on request, through the [CTE Office](#), but please feel free to print and distribute from the [PDF version here](#).
The leaflet is a double sided tri-fold A4.

To request bulk copies of the leaflet for groups, meetings, conferences and other events, please email Lorraine Shannon at: office@cte.org.uk.

New Co-President for Housing Justice

Vice President of Methodist Conference announced as President for National Christian Housing and Homelessness Charity

The Chair of Housing Justice and Bishop of Rochester, the Rt Revd James Langstaff is delighted this morning to announce that Ms Rachel Lampard, Team Leader of the Joint Public Issues Team and currently Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, has been appointed as a Co-President of the organisation.



Housing Justice

Since 2008, Rachel has been the Team Leader of the Joint Public Issues Team, an ecumenical collaboration between the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland, enabling the denominations to campaign and speak out on issues of poverty, climate change and peace.

Rachel's appointment, joining Cardinal Vincent Nicholas, the Archbishop of Westminster, comes at the end of the Jubilee Celebrations for the Catholic Housing Aid Society.

[Click here for more information](#)

History of The Theology and Unity Group 1996-2016

David Carter has written the following history:

The Theology and Unity Group of CTE was created in 1992, soon after CTE's foundation in 1990. Following the principles on which the latter had been founded, its specific purpose was stated to be to respond to requests from the member churches for theological reflection on work that they brought before it, partly in order to gauge the reaction of partner churches to proposed initiatives, in particular those that might affect their relationships with one or more of their partners.

The first chair of TUG, David Calvert stressed strongly that TUG was the servant of the churches, acting at their direction rather than independently. However, from quite early on it was found that member churches did not always let TUG know of their current theological work. In 1997, TUG asked me, as secretary, to draft a letter to the churches mentioning, tactfully, our desire to have an overview of their work, including comments of such aspects of it as they thought might affect their relationship with others. Throughout our subsequent history, we were to find that some churches were much quicker to share work in order to help identify its effect on ecumenical partners and their reactions to it. For much of the time, we also sought to share some of the work done at TUG at the successive Forums. In 1999, for example, we held a special interest group session, at which the question of how our work should be disseminated was raised. Some felt it should be sent out to County Ecumenical Officers for possible use in their bulletins and committees. Generally, TUG has expected denominational representatives to communicate any relevant insights to the ecumenical and/or faith and order committees of their denomination. The extent to which they have done so

has varied.

Since the mid-90's, TUG has taken more independent initiative, less through any deliberate decision and more through the very logic of the ecclesiology of pilgrim Church which had undergirded the Not Strangers But Pilgrims Process and which influenced, albeit with some variation in emphasis, the ecumenical strategy of all the member churches. It also became clear that CTE and its agencies and bodies in association were in a mediating role, looking to explore the implications of developments, at local, regional and inter-denominational level, not just in England, but in terms of the wider oikoumene. All the partner churches needed to look at documents and initiatives coming down from the WCC or CEC. Some of these had important lessons for inter-church co-operation, Charta Oecumenica, which we examined in 2000, being such an example. It was also important, at each stage, to follow the process that led, in 2013, to the publication of World Council of Churches document The Church: Towards a Common Vision, an attempt at a convergence statement in ecclesiology. This was done, very thoroughly, both in 1999- 2000 and in 2008, at the time of the publication of two successive draft interim reports from the WCC. On the first occasion, Donald Norwood played a leading role in producing a TUG response to the first interim statement. On the second occasion, at their suggestion, we held a combined consultation with CTBI on the second statement. In 2013, we looked at the final document with the help of Bishop John Hind.

However, as I pointed out in a report in 1999, it was also important for us to reflect on local and regional ecumenism in England. In November 1998, we looked at the theology of LEPs under the guidance of Flora Winfield, then engaged (with Elizabeth Welch) in a study of their position. In 2016, we looked at some new proposals for the future of local ecumenism, under the guidance of Neil Stubbens, the Methodist Ecumenical Officer, work which we are committed to taking further in the near future. The LEPs continue to be a challenge and a conundrum, though also a legacy in many cases to be highly celebrated

Read the whole history by visiting the permanent web page link:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/285708/Home/Resources/Theology/Theology_and_Unit_y/History_of_TUG/History_of_TUG.aspx

And finally ...

- 1) **New Ecumenical Canon:** His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Great Britain was made an Ecumenical Canon of Southwark Cathedral, Church of England, at Midnight Mass on 24th December 2016: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/southwarkcofe/sets/72157675253711824/>
- 2) **'Doing Good' Theos report:** Ten year after the launch of the Theos think tank was formed, The Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster write a forward to welcome a Theos report, reflecting on 10 years, called 'Doing Good: A Future for Christianity in the 21st Century by Nick Spencer: <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2016/12/14/doing-good-a-future-for-christianity-in-the-21st-century>

- 3) **Bishop Joe Aldred's report on Pentecostal Symposium** held in November 2016, has been added to the web page report of the Symposium here: [http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/284285/Home/Resources/Pentecostal and Multicultural/Pentecostal Symposium 2016/Pentecostal Symposium 2016.aspx](http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/284285/Home/Resources/Pentecostal_and_Multicultural/Pentecostal_Symposium_2016/Pentecostal_Symposium_2016.aspx)
- 4) **Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain resources for Reformation 500.** An order of service, Liturgy prepared by the World Lutheran Federation with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and other liturgical resources are available from: <http://www.jlg.org.uk/Resources/Luther.shtml>

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