

## **A Day in Canterbury**

### **'March for Jesus' and Inter-faith Festival at Cathedral – Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September 1989**

*'Well, today was the day of significant spiritual warfare in the heavenlies over this nation, and over Canterbury in particular. Or was it?*

*The 'Marches for Jesus' took place in 45 towns and cities over the UK -the length and breadth of the country, including the Shetlands, the Channel Islands, and Belfast. I don't know how many Christians the organisers hoped to get mobilised on the streets, but I've heard about a quarter of a million Christians took part.*

*At the same time, the inter-faith celebration of the environment, bringing together seven main world religions to demonstrate their concern about environmental ecological issues, took place at Canterbury Cathedral and in its grounds. It was the 'inter-faith' aspect of this festival that has caused concern among Christians, and Clifford Hill and Tony Higton in particular have been encouraging many Christians to write to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Dean of the Cathedral, to protest about this -which in many ways is a betrayal of the Christian Gospel, in that it puts Christianity alongside the other religions as if it is only one way of many to reach God.*

*Sometime ago, at the August half-night of prayer, I felt it right to get to Canterbury today, -specifically to join in the planned prayer vigil in the grounds of the Cathedral in the late afternoon, but also to join in the Canterbury 'March for Jesus' a few hours earlier. I was one of a small group from St. Mark's who went, going with Nicholas and Marigold, while Madeleine went with Clifford and Monica. (In Canterbury) we met up with Ambrose Dennis, John White, a chap called Paul who comes to St Mark's and is a friend of Ian Long, and I also saw Julie Cronin (who is an opera singer) there.*

*It was a terrific joy and privilege to go with Nicholas and Marigold, who are in the throes of packing and preparing to move out of their flat within the next few days. They have (more or less) stopped work and ministry at St Mark's, although Nicholas keeps popping in to clear out his office, and he has a further funeral to take, and Giovanna's wedding in November. But they really will be moving out of the parish imminently. The reality of that has not yet hit me, but undoubtedly will in the next few weeks. Meanwhile it was a great joy to go on*

*this trip to Canterbury with them, and to do the march with them. Later on we linked up with Clifford and Monica, with Madeleine, and some of the others. I might also add that they made it clear that they were thrilled to be going there with me!*

*Once we'd arrived at Canterbury, we easily located the starting point for the march -Canterbury High School, -although we had to park a fair distance away from it, in the 'British Telecom' car park which had been lent (sic) (to the 'March for Jesus' organisers) for the afternoon. There were a considerable number assembled, as this march included (people from) all the Thanet area, Ashford, Margate, Ramsgate, Dover, Deal, Romney Marshes, and probably churches from the Medway towns as well -basically most of Kent. Clifford later said he reckoned there were ten thousand there, -I'm not so good at estimating numbers and tend to underestimate, but there were certainly a lot of people there!*

*Before the march set off, there was an opening rally in the grounds of the High School, with a live link-up to London and some of the other venues where marches were taking place. On the platform at Canterbury was Roger Mitchell from 'Icthus', who'll be leading the mission at St Mark's in a fortnight's time.*

*Before we set out, we had a short burst of sunshine at a point when it was noticeable that the cathedral was under cloud, -and it certainly gave the impression of having a sad look about it, considering the events taking place there. The weather actually was mainly cloudy along with showers of rain, although they kept reasonably at bay until towards the end of the march, and had gone by the time we were at the cathedral. I had brought my umbrella, but as I explained to Nicholas and Marigold, it wasn't so much 'a lack of faith' since I'd not particularly prayed about the weather. In fact as far as I was concerned, it could rain as much as it liked during the latter part of the afternoon, if that was going to deter people from going to this festival.*

*The march, which probably covered about three miles, took us along part of the ring-road and then into the city centre, passing along crowded paved shopping precincts with quite a large number of onlookers, -many of whom responded warmly, others looking quite bemused -or completely blank. The march went fairly close to the cathedral. As in previous 'Marches for Jesus', a script was followed, incorporating local prayers for the area, along with prayers and Graham Kendrick songs and shouts that all the marches were using. We got back to the High School by 2.30pm, and dispersed fairly soon after that,*

*although there was such a crowd that it took quite a while for all the marchers to return. As we, Nicholas and Marigold, Ambrose and a couple of other chaps were leaving, we met up with Clifford, Monica and Madeleine, -although we took quite a while to get back to where we'd left the car, to find a closer car park to the cathedral.*

*We arrived at the cathedral at about five or ten past four, just in time to join a largish group led by Tony Higton, who were quietly singing the Lord's praises in the grounds. However, Tony announced that they had been asked to disperse by the Cathedral authorities, otherwise the police would come. This to me, was a ridiculous situation; -that one couldn't sing the Lord's praises in the cathedral grounds, and that those who were seeking to honour Him were having their activities frowned upon, whilst representatives from other faiths were present and propagating (sic) their particular wares. I wasn't being totally frivolous when I suggested that we should carry on praising, and let the police come and arrest us if they wanted to. This was not so much an act of rebellion against the police, but it would show up the Cathedral authorities in a bad light. However I readily agreed with someone who said we needed to hear what the Lord's strategy was for us. Apparently there was nothing to stop us from wandering around the grounds in smaller groups and praying, and this is what happened.*

*A smaller group of say, two dozen of us, led by Clifford, assembled about 100 yards from the main cathedral entrance, and he shared an update of his news about the event. He had reason to believe that as a result of massive protests, the format of the event taking place had had to be changed. Much of the exhibition -and certainly those stands that were connected with other faiths - had been removed to other parts of the cathedral grounds;-e.g. Christ Church College as opposed to the cathedral itself. There appeared to be a certain amount of confusion among those involved, as to what the final programme would be even at that stage, and one of the people at one of the stands, told Clifford that only seven people had come in that afternoon.*

*The format of the Eucharist service to take place on Sunday, had been changed to be a more specifically Christian one, -although members of other faiths would be invited to the service, and would be able to meditate on their own holy scriptures during the Eucharist. (The original plan was to have a 'Creation Eucharist', which had pantheistic overtones.)*

*Some, including Ambrose, shared that they felt what was happening was a very dangerous situation for the Church of England, that the Lord couldn't overlook. One of the readings in the cathedral service earlier in the afternoon, had been from Matthew 24 about when the disciples had remarked about the Temple; - 'Master, see what beautiful stones ..what a fine building!', and Jesus had warned that not one stone would be left standing. This was seen as clearly not being a coincidence. When I prayed last night, I was wondering whether the Lord might do something similar to what happened at York Minster four years ago. But I have to admit, that as this was my first visit to Canterbury since the time we as children stayed with the Ritners (29 years ago ), -that I am very attracted to Canterbury, its old streets and historical connotations, and the cathedral itself -and sentiment would keep me from wishing to see anything of this nature happening. (However) Clifford did say that there was no way that we should invoke the Lord to do anything anyway. He is sovereign, and if He acts, He acts!*

*While we were praying, an Indian man in a turban came up to the group, and listened intently to the prayers. Knowing that he was almost certainly a representative from one of the other faiths taking part in the festival, -it did cause much concern for some of our group who saw him. But undeterred by his presence, a number of us continued to pray out loud. Just after I prayed, this man tapped me on the shoulder and asked me whether I believed in 'one God?' This led to a conversation which I had with him. His name is Zhisti (I'm not sure how to spell it!), and is a Muslim, originally from the Punjab, and is conversant in a number of languages, although he said his English was not too good. It didn't prevent us having a good conversation, and basically he seemed to understand what was being said.*

*He had been invited to come to Canterbury to participate in the festival, but it struck me that he wasn't entirely sure of what he was meant to be doing there. I explained that our group was not happy with the festival taking place at the cathedral, and that we believed that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Although he listened intently, and seemed less hard and dogmatic than many Muslims, he probably wasn't really understanding, and I felt that he was taking the line that all roads lead to God -although he did come over as a seeker of truth.*

*One or two other Christians (from our group) sought to join in the conversation at times -I was to be honest, sadly particularly annoyed at an older lady who just sat down and quoted scripture at him. He took it very well, and I know the lady meant well, -believing that the Holy Spirit would use it, - I believe though,*

*that the man did appreciate the love and warmth being shown to him. Our conversation ended shortly after this, but I bumped into him again briefly in the cathedral itself -he was searching for his wife and family, and asked me to pray that he'd find them.*

*Was this the divine appointment that the Lord had for me, in bringing me to Canterbury today?*

*After this I wandered around the cathedral grounds, through the cloisters, and briefly looking into the Chapter house, which was crowded out with school children and displaying paintings on the subject of nature. Then I passed through the cathedral itself, where a small orchestra was playing. I don't know if this was anything to do with the festival, and whether the vast majority of the visitors were even aware of what was going on. After this I linked up with Nicholas and Marigold again, and a group of seven of us eventually found a pizza restaurant, before making our return journey home.*

*Although, when talking to some of the others, it was felt that we had done what the Lord wanted of us, I have to express some dis-satisfaction. I was particularly sorry that not more time was spent in praying together in the cathedral grounds. But as we were not able to stay together for too long for this purpose, although the Lord had clearly brought us there, we have to trust Him to have over-ruled. But I do know that the festival started on Friday night, and events were going on earlier in the afternoon than when the planned vigil started, -and with the service to follow on Sunday, I'd have personally liked to have spent longer there. Madeleine's view was that we shouldn't underestimate the effect of the power of the praises during the march past -even though it was in no way a protest march (sic).*

*(But) I was glad to be involved, and to have had this day at Canterbury at what was surely a significant time (the effects of which may only be clearer later),..*

John Gilman- extract from diary, with some minor amendments