

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Fraternal / Baptist Ministers Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bmj-06.php

**the baptist ministers'
journal**

October 2017 volume 336

Special issue on science and faith

*Dave Gregory, Andrew Openshaw,
John Weaver, Chris Johnson*

Reviews

Of Interest To You

the baptist ministers'
journal

October 2017, vol 336, ISSN 0968-2406

<i>Do science and Baptists mix?</i>	5
<i>A model faith</i>	12
<i>Where science and faith meet</i>	17
<i>Life and death</i>	23
<i>Prize Essay Competition</i>	29
<i>Reviews</i>	30
<i>Of Interest To You</i>	37

the baptist ministers' journal© is the journal of the
Baptist Ministers' Fellowship

useful contact details are listed inside the
front and back covers

(all service to the Fellowship is honorary)

www.bmf-uk.org

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or the editorial board. Copyright of individual articles normally rests with the author(s). Any request to reproduce an article will be referred to the author(s). We expect *bmj* to be acknowledged when an article is reproduced.

printed by Keenan Print (keenanprint@btconnect.com)

From the editor

A great experiment

This issue of *bmj* brings a special focus on science and faith, and I am grateful to Dave Gregory (minister at Croxley Green, but also our BU President Elect, and we look forward to his national tour in due course!) for identifying writers and helping to pull the issue together. We kick off with an interesting survey of Baptist attitudes towards science, followed by three other articles exploring aspects of the relationship between science and faith. I hope you will be fascinated by these articles, and perhaps encouraged to explore the attitudes to science in your own congregations.

We also bring notice of the annual *bmj* Prize Essay Competition. This competition is open to anyone in leadership of a Baptist church (not just accredited ministers), but we especially encourage those new in ministry. Last year's competition produced some excellent entries and in July we published two—how encouraging to see this evidence of good theological thinking in a new generation of ministers. Please encourage any eligible Baptist leader you know to have a go at this essay competition.

Finally, it is my pleasure to welcome Arderne Gillies as our new editor of the 'Of Interest To You' section, taking over from Jim Binney. This section is really popular among readers and we are thrilled that Arderne has agreed to take it on, alongside her continuing ministry at Chorleywood.

The BMF has undergone a major reshaping exercise over the past year or so, and in September we ratified a new constitution and welcomed a much smaller Committee, whose members will be chosen to support tasks and projects of the BMF rather than being Regional as before. This has meant a great deal of change, and we take this opportunity publicly to thank the Regional Committee members who have served us over recent years and have now graciously stood back for the new form of BMF. Our new Committee is listed in this issue.

May I wish you seasonal blessings as we begin to prepare for Advent and Christmas, celebrating our Lord as the One who graciously comes to us. SN

Do science and Baptists mix?

by Dave Gregory

The question came from a teenager, a member of the local church, who attended the secondary school where I had just finished a talk on climate change. This young voice captures a widely held view that science and faith just do not mix. If they do, the combination tends to be explosive! In the early 1970s, Peter Berger, in his book, *Rumours of angels*, observed that whether or not science and faith were in conflict, such conflict has ‘been profoundly believed to exist’¹ in western culture. In the decades since, that perception seems to have grown, led by Richard Dawkins among others, and emphasised by TV shows such as Brian Cox’s *Wonders of the Universe*, in which, at the end, he says to camera:

**Sir, how can you
be a Christian
and a scientist,
as you have to
believe in
evolution as a**

*We are infinitesimal specks in a vast universe...the existence of the whole thing is inevitable...no purpose, nothing special. You are because you have to be. How does that make you feel? The wonderful thing is, nobody knows. Nobody has worked it out yet, so the answer is up to you. What do you think?*²

Certainly this is a statement that adds fuel to the fire, dismissing the search for meaning that religions throughout human culture have undertaken, and which Cox suggests science cannot give! Yet a recent article in the *Guardian* reporting on a study on perceived attitudes to the biblical creation story suggests that while three-quarters of atheists believe Christians have to take the story literally, just under a fifth of Christians do so.³ So, is this sense of conflict real, or is it a phoney war? In particular, how hot is the war of science and faith among Baptists?

During a sabbatical in 2013, I attended a meeting at St John’s College, Durham University, aimed at exploring the ability of senior church leaders—predominately Anglican Bishops—to ‘engage confidently with science-based issues and in the science-religion dialogue’.⁴ Not being a senior church leader, it left me wondering about the attitude to the subject of ministers of local churches and their members, particularly Baptists. So, in the autumn of 2013 and the spring of 2014, I undertook a small survey into attitudes to science among Baptists, the outcome of which is explored here.

The survey was small—16 ministers who attended a session of the Hertfordshire Baptist Ministers' Group, together with 56 people of the Footsteps Lay training programme in the SCBA and CBA, where I teach modules on the 'Theology of Creation' and 'Science in 21st Century Mission and Ministry'. Survey questions covered levels of scientific training, along with general attitudes to science, and the ability to discuss a range of scientific topics at a popular level. Ministers were also asked about their engagement with science during ministerial formation.

Are there scientists among us?

Who were the people undertaking the survey in terms of age, scientific training and general levels of interest in science? Most of the ministers were 50-65 years old. The peak age of those attending the Footsteps programme was lower—between 36 and 49—although only one was younger than 35. Surprisingly—at least to me—a large proportion of both groups had scientific education to at least degree level—around 40% for both groups. This percentage appears to be significantly higher than national figures, estimated to be around 15% of the population of the UK.⁵ Regardless of academic attainment, primarily fed through engagement with popular media, both groups also showed a strong interest in the importance of continued engagement with scientific developments—nearly all the ministers, and three-quarters of those on Footsteps.

It might be questioned whether this is representative of the Baptist movement as a whole. The survey was conducted in the south of England, where perhaps engagement with post-18 education may traditionally be higher than average. It challenges the assumed conflict between science and faith, suggesting that there may be a pool of people within Baptists Together who might be able to help local churches engage with these issues of science and faith. This may complement the academic engagement undertaken by institutions such as the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at Oxford,⁶ and The Faraday Institute in Cambridge.⁷ Yet, despite this continued interest and high scientific literacy, only a third of those on Footsteps reported having heard a sermon on a scientific topic during the previous two years, and another third had never heard such a sermon. These data contrast with perceptions from the ministers' group that nearly three-quarters have delivered such a sermon in this same period, a contrast that might be explained by ministers and laity surveyed not being from the same church.

War or peace?

Of course, experience and interest in science does not necessarily imply a lack of conflict with faith. Participants were asked to characterise their attitude to science with respect to faith under five broad headings: challenge, irrelevant, separate, complementary or enhancing. These categories resonate with Ian Barbour's classification of the relationship between science and faith: conflict, independence, dialogue and integration.⁸

Survey	Barbour (1997)	Theological Emphasis
Challenge	Conflict	Creationism Intelligent Design Scientific Materialism
Irrelevant	Independence	Barthian
Separate	Independence	Barthian
Complementary	Dialogue	Apologetics Pannenberg, Rahner
Enhancing	Dialogue/Integration	Process Theology Sacramentalism Existential Theology

A perspective of conflict sees science as antagonistic to theology, and *vice versa*. Barbour identifies this stance with extremes of scientific materialism and biblical literalism, such as Creationism and Intelligent Design, although the latter might be seen as moving towards dialogue (though a suspicion of science remains). Independence affirms the validity of each discipline within its respective sphere—the theology of Barth, with a focus upon the revelation of God and distrust of natural theology, being a prime example. Dialogue is more open to points of conversation between different fields, both in methodology and understanding. Barbour suggests Rahner's exploration of correlations between evolution and theological views of humanity and Christ is an example of this approach, while Moltmann, Pannenberg and Polkinghorne have also opened a dialogue with science. Apologetics also represents a form of dialogue, with the aim of showing that the reasonableness of faith withstands scientific challenge. Integration takes this conversation further, theological views being shaped primarily by scientific perspectives, such as in Whitehead's Process Thought. However, this thinking radically re-interprets the idea of God and at times integration is characterised by science shaping theology more strongly than theology does science, questioning whether this is true integration or an adjustment of theology to the dominance of science.

This mapping of different theological perspectives onto the alternative positions suggests that the theologies owned by the participants may shape the way they answered the survey

questions. In reality correlations are likely to be complicated. Influences on a person's theological stance may be scattered across different issues, drawing on a variety of different traditions. Further additional questioning about how participants would characterise their own theology would be needed to clarify a possible correlation (lacking in this current survey). Nevertheless, it is clear that among those of the survey, conflict is not the primary understanding of the interaction of science and faith.

Among ministers, most see science and faith as either complementary or enhancing, although a quarter of respondents chose to give multiple answers to this question, also stating it was a challenge to faith. A similar non-confrontational view is also expressed by those on the Footsteps course, over half seeing science and faith as complementary, while a further third see the relationship as enhancing. However, a greater proportion thought science was a challenge to faith, responses which—unlike those from the ministerial group—were not balanced by more positive parallel responses. Among both groups, this overwhelmingly positive attitude to science is shaped by a wide variety of sources. Most important were 'views of scientists in the media' and 'contact with scientists who are Christians', while both ministers and laity cited 'experiencing the natural world' as the most common reason for shaping their view, particularly among laity.

Can we talk about science?

Given high levels of scientific literacy and a positive appreciation of science, how confident do the people surveyed feel about engaging in scientific topics at a popular level? Responses showed confidence varied widely depending upon the scientific topic.

Confidence was high (50-60% saying they had at least some knowledge) with regard to the evolution of life and the origin of the universe, with between half and two-thirds saying they had 'some' knowledge. Similarly there was confidence about climate change, perhaps evidence of the effectiveness with which Christian mission agencies and others have engaged the Christian communities of the UK with this issue. Less confidence was found when extra-solar planets and genetically modified crops were raised, at least two-thirds of each group expressing low confidence in discussing such matters. Even lower levels of confidence was seen (less than 20% with at least some knowledge) with regard to quantum theory and stem cell research.

While some of these seem rather abstract, with little connection with issues of faith, they do raise some significant theological and pastoral issues. In a creation in which uncertainty plays a principal part at the smallest scale, how does God interact with the material world? If life is found on other planets, whether intelligent or not, what does it say about God the creator and the uniqueness of the incarnation? These may seem issues of apologetics, yet as the century progresses, developments in gene modification and genetic treatments for diseases will have profound impacts upon medical care in the

coming decades, raising new ethical issues such as we are already facing with ‘three-person’ babies. A greater understanding is needed within the faith community for adequate pastoral responses to be formulated, informed by a good understanding of the science behind the issues as, together with insights into God’s word, we grapple with such issues.

A deeper engagement with scientific issues, in contrast to a theological engagement with science within theological education and ministerial formation, may assist this process. This engagement was valued in the past, in the early 19th century, The Stepney Institute—later to become Regent’s Park College—employed a Mathematics and Natural Sciences Tutor. Yet less than 15% of ministers I surveyed indicated having a significant engagement (a module rather than an occasional seminar) during their initial formation. The new Common Awards ordination training programme of the Church of England seems to echo historic patterns of training, containing modules on the Christian faith and the environment, along with issues in science and religion. However, they seem primarily to theologise about science, and not all Anglican colleges offer them.

The wonder of science

Do science and Baptists mix—and in a non-explosive way? The responses to this survey suggest they do. So how might this positive view of science be employed in the missional environment in which Baptists Together finds itself in the UK today? Often missional engagement with regard to science focuses upon apologetics, a rational defence of faith in the face of the rational scientific worldview which dominates western culture. Those with scientific expertise and interest might be well engaged to help equip local churches in this. Helping Christians to understand issues such as climate change and genetic medicine will also benefit from the resource that is latent among us.

However, McGrath notes a weakness in much apologetics in that ‘it makes its appeal purely to reason, and neglects the human imagination’. Science is not only a rational exercise, producing classification and an understanding of the way the world material is. Science is just as much an expression of human creativity and beauty as art and music. Poincaré, who in the 19th century laid the foundations for Einstein’s Theory of Special Relativity, suggested ‘the scientist does not study nature because it is useful to do so... (but) because he takes pleasure in it...because it is beautiful’.⁹ More recently, McLeish also suggests that a love of beauty plays a part in process of science ideas and theories: ‘we find them beautiful, compelling, elegant. Sometimes even...to love them’.¹⁰

In large part the positive attitude towards science revealed among those surveyed stemmed from awe and wonder over the beauty of nature. As with no other previous generation, modern imaging techniques reveal the vastness of creation and the intricacy of its smallest parts in astonishing detail. Such images are powerful and informative, evidenced by the popularity of natural history and popular science programmes on TV,

together with *New Scientist's* 'Aperture' pages, in which an image of nature, science or technology is accompanied by a short reflective article.

Prior to the Reformation and subsequent Enlightenment, the power of imagery to inspire and sustain faith was well appreciated, a tradition continued in some Christian traditions and rediscovered in other through the use of video and reflective images. Perhaps this might be reimagined through the new imagery of science, providing iconic windows through which not only is the nature of material reality revealed, but the divine is encountered. For example, the recent Google *Cosmic Eye* video¹¹—combining scientific imagery with computer animation in a whistlestop tour of modern science's vision of the cosmos—provided the call to worship on a Christmas Day service. Centred on an individual human being, it draws out to the edges of the universe. Returning back to the image of a woman, then zooming in on the intricacy on its smallest scales, the sequence ends back with the image of a woman's smiling face. The God who lived among us, or perhaps a focus upon the response of Mary to the angel to news of her impending pregnancy, might be themes explored in the context of worship, along with the relational nature of the cosmos and its relationship with God.

Moltmann, discussing the question 'Why did God create the world?'—a question he ascribes to a child—suggests that 'creation is God's play',¹² in which case the beauty and wonder experienced through science might be seen as joining in play with God! In *Rumours of angels*, sociologist Peter Berger suggests that play might play an important role in countering the increasing sense of hopelessness that the utilitarian view of secularisation brings to life, a moment to encounter God through creativity, beauty and joy.

Hay & Nye, in a study of children's spirituality, found some children using science to express spiritual notions and experience. The use of scientific ideas was not precise, employing creative and imaginative metaphors beyond a more rational approach.¹³ Building upon such insights, and noting the popularity of children's science activities—on TV, at museums and also children's science parties—the 'Messy Church Does Science',¹⁴ funded by the 'Scientists in Congregations' initiative,¹⁵ uses simple science experiments to help children and adults encounter the playfulness of science, appreciating the wonder of creation. They also provide a moment to encounter God, linking in with a Bible story, or perhaps more importantly a moment for prayer and reflection forming an awareness of God's presence in the wonder of the world and in their lives. God is not just interested in our spiritual or faith lives, but the whole of our lives. Perhaps some of the children of the 15 or so families who come along each month to Dr Dave's 'Messy Science Lab' each month in my own church might discover a love of science, and gifts that will enable them to become scientists themselves—scientists who appreciate how science and faith can be part of life together.

It's not just about the children. Parents and carers who come along are rediscovering a fascination with science, and it causes them to wonder. A common question asked by

parents new to the Messy Science Lab is: ‘isn’t it strange that someone who is a Christian is interested in science?’ So, is it strange? And is it strange among Baptists? Perhaps not.

Dave Gregory is Senior Minister of Croxley Green BC and is President Elect of the BU. He was previously involved in meteorological and climate research, and is the author of Messy Church Does Science.

Notes to text

1. P. Berger, *Rumours of Angels*. PUB, 1971, p45.
2. *Human Universe*, Episode 2. *Why are we here?* BBC 2014.
3. *The Guardian*, Sat 16 Sept 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/16/would-you-adam-and-eve-it-why-creation-story-is-at-heart-of-a-new-spiritual-divide>.
4. R. Bouveng, ‘What Bishops really think about science: science and religion among senior Christian leaders in the UK’, in *International Journal of Science in Society*, 2014, **5**, 1-11. This study has been extended through the ‘Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science’ programme (www.community.dur.ac.uk/christianleadership.science/).
5. This figure is estimated from figures published in 2013 by the Office of National Statistics reporting that 38% of the working population of the UK were graduates, combined with a 2012 House of Lords report concluding that just over 40% of graduates in the previous decade had studied STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects.
6. See www.ianramseycentre.info.
7. See www.faraday.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk. The Faraday Institute also produces material for use in local churches such as ‘Test of Faith’.
8. I. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, location 1818ff, Harper San Francisco (1997) (Kindle edn).
9. A. McGrath, *The Re-Enchantment of Nature*. Hodder & Stoughton: 2002, p17, quoting the scientist Henri Poincaré.
10. T. McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science*. Oxford University Press: 2014.
11. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfSNxVqprvM&t=18s>.
12. J. Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*. London: SCM, 1973, p39.
13. D. Hay & R. Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*. Jessica Kingsley: 2006, p121.
14. D. Gregory (ed), *Messy Church Does Science*. BRF, 2017.
15. See <http://community.dur.ac.uk/christianleadership.science/the-project/scientists-in-congregations/>.

A model faith

by Andrew Openshaw

Both science and theology seek to understand the world through models, paradigms and metaphors; but to what extent is genuine knowledge confused with the understanding of the model? The starting points may be very different: often science starts from experience and theology from faith; but are their journeys to understanding as far apart as they seem? By looking at various models of atomic structure and theological concepts of the Trinity, we will explore the nature of understanding and some (perhaps surprising) common ground between science and theology.

In the public arena, when science and faith are drawn together, it seems to be most often in the form of a conflict; of a presentation of competing spheres and systems that are, at worst, mutually exclusive or, at best, setting out to answer two very different questions: we are told that science deals with the ‘how’ and faith covers the ‘why’. It is perhaps too easy to get drawn into the contrasts and differences between science and theology, to keep them apart: lest proximity be the precursor to conflict.

In this short essay, I want to take the opposite approach. As someone with a chemistry degree who is now a Baptist minister, I do not want to compartmentalise my life and my understanding of the world around me: I would want these two facets or strands to inform and interact with each other.

There are many possible ways to do this, but I want simply to explore some basic ideas about how science and theology build their understanding and communicate internally and externally.

Models

I suggest that both scientists and theologians use what we might simply call ‘models’ as they grapple with the world. For our purposes, let us take a model to be a representation (of an idea, an object, a process or a system) that is used to describe and explain phenomena that cannot be experienced directly.

For some, the idea that science is often based around models rather than ‘facts’ could be surprising. In the popular imagination scientists are often seen as ‘experts’, with unquestionable authority and an idea that they know absolutely what they are doing.

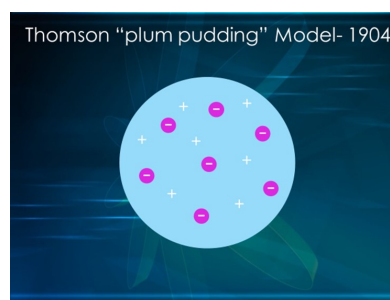
However, in my experience, models are central to what scientists do, both in their research as well as when communicating their explanations.

As a way of illustrating this, let us look at what science understands about atoms and their structure. This may sound a little esoteric, but atoms are fundamental to our existence. We are all made of atoms—the 92 unique pieces of ‘Lego’ that combine and recombine to form the structures and substances of our existence.

The concept of atoms is an ancient one. The term ‘atom’ was arguably first coined by the Greek philosopher Democritus (*ca* 460-370 BCE), based on the notion that taking an amount of a pure substance it would be possible to cut that amount in two. Assuming the availability of increasingly sharp knives, and a way to see, there would come a point where the amount of the substance was so small that it could no longer be cut in two. The idea of the uncuttable or undivided base unit (the *a-tomos*) of the universe was born.

This model of a world built of a range of atoms—uncuttable but different; did not initially take off: competing with the classical notion of ‘elements’ (for example Aristotle’s earth, water, air, fire and ether) and other theories of the basic nature of the world, but it gradually returned with the alchemists and the name ‘element’ began to be ascribed to what were gradually being identified and isolated as the pure building blocks of the universe.

However, the understanding of the nature of these atoms that made up pure samples of elements remained essentially unchanged until the 1800s: for Thomas Dalton atoms were like billiard balls; solid, tiny spheres of different weights and colours; combining to make compounds.

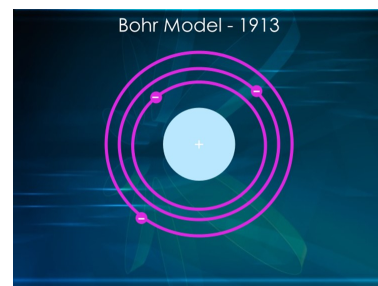
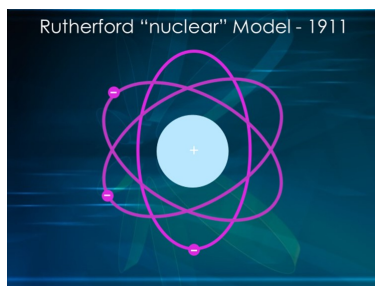


However, by the mid-19th century, it was becoming clear that atoms were not ‘uncuttable’—there was deeper structure within each atom, and the existence of subatomic particles, some bearing either positive or negative electrical charge was postulated.

The first rudimentary attempt to explain how these particles were arranged within the

atom came when J.J. Thomson proposed what became known as the ‘plum pudding’ model; negatively charged subatomic particles, which became known as electrons, were seen to be ‘stuck’ within positively charged material.

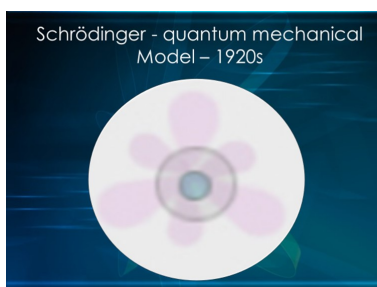
The pace of experimental capability was growing quickly in the early 1900s and soon scientists had developed techniques that would allow investigation of atomic structure and Ernest Rutherford’s ‘gold leaf’ experiment showed, through the way that neutrons fired at a thin film of gold were deflected, that all the positive charge within an atom must be in the centre, with the counterintuitive conclusion that much of the atom was empty space!



The Danish physicist Niels Bohr developed this understanding of the way electrons occupied the ‘space’ in atoms by suggesting that they moved in distinct orbits around the atomic centre now known as the nucleus; broadly analogous to the way planets move around a sun. Each electronic orbit was associated with a fixed amount of energy (quantum) and the movement of an electron between orbits was possible but such movement absorbed or released a discrete and distinct amount of energy (quantum leap).

A further refinement to this Bohr model, where all electronic orbits are circular, was the understanding that electrons really did not behave as hard spheres or ‘planets’ but their

position and momentum were governed by the uncertainty principle—at any given point a precise position and energy for a given electron could not be defined beyond a certain level of accuracy, and that electrons displayed both wave properties as well as those of particles (particle/wave duality).



We could continue, but hopefully the point is well made that a scientific understanding of something as ‘basic’ and yet fundamental as

atomic structure has been fluid over the last 150 years and that many different models have stood in for a more complete and definite understanding.

In fact, all the models, as sketched above, are completely wrong because of the scale at which they are drawn. Atoms are, in fact, anywhere between 20 000 and 140 000 times bigger than the nucleus. If we were to imagine holding a golf ball (4cm in diameter) to represent the nucleus of an atom, then the edge of that same atom could be anywhere from 400m to 2.8km away!

It would be easy to see in this series of models, an irresistible progress of knowledge, where each model or theory completely replaces the previous one, but fascinatingly this is not in fact the case. This is an example of science not blithely discarding and moving on. A truly deep understanding of the theories of relativity that lie behind the most recent models of atomic structure is that we cannot 'know' with absolute certainty, so older, simpler models are still retained as it could easily be argued that each model of atomic structure as illustrated above holds part of the 'truth'. Indeed, for the modern student of science, they will meet the various models as they progress through their scientific education.

The Bohr model of atomic structure is the one taught as 'truth' to GCSE students even today. This does not mean that all teaching this are 'lying', as this model is an excellent way to understand complicated topics, without overwhelming, and allows much useful insight into other scientific and chemical principles

So, hopefully we can see that the hard edges of science, often held up against the softer boundaries of faith, are not that well defined after all, and that the use of models, often with some incompleteness or provisionality about them, is often part of the scientific method: the cycle of experiment/observation; theory; new experiment/observation; new theory and so on.

So far, so good for science and its use of models. Where is the connection to theology? I would wish to argue that theologians also talk about models and metaphors, and not only that, but models and metaphors that are incomplete, or provisional, or that only show 'part' of the truth. Theologians may not be able to conduct physical experiments to 'test' their models and understanding but as we do not believe in a 'static' God there is no need either for an ossification of our understanding.

Perhaps the most obvious place to look for theological equivalents of the models of atomic structure is to our understanding of the Trinity. It is well beyond the scope of such a short essay fully to explore all models of the nature of the trinitarian God but if we were given the task of drawing our understanding of the Trinity we might struggle. Equally, anyone who has tried to prepare all-age illustrations for a Trinity Sunday service knows the difficulty and heretical pitfalls of such illustrations or descriptions of the Trinity as being like water (solid ice; liquid water; gaseous steam) or like the sun (star and light and heat) or even most recently comparing the Trinity to a three-pronged fidget spinner!

Wise preachers and teachers would see in each of these models, useful points of

understanding but they all fall into an assortment of heretical traps and therefore short of the ultimately unknowable perichoretic whirl that is, arguably, the most ‘correct’ understanding.

Even if we were to leave ‘models’ aside and we looked more closely at our vocabulary, we might concede, for example, that the meaning of ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ as two persons within the Trinity was significantly different to the way the same two words are used in everyday speech. We might notice important variances in that no human father and son come into existence at the same time; that human fathers are uniquely male; and that there is usually some hierarchy or at least difference in relationship level between human fathers and their sons. I would argue that when we use ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ in relation to the Trinity we use them in a specific, metaphorical sense: we are describing a model in which Father and Son stand for understanding which is very specific and not immediately transferable to the use of the terms outside the model.

Pulling all the strands together, of the use of ‘model’ in both science and theology, I would argue that the approach of good science and wise theologians to the common task of understanding the world around them is to recognise what we are actually doing, and to do so with humility; we must acknowledge and allow for provisionality—to admit that theories and models are just that, and that they, and we, might be wrong. It is this non-dogmatic approach that allows a willingness to listen to other opinion and insight that is key for science and theology alike. This in turn enables us to not fear models and metaphors; they can be very useful; as long as neither scientist nor theologian confuse understanding of the model with genuine knowledge!

Andrew Openshaw is minister at New Mill Baptist Church, Tring, Herts.

At the meeting of the BMF Committee on Thursday 21st September the new constitution for the BMF printed in last month's journal was unanimously adopted. The Committee appointed under this new constitution is as follows:

Chair: Tim Edworthy 2016

Secretary: David Warrington 2017

Treasurer: Ron Day 2017

Editor: Sally Nelson N/A

Co-opted members:

James Chapman 2017

Michael Peat 2017

Andy Goodliff 2017

Carol Murray 2017

The two remaining vacancies will be filled with people who bring both increased diversity and significant skills. Any suggestions may be sent to the Secretary before the next Committee meeting in February 2018.

Where science and faith meet

by John Weaver

Over the past 100 years the scientific understanding of the universe has moved from the relatively simple picture of a single galaxy of stars, including our Sun and solar system, to an amazing collection of billions of galaxies each with billions of stars like our Sun spread out through a vast expanding universe. Jennifer Wiseman has recently written that the most profound revelation of astronomy is that:

our entire universe has been changing, evolving and maturing for about 14 billion years, transforming from energy and the first simple matter into complex galaxies and star systems, with at least one environment (Earth!) where diverse life thrives and advanced life contemplates its own existence and purpose.¹

The telescope and the microscope have opened up our minds to the size of the universe and the complexity of our genetic makeup.

If we ask: *why consider a dialogue between science and faith?* the answer lies in our questions about meaning and purpose; and we discover that these are understood through relationship. God created us for relationships: with God, with each other, and with creation. This is the message of Genesis 2. But sadly human self-centredness with its lust for power and control leads to broken relationships with the creator, our human neighbours, and with the environment, which is the message of Genesis 3, the 'fall'.

This is no primitive superstitious text, but is something borne out by history and by scientific discovery. For example, psychology has proposed that human beings are biologically wired for spiritual-relationship encounters. If this is the case, we can observe that individualism and secularism are contradictory social constructions, which suppress our innate relationships and substitute a model of self-in-isolation, which leads to depression, loneliness, anxiety and suicide. Individualism separates us from others and from God.

Most biologists believe that evolution is built into the fabric of the natural world. So the world has the seeds within itself to produce order and beauty and this may indicate purpose. Evolution indicates that we are part of a dynamic creation. The contingency of natural processes can be suggested to lie within the sphere of divine and natural causality.

Jerry Coyne, in his book *Evolution is true*, notes that evolution is 'a mechanism of staggering simplicity and beauty' and if there was ever a question over the theory it was in the 19th century, when the evidence for a mechanism of evolution was unclear. He reflects

that evolution does not leave us in a barren naturalistic and materialistic world. He observes that ‘there is no reason...to see ourselves as marionettes dancing on the strings of evolution.’ ‘Genetic’ does not mean ‘unchangeable’. He observes that while the world is full of selfishness, immorality and injustice, we also find kindness and altruism. It is these that suggest something beyond our scientific understanding.

Coyne concludes his exploration of evolutionary theory with these words:

Although evolution operates in a purposeless, materialistic way, that doesn't mean that our lives have no purpose. Whether through religious or secular thought, we make our own purposes, meaning and morality.

Deriving your spirituality from science also means accepting an attendant sense of humility before the universe and the likelihood that we'll never have all the answers.²

He thinks that it is unrealistic to expect the *Origin of species* completely to supplant the Bible in our search for the meaning of life.

Paul Davies, in *The Goldilocks Enigma*, says that he is convinced that human understanding of nature through science, rational reasoning and mathematics points to a much deeper connection between life, mind and cosmos than emerges from the crude lottery of multiverse cosmology—somehow, the universe has engineered its own self-awareness. He expresses his belief that life and mind are etched deeply into the fabric of the cosmos, perhaps through a shadowy, half-glimpsed life principle, and states: ‘if I am honest I have to concede that this starting point is something I feel more in my heart than in my head. So maybe that is a religious conviction of sorts’.³

Relationships

In evolution, cooperation is a primary creative force behind greater levels of complexity and organisation in biology. There is also cooperation through our genes, where cells work in partnership. Christians could suggest that God’s involvement with us is seen in the novelty, contingency and opportunity that can be attained in preserving the integrity of life in the process. We can emphasise relationships, dismissing reductionism in favour of theism, which sees persons as the ultimate foundation of reality. Evolution requires cooperation at all levels, and in the brain we find the relationship between genes and neurons. Natural selection is not the same as competition—for in the so-called ‘struggle of the fittest’ we also find cooperation.

At the level of our genes, Pauline Rudd observes that:

The organisation of a human being, or any other creature, does not have a single, simple hierarchy. There is no means of describing ourselves in a linear fashion, for there are countless starting points and hundreds of feedback loops that pass information around the body. This allows us to respond to our constantly changing

*environment and to engage in the cooperative behaviour that enables us to survive in a challenging world.*⁴

Each of us is unique. Our individual genetic differences have enabled us to withstand plagues, and also to specialise and divide our tasks within a community, liberating time for creativity and imagination—we could never have progressed if we could not share skills. Our cells work in partnership (*cf* 1 Corinthians 12:14-26).

Science recognises that in the natural world new beginnings arise from uncertainty. The biological world is not deterministic, but is a world of dynamic flexibility and ever-increasing possibilities, which poses the question: is there a purpose?

If there is, and that purpose lies with God, then we are accountable for the way we live. For nature does not need us; we need nature. We do not have ultimate control, regardless of how well we can predict and understand natural forces.

The problem for western humans is that we focus almost exclusively on reason, rationality and facts, and in so doing miss the primal sense of awe, wonder and connectedness—the inherent relational nature of creation. Consciousness is always relational: self with other people; self with the environment; self with God (*cf* Genesis 2, 3). This is at the heart of our spirituality.

Broken relationships, a lack of trust and reconciliation, are seen in every conflict, be it individual or between ethnic, religious or national groupings. Broken relationships with creation are seen in treating the environment as a commodity rather than being in ecological communion with creation. We are helped by Pope Francis' call to care for the environment in his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato si, mi' signor*. He suggests that we need to develop an 'ecological citizenship' expressing an 'ecological conversion', whereby the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us. The fundamental problem is our broken relationship with God, which fails to look for God's wisdom and in its place puts a human wisdom based on power and control, which develops fear and violence when such control and power is threatened.

There are new possibilities, because God the creator is still at work. The Bible holds out to us the model of continuity and discontinuity in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Faith has to be in the God of relationships and new relationships, creation and recreation. This is our hope that in Christ all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-20).

For Jürgen Moltmann, an ecological doctrine of creation helps us in a new kind of thinking about God. The centre of this thinking is no longer the distinction between God and the world. The centre is the recognition of the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God. The Creator is present in creation as the Spirit. This relationship to creation is, for Moltmann, an intricate web of unilateral, reciprocal and many-sided relationships:

In this network of relationships, 'making', 'preserving', 'maintaining' and 'perfecting'

*are certainly the great one-sided relationships; but 'indwelling', 'sympathizing', 'participating', 'accompanying', 'enduring', 'delighting' and 'glorifying' are relationships of mutuality which describe a cosmic community of living between God the Spirit and all his created beings.*⁵

God is both transcendent and immanent; this immanence is seen not only in the ecological relationships identified by Moltmann, but also in the model of an evolving universe, and in the evolutionary development of life on planet earth. However, for Christians it is the incarnation of God in Christ that supremely points to God's dynamic and intimate relationship with creation.

Consciousness and personhood

God is the unique consciousness who chose the universe for its intrinsic value. God will discern the true nature of all intrinsic values and God's creative acts will be governed by this discernment. As such these cannot be explained by science.

Keith Ward concludes that 'a fundamental element of belief in God is that there is intrinsic and objective value in such things as beauty, intellectual understanding, creativity, and compassionate and cooperative personal relationships'.⁶ These are located in God, who is the unique consciousness, and who chose the universe for its intrinsic value. This allows Ward to maintain that belief in God is rational, because it is based on our knowledge that consciousness and intentional agency are fundamental features of reality.

We can observe that personhood is defined by self-awareness. The practice of scientific research depends on the belief that the researcher is genuinely free to create hypotheses and models, to design experiments, to assess evidence and to choose the most consistent interpretation of the data. This mitigates against a materialist position. The comprehensibility of the universe is a key fact. Here, the Christian understanding of persons is central.

In discussing cosmology, Keith Ward concludes that God is part of a personal explanation of the universe, which is not reducible to scientific explanation, and has a different function. Personal explanations do explain why things happen as they do—broadly, because they are intended by some consciousness to realise some purpose which that consciousness finds desirable. We can suggest that a personal explanation includes purpose, which leads us to think of a mind behind the universe. So Ward concludes that:

*the idea of God is not part of any scientific theory, and it does not block any sort of scientific search for understanding. It proposes to add a new dimension, the personal dimension, to understanding the universe. It is therefore of great importance to take seriously, if we are not to fall into the delusion that the personal dimension simply does not exist.*⁷

We are helped by John Swinton's definition of spirituality as: 'a kind of personal, existential quest for meaning, purpose, hope, value, love and for some people the divine and the sacred'.⁸ He records research which shows that adherents of religious communities have better health and are less likely to suffer from such things as depression and anxiety than those who do not belong to such communities. He observes that consciousness is always relational whereas individualism separates us from others and from God.

We can conclude that the Christian understanding of persons is central—we are created in the image of God, and because God's nature is personal, then we too are created and embodied as persons. As such persons are different to anything else in the cosmos—we are: knowers, agents, rational, communicative, creative, moral and lovers. Human personhood cannot be self-explanatory; our human identity is derived from the being and person of God.⁹

Purpose

A number of authors have drawn our attention to purpose in the universe revealed through science. Paul Davies bases *The Goldilocks Enigma* on the question raised by Brandon Carter in 1974:¹⁰ 'Suppose the laws had been a bit different from what they actually are, in this or that respect—what would the consequences be?' The focus of this question was the origin of life. Specifically Carter's calculations suggested that if the laws had differed only slightly from what we find them to be, then life would not have been possible and the universe would have gone unobserved. In effect, said Carter, our existence hinges on a certain amount of delicate 'fine-tuning' of the laws.

Aspects of fine tuning include: expansion rate of the universe—lower and the universe would collapse under gravity or higher with rapid expansion and no aggregation of material to form planets; formation of elements—if the strong nuclear force had been weaker the universe would have been composed only of hydrogen, but if it had been stronger a helium universe would have resulted, and either way there would have been no carbon, the element necessary for living creatures; particle/antiparticle ratio—for every one billion antiprotons in the early universe there were one billion and one protons—without this proportion our material universe would not exist.

Ward notes this contingency, and that:

*what fine-tuning arguments show is that states of great value have resulted from, and could only have resulted from, a set of laws that are precisely adjusted in a large number of unexpected and exceedingly improbable ways.*¹¹

It cannot be denied that chance and necessity remain options for the atheist, but while such arguments do not provide an entirely convincing argument for design, the fine tuning of the physical constants is just what we would expect if life and consciousness were among the goals of a rational and purposeful God.¹²

Conclusion

Beyond the scientific facts are the order, beauty and wonder of the natural world, which causes the observer, scientist or not, to consider purpose personhood, and relationships.

The exploration of the natural world is an act of discovery which often leads to wonder and awe. Faith encourages humility, integrity, respect, and wonder in the scientist, which may lead to praise and worship.

Science is based on two elements of faith: the universe can be understood by rational enquiry; and knowledge of it from science is preferable to ignorance. Science develops understanding through reason and explanation, whereas for religion understanding develops through revelation, which provides meaning—but both in science and in faith, the meaning of any system always lies outside it.

John Weaver is now retired but was Principal of South Wales Baptist College.

Notes to text

1. Jennifer Wiseman, 'Universe of wonder, universe of life', in Eric Priest (ed), *Reason and wonder: why science and faith need each other*, London: SPCK, 2016, p82.
2. Jerry A. Coyne, *Why evolution is true*, Oxford: OUP, 2009, p252.
3. Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma: why is the Universe just right for life?* London: Penguin, 2007, pp302-3.
4. Pauline Rudd, 'Is there more to life than genes?' in Eric Priest, *Reason and wonder*, p111.
5. Jürgen Moltmann, 1985, *God in creation: an ecological doctrine of creation*. The Gifford Lectures 1984-1985, London: SCM: 1985, p14; quoted in John Weaver, *Christianity and Science*. SCM Core Text, London, 2010, p237.
6. Keith Ward, 'God, science and the New Atheism' in Eric Priest, *Reason and wonder*, p50.
7. Keith Ward, *Why there almost certainly is a God: doubting Dawkins*. Oxford: Lion, 2008, p 62.
8. John Swinton, 'From projection to connection: Conversations between science, spirituality and health' in Eric Priest, *Reason and wonder*, p156.
9. John Wyatt, 'Being a person: Towards an integration of neuroscientific and Christian perspectives', in Eric Priest, *Reason and wonder*, p152.
10. Brandon Carter, 'Large number coincidences and the anthropic principle in cosmology' in M.S. Longair, *Confrontation of cosmological theories with observation*, Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel: 1974, p291.
11. Keith Ward, *Big questions in science and religion*, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press: 2008, p238.
12. John Weaver, *Christianity and science*, pp75-76.

Life and death

by Chris Johnson

In about 2004 I found myself praying that God might ‘raise up a prophetic voice to speak for Him with regards to the rapidly developing field of human fertilisation and embryology’ (I’m a charismatic—so we pray that sort of thing!). Having worked in the pharmaceutical industry for 13 years I had an awareness of and interest in the area, and as a pastor I could see the impact the emerging science could have among members of my congregation. I am trained as an analytical chemist and I am no expert in biology or ethics. I figured it was a safe enough prayer: ‘Here am I LORD...send someone else’.

Within a couple of years I was called to give evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Science and Technology as it reviewed the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act. I make no claim to having had made any eloquent contribution nor any significant influence over the subsequent report.¹ I do testify to God sometimes using us to answer our own prayers.

As a result of this experience I have maintained an interest in the pastoral implications of advances in this medical science and it is these pastoral implications that I want to discuss here. I will be inviting you to think about some of the ways in which the rapid changes in culture and science have created choices and along with those choices raised ethical dilemmas around the beginning and end of life.

There will be some topics which are of general interest and others which may be personally relevant—perhaps intensely and painfully relevant. So I want to start by reminding you that God’s aim is to give us life and life in all its fullness. My aim is to raise questions, not to bring judgement or condemnation.

There are many areas of modern life on which the Bible gives no specific commands—rather it helps us to see what questions we need to ask and what demands of conscience we need to balance. In a few areas our faith will give us a unique perspective which puts us in conflict with those without faith. Let’s learn how to express our views graciously. In some

**There are new
choices and
ethical
dilemmas
around the
beginning and**

areas Christians will hold differing opinions—let’s learn how to bear with one another in love and to hear God through each other.

Ethical issues: the start of life

Christians take different views on when exactly human life begins. Sometimes our thinking is rather muddled. Do you celebrate Christmas or The Feast of the Conception? Why? I recently received a Christian birthday card with these words inside: ‘Sharing in the joy of your very special day—the day God created you!’ I remind you this was a birthday card, not a conception day card!

The implications of the start of life debate have been a source of conflict, with opinions sharply divided between 'pro-choice' and 'pro-life' factions. In reality, no Christian should be anti-choice nor anti-life! Pastorally is it seldom so simple.

Advances in medical science and culture have opened possibilities unthinkable a decade or two ago. The status of the embryo is core to many specific ethical questions and the implications are far-reaching. Interestingly, the Psalmist (Psalm 139) describes God weaving or knitting us together in the womb, which suggests a process rather than a moment. When does a scarf become a scarf and not just wool? Difficult to say! The Psalm also affirms what is clear throughout the Bible: that God is intimately involved in our lives from conception to the end.

John Wyatt (whose book, *Matters of life and death*² prompted the sermon series on which this article is based) is a neonatologist. I recently attended a seminar in which he spoke of the paradox of working with all the skills and technology available to maintain the life of a premature baby on one floor of a hospital, while one floor away terminations were taking place on stronger more developed fetuses. He did not say this with any condemnation but simply highlighted the dilemma medical advances can bring and the psychological dissonance this can cause.

Neonatal medicine in the West has advanced so that many more very premature babies can now survive—at great cost. That is wonderful for many families, and some of you and your children are probably alive today because of these advances. At the same time, more than 6 million children die before their fifth birthday every year (mainly in the developing world), and mostly from preventable causes. Does this raise any moral concern?

We have been able to end life for many centuries, but only recently have we been able to have more influence over the start of the ‘knitting’ process. Human beings were given a remarkable degree of control over the baby-making process. God does not grant children by any other means than those He has built into creation (with one glorious exception).

However, we are painfully aware that humans do not have complete control over the start

of life. Throughout the Bible, the characters are convinced that it is God who grants or withholds children. Has this changed with IVF? Beyond the tabloid headlines, are there pastoral and ethical dilemmas which we need to address?

Louise Brown was the first so-called test-tube baby, born in 1978. Since then, 5 million babies have been born through IVF. This is, of course, wonderful for millions of parents. However, the *Guardian* newspaper noted that: 'IVF has become a global money-making business producing very healthy profits, and there are hundreds of centres offering treatment around the world'. Labour peer Lord Winston, who was head of the IVF unit at Hammersmith, has been highly critical of the charges patients face in many clinics. 'The biggest change has been the increasingly commercial market which has driven IVF', he says. 'I think that the inequalities in treatment are scandalous, and I do feel very angry that the NHS has used IVF as a money spinner',³ which also raises the question of whether some families should be enabled to have a child while those unable to pay should not.

IVF has created the possibility of much greater human control over the developing embryo. It has been calculated that 70% of natural pregnancies do not lead to a birth, so it is argued that most embryos would not continue to full term. This leads some to regard the embryo as potential life rather than a life and hence to justify selection. Increasingly it is possible to select which embryo to implant based on the parents preferences. This leads to three further dilemmas. Should an embryo be treated as an object to be checked and quality controlled? If so, what characteristics is it acceptable to select for or against? What is the status of those embryos which are not selected?

Increasingly the 'spare' embryos from IVF have become the property of the research companies. Current legislation⁴ allows experimentation on these for up to 14 days when the embryo is considered a distinct individual and can no longer form a twin. Do you believe it is acceptable to use embryos in this way if it can lead to life-saving therapies?

IVF has also greatly increased the use of surrogacy—where a woman other than the child's biological mother carries and gives birth to a baby. India is a leading centre for surrogate motherhood, partly due to Hinduism's acceptance of the concept. Rising demand from abroad for Indian surrogate mothers has turned 'surrogacy tourism' there into a billion dollar industry.⁵ Is that a fair trade?

None of this is intended to imply that IVF is by nature wrong—just that it was the scientific key that opened the door to some difficult moral choices. There are many otherwise childless couples who rejoice in that choice.

Stem cell technology⁶ has developed rapidly and there are many exciting clinical benefits—for example curing arthritis, and restoring sight. These currently all come from 'adult' stem cells. The use of embryonic stem cells promise more life-changing treatments but can an embryo be seen simply as a resource?

As medical technology has advanced, cross-species work has allowed the creation of

chimeras or hybrids which are part human and part animal. How much of our DNA can be changed before the offspring are no longer considered to be fully human? How much can be introduced before an animal is considered human?

The technology of 'therapeutic' and 'reproductive' cloning continues to develop offering the potential to provide transplant organs or tissue which would not be rejected. Is it ever acceptable to create a person for a 'use' even if that use is to save the life of another?

Ethical issues: the end of life

The end of life can come at any time, but I will be focusing on older age (which we might define as 10 years older than you are!).

Unlike our popular culture, which tends to idolise youth, the Bible encourages a positive attitude towards older people, not least in the commandment to 'Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you'.

God's promises do not fade with age.

*The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
in the house of the Lord,
flourish in the courts of our God.
They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green,
proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright;
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him. (Psalm 92: 12-15)*

*planted
they will*

In the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and Daniel were all used powerfully by God in their older age. In the New Testament, Simeon and Anna are among the first to recognise Jesus as the Messiah. Long life is seen as a blessing from God and wisdom associated with age, although one birthday card I received stated: 'another year older, another year wiser is only a rough guide and does not apply to everyone!'. The Old Testament contains many cases studies of those who behave badly in old age when they should have known better, including superstars such as David and Solomon.

Many of the first believers died young for their faith, but the New Testament does give direct guidance on caring for widows and for the elderly. Jesus condemned the practice of 'devoting to God' which supposedly released the children from the need to care for their parents. Paul writes to Timothy: '[children should] put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God' (1 Timothy 5:4). How does this correspond to the Government's call for families to take responsibility for their ageing relatives?

So the Bible has much to say about ageing as well as the only other alternative—dying! For the writers of the Old Testament, early death is seen as a curse, while death in old age is viewed as part of the natural process. The New Testament recognises Jesus' victory over death, hence setting us free from the fear of death which otherwise holds us captive, so Paul can write, 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain'. Biblically death is still seen as something to be mourned. It is the last enemy, to be finally defeated only when Jesus returns.

What contemporary issues about the end of life do we need to consider in the light of scripture? I offer two.

1. *Population ageing*—seen by governments as one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary society, because of its many social, economic and political implications. Globally the number of people age 60 and over will nearly triple to 2.4 billion by 2050.⁷ A recent news programme highlighted the rising costs of caring for the elderly and described this as 'the graph of doom'! It is worth saying that actually this a wonderful thing! People are living longer. As church, we want to be relevant for generations to come—but we should also be positive about those in older age. How do we affirm the worth of all ages and abilities?

Longer life sometimes means a severely reduced quality of life. An ageing population has also seen an increase in incidence of dementia, Parkinson's disease and other chronic debilitating illnesses. This has affected my family and I suspect it is also affecting many readers. How will the church show compassion and care for those suffering and their carers?

2. *Euthanasia*. In *bmj*, October 2016, Michael Peat wrote an excellent article entitled *Dignity when dying*.⁸ I will not duplicate it here but encourage continued reflection on the pastoral questions he raised. The end of life is not always linked to old age and there are demands from many for legalised assisted dying. Many of these ethical dilemmas are brought about by our success in sustaining life in those who would otherwise have died. Nevertheless, scripturally, there is a world of difference between allowing someone to die naturally and murder—and little room for a grey area between the two. Euthanasia literally means 'well-death', but in current debate refers to the intentional killing of a person in a medical context.

Palliative care recognises that when the end of life draws near, the goals of medicine change from cure at all costs to maximising the quality of the time that remains and not striving officiously to maintain life. We might contrast advance directives, or advance statements, also known as living wills, with the right to die. Should Christians keep having medical interventions 'to give God time to do a miracle'? Is it showing a lack of faith to decline further treatment? How could we better prepare our congregations to die well?

Conclusions

At the beginning of life our society has no coherent understanding of the worth of the human foetus/baby but has ended up with seemingly arbitrary dividing lines and contradictory philosophies. These dilemmas are only going to become more complex.

In our culture we often strive to prolong life, because the world sees no hope beyond this life; on the other hand we also seek to end lives no longer considered to be of sufficient quality. Scripture reminds us that we must all face our mortality—and we need to live in the light of that. The Bible reveals that God reserves the right to determine the length of our days—and while healing is praised, ending human life is condemned. Christianity affirms that this life is very good but that eternal life is even more precious. God makes promises that last a lifetime and beyond. He calls on us to serve Him all our days and to care for those who are in need.

To what extent are we helping our congregations to go beyond the tabloid headlines—for behind every one of these headlines are real people? How are we supporting scientists in our congregations as they think these issues through?

Chris Johnson trained as an analytical chemist and worked in pharmaceutical research. He maintains a keen interest in science and faith. He has served in pastoral ministry for 17 years, currently in Burwell.

Notes to Text

1. Mary Warnock, Warnock Report, Department of Health & Social Security Report of The Committee of Inquiry Into Human Fertilisation And Embryology, London: HMSO, 1984.
2. John Wyatt, *Matters of life and death*. Nottingham: IVP, 2009.
3. *Guardian*, 12 July 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/jul/12/story-ivf-five-million-babies> Accessed 6 March 2017.
4. Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008.
5. Tom Heneghan, Reuters Science News, 4 October 2010. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nobel-medicine-ethics-sb-idUSTRE6935HO20101004> Accessed 6 March 2017.
6. A stem cell is a cell which has the potential to develop into any type of cell.
7. T. Rutherford, Feb 2012 researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN03228/SN03228.pdf. Accessed 6 March 2017.
8. Michael Peat, *Dignity when dying*, *bmj*, vol 332, October 2016,

bmj Essay Prize 2017/8

The *bmj* invites entries for our first Essay Prize from those serving in, or in formation for, the leadership and ministry of Baptist churches. We would like an essay of 2500 words on a topic and title of the entrant's choice that fits into *one* of the following categories:

Baptist History and Principles
Biblical Studies
Theology or Practical Theology

We are looking for clear writing and argument, and a creative engagement with our Baptist life. The prize will be £75.00 and the winning essay (and any highly commended contributions) will be published in *bmj*.

We particularly encourage entries from those in the early years of their (Baptist) ministries, including MiTs, and you do not have to be in a nationally or regionally accredited or recognised leadership roles.

Closing date: 30 March 2018

Entries should be submitted electronically, double spaced and fully referenced with endnotes, not footnotes, to the editor, including details of your name, address, church, role, and stage of ministry.

Judges will be drawn from the Editorial Board of *bmj* and subject-appropriate academic Baptist colleagues. We reserve the right not to award a prize if the entries are unsuitable, of an inadequate standard for *bmj*, or do not meet the criteria.

Please share this competition with colleagues to whom it might be of interest.

Contact the editor if you have any queries.

Reviews

Editor: Michael Peat

The Biblical Cosmos: A Pilgrim's Guide to the Weird and Wonderful World of the Bible

by Robin Parry

Cascade books, 2014

Reviewer: Andy Goodliff

Robin Parry is a diverse thinker and writer. He has written on Old Testament ethics, the book of Lamentations, worship and the doctrine of the Trinity and the theology of universalism. To this list, he now adds this book on the 'weird and wonderful world of the Bible.'

This is a fascinating and fun guide to the world of the Bible. By world I don't mean worldview—as in beliefs and values—but the actual world as the biblical authors understood it. Parry guides on his tour of the biblical earth—sea, land and Sheol and the biblical heavens—sky and God's heaven; before looking more closely at Temple and Jesus.

The book provides a helpful context to how the Bible sees the cosmos from dragons in the sea, to particular mountains and the stars as gods. In so doing, it usefully reminds us that how we see the world is very different and so not to make assumptions. The final section of the book asks what does this mean for us today.

I finished this book, informed, at times amused, and pondering a sermon series around biblical mountains (last Lent I did one on biblical trees!).

The Bible: A History. The Making and Impact of the Bible

by Stephen M. Miller & Robert V. Huber
Lion Hudson, 2015

Reviewer: Dr Pieter J.ALLEMAN

A decade or so ago, Stephen Miller published a brief but well-illustrated *User's Guide to the Bible* (also Lion Hudson) in which he took quite conservative positions on matters of introduction such as authorship and dating. In this book, Huber & Miller defend much more critical positions on these issues, including our old friend, the Documentary Hypothesis.

For those not bothered by this concern, the book has much to offer. Part 1 describes how the Old Testament came into being. It contains much background information and discussions of the relevance of Josephus, Philo, the Apocrypha and much more. Part 2 tells how the New Testament took shape, with more focus on writing materials, reception, canonisation etc. than on the actual content of the 27 books. Part 3 is entitled 'The Bible in a rapidly growing church' and tells about people such as Jerome and Augustine. It provides much detail about the manual copying in the Middle Ages and the beautiful illustrations which were often added. Part 4, 'The Book of the Reformation', is brief on Luther and very brief on Calvin; the attention goes to Wycliffe, Gutenberg and English translations including the King James Version. But we also learn who introduced the verse numbering and how the Roman Catholics responded. Finally, Part 5 is called 'The Bible in the modern world' and offers wide-ranging chapters on biblical criticism, translations, slavery, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the role of the Bible in literature and film, to mention just a few.

Not everything in the book is strictly about the Bible; in many places, we get a potted history of the church and of development in 'Christian' culture. There are a few

inaccuracies (such as mixing up of miles and kilometres in some places), but on the whole this book is well written and very informative. The extensive index helps you find your way to particular topics. On the downside there are no illustrations and the paper is not of great quality. But what were you expecting for this price?

Walking with Old Testament Women

by Fiona Stratton

Bible Reading Fellowship, 2014

Reviewed by Jenny Few

This book was written to be used with small groups or for individual study, and takes the lives of 11 named Old Testament women—Sara, Rebekeh, Rachel and Leah, Miriam, Tamar, Rahab, Naomi and Ruth, Hannah, Bathsheba and Esther. For each one, the author presents one or more original monologues, supported by biblical references, and questions for reflection and discussion. Fiona Stratton is a speech and drama teacher and therapist, and like her first book, *Walking with Gospel Women*, this is written primarily as ‘a gentle introduction for those who have not encountered the stories before.’

The premise is a sound one; as the author says in her introduction, the world of the Old Testament is remote for many Christians. So I hoped to find this a useful and valuable resource for small groups. But I have to say I was rather disappointed in the content. For me, the monologues seemed to offer little in addition to the text; they are narrative rather than reflective, and offer little ‘behind the scenes’ imaginative insight into motive or feeling or response to the events they are narrating. There is no emotional angst or wrestling, they are in the main almost bland and passive. Nor is there much in the way of cultural background which is surely vital to understanding the behaviour of all the women in the stories. For example, in the two monologues about Rebekeh, there is no

insight into how it feels to be childless, rather a passive acceptance, and a reiteration of her submission to her husband Isaac’s prayers and God’s covenant promises. And in the second monologue about the rivalry between Esau and Jacob, there is nothing about the deep emotion this would evoke in a mother who loved one more than the other. Although this book does not claim to be a feminist reading of the text, this approach is disappointing. We are shown women who live their lives solely in response to and for the men in their lives.

The best part of each chapter is the reflections and questions which attempt to go deeper into the stories, with relevant biblical references from both Old and New Testament. This section may well generate discussion and sharing, and invite a personal prayerful response. I come back to my initial disappointment with the monologues. I think the aim of the book is sound and commendable, but could probably have been achieved by encouraging group participants to read the original biblical texts in a good modern translation, rather than relying on someone else’s narrative. One of the barriers for people who have not encountered the stories before is lack of familiarity with the bible itself, as a book, and to be asked to find your way round it, week by week, and to see the stories in context, might well be a better introduction, not only to the women but to the Old Testament itself.

Celebrating the law? Rethinking old testament ethics

by Hetty Lalleman

Authentic Media, 2016

Reviewer: Helen Paynter

I’m sure I’m not unusual in this experience of ministry. In any typical week, I’m likely to have at least one person telling me they’d like to get rid of the Old Testament altogether. Less frequently, but a couple of times a year, I’m likely to have someone ask me³ if the

Levitical laws are binding for Christians. How we, as Christians, should view the Old Testament law is a difficult issue, and one which Hetty Lalleman's book *Celebrating the Law?* seeks to help us navigate.

Lalleman's approach is not principally to address particular topics (though she uses some as a case study), but rather, to provide a framework for using the Old Testament law to make sense of ethical issues. In this pursuit she refers to (and, indeed, represents) serious scholarship, but her book remains readable for the non-specialist. Most ministers would find it accessible, and some of the hungrier folk in our churches would appreciate it. At the end of each chapter are study questions for deeper engagement, and I can imagine some church study groups finding it useful.

After some helpful preliminary chapters, Lalleman really gets down to business in chapter 3, where she reviews and evaluates some different Christian approaches to finding a paradigm in Old Testament law. Here, she engages with heavyweights such as Walter Kaiser, Waldemar Janzen and Christopher Wright, and settling largely on Wright's model, derives a framework for use. She then sets out to test this in the chapters which follow, with regard to the food laws, jubilee (which of course impacts upon slavery), and warfare. With each, Lalleman shows that these paradigms extend in direct continuity into the New Testament. For example, in her chapter on food laws (principally in Leviticus 11 and 19), she draws the following conclusions: rather than fitting into a spurious 'religious-secular' dichotomy, they are, in fact, all about the life-cleanness-wholeness axis of ideas, whereby the people of Israel enacted their distinctiveness, as the called people of God. The challenge for Christians is to understand just how these are extended and fulfilled in the New Testament. Lalleman quotes David Wenham 'God is intervening in Jesus to establish that wholeness,' and she adds, 'This call to

godliness, which is at the heart of these laws, will never change or become obsolete.'

In sum, Lalleman uses the paradigmatic approach to the Old Testament laws to show that, far from being redundant and dull, they actually powerfully direct us towards the exciting, daring, rich challenge of living in the Kingdom of God. I commend this book to all who struggle with the important question of the relevance of the Old Testament today, and to those who ought to.

The Lion and the Lamb: Studies in the Book of Revelation

by Pieter Lalleman

Apostolos Publishing, 2016

Reviewer: Stephen Finamore

Pieter Lalleman's study guide to the book of Revelation starts with a short introduction followed by a series of brief studies on the 'more readily accessible' (p9) bits of the book and their connection to passages in the Old Testament. The studies are clear and concise. They interpret the visions of the book in terms of the first century context of Asia Minor and acknowledge the truth that 'many things in Revelation are symbols and metaphors'.

Inevitably, there are a number of points on which I could take issue. I think it would have been helpful if the book had taken seriously the Temple context of the visions and drew attention to the many perspectives on atonement that Revelation contains. In addition, the decision to focus on the accessible parts of the book means that some interesting and significant chapters are not discussed at all. These include chapter 12 with its depiction of war in heaven. This causes some difficulty because the text should surely be treated as a whole.

Overall, Lalleman is a reliable guide and the studies are good, safe and reliable. The book might provide some outlines for a preacher

tempted to venture beyond the letters to the seven churches but it would need to be supplemented by a good commentary. However, preachers are not really its intended audience. This would be a good book to put into the hands of a small group leader who has been asked to lead some studies on the last book of the Bible.

Advancing Practical Theology: Critical Discipleship for Disturbing Times

by Eric Stoddart

SCM Press, 2014

Reviewer: Ronnie Hall

There are all kinds of different theologies out there. We talk about biblical theology, pastoral theology and systematic theology, among others you can think of. For us as pastors, chaplains and educators, we have a particular interest in practical theology. For the purposes of the review, practical theology has elements of what we would call black, liberation, pastoral, political, feminist theologies. The book itself builds on the works of pastoral theology written in the past 50 years. What is interesting is the style of the book itself and how the story it tells gives a manifesto for practical theology to inform and challenge future developments in Christian living. The book is first of all autobiographical. The life story being told is an interesting one, and Stoddart tells it with great humour. What does it mean for someone to be a Scottish Baptist minister, to go to South Africa and see marginalisation, to leave the Baptist Church and eventually be a Scottish Episcopalian? The story is relevant because the inner dialogue that happens leads the author to know that he is first and foremost a practical theologian, meaning that theology is something that is done (whatever that means - that is part of the exploration) but can also be subject to the same intellectual criticism as, say, biblical theology. The autobiography element encourages all of us to think about our own faith convictions: where have we been theologically? Where are we going? Have I

changed over the years? Why or why not? What difference does it make?

The book is also a case study. One of these is particularly relevant as it describes the language and theological thought process of the Scottish independence referendum. That may sound quite out of date now, but if you insert 'Brexit' into some of that discussion it gives a wonderful theological nuance to a very live topic. It made me think a little bit more carefully about the language that is used around Brexit and how that language does have theological implications. It is very interesting.

I have no wish to spoil Stoddart's manifesto for what a radical practical theology will look like; I leave that for you to find out for yourself. I will only say that this theology is as 'real' as any other and highly relevant to us. We pastors may not think of ourselves as theologians, but we are. We think about God and put that into practice.

This book is for anyone with an interest in theology that is defined as 'doing something'. It will be of particular benefit for students, especially those embarking on degrees with a strong practical theology element, like the DMin or DPT offered by a confederation of universities. It is well worth a read.

The Universities We Need: Theological Perspectives

edited by Stephen Heap

Routledge, 2016

Reviewer: Michael Docker

Stephen Heap, now a Visiting Professor at the University of Westminster with many years experience as a Baptist minister, a full-time university chaplain and a national chaplaincy coordinator (in the Church of England) has provided us with a rich manual for reflection and action. The 'we' of the title? Chaplaincy practitioners, academics, students—anyone in universities and beyond, such as policy

makers; indeed anyone who is concerned with the way our society is shaped and is developing.

This is not a book about chaplaincy as such, but Higher Education chaplaincy practitioners will find plenty here to inform and enrich their own practice. In the book, history is important. J.H. Newman, unsurprisingly, features while there is a reminder that Western Judaeo-Christian models of university education are not the only ones—ancient Chinese ideas about universities, as well as Greek and Islamic are all explored and illustrated, and shed light on current concerns.

More explicitly theological themes are explored in several of the essays, in connection to such things as ‘public theology’ and current Chinese approaches to religious studies and scriptural reasoning.

There are case studies of ‘Church Foundation’ universities—the University of Westminster and Heythrop College—that highlight both the positive and some of the problematic aspects of religion in relation to higher education. An essay from an Islamic perspective explores the rich intellectual tradition of Islam and the positive contribution Islamic scholarship still makes—a counter to the widely encountered ‘Islam-as-problem’ narrative.

Another essay surveys global university education and finally Stephen Heap himself sums up some of the issues, and discusses what a university is for and what society wants universities to be and needs them for. He ranges widely; successive governments’ policies are critiqued before a concluding, forward-looking vision is laid out.

There is an embarrassment of riches here, and few gaps as far as I can see. Chaplaincy issues such as the ‘student experience’ are not addressed directly but arguably belong in a different kind of book. The book

contains plenty of notes and bibliographical sections and is likely to be a valuable resource for years to come. It deserves to be read and its arguments and insights carefully considered and absorbed, by anyone with an academic, political, pastoral or personal interest in university education.

The reluctant leader

Peter Shaw and Hilary Douglas
Canterbury Press, 2016

Reviewer: Martin Gillard

Do you know someone who would make a good leader but their personal insecurity holds them back? Do you sometimes feel this is true of you, that your own moments of self doubt in your ability hinder you from your full development as the leader God wants you to be? If so, this short and helpful book could make the difference. Its 25 short chapters, each four or five pages long with concluding questions to help with individual reflection, are filled with good sense, practical analysis and useful personal application.

Starting with two brief chapters on the importance of good leadership and the ways we think about leadership, the authors then lead into their two main sections. The first is called *Take the Plunge* (a great phrase for Baptists!) which tackles such subjects as; the fear of failure, having the courage of our convictions, finding your vocation, approaches to interviews and assessment, and sources of support. This section is particularly helpful for those who are researching or preparing for a new leadership appointment, maybe with some trepidation.

The second main section, *Come Out of the Shadows*, focuses on stepping up to responsibility within an already existing situation. Subjects include, among others: sources of authority, dealing with difficult people, making decisions, managing

emotional reactions and finding what keeps you fresh and energised. Sometimes leadership is thrust upon us by circumstances that we have not planned or desired, and maybe the hand of God is in those events. These chapters help the reader think through the situation they find themselves in and inspire confidence to fulfil the task.

The authors have not specifically written this book for Christian leaders, but they do come from a Christian background. So there isn't any biblical exposition or theological references, church language or anything else that would stop you passing this book on to a believing or unbelieving friend. The authors' advice is relevant and applicable to business, government and voluntary sectors. The fact that all royalties from this book will go to the British Red Cross tells you something about the character and values of the authors.

I enjoyed this book and learned (or remembered) some very simple practical principles that I could apply to my own moments of reservation over leadership and responsibility. I commend it to you.

Deep Calls to Deep: Spiritual Formation in the Hard Places of Life

by Tony Horsfall

Bible Reading Fellowship, 2015

Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

Tony Horsfall is a well known Christian writer and teacher. He has written this book as a resource for Christians undergoing difficult times in their lives. It could prove very useful for pastors to recommend to the people they minister to, not just those who happen to be in a hard place at the time.

It is a book about the Psalms—six in particular (counting 42 and 43 as a single Psalm)—interspersed with personal stories of painful experiences which more or less correspond to the circumstances envisaged in the particular psalm to which they refer.

Horsfall follows the classification proposed by Walter Brueggemann in *The Message of the Psalms* (Augsburg 1984), namely psalms of orientation, disorientation and re-orientation, although only four of the psalms chosen by Horsfall are also dealt with by Brueggemann in that particular book. The psalms dealt with here are 145 (orientation), 130, 42-3, 69, 88 (all disorientation), and 30 (re-orientation). Themes corresponding to the chosen psalms are, respectively, praise, failure, despair, unjust suffering, the depths of darkness, and thanksgiving. Given the intention of the book, the emphasis on psalms of disorientation is entirely appropriate. There are three introductory chapters and a concluding summary. Also included are questions for group discussion, thus widening the usefulness of the book, and an appendix classifying a number of psalms.

I read the relevant sections of Brueggemann's work alongside this book and noticed that Horsfall confines himself, understandably given his pastoral intention, to the application of these psalms to personal life. In the light of Brueggemann's prophetic edginess, some might judge Horsfall to have privatised the message of these psalms a little too much. Preachers, I suggest, might prefer to be guided by Brueggemann, which is not to suggest that Horsfall is entirely irrelevant in this respect.

Despite this small reservation, Horsfall's book is an excellent resource and I would recommend it to pastors to read for their own benefit as well as something to put into the hands of people in their congregations.

Creative Ideas for Wild Church

by Mary Jackson & Juno Hollyhock

Canterbury Press, 2016

Reviewer: Sian Hancock

From the popular *Creative Ideas for...* series, this book offers practical ways to take the church outdoors for multigenerational

worship and learning, as well as suggestions about how nature and elements from the natural world might be brought into the church to enrich worship and learning. The geographical landscape, be it rural or urban, has the potential to inspire and re-energise how we think and feel; it can make the Creator God more tangible if we take time to step out, look up, breathe in and allow our senses to engage.

Setting the church year within the seasons, the authors offer a range of creative responses from the flow of a service, to the use of words and pictures, and the adventure of journey, creativity, silence and spiritual reflection. Of course, any change of approach takes thoughtful preparation and time to ease people into it, but the authors open the book giving practical advice to consider beforehand to help frame this process. This includes some basic things to get started (especially when bringing the outside in); the inevitable health and safety issues as well as ways to ensure all are included and can access the experience.

Clearly presented, with an identified aim and the resources needed, these activities are ready to deliver. There are creative ideas for journeying through Holy Week; suggestions of rituals to mark key events; biblical stories to engage with; prayers to share and discussion starters.

The book concludes as it began with the practicalities of the next steps and how to create permanent outdoor spaces making the best of the space you have. It also encourages ways to think beyond the church year to integrate and have a sense of wild church throughout the year.

Any church leaders, including ministers, Messy Church teams, children and youth workers, pioneers and group facilitators seeking to use creation and the outdoors to nurture spirituality with any age would find this a useful resource book to get them started. It may be that those working with children, young people and

families explore it first as it is closer to their experience. That may require more adults to accompany them outside which in turn helps grow the number of those seeing it first-hand and recognising its value. 'And a child shall lead them' to be playful, multisensory, creative and connected to the world outside the building called church.

The Seeds of Heaven: Preaching the Gospel of Matthew

by Barbara Brown Taylor
Canterbury Press, 2016

Reviewer: Andy Goodliff

Barbara Brown Taylor is the author of numerous books of sermons and spiritual reflections, some of which have won awards. This book is a new edition of a book that was originally published in 1990, and by Canterbury Press in 2004. This new edition has a new preface and three new sermons to accompany the original twelve.

I find there is sometimes no better sermon preparation than reading those who have preached a passage before. This is often much more helpful than a commentary and may open up new lines of engaging with the text. My shelves continue to fill up with sermon collections by the likes of Brueggemann, Rutledge, Wells, Hauerwas, Willimon and others. I am grateful to now add Brown Taylor to that list.

When I next tackle the gospel of Matthew, *The Seeds of Heaven* will be a likely companion. The sermons on offer here are very much from the middle of the gospel, engaging with the ministry of Jesus—teachings, parables and miracles—so the subtitle might have been more accurately *Preaching from the Gospel of Matthew*. Many of these passages are of course extremely well known to the preacher, even to our congregations, and so Brown Taylor's approach and interpretation is welcome to keep preaching fresh.

Centre for Baptist History and Heritage *with* the Baptist Historical Society

Wednesday 25 October 2017, Regent's Park College, Oxford

Evening Lecture and Book Launch

7.30 pm Launch of new book by Keith Clements, 'Look Back in Hope. An Ecumenical Life'. All are invited to a reception (wine or soft drinks).

8.00 pm Lecture: Revd Dr Keith Clements, "The Long Search for Christian Unity: Confessions of a Baptist Ecumenist"

No cost for attendance, but please indicate intention to attend
(paul.fiddes@regents.ox.ac.uk)

Saturday 25 November 2017, Regent's Park College, Oxford

Day Conference: The Fourth Strand of the Reformation

Marking the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation and the launch of 'The Early General Baptists and Their Theological Formation' by William H. Brackney

Lectures by Prof William Brackney, Prof Paul S. Fiddes and Prof Malcolm Yarnell on the ecclesiology of Anabaptists, Separatists and General Baptists.

10.00 am – 4.15 pm.

Full programme is attached to this email.

Cost: £10.00 including all drinks during the day.

Please indicate intention to attend to paul.fiddes@regents.ox.ac.uk

Saturday 17 March 2018, Regent's Park College, Oxford

Day Conference: Baptists on the Journey to Justice

The Baptist Union Apology and the Heritage of Slavery: Historical and Contemporary Issues

Speakers from the UK and Jamaica: Anthony Reddie, Rhea Russell Cartwright, Eleasah Louis, Devon Dick, Wale Hudson-Roberts, Rosemarie Davidson- Gotobed

10.00 am – 4.30 pm.

Cost: £10.00 including all drinks during the day.

Please indicate intention to attend to paul.fiddes@regents.ox.ac.uk

Saturday 24 November 2018

Day Conference: Baptist Women in Ministry in the Long Nineteenth Century

Details tba – please keep the date.