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Editorial

At the turn of the year we often hear or read the familiar words of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3. 'The Preacher' reminds us that there is a time for everything: birth, death, love, hate, war, peace, speech and silence – all is encompassed within the sweep of life's times. But are these words fatalistic or hopeful? Heard as an acknowledgement of fundamental helplessness, they may remind us that, since eternity is not up to us, we may receive the present moment as gift from God and do with it what we can.

Those who travel with the Revised Common Lectionary are beginning the year with the Gospel according to Luke and responding to the particular challenge which it brings to Christians in a rich world. We rushed through the words of the Magnificat in order to get to the Crib, but the story of strangers without a roof over their head as a sequel to the song "the rich he has sent empty away" still hovers in the air when the angel wings have quietened.

Malcom Duncan's reflections are pertinent as he recognises that whilst material poverty takes precedence in our sight-lines and action, there is a wider interface that presents through the aspects he identifies as spiritual, civic, identity, and aspirational.

Anyone who has lost their internet connection for a while will have realised just how important the web has become as a communication, study and leisure tool. The days of complete ignorance are largely past for the current generation of ministers, but the jury is still out as to whether its long term benefits will be greater breadth and depth of understanding or an ever-more-frenetic search for information; and whilst the Web itself may be inherently neutral, huge power is wielded in the background by some who hold massive stakes.

However, it with us and to stay, for those whose power and energy supplies are sufficient to make it accessible, and is constantly evolving and changing its shape. An initial article by Bob Almond in this Journal, followed by a tongue-in-cheek comment by Jude Simpson brings to mind the sometimes uneasy tensions into which we are drawn.

Church and Poverty

Malcolm Duncan, leader of Faithworks, reflects on the Church's response to the multi-aspected challenge of poverty.

There was once a rich man, expensively dressed in the latest fashions, wasting his days in conspicuous consumption. A poor man named Lazarus [literally means 'without help'], covered with sores, had been dumped on his doorstep. All he lived for was to get a meal from scraps off the rich man's table. His best friends were the dogs who came and licked his sores.

Luke 16:19ff [The Message]

At the heart of my politics has always been the value of community, the belief that we are not merely individuals struggling in isolation from each other, but members of a community who depend on each other, who benefit from each other's help, who owe obligations to each other. From that everything stems: solidarity, social justice, equality, freedom. We are what we are, in part, because of each other.

Tony Blair, Faithworks Lecture, March 2005

Introduction – A North / South Divide

One of the saddest indictments of many aspects of the church in the Northern Hemisphere (particularly in North America and in the UK) is that we have become the 'rich man' in Jesus' parable recorded in Luke 16. We have become a church that is obsessed with itself. If the churches of the North are the 'rich man' then the churches of the South are often the poor man at the door. The same is true of our societies. What is true internationally is also true nationally. The resources available to local congregations in the UK vary vastly. The 'fashionable' churches have healthy bank balances – the struggling do not. The former does not help the latter enough. The reality that poverty walks our neighbourhoods, our streets and our workplaces is often too uncomfortable for the church.

In Jesus' parable the rich man goes unnamed in Luke, but the poor man is named. His name is Lazarus – which literally translated means 'someone without help'. The church in the UK could be accused of leaving the poor without help. But we have gone further. In a cruel twist or irony we have made sure that our names are known – and have often taken the very names of poor people away from them. Luke often reverses social situations to make a point and he has done the same here. The tragedy is we still do it! Too often our work with the poor has become our work for the poor. We have too often robbed poor people of their dignity and their voice – and in so doing we have compounded their poverty and taken their name from them.

We ignore what we do not understand – or fear it.

It is easier to ignore the problem of the absence of the poor from our churches and communities of faith than it is to face it. When William Booth was asked, in the 19th century, why he had founded the Salvation Army, he replied that he had done so because there was no church for the poor. In 2006, where is the church for the poor? We have too often adopted the principles of market forces in place of moral obligation, losing some imperatives along the way, e.g:

1. God sides with the poor.¹
2. The love of money is the root of all evil.²
3. The church cannot serve God and lust after money, power and influence simultaneously.³
4. Every person bears the image of God.⁴
5. We have a moral obligation to the poor and not to show favouritism.⁵
6. We should show compassion to those who are poor.⁶
7. What we have is not ours, but loaned to us that we might use it wisely.⁷
8. The Gospel is for the poor.⁸
9. Poverty will be eradicated because of the promise of the Kingdom.⁹
10. Christians engaged in the eradication of poverty do so from the perspective of HOPE not despair.¹⁰

The challenge for us is to do something about poverty.

Faces of poverty?¹¹

The challenges around a definition of poverty are well known. When we address poverty as Christians we

cannot only address material poverty – there other forms of poverty we must deal with.

1. Material Poverty has Precedence – Learning from Social Activists

It is important to make sure that we do not reduce material poverty to one aspect of poverty like any other. There is no doubt that there is an emphasis on physical and material poverty within the context of Bible. Material poverty is anything that deprives a human being of the physical requirements of living a fulfilled life as God intended.

Physical poverty and social change have long been championed by the Church, from Roman Catholicism to Methodism. Many in the church who are more socially progressive would see the eradication of physical poverty as their utmost imperative. They would engage in a battle to see the materially poor served, supported and worked with in order to bring an end to the injustice of poverty in their lives.

Physical poverty and wealth are some of the central themes of the Bible. Money and possessions and how we use them are closely related to idolatry, and idolatry and the handling of money are probably the most present issues in the Older Testament. The New Testament contains in excess of 500 direct references to wealth and material possessions (that is a mention in one of every 16 verses). In the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke, one verse in every ten is about poverty and wealth. In Luke the ratio is to one verse in every seven. In James it is one in every five. Jesus talked about

money and wealth more than he did about almost anything else.¹²

Too often the church has downgraded material and physical poverty as only one aspect of poverty. It is true that it is one aspect, but it is a primary focus of Christian teaching. Yet the biblical imperative is that the Good News must be shared with the materially poor. As Albert Nolan points out:

*The option for the poor is not a choice about the recipients of the Gospel message, to whom we must preach the Gospel. It is a matter of what Gospel we preach to anyone at all. It is concerned with the Gospel message itself. The sign that Jesus gives is not that the Gospel is proclaimed to all peoples: it is that the Gospel is proclaimed to the poor.*¹³

It is worth noting that somehow the presence of material poverty in the world challenges the church about the effectiveness of our Gospel. Fr Mathew Kariapuram SDB is a research scholar in the Department of Christian Studies at Madras University and he has noted that "Poverty is a dehumanising situation and when it is rampant God's image can never be made perfect in human beings."¹⁴

The reality of material poverty cries out at us. It is impossible to ignore it. The travesty of life is that it has become almost as impossible for a poor man to live on earth as for a rich man to enter heaven. Rich people are always finding new friends, but the poor cannot keep the few they have. In such a situation theologising cannot but force us to take sides and show where our priorities lie.¹⁵

Perhaps one of the reasons that we

have shied away from the material face of poverty so much is because of the challenge of obeying the teachings of Christ on the subject of wealth. After all, many of us are deeply challenged by the call of Luke 14:33

So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

The international challenges around material poverty are clear. But there are challenges around the UK context, which we cannot ignore.¹⁶

Bartolomé de las Casas¹⁷ – a Dominican missionary from the 16th century, said:

Of the least and most forgotten people, God has a very fresh and vivid memory.

In fact, we would do well to remember some Roman Catholic doctrine when it comes to material poverty. The 1938 Catechism reads:

Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity and human dignity...

In economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of temperance, so as to moderate attachment to this world's goods; the practice of the virtue of justice, to preserve our neighbour's rights and render him what is his due; and the practice of solidarity... (Catechism, 2407)

St John Chrysostom made it clear that he believed Christians had an obligation to overcome material disparity:

Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.

The Salvation Army have made their commitment to the materially poor clear too.¹⁸ Having recognised their responsibility to the poor, the task force from the Lotus Notes and Internet conference on poverty concluded:

*The group operated with full acceptance of the Army's sixth doctrine, noting also that "... any Gospel which is truly universal - or, as Salvationists would say, 'for the whosoever' - must clearly identify the poor and oppressed as the first ones to be addressed and invited to enter the new Kingdom. The easiest ones to exclude must be the first ones included. Otherwise, the Gospel's whosoever is in jeopardy."*¹⁹

Albert Nolan really was right. If we have not engaged with the materially poor, we have not shared the gospel.

2. Spiritual Poverty

There is a sense in which all of us are poor – without the knowledge of God and his commitment and love to us. This is spiritual poverty. It is clearly outlined within the context of both theology and Scripture. It is perhaps this poverty that evangelicals and pietists have focussed on most. For them, the precedence has been given to helping those who are spiritually poor understand that they need a relationship with God as their Creator and their Redeemer in order to thrive and prosper.

Oscar Romero put it this way:

*In our preaching to rich and poor, it is not that we pander to the sins of the poor and ignore the virtues of the rich. Both have sins and both need conversion. But the poor, in their condition of need, are disposed to conversion. They are more conscious of their need of God. All of us, if we really want to know the meaning of conversion and of faith and confidence in another, must become poor, or at least make the cause of the poor our own inner motivation. That is when one begins to experience faith and conversion: when one has the heart of the poor, when one knows that financial capital, political influence, and power are worthless, and that without God we are nothing. To feel that need of God is faith and conversion.*²⁰

For all Christians, there is a deep connection between the physical and the spiritual. Physical poverty cannot be overcome for the Christian without also addressing the pressing need to eradicate spiritual poverty. Change works best from the inside out.

3. Civic Poverty

Dom Helder Camara²¹ once commented that when he asked why the poor had no food, people called him a communist. Yet he struggled because he knew that it was not enough to just feed the poor; although they need to eat, it is also important to ask why they are hungry in the first place. Why is it that they have been excluded and marginalized? This is civic poverty. Pope Pius XI called this struggle against civic poverty a 'struggle for justice'. Civic poverty is the lack of

opportunity for the excluded and poor to shape their own future and have a role in their own community and society. It is the disempowerment of the poor.

Why is it that when we ask why the poor are hungry we are communists, yet when we feed them we are saints? We are struggling against an unjust system. Saint Augustine once said that although we give bread to hungry people, it would be far better to have no hungry people in the first place! If the first level of serving the poor is demand – the social and pastoral level of the preferential option for the poor – then the second level is theological. The option for the poor is not only to be committed socially and pastorally; it is also a way of doing theology. It is not necessarily their way, but it is one way of doing theology.

In addressing civic poverty, we must begin to ask hard questions of our society and of ourselves: questions about the very understanding of poverty and sin,²² and questions about the connection between personal responsibility for poverty and societal responsibility. We cannot eradicate poverty by only working with individuals. Nor can we eradicate poverty by only working on the challenges of society. The two are connected. There is strength in both models. We need both. There has been a tendency for Churches to fall into 'one camp' or the 'other' when addressing the issues and challenges of poverty. However, if we are to see long lasting solutions rather than sticking plaster panaceas, we must move beyond extremes and learn from one another's approaches

in addressing poverty and ensuring its eradication.

4. Identity Poverty

This is a poverty that is deeply embedded into the psyche of individuals, and even whole communities throughout their history. It is a poverty that springs from being persistently undervalued, and the sense that the community of which you are part is worthless, or that you yourself are worthless. It can spring from bad parenting, inappropriate educational techniques or poor mentoring for individuals. It is the constant voice in a person's mind, which could sound like an angry father or a neglectful mother or an overly harsh teacher. The sentiment of being stupid, worthless, hopeless or from 'bad stock' lies behind the poverty of identity. It is a belief that the past is more important than both the present and the future, and that because of where you have come from or what you have been told about yourself, you are worthless. This poverty holds its victims in a vice of self-doubt and degradation.

Poverty of identity can be perpetuated about a community by constantly reporting the history of the community and its troubles rather than focusing on the positive things that also take place within it. It is often employed by an 'outsider' as the community is viewed from a distance. By labelling an individual or a community because of its past, we can actually perpetuate the impoverishment of that community.

5. Aspirational Poverty

Closely tied to the identity poverty of the past is aspirational poverty – poverty of the future. This poverty exhibits itself in the conviction that an individual or a community cannot change – that change itself is impossible. The dreams and ambitions of a person or a community can therefore be stolen from them by an attitude of hopelessness and despair. This can spring from past failure, from lack of understanding of a way forward or from a sense of being overwhelmed by the challenge and possibility of change, renewal and transformation.

Conclusions

There is so much more that could be said about the issue of poverty. However, we as Christians must understand that to engage with the poor is to engage with God. While we fight not only the symptoms but also the causes of material, spiritual, civic, identity and aspirational poverty, we are doing what God has called us to do. As we work with people and stand alongside them we are following the example and model of Christ. The heart of Christian unity is the purpose of the practise and living out of the Good News to the poor – this is our mission. We must also recognise that words and essays and debates are never enough. For poverty to be tackled we each must do something. Lastly, hope is our greatest gift. Things do not always have to be the way they have always been. As Christians we are harbingers of hope, we are convinced that the world for individuals and communities

will be a better place. But we are also convinced that change is only possible as we learn from one another, and as we each play our part.

Long after social services, government funding and other programmes will have left a community, the church (in the truest sense of the word) should still be there. Our commitment is not determined by funding, approval or support from a hierarchy or a government or a programme. We move beyond programmes because we recognise that deeply embedded within every single human being is the image of God. We weep and laugh with them. We stand with them. For in following Jesus, we follow the one who leads us to the poor. Wherever there is good work, wherever there is a stand for justice and against injustice, wherever the poor are cared for, whatever the name of the person or group helping – God smiles. We must stand with those who stand with the poor for in so doing we stand with God.

God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them.²³

1 e.g. Minor Prophets; Beatitudes and Luke 6:20

2 1 Timothy 6:8-10

3 Luke 16:13

4 Genesis 1:26ff

5 James 2

6 Mark 14:7

7 Stewardship as set out in Corinthians and the Covenants of the Old Testament, particularly Genesis 12. Consider this startling reminder:

'You eat to excess; Christ eats not even what he needs. You eat a variety of cakes; he eats not even a piece of dried bread. You drink fine Thracian wine, but on him you have not bestowed as much as a cup of cold water. You lie on a soft and embroidered bed; but he is perishing in the cold... You live in luxury on things that properly belong to him. Why, were you the guardian of a child and, having taken control of his estate, you neglected him in his extreme need, you would have ten thousand accusers and you would suffer the punishment set by law. At the moment, you have taken possession of the resources that belong to Christ and you consume them aimlessly. Don't you realise that you are going to be held accountable.'

On Matthew: Homily 48:8 as cited by "Patristic Social Consciousness - The Church and the Poor" by William J. Walsh, S.J. and John P. Langan, S.J. from *The Faith that does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change* edited by John G. Haughey (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p130

8 Luke 4:16

9 Luke 11

10 Isaiah 65; Romans 8; Revelation 21,22

11 The idea of Material Poverty, Spiritual Poverty and Civic Poverty is taken from *Faithworks: Lesson on Spirituality and Social Action* by Jim Wallis (London: SPCK 2002), pp 51-70

12 See Wallis, *The Call to Conversion*, p57

13 As quoted by Fr Mathew Kariapuram SDB is a research scholar in the Department of Christian Studies at Madras University [www.missionsocieties.org.uk]

14 *ibid*

15 See Matthew 19:24 for the original idea from Jesus himself

16 For more information on poverty in the UK visit www.shelter.org.uk and www.poverty.org.uk from the New Policy Institute

17 As quoted in Pope Paul VI lecture, 2005. For information see www.cafod.org.uk

18 THE SALVATION ARMY AND THE POOR/VOICES OF OUR GLOBAL FAMILY Conclusions of the Task Force on the Internet/ Lotus Notes Poverty Summit

19 Phillip Needham, in *Towards a Reintegration of the Salvationist Mission - Creed and Deed*. Published by the Salvation Army

20 Oscar Romero, Homily February 18, 1979

21 A liberation theologian and priest. 1909 - 1999

22 See a helpful article by Jon Kuhrt on Sin. See www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk

23 Bono, keynote address to the National Prayer Breakfast, 2nd February 2006, Washington D.C

Word made flesh, speak to us
and then through our hands and arms,
our life blood and our sacrifice,
our flesh will learn to speak,
our lives to work
and meet with heaven's gifts,
the needs of those on earth.

*from 'Called to Praise' © Donald Hilton 2005
Christian Education*

A Biblical Basis for Affirming Women in Ministry – Part 2

Simon Woodman, South Wales Baptist College

In the previous issue, we looked at some of the biblical support for women in ministry, and began an examination of the three key 'difficult passages' by looking in some detail at 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. In this present issue, we continue our examination of the difficult passages, before drawing some conclusions.

1 Corinthians 14:33b-36

This passage is problematic because, at first glance, Paul seems to contradict what he said in 1 Cor 11:4-5. In the earlier passage, Paul clearly expected that women would pray and prophesy in public worship, and his concern was that they should do so with propriety and decorum, whereas a superficial reading of 14:34 appears to say that women should be silent in church. The key to solving this is found in 14:35, where Paul says that if women desire to know anything, they should ask their husbands at home. Paul is actually only restricting women from the shameful public asking of questions.

One of the problems in the early church, and particularly the church in Corinth, was that of order and propriety in worship. In so many ways, the post-Pentecost community of Christian believers had broken down barriers of race, class and gender; but the danger of this freedom was that it ran the risk of breaking down into anarchy, which would seriously hinder the witness of the church. In the Corinthian cultural situation, women would traditionally have received little formal education, and would have been restricted in their access to temple worship. In the new Christian community, they suddenly found themselves, for the first time,

being given liberation from these restrictions, and being allowed equal access with men to worship services. The problem seems to have been that they didn't know how to handle that freedom appropriately.

It was common practise in worship to interrupt the speaker to ask a question of clarification, or to make a relevant point. Which was fine as long as the question was appropriate and useful. The problem was that the granting of equal participation in worship to uneducated women, could so easily have led to them disrupting services by continually asking inappropriate questions. So to avoid this and preserve propriety and order, Paul proposes both short-term and long-term solutions¹ to the problem. The short term solution is that women should keep quiet in worship, and refrain from asking uneducated and disruptive questions. The long term solution is that women should receive education in the form of private tuition from their husbands. These solutions were actually more progressive than restrictive, as Paul is not doubting the abilities of women to learn, and he is opening the door for them to receive an education that would otherwise not be available to them. However, until that long term solution paid dividends, Paul was concerned to preserve dignity

and propriety in public worship.² This passage is a further example of Paul tempering the freedoms of Galatians 3:28 with a concern for love, unity, and good witness.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

The wider context for this passage is that Paul is giving the congregation at Ephesus some instruction concerning public prayer. Paul is, as always, concerned that worship be conducted with order and in an appropriate manner, and is writing to offset various abuses which were creeping into the worship of the Ephesian church. In verse 8 Paul addresses the men, who seem to have been bringing conflict into church, and in verses 9-10 he turns his attention to the dress-code for women in the church. It seems that some (clearly wealthy) women had been coming to church arrayed in all their finery. Paul's concern is that in a congregation where class barriers had been removed,³ the door wasn't opened for division and resentment to creep in between the haves and the have-nots. Hence Paul instructs the women in the church not to dress ostentatiously.

When considering 1 Tim 2:11-15, it needs to be remembered that Paul was writing to a very specific social situation, and that he was not setting out to write systematic theology. His instructions in this passage come as a pastoral response to a specific pastoral problem. Paul is concerned that false teaching has been gaining a foothold in the Ephesian church,⁴ and he wants to ensure that all avenues for the heresy to be taught are closed.

As was discussed above, most women in Paul's time would have lacked formal education, and therefore they would have been at greater risk of being drawn into the false teaching than the educated men in the church. It is easy to see why, if women had been taking advantage of the new freedoms that were theirs in Christ by beginning to share in the teaching of the church, Paul would be concerned that this might open the door to propagating the false teaching that he was so anxious to refute. In addition, having women assuming teaching roles, even if they were fulfilled competently, would fly in the face of what was acceptable in terms of cultural standards at the time. As has already been seen, one of Paul's overriding concerns was that the public witness of the church not be harmed.⁵ For the church to have women in teaching roles would certainly have negatively affect the extent to which the male-orientated society of his day, would be prepared to listen to the message the church was seeking to proclaim.

In the face of these two concerns: that the church's witness not be harmed, and that uneducated women not be given teaching responsibility in a congregation facing the difficulties of false teaching, it is easy to see why Paul proposes the solutions that he does. As with 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36, Paul proposes both short-term and a long-term solutions.⁶ The short-term solution is that women should not take up positions of teaching authority in the church. Whilst the long-term solution is that women should be educated (v.11). Here Paul is again affirming the ability

of women to learn, something which in terms of the prevailing society's attitude to women can be seen as progressive. Too much should not be read into Paul's instruction that the women are to learn in silence and in full submission, because this was the demeanour that was expected of all students. Paul has in mind here the public witness of the church: If they were going to fly in the face of prevailing culture by educating women, then this needed to be done with utmost regard to received custom.

As in his discussion concerning head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:7-11, Paul turns once again to the creation story for supporting arguments to bolster his advice. As in 1 Corinthians, Paul's argument from creation is confusing for a 21st Century reader. Paul's analogy with the creation story is set out in verse 13: In Genesis 2:18 man is described as being alone and this is stated as "not good," so the Lord creates woman to be his partner. Paul seems to be making the point that it is similarly not good for men to be alone in worship, as would traditionally have been the case in pagan worship, and that the inclusion of women as partners with men in the worship of Christ is a parallel to the creation of woman to be a partner of man in Genesis 2. Clearly, however, it is also central to his point that Eve was deceived first, and then led Adam astray.⁷ The question is whether Paul is saying that all women are inherently more easy to deceive than men, and that therefore no woman is ever fit to teach. Or whether Paul is using the story of Eve to illustrate the particular situation facing

the women in the church in Ephesus.⁸ In the light of the discussion above concerning the lack of education of the women in Ephesus, and therefore their particular susceptibility to the false teaching in that church, it is most likely that Paul was simply drawing an analogy between the Ephesian situation and the story of Eve, rather than mandating a genetic principle for all time.⁹

In summary, 1 Timothy 2:8-15 contains Paul's specific response to a specific cultural situation. He is concerned to stem the tide of false teaching, and therefore instructs that uneducated women should not participate in teaching for fear they may unwittingly participate in the heresy. He is also concerned that the witness of the church not be harmed, and that to have women teaching, however competently, would compromise this. He affirms that women should be educated, and is therefore setting in place a long-term strategy so that the short-term restrictions can be lifted in due course. In this way, Paul can be seen to be working towards the fulfilment of Galatians 3:28 in the new Christian community, whilst at the same time balancing his concerns for unity and good witness.

Conclusion

Paul says, when answering the question of whether Christians should eat food which has been offered to idols, 'take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.'¹⁰ Paul also says, when addressing the issue of freedom in Christ, "All things

are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial.¹¹ It seems that Paul, the idealistic champion of Christian freedom and equality in Galatians 3:28, is also something of a pragmatist. It's as if he has caught this wonderful grand vision of the way it should be in the new Christian community, and then has to come back down to earth and start to think through the practical implications of the transition from law to grace. Hence Paul welcomes the freedom of women to minister in his churches, except where it is exercised in such a way as to compromise the church's unity and public witness. Of his own ministry, Paul says, 'though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them... I have become all things to all people, so that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel.'¹² It seems that he expects no less of those in his congregations.

The passages where Paul asks women to set aside their freedom in Christ for the sake of the unity and witness of the church remain a challenge to the contemporary Christian. In Western culture it is no longer harmful to the proclamation of the gospel for women to minister in church; in fact the converse is probably true.¹³ Those who persist in seeking to restrict the ministry of women actually alienate the church from the culture to which it is called to minister, in much the same way as allowing women to minister in Ephesus would have done two thousand years ago.

The challenge from these passages to the contemporary church is this: What

freedoms are ours in Christ, which we are being called to set aside for the sake of the gospel? What about our freedom to invest our money wherever we choose, without regard for the ethical practises of our financial institutions? What about our freedom to drive our cars and consume irreplaceable natural resources? What about our freedom to buy our goods at the cheapest price, regardless of the human cost of their production? What about our freedom to remain a predominantly middle-class church? These, and many more, are freedoms with implications for the public witness of the church. In this way, I believe Paul's approach to Christian freedom is one which can helpfully challenge the contemporary church.

To return to the issue of women in ministry, I would like to close with a quote from Paul Fiddes:

As long as there is no equality of opportunity, social stereotypes will block the path to finding the real distinctiveness between male and female that reflects the distinction in unity within God.¹⁴

As long as our dominant models of ministry remain informed by predominantly male patterns of pastoral leadership, we will continue to be denied the true richness of ministry that is potentially ours in Christ; even those women who are called to the office of pastoral ministry will face the expectation that they have to become, in some sense, 'honorary men' in order to fulfil their calling. If the Christian community could truly grasp Paul's radical vision for gender equality, women would be

called to ministry as women, and free to minister as women. It is tragically true that nearly two thousand years after Paul wrote Galatians 3:28, the Christian church still retains divisions based on race, class and gender. It is equally tragic when the public witness of the church is compromised because the prevailing culture has a clearer grasp on human equality, than does the community of Christ's people. The time has now come for the church to adopt wholeheartedly what it has always known; that both women and men are called and gifted by God for the task of ministry in the church of Christ.¹⁵

- 1 Keener, Man and Woman, 1993, 590.
- 2 Paul's concern that women 'should be subordinate, as the law says' (v.34) reflects his concern that the practise of the church in worship should not bring the church into disrepute with those who he was concerned to reach with the gospel of Christ.
- 3 See Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14-15; Col 3:11.
- 4 See 1 Tim 1:4-7, 20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim 2:17-18.
- 5 For further examples of Paul's concern that the church be seen to be above reproach, see 1 Tim 3:2, 7, 10; 5:7, 10, 14; 6:1; Tit 1:6; 2:1-5, 8, 10. Keener, Man and Woman, 1993, 591.
- 6 Keener, Man and Woman, 1993, 591.
- 7 1 Tim 2:14.
- 8 Keener, Man and Woman, 1993, 591.
- 9 There is considerable debate regarding the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:15. As C.S. Keener says, it could mean, 'salvation coming through Mary's childbirth, perhaps as the new Eve; through women submitting to traditional roles like childbearing; or simply a woman being brought through childbirth safely, challenging

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the curse in Eden.' Keener, Man and Woman, 1993, 591.

10 1 Cor 8:9.

11 1 Cor 6:12; 10:23.

12 It should be noted that there are situations around the globe, where having a woman in leadership of a congregation might pose an insurmountable barrier to the gospel being preached. Under such circumstances, the practise of the church in that culture might be to echo Paul's practise under similar circumstances, and to work out both short- and long-term solutions; always aiming towards the ideal of Gal 3:28, whilst living in the reality of a situation where that ideal is not yet possible.

14 Fiddes, Participating in God, 2000, 104.

15 I am grateful to Steve Finamore for his assistance in clarifying the expression of this final paragraph. The following books were also consulted in the production of this paper: Bailey, Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View, 1994; Barton, Is the Bible Good News for Human Sexuality? 1996; Bassler, 1 Corinthians, 1992; Brown, Apology to Women, 1991; Caird, Paul and Women's Liberty, 1972; Clague, Authority, 1996; Dines, The Bible as a Resource for Women, 1996; Dunn, 1 Corinthians, 1995; Evans, Women in the Bible, 1983; Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 1983; Hauge, Feminist Theology as Critique and Renewal of Theology, 1996; Hays, First Corinthians, 1997; Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 1998; Hull, Equal to Serve, 1987; Hull, Appendix II - Exegetical Difficulties in the Hard Passages, 1987; Kroeger, Appendix III - The Classical Concept of Head as Source, 1987; Kroeger, Evans et al., Women's Study New Testament, 1995; McKinlay, Biblical Exegesis, 1996; Mounce, The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament, 1993; Scanzoni and Hardesty, It All Started With Eve, 1992; Storkey, What's Right With Feminism, 1985; Witherington III, Women in the Earliest Churches, 1988; Wondra, By Whose Authority? 1993.

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The Jigsaw of Spiritual Growth

Roy Dorey, London

In pastoral work in local churches, in working with a hospice, and in a university college I have often been a guide to people in their spiritual lives. This has not meant that I have been a spiritual director in a formal sense, but have certainly been privileged to contribute to the pilgrimage of people, across a wide range of ages and situations.

The difficulty most people present has usually been a loss of a sense of the presence of God in the lives they are leading. Often they have a perception that it has been better at times, and that there have been spiritual highlights. Such an understanding is frequently expressed against a background of a general lack of openness to God, and even that God has not been present in their lives. Recently, for a number of reasons, I have given time and thought to why this has been such a prevailing experience for the people I have encountered.

Tentatively I want to suggest two things which have contributed to it. The first is the perspective of continual development and growth is seen as normative for the spiritual life, in a way that assumes a progression from one stage to another. The second is the way in which they identify God in their lives in some and in rather limited ways, and they do not identify Him as present in other parts of their lives. These two suggestions are not

essentially separate, but are significant to each other.

My suggestion is that it is more helpful to look at our lives, not as a progression tied in with human development and the process of maturity and aging, but as a jigsaw. Ideally we may want to look for a progression that is found in positive terms, but that does not seem to be the life-experience of many. In this case the jigsaw has no picture which we can follow, and although we have a responsibility to work on the jigsaw we are also dependent on God to provide 'the pieces.' The illustration is not perfect, as it is the inter-dependence of our responsibility and God's initiative that so often shapes our lives. However it highlights for me the experiences of life, as not fitting into a progression, but seemingly as unrelated parts that at times make more sense than others.

The adolescent experience of a spiritual search and early expressions of faith and discipleship are then seen as valid parts of the jigsaw, and not to be discarded as immaturity, or even lacking any spiritual credibility. We cannot see the overall pattern of where it fits in the completion of our 'picture' as God has drawn it, but it waits for other pieces to make the overall picture begin to emerge.

contd. p.18...

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BUSY DOING NOTHING

With ever increasing costs of maintaining property coupled with a lack of willing volunteers who have time to help, there is a certain inevitability of some churches coming to rely on that well worn maxim of "if it ain't broke don't fix it". The problem is that this often extends to a "do nothing" for matters which cost little or nothing to attend to, with the likely result that damage occurs closely followed by the cost and inconvenience of repairs.

After our long hot summer we will have been lulled into a false sense of comfort that it will continue for ever. Well, we know this just will not be the case, so why is it that so many property owners get caught out? I therefore make no apology for treading over old ground with a few winter maintenance recommendations.

Have the nearby trees been pruned back in recent years? Do they overhang nearby public footpaths/roads? Fallen leaves from nearby trees can be a major source of problems.

Do you check your valleys/gutters/hoppers/downpipes for blockages annually? (Borrow a pair of binoculars and have a good all-around look at your roofs, and rainwater goods!). (Fixing one loose slate now can save a great deal of time and trouble later).

Tell tale signs often seen at Churches is a "damp patch" on a wall behind a downpipe - usually where there is a joint, or a continually wet (often slimy) patch of ground under the eaves of the building at one point. (Slimy footpaths are also a safety hazard!). Water is overflowing or escaping at this point - either due to a blockage, or fracture. In worse cases, grass or other vegetation is often seen growing out of the blockage material atop a rainwater hopper, or in a gutter!

Check all ground level gulleys, drain gratings and soakaways to ensure they are unobstructed.

These are all simple protective measures which if done regularly now, can save a good deal of money later in repair/replacement costs.

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

PS, Sadly this is my last article for the BMJ as I retire at the end of 2006 after 46 years in the insurance industry. I have thoroughly enjoyed the freedom to pass on a message through your journal. I hope that my occasional words of advice have been thought provoking and perhaps timely enough to prevent your church from having the misfortune to suffer loss.

Many with a profound spiritual experience in teenage years feel that later they have to abandon them, and for some there is even a feeling of guilt when explaining them. If they can see such experiences as a valid part of the way God deals with them, they then have an authenticity which fits into later experiences. They are not leaving such experiences behind, but are using them to make up the picture of God's dealings with them. When we have a jigsaw before us we often separate out the edge pieces, and then group together all the sky, the brick buildings and the slate roofs, and the people. We start to build up the different pieces that do make sense, and eventually it starts to fit together – often in surprising ways. To see each part as valid is not to say that they are normative for all later experiences. They are part of the way God is working, and are 'stored' to eventually make up the overall picture.

The times of seeming barren-ness are often, partly at the time and partly in retrospect, found to be very frustrating, and ultimately rejected as of no spiritual significance. This has often been the 'something' that has emerged in pastoral work that the person has 'not wanted to trouble me with', but still wanted to speak about. At times it has been linked with difficulties in the family, coping with changed health, excessive working hours, routinisation of life in general, and lowered attendance at worship. It would be wrong to say that such situations are positive experiences,

but like much of the grey clouds or the repetitive brickwork in the jigsaw it seems helpful for people to see them as valid experiences which make up the eventual picture, even if the picture is not clear. Such circumstances, unsought and seemingly 'unspiritual' can be seen as the working out of our humanity in a broken world. In some circumstances they can be held in the understanding of suffering in a suffering world. They contrast with other parts of the jigsaw having greater vibrancy and meaning, and have a validity in spiritual development.

Crises can never be a sought-after part of spiritual experience, but they are part of the lives of most people. Nor are they necessarily a part of a progression in spiritual understanding. The crisis can depend upon so many things – relationships, illness and infirmity, study and work, and how people see themselves. So often when the crisis is resolved, or reconciled, people are able to see it as a 'piece of the jigsaw' which has led on to other things. This seems to be the case with the student who finds the demands of work are cancelling out their spiritual concern. Also the bereaved who has lived with the illness of someone close for some long period of time, and they have faced all kinds of questions about themselves and the God whom they have tried to be faithful to. It is also, with exceptions, the situation in the break-up of a marriage. The complexity of life, and the breaking up of so much emotional investment usually means that the spiritual issues, and the spiritual expression of

lives are set on one side. These crisis parts of the jigsaw are understood more clearly when other pieces have been put together. Instead of being rejected it is helpful if they are set to one side, awaiting later 'pieces' which will help them to make more sense of them, and contribute to the overall picture of what God is doing.

Listening to a woman in her early sixties and using this approach in trying to help her put together some of her very fractured life she said to me 'I think I have lost some of the pieces of the jigsaw.' The death of a son in his twenties, and being made redundant in her fifties were experienced as 'lost pieces.' A granddaughter, very unexpectedly born just two weeks before, was an 'extra piece' that she had never thought would fit into her life. Perhaps they were lost pieces at this present time, but I suspect that when the picture is nearer completion they will find their place, not just in her spiritual pilgrimage in some theoretical way, but in the purposes of God for her. Reviewing much of what people have said to me in the past it seems that we need to value those parts of our life that do not seem to fit into what we want or expect from life. They are the pieces put to one side, because they do not fit the sky, or the brick wall and roof, or even the people who seem to be part of the picture we assume we should be putting together.

With this understanding there is the valuing of past life experience, instead of dismissing it. When past experiences are dismissed it can lead

to a sense of guilt that the opportunity, or time, or relationship was not used positively. Some of that guilt may be appropriate, but much of it can build up to a self-view of having wasted one's life. To find ways of helping people resolve the difference between appropriate and inappropriate guilt seems to be a significant part of pastoral support.

The second use of the model of a jigsaw requires us to own that God is present in what we are, in what we do, and in all parts of our lives. It is a change of orientation in which we need to identify God in our lives even at the times when the 'feeling of God being present' has gone, and we are left with a form of belief that does not wholly engage us. The jigsaw illustration sees these as an essential part of the overall picture. It is not that God requires of us that we 'lose our faith' or that our spiritual experiences are to be crowded out by circumstances that overtake us. It is the need to understand the God who comes to us in incarnational terms, and the wilderness is teeming with life that we cannot always see.

Biblically we can argue this for Moses in the desert which led to his calling to lead the people of Israel. It can help us to see the experiences of Elijah in the three snapshots of triumph over the Baals, despair on Horeb, and the commissioning of Elisha. In the New Testament the temptations of Jesus make sense for me as a piece of the jigsaw of his life. The story of his life in the Gospels would be complete without them, but with the story there is an enriching of our understanding of

His person and purpose. Moving from Scripture and looking at nature even in our harassed island we can find the heath land, seemingly barren except for gorse and heather, but the living space of reptiles, insects and birds, in abundance.

Part of the practical difficulty for many people seems to be the compartmentalising of their lives. Where people live and where they work are, for most people, geographically very different places. For many in our cities the journey to work forms a physical and emotional barrier. For some our links with the Christian community is also separate from where we live, for although physically near many keep them quite separate. Both examples form a barrier, in which what we see as 'spiritual' is separated from everything else. The incongruity is that 'everything else' is also part of the world that God has made, and that He has given to us to live our lives in. Jigsaw pieces are made to fit together. They are not a series of unrelated pieces which can be put anywhere in the picture. They are part of the whole. It seems significant to our spiritual good health that we release all our lives into the purposes of God. We may not be able to achieve the Brother Lawrence sanctification of the mundane into a spiritual offering, but by looking at our lives in this God-total way we can find some meaning and strength in seemingly 'un-spiritual' hours and activities. In some ways this is an intellectual exercise. We rationally understand that it is God who is both the initiator and sustainer

of all creation. It can move on from this to a faith exercise in which we begin to live our lives in the light of that understanding. What helps in this is often the way we look again at the people we encounter in those areas of our life we have dismissed as not anything to do with God. We can then find God is already there, and working out His purposes in many surprising ways. This is not a new understanding. The prophets were always calling people back to their roots of faith worked out in their lives. Micah gives the clear contrast when he dismisses the 'spiritual offerings' of wheat and olive oil, and affirms that the right offerings to be given to God are living out justice and love as our worship.

Part of the way we see our lives as a jigsaw is to consider again the things that have taken place in our lives in the past. There is a need to escape from the pressure of the present, and to take some measure of the presence of God in past times. My mother used jigsaws as an escape from the demands of her family. At times when she could not find the right place for a piece she had a cup of tea, and just looked at what she had achieved so far. Sometimes, but not always, looking at it all again made the next step easier. Often the present difficulties seemed easier to find solutions to. Most of us in doing a jigsaw are pleased to have the picture on the box lid. In our lives we work on without the picture. There is a picture emerging, when once we put two or three pieces together, but we cannot assume the picture. It would be taking

over from God His place as the one in authority in our lives to demand a picture which we want to complete. It is a lesson in all spiritual growth, that the growth is God's in us, and not at root our growth in Him. The parable of the vine stresses this very potently.

Children can be very dismissive of past generations. 'In your day ...' is claiming the 'now' as their possession, and writing off all that is past. There is an immaturity in our spirituality which can do the same. Whilst we are concerned with the present the pieces of the past with all the successes and failures, the 'highs' of spirituality and the 'sloughs of despair,' belong to us, and belong to the God we want to be in relationship with. It is in this way that we leave the future open for what God is wanting of us in our lives.

It seems natural that in our assessment of our lives we search for some kind of order. Most of us prefer order to disorder or chaos. To attempt this in our spiritual understanding of ourselves seems to be trap which is not helpful. There is always an eschatological element to our spirituality, and that is not just relating to time and progression. It relates also to the God who will bring all things to completion. I suggest that to keep in mind a jigsaw approach to our lives means that we

can find ways of living with uncertainty and of developing faith and reliance on God. This approach can also stop us presenting God with an agenda for our lives. It means that we are open to whatever new pieces God wants to bring into them. Many people live with what I call assumptions about how God wants to deal with them. Sometimes this is based on the way a retreat has influenced them, or the reading of one of the spiritual giants of the past. The experiences of retreats and reading are important as being part of the jigsaw, and for some they are the way in which paths are set. However, they also need to be seen against the whole experience that God is giving. We should be seeking God's picture, shaped for us by so many things, rather than seeking our own picture.

When my mother worked on a large jigsaw it could stay on the table in the dining room for weeks. She would come back to it again and again, sometimes for just a few minutes, sometimes for an hour or so. We watched with interest, and often helped her to sort out the pieces – but she had to put them in place. It is a parable for me of the one who has authority over the jigsaw of our lives, and the fact that we are never sure when it will be completed.

Theological discussions and the internet

Bob Almond, Leicester, offers some preliminary thoughts.

For some time now, the Internet has provided a rich and growing resource for theological work. Without much effort, it has been possible to extend research throughout the world through online searches of theological journals, and libraries have made available digests of articles and books. Email has supplanted the written letter for all but the most reactionary of academics, and some adventurous types have even published to the web. But, like most 'Web 1.0' material (I'll explain that in a moment!) the metaphor has been literary; this is the publishing world in electronic format. Take a look at www.bsw.org - 'Biblical Studies on the Web' - for a typical example of this kind of material.

Something has been happening online to change all this. And that something is 'Web 2.0' Now, there isn't really a new version of the internet coming along - well, actually there is, but that's a whole other article - but what is happening is a leap in the numbers of people online, and the speed at which they access the internet. These changes have produced a move away from the technology and towards the content; the internet is no longer the domain of the geek and the nerd, but of the ordinary person.

You can see something of this in the changing demographics. Women as web users are growing faster than men; and the age profile of web users is growing at both ends - more older people, and lots more younger people. Internet shopping, banking and similar services are growing, as is to be expected. But the unexpected is the massive growth in those areas where the user is more than a consumer; where the user is a creator.

Web space is, of course, littered with ghost towns already - all the abandoned relics of personal websites

that never quite got off the ground. But more recently people have discovered ways of sharing that don't require a knowledge of the language with which websites are created (html), but instead uses more familiar tools - the mobile phone, the digital camera, the video camera. Web 2.0 is the phrase coined for the new paradigm - no longer publishing and consuming, now sharing and messaging. Web 2.0 is user-created webspace.

A few instances, then back to the theology.

- There's the **blog**. A blog is one person's reflection, rather like a personal journal, illustrated with images spotted online, or captured on a mobile phone. But instead of jotting these (often very incomplete, unpolished) thoughts down on paper, they are posted to a personal blog, where anyone can see them and comment on them.
- There's the **'YouTube'** phenomenon. This time, the image is key. Mobile phones, digital cameras and video cameras

generate vast amounts of data. And instead of printing pictures or creating video tapes or discs, Web 2.0 encourages us to dump the lot onto a sharing site - like Flickr or YouTube. Again, for others to watch and comment on. Bands rise to fame, and obscure people from across the world become superstars because of a 4-minute tiny video watched by millions of people. Just try doing a Google search for the numa numa video, and you'll see what I mean. Numa numa has been watched by over 10 million people!

And then there's the even more astonishing '**Second Life**'. There's a title with theological potential! Second Life is an immersive online environment, where players - it seems at first like a game - can create for themselves a persona, a living environment, and a range of activities. The Second Life world has currency, artistic activity (famous pop musicians have performed online concerts wholly within Second Life), and even sex. More to the point for us, there have been lectures, debates and seminars. There is a church too - but sadly it is the '1st Second Life Church of Elvis'. It has Sunday Services, with sermons, and 93 members. There are others - already a multiplicity of denominations.

All these are examples of user-created web content. And Web 2.0 has affected theological discourse. There are hundreds of blogs written by those in active ministry, and many

of these are updated daily. I could list some here - Andy Goodliff, Simon Jones and others - but better still, go the BMF website forums, and click on some of the links. They're posted in the 'General Chat' section. Maybe you could add some of those you read?

Simon Jones has been conducting a fascinating discussion about the meaning of membership, which has sparked some really significant thinking. Benjamin Myers has done a section condensing Karl Barth's 'Church Dogmatics' into a sentence per volume!

Am I going anywhere with this? Yes, I am. Although it may take a long time, the internet is changing human communications. It is slowly removing debate from the academic world to the market place. To coin a phrase, we are seeing the democratisation of theological discourse to an extent not seen before. Methods may change - blogs may just be this year's fashion - but the trend will surely continue. And I for one am glad that folk like Andy and Simon are acting as 'Worker Priests', contributing their thinking to a debate that gathers speed daily.

The text of this article, together with links to all the sites mentioned, and a few more besides, is available on the BMF website. The main website is at www.bmf-uk.org, and the forums can be found at www.bmf-uk.org/bmfforum - the 'Journal Articles' discussion group. Please feel free to register and post comments there. You might also like to take a look at Bob's own blog, located at <http://revbobuk.blogspot.com/>

You won't find Jesus on Myspace

Jesus doesn't have a Myspace page.
He doesn't sit at his personal computer
for hours
making lists
of his favourite lists.

Jesus doesn't have a Myspace page.
He hasn't composed a profile
which sums him up in fifty excruciatingly well-chosen words,
making him sound like God's gift.

Jesus doesn't have a Myspace page.
and he doesn't get worked up
at how both Mel Gibson and Tom Cruise
both list him as their number one friend
in the world ever,
or that they schmooze him daily
by email
to try and get him to make them his
number one friend in the world ever
in return.

Jesus isn't even particularly bothered
that both Madonna and Michael Jackson
have already appropriated "the Messiah" as their MySpace i.d.
Jesus doesn't have to prove himself electronically.
He doesn't have a funky alias
like sinforgiver or waterwalkingdude.
He hasn't listed his interests
as home brewing,
complementary medicine, and
extreme fishing.

Jesus won't email you every week
with a "hilarious" new photo
of him wearing a funny outfit,
or a video of his pet goldfish doing synchronised swimming
across the sea of Galilee.

Jesus is not the sort of friend who instant-messages you
twice a year to say, "hey we should meet up some time!"

Jesus didn't employ an army of A&R men to
use his Myspace page to
broadcast clips of him preaching in his basement

and then write stories of how he went from no-one to world fame in three short years.

Jesus claims to be only two steps away from Kevin Bacon, but no-one's ever seen him prove it.
Jesus doesn't have a Myspace page.
and Jesus isn't owned by Rupert Murdoch
thank God.

Jesus knows that you've never read the whole of Catch 22 even though it's listed as one of your favourite books, and do you know what? He doesn't care.
If you look for Jesus on MySpace,
Jesus isn't there,
because Jesus doesn't have a MySpace page,
even though it's fast, fun and easy.

Jesus shut down his p.c. before p.c.s were invented and he put on his sandals, with or without socks, and he walked to your door, and sat by your heart, and invited you to be his friend.
That was like, 2,000 years ago –
and he still hasn't had a reply.

He's probably standing at your door right now while you're sat staring at your screen, listening to the tune on somebody's MySpace and making them your two thousandth friend.

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Studdart Kenneday and the Good Samaritan - a footnote

Anthony Thacker

In a recent issue, I talked of sequels and prequels for Jesus' parables. Some were biblical, others imaginary, and the article triggered a few responses: thanks. As for the parable of the Good Samaritan, I did not imagine that Jesus himself implied the sequel I suggested, but that once we start thinking about them, Jesus' evocative parables start making us think, 'Yes, but what might happen next?' We might welcome the

Prodigal Son back – but that's not the end of the story. His messy past comes into the church, and it can get a bit challenging. Implementing Jesus' teaching, I suggest, obliges us to work out these further consequences.

With the Good Samaritan I wanted to quote the inspiration for this particular sequel, but having not seen the book (G. A. Studdert Kennedy's *The*

New Man in Christ) on my shelves for a decade, I presumed it lost or permanently lent out. One of the unexpected benefits of moving my books from Oadby to Hinckley is that this book has mysteriously reappeared on my shelves! It was only misplaced. So I hope the editor will permit the indulgence of a belated quotation or two and reference!

Studdert Kennedy's main point was that we can't really succeed in following the Samaritan consistently without God's help, because we will be overwhelmed. He comments on the 'problem of numbers'.

"You see, the Good Samaritan in the story was lucky, he only struck one man that had been knocked out, and he had all that was necessary – a donkey, some oil and wine, and twopence. But when I go out on that tack I don't find one man, I find processions of them, and I have not got all that is necessary. If I am to do it properly I seem to need a bottomless pocket, infinite wisdom, a fleet of motor-cars and a general hospital, and even that would not be enough..."¹

A later point is even closer to the sequel I explored: "And there is another side to it. It was all right for the Good Samaritan in the story picking up the chap by the road side, but he did not own the road; if he had owned the road, his duty would have been to get it cleared of thieves, and not to keep trotting along with a donkey picking up men that had been knocked out."²

Woodbine Willie, as Studdert Kennedy was affectionately known, knew far

more than most what it meant to attempt to care for the needy in this radical way, as his biographer reports.³ So he had the experience and the right to point out that our attempt to implement the challenge of the Good Samaritan is disturbingly radical, and impossible without God: "you and I are part owners at any rate of these roads to Jericho that are infested by sharks and thieves," so donkey-trotting falls short of our responsibilities as citizens: we need to "clear out the thieves," and help defend travellers on these roads. But if we are to help many who fall, who are "without hope in the world", then to be up to the task, we need God to help us help them.

Jesus' parables intersect with our lives. But as we seek to follow them through, trying to act like the Samaritan, in helping life's victims, or like the Prodigal's father, in welcoming repenting, returning sinners, as best we can, there are awkwardly challenging sequels, and we need all the resources God gives us.

1 G. A. Studdert Kennedy: *The New Man in Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), p.233.

2 *Ibid.*, p.234.

3 William Purcell: *Woodbine Willie: A Study of Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy* ([1962] Oxford: Mowbray, 1983).

Books - January 2007

reviewd by Alec Gilmore, Worthing

Healing as Empowerment. Discovering Grace in Community, **Usha Jesudasan & Gert Ruppell**, WCC Publications, 2006, £5.50

A woman is walking along the street with her husband and their little girl. The child dashes out into the road in front of a bus. Her father rushes to save her. Both are killed. And that desolate woman is also pregnant. Her doctor is her saviour. But how?

In the course of treatment the doctor discovers that her patient, who still has to cross the road at that same point every day, is unable to face it, so she called for her every morning for six months to help her across that road, beginning by simply holding her hand.

The hospital was so impressed that other members of staff began to pull out extra stops to help the healing process. Their combined love and sacrifice brought healing to that woman, created a new atmosphere of concern in the hospital and a new

start for the unborn child. Security, friendship, healing.

That is an abridged version of one story from this book on healing. Readers who have sometimes felt uneasy about talk of a healing ministry or found it difficult to handle stories of healing from churches with an Asian, African or Caribbean background, will benefit from reading and reflecting on this collection of stories of healing from many parts of the world compiled by an Indian writer and a Finnish theologian. It will not take many stories to increase your awareness of how much healing is needed, how it is a need we all have, and how we may be helped. There is nothing mysterious or magic about it. Sympathy, imagination, hard work and personal sacrifice are the main requisites.

An ideal bedtime read, one or two pages at a time. An excellent group study document. Perfect for prayer. And all so human, theological and liturgical.

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Engaging the Bible: Critical Readings from Contemporary Women, **Choi Hee An, & Kathryn Pfisterer Darr** (eds), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, pp x + 150. \$18.00. ISBN 13: 978-0-8006-3465-7, ISBN 10: 0-8006-3565-5. [Distributed in the UK by Alban Books.]

Imagine having the same unusual dream three nights on the trot. You

are standing in the middle of a huge, dark valley, the fog so thick you could cut it with a knife. At times you cannot even see your hands. You are cold. The ground under your feet is muddy and soft. Suddenly you hear a noise. A gentle wind blows across your face. Then out of the fog come shapes emerging from the shadows. They are steel robots, looking like human skeletons, coming from the four

corners of the valley. Their eyes are bright red. You hear voices screaming, 'There are too many of them; we are not going to make it.' In desperation you look round to find you are not alone. You shout to them. 'Awake, rise up, we must find the brain that controls these robots and destroy it. Don't despair. We will be saved.'

Next Sunday the Lectionary is Ezekiel 37. What do you do with it? To find the answer read how for Aida Irizarry-Fernández it became a moment of revelation in which the Valley of Dry Bones came alive in a new way. She begins by asking questions. Who are these people in (what for her was) a Latin American context? What is their future? And how can we make Ezekiel's vision our vision?

Aida is one of five feminist theologians and biblical scholars currently working in New England, with different cultural, ethnic and/or social perspectives exploring diversity of Christian ministry and hermeneutics, each of whom makes her own inimitable contribution to this book.

Each lecture is in two parts: method and application. Methods reflect a wide variety of traditions, Afro-Christian, African-American, Latino all concerned with liberation and emancipation of the oppressed and marginalised. Applications are to specific texts and include Lazarus, Rahab, the valley of Dry Bones and 1 Peter. The scholarship is thoroughly sound and the objective is to encourage church communities to engage with the text so as to increase multicultural consciousness and to explore new ways of bringing together our various struggles and our Bible reading.

Colleges training preachers would do well to confront their students with it at some point. Preachers would do well to dip into it, not so much to raid the examples (though there is nothing wrong with that as a starting point) as to explore the method in their own way. Bible Study groups could profit from trying some of the material and method and then moving on to other pastures.

Pastoral Exchange

Dr. Tom McKibbens writes from Worcester, Mass. seeking a minister interested in a 'pulpit swap' with a pastor in England, Scotland, or Ireland:

"I am pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Reidsville, North Carolina. My wife and I like to travel and experience new cultures. I also have a special interest in Baptist History. Since we have a limited budget, I thought we might be able to find a pastor who would like to swap parsonages and pulpits for two weeks this summer. Our people at Calvary would love to show them around, taking them to the mountains and other excursions. We would consider a automobile swap as well if insurance and license permit."

Please contact him direct on www.cbcrnc.com if you are interested.