

**the baptist ministers'  
journal**

**January 2011 volume 309**

***God and climate change***

John Weaver

***Worship and the media***

Anthony Thacker

***Cinderella church***

Peter Shepherd

***Retirement retreat***

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# journal

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# From the editor

## *In search of impartiality...*

The BBC was criticised recently for its reviews of the newspapers during news programmes like *Breakfast*. If guest reviewers are used, said the critics, they are too middle class (who on earth admits to being middle class these days?—it is a bit like having leprosy) and therefore are simply unable to offer a balanced critique; while if the usual news presenters simply comment on the front page stories, then they are guilty of promoting the inherent bias of the newspaper editors.

Frankly, I was surprised, because I have always found the quick gallop through the papers quite interesting. I only read one newspaper normally, so it is nice to know what the others might feature on the front page, and I am always keen to know what other people find interesting and why, though I may not agree with them! I am far from uncritical of the BBC's news coverage—interviews are often ridiculously aggressive, for instance—but I do appreciate that even the BBC can't cover every angle of every story, all the time. Modern narrative thought suggests that we all read any story through our own 'baggage' and that the search for pure objectivity is probably doomed to failure, because we will never be able to know exactly how another person interprets the same information.

So, although the media has enormous power, I do feel some sympathy when presenters are vilified for not doing our critical reading for us. If we listen to others, we will find that people *can* do it for themselves—often verbally, at social events or down at the local.

Nonetheless, we do well to be aware of the power of mass media to inform, influence and manipulate. The choice of information that is made public is indeed significant. Two or the articles in this issue deal with the role of the media—John Weaver tackles the problem of climate change, while Anthony Thacker deals with Quentin Letts' views of modern church music. Is Graham Kendrick indeed 'the nation's pre-eminent churner-outer of evangelical bilge'? Does it simply depend on one's perspective? What do you think? Let us know through these pages. *SN*

Please contact me (revsal96@aol.com) if you have a contribution for *bmj*. Concise articles will usually be published more quickly (allowing for other constraints), so please try to keep to under 2000 words for main articles and under 1500 for *Points of view*, with minimal footnotes and formatting. Shorter comments are also welcome. If you would like to discuss or submit a longer article, it may need to be adapted or serialised. Thank you. Sally Nelson.

# God, truth and climate change

by John Weaver

I was taking part in a discussion about global climate change last May, when the first respondent after the presentations said: ‘It’s not happening’; to which one of the keynote speakers replied: ‘I wish that was true; how I wish that that was really true’.

It is happening, and how I wish that that was not true.

Martin Rees, President of the Royal Society and Anthony Giddens, author of the *Politics of climate change*, wrote in *The Times* newspaper on 31 October 2010:

*Data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the US show that 2010 is set to be the warmest year globally since its records began in 1880. June 2010 was the 304th consecutive month with a land and ocean temperature above the 20th-century average. A report produced by the NOAA last year analysed findings from some 50 independent records monitoring climate change, involving ten separate indices. All ten indicators showed a clear pattern of warming over the past half-century.*

But arguably much more significant are comments from farmers in the developing world such as Rodrigues, from NE Brazil, who says, ‘We know that the climate is changing—it is hotter and there is less rainfall. If we don’t look after our environment then we don’t know what our future will be’. From Malawi, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal the message is the same—the unpredictability of rainfall. One of our BMS World Mission personnel in Kathmandu wrote to me: ‘When you were with us two years ago, the power cuts (load-sharing) were 8 h per day, now they are 16 h per day. When you were with us we had water but needed to pump it into storage tanks at night because water was cut off during the day. This year water is only available on alternate days’. Andrew, a farmer in Malawi, says of the effects of intense rainfall: ‘Before the flood I used to plant rice and wheat. Now everything has changed. There is just sand. Even in my parents’ generation there has never been a flood like this’.

environmental issues

God is the creator, and God is still creative and creating. It is God who gives research and technological skills to humankind, but technological pragmatism has led and is still leading human beings to mistreat the planet. Ecology has shown us the unforeseen effects of human interference with natural processes, and we can no longer plead inadvertence as the excuse for technological excess. Ruth Conway (who leads the Education Group of ECEN and represents it on CTBI's Environmental Issues Network) notes that 'we are part of a world frantically pushing at technological frontiers...we are also part of a world whose technologies are threatening the very basis of life'. She believes that our human-centred culture is in the grip of a technological power that is out of control. Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian liberation theologian, believes that science, technology and power can be part of a programme of redemption, construction, consolidation, and expansion of human life and freedom, but it is the ways in which we use our scientific and technological understanding that is of prime importance.

Celia Deane-Drummond, theologian and scientist, asks how we can distinguish one research project from another in terms of its likely risk and benefit for humanity and the earth. She suggests that 'a theology of Wisdom serves to unite themes of creation and redemption by identifying Christ the Redeemer and the divine Logos with Sophia, the Wisdom of God involved in the creation of the world'. Key to her argument is the wisdom to recognise the presence of God in the new technologies, but we still need to ask whether or not we are achieving God's purposes. Deane-Drummond rightly remarks that 'Wisdom is helpful in that it does not deny reason or deny science its place, but it puts it in a wider context of social justice, prudence and temperance', much needed in this debate.

### **What can we say about God?**

God is the covenant maker and the covenant restorer. We recognise that God's relationship with the natural order is implicit in the very act of creation. Creation is contingent, it is God's will that it should be the way that it is. God's relationship with creation is faithful and continuous, and God gives value to all life. There is no clearer evidence of God's involvement and valuing of creation than in the incarnation. Through our scientific and technological approaches there is a danger of removing God from creation (except as the ultimate source) and substituting nature and natural laws, discovered by human beings. Our true humanity is to be located in Christ, and when we locate ourselves outside Christ we will find ourselves in dis-

harmony with God's purpose for the wellbeing of creation.

God is the sustainer who cares passionately about the world and human lives and calls human beings to share in this concern. We are drawn into the covenant community of God, humanity, and creation, and stewardship can be understood in terms of being made in the image of God, being redeemed in Christ, and becoming children of God in the power of the Spirit. Christians with this worldview have a contribution to make. God created the earth and entrusted it to us, and God will redeem the whole of creation (Romans 8:19-21). Creation is brought back into relationship with God as human beings find their restored relationship with the Creator, through the cross.

### **The nature of truth**

What is truth? Who is telling the truth? Who can we trust? Should Christians challenge people about which newspaper they read, or at least to critique the news media? Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). We can translate this to imply that we only understand the world as God intended it to be, as we see and recognise truth as exemplified in Christ.

In their book, *Merchants of doubt*, historians Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway explain how a loose-knit group of high-level scientists, with extensive political connections, ran effective campaigns to mislead the public and to deny well established scientific knowledge over a period of four decades—the subjects addressed include tobacco, acid rain, the ozone hole, global warming, and DDT. The authors seek to show that an ideology of free market fundamentalism, aided by a too-compliant media, has skewed the public understanding of some of the most pressing issues of our era. The result is that many US citizens remain sceptical about global climate change despite the scientific studies of over 60 years.

It seems that the media is at the mercy of the public relation industry (PR) and the scientists that it employs. PR according to Edward Bernays (seen as the founding father of PR) is the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government, which is a true ruling power.

PR tends to be unreliable because it usually serves an interest. It is dangerous for, as

Nick Davies of *The Guardian* notes, 65% of mainstream broadcast news is wire copy from the Press Association (PA), and that PR material then gets into 54% of the news stories; furthermore, 80% of news stories included material from either PA or PR, or both.

Most PR does not involve outright untruth, but it may distort it, which is a gentler art involving the judicious selection of truths and issues, and the often skilful manipulation of reporters to persuade them to focus only on those chosen angles. In spectacular fashion, the oil companies' PR machine rolled into action in the face of Kyoto. 'Within months of the UN producing its first report endorsing the idea of man-made climate change in 1989, Exxon and other big corporations started setting up pseudo groups, the first and biggest was the Global Climate Coalition. The PR groups focused, as the tobacco companies had done some 40 years earlier on doubt and lack of certainty in the scientific reports'.

Oreskes & Conway note how journalist Chris Mooney 'documented that in just a few years Exxon Mobil had channeled more than \$8 million to forty different organizations that challenged the scientific evidence of global warming. However they draw attention to the Stern Review on the economics of climate change, which referred to climate change as 'the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen'. Oreskes & Conway observe that for the sake of extreme free market ideology some are denying not only the facts of science, but also of history.

We need to  
see the  
world with  
Christ-like  
eyes

We need to see the world and interpret all media reports with Christ-like eyes, and it is helpful to ask how Jesus explained/demonstrated/exemplified incarnate truth. We could work our way through John's gospel. He begins his account with the declaration in the prologue that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth; and that while the law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1: 4,17). John Marsh notes that 'truth' is a key word in the John's gospel. Marsh believes that it is possible to substitute 'truth' with 'reality'. Thus the law comes through Moses, but



reality is found in Christ (John 1:17).

In the final discussion of truth, which takes place at Jesus' trial before Pilate, we find that Jesus declares his purpose to exemplify the truth, a statement that leaves Pilate musing, 'What is truth?' (John 18:37-38). Bruce Milne notes that in a world of illusion and unreality, Jesus offers the one true reality which is found in a relationship with God. Milne then wonders if Pilate's question indicated the wistful longing of a professional politician, 'steeped in the daily compromises, the prudential balancing of forces, the application of ruthless power, the half-light world of grey and polka dots where people grope wearily for truth and the soul withers and dies'. Those who seek truth should address the policies and pronouncements of the professional politician, and all PR reports.

For Paul, truth clearly must stand against the 'principalities and powers' (Ephesians 6:10-20), which are often interpreted as structures of thought, tradition, convention, law, authority and even religion, as embodied in the structures and institutions of the state. George Caird and Markus Barth saw the powers exposed in politics and religion, economics and society, morals and biology, history and culture. Thus the gospel should address political, social, economic, cultural and psychological situations. John Stott sees the principalities and powers as supernatural agencies, but he does not deny that they use the structures, institutions and traditions of society.

In the New Testament we can note the horror of environmental destruction portrayed in the outpouring of the bowls of God's wrath in Revelation 16. Empires which take control over the earth frequently engage in ecological violence. The environmental judgments of Revelation are not punishments targeted personally against those who deny the lordship of Christ, but rather are images evoking the inevitable end-results of the human capacity for empire and exploitation. The environmental call of Revelation is therefore for the Church to discover its vocation as witness to an alternative, non-exploitative expression of humanity, focused around the lordship of the one who is seated on the heavenly throne. Any such activity will always be perceived as a direct challenge to the idolatrous claims exercised by the satanic empire of Babylon in all its forms, thus inevitably the Church is placed at odds with the dominant powers of the creation-destroying empires of earth, whether these are self-serving governments or profit-making global corporations.

So we look for a medium that critically addresses the 'powers and principalities'

of the structures of the state, political parties, market forces and global corporations, religious power structures, together with the PR industry. As Christ in and for the world, Christians are called to bear witness to the truth, the truth of God's sole sovereignty, eternal and universal in distinction from that of the temporal and finite, partial and competitive sovereignties of our political and economic world.

Is the situation completely hopeless? 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die'; or, as today's hedonists might say, 'Fly, drive and consume, for tomorrow you may die.'

Is there hope? Yes, there is indeed hope. During the climate summit last December, Copenhagen rebranded itself with numerous posters and T-shirts with the logo 'I am a citizen of Hopenhagen'. There is hope. The prophets speak of the heart of the Creator who loves creation, and the gospel reminds us that God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Paul, writing to the church at Rome, wrote that 'the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed' (Romans 8:19)—when Christians become truly Christ-like in the power of the Spirit.

There is hope if Copenhagen and Cancun can be seen as steps on the road, when 192 nations realised the immensity of what needs to happen to address climate change—not the end, but rather the end of the beginning. There is hope if leaders have been listening to each other and will go on listening, and take the economic and political risks.

Christians can play their part. Redemption is possible, our lives can be transformed, we can find salvation through Christ, and through transformed lives the world can be transformed and creation redeemed. But be warned: it is much more comfortable to believe that science has got it wrong, to ignore the scientific and green prophets of our age and to sit back and say 'All will be well' (Jeremiah 6:10-14), while singing *The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord* (Jeremiah 7:1-8), or whatever our favourite song might be.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Executive Secretary, Christiana Figueres, looked forward to the UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Mexico, in December 2010 as an opportunity to restore faith in the ability of parties to take the negotiations forward. She was hopeful of a growing convergence in negotiations taking place that could deliver a balanced package of decisions that define the actions to address climate change.

Such a politically balanced package of decisions would include a new global framework to help countries adapt to the already inevitable changes to the climate system, the launch of a new mechanism to drive faster deployment of technology to developing nations, a decision to establish a new fund to oversee the long-term money raised for the specific climate needs of developing nations, and a decision on early and large-scale action to protect forests and the livelihoods of those who live in them.

However, Figueres acknowledged that there were political disagreements, mainly over how and when to agree on a fair share of responsibilities of present and future action on climate change, but added that they were not insurmountable.

## **Conclusion**

There is a need to maintain the pressure on world leaders for a deal that is fair, ambitious and binding. It's not too late, but hearts and minds have to change, beginning with us and our influence on our MPs, and from them to the leaders of the industrialised and growing industrial nations.

Our hope is in the one whose birth we celebrated at Christmas, who declared that he has come to bring life in all its fullness, and invites us to deny self, take up the cross-shaped life of sacrificial love, and follow him.

Our trust and our hope is in God, in the people God uses, and in the future that God is preparing:

- as John stated, 'For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son';
- as Paul challenged the church in Rome, there is hope when human beings take up their adoptive role as children of God, adopting a truly Christ-like lifestyle (Romans 8:18-25);
- and ultimately, as recorded in Revelation, there is hope when God finally redeems and renews creation (Revelation 21).

***John Weaver is Principal of South Wales Baptist College and Chair of the John Ray Initiative connecting environment, science and Christianity. This article is based on a talk given at a JRI sponsored conference in Oxford in November 2010. John's book, Christianity and science, is also reviewed in this issue (see p 30). John can be contacted by email at [jdweaverswbc@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jdweaverswbc@yahoo.co.uk).***

# Worship wars and the media

by Anthony Thacker

If you are a reader of the *Daily Mail*, you will be familiar with the columns of Quentin Letts. I am not, and I suspect that most readers of the *bmj* will not be either—but I do regularly view the programme *This Week* (hosted by Andrew Neil with Michael Portillo and Diane Abbott as regular guests), on which Quentin Letts is a frequent correspondent. This programme, unlike most political TV shows, is not usually dominated by point-scoring, or the guests speaking all at once, or above all, the wearisome norm in which every interview is a gladiatorial contest designed to destroy the interviewee. By contrast, *This Week* includes a far higher ratio of agreeable honest comment and genuine, if humorous, debate.

So, although the *Mail* is not my fare, Quentin Letts is more agreeable than most of his colleagues, even if I usually disagree with his conclusions. After Christmas I read his recent book, an interesting example of right-wing discomfort at the current state of UK politics, *Bog-standard Britain*.<sup>1</sup> But it is his 2008 book that I think may be of some interest to readers of the *bmj*, entitled *50 people who b\*\*\*\*\*d up Britain*,<sup>2</sup> with its piece on contemporary worship.

There are of course Prime Ministers in the 55 people featured, and not just Labour ones—in fact every single one from 1964 onwards is included except, strangely, John Major. Even so, maybe he saw Major, ‘hospitable, hopeless John Major’ as too insignificant to merit a whole chapter. And how, according to Letts, did these PMs wreck Britain? Wilson’s folly was to invent special advisors (positively mushrooming under Major and Blair—‘One of them, you will recall, was called David Cameron’); Heath’s disasters were to sack Enoch Powell and so foster the ‘race relations industry’ and of course take us into Europe; Callaghan’s crime was (as Chancellor) to decimalise our currency; Thatcher’s (for all Letts admired in her) was to rupture our national unity, fomenting the north—south divide; as for Blair, for all the things one might criticise (Iraq for example!), Letts chooses to denounce him for quitting Parliament the moment he left Number 10, unlike his predecessors. Finally, Brown is lambasted for profligate spending. I think you get the picture: Letts is a full-time, old-fashioned small ‘c’ conservative, writing in a very entertaining way. I disagree with much of his take on these PMs and others,

but his books are entertaining, insightful, and well worth a read. Letts also takes on Richard Dawkins, who is criticised for his destructiveness of hope, especially hope of heaven, and his dependence on the curious Charles Simonyi. But it is Graham Kendrick and the entry on him that prompted this piece for the *bmj*.<sup>3</sup>

From everything said so far, you will not be surprised that Letts finds ‘happy-clappy hymns’ toe-curling. He imagines a context where you have arrived for a wedding or christening, only to have low grade ‘Disney’ music inflicted on you, ousting ‘the genius of Wesley and Bach’. For example, *If I were a butterfly*’s ‘fuzzy-wuzzy bear’ leads his imagination straight to Corporal Jones of Dad’s army. Letts’ critique is worth hearing, because he raises issues that illustrate the contradictions inherent in attempting to enable people to worship, in an age of diverse and competitive subcultures. Worship wars, indeed! Letts gives us a rare example of a reasonably well informed media critique of the kind of contemporary worship common to Baptists (he may, of course, have little or no experience of Baptist worship). Letts is clearly at home in the Church of England, preferably middle to high: ‘The green cloth covers of the *English hymnal*, filled with Ralph Vaughan Williams’s adaptations of mediaeval English airs, are now rarely seen’. As a media ‘grumpy old man’, Letts is excellent and very amusing. The real thing, in the flesh, harrumphing at us with disapproval at some feature in the service is a different matter!

There are two closely related sides to Letts’ critique: Kendrick in particular, and the whole music genre in general. For Letts, ‘Kendrick...is the nation’s pre-eminent churner-outer of evangelical bilge. This man is king of happy-clappy banalities’, and ‘Kendrick...is a lazy writer’, whom Letts criticises for unvaried rhythms and ‘frightful old chestnuts. He calls religious love “pure as the whitest snow”. Come on, man, even a schoolgirl would blush to use that one again’. He tires of Kendrick’s repeated talk of rivers (‘Such a powerful metaphor, in-nit?’), recoils at jarring shifts (the talk of traffic jams, in *Wish I could cry*, interrupts ‘the Holy Ghost [with] an image of a Mini

...imagine  
arriving for a  
wedding...to  
have low-grade  
‘Disney’ music  
inflicted on  
you...

Metro'), and derides his rhymes ("I'm the Jar" rhymes with "Ah": "Urrrgh" might have been more accurate').

Letts' critique of Kendrick is not the main point. If (to imagine an alternative universe) Kendrick had developed into a writer in a more classical style (the example of Karl Jenkins springs to mind), everything Letts hates about the changes in music within worship would have happened anyway; and Letts' book would have pilloried someone else.

So let's turn to the main point: the change in worship music style. We may think that Kendrick is among the better writers in the contemporary genre (and Letts might even agree, seeing him as the best of a bad bunch). Then, all Letts' jibes against Kendrick will apply generally, across the board. In addition, Letts hates the 'numbingly repetitive' lyrics, and loathes the dumbing down of worship, actions to the songs, the 'couple of show-offs in the front pews raising their arms and swinging them from side to side', and the loss of 'muscular harmonies' of hymns like *He who would valiant be* replaced with 'the roughage-rich *Bind us together*'. Perhaps the most interesting criticism makes a significant comparison: these songs 'demean adult worship, dragging it to a level even lower than Mrs C. F. Alexander's *All things bright and beautiful* (1848). They are self-obsessed, babyish, clichéd, simplistic'.

Perhaps you disagree profoundly with Letts? Perhaps you are delighted with the way Baptist music has moved on from Victorian mid-brow to contemporary, and the whole feel of a typical Baptist service no longer seems strangely dated, stuck in a timewarp, but rooted in today's culture? Actually, the difference between the Baptist experience and the Anglican is relevant here.

At the 2009 Baptist Assembly, as worship was led by the choir from the church of our president, Kingsley Appiagyei, I was struck by just how strongly rooted it was in the Ghanaian subculture, and how relevant it was to the people of its church and community. We have a different challenge as Baptists in the UK. If we go back to the mid-Victorian situation, we can see that music and worship was much more enculturated than it is today.

At that time there were two major subcultures reflected in the churches. One was the classical, traditional, high-brow, which most obviously affected the Anglicans and Catholics, and especially the Anglo-Catholics, who flourished as they found new ways to make the traditions come alive. It was an era of great hymn writers

versifying ancient texts. A late high point in this development was indeed the English hymnal, the music of which was edited by England's greatest composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams. The Anglo-Catholic revival was deeply embedded in that part of our culture.

The Baptist and nonconformist experience, though influenced by all these new Anglican hymns, had a different centre of gravity: culturally, it was mid-brow. Both in terms of music and words, it was much more the language and music of the people. At its heart it spanned the range of the great 18th century writers from Wesley, Watts, and Doddridge on one side to the almost low-brow, popular, 'simplistic' lyrics of Moody and Sankey and the revivalist tradition on the other. The journey from *All things bright and beautiful* to *Shine, Jesus, shine* is shorter and more viable than the one from J. S. Bach to *If I were a butterfly*. In musical metaphor, Baptists have moved from The Light Programme to Saga FM, while many Anglicans have moved from The Third Programme to Radio 2.<sup>4</sup>

Letts believes that contemporary worship infantilises us all. This challenge is important, with a wide reference and relevance. Our televisual age is immediate and entertainment-based rather than cerebral and education-based. Anyone who has a message, especially a complex message—teachers, politicians or indeed preachers and Christians generally—has a challenge. In practice, there is a never-ending battle to convey the heart of Christian faith and life to a culture with a shortening attention span.

The big question is: has our culture changed? Is Letts simply shouting at everyone for moving on? He breathes a sigh of relief that King's College, Cambridge has not been forced to accommodate the 'syncopation tendency'. I have bad news for Mr Letts: the change is already coming. A closer look at King's will show that a more popular idiom is on the way. John Rutter may not quite be Graham Kendrick, but he is certainly not Felix Mendelssohn or David Willcocks either. The more sentimental tone Letts dislikes is there in spades, though it's Classic FM rather than Saga FM. Worse still, Letts derides 'the syncopated chorus and inane words ascribed to someone maybe called "Bob"...'—so King's-trained Bob Chilcott should scare Letts even more:

Does  
contemporary  
worship  
infantilise  
us?

his music introduces into King's the syncopations that Letts hates. While some harshly term his music 'cheesy', it is a hybrid of popular and classical. And the annual carol service uses Rutter's and Chilcott's music already. That's a sign that this cultural change is across the board, and a pretty awkward one if you prefer classical music to pop—which is while I am musing on this theme.

If I were at liberty to inflict my musical tastes on congregations, there would be a contemporary classical bent. It would be Vaughan Williams, Shostakovich, Bartok, Copland and Benjamin Britten (with plenty of the classics of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms added in, of course), rather than imitations of Boyzone, the Spice Girls and Michael Jackson. And I would empty the church quite quickly! Quite a bit of me hankers like Letts for Vaughan Williams and the use of folk melodies that enriched worship in an earlier generation. And to some extent they can still be used. But music in worship must help people to worship God—and that raises contradictory issues.

At one level, Kendrick might consider himself flattered to be included in Letts' 50. There is a B-list of 20 minor extras in a postscript, which includes Paul McCartney and Victoria Beckham. Otherwise, in the world of pop musicians, Kendrick is alone convicted of wrecking music; but in reality, Graham Kendrick is for Letts the man who really 'b\*\*\*\*\*d up' the church.

The really awkward question for Christians in every age and culture is how we reach people in a life-changing way with the gospel, and how we help those who have become Christian to grow and mature in their faith. In practice, I am sure there will remain a niche in our towns and cities for people like Letts: a subculture of people who loathe pop and dislike all the things that characterise contemporary culture. Our cathedrals and many traditional Anglican churches in cities and towns will flourish with high quality traditional choirs, classical music, dignified liturgies, places which still suit 'the native English character': understated, reserved, private, discreet.

Such a context does not suit many children (even in the 19th century, they needed Mrs Alexander and her like to provide something for them)—and the generation gap has grown since 1848. Letts and his fellow travellers apparently want to be in a church undisturbed by children. There are many such churches today, but their future is insecure. Parents rightly want to ensure that church will be helpful to their children, and will make some sacrifices to ensure their children don't rebel through boredom.



The bigger question relates to the adult congregation. In church, we are always trying to pull off the impossible and enable very different people to flourish together, in one act of worship. The surprise is that it sometimes works! It works in some places because the church has opted for a distinct niche within one subculture. For high Anglicans it can still be the classic forms that Letts would love to be universal. Many of the newer churches follow the Radio 2 subculture pretty consistently, and some aim at the Radio 1 subculture, and many Baptist churches align with this Radio2/Radio1 medium in a less ruthlessly consistent way.

It sometimes works in other places, because the church has managed to cross some bridges drawing different people together. For me, the 1989 East Midlands Baptist Assembly at Peterborough was iconic. The local church led the worship, and the kind of music group that has now become the norm was there, but there was a difference: in addition to the typical band of the time, with members aged 18-30, there was a man in his 70s playing the violin with the flourish of a Stéphane Grappelli. The typical pop group—with a pensioner! And it worked fantastically well. To me it is an image of our impossible task. Somehow we have to keep finding those elements of our varied subcultures which can work together to help people of different generations, backgrounds, and tastes, to worship God. The issue is never the music itself, as if music is worship. Music is a vehicle, so the real task is finding the adaptations that enable it to carry us closer to God.

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### Notes to text

1. Q. Letts, *Bog-standard Britain: how mediocrity ruined this great nation*. London: Constable, 2009.
2. Q. Letts, *50 people who b\*\*\*\*\*d up Britain* (2008), quoting from the new edition *With added bankers*. London: Constable, 2009.
3. *ibid*, pp 145-149.
4. The Light Programme preceded Radio 2, broadcasting pre-Elvis 'music while you work' material—definitely no more up-to-date than Glenn Miller's *In the mood*; The Third Programme preceded Radio 3, and was broadly similar to it; today's Radio 2 provides pop music while being less 'edgy' than Radio 1; and Saga FM (now Smooth Radio) centred on pop hits from the 60s and 70s.

# Still in the cinders?

by Peter Shepherd

Last year I encouraged my church in Derby to explore the character and personality of each of the churches of the New Testament. In each case, I summed up this personality by depicting it as a particular bird or animal or plant, as a way of fixing it in people's imaginations. About 20 pictures of a rather strange mix of creatures and plants were displayed around the church.

The church at Thessalonica, for example, is a young penguin embarking on its first dangerous adventure in the southern ocean, eyeing the ocean from its rocky Antarctic birthplace with excitement and fear—not only the waves and the surf, but leopard seals and killer whales threaten its young life. This church was young, eager and ready for adventure, yet faced violent threats from the established powers in the city—the Roman authorities and the leaders of the synagogue. The church at Smyrna, on the other hand, is like a lady slipper orchid, poking its pretty head above the moorland vegetation of the Pennines. Fragile, beautiful, fearful, vulnerable, lacking confidence, in need of reassurance and affirmation.

## A picture of our church

Partway through the year I asked people how they would depict our church. What kind of personality do we have as the body of Christ? Are we like an owl, as one of our young people suggested—wise, keeping an eye out for each other; or perhaps a mountain gorilla—impressive, yet vulnerable, finding it hard to adapt to a changing environment; or possibly a hermit crab—needing to change our premises but as yet unsure of how and where to scuttle to a new home? The point is not, of course, to find a definitive answer, but to engage in a process of thinking about our identity, and what kind of congregation we might be.

James Hopewell's book, *Congregation: stories and structures*, arose from a course he was teaching in the US for priests and ministers in the mid-1980s. It was designed to help his readers to gain 'a critical and appreciative perspective on the dilemmas and strengths of local church existence'. He encourages us to adopt

a narrative approach to this task. Each church, he says, has its own unique story, and the first task of the pastor is to understand that story. Churches are story-shaped communities, and healthy churches are those which understand, value and tell their stories. A technique used by Hopewell was to find well known stories, from classical Greece or Rome, for example, or more recent fairy tales, which reflect something of the church's character. So, one church might see itself in the story of Daedalus, and another in *Sleeping beauty*. This method was more interesting and helpful, he believed, than a dry analysis of numbers, demography and activities.

Hopewell's book kick-started an interest in congregational studies, a discipline that, in recent years, has become significant in the UK context. He wanted to affirm the local congregation as the place where the gospel is rooted, and to argue that understanding and valuing its character and story was vital. In a small way, my animal pictures of the church had the same purpose.

### **Baptist congregational commitment**

Baptists emerged as a people who saw the church as essentially rooted in the local congregation. The vitality and competence of the congregation provided an ecclesiological challenge to powerful church structures. This perspective has changed over the centuries, but is still a vital insight, particularly in our post-christendom age. My title, *Still in the cinders?* is a reference to Michael Griffith's book, *Cinderella with amnesia*, in which he argues that the church is failing to recognise its calling from God as something of beauty and importance. I am convinced that in important ways the local congregation is similarly being neglected today, even by those, like us Baptists, who claim to champion it.

Some may object that everything we Baptists do is centred on the local church, and that our whole denomina-

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importance

tional structure is geared towards the health of local churches, so how can they possibly be said to be neglected? I am sure we do want to serve the needs of the local church, but are we really achieving our aim? The only way to do it is to find ways of intentionally placing local churches, which are mostly small and have few resources, at the centre of what we do. Essentially this is a theological issue, about where we see the heart of the church, and making sure our actions truly reflect our words.

But what may be said about the huge number of books on various aspects of church renewal? I have many on my shelves and have found some of them useful. They tackle everything from leadership to music; from evangelism to pastoral care; from administration to social action, from children's work to preaching, from conflict resolution to finance. But for the most part their interest is in particular activities of the church, or people in positions of leadership, rather than with congregational life as such. They address what the church does rather than what it is, and as Hopewell observed, are usually designed to facilitate change, not to deepen understanding.

In the late 1990s, after over 25 years of ministry as a parish priest and as a consultant and trainer with churches of different traditions, Malcolm Grundy bemoaned the fact that 'very little thought and research is being done to understand the life of our local churches'. It was, he said, 'one of the most fundamental needs' facing our churches. In spite of all the books on church life and ministry found on ministers' shelves—including my own—there is a relative lack of attention to such basic, congregation-centred questions as: What does it mean to be a congregation? How do congregations function as bundles of relationships? How do they develop their corporate identity? How is power exercised? How do congregations relate to the communities in which they are set?

Helen Cameron suggests how sociology and organisational studies may help increase our understanding of how congregations work. Local churches differ from secular organisations in important respects, but a greater awareness of their organisational characteristics need not crush their unique spiritual character. It may help us to appreciate how much they have to offer, both to their members and to the world, longing as it is to recover a sense of community.

Some may argue that a focus on congregations is precisely the wrong thing to do. We are already too narrow in our ecclesiology, they say. What we need is a broader understanding of the church, not a narrower one. Among Baptists today,

the argument goes, we are far too parochial already, fiercely protective of our independence and refusing to look beyond what is familiar. Is not a study of the local congregation simply going to encourage this spirit of introspection? Some go further, and speak passionately of the harm caused when congregations turn in upon themselves.

Much damage has indeed been done by a narrow-minded attitude. The local church can become proud, introspective and self-serving, as we all know. But surely such problems occur, not because congregations have been taken too seriously but because they have not been taken seriously enough. If we do not cherish and value the local church, then we should not be surprised if it becomes infected with harmful customs and fails to live up to its calling.

So how can we put the local church back at the centre? First, it needs to understand, value and tell its story. The relationship between the future and the past is a dynamic and important one. Church history is not just for older members of the congregation who enjoy reading about their grandparents and Sunday school teachers, and looking at pictures of the sanctuary as it used to be. The past is a story of God's grace, and provides signposts for what lies ahead. I try to remind my own church, which has a strong sense of tradition, and is sometimes resistant to change, of the energy and vision that often characterised its past. We need to be imaginative and creative in retelling the story, using pictures, objects, music, flowers and any other resources to hand, as well as words, to instil gratitude for the past, and perhaps penitence too, as a deliberate and conscious way of helping us welcome the future.

Encouraging, and giving space for, the informal development of congregational identity is important too. Charles Foster has described the significance of informal conversations in the strengthening of congregational life. Our sense of belonging is shaped profoundly by what happens at the edge of the formal activities of the church. The kitchen and the corridors are not simply for preparing food, washing up and moving from one place to the next, but are meeting rooms where

How can  
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conversations take place, and the congregation embodies itself.

One of the consequences of the 20th century move towards a greater national coordination of Baptist life was the increased difficulty local churches felt in having a sense of ownership of mission and ministry. There is a need to affirm, celebrate and nurture their creativity, confidence and energy.

There is a famous painting of Cinderella by the artist Millais. She is dressed in rags and dirty, but her beauty shines through. Perhaps if she possessed a mirror and looked at herself, she could see through the dirty stains of smoke and ash on her face and the worn-out clothes she wears, to the person of beauty and grace she really is, as we can as we look at the painting. We know that the taunts and sneers of the ugly sisters are unfair and untrue, and are glad that the time is coming when she will know it too. Perhaps our congregations too, can come to see themselves as God does, loved and valued, in spite of their obvious flaws. Such a realisation might enable them to become more like the churches God called them to be.

***Peter Shepherd is minister of Broadway Baptist Church, Derby, but will soon be moving to Stoneygate, Leicester. He can be contacted by email at shepherd.peter@talk21.com.***

#### **Notes to text**

1. J. F. Hopewell, *Congregation: stories and structures*. Fortress Press, 1987; SCM Press, 1988.
2. J. F. Hopewell, *ibid*, p xi.
3. M. Grundy, *Understanding congregations* (Mowbray, 1998); M. Guest, *Congregational studies in the UK* (Ashgate, 2004); H. Cameron, *Studying local churches* (SCM, 2005), have been important publications from the UK context.
4. M. Griffiths, *Cinderella with amnesia*. IVP, 1975.
5. M. Grundy, *ibid*, pp xii-xiii.
6. M. Guest, *ibid*, pp.139ff.
7. C. R Foster, *Communicating: informal conversation in the congregation's education*, in C. Ellis Nelson (ed), *Congregations: their power to form and transform* (John Knox Press, 1988), pp 218ff.

# A retirement retreat

by Philip Clements-Jewery

Loyola Hall is a Jesuit retreat house in Prescott, Merseyside. Its emphasis is naturally on Ignatian spirituality, which is, of course, very biblical in its approach. I went in the summer of 2010 with the express intention of preparing myself spiritually for my retirement in early 2011. The retreat was very helpful to me in the realisation of this purpose: in fact, it more than fulfilled my expectations.

During the first 24 hours of the retreat I was able simply to enjoy my relationship with God. Then, under the guidance of a spiritual director I began to explore passages of the Bible that bear upon my particular circumstances.

Thinking about Mark 1:15 'The time is fulfilled...' led to a review of the ups and downs of almost 40 years of ministry in six different situations, as well as to a reflection on future possibilities. Jesus' call was also to repent. There was sorrow for the hurt and pain experienced, not least by my family, but also that inflicted on others over the course of my ministry, through the mistakes I have made. I pray for the grace of healing and wholeness for those I have ministered to, as well as for myself and my family. However, repentance is also forward-looking—the opening up to and acceptance of new opportunities. Retirement for a minister I have come to see as simply the opportunity to serve God in a different way.

I went on to consider the gospel passage about the call of the first disciples, enabling me to think about what needs to be let go as I conclude my ministry. Simon and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea (it could be said metaphorically that they were engaged in missional activity), but they left their nets to follow Jesus. I realise that retirement will mean letting go of my professional life as a minister. On the other hand, James and John were mending their nets (maintenance ministry), and left their father and his workers when they followed Jesus. Retirement is thus also about letting go the pastoral relationships and friendships that I have enjoyed, or at least being prepared for them to change. I was also reminded that my primary calling is to follow Jesus, and that this will continue in new ways after my retirement.

Another Bible verse I was directed to was Acts 2:42. This led to reflection on what it might mean for me to join a different Christian community after retirement, where I will no longer be the leader and where I will find myself, as an ordinary member of the fellowship, more on the receiving end of ministry than on the giving end. I realised that I will need grace to listen and to restrain a critical spirit. Others will not do things the way I would do them and I will have to learn to operate in a different mode than that of a minister. Cultivating a spirit of humility will be crucial. If, during the course of ministry, gifts of the Spirit have been uppermost, in retirement fostering the fruit of the Spirit will come to the fore.

Finally, I was given John 21:15-22, with its repeated challenge, 'Do you love me?' and its repeated call, 'Follow me!' The words of Jesus to Simon Peter in vv 18-19 about what would happen when he became old can be adapted to apply to the retirement situation. The point is related to one made in the last paragraph about willingness to be led in ways I might not naturally find comfortable and which I might not have chosen of myself to follow; yet Jesus says, 'Follow me!', and I will have to learn to discern where it is truly his voice that I am hearing.

All in all, then, this retreat was a very valuable experience, and I am glad that I had the opportunity to take it. I was very grateful for the encouragement and financial support of the BUGB Ministry Department and of my church, which made it possible for me to go.

*Philip Clements-Jewery was minister of New North Road Baptist Church, Huddersfield, until early January 2011. He is now embarking on retirement. You can contact Philip on [philip.clementsjewery@gmail.com](mailto:philip.clementsjewery@gmail.com). This article has also featured in the BURG Journal, Autumn 2010.*

**Have you moved recently? Please let Niels Waugh or Nigel Howarth know, so that we can keep our membership list up to date, and you continue to receive *bmj* without a break. The addresses are on the inside covers of every issue. Thank you.**



# Pulpit exchanges abroad

by Frank Boyd

I have been privileged to travel to many parts of the world. When I was Association Secretary (Southern) and then Regional Minister in the Southern Counties Association, I made several visits to the US—on Partnership Mission, on holiday, and just once, to speak at the Southern Baptist Convention. I have also visited Bulgaria, since the SCA was twinned with the Bulgarian Baptist Union. More recently, I have been to many other countries, while acting (in retirement) as a cruise chaplain. I need hardly say that such travelling was enjoyable, but the ministry was equally good! The discovery of different cultures, and of new and unknown places, has been a real joy. Yet the experience that has excited me most has been the meeting with other brothers and sisters in Christ and entering into their mission, which is more beautiful than all the mountains, flowers and animals I have seen.

For most of us, unfortunately, finance is a brake to such experiences. One opportunity to fill such a gap is to arrange a pulpit exchange with another church and its minister. I have been asked recently by the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship to act as a convenor for such exchanges—usually with churches in the US, but possibly with other nations.

Currently I am exploring possible exchanges with two ministers in the US: one in the Southern Baptist Convention, and the other in the American Baptist Convention, whose churches are primarily in the north. I have also been asked by a pastor in Australia to help him link up with a UK church for an exchange.

How does it work? Once a link has been made, it is for the pastors to get the agreement of their churches, to fix a mutually convenient date, and to agree the details. These normally include: (i) the pastor's own church pays the normal stipend to their own minister; (ii) the manse will be made available to the visiting minister and his family; (iii) there is agreement to the use of the other's car; and (iv) the expected involvement the visiting minister will have in the host church.

On the latter point, normally the visiting minister will involve him/herself in the weekly activities of the church for two days per week, including some visiting,

and preach at least once a week at a Sunday service. Other details, relating to the specific church situation and the minister's personal talents, will be agreed before firm arrangements are made.

The length of time of the exchange will vary from between one to three months. For some it could easily relate to a period of sabbatical leave. It would, nevertheless, still have to be able to accommodate the needs of the host church. Planning needs to be done well in advance—we are talking of at least 12 months.

If you are interested in an exchange to Australia or the US in about 12-15 months from now, please contact me. Equally, if you might be interested at a later date, please let me know now, or at least take down my e-mail address for future contact.

***Frank Boyd's e-mail address is frank.boyd1@btopenworld.com. Now officially retired, he is deacon with responsibility for mission at Thornhill Baptist Church, Southampton.***

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## ***Gospel for starters***

by Mike Smith

*And all was for an apple, an apple that he took*

*As clerkes finden, written in their booke.*

The sentiment may be mediaeval, but that's how people outside the churches (and some inside!) can see the Bible. Yet the original New Testament was not meant to be opaque and mysterious. That converted professor of literature, Augustine of Hippo, found the gospels pretty plain after the classics of Rome—more in the style of *The Daily Mirror*, than *The Times*, or Shakespeare. So how can the story of Jesus be made more accessible? I was driven to writing this book initially because people came to our Bible Times Exhibition and wanted to start reading the Bible, and I had nothing simple to give them. *Gospel for starters* was the result.

I began by asking myself how the first readers would have taken Mark's account of Jesus. It was a plain, simple account which they would readily have understood. I decided to demystify the usual text with today's readers in mind.

‘Pharisees’ became ‘strict religious people’ (the word had no bad vibes then); ‘Sadducees’ were ‘the high priest’s party’ and the ‘Herodians’ were ‘pro-Roman’. Since Mark uses the word *baptizo* for washing up cups and plates, ‘John the Washer’ is a fair translation for the Baptist. But ‘synagogue’ is still a Jewish place of worship and the Jerusalem Temple isn’t really like a cathedral, so I left those terms as they were. Most names were left, but I did note that James was really Jacob. Finally, and somewhat controversially, I followed Geza Vermes (an eminent Jewish scholar) and rendered ‘Son of Man’ as either ‘I’ or ‘me’—a translation that makes Jesus’ reply to Caiaphas quite explosive.

Mark’s Greek contains ‘loan’ words in Aramaic and Latin. I resisted the temptation to use foreign words in my version, but I did note their occurrence. I did include other features—since Jesus spoke with a regional accent from Galilee, surely he would have said ‘get up, lass’ to Jairus’ daughter—and he was asked if it were proper to pay ‘poll tax’ to the emperor.

Getting away from ‘posh speaking’ and avoiding slang that would date meant walking a tightrope. So Herod Antipas ‘throws a party’ and Herodias ‘has it in for John’. Jesus tells the storm to ‘shut up’; ‘bandits’ are crucified with Jesus, and with the help of inverted commas (not known in Roman times) we have the woman with a haemorrhage who spent all her money on ‘cures’. ‘Prophets’ have become ‘preachers’ and references to the Old Testament are just said to be from the Bible.

When I first embarked on this project, I merely produced a translation with footnotes. But the footnotes increased in number and length, so eventually I recast the work with short sections of text followed by a little explanation. I found this method liberating because I could include more explanatory material without lots of footnote numbers breaking up the text. I had the chance to talk of the boat like Peter’s which was recently found in Galilee: in terms of cars, a right old banger, mended many times with poor quality wood. No wonder Peter was scared when the storm came on!

Avoiding posh  
speaking and  
slang meant  
walking a  
tightrope!

I could explain about coins, and how the high priests made a rake-off from the money changers. I could point out how the disciples picking ears of corn was actually a primitive form of social security; and how a fig tree has small green figs on its branches for over a year before they ripen. I could mention a little about Pontius Pilate's career and also how Barabbas first name was probably Jesus (quite a common name in those days).

At times I was able to highlight things of theological importance which might be missed. Before John the Washer, all the ceremonial washings of the Jews were self-administered. But there is no DIY salvation: we have to have it done for us! The healing miracles of Jesus can be seen as acted parables of salvation (we are blind, deaf or paralysed before Jesus saves us). I could explain how the cries of 'Hosanna' ('Lord, save us') were a bit like the singing of *Abide with me* at the Cup Final. The tearing of the Temple curtain from top to bottom signifies that it was God's action, not man's.

The page layout is important. I have used a different typeface for Mark's text and I give the traditional chapter and verse references at the end of each short section—but otherwise it is set out as a normal book (the two-column format with cross-references baffles the unwary).

Ancient manuscripts have few punctuation marks and some do not even separate the words, because in those times everyone read out loud, and you knew when to draw breath. Short sentences are thus the order of the day in my version, with usually only one dependent clause allowed. It makes for easy reading: Mark's complete account of the crucifixion kept 200 Key Stage 2 children utterly silent as they listened.

I have had some good feedback: the deputy features editor of *The Daily Mirror* commented on how accessible it was (unlike the school Bibles he had known); as did the RE Adviser for Kirklees (not a churchgoer); while many church people have said that it gave them a new view of Jesus. For myself it has been a great spiritual experience to journey with Jesus and feel the excitement of it all again.

*Gospel for starters* is meant to be the first course of a Bible reading 'meal', a starter for those who haven't tried the Bible before. I hope and pray that it will help many. It was published in 2010 by Athena Press at £9.99.

***Mike Smith is retired and lives in Marsden, near Huddersfield.***

# Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

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## ***Mission shaped evangelism***

by Steve Hollinghurst  
Canterbury Press, 2010  
978-1-85311-842-5

*Reviewer: Graham McBain*

Evangelism used to be so easy; there were countless ways to convince people of their wretchedness and sin. Once we knew they despised themselves enough, we led them to Jesus' death and resurrection, commitments were made, baptisms followed, and churches grew. We learned all the arguments and facts proving the truth of scripture and the existence of God: these, combined with an encyclopaedic knowledge of Bible verses, convinced the staunchest pagan of their need to repent. We had the tools and we had the results to prove it.

But recently there has been a problem. Our tried and tested ways of evangelism are not working; the big evangelistic events and altar calls no longer hit the spot and people are not impressed by our Bible verses. What do we do?

How are we to do evangelism in this post-christendom culture, in which our reference points have faded?

Steve Hollinghurst's book is a must read for any church/pastor/Christian exploring this area. It is supported by solid research and impressive experience. He writes with integrity as a mission practitioner and proves again and again that he knows his field, without ever drifting into self-promotion. The book is a page turner—I didn't want to stop, even when his observations came dangerously close to the mark.

Hillinghurst's premise is that churches need to adopt a new mission-shaped evangelism to be effective in today's culture. The usual suspects—Bosch and the Fresh Expression authors - are used to support Steve's points. 'Double listening' is imperative if Christians are to reach people outside the walls of their churches—it involves listening to the community, its beliefs, values and stories; and listening to how our Christian tradition can speak into it. This is what foreign missionaries do when they learn new languages and cultures and it is what we should all be doing in this new era of post-christendom church.

Hollinghurst leads us through an inspirational section mapping the mission of God from Old Testament times right up

to today. He argues that double listening spread Judaism in the Old Testament, and the Christian church in the New. Many pastors will enjoy planning fresh preaching series from this insightful section.

We are on a journey with Hollinghurst, a journey we must finish ourselves in our own cultures and contexts, but before we set out, he shares examples and stories of how mission-shaped evangelism has led to innovative and inspiring new models of church. Some would argue that these are not churches in any recognisable form. That's the point—culture has changed, and church and mission need to change accordingly.

This book is essential reading for anyone brave enough! It is excellent.

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***Creative ideas for pastoral liturgy: baptism, confirmation and liturgies for the journey***

by J. Brind & T. Wilkinson  
Canterbury Press, 2010,  
Paperback & CD-rom, £18.99  
ISBN 978-1-84825-004-8

*Reviewer: Peter Shepherd*

This excellent resource is the latest from Canterbury Press in a series by Brind & Wilkinson. Exploring it, I

wished I had read some of the earlier volumes, since it is the kind of book for which ministers are always grateful.

For Baptists, its usefulness is limited because it is directed at Anglicans. When it comes to funerals and weddings, or worship more generally, this may not matter too much, but for baptism and confirmation it's a different story! Nevertheless, there is much that is helpful and stimulating, with a host of ideas and resources for prayers, readings, children's worksheets, songs, banners, cards, crafts and song suggestions.

Under the heading *Liturgies for the journey* there are many creative suggestions for a large range of church events and celebrations. Celebrating bell ringers, chalice assistants and church wardens may not be of much practical use for readers of the *bmj*, but celebrating church cleaners, flower arrangers, magazine production teams and the treasurer and stewardship team certainly are. There are also sections on *Saying farewell to a gap year student going travelling*, *Blessing a house*, and *Closing a church*, among many more.

The language is accessible and the ideas creative. I am sure I will use this book, and look forward to getting hold

of others in the series. The forthcoming *Creative worship for the whole church family* is one for which I will particularly look out.

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***Resourcing renewal: shaping churches for the emerging future***

by M. Atkins

Epworth Press, £14.99

ISBN: 978-0-7162-0668-2

*Reviewer: Jem Sewell*

Martyn Atkins is the General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Britain and was former Principal at Cliff College. This book, originally published in 2007, has been reissued in 2010. You may detect a Methodist streak in the CV but Martyn draws on influences far more eclectic: Star Trek, Vatican II, and the evangelical revival in Cuba.

The main title is misleading; this book is primarily an offering into the crowded marketplace of thinking around emerging church and the Fresh Expression movement. Martyn offers a nuanced argument for a mixed economy; with a blend of inherited church which in some ways and areas is working well, and emerging church, which is exploring the boundaries and finding new, relevant ways of conversations

with those who are not part of the church. The book is about God, missionary and evangelist, and about the church as God's key partner.

The book gives the occasional useful analysis; one part looks at the value of the ecumenical and mission movements for the local church, another at more traditional forms of church life. Martyn interweaves these with ideas from the pioneers of new expressions of church. Other than these bright glimmers, as a whole this book does not cover ground already well documented.

Overall it comes across as a well researched but loosely argued piece of work with a clear academic background. Some serious challenges are included, not least in the direction of ministry (chapter 9). The caricatures often portrayed throughout the book seem a bit tired.

The book is very readable, yet contains real depth. Martyn is brilliant at leaving memorable and provocative quotes, such as, 'the church is not of ultimate importance'; or, 'mission shaped ecclesiology enjoys a love—hate relationship with traditional understandings of the church'. Each chapter finishes with a few points which might make the book useful in a reading group.

***Christianity and Science***

by John Weaver

SCM Press, £17.45

ISBN: 978-0-334-04113-9

*Reviewer: Steve Langford*

John Weaver prefaces *Christianity and Science* by laying out his own credentials both as a scientist and theologian. He then explains that this work is based on a series of lectures given at Oxford and Cardiff universities between 1997 and 2010 on science and Christian faith in dialogue. This heritage makes *Christianity and Science* a solid and well practised introduction to the often tricky interaction between science and Christian faith. It also provides the reader aiming to enter the debate between science and Christianity with a firm foundation from which to begin further study.

After his introduction, Weaver lays down the historical foundation for five key areas of current scientific research and debate: cosmology and the structure of the universe; evolution and the origin of life; the human brain and the development of the mind; genes, the human genome and genetic engineering; the environment and the care of creation.

Although constraints of space mean that each historical synopsis is short,

they are extremely succinct. They introduce the reader to the primary figures in development of the scientific theories that underpin each of the five areas before highlighting some of the potential conflicts with Christian faith.

Weaver concludes each chapter by suggesting how theology and science might enter into dialogue and overcome these traditional areas of controversy. Personally, I found these suggestions very helpful. However, I am conscious that readers who hold a more Reformed theological viewpoint may struggle with the easy way in which Weaver dismisses a seven-day view of creation in his chapter on evolution and the origin of life.

In the final chapter, Weaver introduces the reader to ways in which God might be understood in a world where much of the mystery of creation has been uncovered and yet human beings still suffer, both from others and from the unpredictability of natural disasters. I found this chapter particularly useful as it demonstrated how creative theological thinking can robustly defend the Christian faith in the light of some of its most common areas of critique.

Although the areas of scientific research covered by this book are clearly complex, John Weaver proves his knowledge of the subject by presenting



them in an easily accessible form. This makes *Christianity and Science* a useful addition to the bookshelf of any student of theology.

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***Sun of righteousness, arise!***

by J. Moltmann

SCM Press 2010, £25

ISBN 978-0-334-04348-5

*Reviewer: John Matthews*

Subtitled *God's future for humanity and the earth*, this book is a wide-ranging collection of 17 lectures and essays from the past 10 years, which are, says Moltmann, intended to contribute not only to the specific Christian perception of God, but also to joy in the God of Jesus Christ, the 'sun of righteousness'.

The material is based on three fundamental Christian insights: God is the God of Christ's resurrection; God is the righteousness which creates justice and puts things to rights; and the traces of and signs of God give the world meaning. The book is in four parts, dealing with the future of Christianity; the resurrection of Christ, of the body and of nature; God as righteousness and justice; and God in nature.

While Moltmann was ordained in the Reformed tradition, he sees this as a starting point and not a boundary. For

him 'to be evangelical in the true sense means thinking ecumenically, for the gospel of Christ...is ecumenical' (p 2). True to this sentiment, he quotes or lists works by a wide range of theologians, including Paul Fiddes.

Moltmann continues to be a major theologian who writes in an intelligible way. In words that have a similarity to Tom Wright, he asserts that 'God does not save his creation for heaven, he renews the earth' (p 72). When it comes to scientific research he is clear that 'We do not have to do everything it is possible to...'Can does not imply ought', (p 216); and he is equally clear that 'a fertilized ovum in its potentiality and with its future is a human being and nothing else' (p 217). There is a n index of names and subjects, but no bibliography.

Each of the chapters is well worth reading and pondering. Fans of Moltmann will not be disappointed with this latest volume, but they, and other potential buyers, may be deterred by the price; £25 for a paperback of 260 pages seems very expensive. The publisher's reply to my query about this was that print runs have decreased and that discounts are available from Amazon and themselves. They did not reply to my further response!

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