

**the baptist ministers'
journal**

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KJV anniversary

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From the editor

Footprints from the past

Recently I came across an old copy of *The rail engineer*. In it was an article about the Leicestershire village in which I grew up, which was home to a one-mile long railway tunnel. Only the second such tunnel in the world, it had been built by Robert Stephenson in the 1830s. The line closed in 1966 when the coal in Leicestershire was running out, and in 1969 the tunnel was sold for £5 to the local council. The council didn't fill the tunnel in, and for some years it was possible to walk in and explore this bit of transport history. Later, health and safety considerations forced the council to stabilise the brickwork and seal the ends. Now you would hardly know it was there, except that the cul-de-sac of cottages nearby is named Stephenson Close, and some bits of the old ventilation shafts remain in the gardens of houses built above it.

Today's residents may never have seen the marvel of engineering behind their garden sheds. The footprints are there, but what might have made them? One wonders about archaeologists some centuries in the future uncovering this tunnel and trying to work out what it was for. Were we a nation of troglodytes? Hopefully this hypothetical future generation will have both access to public records and a practical mindset, and will be able to work it out from the footprints.

The tunnel could be a parable of the kingdom of God: many of Jesus' parables included an element of hiddenness and discovery. If we confess, with Augustine, that 'our hearts are restless until they find rest in you', then even if the church is culturally marginalised, there will be those who will pursue the quest for meaning and recognise the footprints of God. In this issue of *bmj* we have articles about the legacies of the KJV Bible and of the conflict (and the peace) that defines the Middle East. The footprints of God are there, but sometimes in surprising places. Such stories make us wonder what footprints we might be leaving behind us. *SN*

Hearts and minds

Baptists and the mission of God, from 30 August to 2 September

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heartsandmindsconference.org.uk

The KJV: 400 years

by Ray Vincent

‘If every man’s humour should be followed there would be no end of translating’. This was the reaction of Richard Bancroft, the Bishop of London (soon to be Archbishop of Canterbury), to the proposal that a new translation of the Bible should be made. Before long he found himself in charge of the project, and that ‘unnecessary’ translation became the one which for millions of people 400 years on still is ‘the Bible’.

Bancroft’s remarks are understandable when we consider that it was only in the previous century that the idea of having the Bible in English had really become established, and by that time there were already at least seven versions. The Vulgate alone had been thought quite sufficient all through the Middle Ages: why so many now?

The reason lay partly in the weakness and unsuitability of the previous English versions. From Tyndale through Coverdale, the Great Bible, the Bishops’ Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Roman Catholic Douai-Reims Version, the translation of the Bible into English had been a battleground of different theologies. When James VI of Scotland inherited the throne of England in 1603 his aim was to maintain the Church of England as a Protestant church, balancing the traditional and Puritan tendencies. There was no English Bible that was not to some extent controversial and divisive, and so in the first year of his reign James eagerly grasped the suggestion that a new translation should be produced.

Within about 50 years the other versions had almost entirely fallen out of use, and the 1611 translation was virtually the only Bible known to ordinary English-speaking people until the 20th century. We have to beware, however, of assuming that the King James Bible we now hold in our hands and read is exactly the same as it was in 1611. There has been an ongoing process of revision over the years. From the very beginning, printers’ errors were a constant annoyance, the most notori-

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ous being the 'Wicked Bible' of 1630, with its commandment 'Thou shalt commit adultery'! Most were far less serious than this, but numbers of mistakes accumulated with successive printings.

Determined attempts were made to put things right in the 18th century, and the form in which we have the KJV today dates substantially from the Oxford edition of 1769, which made no less than 24 000 alterations of punctuation, spelling and occasionally grammar. Some archaic spellings have remained: for example *musick* (Luke 15:25 *etc*) and *bason* (Exodus 24:6 *etc*). A particularly interesting one is *fats* (pronounced 'vats') in Joel 2:24 and 3:13. This word is a relic of the Anglo-Saxon use of 'f' to represent the 'v' sound, a usage still adhered to in Welsh but whose only survival in modern English is the word 'of'.

Authorised or King James?

For many years this version had no particular name, being referred to as 'a new translation', or 'that now in use'. It was not until the early 19th century that both the expressions 'King James Version' or 'King James's Bible', and the 'Authorised Version' became popular. And so, in a sense, there is equal precedent for using either name.

Though popularly known in Britain as the Authorised Version, it was never authorised in the way Coverdale's translation had been in 1535 or the Bishops' Bible in 1568. Its title page says that it is 'appointed to be read in churches', but churches were not ordered to use it.

The name was hardly an issue until the mid-20th century, because for most Protestants in English-speaking countries it was simply 'the Bible'. It is only the increasing use of other translations that has compelled ordinary Christians to refer to it by a specific name. Generally it has been called the 'King James Bible' or 'King James Version' in the US, and the 'Authorised Version' in the UK, but 'King James' seems now to be catching on in the UK too.

There is justice in this title, because it owes its existence very largely to King James I. The dedication to him that appears at the beginning of most printed editions refers to him as 'the principal Mover and Author of the work'. The historical evidence suggests that this was not mere flattery: Richard Bancroft was not the only bishop who was rather unenthusiastic about the project, and it would probably not have been undertaken without the advocacy of King James himself. However,

it appears that, having enthusiastically advocated the translation in 1604, he had rather lost interest in it by the time it was completed. It was not launched with a fanfare of publicity. In fact, being considered a revision rather than a new Bible, it was not even entered into the Stationers' Register of new books. This is why the celebrations this year are not focused on a particular date: we simply do not know when in 1611 it was published.

The KJV and the English language

The translators were instructed to stay as close as possible to the wording of the Bishops' Bible, while taking other translations into account: hence the words on the title page, 'translated out of the original tongues: and with the former translations diligently compared and revised'.

The King James Version is 90% Tyndale, though his name is not mentioned in its Introduction. The chief difference is that its style is rather more formal, using Latinate words where Tyndale used Anglo-Saxon, and if anything slightly more archaic than Tyndale.

The translators were very aware of the diction and cadences they were producing. They wanted it to be a Bible that would sound dignified when read in church. The language they used was slightly old-fashioned even for that time. For instance, the use of *thou*, *thee* and *thy* was already dying out in speech, as were the third person ending in *-eth*, and the use of *which* when referring to a person (as in 'Our Father, which art in heaven'). The translators' decision to use this kind of language (along with its use by Cranmer in the Book of Common Prayer) kept it alive for at least three more centuries in the language of hymns and prayers. In my own ministry, it was not until a change of pastorate in 1979-80 that I eventually stopped calling God 'thou' in public prayers.

One rather unfortunate feature of the translation is the inconsistency of the rendering of names between the Old and New Testaments. Elijah becomes Elias, Isaiah becomes Esaias, Jeremiah becomes Jeremy, and so on. This can be confusing, and is particularly misleading when Joshua is called Jesus (Acts 7:45; Hebrews 4:8).

It is commonly said that the KJV helped to shape the English language itself. Certainly many words and phrases that are now a familiar part of the language are found in KJV, but the situation is not quite as simple as that. Many memorable phrases in the KJV had already been coined by Tyndale or one of the other, earlier,

translators. Others had been a familiar part of the language for centuries: ‘salt of the earth’, for instance, is found in Chaucer. However, their use in the KJV, even if not original, probably popularised them and contributed to their continued survival.

A foreign student of English today who was totally ignorant of the King James Bible would be puzzled by turns of phrase we use that do not reflect normal modern usage. For instance, why do we still use expressions like ‘the powers that be’, ‘O ye of little faith’, ‘holier than thou’ and ‘whited sepulchres’? Without some residual memory of the Bible in the King James Version, we would lose the wit of an advertising slogan for an airline company that reads ‘let there be flight’, or a remark that ‘technology was made for man, not man for technology’. Many phrases we use today may not have been originally coined by the KJV, but the Bible, which has been known among English-speaking people for centuries in that version, has permeated the language very deeply.

Theologically biased?

Early versions of the Bible in English were unashamedly biased. Both Tyndale and the Geneva Bible included copious interpretative notes. As the King James Bible was intended to have a unifying influence, its translators were instructed to include no notes other than those thought essential for the understanding of the words (*eg* where the meaning of the original was in doubt) and cross-references to other parts of scripture, so that readers could compare scripture with scripture and come to their own conclusion.

However, no version could be entirely without bias. Just as ‘non-political’ tends to mean conservative, so ‘non-sectarian’ then meant the establishment. The translators were instructed to stay within the bounds of the accepted norms of church and society, using for instance *church* for *ecclesia* in the New Testament rather than ‘congregation’, and rendering *agape* in 1 Corinthians 13 by the ‘churchy’ word *charity* rather than *love*, which had already been used by Tyndale and others. There were also chapter summaries (not always printed in modern editions of KJV) and running headlines on the pages, a feature that is still common. And so, in the Song of Solomon we see page headings like ‘The love of Christ and his Church’, and ‘A description of Christ by his graces’, and the page heading above Isaiah 53 reads: ‘The humiliation and sufferings of Christ’. Features like this were not controversial in the context of the 17th century: they represented beliefs on which Protestants on

the whole had no disagreement with Catholics. In general the intention of being as free as possible from sectarian bias, so that people could read and judge for themselves, was quite successfully adhered to.

It is interesting to compare this with the approach of the New International Version. The NIV was produced mainly because all modern translations so far had been made by 'liberals' who did not believe in the verbal inspiration and infallibility of scripture as the KJV translators did, but there is a significant difference. The NIV is distinctly biased towards the doctrine of infallibility. For instance, in the flood story, the discrepancy about the number of clean animals (two or seven?) is solved by translating the Hebrew word for two, which is plural in form, as pairs (see Genesis 7:2,8-9 *etc*). The KJV translators, being creatures of their time, revered the actual text of scripture, neither daring to alter it nor attempting to defend it. They simply translated it faithfully as they found it and left the reader to puzzle over any difficulties.

The KJV's continuing influence

While many of us in the UK churches today are more familiar with modern translations, the KJV still has an assured place in the hearts of all kinds of people, often more because of its style and associations than because of its content. Even the noted atheist Richard Dawkins has said, 'we come from a Christian culture and not to know the King James Bible is to be, in some small way, barbarian' (quoted by Nick Spencer, *The Bible in Transmission*, Bible Society, Spring 2010, p 3).

It is in the US, and in most of the former 'mission fields' of Africa and Asia, that the KJV now has its main following. The Pilgrim Fathers took it with them to America, and the fact that Protestant evangelical Christianity became the dominant ideology in the US resulted in its being embedded firmly in that culture. There is actually a vociferous 'King James Only' lobby in the US, some of whose representatives go so far as to assert that God, having ordained that English should become the world language of these last days, provided in the KJV his infallible word in that language. It is ironic that a translation commissioned by a king who believed in his divine right to rule is now the favourite Bible of the world's most powerful republic.

The editor of the *bmj* suggested I might find a Baptist angle to this theme, and here it is! The KJV is particularly treasured in the more conservative evangelical church-

es, most of which in the US are Southern Baptist. I am not aware that any statistics are available, but I would venture to guess that in a worldwide context Baptists account for a very high proportion, if not a majority, of those who regularly and seriously read it today.

Ray Vincent is retired from full time ministry, having been minister of Leytonstone United Free Church until 2001. He now works part time in the chaplaincy team at the University of Glamorgan. Ray's book, Let the Bible be itself, was published by O Books in 2008. Ray can be contacted by email on revrayvincent@btinternet.com.

Further reading

Gordon Campbell, *Bible: the story of the King James Version*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Derek Wilson, *The people's Bible: the remarkable history of the King James Version*. Lion Hudson, 2010.

David Crystal, *Begat: the King James Bible and the English language*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Baptist Ministers' Fellowship

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or nielswaugh@uwclub.net.

The KJV and black Christians

by Israel Olofinjana

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible (KJV), otherwise known as the Authorised Version (AV). The KJV has become such a part of the fabric of British society that today its language is still used in daily conversations with such expressions as ‘the salt of the earth’ (Matthew 5:13), ‘the land of Nod’ (Genesis 4:16), ‘money is the root of all evil’, and ‘turn the other cheek’ (Matthew 5:39).

As we celebrate the historical and popular achievement of the KJV as one of the most influential Bibles ever, I cannot but help reflect on its impact on black history, located within the Reformation movements of the 16th century. Several historical phenomena combined at this time. James IV of Scotland and I of England wanted to assert and enforce his divine right as king over his subjects. He did not accept the Geneva Bible (published in 1560) because of its Calvinistic roots. Further, the Puritans of the time hoped to purge Catholic dogma from the Church of England. These factors led King James to assemble 54 scholars (the finest minds of their time) who worked tirelessly from 1607 to 1611 to produce what we now call the KJV Bible.

The scholars worked in companies of six, referring to the original Hebrew and Greek texts and earlier translations such as the Tyndale Bible. The KJV, being commissioned by the King, has this opening: ‘To the most high and mighty Prince James by the Grace of God...’. The style of the language reflects the Shakespearean English of that era, and is one of the beauties of the KJV Bible.

At this time, when the KJV was being used in the English churches, European nations began to carve their way into America, the West Indies, and Africa. The result was the slave trade, which started around 1441 and continued until around the 1850s. The trade was very successful for many European nations, including England. It was during this period that Hamitic theology (the ‘curse of Ham’ theory) was used to legitimise the slavery of black people, and it seemed that the Church of England,

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with its KJV, was silent about it until the Clapham Sect arose as an abolitionist group to fight the slave trade in the 18th century.

The KJV became so popular during the slave trade that African slaves and abolitionists such as Olaudah Equiano (1745-97) and Quobna Ottobah Cugoana (1757-91) quoted freely in their books from the KJV in their arguments against slavery. After the slave trade ended in the 1850s it was quickly replaced with colonialism, in the Caribbean and in Africa. Colonialism (*ca* 1860s-1950s), which was conceived as a legitimate alternative trade pathway to the slave trade, went hand in hand with the missionary movement of the 18th century.

Revival and mission

An important motivator for mission at this time was the birth of the evangelical revival—Christian missionaries from Europe and America went in numbers to the colonial lands. The Church of England, through mission agencies such as Church Missionary Society (CMS), and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), together with other Protestant organisations, went to the Caribbean and Africa, and they took with them the KJV. The use of the KJV became so common that today many churches in Africa and the Caribbean view it as the most authentic translation of the Bible. Some even think not using the KJV is similar to having a low view of scripture—that is, not believing that the Bible is God's Word. Black preachers bask in the euphoria of quoting the scriptures from KJV in their sermons. Even in his struggle against racial segregation in the US, the late Dr Martin Luther King in his famous *I have a dream* speech at Washington DC quoted Psalm 30:5, Isaiah 40:4 and Amos 5:24—all from the KJV.

In many of the motivational or inspirational books written by black preachers today in the UK, the KJV is often the Bible translation used. Black Christians are also very good at Bible quotations from the KJV, in all situations and circumstances. The KJV, through western Protestant transmission, has become the emblem of black Christianity, but the ignorance attached to it by referring to it as the only or best translation needs to be addressed. While it is sufficient and right for black Christians to celebrate the influence and achievements of this Bible, we must also reflect on the colonial legacy it has had on our history. This process is important if we are to purge the black Christian community of the problematic history and use of the KJV, and to facilitate the use of other credible translations of the Bible.

Positively, one thing that is certain and cannot be taken away is the love and passion

black Christians have for God's Word. 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts' (Jeremiah 15:16 KJV). 'Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food' (Job 23:12 KJV). These verses of scripture describe very well the African and Caribbean love for the Word and it is worth celebrating! It is also worth celebrating because the likes of Olaudah Equiano, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, Martin Luther King and many more have used KJV in their fight against slavery and oppression.

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Bibles for China

The Chinese church is growing rapidly and its members may very well outnumber those of the Communist party, but it is under-resourced. In rural areas as many as 100 Christians may share a Bible. There is a way in which Ministers' Fellowships could help—by sending Bibles for Chinese fellow pastors.

The Bible Network (TBN) is sending study Bibles to ministers in such areas. This year we celebrate 400 years of the KJV, and we have access to numerous versions of the Bible. Perhaps local BMF groups could take on a project for this year to send some Bibles to China.

For further information, contact The Bible Network, 87 High Street, Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 8JA; email BibleCampaign@aol.com and website <http://www.TheBibleNetwork.org.uk>.

Ownership of the Middle East

by Tony Cross

To name that bit of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea is to court controversy. One Labour minister called it 'Palestine', to the horror and complaint of the Israeli Government. Any who call it 'Israel' do the same for the Arab states. Forgive me if I do not venture there, though I hope readers will not feel I am avoiding controversy. That would be a first!

In this paper I will focus on seeking to understand what Jesus is really saying as he addresses the faithful in his home town and, later, to the assembled Galilean throng on the shores of the lake. In the case of the latter I specifically want to look at Matthew's third and fourth beatitudes. In so doing I am particularly grateful to Kenneth E. Bailey.¹

Let's start with the third beatitude. There are two versions of the beatitudes, and most scholars accept that Luke's is a short version of Matthew's, rather than describing a separate occasion. Luke's style suggests, according to Bailey, a Jewish written original.² Sadly it is impossible to recreate the Aramaic original to get the rich flavour of the words actually used. The English we have is usually rendered, *blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth* (Matthew 5:5).³ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) tells us that the word *meek* means 'Gentle, courteous, kind. Of a social superior: merciful, compassionate, indulgent'.⁴ It also suggests that *meek* is the opposite of proud or self-willed, and can mean humble and submissive. It can be deprecativ in use to mean 'inclined to submit tamely to oppression or injury, easily imposed upon or cowed, timid, biddable'.⁵

Christian commentators usually want to take the positive meanings without the negative, but *meek* is an old word whose precise meaning has shifted over time, making it rather difficult to interpret. The exact meaning of the Greek word used is less than straightforward either and the Aramaic word actually used by Jesus is conjecture.

In classical Greek culture the concept of οἱ πραῦα (the meek) is a highly prized quality but perversely one that is often used deprecativly.⁶ Vincent believes the classic and the NT uses are different; the former being a quality relating to interaction between humans, the latter, the interaction between individuals and God. Is this valid? The classic usage is of animals (Xenophon and Plato) or of feelings and ac-

tions. Xenophon uses it adverbially to mean *to speak lightly of*.⁷ It is worth noting that Jesus uses the term of himself in Matthew 11:29. How would we understand Jesus to be meek? The context there suggests the attitude of a benevolent King or master, closer to some classic usage. Furthermore, the classical use, both in verse and in prose, emphasises the gentleness quality, *a lacking in strident actions*.⁸

Bailey conjectures that the word used by Jesus is probably the Hebrew/Aramaic word *'ani* (poor/humble), which has to do with obedience in accepting God's guidance, and that both the Greek and Hebrew senses may have been in Jesus mind at the time.⁹

The text says that the meek will inherit the earth. I admit to taking this at face value. Both Bailey¹⁰ and Carson¹¹ give it a messianic interpretation, linking this with the promised land and even the new earth.¹² The Greek text uses $\gamma\eta$ (*earth*). NT usage is for *earth*, as opposed to *heaven*, *land* as opposed to *sea* and can mean a region or even what farmers cultivate. Woodhouse¹³ provides that classical usage is more earthy, literally! The word is a later contraction of $\gamma\epsilon\alpha$, the Greek equivalent of the Latin *terra*.¹⁴ It speaks of the substance of which the earth is made and therefore the landmass itself. So what is it that the meek inherit?

If we follow Bailey, which is very attractive, the quality that the *meek* possess is the very quality God looks for in those who will inherit the kingdom. If so, Jesus is skating towards very thin ice in the opinion of the Zealots—for them, Israel is the inheritor (by right?); certainly to the exclusion of the Gentiles.

The Nazareth sermon

This thinking brings us to the sermon at Nazareth as recorded by Luke (4:16). We know very little about the beginning of Jesus's ministry. The synoptic writers were relying on personal reminiscence, which would not have existed until after the appearance on the scene of Peter, Andrew, James and John. All three synoptics agree that Jesus was baptised by John, then went into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan before returning to Galilee. Only Matthew suggests this starts at Nazareth. It would appear more likely that Jesus started preaching on his way back from the wilderness to Galilee. He preached and taught in the open and sometimes in synagogues, so by the time he arrived at his home town he had something of a reputation—which may have been more for his teaching than his healing. He may have already met with the fishermen and they may have been with him in Nazareth.

So, when he attended the synagogue on the sabbath, it was natural for the elders to invite him to read from the prophets. He was one of their own, after all. So he opened the scroll, whether by chance or by design, to what we call Isaiah 61 and read most of the first two verses.

I am convinced that Luke wants us to understand this reading to be by chance—*ie* that this was where the previous reader had stopped. Jesus went on to apply the reading to himself. What follows next does not depend on the chance/design factor, however.

We do not have the version of the text Jesus read from. It was not our MT. It may have followed closely the LXX or been influenced by Qumran texts.¹⁵ According to Bailey,¹⁶ it was usual for the reader to read in Hebrew, pausing to allow someone to translate into Aramaic. This allowed for commentary (by either reader or translator), and even the addition of other verses from nearby passages *etc*. What was always required was that the translation flowed without a pause. The result would be that the hearers would not know what was text and which was commentary. I am not sure our congregations would be happy with that. Or would they?

A comparison of the Isaiah and Luke texts quickly shows this editing. If Bailey is correct, the editing is the work of Jesus rather than Luke and his sources. To understand the significance of this we need to understand the historical context of the story.

Then and now

Galilee, in the first half of the 1st century, had much in common with the West Bank today. It had become a stronghold for the Gentiles. Attempts by the Jewish residents from the south to reclaim the land resulted in settlement towns, the chief of which was Nazareth.¹⁷

Jesus knew that popular understanding linked the coming of the Messiah with recovery of sight for the blind and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel. So Jesus's reading first confirms the former, but gives a different light on the latter. By stopping at 'to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour', omitting 'and the day of vengeance of our God,' and relocating 'to comfort all who mourn', he gives a new meaning to the passage. It removes the expectation of the Jews that their enemies will experience judgment and that the land is only for the descendents of

Abraham! The rendering gives a wider Gentile expectation. No wonder Jesus was not so popular.

While it is not directly pertinent to our subject I will also comment on the crowd's reaction. English translators of the Luke passage invariably present the story to suggest that Jesus at first got a favourable reception which turned hostile. This interpretation reads awkwardly. Bailey¹⁸ and others suggest the text is more easily understood as a hostile reaction from the start. The abrupt end of the reading with its implied interpretation just mentioned prompts the crowd's displeasure to which Jesus makes his claims and quotes the famous proverb about a doctor healing himself. In *this* context the proverb is easily understood as *charity should begin at home*. In other words the judgement of God first gives victory of the Jews over their enemies—it starts at *home*. Jesus is suggesting otherwise!

So whose land is it? The Jews and a large section of the Christian church answer emphatically that it belongs to the Jews for that is to whom the promise is made. Factually the claim appears to say 'to the descendants of Judah', though most mean the descendants of Abraham¹⁹ (is this even true?²⁰).

Yet the words of Jesus we have been investigating suggest two clear things:

1. The land (the kingdom of God) is for the *meek*.
2. The land is *not* exclusively for the Jews.

Furthermore the character of the meek is to not claim rights for themselves but for the rights of others. Therefore, whoever has claim to the land, if they are to have the mind of God they will put aside their own claims for the sake of others.²¹ It is a pity that those currently in dispute about the land are not likely to follow this advice. That leaves those of us who look to another kingdom to ponder what our role should be.

So back to the beatitudes, to the fourth: *blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled* (Matthew 5:6). There is not space here to consider the huge significance of righteousness in the Hebrew Bible. Few of us have ever hungered in our lives for anything, but the audience Jesus addressed with these words will have been only too familiar with real hunger and real thirst. They would also know the importance of righteousness for the faithful, for one cannot be faithful and not seek after righteousness.

Yet seeking and striving are not enough. *The blessed are not those who arrive but those who continue, at whatever cost, in their pilgrimage toward a more perfect*

*righteousness. The constant, relentless drive toward righteousness characterises the blessed.*²²

Righteousness has to do with God and his relationship with humankind. It has to do with our relationship to him, our hopes, our desires and our relationships with other people. It is associated with *justice* and *peace*.

Jesus demonstrated what was meant by justice in the parable of the unmerciful servant.²³ Justice is about showing mercy and compassion to those weaker than ourselves. Isaiah 32 declares peace to be the consequence of righteousness.

We may pray for the peace of Jerusalem but will there ever be an answer to such a prayer until there is justice for *all* the people of the land? For this to be achieved all of *us* may need to hunger and thirst for such an outcome.

Tony Cross is retired, after pastorates in the West Midlands, London and latterly as Regional Minister in Kent. He is not to be confused with Anthony R. Cross, though he sometimes is! Email him on tony@harmonic.org.uk.

Notes to text

1. K. E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes*. SPCK, 2008.
2. *Ibid*, p 66 ff.
3. Quotations throughout are from the NIV.
4. OED, online resource.
5. *Ibid*.
6. M. R. Vincent, *Word studies in the New Testament*, vol 1, p 37 (Hendrickson, no date), His reference to Aristotle may be most useful ‘the mean between stubborn anger and the negativeness of character which is incapable of even righteous indignation’. He goes on to suggest that the NT use refers to an inner quality that carries the flavour of self-abasement.
7. H. G. Liddell & R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* 7th edn, Oxford, 1955.
8. S. C. Woodhouse, *Vocabulary of the Attic language*. Routledge & Paul, 1964.
9. Bailey, *ibid*, p 73ff.
10. *Ibid*.
11. D. A. Carson, *Expositors’ Bible commentary*, vol 8, p133. Regency, 1984.
12. Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1.

13. Woodhouse, *ibid.*.
 14. Liddell & Scott, *ibid.*
 15. Bailey, *ibid*, p 149ff has a useful comparison of versions.
 16. *Ibid*, p155ff.
 17. See Bailey chap 12 for a full discussion.
 18. *Ibid*, p152.
 19. Factually this is understood to be the descendants of Sarah, since the illegitimate Ishmael is excluded, though not in the texts!
 20. The text seems never to exclude Ishmael or his descendants from the promise of the land, only of the Covenant. See Genesis 16 ff.
 21. Could that be the interpretation of that troublesome passage (Matthew 15:21) in which Jesus appears to be very racist, rejecting the cause of a Canaanite woman only to commend her for her faith? Was this another visible lesson for his disciples on who are the citizens of the Kingdom?
 22. Bailey, *ibid*, p 77.
 23. Matthew 18:23-35.
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Peace in Palestine?

by Geoffrey Whitfield

As I wrote this, on 15 October 2010, I received an email from Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) in Jerusalem. Again they asked for volunteers to help the Palestinian farmers to gather their grape harvest. The army was supposed to protect them from the religious settlers but the soldiers left early, exposing them to the settlers who, 'threatened to crush their skulls'. On the return of the farmers the following day, they found that the grapes already harvested had been stolen. Two days earlier, on October 13, RHR had reported on the theft of the olive harvest by religious settlers elsewhere and the vandalising of hundreds of trees, which had been photographed as objective evidence by members of the Jewish human rights organisation, B'Tselem. The violence is normal for Palestinians and Jews, because such events happen every year throughout the West Bank.

One perplexing issue for the West concerns our difficulty in identifying which Jew is which. There are religious Jews who want to possess the land but are less concerned about the State of Israel than their Messianic idealism. There are secular, political Zionists, who are less concerned about the Messiah and more concerned about security and military necessities, especially the threat of Islam. There are many, many factions in between. At a different level, President Ahmadinejad of Iran continues his threatening stance against the existence of Israel. There are many confusing stories of bellicose words and actions by one against the other, so that it is hard to find a clear perspective. We will witness a long journey before the war of narratives ends.

Two major historic tragedies

Following Professor Gilbert Achcar of SOAS, the Jewish genocide, or Holocaust, is more correctly to be seen as the *Shoah*, or the ‘Tragedy’, and the post-1948 Arab scenario is known by the Arabic word, *Nakba*, meaning ‘grievous tragedy’. Both *Shoah* and *Nakba* were devastating for the people involved, through loss of life, property, homes and communities on a huge, though different scale. While acknowledged by most, there are still deniers of both tragedies. Tzipi Lipni has called for the word *Nakba* to be ‘eliminated’! Undoubtedly, the use of the word ‘Holocaust’ readily arouses images of gas chambers, concentration camps and the extermination of millions of Jews—and a justification for the State of Israel, to the cost of the long-resident Palestinian population. Sometimes it is easier to feel sympathy for the Jews rather than the Palestinians, when it should be even-handed—the histories of both are dire.

In the light of the *Shoah*, Israel receives an immediate sympathy that could more justly be perceived, were it less one-sided. If Israel were justified more on the need for Jews to escape the antisemitic pogroms in 19th and early 20th century Russia, there might well be a different emotional context around it: quite proper, but more proportionate. The effect of the *Shoah* brings with it a more purposeful and urgent dynamic because it alerts us to its inhumanity during the past 100 years. Hence the obvious need to include the place of empathy for the Arab catastrophe, or *Nakba*, in Palestine and its global diaspora. Do the Jews really need the narrative of the Holocaust? Is it crucial for them to deny the *Nakba*?

Professor Achcar distinguishes two narratives: the Israeli one of extermination, and the Arab narrative of expulsion from their land by their Hebrew cousins. By the Law of Return, any Jew can return to Israel as a citizen, whereas the pressure on Arabs living in Israel and the West Bank has often identified as similar to apartheid. Gaza

has its ongoing, calamitous story, while the contemporary scene includes the threat to Israel's very existence by its semitic cousin, President Ahmadinejad.

The noxious natures of the two extremes are increasingly evident. Instead of enemies seeking to become friends, the nations have hardly been helped by less than impartial assistance, notably from the US, the EU, the UN, or certain versions of Islam. It might reasonably be expected that Jews, who were persecuted so grievously, would recoil from any notion of oppressing others. Such is hardly the Palestinian experience. Indeed, because of its pro-Israel bias, supported by the conservative Christian bloc, US assistance has been open to criticism for decades. The intense US Christian focus on literalism in biblical interpretation, notably the Abrahamic covenant, focuses more on the exclusive possession of the land of Israel by Jews, and less on inclusive, relational godliness! Those who seek to facilitate the second coming of Christ, by bringing about the return of the Jews to Israel, seem to concede to its consequence in the murder by God of the unbelieving billions in the human race! Who would wish to be associated with such theological interpretations!

To this generation

Theological college did not prepare us for discussions at a national and international level, but was pivotal in grounding us in Biblical studies so that we could appreciate the processes of Jewish religious thought and the thrust of their conservative Christian supporters. From a political perspective, the arguments of secular politicians, who sought power sharing and land sharing between Jews and Arabs, were wide of the mark in relation to the Abrahamic covenant, which promised the land to the Jews for their exclusive, eternal possession. Moreover, this conservative claim was basic, in terms of the coming of the Messiah for the Jews, the return of Jesus Christ, and the judgement of the world by God—but there are wider biblical and political inclusive interpretations, which result in very different possibilities.

Is it the land of the Jews alone, or is it God's land? One test of its integrity is to consider the history of the people and how much they have learned from the rest of the world's errors and successes. As yet, in Israel and Palestine, there is no sign of the internalisation of Archbishop Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa. While Israelis and Palestinians each focus more on the outrages of the other, there is much to be learned and assimilated from Tutu's initiative. It is vital for the parties to recognise their contributions to, and responsibilities for, the ongoing outrages. Apologies may not come easily to ideologically focused people, but they can

be recognised as a mark of strength. The words of Isaiah come to mind: ‘Come let us reason together’, followed by words of forgiveness. This process is the mark of authentic spirituality.

The future

The Arab Peace Initiative of 2001 had great potential, but was not sufficiently supported by the East or the West, and still sits impotently on the table. Meanwhile, despite being the more powerful nation, Israel appears paranoid, xenophobic and Islamophobic, while the Palestinians appear increasingly impotent, resentful and desperate. At this time, it is hard to see how Israel can learn from its lessons of history and find its soul in ‘doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly’. I suggest that there is wisdom in Islam from which we would also benefit, as advocated by Kenneth Cragg (WHAT?). It is time for there to be closer, and humbler, exchanges of heart and mind with those who also seek for peace and justice? We know that Islam is bigger than Hizbollah. But nowhere is it easy to find enlightened religion.

A question was put to me in Bethlehem by a German film crew in the summer: how did I see the situation and what did I feel was necessary? I replied that theologians, academics and the judiciary had still to fulfil their intellectual responsibilities—which would mean creating a space between themselves and the conflicts, and to find places of objectivity, free from partiality and to find the key obstacles and objectives. Both sides see themselves as victims who need protection.

Further, there need to be projects to involve antagonists in effective teamwork. As an example, I gave the project that they had just finished filming in Israel, in which I had been involved since 2000. Youngsters, who had been fed a diet of propaganda about the dangers of the other, were put together in mixed teams, to play sport against similar, mixed teams. If they were to win, they would need to put aside their mindsets and learn to trust and play together as a team. Within five days, 2000 young people, from over 20 towns in Israel, and of Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Druze background, were able to celebrate a new way of relating with enthusiasm. Every summer, since 2001, that project has been expanded and will continue.

One natural outcome of their close contact would be an interest in the lives of their team members, including their celebrations and disasters—including learning the personal, family experiences of both the *Nakba* and the *Shoah*, the terrorism and the displacements, the freedom and experience of imprisonment by those then living be-

hind the security wall. Less than a month later, during a meeting at the House of Commons, two men sitting close to me were talking, discussing what to do with, ‘those monsters of Hamas’. I interjected and said, ‘Get your colleagues to turn their enemies into friends as we did in Israel in the summer’. Of course, a wider and more inclusive set of strategies and projects have always to be discovered and, through perseverance, implemented. Where people differ strongly, inventive minds can always find alternative strategies. Just as France and Germany had to find new policies with international help after two devastating world wars, so the world cannot continue to stand aside in relation to Israel and Palestine. As both European countries had to face their responsibilities for their parts in the conflicts and the deaths of millions, so this is part of the political and theological package in the Middle East.

The current situation

I have been fortunate to spend the past 15 years working with informed people in diplomatic, political and community work in Israel and Palestine. It is noticeable that people now come together regularly—including leading Jewish and Hamas academics. Those who gather are encouraged to speak their truth, and then to listen as others speak theirs. Others of course seek opportunities to keep people even further apart. The Israeli academics Tamar Hermann and David Newman stress that outbreaks of violence after an agreement need not stop the process—they should be expected as a strategy of spoiling! My own view, coming from an IRA background, is that we can no longer reckon to leave Islam aside, especially with the sounds coming from Iran, rather than hearing creative voices from Malaysia and Indonesia.

In 10 years’ time, there will be different movements in Israel, emerging from these grassroots. Some will be creative but some otherwise. Are we ready for them and how will we, peace creators that we are meant to be, use our theological understanding of truth and reconciliation? Is this not the time and opportunity for visionaries to do the impossible and turn it into normality? For sure, our grounded quest and ultimate responsibility are located in the words ‘Thy will be done on earth’.

Geoffrey Whitfield is now retired and helps in the Sussex University chaplaincy as well as giving a day per week in London as an ‘intern’ with an NGO that focuses on international relations in the Middle East. He can be contacted on geoffreywhitfield@btinternet.com.

Tony Cross responds to Geoff Whitfield...

Geoffrey brings us swiftly down to earth with the complex issues of today. What would Jesus make of it? Would he still weep? Certainly. Would he say, ‘a plague on all your houses’? Emphatically not. The implications are clear. If we are to ‘hunger and thirst’, it is for us convince our Christian brothers and sisters—especially some Baptists in the US—to stop allowing guilt about the Holocaust to cloud our judgement. The only hope for peace in Jerusalem is for us to call for an end to violence. Opting out is not an option.

Geoff responds to Tony...

How excellent it is that the BMF has a member who explores the biblical exegesis of a passage and another who comes to the process in terms of political theology, based on biblical analysis! In view of the inflammatory nature of the Israel—Palestine conflict and the divisive nature of the Abrahamic Covenant, both Tony Cross and I surely know that when we suggest the land of Israel is hardly the exclusive possession of the Jewish people alone then, if we are wrong, we are raising ultimate issues of morality in our understanding of the nature of God.

Baptist twinning

by David Ronco

For the past 10 years I have been involved with Baptist twinning in Israel. Our small group is linked to the Central Baptist Association and seeks to build relationships with the Arabic speaking churches belonging to the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel—about 3000 believers in 20 churches. They have informal links with their fellow Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Gaza and they also seek to build bridges with the various groups of Messianic believers. Many Christians in the UK are unaware of their existence and so we have tried to tell their story and to foster relationships between churches there and here.

Although relatively small, the Association exercises an influence beyond its size

through two institutions. Nazareth Baptist School is a 1000-roll primary and secondary school with an excellent academic record and with a quarter of its pupils coming from Muslim families. For the past three years the newly formed Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary has been providing much needed training for church leaders within the Baptist churches and other evangelical groups.

In May this year visitors from round the world joined the Association of Baptist Churches as they celebrated 100 years of Baptist witness in Israel/Palestine. It was a joy to be there with a group from the UK and see the ongoing story of God's people as they seek to develop their mission in such a deeply divided land.

It has been an enriching and challenging experience getting to know our brothers and sisters and to understand the difficult path they tread in their Christian witness. They experience something of an identity crisis as a minority within a minority. They are part of the 1 million Arabs/Palestinians living as Israeli citizens alongside the majority 6 million Jewish Israelis. While they fare better materially and enjoy more stable government than their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza they are frequently treated as second class citizens by many Jewish Israelis. Churchwise, together with Christians from the traditional Catholic and Orthodox churches, they comprise a small minority (about 10 per cent) of the majority Muslim Palestinian population in Israel. As evangelicals, the Baptists are in a tiny minority within this larger traditional Christian community. Sadly, ecumenical understanding is not advanced and the Baptists are often treated as a suspicious sect by some Orthodox and Catholic priests.

Although I have met with Palestinian Christians in the West Bank my main experience has been in developing relationships with this group of Arabic speaking Baptists in Israel. So how has this shaped my perspective on the seemingly insoluble Israel/Palestine divide? It has underlined the importance of three things.

1. Seeing the bigger picture. Sadly, so much opinion on Israel/Palestine, both secular and Christian, tends to be polarised and offers simplistic solutions. Someone has rightly said: 'If you are too pro-Israeli or too pro-Palestinian you become part of the problem and not part of the solution'. A while ago a Christian Zionist asked if she could start a prayer group for Israel in my church. When I said it had to be prayer for Israel/Palestine she did not want to know! It is easy to take sides and hard to maintain a balanced viewpoint. But the more I get to know the more I realise how complex the whole situation is. There are no easy answers and one-sided dogmatism always misses the bigger picture.

2. Supporting the body of Christ. In such a racially divided land it makes sense to en-

courage the church there in its witness to the unifying and transforming power of the Gospel. I have experienced Messianic believers and Arab Christians worshipping together and it is a powerful moment. However, it is not an easy road to follow and both sides can experience suspicion and misunderstanding from their own people when they seek to build bridges with believers 'on the other side'. They need our prayers and partnership as they seek to live out the Gospel message.

3. Discerning what God is doing. I have visited Israel many times over the past 40 years, but it is only in the past 10 years that I have really got to know God's living stones there. I have also discovered time and again that the unchallenged default position of many UK and US Christians is simply to assume that the Jews have a right to the land and that's the end of the story. Most are surprised to hear that there are vibrant Arab churches in Israel. We need a greater awareness of what is happening. Only when we see that will our thinking be expanded and our theology challenged. Through my visits I have seen how God is building his church amongst Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians. That surely shows he has a place there for both peoples.

With entrenched views on both sides it is hard to see how a two state solution could ever work successfully. With increasing hostility created by Israel's oppressive dividing wall and provocative settlement expansion and by the violent actions of extremist Palestinians there seems little chance of a just and lasting peace. But, if the Lord is building his church with Jews and Arabs then we must keep praying and working for that Gospel peace to spread and bring much needed hope for Israel and Palestine

If you would like to find out more, see our website www.centralba.org.uk/Twinning and the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, www.baptist.org.il. The Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary is organising two 28-day sabbatical study programmes for ministers this October and next April. Entitled 'Come and see', these events provide a unique opportunity to understand more of what is happening in Israel/Palestine. More information can be found on their website, www.nazarethseminary.org.

If you have found these four articles on the Middle East interesting, you may like to look at the Kairos Document, issued by Palestinian Christians, for their perspectives. Visit <http://www.kairos-palestine.ps/>, or the WCC website: <http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/resources/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/kairos-palestine-document.html>.

The power of the past

by Andrew Kleissner

As a follower of Christ, I yearn to see peace breaking out in the world. I believe that the Son of God's mission to the world had peacemaking as one of its primary aims. I long especially for peace to be established in Jesus' own land of Palestine.

But what is peace? For many people, it is merely the absence of fighting, which may range from the decisive laying down of weapons to a state of armed neutrality, a delicate balance which can so easily be tipped into conflict. While this is clearly better than active warfare, the peace we want to see brought about is much more wholesome and comprehensive. For, as Albert Einstein said, 'Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order—in short, of government'. Einstein was basing his words on those of his compatriot Spinoza, uttered three centuries earlier, who averred that 'Peace...is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice'.

It seems to me that one of the biggest barriers to lasting peace is the burden of history. Whether the sad tale of the British occupation of Ireland, the massacre of Armenians by Turks, or the long-standing animosity in the Balkans, history holds people back and trammels their thinking. Usually all the actors in a dispute view its history from a different and partial viewpoint, advantageous to themselves but condemning the other with ugly stereotypes. The truth, of course, is often much less clear-cut, as land-grabs, dispossession, revenge attacks and atrocities are often perpetrated by all parties, albeit unequally.

These prejudiced understandings may be actively encouraged, not just through biased retellings of a story but, more cynically, by sectarian politicians seeking to enhance their reputations. Bigotry may also be reinforced by public displays of nationalistic fervour, in the shape of tub-thumping military parades or dramatic presentations. In the case of Israel/Palestine, this burden of history is complicated by the inclusion of God and his story. It is impossible to balance the saga of divinely ordained occupation with the theme of a just settlement for inhabitants of all races.

So, moving forward can only come about through a loosening of ties to the past. It seems to me that this is something which Christians are uniquely placed to do (which is not to say that others have nothing to say on this topic). We believe in a Christ who, in

his death on the Cross, has taken the weight of the world's sin and pain on his shoulders. Those who repent of their sin and accept his lordship are not only exculpated from sin but are born again. For Baptist Christians in particular this belief is powerfully demonstrated in the sacrament of believers' baptism.

Reconciliation and renewal must begin with a rejection of the past's power to dominate us. We believe that Christ, who 'makes all things new', has given us the capability of doing precisely that. Clearly we cannot ignore our history, for it is one of the many forces that shapes the people we are and gives us identity. But we must refuse to allow it to determine every attitude and action, on either an individual or a collective level.

Some people may argue that we cannot 'forgive and forget', because the sufferings of the past are beyond pardon. They would say that any effort to 'begin with a clean sheet' would be unfair and unworkable because it fails to deal with earlier injustices. Although clearly true on a purely human level, it seems to me that a pervading theme of the New Testament is that of forgiveness and reconciliation, aided by God. And, as we have seen in South Africa, it is possible to apply this principle to entire societies which have been through trauma together.

Christ's actions go beyond mere victory over the chains of history, whether personal or national. For he has also battered down the barriers that divide humankind, creating a new people whose members have lost their ethnocentricity and whose first allegiance is to God. Of course, it doesn't quite work out like that in practice, but one sincerely hopes that crude nationhood has been dethroned and replaced by a generous humanity to every person who is loved by God.

We know that both the Jewish and the Palestinian peoples have been the victims of injustice. Sadly their histories of oppression have often been used to justify new acts of violence instead of being allowed to stimulate reflection and repentance. It is our mission as peacemakers to break the cycle of mutual retribution and show that a radically different approach is the only escape from this impasse. We may well feel that the task is too great, but we must make the effort: for this is a cause which surely lies close to Christ's heart.

Andrew Kleissner has been the minister of Christ Church (URC/Baptist) in Ipswich since 2005. His parents left Germany at the end of 1938 and settled in the UK. Andrew is a member of the Baptist Peace Fellowship but his views are his own. He can be contacted on ministercci@btconnect.com.

Points of view

And what about hymns...? by Brian Hill

After reading the article by Anthony Thacker in January's *bmj*, and the responses in April by Michael Ball and Geoffrey Griggs, I wonder if I dare do the unthinkable in today's climate, and speak up for worship which still needs the hymn.

I refer readers to *And now let's move into a time of nonsense* by Nick Page, who writes from within a culture of predominantly worship songs. Although Page does not want to return to hymns, he laments the standard of words written for worship songs. It seems that a common practice is to write the (pop?) music and then to try to write suitable words (lyrics!). This writing method is the very opposite of the classic hymns, where good words were enhanced by the use of a tune selected to support their meaning.

My father was an organist many years ago, and one of his skills was to choose a tune that was satisfying to sing, but also helped the phrasing and meaning of the words. The hymn, properly used, does not intrude clumsily into worship, but helps it along, by its expressions of adoration, joy, thanksgiving, penitence, intercession and so on, all integral parts of worship. I listened quite recently to the *Daily Service* on Radio 4, and heard Roy Jenkins use *Love divine* to support his words beautifully. Only the best hymns survive from other eras, but there are also many fine new hymns being written still to enrich our worship. Fred Pratt Green, Brian Wren, Fred Kaan and John Bell are just some of these hymn writers.

I recognise that in numerous churches the popularity of the worship song is enormous, but so often the shape of worship is lost and the 'time of worship' (what a tragic phrase in its presumption) denies what is happening in the remainder of the activity. There are people who are not only not helped by such activities, but are even deterred—many are thinking people who struggle to find a church whose worship offers them time and space to think and reflect. The material within much modern worship so often fails to allow the mind to grapple with the gospel.

Some of us find it difficult to cope, not with what is imposed in current worship, but with what is needlessly jettisoned. However, we live in a society better educated than earlier generations, and what must be preserved is an environment of worship that allows people to approach God in reverence, with praise and penitence, and then to hear and receive the Word of God, and the gospel sacraments, with the space and time to

think, reflect, and respond.

Brian Hill is now retired and living in Leicestershire. He can be contacted at brianchris@btinternet.com.

Where does priority lie? By Bob Allaway

While I sympathise with the criticism of many modern worship songs by Ball and Griggs in April's *bmj* (and the questions raised by Thacker in January). I want to make a positive rejoinder and issue a challenge to other pastors.

The past few decades have seen an abundance of fine modern hymns written by the likes of Timothy Dudley Smith, Christopher Idle, John Bell *etc.* I would particularly draw your attention to Martin Leckebusch, whose work needs to be known more widely. Such hymns are in modern language, poetic, solidly biblical and often deal with a wide range of emotions and life situations. Since they are usually in standard metres, it is easy to find familiar tunes to which they can be sung. The best worship songs of Stuart Townend and Graham Kendrick (which are effectively hymns) have equally good words, with memorable, singable tunes.

Now the challenge: my congregation gets to sing such hymns because I take the trouble to find them. I am not a 'one-man-band' minister. I have a worship committee that plans Sunday morning services with me (starting with the Bible reading for that service, and where I think I may be going with it in the sermon). They make sure we have some worship songs as well as hymns, so all members of the congregation are able to respond to God. But the bottom line is that I am responsible before God for the spiritual wellbeing of my church. If I believe something the group suggests is heretical or unsingable, I will veto it, and the members expect this. Brothers and sisters, I fear that many of our number have abdicated this responsibility to a worship leader, whose priorities may be musical rather than pastoral.

Bob Allaway is pastor of Eldon Road Baptist Church, Wood Green, and he can be contacted at robert.allaway@o2.co.uk.

God's wrath satisfied? By Colin Sedgwick

Thanks to Michael Ball for his piece on Christian worship in April's *bmj*. I found myself nodding vigorously in agreement at much of what he said, though I think he is rather hard on Graham Kendrick and Stuart Townend who, in my judgement, are superb when at their best.

But I must take issue with his comments regarding Townend's (and Keith Getty's) lines, *Till on that cross as Jesus died/ The wrath of God was satisfied*. Michael dislikes being presented with the idea of 'penal substitution/satisfaction', a theory he describes as 'both offensive and vacuous'.

First, a bit of friendly pedantry. Vacuous means 'empty, devoid of meaning or substance'. But if something is empty—if there is really nothing there—how can it offend? If something is vacuous, it may bore and annoy, but it can't cause offence. If something is offensive, it must have some content (which the theory of penal substitution certainly does, however wrong you may consider it to be!)—it can't be vacuous.

More to the point, I do understand that the whole notion of divine wrath needs to be hedged around with qualifications to safeguard against crude and misleading ideas. I am sure that Michael would agree that the wrath of God, however we understand it, is a given of scripture, running through both Testaments. Even if we take the view that it is a primitive way of talking about an impersonal chain of cause-and-effect, that chain was presumably set in motion by God (who or what else?), so that doesn't exactly let him (God) off the hook.

Unless we are prepared simply to airbrush the whole uncomfortable notion out of scripture, we are left with a question that may seem rather naive, but which still requires an answer: if there is indeed such a thing as the wrath of God, what actually happens to it? Where does it go? How is it dealt with? Does God simply decide to either cancel the cause-and-effect chain (if you take the impersonal view), or to stop being wrathful (if you take the more traditional view)? And if so, why? What happens to bring about that change? Or is the wrath still somehow eternally in operation, a bit like that radioactive waste that we are told will still be polluting the planet centuries from now?

It is questions like these that lead me to the key question. Is there really no connection at all between the wrath of God and the cross of Christ? My own view is that there is indeed some real sense in which God can be angry with us, and that therefore part of the purpose of the cross was, as it were, to soak up that anger. There are plenty of scriptural passages which are, to say the very least, susceptible to that interpretation. Not that God was vindictively 'taking it out on Jesus', but rather that he was 'in Christ', reconciling the world to himself. I think this is essential to a properly balanced atonement theology—and will accordingly continue gladly to sing Townend's stirring words.

Colin Sedgwick is minister of Lindsay Park Baptist Church. He can be contacted at colsedg@hotmail.com.

Reviews

edited by John Houseago

New monasticism as fresh expression of church

Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby & Aaron Kennedy (eds)
Canterbury Press, 2010
ISBN 978 1 84825 044 4

Reviewer: Bob Allaway

Don't ignore this review because the book title seems esoteric to you. One feature of 'monasticism' is commitment to a 'rule'—relevant to a live issue for us: how does traditional Baptist church membership work in an era in which people avoid joining anything or making any sort of commitment? Also, how can our churches become 'intentional communities', to compensate for such things as the break-down of traditional family structures and the support they provide? I read this book hoping to find possible answers to these two questions.

It is published in a series, *Ancient faith, future mission*. Being a collection of chapters by different authors could make for repetition, but where ideas recur (such as 'accountability'), the understand-

ing of them is enriched. In the opening chapter, Graham Cray speaks of 'character formation' as 'the key to growth in discipleship' and 'this...has a much greater chance of success in community.' He warns that not all interest in new monasticism is motivated by mission. Still, these chapters contain interesting stories of new forms of church that are reaching those lost to the old. These are often the work of Anglicans, who are able to relate directly to a bishop without being tied to a local church. How relevant are such works to us?

The two chapters which I found most approachable were by Shane Claiborne and Tom Sine. Amidst Claiborne's twelve *Marks of new monasticism*, I especially appreciated 'celebrating singleness and marriage', with its reminder of 'the gift of singleness that Paul spoke so highly of, and that Jesus celebrates'. (I am happily married, but most of my members are singles.) Sine dives straight into the global recession and increasing cost of housing, to launch his chapter, *Creating communities of celebration, sustainability and subversion*. Both these chapters might be shared beneficially with younger members of my church. The *Afterword* recalls Sine's quotation of Claiborne's vision: 'another world is possible...necessary... already here!'

Did I find it worth studying this book?

Yes, but not so much that I would have paid for it! It did not provide answers to my questions, but gave me pointers to finding my own. Its value probably depends on the questions you bring.

Gospel for starters

Mike Smith

Athena Press, £9.99

ISBN 978-1- 84748-681-3

Reviewer: Bob Little

The words ‘Gospel according to Mark, translated and with commentary’ appear on the title page of this book by Mike Smith. That summary is not only succinct, it is also about as accurate as anyone could get in eight words.

Having confessed to being ‘fluent in classical Greek’, Smith explains that he had already published his translation of Mark’s gospel—under the title ‘Mike’s Mark’. Adding the commentary is the result of having worked with people who are new to the Christian faith and who are confused by Mark’s gospel and struggle to understand its full meaning.

After a few words about John Mark—including that he was probably killed in Rome alongside Peter during Nero’s persecution—and his gospel writing style (more *Daily Mirror* than *Times* or *Guardian*), Smith embarks on his version of

Mark, splitting the story into 14 chapters. After the first chapter, they bear little resemblance to the gospel’s traditional chapter markings but they provide useful ‘compartments’ for the modern mind to relate to Mark’s story. Smith includes ‘the first battles’ (Mark 2:1—3:35); ‘bigots’ (Mark 6:7—7:23) and ‘actions that demand a verdict’ (Mark 7:24—8:26). There is also glossary, which is useful for those who want to check out the exact timing of the Jewish Sabbath; the constituents of the three sets of coinage in concurrent use in Judea in Jesus’ day; the cultural implications of having your own tomb, and much more.

Smith’s translation, which displays the supreme confidence—some might say arrogance—of the accomplished linguist, is direct and simple, faithfully delivering Mark’s direct and action-packed narrative into modern English. Inevitably, this makes it light on poetical turns of phrase but, given the audience for whom it is intended, this is a major plus point. The commentary uses similarly straightforward language and raises the sort of issues much beloved by those leading ‘Christianity explored’ discussion groups.

The book has much to recommend it as self-study material for those enquiring about or new to the Christian faith. It could also be beneficial as the basis for group study, perhaps with young people.