

**the baptist ministers'  
journal**

**July 2012 volume 315**

***Desert island books***

David Coffey

***New monasticism***

Geoff Colmer

***Associating***

Andy Goodliff

***Environmental issues***

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**Contents**

<i>Desert island books (David Coffey)</i>	3
<i>New monasticism</i>	7
<i>Whatever happened to associating?</i>	14
<i>Care for the creation</i>	19
<i>The inspired Word of God?</i>	22
<i>Point of view: human righteousness</i>	27
<i>Reviews</i>	29
<i>Of interest to you</i>	37

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# From the editor

## *The Lady's piano*

One of the stories that captured my imagination about Aung San Suu Kyi was the account of her piano, which she was allowed to use in her home while under house arrest. From time to time, a piano tuner was allowed to enter the house and put the piano to rights for her. I was fascinated by the oddness combined with ordinariness of this tenuous contact with the world outside. The piano tuners considered it a great honour to tune the piano belonging to this iconic woman, 'The Lady'. For her, it was a visit from the outside world.

Recently, Suu Kyi has been able to visit Europe freely, to receive degrees, give speeches in person, and to visit Oxford, where once she was a happy family woman. One of the things she said was that, while in captivity, she had no idea how much people cared about her cause, and she had been very moved by discovering the profound level of support that existed.

In our own time and culture, in which communication is full and unrestricted, how vital it is that we do not just hold quietly our views, beliefs, and respect for others, but that we actually articulate them. Our 'dialogues' with others not only shape the space between us, but form both parties as human beings. A hard word, or a misjudged silence, can damage someone deeply, while a word of encouragement or a warm silence can be a gift of life. A lifetime of accumulated dialogue and relationships leaves deep marks on people.

So here is a call both to personal pastoral engagement, and to fellowship within our Union, Associations, and churches—for this dialogue shapes us at every level, and at no time has it ever been needed more than during this thinking about the 'Future'. It is not good for a human to be alone, and the call of Christ is to love one another, which means an intentional fellowship even with those to whom we do not naturally feel warm because they are 'old' or 'young', 'liberal' or 'narrow'. We are simply too small a denomination to hold these divisions, to disparage others, and whatever the Future looks like, we need one another. *Do not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day.* SN

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## David Coffey's

### *Desert island books*



When the news was shared with my family that I had been invited to select three volumes as my desert island books, the big question was whether my absence from home would be during the football or the cricket season? Despite an abiding passion for both sports neither pastime features in my final choice of books! After some delightful meandering through dozens of possible choices I have chosen three juggernauts whose combined weight amounts to nearly 10kg with a total number of 3254 pages. With all this excess baggage I must have an agreement with the *bmj* editor that my chosen reading is waiting for me on the desert island!

My first choice is *The Times Comprehensive atlas of the world*, the world's most prestigious and authoritative atlas, claimed by Ranulph Fiennes to be the greatest on earth and the ultimate starting point for planning any adventure or expedition. Maps fascinate me as I have visited almost 100 countries, in six of the seven continents, and I am open to suggestions on how I can obtain a preaching invitation from the frozen acres of Antarctica! What a beautiful experience it is to turn the pages of this Lamborghini of an atlas. The naming of every country with its national flag, capital city and date of independence is a cruciverbalist's delight.

My leisure time on the island will be to find the hundreds of places I have visited and to recall the people I have met during my global travels. I will retrace the road from Dimipur to Kohima in Nagaland and think of a scary drive on a winding dirt track early on a Sunday morning; locating Kinshasa, Upoto and Pimu will bring back memories of a visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo and a boat ride on the River Congo when the temperature was 43C; finding the route the bullet train takes from Shanghai to Hangzhou will refresh the inspiration of visiting the 5000-seat Chongyi church; while tracking the Chilean coast road from Santiago to Valparaiso I will remember the vineyards and coastal fish restaurants of this port city, termed the 'jewel of the Pacific'; I will relive the scenic drive down the Great Ocean road south

of Melbourne and I will pour over the sprawling miles of Kazakhstan and remember a December journey through the ice-packed roads of Almaty. Locating the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia I can visualise huge flocks of migrating sandpipers, which used the mudflats as feeding grounds *en route* to South America. The map of Armenia will revive nightmares of a hair-raising night-time journey with a 'mad' pastor driving from Tbilisi to Yerevan; locating the border crossing between Hungary and Serbia will bring back memories of visiting families in war-torn Novi Sad a few weeks after NATO bombs had destroyed the roads and bridges of the city.

During my daily devotions I plan to use the atlas as a prayer diary, choosing a country per day and recalling churches I have visited and pastors I count as personal friends. The CPC countries (countries of particular concern) listed by Human Rights Watch will have a particular prayer focus as I remember the 250 million believers in 60 countries denied their basic human right of religious liberty.

My second book is *A history of Christianity: the first three thousand years*, by Diarmaid MacCulloch, which I have chosen for the expertise of the author, who is a polymath with an extraordinary range of knowledge in numerous subject areas.

I am in awe of this mammoth work and it intrigues me that the author describes himself as a critical friend of the Christian faith. MacCulloch was brought up in a Suffolk parsonage (he depicts his father as a man with a high view of episcopacy but a

low view of bishops) and says his book is church history from the rectory window. He dedicates the book to a faithful friend 'who has managed to persist in affirming a Christian story'. He puzzles over Christian faith wondering 'how something so apparently crazy can be so captivating to millions'. I love his description of the gospels as downmarket biographies, because they allow ordinary people to reflect on their experience of Jesus while the powerful stand on the sidelines. I affirm his hope at the conclusion of his book 'that Christianity has yet to reveal all its secrets'.

The 92 pages of footnotes and suggestions for further reading is a continual feast, although

...I plan to  
use my  
atlas as a  
prayer  
diary...

reading these pages on a desert island will be frustrating with no online access to library facilities! The book is rich in theological debates, prayers, hymn lines, and pithy quotes that will keep my mind stimulated between collecting water and stockpiling wood for the fire.

I have lived with this book since it was published and tucked inside my copy is a review by Rowan Williams. It's an appreciative critique that you can find on *The Guardian's* website, and provides an insight into what an Oxford tutorial must have been like with Archbishop Rowan. When I am rescued from my desert island I will request an afternoon with Professor MacCulloch. I will first thank him for his spirit of generosity to all traditions

in this *magnum opus* and then humbly provide him with evidence for including an even stronger English Free Church perspective to his revised edition of the book.

My third book is the *Gramophone classical music guide (GCMG)*. I have subscribed to *The Gramophone* magazine for over 40 years, and this annual volume is considered the most authoritative guide to the best classical recordings by the world's leading music critics. It has brief biographies of major composers from Adams to Zemlinsky, and compares the best recordings with star ratings.

From childhood, music has been my love and inspiration and most days I am listening to music streamed from the digital music service Spotify. My earliest memories of musical influence include piano lessons with Marjorie Hellyer who accurately prophesied that my ability to play anything by ear would hamper my discipline of sight reading; I enjoyed membership in the junior school choir that was led enthusiastically by my music master Geoffrey Tristram, the organist at Christchurch Priory. I recall memorable visits in the late 1940s to the Bournemouth Winter Gardens for concerts by the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra (later the BSO), which was building a national reputation under its Austrian conductor Rudolf Schwarz, who had been a prisoner in the Nazi concentration camp of Belsen. But my burgeoning musical career came off the rails in St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Bournemouth, when I fell off the piano stool during an exam and the examiner kindly recorded: 'This piece had vitality

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inspiration

in spite of one slight stumble!

I have selected for my luxury item on the desert island a 64GB iPad, on which I hope to have pre-stored some of my favourite music albums (more eclectic than the classical *resumé* which follows). I will relish reading the critics' notes in the *GCMG* as I listen to the spiritually intense *German requiem* by Brahms (Otto Klemperer version) and recall the personal spiritual roots to Eric Whitacre's *Water night*, which enhances the listening experience of his music. His adaptation of e e cummings' words, 'I thank you God for this most amazing day,' would be a perfect way to start an early morning biblical reflection on the island. For the end of the day I might select Tchaikovsky's invitation to worship with his heart-stopping *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*, and if I need an adrenaline rush I will choose the mercurial performance of Rachmaninov's *Third piano concerto* with Martha Argerich's seismic final movement.

If I am feeling morose then the *Adagio* from the Schubert String Quintet, Elgar's *Elegy for strings* or his *Cello concerto* (Du Pre's EMI 1965 recording) will be a soothing consolation, and remind me of friends who suffer from long-term depression who testify that when words fail to get through, then music speaks to the soul in the valley of despair.

For the Christian festivals I would select one of the Bach *Cantatas* from the outstanding *Bach millennium edition* by John Eliot Gardiner. This ambitious project recorded all 198 surviving cantatas by J.S.Bach and was accomplished in one year with 59 concerts performed in 50 cities in 13 countries. I often play these discs for spiritual inspiration when I have a writing project.

Having devoured this compendious music guide I hope I would emerge from the island with the capacity to share my newfound knowledge on lesser known Polish composers like Henryk Wieniawski and Tadeusz Zeligowski!

As I prepare to depart I am collecting desert island ideas and stories that will bring inspiration and encouragement and I share one from the collection. A traveller is stranded for several months on a small desert island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and one day notices a bottle in the sand with a piece of paper in it. 'Due to lack of maintenance', he reads, 'we regretfully have had to cancel your email account'.

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# New monasticism

by Geoff Colmer

I'm not a great fan of reality television, but *The monastery*, shown seven years ago, was a compelling account of five men spending time at Worth Abbey. It provided an insight into the spiritual journey and monastic life. This series was followed by *Convent*, about four women on a similar journey; and three years ago *The big silence* filmed five men and women on an individually guided Ignatian retreat at St Bueno's in North Wales. Then, one of the most inspiring films I've seen over the past few years has been *Of gods and men*, based on the life of a group of Trappist monks in an impoverished Algerian community under threat by fundamentalist terrorists, and their crucial decision of whether to leave or stay. More recently I watched *Into great silence*, a documentary about the life of a reclusive Carthusian order in France—no dialogue, no soundtrack, yet stunning reviews.

All of this may just be part of the appetite of our society for things 'spiritual', but it provides an engagement with that which is profoundly Christian and which has an ancient history. So, what is new monasticism (NM)? It only makes sense if it is viewed through the lens of traditional monasticism.

## Something old

What did monasticism ever do for us? Well, quite a lot actually! Christianity has no monopoly on monasticism, but in a specifically Christian sense it is rooted in the scriptures. Christian monastics have always understood their vocation in the light of the great prophetic and desert figures such as Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist, as well as the Wisdom tradition. Christ himself—in his withdrawal into the desert at the beginning of his ministry, in his celibacy, and in the radical claims of the gospel, in his privileging of the poor, and especially in his suffering, death and resurrection—is seen as the primary model of the Christian monastic. In the *koinonia* of the early church, including the sharing of goods, we have something of the seeds of monasticism.

It was in the early fourth century that monastic life became clearly established, in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria, and in the households of bishops such as

Augustine, and the Cappadocians. Antony of Egypt is its principal father, not least because of the very influential *Life of Antony* written by Athanasius in ca 357.

Besides the solitary lives and the communities of hermits, monastic communities soon emerged, particularly through Pachomius, a younger contemporary of Antony, who organised communities with clear structures. But the more solitary form continued to flourish and the wisdom of the desert *abbas* and *ammās* was recorded in various collections of the *Sayings of the desert fathers*. John Cassian brought this rich experience into the West and made it available through his writings.

In the West, early Christian history is significantly monastic, with Ninian, who brought a missionary form of monasticism to England before the end of the fourth century; Germanus, who visited England in the fifth century; Patrick and his monastic mission to Ireland in the fifth century; and Columba in the seventh century and his foundation of Iona. Celtic Christianity, which was emphatically monastic, spread from Iona throughout much of England. Benedict, who died in 550, wrote his Rule by drawing wisdom from Basil, Cassian, Augustine and many other earlier monastic sources. Elements of this Rule include the balanced daily rhythm of divine office, *lectio divina*, and work, all expressed within community in Christ.

Pope Gregory transformed his own Roman home into a monastery, and from that community sent out Augustine and his group of monastic missionaries, who founded monasteries and schools, established provinces, dioceses and parishes, laying the foundation for the English church of the Middle Ages and beyond. By the 10th century the Rule of St Benedict had become the standard monastic rule in the West.

Other notable monastics include Cuthbert, Hilda, the Venerable Bede, and Anselm. Francis and Clare are not included because they were not monastics in the strict sense. This brings into focus something that is important in relation to NM: the distinction between monks and friars. Monks were members of an enclosed or cloistered monastic order, while friars were those who had no vow of stability and were active in the community. They were members of a religious order rather than a monastery. Francis was a friar who gave particular emphasis to poverty. He was itinerant and therefore dependent on begging alms, finding his inspiration in ‘following in the footsteps’ of Christ.

Western monasticism experienced both declines and reforms throughout the Middle Ages. With the Reformation Luther, who was a monk, attacked monasticism as ‘works righteousness’ and spiritual elitism, and in England, Henry VIII began the dissolution of the monasteries. Several early Anabaptist leaders were formerly monks and something of the intentionality of monasticism went with them into their radical reforms, and indeed some of the communities that subsequently emerged and remain with us today.

## Something borrowed

NM is more difficult to chart than monasticism, because it is new and diverse. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove writes, in *New monasticism: what it has to say to today's church*, 'In the history of the church, it's nothing new to look around and find our institutions severely compromised. Ours is a tragic story. But it is also a story of hope. In every era God has raised up new monastics to pledge their allegiance to God alone and remind the church of its true vocation...they found hope in the story of the people of God and strove to get back to the roots of that story'. He, like a number of others, including the Northumbria Community, quotes Bonhoeffer writing to his brother in 1935, 'The restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of new monasticism which has in common with the old only the uncompromising attitude of life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Christ' (*Testament to freedom*).

Over the past couple of decades Emerging Church has developed, and some NM communities are offshoots of it, but their inspiration comes from a conscious drawing on religious orders of the past to inform present understandings of movements of mission—though NM isn't necessarily a movement of mission. Ian Mobsby, a founding member of the Moot Community, based in the City of London, observes that NM is a new, not just a renewing, movement. It seems to have emerged in three forms.

1. The first group identifies with the monk tradition, establishing new places for prayer and contemplation and gathering communities of people for worship and loving action in the local community with the de-churched and never-churched. Many have a strong sense of seeking to catch up with what God is already doing in his work of reconciling all things. There is a focus which seeks the sacred in the ordinary, and in this sense they have a Benedictine vision of 're-monking' the church. Examples include Contemplative Fire in West Sussex and Sheffield, mayBe in Oxford, and the Northumbria Community.

2. The second group of NMs identifies with the friar tradition. These groups are also committed to seeking the sacred in the ordinary but follow a different model. While the first gathers for worship and action, and then disperses away from the meeting place, this second group tends to move into an area either as single households of pioneers or as intentional communities. The vision here follows the example of the Celtic wandering monastics, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, and is concerned to 're-friar' the church. Examples include the Simple Way Community in Philadelphia and the Sojourner Community in San Francisco. The Order for Mission from the Philadelphia Centre in Sheffield is one of a number of UK expressions of this form.

Both these groupings of new monks and new friars have a vision of social transformation, mission and evangelism through cultural engagement in differing forms. Both draw on contemplative spirituality reframed for the 21st century.

3. The third form combines monk and friar models. Examples are the 24/7 Boiler Room communities, and the Moot Community. As an example, Moot seeks to create a sacred place to which people pilgrimage, coming from the monk tradition. But alongside this the community seeks to establish an intentional community, realising a vision of daily prayer and shared living, a base from which people are sent out to seek social transformation and justice, which is the friar tradition. There is also a formal rhythm of life as its anchor. This type may be where there is the most growth in NM.

These diverse NMs show a number of emphases (as follows), which do not exist in separate compartments. There is repeated overlap and coalescence.

*Spirituality.* Some pattern of prayer is shared, often expressing itself in the daily office, consisting of morning, midday, evening and night prayer. There is attention to scripture, and to sacrament. Stillness and silence—an emphasis upon the contemplative—is a common feature.

*Shared rhythm or rule of life.* This is less a list of rules than a holistic and healthy ‘framework for freedom’. A rule captures and articulates the core values and vocation of a community. One of the repeated emphases of all NMs is a passionate love for God and a determination to follow Jesus as a whole-life, lifelong commitment.

*Mission.* While some NMs may not define themselves primarily as mission movements, mission is a consistent emphasis. Mobsby speaks of modelling some form of radical mission and generosity to groups of people and individuals outside their spiritual community with a focus on never-churched spiritual seekers who are looking for a spiritual path. Consistently, there is an emphasis upon enabling people to know God but also to experience God. More generally, life is seen as mission, celebrating the sacramental presence of God in all things.

*Discipleship.* Graham Cray couples the emphasis upon mission with discipleship, ‘NM is not automatically connected to a missional motive, but to the extent that it enables Christians to be authentic disciples in a changing culture, it can only enhance the mission of God through the Church’. Mobsby observes that NMs need to be radical in discipleship, called to be countercultural, facing up to the darker side of culture and the consequences of consumerism. Some discipleship courses are good at enabling commitment to Jesus but not so good on living the faith in a complex world. Graham Cray puts it more bluntly, ‘Anyone who has written a discipleship course which hasn’t engaged with consumerism hasn’t written a discipleship course that’s

needed'. He goes on to say that 'the key to growth in discipleship in this context is character formation, not intellectual instruction alone'. And he stresses the need for community for this to happen.

*Creativity.* The thread of creativity, innovation, improvisation, in both spirit and practice, seems to weave its way through all of these expressions.

### **Critique of NMs**

Positively, we might note the following.

- \* In many expressions of NM there is a new energy for relational mission and evangelism centred on the importance of being community, by imitating Christ.

- \* There is a new zeal for Christian discipleship which helps people to engage with the the ancient spiritual traditions.

- \* There is a vital focus upon spirituality as a journey of life around the question, 'How should we live?', resulting in articulating Christian values based on social, ethical, economic and ecological justice.

- \* Through a spiritual rule or a rhythm of life, there is a necessary emphasis not just upon orthodoxy but orthopraxy, expressed with intentionality and with accountability.

Positively these emphases are vital for 21st century Christianity and for the task of mission, especially where a new cohort of spiritual seekers increasingly reject organised religion. Roy Searle asks, 'Could it be that one of the things we need is a "re-habiting" of the Church? Could a new wave of monasticism help the British church return to its first love? Might it just be that the values of community, commitment to prayer, devotion to the ways of God, and a way of life based upon the Sermon on the Mount would provide a vital stimulus to a church in exile?'. He suggests that it is 'new monasticism' that is regarded as being of greater significance than most other expressions of church because it invites us into a deeper spiritual life.

Negatively, we might note the following.

- \* Is NM another fad? Is this the next thing that will save the church if not the world? A friend in a religious order says, 'I think new monasticism is a renewal in the Holy Spirit for people who live in a society that is disintegrating to some extent, and I find that exciting and incredibly promising for the life of the Church. On the other hand, it could be a fad. Friars were the new monks once. Eight hundred years later we are still around, but we have to keep adapting to the world we live in or we will lose our purpose and die'. The monastic tradition is characterised by a commitment to the long haul.

\* Like many of the expressions of Emerging Church, is this a reaction from those who are disillusioned, maybe rightly so, but disaffected nonetheless? It may be the catalyst for new and vibrant life, but might also be a wound which remains unhealed. The fact is that the church in any form is far from perfect this side of eternity.

### **Some questions**

Is NM just another expression of consumerism? Another choice? There can be a romanticism about community. Bonhoeffer comments: 'He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself become a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial', while Jean Vanier says 'We shouldn't seek the ideal community. It's a question of loving those whom God has set beside us today'.

The same friend from a religious order says 'People do sometimes romanticise monasticism, maybe because as guests they experience the blessings without particularly having to persevere with the long-term (even lifelong) commitments to awkward, infuriating brothers and sisters'. If that's true of traditional monasticism then it's likely to be true of NM.

Is NM sustainable? This is a big question, and one that can't be answered, though I suggest that if NM has no authentic mission focus, however that is expressed, it is unlikely to be sustainable.

How does it relate ecclesially? Does it remain connected and is in some way an expression of the church or is it at risk of becoming another church? I value Roy Searle's emphasis upon the contribution that NM can make to the church in terms of re-habiting it.

These are questions that aren't easily answered but need to be held.

### **Baptists**

What part do Baptists play in this movement?

In 1997 Margaret Jarman and Evelyn Pritty formed a Baptist Community, The Community of the Prince of Peace, in Carterton, Oxfordshire, under the guidance of Burford Priory. The Community moved to Derbyshire and closed in 2002, but the contribution it made during its short life remains significant—although it needs to be seen as within the monastic tradition and not NM. In Breakwater, Victoria, Australia, there is a Baptist expression of monasticism, The Community of Transfiguration, which is

described as ‘a compelling adaptation of historic Christian monastic traditions to contemporary life’. This is a continuation of the life and witness of a 135-year old Baptist congregation while drawing on classic sources of Christian monasticism.

In the UK Baptists seem to be more linked to Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church models which don’t claim to be NM but have an emphasis upon pioneer church planting and mission—I think particularly of the Incarnate Network and Urban Expression. They share a number of characteristics with NM, and Urban Expression has a daily liturgy with daily readings, reflective exercises and prayers.

The Northumbria Community, while far from solely Baptist, has had significant Baptist involvement, especially through Roy Searle. I want to acknowledge with huge gratitude the rich gift that this expression of NM has been for us as Baptists. Many ministers, from all kinds of theological backgrounds, use the Celtic daily prayer and have been to the mother house in Northumbria. And the emphasis that Roy has repeatedly brought to us upon ‘the one thing’, seeking God, is at the heart of monasticism, old and new.

The Order for Mission based at the Philadelphia Centre in Sheffield is another ecumenical expression of NM which has significant Baptist involvement.

Over the past three years I have been part of a group that has established an Order for Baptist Ministry, and I quote, ‘who see ministry as a living means of grace to the church as together we mediate the presence of Christ in the world’. Our priority is ‘to encourage patterns and rhythms of relationship and devotional life that sustain this way of being’. We would say that we are not NM but resonate with a number of aspects, particularly in our commitment to prayer and attentiveness using a daily office, and our commitment to gather in a cell. In January of this year a number of us made our initial vows.

It would seem that monasticism has been instrumental in preserving the gospel during those ‘dark ages’ of our history and passing on the gospel to those who have not heard, and at its best has served the whole church to live out its calling to follow Christ faithfully. If we should find ourselves entering something of a ‘dark ages’ in Europe in the years ahead, then NM may well have a part to play.

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# Whatever happened to associating?

by Andy Goodliff

In his 1986 study, *A question of identity*, Brian Haymes observed that ‘it is a disturbing feature of our present Baptist ways that association life is marginal to most congregations’. Over 20 years later, it seems little has changed, since he and two colleagues have recently commented that ‘more attention should be paid by local churches to the associations of which they are members’. This immediately provokes the question of why Baptists find little time or desire to associate with one another. In answer to the question Barrie White claims that ‘across three and half centuries, if Baptists have to choose between the independence of the local church and cooperation in fellowship with an association, they have chosen independence’.

## Beginnings

Associating can be traced back to the 17th century. The Particular Baptist confession of 1646 acknowledged that individual congregations shared common ground with others. In the 1677 confession this was made more explicit, to the extent that Stephen Copson argues that there was an ‘association ecclesiology’, which ‘had been absorbed into doctrinal Confession and church practice’. This cooperation was not yet the formalised structure that we recognise today as association, but a more practical ‘process of associating’. However, Copson argues that ‘associational thinking was by then an integral part of the Baptist tradition’. The local church was still independent, but that ‘independence was set within the context of associated churches’. Copson says that Baptists chose to associate because ‘they were able to perceive the activity of God beyond their own congregation’; while Nigel Wright argues that it was because ‘early Baptists were conscious of the dangers of isolation and sought to guard themselves against this by developing associations’.

The 1964 Baptist Union Report of The Commission on the Associations notes that ‘the development of the Baptist Union over the 150 years of its existence has gone on without a great deal of serious consideration ever being given to its relationship to the Associations’. The report also identifies ‘two matters which are producing a feeling of anxiety amongst us: the basic motive for existence of associations’ and the question of

authority as it is related to the Union and to the association. These remain, 50 years later, unresolved issues.

Peter Shepherd's study of John Howard Shakespeare has demonstrated that there was an increasing centralisation under Shakespeare, that is, 'the shift in the focus of denominational life away from local congregations and associations towards the Union'. Shepherd argues that the introduction of general superintendents saw the responsibilities that had been held by associations become reduced and 'their importance as expressions of inter-church fellowship was greatly weakened'. While 'associations were historically the product of local churches and ministers desiring fellowship with one another', the introduction of superintendents was part of Shakespeare's belief that 'the work of the churches could only be done by means of a centralised administrative structure, dependent on the Union'. The result was 'the dramatic and permanent decline in the importance of associations'. Associations are now bypassed in the relationship between local church and Union; they are largely defunct. The question becomes, if associations disappeared and regional ministers were centrally employed by the Union, would anything change? My suspicion is that in many areas—not much.

### ***Relating and resourcing***

Despite the reforms that emerged following the 1998 report, *Relating and resourcing*, which saw it become the responsibility of local associations to call, employ and pay regional ministers, a move back to the centrality of associations has not occurred. After *Relating and resourcing*, the Baptist Union moved from 29 geographical associations to 13 regional associations, which increased the geographical size of many associations, and as a result, in some places (I would argue) added to the decline in association life—in places the distance to travel is just too large to make associating workable. The task group that wrote the report may well respond that their desire was to see more associating or relating and that this does not have to be institutional, ie through the structures of associations. They also recognised, positively, that many Baptist churches were 'associating' in local ecumenical structures more than perhaps they were with other Baptists churches. The irony is that an increase in ecumenical relationships (from historically wary Baptists) has generated a decreasing 'need' or 'desire' to relate denominationally.

One other (contributing) potential area of weakness is the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle—the basis on which churches join the Union—which identifies the autonomy of the local church, without any reference to associating. So article one reads: *That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute*

*authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws.*

In their 1997 study *Something to declare*, the college principals at the time argued that the article does not set out the 'independence' of the church. They note first that the Declaration says that 'each church has liberty' and not 'autonomy' or 'independence'. Secondly, that the Declaration stresses the 'authority of Christ', not the authority of the local church, and 'Christ is calling [each church] to covenant with others'. White's view is that this 'sounds to me all too much like an assertion of unbridled independency'. John Colwell adds that it is 'woefully inadequate, if not ecclesologically erroneous'. He goes on to suggest that the statement is a 'blatant denial of catholicity for the sake of a radical autonomy'. Both urge that 'there should be some explicit reference to associating'. The lack of reference assists the notion that associations are optional and voluntary, and that the key relationship is between church and Union, and even this relationship is a minimal one from the church's perspective. Colwell is surely right in saying 'if our covenanting is to be meaningful, then the basis of that covenanting should be more persuasive and precise'.

### **Covenant theology**

In more recent history new attempts have been made to define the relationship between churches, associations and Union. This has largely sought to develop a theology of covenant and trust. While in other denominations local churches are related to each other through the office of the bishop, Baptists have championed 'covenant' as the form of relating. Paul Fiddes wants to argue against a (mere) voluntary understanding of association, where churches associate because it is practically sensible and argues for an understanding of associating rooted in covenant. He writes, 'if a local church is under the direct rule of Christ as king, then it is necessarily drawn into fellowship with all those who are under Christ's rule and so part of his body'. He is critical of *Relating and resourcing* for being too tentative about churches belonging to associations, and instead argues unambiguously that 'it follows from a biblical understanding of Church as covenant, fellowship and body that there is also no option about local churches being part of a wider fellowship of churches'. Here, 'covenant' is linked closely with an understanding of 'the body of Christ'. It is also defined 'by deep bonds of mutual trust'.

In his doctoral study of membership and belonging, Darrell Jackson says this turn to

covenant theology in the past 30 years is 'primarily located in published theological literature and Baptist Union reports'. Before *Bound to love*, there was little to reference to 'covenant' as a theological resource. For example Jackson notes that 'the Report of the Commission of the Associations (West, 1964) makes no reference to covenant as a theological basis for associating'. The work of the Doctrine and Worship Committee (under the chairmanship of Fiddes) during the 1990s was influential in developing a covenant theology that sought to give 'greater theological clarity concerning the status of Baptist Associations and the Baptist Union'. However, Jackson argues that 'each of these reports...failed to convince the wide audience' that was required and had been hoped for in the early 1980s. Jackson's research concludes that 'covenant theology is not used widely' among local Baptist congregations. David Coffey's 2006 George Beasley-Murray Memorial Lecture makes no reference to covenant, to which Jackson comments that '[Coffey's] omission seems illustrative of the fact that covenantal theology has still some way to go before it can claim to command widespread acceptance'.

Here perhaps the growing role of the regional minister has come more closely to resemble in some ways that of a bishop: the relationship between Baptist churches is through the regional minister. They are the association, and associating is with the regional minister rather than fellow Baptist churches. A better description might be to see the regional minister as a 'catalyst for catholicity', whose primary focus is to promote, encourage and enable greater associating between churches. If Nigel Wright is correct to say that relating and resourcing are 'the two primary functions of associating', then perhaps associations and regional ministers become responsible for 'relating', and the Union (through Council and the different executives and departments) becomes responsible for 'resourcing'.

### **Suggestions for stronger associating**

1. More theological work done by Baptist scholars on the Baptist doctrine of the church, including a 'thicker' theology of association: a theology of the body of Christ; a theology of partnership and trust. *Relating and resourcing* states that 'the body of Christ is not confined to local churches but finds expression in the relations between churches as well as within them.' Relating with others is built into our ecclesial ontology.
2. Greater involvement of regional ministers in ministerial formation—space to build relationships and to talk about associational life and greater involvement of

ministerial students in association life. Each ministerial student should have some induction into the association where s/he is are placed, rather than waiting until s/he has become accredited.

3. All ministerial students to have a Baptist Union induction week before starting their formation. Currently students have one day during their formation where they visit Baptist House and meet the different departments. This should be a longer induction—two or three days, where they can get a better sense of Union life, association, Council, Assembly and the National Resource. From the start of formation a stronger (and clearer) sense of Baptist life and identity would be encouraged, and possibly a firmer expectation that Baptist life goes beyond the local church in which ministry is set.

4. Associations to give their assemblies a specific focus on issues that require a wider church witness—politics/economics/ethics—*ie* a greater reason for local churches to associate. The renewal of association assemblies as places of partnership where covenant relationship is expressed. Fiddes says: ‘The association life of Baptist churches might come more alive if church members gathered in their own church meeting really believed that they needed the insight of other churches into their own situation, to see things they could not see themselves’. Copson says that historically assemblies were ‘a divinely ordained forum for the exchange of understanding and practical assistance’ and ‘they represented a mutual seeking after the will of God as related to particular problems in church life or particular points of doctrine’.

5. Revise the Declaration of Principle to make it clear that associating is not an optional extra and the autonomy of the local church is not exclusive. In other words, make explicit that ‘there can be no question of localism, the omnicompetence of the local congregation or the ultimate authority of the church meeting’.

6. Greater encouragement to local clustering, especially in rural and urban areas. For example, in Oxford there are five churches within the city boundaries, and three or four more within a 10-mile radius. There is currently little meaningful associating. This was one of the key recommendations of *Relating and resourcing* which has not been taken up as widely as it could.

7. The restructuring of regional associations. Some (*eg* Southern and Central) are too big and lack the centre that makes real associating possible. The shift from 29 to 13 was too extreme.

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# Care for the creation

by Joan Kearney

Why do some Christians decide that environmental issues are a vital part of life and faith? There are three reasons: because it needs our care; because the Bible has something to say about it; and because it is part of our Christian witness. If we believe that our God made this astonishing universe in all its balance and beauty and said that it was very good, we shall not deliberately live in a way that harms it. John Stott said, ‘... our care of the creation will reflect our love for the Creator’. I love that quotation. It makes each lifestyle choice an expression of love and worship. Nothing is trivial any more.

So what is the biblical background to the transition from my youthful view of the world as an evil system to be avoided to my present concept of the world as something wonderful for whose care I and the rest of humankind have been given responsibility? Both can be found in the Bible (2 Peter 3.10-13 against Romans 8.20-22). Either the world we know is heading for a disastrous end, or it is still redeemable. Does this mean a new earth, or a renewed earth? Whatever its future, I know that I should not hasten its end by disregarding my responsibility to ‘take care of it’ (Genesis 2:15).

## Evidence

We now have indisputable evidence that the Earth is becoming warmer and dangerously unpredictable. In *bmj*, January 2011, John Weaver quoted findings from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association that ‘June 2010 was the 304th consecutive month with a land and ocean temperature above the 20th century average’. John Vidal, in an article in *The Guardian* in June 2011 said, ‘Last year, more than 2m square kilometres of Eastern Europe scorched. An extra 50 000 people died as temperatures stayed more than 6C above normal for many weeks, crops were devastated and hundreds of giant wildfires broke out...When Kent receives as much rain (4mm) in May as Timbuktu, Manchester has more sunshine than Marbella, and soils in southern England are drier than those in Egypt, something is happening...No-one is too sure what normal is any more’.

The facts are there. In the UK a moderate climate is becoming more extreme; the horn of East Africa with an already fairly dry climate is becoming a place so dry that life is

almost impossible to sustain.

When the Scriptures were written, this was not the situation facing the writers, and so the Bible does not deal in detail with this subject. How then do Christians know how to react to those facts? In the May/June 2009 issue of *Theology*, there is a number of relevant articles from theologians at the University of Exeter. These suggest that we draw from the Bible ‘a sense of responsibility based on abiding truths about God, moral principles or divine commands’. One example is the command of Jesus to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Cherryl Hunt (of that department) says that this command ‘can promote action to mitigate the effects of environmental degradation where this influences human health or welfare’. Can I continue to be unconcerned about my carbon footprint when I know that the way developed nations live is adding to the despair of those for whom global warming means famine? In the same article she quotes the example of Jesus in Philippians 2:6ff. He deliberately chose to walk a path of self-denial for others. We claim to be his followers.

Another challenging line of thought is that God seems to be interested in saving not only mankind but also the whole of his creation. Verses to ponder are Colossians 1:20, *through him to reconcile all things to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on a cross*, and Romans 8:19-22, *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God*. I don’t pretend to understand this, but I do see that, if our God is planning something so amazing, we don’t want to be living in a way that militates against his plans.

## **Witness**

In thinking of creation care as part of our Christian witness, I return to John Weaver’s article (*bmj*, January 2011). He quoted from the Edinburgh 2010 conference, *Witnessing to Christ*: ‘Young people today demand that we witness to Christ ‘with substance’—that is, not in word only’. Similarly Jeff Lucas, in his seminar *The power of creative kingdom leadership* at the Baptist Assembly 2011 said, ‘This generation is not going to be reached by the offer of an eternity ticket. Their passion for justice, their passion for the right treatment of the environment...all that passion can not only be harnessed but find its appropriate foundation in the message of the kingdom of God’. I have been challenged recently by reading a book by John Humphrys, *In God we doubt*. After a church-going childhood in Wales, he eventually became a reporter

with first-hand experience of the horrors of war, natural disasters, and extremes of human suffering. In that context he found himself unable to believe in a good God. But the thing that stopped him becoming an outright atheist was that, during his life, he occasionally met believers whose lives were marked by love and peacefulness and the willingness to serve others whatever the cost. Because of them, he now describes himself as a failed atheist. What if all our lives, marked by true concern for all humanity and the world we live in, had that effect on those around us struggling with doubts and wanting to discover the truth?

So, how are we to show our concern for the wellbeing of the planet? The basis, I believe, is changing our lifestyle, our goal being to live simply and joyfully in a way that is non-competitive and non-extravagant, accepting the blessings of our lives with thankfulness and contentment, and using what possessions we have for the advantage of others as well as ourselves.

## **Resources**

That will show in our care of the earth's resources. Water, gas and electricity are precious resources that we shall be careful not to squander. There is great satisfaction in seeing the water butts filling with rain from the roof, or seeing the electricity bills go down when the water is heated with solar power. Many secular sources of information about light bulbs, loft insulation and so on are a great help to us. We shall recycle whatever 'rubbish' our local regulations allow, and shall recycle clothing and unneeded household goods through charity shops, Freecycle and so on. When my husband was a minister, we ourselves benefited greatly from church members who generously recycled children's clothing and many other things in our direction!

And what about the products we use? In our modern age we have become accustomed to using cleaning products and toiletries that vie with one another to produce the whitest wash, the most grease-free surfaces and so on. In so doing, some of the products include chemicals that are so strong as to be harmful to us and to life in rivers and seas. For some years I have enjoyed choosing from supermarket shelves eco-friendly products that are much less harmful. Now, in retirement I have become a distributor for a firm called Wikaniko (we can eco) which sells a wide range of such products. I have a dream that one day it will be as normal for churches to have a Wikaniko distributor as it has become for us to have a Fairtrade rep.

Increasingly, I hear of churches that have a 'green group', a group of like-minded people who get together from time to time to encourage one another in this way of living. In

others the minister has set up a weekly eco-spot in the morning service (see Tonbridge Baptist Church Creation Care Tips on the web). The congregations of some churches have worked together to qualify as an Eco Congregation ([www.ecocongregation.org](http://www.ecocongregation.org)). This organisation is now part of A Rocha which does mission in a number of places at home and overseas by helping local people improve the health of their environment ([www.arocha.org.uk](http://www.arocha.org.uk)).

To live in a responsible way that cares for the planet and all who live in it may seem something of a chore to people who have not yet discovered the reality of God. For Christians who know his reality and his joy in the amazing world he created, it is a celebration and a sharing in his joy.

To quote John Stott again: ‘...our care of creation will reflect our love for the Creator’.

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## The inspired Word of God?

By Rowena Wilding

For hundreds of years biblical scholarship has been male dominated, but over recent decades the voices of women have demanded to be heard. Within the academy, feminist scholars have made much headway; but in the most part the church remains unaffected by feminist biblical interpretation and is still influenced by the archaic patriarchal structures of the biblical writers.

Feminism has a long history, and the driving force of feminist theology lies in a critique of male theology. Patriarchal thinking is exposed for its role in elevating gender differences to a religious, cultural and social level. Feminist thinking criticises exclusively male images of God, emphasises the predominant role of women in the life of Jesus, recovers female traditions in the Bible and establishes a profile for female spirituality and holistic anthropology. Feminist interpretation can broadly be classified into three groups, which are different enough to warrant separate discussion: the historical-critical study of female characters in the Bible, a hermeneutic of suspicion, and a hermeneutic of condemnation.

**1. Historical-critical study.** An historical-critical study of female biblical characters gives the women in scripture their voices back. The method is used by feminist scholars to emphasise that both men and women are created in the image of God, by examining major female characters. This exegetical work describes how these women play a much more important role in the Bible than we may have been led to believe.

This interpretation process is necessary within churches, because female Bible characters are not honoured. Ministry is male dominated, which has led to a lack of sympathy for these women, or at the least a lack of desire to challenge the normal androcentric readings. To read the text in a feminist way goes against the grain, which shows not simply the extent of patriarchy, but also its depth. To fight the desire to give up requires a true dedication to seeing the stories behind the stories, a reading between the lines, and an interpretation of what is *not* said, as well as what is.

**2. Hermeneutic of suspicion.** The second type of feminist exegesis, the hermeneutic of suspicion, is based on the female perspective that the biblical texts have not been handed down in their original form. A greater distinction needs to be made between the divine and the human (and androcentric) word. It is likely that the patriarchal tradition has resulted in the editing of texts that had strong feminist impulses, and has weakened or distorted the emancipatory content as a form of control, domination and oppression. In this form of exegesis, the final canonical shape of the text should not be accepted as normative. The task of exegesis becomes one of recovery of the original pro-feminine content.

The hermeneutic of suspicion is important in uncovering anti-feminist tendencies in the tradition. It also begins to work against one-sided male language about God. Biblical theology must continually face critical feminist questioning and work towards the elimination of patriarchal distortion. In a church setting this can have an extremely positive effect—considering the appropriateness of using ‘Father’ to refer to God and ‘Lord’ to refer to Jesus is pastorally (as well as hermeneutically) important, and can empower women within the church, and allow them to be fully a part of the community. Through it, all members of the community will be shown their worth, and the church can work towards being a place of equals, where all are encouraged to grow and serve, and all are loved by God who created man and woman in ‘his’ (or ‘her’) image.

**3. Hermeneutic of condemnation.** The third group of feminist interpreters uses a hermeneutic of condemnation. This method works on the assumption that the final

canonical text, especially that of the Old Testament, is irreversibly and offensively biased against women, and that no woman can interact constructively with scripture as it stands. Instead, women must draw a line under the hierarchical, androcentric structures of the church, distancing themselves from an incurably patriarchal religion, and search for a spirituality in which femininity can be respected appropriately. This approach is not only open to, but actively demands, the retelling of biblical narratives from a feminist perspective, and that biblical visions and commands be handled from a position of gender equality, expanded and embellished by emphasising the feminist traces that have survived the biblical tradition.

What value, then, can a creative, alternative, feminist rewriting of texts have for understanding the Bible? Many interpreters want to say that it is not possible for any sort of understanding to come from such a premise. It is a highly radical form of reinterpretation, but it has the potential to be useful beyond that for which it is given credit. The patriarchy of Christianity is, in itself, highly radical, and though I do not wish to 'declare war' on the scriptures, the importance of allowing women to have their own spirituality and to know God for themselves comes across more strongly in this hermeneutic than in any other. Used within a faith setting as a way to allow people to explore scripture through a different lens, this hermeneutic could empower women and help them not to feel 'other' or 'alien' in religion. Instead, the church becomes a safe place for women, somewhere that women can flourish and find their true potential.

### ***The women's Bible***

In 1895 *The women's Bible* first appeared in New York. It was the first volume of a work that created both sensation and indignation. It was put together by a group of women wanting to take texts and chapters of scripture which referred to women, or 'in which women are made prominent by exclusion',<sup>1</sup> and revise them to create a commentary that 'teaches the equality of women'.<sup>2</sup> *The women's Bible* came into being primarily through the labours of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was marginalised by women's rights movements because her work was too radical a step for most to follow.

Stanton was appalled at the degree to which the Bible was used as divine authority for the religious and political legitimation of the injustice visited on women. She was convinced that this process contradicted faith in a divine being who, in wisdom and rationality, orders and rules the world and who should not be thought of as uninterested in human rights. It was such thinking that caused her in 1887 to initiate the project of a 'women's Bible'. She gathered about two dozen women for the project who were versed in literature, history and, like herself, Greek—though none was trained in theology or

biblical studies. The aims of these women were far more basic than theological scholarly pursuits—they simply wanted to unmask the church's misuse of the Bible and to undermine thereby its wrongly held authority.

The structure of the work follows the order of the biblical writings, yet they are not commented on sequentially. The texts are either assessed through summary retelling (eg Ruth) or studied in terms of selected sections (eg Matthew). On the one hand, such selections focus on passages that were used in the US to legitimise the inequality of women before the law, on the other hand, they recall passages that would permit a wholly different perception of women. While Stanton herself produced the base text around which she coordinated the contributions of other women, it is in some of these other contributions that we find the important ground work for feminist biblical scholarship in more recent years.

Devereux Blake sees the problem less in the biblical texts themselves than in the history of their interpretation, in which they have been badly distorted.<sup>3</sup> Her approach is to elevate the stories of women—a clear forerunner of the redemptive historical-critical feminist studies of biblical texts. A similar approach can be found in Ellen Battelle Dietrick's attempt to excavate a 'her-story' over and against the 'his-tory'. Finally, the perspective of Clara Colby shows a different approach; her notes on Genesis make it plain that for her, in keeping with what was beginning to be known at the time as 'new thinking', the Bible is no longer the word of God in the sense of an authority that encounters humans 'from outside'. Colby seeks, rather, to discern the symbolic content of these writings to show how they correspond to the processes of human self-discovery.<sup>4</sup>

These sentiments have been echoed by those who use a hermeneutic of condemnation. Stanton was concerned mainly with pitting enlightened reason against the historically limited men's word of the Bible and in this way advancing the public discussion of the equality of women—the beginnings of a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion. Though *The women's Bible* was quashed and disappeared until the mid-1970s, more recently the works of these women, which comprise the first venture into feminist biblical hermeneutics, are finally being explored as a legitimate attempt at biblical revision. These were the first women to take the Bible and explore ways in which the text could be used to preach equality for the genders.

Despite *The women's Bible* being a revolutionary piece of work, created well over a century ago, the church is still dominated by male leadership and is still hostile to women. As long as biblical interpretation is steeped in the patriarchy from which the text arose, women will be unable to grow to their full potential within the church. A

century ago, women were fighting for equality within society; for the right to vote and the right to work; the suffrage movement was in full force, until finally in 1928, women were awarded the right to vote on equal terms with men. Now, nearly 100 years on, women in the church are going through the same struggle: the right to be in leadership, the right to be treated as equals to men. Gender-inclusive translations of the Bible are slowly beginning to be used in church settings, meaning that the constant process of translation, to which women have had to become accustomed, is coming to an end. This is a step forward, but it is not enough.

The feminist critique now challenges the very system of hierarchy itself. To question the hierarchical ordering of church ministry seems to some to be questioning the need for structure and indeed the rootedness of the church in Jesus, rather than in man. Belief in the church as a Spirit-filled community, however, sustains hope that a new birth can take place and that the church may become within and for the world a place 'where the good news of liberation from sexism is preached, where the Spirit is present to empower us to renounce patriarchy, where a community committed to the new life of mutuality is gathered together and nurtured, and where the community is spreading the vision and struggle to others'.<sup>5</sup>

Sustained by this hope, feminist critique, be it historical-critical, a hermeneutic of suspicion, or a more radical separatist condemnatory form, presents patriarchal and hierarchical structures in the light of the church's liberating mission. It proposes methods of exploring that mission, the scriptures, and the community itself, in ways that free the tradition from the harmful, oppressive influence of patriarchy, and includes the experience of women so that the church may truly become a community of liberation and equality for all humanity.

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### **Notes to text**

1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The women's Bible*. Reprint edition, 1988, p 5.
2. *Ibid*, p 9.
3. This is quite clear in her first entry in *The women's Bible*, in which she explores Genesis 1:26-28. Her route is to expose the inaccuracies of the scholarship that has gone before, pp 16-19.
4. *Ibid*, pp 31-33, 35-37, 47-50.
5. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*. 1993, p 213.

# A point of view

## *Human righteousness* by Crawford McIntyre

In the week before Christmas, my wife and I watched a film on the television called *Defiance*. It is based on the true account of three brothers who in 1939 escaped into the forest of Poland during the Nazi invasion. Their family was killed, and being of Jewish extraction, they were in constant danger. Other refugees joined them and though they settled in one area, they later had to run for their lives to flee the German troops.

A resistance movement was formed with some success. On one occasion the fugitives had to leave their camp and try to get away from their pursuers, but faced crossing a snake-infested swampy river. Reminiscent of the crossing of the Red Sea in Moses' time (without any parting of the waters!) they managed to escape again. For a further two years they lived in comparative safety in the forests of Poland. The numbers in the group grew to 1200 and many of their children and grandchildren still live in parts of Europe and N America.

One incident in the film particularly affected me. The resistance fighters captured a German officer and brought him into their camp. The terrified man is surrounded by angry and bitter men and women whose family members have been murdered by the Germans. They goad the prisoner, shout abuse at him, hurl insults and then in fits of rage beat him to death. All this happened despite the protests of some of the group members, and an appeal to their heroic leader to stop the cruelty—but all in vain.

It was war, of course and we can perhaps understand and sympathise with this desire for revenge against such a cruel regime as the Nazis. Taking revenge upon those who have murdered, pillaged and raped is a very human reaction—more so when it is your mother or father, sister or brother who has been a victim. Yet I was shocked at this scene and wondered if the film director had intentionally put this in to make a point?

I was left wondering about our ideas of 'righteous' indignation. We remember only too well the terrible scenes of the fairly recent capture, brutal treatment and execution of Colonel Gaddafi of Libya. We can, to some extent, empathise with those who suffered under the former president's despotic rule. It was 'justifiable homicide', 'righteous' anger and action, we might say.

I have put the word 'righteous' in quotation marks since I am not convinced of its use

in the context of the film, or indeed even in the treatment of a terrible man like Colonel Gaddafi. The scriptures have an uncanny way of portraying human beings in every condition of the heart. Genesis 34 tells of the violation of Jacob's daughter Dinah by Shechem. Shechem wanted to make amends for his sinful action and take Dinah as his wife—though with strings attached (*ie* great material benefit): 'Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours?'. Jacob wisely delayed to consider the proposal of marriage, but his sons, Judah and Levi, had no time for patience. They tricked the Hivites into circumcision and then carried out a brutal attack on them, looted the goods of the dead and plundered the Hivite city. 'Righteous' anger!

This reaction is all so different from Paul's guidance to the Christians in Rome. Romans 12:17-21 tells us: *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay', says the Lord. On the contrary: 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head'. [Paul interestingly quotes the book of Proverbs] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

We might recall Deuteronomy 32:35: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay'.

How much, in war and in peace, are we influenced by our concepts of retribution and self-approved 'righteousness'? I am always impressed and greatly challenged by Paul's attitude toward those 'who preach Christ out of envy and rivalry' (Philippians 1:15). Were they hoping to outdo the great apostle while he was imprisoned for the gospel? No matter, he says, 'whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached'.

I am proud of my Scottish birth and heritage, though not too enamoured by its famous bard, Robbie Burns. Despite his many failings, Burns at times sheds a light on the human condition. He said, *The heart aye's the part aye that makes us right or wrang*. The heart is always the part that makes us right or wrong.

The film revealed the human condition. The sin and problem did not solely lie with the invading force of Hitler. The persecuted became the persecutors. The 'righteous' were just as unrighteous as their enemies. The Old English for righteousness was *rihtwis* (right+wise). It is having the wisdom that our Lord exemplifies and wants to be seen in us that counts.

***Crawford McIntyre is now retired from Baptist ministry and can be contacted on [crawford@crawfordmci.plus.com](mailto:crawford@crawfordmci.plus.com).***

# Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

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***Dynamics of a journey to conflict prevention and peace in Israel and Palestine through an Olympic sport***

Geoffrey Victor Whitfield

Emeth Press

ISBN 978-1-60947-025-8

**Reviewer: Bob Little**

The 'Baptist minister and therapist', the Rev Geoffrey Whitfield MBE, is no stranger to writing about the Israel—Palestinian conflict. His previous books include *Amity in the Middle East* (2006), *Roots of terrorism in Israel and Palestine* (2007), and *Israeli and Palestinian terrorism: the 'unintentional' agents* (2009). This time, he's eschewed a pithy title for something more all-encompassingly descriptive.

The book chronicles a 'conflict prevention scheme' which emerged over nine years from a casual conversation and has grown—as these things can do—into an ongoing international cross-community annual event. Eventually entitled World Sports Peace Project (WSPP), its foundation was set in the

village of Ibillin, in northern Israel, and in Bethlehem, in the West Bank.

The key ingredients in this scheme are young people and football. In setting out this case study in successful cross-cultural relations, the book outlines a model for the development and management of similar initiatives, so that they become embedded in the community and 'owned' by those involved.

There would have been no point in writing the book if everything about the scheme had been straightforward. Bringing together a complex assortment of cultures, value systems, organisations, individual and corporate interests involves a high degree of diplomacy—and acceptance when things don't turn out exactly as had been hoped. All this adds both spice and pace to the narrative which is a welcome addition to the growing wealth of literature on practical approaches to conflict resolution.

Whitfield's idea was to create a football project where young Arabs and Jews in Israel and Palestine could play together in mixed teams against mixed teams. To win, team members must put aside previous prejudices, combining skills and energies to achieve their common objective. The political implications of this sporting maxim are obvious—as are the longer term potential benefits for both the Arab and Jewish communities.

Carefully combining idealism and realism, Whitfield's account is inspirational as a story of developing positive relationships in a conflict-ridden area. It's also instructive because it outlines how to develop an organisation from modest beginnings into being a significant player on the international stage.

Few of the book's readers will be working in as culturally sensitive a situation as Whitfield describes but they can take heart in the knowledge that, if it can be done successfully in the Middle East, it should be possible anywhere.

***Wide awake worship: hymns and prayers renewed for the 21st century***

John Henson  
O-Books, 2010,  
ISBN 978-1-84694-392 8

***Reviewer: Bob Allaway***

Many years ago, I bought a copy of John Henson's *Other communions of Jesus*. This book suggested ways in which communion services could be modelled on the pattern of other meals Jesus had with his disciples, instead of the Last Supper. Such freshness of thought encouraged me to review this more recent contribution to worship.

It has two parts. First, *Gems reset* rewrites classic church prayers (*Sursum Corda* etc) modernising not just the lan-

guage but the very thought forms. Then *Buttons polished* does the same job with hymns. John is strictly the compiler rather than the author, as he includes some items by his friends.

The major problem is that John's desire to 'strip away the militarism, triumphalism, imperialism, flat-earthism, exclusivism, sexism and sentimentalism' can result in a diminished vocabulary and uninspiring language.

For example, the first item is the Grace, which becomes 'The beauty of Jesus our Leader...' Beauty? Biblical 'grace' is surely 'generosity' or 'kindness'. Beauty also has to do service for 'glory' in the Gloria: 'Enjoy God's beauty above and around...'. But 'glory to God' is surely 'honour', 'praise' or 'cheers'! It then turns 'Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father' into 'Our God and eternal friend, Mother and Father of all'. Any form of 'hallowed be your name' vanishes from the Lord's Prayer. Might not a phrase involving 'respect' have served to express it?

Perhaps I am unfairly stressing the bits that don't work. But when rewriting so distorts the thought of the original, would it not be better simply to compose new liturgies and completely new words to familiar hymn tunes?

In fact, there are a few new compositions in both sections. Anyone wishing

to conduct a service for a civil partnership would find one ready made here. (John has been using it since the 1980s!) While I profoundly disagree with 'gay marriage', I have no problem with this service of 'Celebrating a friendship'. *Buttons polished* includes a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13, written for such a service by one of the participants.

Some rewritten hymns almost work (eg *And can it be*) because John leaves all the best phrases unchanged. Others can seem a parody. His intentions are good, but I fear his political correctness too often overrides everything else.

***Building bridges, crossing cultures: a life shaped by India and by inner city Birmingham: memoirs of a physicist, missionary and minister***

Edward H. B. Williams

Aspect Design (Malvern), 2011

ISBN 978-1-905795-97-0

***Reviewer: Peter Shepherd***

Edward Williams, together with his wife Rosemary and young daughter Jenny, sailed for India as a BMS missionary in 1959. He served as a physics teacher and in various other capacities at Serampore College for the following 10 years. Several chapters in this autobiography describe these years, providing a fascinating personal insight into the

changes taking place during that period, as the "missionary era" came to an end and the Indian Church came of age. By 1974, the number of BMS missionaries was less than a quarter of what it had been a decade before, and the leadership and teaching at Serampore College had passed almost completely from British into Indian hands. The Williams' experiences are part of the story of that transition. The book is not, as the author acknowledges, an attempt to write a history of those years, but a personal account of personalities and events as they affected one missionary family caught up in the period.

The earlier chapters describe the author's early life and training, and the later ones ministry in Sparkbrook, Birmingham and Alcester. Experiences in India were valuable in preparing for ministry in increasingly multifaith inner city Birmingham between 1969 and 1985. The Williams' continued to support Serampore in retirement as joint secretaries of Friends of Serampore.

The author is refreshingly open about the questions that arose for him as a result of working and living alongside people of others faiths, both in India and in Birmingham. One of the most significant contributions to the wider Baptist denomination the Williams have made in recent years has been their involvement in Joppa—a group of Baptists seek-

ing to foster interfaith understanding and dialogue, now absorbed into the work of BUGB and BMS World Mission.

As David Kerrigan says in his foreword to the book, first-hand accounts such as this are invaluable in enabling subsequent generations understand what the past was really like for those who participated in it. In this book, the connections with Serampore College, with its historic—one might say even iconic—significance for Baptists, for India and in the history of Christian missions, make it a fascinating read.

Any profits from its sale are to be given to the college.

***Basic types of pastoral care and counselling, 3rd edition***

Howard Clinebell

Abingdon Press, 2011

ISBN 978-0-687-66380-4

***Reviewer: Ronnie Hall***

This book is a completely revised and updated edition of the 1966 and 1984 editions. This third edition has been sensitively updated by a former student of Clinebell, Bridget McKeever, herself a published author and pastoral care editor for a Christian magazine. The book is a standard text for US seminarians and clergy. It is both a complex text with a lot of detail and difficult terminology

and a 'how to' book for different pastoral situations.

It starts with a description and rationale for a particular model of pastoral care and counselling, which is person-centred, holistic and with the defined aim of spiritual and physical transformation of the care receiver. The first five chapters describe how the model works and its basic principles. The remaining chapters apply the model to particular pastoral situations, for example, illness, bereavement, family issues. Thus the book is not useful as a reference or 'how to' guide without a working knowledge of the early chapters.

It is not a light read. There is an enormous amount of detail and it is written in a verbose style. The author(s) do break the text by inserting practical examples of the principles from their experience. It is not a standard textbook in the UK because the language and examples are very American. The UK reader constantly has to translate the American idioms into something understandable. Those quibbles aside, the book is in places excellent. I found it made me question my own practice as a caregiver and to have more awareness of my own limitations in that role. Now I have done the work of understanding the model I will refer to this book again and again as the need arises.

The final chapter concerns self-care for caregivers, and should be required reading for all ministers, who can be bad at looking after themselves. This chapter opened my eyes to the dangers of not taking time to get away from ministry and have an interest outside the church.

### ***Preaching in the inventive age***

Doug Pagitt

Sparkhouse Press

ISBN 1451401485

#### ***Reviewer: Rosa Hunt***

When I first opened this book, I thought I was going to hate it. It is neither a standard academic work with footnotes nor a standard popular book with anecdotes, and it has two very unusual features.

The first is that it is designed as hypertext: the reader is invited to abandon their normal sequential reading habits and instead to follow their trail of interest weaving back and forward through the book. The second feature is that key points are not underlined or italicised but instead are displayed within the text in a huge bold font, a sentence sometimes taking up half a page.

I am really glad that I managed to overcome my initial reaction and persevere with it—it turned out to be a challenging and thought-provoking read. The author's main contention is that what he

terms 'speaching'—the classic preaching we hear every Sunday in most Baptist churches—is an outdated phenomenon that needs to go. He argues that it is a practice totally at odds with the culture we live in, and that the custom of one man or woman standing at a microphone every week to tell people what to think and how to behave is completely bizarre.

Pagitt examines the explicit and implicit power messages behind this practice, the insecurities of the preacher and the expectations of the congregation and concludes that some serious self-examination might lead to the emergence of a more collaborative form of preaching in which the voice and contribution of every member of the congregation is heard and valued. Pagitt calls this 'progressional dialogue', and likens the minister's role in this setting to that of a jazz musician. With input from the congregation, preaching starts to resemble a jazz improvisation—it may seem easy and spontaneous, but can only be done well through much preparation and prayer, just as jazz musicians are usually very technically proficient. In fact Pagitt's congregation don't just participate in the sermon, they even help him to prepare it at their mid-week meeting where they hold a preliminary discussion of the sermon topic for Sunday.

I think that this book contains some important truths. I particularly like the au-

thor's contention that the real test of good preaching is the extent to which the congregation matures and is transformed in their response to it. I also suspect that he is right to argue that 'speaching' is less likely to achieve this than some sort of communal engagement with the Bible. I'm going to try it out on Sunday ....

***The four gospels on Sunday: the New Testament and the reform of Christian worship***

Gordon W. Lathrop

Fortress Press, 2012

ISBN 978-0-8006-9852-2

***Reviewer: Kath Lawson***

This book reminds me of the literary equivalent of an archaeological dig! Archaeologists painstakingly dig through accumulated layers of dirt and rubbish, to unearth and reconstruct artefacts of bygone ages, building up a picture of past life and times by interpreting and reinterpreting what they have found. Sometimes their discoveries lead to a radical rethinking of previous ideas. Lathrop painstakingly sifts through the New Testament gospels in the light of recent developments, discarding the accumulated dust and debris of Christian interpretation, to reveal what he believes is the original structure and intent of the gospels. It

makes fascinating reading!

By exploring the literary structure and themes of the gospels, Lathrop produces a picture of the early Christian groups, their challenges, strengths and failings. He suggests Mark wrote his gospel, the first of a new genre, soon after the death of Paul, as a successor to Paul's epistles and with the same idea in mind—to maintain in the face of heresy a sound picture of who Jesus is and of what the gospel is, and to be the means for an actual communal encounter with him. Similarities in thought and vocabulary between Paul and Mark may indicate Mark was familiar with Paul's writing. He rejects the idea that Mark wrote clumsily and primitively, arguing that it is a composition whose structure enhances and expands layers of meaning, much like the Iliad.

Lathrop suggests that each gospel writer in turn may well have intended his/her document to supersede the previous one, but in the event all four were preserved in our New Testament. Matthew and Luke clearly knew and used Mark's writing, arranging and adding to it in order to make it relevant to the characteristics and needs of their church communities. Less obvious, but with strong evidence to back it up, is that John knew Mark and Luke, and probably Matthew.

Having looked in detail at the four gospels, in the second section of the book Lathrop turns his attention to their application and relevance for the church, their assemblies and leadership today. He maintains that it is as they are read and heard aloud that they come to life in the gathered community of the church. To quote '...in the words of the Gospel, we encounter the crucified and risen Christ, just as we do in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist' (p 209) with the same power to reform, challenge and reorient our attention that it had for the communities for whom they were originally written.

### ***Help! We have dementia: caring for Granny***

Gaynor Hammond

Faith in Older People (<http://www.faithinolderpeople.org.uk/>)

ISBN 978-0-9568342-6-3

***Reviewer: Nik Hookey***

Hammond has written a very practical book to help those who are caring for people with dementia. She covers three stages of dementia.

In the early stage, she suggests ways in which we can support the person with dementia, by helping them to find lost objects (or not to lose them!), to remember people, and to keep the threads of conversations.

In the middle stage, Hammond empha-

sises the importance of entering the dementia sufferer's reality, whether it is another place or time. She suggests methods to help people to continue to do tasks independently or with some assistance. She stresses the importance of the five senses in awakening memories and stimulating conversation. She also has suggestions for creating a memory box.

In the later stages of dementia, where mobility or communication skills may appear to be lost she emphasises the importance of continuing to talk to the person. The five senses are still a useful trigger and stimulus.

She has a section on the difficulties of aggressive behaviour and swearing, and incontinence, and suggests ways to find support through this difficult stage. She also writes about the decision to transfer the person to a care home, with practical advice on choosing one. In these later stages she stresses the importance of respecting the person's faith, and using familiar rituals and words to feed the person spiritually.

Throughout, Hammond makes great use of stories from ministers and carers, and the book is rooted in practical pastoral support. The book will be particularly suitable for ministers and others who offer pastoral care, or who are simply friends with people caring for loved ones with dementia.

***Good as new: a radical retelling of the scriptures***

John Henson

O-Books. 2004

ISBN 190504711-8

**Reviewer: Graham McBain**

The Bible is never boring but sometimes the way we read it or have it read to us becomes so familiar that its impact is literally lost in translation. *Good as new* is a controversial new retelling of the New Testament which attempts to banish claims of dullness, boredom and familiarity forever.

Most of the New Testament books are given a fresh telling; names and places are modernised. Phrases and sentences that may appear stiff in many Bible translations soar and fly with a new found freedom. I found myself not wanting to put the book down while reading through Matthew, retitled *Good news from a Jewish friend*. This is more than just a UK *Message*. Henson has tried to return to original meanings with modern words, which can feel awkward in places yet often it works. For example, the word 'dipped' is used for 'baptise' (in biblical Greek, it does literally mean 'to be dipped'). At other times, Henson may be trying a bit too hard: Peter becomes 'Rocky', Thomas is 'Twin' and Jesus' self-references of 'The Son of Man' have him calling himself 'The Complete Person'. I have had

to re-read whole sections noting down who these people are!

This is a challenging book, asking the reader to re-examine what may be biased or prejudiced by past translations. In Matthew the story of the centurion who approached Jesus to heal his servant is retold as an army officer asking for healing for his 'houseboy', who is likely to have been his same-sex partner—a common Roman army practice. This led me to reading and research—is Henson right or not? Whether you agree with his conclusions or not he certainly forces us to wrestle with scripture again, which is no bad thing.

But is *Good as new* Scripture, or not? It's not a complete New Testament: eight books are absent. 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter are dismissed as frauds. Revelation is omitted as contrary to the mind of Jesus, but the Gospel of Thomas is included! Henson explains that some things included in the Bible are no longer scripture for us, which may be a step too far for some people. For me, it awakened a desire to read and study scripture.

There are some lovely touches to this book too: quotes from Old Testament poems are retold as rhyming poems which work well. The best way to read this book is beside your existing Bible version to see how familiar stories can be reborn with new words.