

the baptist ministers'  
**journal**

January 2014 volume 321

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## ***From the editor***

### *The future behind us*

We have had a persistent damp problem in our house, part of which is a 200-year-old railway worker's cottage. After various attempts to remedy the problem over the years, we recently called in a 'damp consultant'.

'Houses used to have draughts under the doors and round the windows, and coal fires which created airflow', he explained. 'Trying to be energy efficient, we have taken these houses and sealed them up with double glazed windows and doors, and filled in the chimney flues to stop the draughts. The result is a house that can't breathe'. The answer is to put the draughts back—by installing some fans, and reintroducing a fire. Going backwards to go forwards...

In a time when we are under pressure to reinvent church and to grow our congregations there are myriad programmes and strategies on offer which promise to make you 'missional', or to grow the church, or to create disciples. It can be a bit overwhelming when you thought ministry was about being able to explain the gospel and being a pastoral servant of the church. You know, something old-style, a bit like what Jesus did.

In the desire for success, alongside the strategies, may we also remember to allow the draught back in and may the wind of the Spirit flow freely through our churches this new year. May God bless your commitment to him in ministry, simply following Jesus in your community. SN

***BMF needs to create an email mailing list for its members. When you receive this journal, please email the editor, Sally Nelson, confirming your current email address. Thank you.***

## Keith Clements'

### *Desert island books*



Islands have enormously enriched my experience, thanks to a bird-watching passion since schooldays, a student itch for adventure in far places, and a love of historical associations. Skokholm (off the Pembrokeshire coast), Tanera Mhor (in the Inner Hebrides), arctic Spitzbergen, Green Island on the Great Barrier Reef, and the notorious Robben Island off Cape Town, to name but some, have all left their mark on me.

To be a lone castaway, however, and for an indefinite period, is a different proposition! The idea raises interesting questions. Would I primarily want reading that would somehow keep me connected with my past? Or would I be looking for material to provide a diversion from what could be an awful present situation, or at any rate keep my mental cogs turning? Or should I look for help and inspiration to prepare me for a return to normal life after an imagined rescue—one that might never come?

One thing is clear: there's no point in having anything which is already so familiar that you can virtually see the pages (and footnotes) in one's mind. For that reason I'm not asking for anything of Bonhoeffer. Having worked on so many of his writings over the years, including involvement in editing the new English translations of his works, I have my own inbuilt mental Kindle version! On the other hand, I wouldn't want to take a gamble with something so totally new that I've no hint that I'd find it worthwhile. After a couple of dispiriting chapters there'd be no library to return to, to swap it for a more promising item. Better, then, to go with something to which you've already been drawn but want to explore more fully, or which you know already but have very good reasons to revisit in these odd circumstances.

So for theology I'll go for Thomas Traherne (1637-74), Anglican priest, scholar and poet who ministered for several years of his quite short life in a quiet Herefordshire

parish. He's intrigued me ever since as a student I heard a reading from his *Centuries of meditations*: 'You never enjoy the world aright, till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars...'. His is a theology of delight in God and in creation as God's gift, which affirms the world and all humanity as the medium of our communion with God, and which calls us to celebrate God's overflowing generosity in and to all God has made.

Much of his writing only became known long after his death. Thirty years ago I devised and presented a series of Sunday evening programmes on BBC Radio 4 which largely comprised excerpts from his poetry and meditations. This prompted a surprisingly large postbag of responses from listeners. Quite movingly ('this is really important for me,' wrote one woman) some of them felt that Traherne, albeit from a country rectory three centuries earlier, was saying something quite new yet equally was putting into words what they themselves had for years been struggling to express about God and life in the world.

Traherne has often been classified as a 'mystic'. That is misleading if it implies a purely private and inward transport of delight which leaves the individual wrapped up in selfhood. Rather, for him, communion with God takes us *out of ourselves* to participate in and share with others the whole wonder of the cosmos and the overflowing, generous and joyous love of God for all people. Nor is this to be dismissed as a Christ-less, cross-less way to God. Quite the opposite: there are spellbinding passages which place the Saviour's cross—'like the centre of eternity'—at the heart of faith, the point where the meaning of everything is to be seen and the place from which that universal love radiates to all, taking up the soul 'with wonder, admiration, joy and thanksgiving'.

Why go to Traherne again? In the past 20 years or so a lot more scholarship has been devoted to him, more manuscripts have newly come to light, and studies have revealed a fuller picture of his life and his involvement in those turbulent years of the 17th century. I'd like now to reap the benefits of this work, so will gladly accept a copy of Volume V, *Centuries of meditations and select meditations*, in the new series of Traherne's works edited by Jan Ross. In any case, many of Traherne's sayings are worth pondering again and again: 'Never was anything in this world loved too much, but many things have been loved in a false way, and all in too short a measure'. Surrounded by sea and with little else but rocks and palm trees (and birds, I hope) to occupy me, it would a good place to sit with Traherne.

Second, I'd like a novel which I know will stand re-reading, as a way of entering into the life-story and experience of another person, and indeed another nation: *The years with Laura Díaz* by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes (1928-2012). Laura is an artist, lover and mother, passionate, compassionate, wayward, open to being wounded as well as wounding, her story interacting with the tragic dramas let loose by revolution and political reaction in a country I've never yet visited but is connected with the traumas of mid-20th century Europe too. It's a welcome contrast to the sort of contemporary writing (including a lot of British) which seems to end up focusing so much on the inner crevices and workings of one or two relationships in isolation from everything and everyone else, as to be almost suffocatingly 'personal': a kind of secular pietism.

Perhaps that is indeed what happens when the other person represents only what one wants for oneself, when there's no real encounter with transcendence of any kind, no 'beyond' in which the relationship is grounded and where faith plays no role except to be dismissed with a chuckle. Fuentes was not, as far as I know, conventionally religious but any book set in Central America has to deal with Roman Catholic Christianity. Yes, there is a corrupt priest (but also, and just as bad because totally devoid of compassion, a ship's Lutheran chaplain who refuses to give communion to the Jewish Catholic refugee).

In fact there are profound reflections in the book on the meaning of faith: 'Who knows what deep religious roots each individual and family had in Mexico? Maybe rebelling against religion was a way of being religious'. Moreover, not as an intrusive eccentricity into the story, but in a wholly natural way, certain of the characters discover the Christ of the cross as their only clue to remaining human under unimaginable cruelty. All in all it's a moving testimony on how the love of beauty and the beauty of love can insist on their rights against the most malignant forces. In any case, it will encourage reflection on what are the most important continuities in one's own relatively undramatic, but in some respects fragmented and puzzling, life.

So to the third choice in my book allowance. Not being a musician (beyond singing in the local choral society, which my wife and I joined on retirement), yet an avid listener to music, I would like to continue my education, and so ask for the latest edition of Grove's *Dictionary of music and musicians*. It's not just that Grove will satisfy my curiosity on all manner of questions, from who's who in the composing and performing world to puzzling technical terms and mysterious instruments. It's that

one of the most productive ways of reading is simply to browse at random through an encyclopaedia and fasten upon whatever happens to catch one's eye, in a kind of relaxed serendipity (you can do the same with Karl Barth's *Church dogmatics*).

Of course I'm glad that the Bible and Shakespeare will be there. I would devise my own lectionary and include parts of the Bible I've tended to ignore (like I and II Chronicles and some of the Minor Prophets). Shakespeare I won't just read but recite out loud as I bestride an imaginary stage on the high tide mark. How marvellous, being completely alone and so without embarrassment to be able to declaim with Portia on the quality of mercy, to be Henry at Agincourt and even to walk the shadows as Lady Macbeth—who knows what one may discover not just in the poetry but in oneself?

As for the luxury item—it will be a snorkelling kit. There's no quicker and more delightful way into another realm than to float on the surface of the sea and look down on that world, so near, yet so different: the amazing colour, movement and life you find on a coral reef. There must be a theological parable here (but please, don't go on about sharks).

***Keith Clements is now retired but held two pastorates, was a tutor at Bristol Baptist College, then Secretary for International Affairs at the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, followed by eight years as General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, Geneva.***

*An invitation to you....*

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*Coming to you from BMF, more details in April 's bmj and via the  
Associations.*



# Co-ministry: a reflection

by Jeannie Kendall

In May 2011 I began my present post as co-minister. Put briefly, this means there are two of us, both general ministers (*ie* not youth ministers, older persons' ministers *etc*), but with no hierarchy. This is not unique, but is fairly unusual and arouses much curiosity. There is occasionally some scepticism about whether it can really work, with such remarks as, 'Yes, but who is really in charge?'.

Before considering the practicalities of how a team of equal ministers might work, it might help to consider the biblical picture. Others reading this article will be much better theologians than me, and have different perspectives, but here are a few thoughts.

The New Testament uses three terms in the description of those in ministry and leadership: *diakonos* (deacon, which had no background as a term used for an office holder); *presbyteros* (elder, widely used in various ways); and *episkopos* (bishop). It is not the purpose of this paper to give a sustained theology of ministry and leadership (there are many resources: Steven Croft's *Ministry in three dimensions* is very helpful), but simply to note that these three dimensions are all biblical and that nowhere in the New Testament is there any hint of hierarchy. There were differences of role and function, but not of status.

The listing in Ephesians 4:11 (apostles, prophets, teachers *etc*) also gives no hint of hierarchy—indeed it is in the context of unity and the importance of every part in the functioning of the body. Charismatic gifts are clearly given by God as he chooses, and in no way according to merit. Most of all of course we see modelled in the Godhead a unity of relationship and purpose which expresses itself in different ways.

This is not to say that more familiar patterns of leadership of (for example) a senior minister with an associate are inappropriate—rather that they are not, according to the biblical witness, the only patterns. Each pattern of leadership and service has its benefits and potential pitfalls. One of the most apt passages is Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12:

*Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.*

Though often used in marriage ceremonies, companionship is the theme here (v11 referring to travel on cold nights) and I think it expresses the strengths of co-ministry. Much of the curiosity around co-ministry is about the practicalities—how does it work?

### **Advantages**

There is much in common about the way we operate, but different personalities, experiences (and yes, genders) bring a breadth that might not be there otherwise. What is crucial is having the same values and heart. My colleague and I happen to be fairly similar theologically, but even if we were not, our strong feelings about what is important (the church as a place of welcome, that it is God's church and not ours, and a disinterest in power games, to name but three) would be essential.

Another helpful feature opened up by co-ministry is the possibility of a gender mix on an equal footing. As a woman minister, this has been particularly welcome. In my own setting, my co-minister is a man, and there is also a generational difference as he is considerably younger than I am. Both these differences bring an additional strength and breadth to the ministry.

Co-ministry subverts power issues in a very clear way. Though we are called to servant leadership, power issues are a constant danger in a church. There are well documented cases of abuses of power by individuals in position of leadership: equally at times, sadly, congregations in a setting where they carry the decision making are not exempt from difficulties with issues of power. I believe co-ministry models something very different: a genuine sharing of decision making and a mutual respect one to the other.

Co-ministry is, I believe, less lonely than solo ministry can be. For example, most ministers know that feeling of vulnerability after a sermon. To share ministry with someone who genuinely understands the complexities of ministry and can be supportive and encouraging (as an equal) is a great strength. It is also helpful that when one is on holiday (or on sabbatical) the other is there to carry the ministry, and make decisions.

### **Disadvantages**

I have not yet found any disadvantages in our particular situation, but there are differences from other ministries. For example, if a minister in sole charge is making a decision on a preaching plan, they will think and pray and decide. Co-ministers do the same of course, but with two that process is likely to be longer as ideas are formulated and adjusted (or at times rejected). Planning of all kinds, such as a service for a major festival, may be a longer process: but more creativity is possible with two minds and sets of experience. Having two may also mitigate against a hasty decision when more

thinking time might be helpful.

One future implication is what will happen when one of us decides to move on. One may retire before the other, for example, or be called to wider ministry. At this point the church will face the decision whether to appoint a co-minister to work alongside the minister who is left, or to return to a more familiar pattern. I suspect it will depend on how well co-ministry has worked in a particular setting. Although my colleague was in the church already (as a youth minister, having trained for general ministry), we started co-ministry together. There would be a different dynamic for a person coming in, but with the right personalities, I believe it could still work.

### **Anxieties from the church**

A major anxiety is ‘what if the co-ministers fall out?’. Of course, this would be problematic in any team. But where there is genuine equality, a major disagreement would be even more problematic. We have not yet had any, and to be honest we do not expect it. We have agreed to sort out quickly any minor differences of opinion. After two years of working together we are confident that there is sufficient depth of relationship and mutual respect that we could do this. However, the question does underline the importance of clearly discerning—before the decision is made—whether the co-ministers are compatible. During our own decision-making process (which took four months), we met every week to pray and share together. This pattern has continued, and we now spend one afternoon a week together praying and planning, and an additional hour a week praying in the church.

Another frequently asked question is ‘Who makes the final decision?’. The answer is: for some things, one of us; for others, we both do! Each of us has areas of sole responsibility in which we are free to make decisions, though we do share them with each other. In some areas, such as public worship, vision and direction, decisions are talked through and made together. For major decisions of course the decision making in our Baptist context is the leadership team and ultimately the church members meeting. Were there a significant decision to be made that we could not agree on, these other groups would make those decisions.

A final comment—there is in co-ministry, because of group dynamics, a risk of playing one off against the other. This dynamic is not unusual. It is essential for co-ministers to exhibit mutual loyalty and transparency. On the (thankfully very rare!) occasions a church member complains to one of us about the other, we immediately say the person needs to speak to whichever of us they have the issue with. As co-ministry works well for us, it is not difficult to affirm the other when they are not there, but anything else would soon lead to a profoundly unhealthy dynamic which would quickly poison the

spiritual life of the church.

Practicalities would vary in different settings, depending on the individuals concerned and their gifting. Before we started co-ministry we talked about our perceived gifts, passions, and limitations, and as a result we developed areas of responsibility. Some things are equally split (preaching, chairing meetings). These 'up-front' ministries must be shared to avoid the perception that in practice one minister is senior.

Within this overall sharing of responsibility there must be clarity on joint and separate areas within church life. For example, my colleague has musical abilities which I do not, and so takes responsibility for worship and liaison with the worship team, but we work together on creative elements in services, and service planning for special events and times of year. Dedications, baptisms, weddings and funerals are shared.

Having previously run a counselling service, I take responsibility for this work, particularly in areas such as strategy, Vulnerable Adults Policy, and training the pastoral teams. This division does not preclude my colleague's involvement in this area or, for example, our occasionally making joint visits where appropriate in a serious situation, and indeed this is invaluable as my colleague is highly skilled and sensitive pastorally.

What is absolutely essential is good communication. We meet weekly for a whole afternoon (up to six hours) for planning, discussion and prayer. This sustained good quality time is one of the things which has made for a healthy working relationship. We also touch base between times as needed.

Finally, there was some discussion at the beginning about our line management, with the suggestion at one point that we had separate line managers. We felt strongly we needed to have the same line manager so that we were not being guided in different directions. We have done this, and it has worked well.

I am aware that much I have written could be said of a team ministry which has hierarchy but where members work closely together. For example, I know of one church which has a sole male minister but has also appointed a lay female volunteer in what is effectively a co-ministry. Equally, I have to confess personal bias. For me, the two years in co-ministry have led to more growth professionally and personally than I expected, and it has been a period of great happiness and fulfilment in ministry.

Undoubtedly our working together has grown in quality as we have got to know each other better. Much of this is about the privilege of ministering with a colleague who is gifted, generous in ministry, and from whom I have learned and continue to learn a great deal. Co-ministry as a way of working has much to commend it and I hope that it might be considered more often in patterns of ministry. Theoretically, I am aware of little written on it, and so this is inevitably a personal reflection. I would be interested to hear from others with experience of this style of ministry, or who are aware of further

writing about it.

***Jeannie Kendall is co-minister at Carshalton Beeches Baptist Free Church.***

### **Sabbatical exchange in Melbourne?**

Are there any UK ministers who would like a house and car swap with a family here? Lee Kohler is an experienced pastor and church planter who has 3 months of leave to use. He is willing to preach and cover pastoral duties in a church for 3 days a week, and is flexible about timing, recognising that a UK minister is unlikely to have such a long leave period. He is thinking of any time between May and August 2014.

Lee has 4 children between 4 and 11, and offers a 4-bed house, with billiard table, home theatre and a nearby park, making it a great spot for kids. Berwick is to the east of central Melbourne, with easy access to mountains and beaches. The church Narre Warren Baptist Church would be middle of the road/conservative evangelical and Lee is gently charismatic. He would be used to leading fairly high tempo contemporary worship. There is also an active Spanish-speaking congregation, with another full-time pastor who is part of the Berwick team, and a very good youth pastor.

# Dementia and the church

by John Matthews

**T**he number of people suffering from dementia is increasing—and is likely to go on doing so, representing an opportunity and a challenge for churches. I want to explore how people who suffer from dementia (and their carers) can be better supported by church communities. I approach this task as a Christian minister whose mother has recently been admitted to a nursing home with dementia.

‘Dementia’ is a Latin word, meaning ‘away from the mind’. Bare definitions can, however, be misleading. Morse & Hitchings’ book *Could it be dementia?* has the subtitle, *losing your mind doesn’t mean losing your soul*, but not everyone agrees that people with dementia are ‘losing their minds’. For some, the word ‘dementia’ has connotations of madness, but those suffering from dementia are not insane. They are people with failing mental powers. We accept that other parts of our bodies can fail, so why do we find it harder with our brains? Perhaps it is because of the effects on people’s lives, behaviours and relationships.

## Facts and figures

‘Dementia’ is an umbrella term used to describe a range of illnesses which affect the brain, of which the two most common are Alzheimer’s disease (most cases) and vascular dementia (about one-third of cases). In Alzheimer’s the chemistry and structure of the main part of the brain are changed, causing brain cells to die. Vascular dementia is caused by problems with the supply of oxygen to the brain, often due to a series of mini-strokes.

It is generally agreed that there are three stages of dementia; early or mild, middle or moderate and late or severe. Dementia causes a decline in a person’s ability to think, to reason and to remember. Symptoms include increasing short-term memory loss, confusion, changes in behaviour and personality and progressive loss of life skills. But, even as the condition progresses, people may have times of lucidity.

Not all people with dementia suffer in the same way or have the same needs. There is no cure for dementia, though it can sometimes be arrested or slowed by medication and mental and physical activity.

There are currently about 820,000 people diagnosed with dementia in the UK, and

many more undiagnosed. One in 14 people over 65 years of age and 1 in 6 people over 80 years of age has a form of dementia. Two-thirds of those diagnosed are women and two-thirds are not living in care.<sup>1</sup>

### **Personhood, identity and worth**

In a society that stresses the need to be productive, it is easy to feel that people with dementia are of little or no value. But just as a £20 note is worth the same whether it is crisp and new or old and worn, so a person with dementia is worth just as much as anyone else.<sup>2</sup> Christine Bryden, who has dementia, says, ‘as I lose an identity in the world around me, which is so anxious to define me by what I do and say, rather than who I am, I can seek an identity by simply being me, a person created in the image of God’,<sup>3</sup> while Rowan Williams writes: ‘What is fundamental and indestructible about my identity (is) that I am an object of divine intention and commitment, a being freely created and never abandoned’.<sup>4</sup> Where people can no longer remember their own identity, the church must do it for them. Williams suggests that ‘The question is whether we can respect and love those who may seem to have no clear picture of themselves or others at all’.<sup>5</sup>

In particular, it is important to see the *person* with dementia rather than the person with *dementia*. This ‘person-centred approach’ was pioneered by Tom Kitwood in 1997. It does not deny the reality of the disease but treats each person as an individual, emphasising what they *can* do. As one person in the early stages of dementia said to me, ‘we can quite easily write people off. We need to give anyone a chance to perform, to contribute.’ Goldsmith reminds us that ‘we know only too well from history what can happen when people are seen as less than human’ and suggests that ‘there is a real ethical challenge to maintain the integrity and dignity of the person with dementia’.<sup>6</sup>

It is not uncommon to hear relatives of people with dementia saying things like, ‘the person I love died a long time ago’, or ‘all that is left of the person is an empty shell’.<sup>7</sup> Dementia has even been called the ‘long bereavement’. Goldsmith takes a much more positive view. He affirms that the person has not died and believes that, ‘awful though this illness is, it is not the dissolution of the person, nor is it necessarily the last word in communicating, living and loving’. Indeed, he believes that ‘the experience of dementia can lead us into new understandings—about ourselves, those who are ill, and the mystery that we call “God”’.<sup>8</sup>

### **Theology**

Dementia is an illness. Some people will ask why it happens in their family, and even whether it is a punishment sent by God. I agree wholeheartedly with Goldsmith’s words: ‘Most certainly and emphatically it is not. A god who hands out illness and

suffering, pain and distress is not God as experienced and understood within the Judaeo-Christian tradition...Never, ever does God punish us by inflicting illness or disease, suffering or tragedy upon us'.<sup>9</sup> He continues, 'It is the very essence of Christian Faith that we discern the presence and activity of God in brokenness and weakness'.<sup>10</sup>

One way of addressing the 'why?' question is to give the medical explanation of the causes of dementia, but the questioner is usually looking for a reason rather than an explanation, and there are no easy answers. Goodall observes, 'We cannot answer the question, 'Why?', especially when that refers to dementia. But we can, with careful attention, offer such care that meaning and integrity can be found and so enable the journey to a good death'.<sup>11</sup>

Rather than 'why?' it may be more profitable to ask 'how am I going to cope with this?' and 'what resources do I have and where can I go for help and support?'.<sup>12</sup> Or, as David Watson asked while suffering from cancer, 'What are you saying to me, God? What are you doing in my life? What response do you want me to make?'.<sup>13</sup>

God's love and mercy are unconditional and unending, neither limited by our unworthiness nor dependent on our responses, including our rational responses. It has been said that God's grace 'is a gift which is only possible to a rational being',<sup>14</sup> and that faith 'is reason subject to the rule of God',<sup>15</sup> but both statements are highly questionable. Indeed, it can be argued that 'the life of dependency in dementia models faith as relationship, and could be seen as a more perfect way of being human'.<sup>16</sup>

Forgetfulness is one of the typical symptoms of dementia, and it is important to affirm that whether or not we remember God, God always remembers us. People with dementia can be reminded of this through worship and the pastoral care of Christian people.

## **Spirituality**

Shamy defines spiritual wellbeing as 'an affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community and the environment, that nurtures and celebrates wholeness. It is the strong sense that I am 'kept' and 'held' by Someone greater than myself who 'keeps' the whole of creation, giving it life and purpose. It is the certain knowledge that I am part of meaning and purpose'.<sup>17</sup> The spiritual care of people with dementia and their carers involves fostering their sense of spiritual wellbeing, whatever that means for them. Neglect of the spiritual dimension seriously impoverishes life and confusion may be greatly exacerbated by such neglect.<sup>18</sup>

Do we believe that God loves people with dementia? Do we believe that Christ died for people with dementia? Do we believe that the Holy Spirit can work in and through people with dementia? I suspect that many Christians would readily answer 'yes' to the first two questions but would be more hesitant about the third. It is interesting to hear of



‘re-menting’—a term used for people with severe dementia responding to religious activities with which they are familiar: joining in hymns and the Lord’s Prayer; saying ‘amen’ at the end of a prayer; even praying aloud themselves.

It is easy to assume that people who give no indication of comprehending, let alone responding, are without spiritual awareness. This is not necessarily so, but they may value different ways of experiencing God. Robert Davis, an American minister with dementia, says he is brought closer to God through watching nature videos than listening to sermons, when he gets lost after the first point.<sup>19</sup>

## **Worship**

Churches should welcome people with dementia to their services and other activities and help them to participate as far as they are able. Hopefully, the days of people with dementia being refused communion on the grounds that they don’t understand it are past. After all, which of us does understand?

If it is not possible for a person with dementia to attend worship, s/he could be brought to the church at some other time, and allowed to walk around, explore, sing, cry or whatever. It might be appropriate for there to be a short Bible reading and/or prayer, or even for a hymn or two to be sung. In this way, the person’s relationship with the building remains and may serve to remind them of past occasions. It might even provide the nucleus for a small group to meet together.

Many residential and nursing homes welcome people from churches to lead services. These need to be short, perhaps 15-20 min, with familiar hymns (traditional words), on a sheet in large print so people don’t have to find numbers in hymn books. Bible readings need to be short and are best from the Authorised Version, which is more familiar to older people. A short story or talk can remind people of God’s love for them and presence with them. They can be invited to join in familiar passages like Psalm 23 and the Lord’s Prayer. Symbols like a cross can be helpful. Morse’s *Worshipping with dementia*<sup>20</sup> has some helpful material. After the service it is good to greet each person individually and to shake or touch their hands. It is also good for those involved in leading to reflect on what went well and what did not.

## **Pastoral care**

The pastoral care of people with dementia can be very different from that of people without it. Some people feel that visiting someone who will forget shortly after you have left is a waste of time. It is not, for at least two reasons. One is that the present moment is important. Being with a person who has dementia, speaking to them and listening to

them, sharing pictures, or listening to music are all ways of showing them that they matter. The second reason for visiting is that after the visitor has left, emotions and feelings from the visit will remain. A positive visit can give the person a sense of wellbeing for some time afterwards. It is important to remember that people with dementia are dependent on others to make and maintain relationships.

When visiting it is important to communicate in ways appropriate to the person concerned, taking into account factors such as how they are feeling, what time of day it is, what they have been doing immediately beforehand, whether anyone else is in the room, and, if so, whether to move to their own room. The greater the severity of the person's condition, the more difficult verbal communication becomes and the more skilful we have to be. Kitwood uses the analogy of playing tennis; the person with dementia hits the ball over the net and the visitor has to return it in such a way that the person with dementia can reach it and hit it back.<sup>21</sup>

Communication does not need to involve words. Facial expressions, a gentle touch and shared activity are all means of communicating. Such activities might include looking at pictures, an album of photos of the person's life, or sharing the contents of a memory box. The MHA leaflet *Visiting people with dementia*<sup>22</sup> reminds us that 'communication is '...the smile on your face...a friendly approach... listening thoughtfully...the warmth in your voice...a gentle touch'.

Caring for a person with dementia is very stressful—the relentlessness of the task, seeing the continuing decline in the health of a loved one, disturbed nights, physical, mental and emotional fatigue, social isolation, career disruption with loss of salary. Carers can become so immersed in their caring role that they neglect themselves. They can also be neglected by the churches of which they are part. One carer wrote, 'I feel very isolated. I have had no letters or phone calls from ministers or other Christians. I can only reflect that it is because church members are not aware of the demands this illness makes, or they are afraid of what it might involve'. Another said, 'I believe my own family situation would be greatly alleviated if the local church were to reach out and help'.<sup>23</sup>

The experience of dementia is the experience of being in a foreign land—both for those who suffer from it and for those who watch—and, like the Israelites in Babylon we ask, 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'...for Christians this is a question we must ask, for the sake of those with whom we work, and with whom we watch.<sup>24</sup>

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# The end of anthropocentric theology?

by Michael Ball

Child development studies suggest that human babies are initially only aware of themselves and their needs, especially hunger and pain. They gradually come to realise the existence of others, beginning with the mother, then the wider family, and finally the outside world. The scope of their experience is very small, and needs to expand throughout childhood, and indeed the whole of life.

In many ways the human race has had to make a similar journey of discovery. We found that our planet is much larger than our individual or tribal experience told us. We naturally assumed that we (and our planet) were the centre of the universe, and that sun, moon and stars revolved around us. We conceived of the age of things in figures that were comprehensible in terms of individual life-spans and the history of tribes and nations. For instance, the Graeco-Roman world explained the dinosaur bones it discovered as the remains of giants from the old times, just before history.

## Paradigm changes

Since the rise of modern science, we have had to make innumerable paradigm changes, which were often counterintuitive and difficult, controversial, even offensive to some thinking. A couple of examples suffice—the problems Galileo encountered in suggesting that the earth is not the centre of the universe, and the problems encountered by Darwin in suggesting that life forms did not come into existence fully formed as we now see them, nor are they permanent fixtures.

Scientific understanding has, time after time, had to free itself from anthropocentric thinking. The glowing ‘cloud’ of the Milky Way is actually our galaxy, consisting of billions of stars. Our galaxy is shown by telescopes of various kinds to be only one of billions. We now know that planets are found around many other stars, and unless we believe that life has only resulted once from miraculous intervention, it seems most likely that it has evolved in many places and many times elsewhere in the universe.

More recently, the theory of relativity, the magnitude and age of the universe, the discovered strange world of quantum physics and subatomic particles all bear little resemblance to human everyday experience and ‘common sense’, not to mention the possible existence of other dimensions, universes and the mysterious ‘dark matter’, which seems to comprise much of the universe, but whose nature and whereabouts are

unknown.

It really has become impossible to consider human life as the crown or centre of creation. There is so much time and space in which humans never existed, that if there is any ultimate meaning it must go beyond humanity. Scientific thinking about the universe has long ceased to be anthropocentric, and theology, to be realistic, must make the same change. This came home very strongly to me during a visit to Iceland. We walked across the rift valley there. One half is attached to the American continental plate, the other to the Eurasian, moving apart at the rate of about 2cm per year (roughly the length our fingernails grow in a year). We were walking on young rock from the last eruption, which took place about 9000 years ago, already deeply fissured by the stretching, and which will one day be levelled again by a further eruption—and so on, until the continental plates finally drift apart and a new ocean comes into existence and floods the area on which we stood. Our human timespan and dimensions seemed very small indeed.

### **Humanity as central?**

Moving away from a human-centred viewpoint creates a major difficulty for Christian theology, which has always tended to see humanity as central to creation. Genesis 1 and 2 both suggest that human beings are the main purpose of God's intentions in creation, though it is worth noting that the author of Genesis 1 is humble enough to start his narrative in indescribable dark mystery (Genesis 1:1), before creation as humans now perceive it comes into being. He thus leaves open the possibility of meaning beyond human description or understanding. Psalm 8 and Second Isaiah 40, while stressing the greatness of God, and expressing amazement at his care for humans, do not have a significantly different perspective.

During our Icelandic holiday, I was reading the Book of Job, which takes a radical stance in biblical terms, suggesting that God's purposes go far beyond human concerns and comprehension. Even the folk-story first chapters provide an 'explanation' of earthly events which cannot be known by the human protagonists. This theological point of view is further developed when God finally responds to Job's complaints with the speech from the whirlwind. As Robert Alter has recently written (*The Wisdom Books*, 2010 p10), '...God's thundering challenge to Job is not bullying. Rather it rousingly introduces a comprehensive overview of the nature of reality that exposes the limits of Job's human perspective, anchored as it is in the restricted compass of human knowledge...?.'

The author of Job is also radical or even subversive in his rejection of the simplistic view of rewards and punishments for individual human good or evil behaviour that is

propagated by much of Proverbs and many of the Psalms. (Would he have been as dismissive of the similar theory of the Deuteronomic historians concerning the fortunes of Israel and Judah?). In this, he also finds support from the author of Ecclesiastes, whose insistence on the impossibility of understanding God's ways again subverts anthropocentric theology (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Paul in Colossians sees a cosmic significance for Christ (Colossians 1:15-20), claiming that he is directly involved in the creation of all things, visible and invisible both on earth and in heaven and that everything has been reconciled with him through the cross. John also sees cosmic significance for the Logos (John 1:1-2), who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:14). Clearly neither author had any idea of the magnitude and age of creation, as now understood, though Paul's mention of what is invisible leaves open application of what he wrote to that which was beyond his knowledge and experience. However, if we are to pursue their idea, that God's purposes include the whole created order, then we must ask how this applies to the enormity of time and space in which human beings play no part whatever.

Creationists and fundamentalists firmly refuse to do this. They retain a prescientific outlook and take a totally anthropocentric view of reality. They insist that all species, especially human beings, were individually created by God in a world that is only a few thousand years old, and was created simply to provide a setting for the human race. This is consistent with a face-value approach to the Bible, Job excepted, though it is salutary to remember that Augustine parted company with the Manichees partly because they refused to accept the findings of the natural philosophers' discoveries concerning astronomy. Because they could both explain and predict such matters as eclipses, their theories seemed to him to be evident truth. By contrast, the Manichees believed that eclipses occurred when sun and moon veiled their eyes from cosmic battles between light and darkness (Augustine, *Confessions*, Book V).

Fundamentalists usually claim that their faith is that of Jesus and the Bible. Existentially, this is not so. The fundamentalist lives in a day to day world totally transformed by truth revealed by science (in medicine, technology, digital technology, materials), yet holds his position on the age of the earth by arbitrarily rejecting plausible alternative views, also resulting from the same scientific enterprise. Obviously, people of 2000 years ago did neither! In much popular evangelical preaching, God's main purpose seems to be to rescue as many humans as possible (or for the Calvinists, as many as he has chosen) for existence in heaven. When human history has run its course and the day of judgement arrives, then history will come to an end, and all the rest of the universe will dissolve away. In their view, its sole purpose is to produce human souls for heaven.

Of course, this view cannot be disproved, but the magnitude of the universe, even if a scientific estimate of its age is rejected, suggests that it is really disproportionate in size to exist simply for the inhabitants of one planet of one not particularly important or unusual star. If we accept a scientific dating of the universe, then the argument becomes even

more compelling, given the almost vanishingly small part of its existence for which humans have existed.

### **Poetry and story**

Some Christian thinkers have started to think this matter through. For instance, the poet Alice Meynell (1847-1922) speculated on God's dealings with possible other life-forms in her poem *Christ in the universe*, quite remarkable for her time, given the then current understanding of the universe. C. S. Lewis also toyed with the idea of God's wider purposes with other creatures in his books, *Out of the silent planet* (Mars) and *Perelandra*, or *Voyage to Venus*, though in view of what has since been discovered about the physical conditions on those planets, and the many more planets existing elsewhere in the universe, Lewis's stories today are unconvincing as science fiction and appear rather dated, even parochial. He also describes the same God at work in his fantasy world of Narnia. Sydney Carter again took up the theme in his Christmas song *Every star shall sing a carol* which was included in *Baptist praise and worship*, where it raised some eyebrows among the theologically more conservative.

Teilhard de Chardin took a mystic view of God's unfathomable purposes, but so far as I understand him in his book *The phenomenon of man*, his theory seems to be grounded in the evolution of humanity on this planet, leading to an 'omega point' of wider spiritual consciousness. His ideas, though radical, no longer seem radical enough to comprehend creation as we now perceive it.

I am suggesting that a Christian theology of creation must follow the lead of the author of Job and take seriously the reality that God's purposes go way beyond human concerns and comprehension. To take a trivial if popular example, it really will not do to see the dinosaurs as an irrelevant evolutionary dead end whose only purpose is to fascinate little boys! Perhaps we need to see them somewhat as the author of Job saw Leviathan and Behemoth (Job 40:15-41.34), composed of elements of hippopotamus, crocodile, dragon and sea monster, totally strange creatures to humans. We do not understand their place in the created order, but they have significance for God their creator.

Militant atheists like Richard Dawkins cannot accept traditional Christian theology which suggests that humanity is the central purpose of God. I agree that there is just too much time and space for this to be likely to be true. However, if Christians make the much more modest and less implausible claims that the very existence of humans as well as human experience and history, and especially the incarnation, provide clues or keys to the meaning of the universe, rather than provide its central whole meaning, this would seem less arrogant and probably less implausible to a scientific mind.

If a scientific account of the universe is basically correct, then we also need to abandon

any anthropocentric view of the *parousia*. The end of human history is a realistic option, but it hardly seems plausible that the fate of the whole universe should be tied to it. There are many possible threats to the very existence of the human species. Ultimately, our sun will die and in the process, consume all the planets in its solar system. In the shorter term, the earth could be subjected to a cataclysmic collision with an asteroid, or be darkened and poisoned for years by a really large volcanic eruption—such events have occurred in times past. We could be victims of new virulent viruses or bacteria, or could make our planet uninhabitable through over-population or runaway global warming. This is not a prospect that I relish, but my faith trusts that while humans are a part of God's purpose in creation and subjects of his unconditional love, they have no monopoly of either.

The New Testament authors and Jesus himself as a true man held a much more anthropocentric view of creation than is plausible today, and we need to take full cognisance of this in our understanding of any doctrine of last things. This anthropocentrism related to both the magnitude and the age of the world as they understood it. To insist that their first century language of the moon turning to blood, the stars falling from the sky, the heavens rolling up like a scroll and all the rest refer to the universe in its magnitude as we now know it in the 21st century seems perverse. People whose view of the age of the human race, and indeed the earth itself was only a few thousand years, could realistically look forward to its end in a time well within human thought.

There is perhaps one way in which anthropocentric theology is valid. Although, given the size and age of the universe, sentient and intelligent life may well have appeared many times and in many places, our chance of comparing notes seems vanishingly small. For contact to be made, we should have to be looking in the right direction at the right time to detect any signals which intelligent life was sending into space. (Consider how short the time the human race has been capable of transmitting messages into space and how short the time, compared with the age of life, humans have existed.) Even if contact were made, messages would be so impossibly slow that any meaningful exchange of information would be virtually impossible. (It would take four years for a message from us to reach even the nearest star, and just as long for an answer to come back!).

To the best of our knowledge we are the most complex phenomena in existence, the only known part of this vast universe which has any consciousness, self-awareness, or understanding of the whole. If there is any ultimate meaning to be found, then in humanity we have our best chance of discovering it, by considering not only rationality, but also culture, aesthetics, emotional relationships and spirituality. Here Christian theology can help. We believe that humans are created in the image of God (not necessarily the only life-form of which this is true), and we believe that in human experience and history, particularly the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the perfect



image of God for human beings, the Creator has truly made himself known.

***Michael Ball, now retired, read chemistry and researched physics at Oxford before ministry and held pastorates in Ipswich, Pontypridd, Sutton and Llanishen.***

### ***Response to the BMF Conversation Day by Bob Allaway***

Unlike many evangelical churches, most members of my church are single. This is good, because it means those on their own can find others to support them.

The modern obsession with homosexual relationships can cause distress to celibate, same-sex Christian friendships. 'It is not good for a person to be alone', so single Christians should be encouraged to support one another. Christian ladies, particularly, have often shared homes in the past. I remember a couple of such ladies, coming to stay with us, who felt it necessary to assure us that they were not lesbians...but they should not have needed to.

If there is one good thing about the government's desire for 'gay marriage', it is that it can free up civil partnerships for such celibate, same sex friendships. I believe the BU should encourage us to bless civil partnerships, provided it is made clear that such relationships are entirely celibate.

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# Missing: the children's talk!

by Colin Sedgwick

**R**etirement brings all sorts of opportunities, apart from the obvious ones. When I retired recently, my wife and I decided that we would take a few months to visit various churches before deciding where we would become members. (Though staying in the same area, we were absolutely clear that there was no way we could continue in the church of which I had been pastor.) All those people—good friends with whom I had shared many a ministers' fellowship meeting—what did they actually do on Sundays? How did they go about things? How did they preach? How did they lead worship? What amazing innovations, what daring experiments, what radical ideas, was I going to find?

Well, it was an eye-opening experience. The variety was considerable, and there was much to be grateful for. But at risk of falling into grumpy-old-man mode (well, at least I'm cheerfully grumpy; and I insist that I'm not really old!) I'll mention one or two of the things that struck me less favourably...

The dress-code was often informal to the point (in my obviously subjective opinion) of sheer sloppiness. I long ago abandoned any idea that a (male) minister must wear a tie, never mind a jacket, but it seems to me that reasonably smart casual is important, at least in a fairly typical neighbourhood church. But sometimes there seemed to be almost a self-conscious delight in sheer scruffiness.

Leadership of services was often contracted out to a 'worship leader'. No problem with that; but it was difficult to avoid the feeling sometimes that anyone who could strum a few chords on a guitar (hey, I was doing that nearly 50 years ago!) was thereby qualified to be a worship leader, with the result that the quality of the service varied from the excellent to the squirm-making. Fine, you could say (though personally I wouldn't), for the regulars, for in-house; but what about the newcomer, the enquirer, the sceptical non-Christian?

Music—ah, that perennially controversial issue. This was usually led by a band rather than a solo instrument. In principle I regard this as an excellent development; the days of the tyranny of the organ seem to be largely gone. But again, there was a down side too. Why is the strummed guitar regarded as the default instrument?—could you sometimes give us the tune, please! And is it really necessary to have the

drums played so deafeningly loud? It was a joy occasionally to hear a violin, a saxophone, a flute.

And prayer—mmm, I have to be really careful here, for this is an area where all my prejudices come bubbling to the surface. For example...

I long ago gave up the notion that the Lord's Prayer has to be included routinely in every service. In fact, I was once told off over this. But—er, never? or virtually never? And on the rare occasions when it is included, isn't it a little odd to have it in the archaic version? Why?

And what has happened to intercessory prayer?—apart, of course, from remembering the needs of people in the fellowship? Certainly Peggy's ingrown toe-nails and Jack's loss of work are not to be minimised. But there's a big wide world out there!

And what has happened to structured, prepared prayers? Is it really so unspiritual? God forgive me, but I have even found myself falling into the habit of counting the number of 'justs' and 'Lords', mere meaningless filler words, in any given prayer, a sure sign that the person praying is, ahem, just winging it: 'Oh Lord, we just want to thank you, Lord, that we are here today, Lord. We just want to say how much, Lord, we love you, Lord. And Lord...'. We expect people to prepare when they are speaking to the congregation on behalf of God; why not, then, when they are speaking to God on behalf of the congregation?

But hold on, I'm running away with myself. None of this is what I sat down to write about! No; what was particularly striking was that the children's slot, whatever it is called, has largely disappeared. The pattern still seems to be that the children go to their different groups after 20 min or so, but it seems odd that while they are with the full congregation there is no provision specially for them. They simply have to sit through what is largely appropriate for the adults, even if that is seemingly interminable singing. What better way to put them off church for life?

I have asked about this change once or twice and been looked at as if I am some sort of dinosaur. 'Goodness, have you still been doing children's talks! We gave them up 20 years ago!'. At first I thought there must be something seriously wrong with me; but on reflection I decided it was time to come back fighting and to ask, 'Wait a minute!

...a brief  
talk could  
change a  
child's life

How can it possibly not be a good thing to give the children a place of their own in the service?'. All right, they are going to be catered for in their groups. All right, they have Messy Church as well. Fine. But so what? Aren't we, as churches, families? And doesn't a family when it comes together make space for the youngest? What, as they say, is not to like?

I know of course that children's talks can be bad. Let's grant that straight away—I'm sure I have given a few bad ones in my time. (I heard one once that was an excuse to make a series of stupid mother-in-law jokes, seriously offending a non-Christian young woman we had gone along with. On another occasion the speaker, no doubt inadvertently, had the congregation laughing at (not with) something a child had said.) They can be patronising, even manipulative, in the sense of effectively using the children for some other purpose than simply drawing them closer to Jesus. They can be done with more of an eye to the adults than to the children: 'Ah, isn't it lovely to see the children involved?'; 'Aren't the children cute?'

I'm sure it's good that in recent years serious questions have been asked about children's talks, what their purpose is, what form they should take. But the fact that things may be done badly is no reason for not doing them at all. I imagine that many Baptist churches have a fair quota of people in the teaching profession, so even if the pastor or other leader doesn't feel comfortable with speaking to the children, surely there is someone who could take on the task.

Jesus loved children. He enjoyed their company and made them welcome when others tried to turn them away. Anything—anything—that can be done with integrity to bring children closer to Jesus should surely be grabbed hold of with both hands: we know only too well that our world will woo them away from him quickly enough. Sunday morning affords a perfect opportunity: to teach, to interact, to create a bond, to say in effect: 'You matter here!'. Who knows, a brief talk or other presentation could change a child's life for ever. So I say: Let's do it! Let's do it unashamedly. Let's do it with conviction. And let's do it well!

***Colin Sedgwick is a recently retired Baptist minister.***

# Have you been collared?

A response by Mike Smith

**I**n response to Simon and Ruth's article on clerical collars (*bmj* July 2013), I would like to share the positives and negatives of my idiosyncratic practice over many years.

With two exceptions, I never wear a collar at my church. I do this as a conscious act, because I do not wish to be thought of as a special 'holy' person. I am called to do a job by God, but the callings of other people in my congregation are just as valuable. The two exceptions are weddings and funerals, which is just practical. Visitors need to know who is in charge—if only to ask where the toilets are!

Outside, I always wear the collar to ecumenical meetings of clergy. There are some Roman Catholic priests or Anglican vicars who still think that those without the bishop's hands laid on their heads are 'not properly ordained'. Wearing the clerical collar is a sharp rebuff to this. In schools, hospitals and elsewhere, the collar is first and foremost a matter of identification. It says that I am 'Christ's man'.

In schools, especially, we show children what Christians are like. So when I do history or science, it shows that these are just as proper for a Christian as worship and the Bible. In schools I avoid serving on governing bodies. But my collar means that I can be a sympathetic listening ear to the concerns of staff that they would not want aired on an official level, analogous to the position of the naval chaplain, who has no officer rank.

In hospitals, I sometimes jokingly refer to the collar as my 'plastic crowbar'. It means that I can get in outside official visiting hours, and can access some kinds of information that might not be available to just anyone. The same holds good in my occasional visits to prison—on one occasion, making a second visit, one of the chaplaincy team actually asked if I would like to become a prison chaplain! Also, while taking part in a public demonstration, I was asked by a Trade Union official to lead prayers, as it was 11 November and 'you're the only man of the cloth here'.

When out and about in the area of my pastorates, I usually wore my collar. The only negatives were that once or twice I was insulted or spat at, and there were always those who thought I was a soft touch for money. But the positives were infinitely greater. To

start with, it meant people could approach me, knowing Whom I represented. Although one man did tell me it took six whiskies before he could pluck up courage to do so!

Also, in times when people are worried about paedophiles, it could save embarrassment and suspicion. A small boy hailed me as a friend. When his puzzled mother asked who I was, the reply came, 'That's Mr Smith, who comes to our school to tell us about fossils and Jesus'. It also helps in pastoral visitation. Visiting a woman at home in the daytime might get nosy neighbours asking questions. On sight of the clerical collar, their response (in West Yorkshire, at any rate) is: 'Oh it's only the vicar. He's all right'.

Being fortunate enough to have had a few appearances on television, I have always asked 'Shall I wear my collar?' Most times the answer has been an emphatic 'Yes'. No doubt there is the novelty factor, but I have had some very good chats with people involved in programmes who were only too ready to talk publicly or confidentially to a Christian minister. There have been plenty of laughs, and also some quite serious talk, both in front of the camera and off it.

Wearing a collar also has an effect on the wearer, especially when behind the wheel of a car! I do remember also one incident in my cycling days, when I got sworn at by a driver behind me. He then passed me, saw the collar, and pulled up to apologise profusely.

More seriously, you take on a responsibility if you are noticeable as a Christian. But surely Christ expects his servants to be noticed, and to be noticed doing good. Admittedly, it can have its funny side. I once met two young police officers trying to help a man who had locked his keys in his car. When I opened the car for them, I was glad I was wearing my collar. And I did explain how one of their older colleagues had shown me how to do it!

Walking the streets publicly identified as a Christian minister is part of the job. I hate the idea prevalent in some circles that a minister today is some kind of CEO sheltering behind a desk, with whom you have to officially book an appointment. In retirement, I still wear the collar for schools, funerals and other public events. And off duty I always wear a small lapel cross, to show that the Lord Jesus Christ is my Boss, and I am glad for this to be known.

***Mike Smith is a retired Baptist minister living in Huddersfield, well known for his quiz work both on and off TV.***

# Settlement: fit for purpose?

by Simon Farrar

**F**or the past 10 months I have been involved in the settlement system of the BUGB. I have come to think that the process does not fit well into the 21st century with regard to practice, time or finance. I would not want to be thought of as a complainer simply because I am still in the system after quite a long period—though some of my comments are inevitably made from my personal opinion and experience—but more want to question, as people have done before, whether it is time for a review of the BUGB settlement system. There are three main areas I would like to highlight.

**1. Communication.** In the old days this was paper and snail mail—today's is email, text, Skype and so forth. My point here is to note the speed with which things can be done. All my communication comes from the regional minister in an electronic form, yet it only comes when the National Settlement team (NST) has physically met.

Along with this, the profile which prospective ministers are asked to produce still involves two pages of A4 (as far as I understand this is what is suggested). As a student this seemed feasible, but with 15 years of ministry behind me it seems impossible to put all the details needed into this package. Postage is not an issue, so why not have a document that can be sent by email and gives a better picture of who one is: after all, the church leadership has to make an initial decision on this brief two sides of A4. This is not a system that other organisations—secular or Christian—would use. Indeed, my recent application to another Christian organisation, which provided the information for the initial decision, ran to nine pages of information. I know we would not want to overload a leadership with information at the start; but they do need to have a reasonable picture of the prospective minister.

**2. Regional minister time.** In these days when the BUGB is cash strapped and reducing staff, we still ask all the regional ministers to meet every five weeks or so, person to person, to talk through the details of the settlement list. In the South West, where we have one regional minister stretched to the extreme, I question if this is a good use of time and resources. Each NST takes three days of time and involves a substantial journey. I recognise there will be other work to deal with on these occasions but the costs must be quite high for these meetings since 13 people travel, stay overnight, and are away from the regions for this meeting.

**3. Lack of control.** From my personal situation I would say that it all feels very out of my control and sometimes very much in the hands of the regional minister. I am not in any way discrediting the work they do on our behalf in the settlement system, and also not in any way discounting the amazing timing and control of God over these things. I am a pastor not currently in pastorate and yet I am left to wait for others to meet and make decisions and have no ability to further my cause to be back in a full time ministry—at least not in a local Baptist church.

As an example, after the July NST meeting my name went to four churches, which let me know within two weeks that they did not wish to speak to me, and yet there is no NST in August—so I had to wait till September for any more movement. Four more churches, three rejections and one initial discussion—and another six weeks before the next NST meeting. During this time out of pastorate, I have no income. This is really frustrating for a person who is motivated and ready fully to engage in ministry—and there are several ‘unemployed’ ministers seeking ministry at this time.

So how might a new system work? I have no conclusive answer, but a few suggestions. Should we develop a way for churches to advertise and pastors to respond by application? There could be a part of the BUGB website that carries adverts for churches looking for a pastor. This allows the system to continue regardless of the time of month or year, or when the regional ministers might be meeting. It also allows the church to create an application form for interested parties that would help them tease out the information they are looking for from a new pastor, rather than a bland two-page statement to work from and, let’s face it, from a pastor who may not want to go to that region/town anyway—we have all probably had that experience despite our desire to go where God calls.

Conversely it would allow an applicant to fill in more detail about themselves and what s/he can offer in style and gift to the ministry of the church. A settlement section of the BUGB website could be ‘controlled’ by a password so that it was not public information. The pastor looking for new ministry might meet with his/her regional minister first, to register their desire to look for new ministry and be given a code for access which would last, say, three months, at which time a review with the regional minister might be undertaken. The regional ministers might then meet every three months for any business they may have, perhaps to share the commendations they have produced for ministers and review what’s going on in the system. Any concerns in between could be dealt with on email/Skype if needed.

None of the above diminishes the need for church and minister to determine what the call of God is for the situation, which is presumably at the heart of our desire to serve God effectively and in the right place, but does allow for a more flexible and potentially speedier system of settlement.

This is not a conclusive answer to what I perceive to be a system in need of



overhaul— but perhaps it might get a discussion going and create a system more in keeping with the 21st century communication and recruitment patterns.

***After pastorates in Eastbourne and Taunton, Simon Farrar is currently seeking a new church.***

### Submitting copy to *bmj*

The *bmj* publishes articles to resource and inform Baptist ministers, so that we are better equipped to fulfil our calling. We are always keen to hear from you—do contact me if you have a contribution for *bmj*. Please keep to under 2500 words for articles, with minimal endnotes (no footnotes please). Shorter comments are also welcome. If you would like to discuss or submit a longer article, it may need to be adapted or serialised. ***Please send electronic copy.***

Your article may not appear in the next published issue of *bmj*—it may be a special issue, or I may have too many articles, or need to find a balance. Please be patient if that is so! All your contributions will be considered, and I may seek other opinions if I am not sure whether it is suitable for *bmj* or would be better published somewhere else.

We are always looking for new book reviewers, so contact John Goddard if this is something you feel you could do, letting him know what subjects interest you. You get to keep the book, of course!

Our copyright position is summarised under the list of contents on p1 of this issue. Thank you.

*Sally Nelson*

# Reviews

Edited by John Goddard

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***Crafting prayers for public worship:  
the art of intercession***

by Samuel Wells

Canterbury Press £12.99

**Reviewer: Bob Little**

This practical guide—by the vicar of St Martin in the Fields, also Visiting Professor of Christian Ethics at King’s College, London—aims to empower and equip anyone to offer heartfelt, informed, thoughtful and appropriate prayers on behalf of God’s people for God’s world.

Putting the book’s contents into a context, Wells comments: ‘I’m not a mystic...but I found extraordinary renewal in prayer when I came to realise that there was a profound gift to offer God’s people when giving them words and a shape for their silent yearnings and compassionate searchings—and in practising that ministry I’ve found freedom and joy’.

His book defines and discusses public prayer and offers guidelines for avoiding common pitfalls. It explores prayer as an integral part of worship and the kinds of speech we need—and don’t need—to address God. There are also reflections on the basic structures and shape of the

prayers we create—advocating the need for these prayers to stay rooted in scripture.

Chapters 1-4 set out ground rules for public intercessory prayer—forged by the author’s seven-year experience of regularly leading intercessory prayers in an ecumenical setting in North Carolina. This experience provided him with two distinct perspectives on public intercessory prayer: a cross-cultural and a professional one, since in the Anglican church lay—not ordained—people tend to lead intercessory prayer.

Importantly—and most valuably—the book concludes by providing a range of relevant templates and examples. These include prayers in a liturgical context (for Advent, Epiphany, Lent and Easter) as well as prayers for more informal occasions.

While, for centuries, Christians have asked rhetorically, ‘Why should the Devil have all the best tunes?’, it’s equally valid to ask, ‘Why should the Anglicans have all the best intercessory prayers?’ In this slim but valuable book, Wells provides some helpful and insightful prayers but, more importantly, also sets out the templates and underlying principles for readers to generate their own—equally meaningful - public intercessory prayers.

This extremely valuable book is encouraging, enlightening and empowering. Hopefully, those who pray in public will read it and put its tips, techniques and templates into practice to enhance the worship they lead.

***As a fire by burning: mission as the life of the local congregation***

by Roger Standing

SCM Press, 2013

**Reviewer: John M. Goddard**

‘The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no Church...’ (Emil Brunner).

This significant new book from Roger Standing, Principal of Spurgeon’s College, London, might cheekily be described in footballing terms as a game of two halves. Following a brief introduction and important scene-setting chapter called *Missional church*, the main body of the book consists of two contrasting but complementary sections which unpack this theme. This book rightly returns the local church to the heart of the mission conversation. Standing’s chapter concludes with Lesslie Newbigin’s famous comment that, ‘The only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it’.

Part 1, *Mission in context*, opens with a further contribution from the author under the heading of *Mission and locality*, before gathering together brief chapters from 16 different authors which help to highlight something of the complexity and diversity of mission contexts and approaches in contemporary England. Part 2, *Mission and the local congregation*, is Roger Standing’s own sustained reflection on his theme.

This book will be useful for students of mission and ministry, and will no doubt be on lots of college reading lists in the near future. But it is primarily a book for local churches and for those women and men who seek to lead and inspire them in mission. A number of chapters would work very well as stand-alone reading projects for diaconates and leadership teams to explore together the essence and essentials of mission in the local church. Some books inform, and some books inspire, but the best manage to combine both information and inspiration in a meaningful and accessible way. In my opinion, Roger Standing’s book manages this difficult balance, and while some chapters will date more quickly than others (the perils of contextualisation...), I believe it will be used and useful for years to come.

***Making church accessible to all***

by Tony Phelps-Jones

BRF Abingdon 2013

**Reviewer: Sally Nelson**

This little book will not take long to read. If you are already interested in disability issues then it may not tell you much that is new—but it is excellent as a starting point if you want to know what the basic issues are, or to give to church members who say things like: ‘...but we haven’t got anyone in a wheelchair at this church!’.

Tony Phelps-Jones belongs to Prospects, a Christian charity that supports churches in the UK as they work with and include people with learning disabilities, and

brings years of experience and commitment to the pages.

This book is split into two parts. The first deals with the generalities of inclusion—helping us to think about our language (which betrays inner attitudes), our activities and our communication, and where these things might become obstacles rather than helps. Tony introduces the reader to the basic models of disability (medical, social and relational) and gives short anecdotes and quotes to support his points, helping churches to see how they might appear to others. He also helpfully summarises our legal responsibilities for access and inclusion, and makes many practical suggestions about adapting activities to make them more inclusive. Most of these suggestions are simple and easy to introduce.

The accessibility of the building does have a chapter to itself but this chapter is the last, not the first, of Part 1. Inclusion comes primarily from an attitude and only secondarily from putting in a ramp and a toilet. Having said that, there is good practical advice in this chapter—not least, to include someone with a wheelchair on the planning team for any developments! Many, many ‘accessible’ toilets are built with a handbasin that cannot be reached by someone in a wheelchair, or a toilet so neatly tucked into one corner to accommodate the baby changing shelf that you can’t get to it without serious gymnastic effort!

Part 2 of the book is written by various contributors and offers more specific

advice on, for example, people with recognised disabilities, together with resources for each. There is also a useful chapter about children with disabilities, from *Contact A Family*. Did you know that it costs three times as much to raise a child with disabilities as a child without? Did you know that parents don’t always want prayer that their child be healed from his/her disability (and disabled adults may often feel the same)—because this request to God implies that they are already defective as people?

The book ends with the account of a moving and prophetic song written down by Tony, challenging the church to see the institutionalised injustice towards people with disability in this country.

You can read this book in a couple of hours and it might give your church a whole new life.

***The preaching life: living out your vocation***

by Barbara Brown Taylor  
Canterbury Press, 2013

**Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery**

US Episcopalian Barbara Brown Taylor's addresses, very much enjoyed by this reviewer, were one of the highlights of the 2013 Greenbelt festival. It seems that her UK publishers have taken the opportunity of her visit to reissue her books. This one originally dates from 1993. At that time she was ministering in a large downtown Anglican parish in

Atlanta, Georgia, and sometimes her references and choice of language reflect that context. Barbara Brown Taylor has now left parish ministry for reasons she herself relates in her later publication *Leaving church*. She now exercises an international ministry of writing and speaking.

Brown's eloquence and lyrical style comes over in her written work as well as in her sermons and addresses. Even so, this is a collection of different pieces which, to my mind, seem to be brought together rather artificially. The first part of the book (*The life of faith*) sets out to explore the subject of the book's subtitle. Three or four chapters are given to the topic of Christian vocation, understood in the widest possible sense—*ie* God's calling is to be discerned by every Christian in the ordinary course of their lives. This is not, then, a book primarily about the call to, or the exercise of, pastoral ministry. The book's main title (*The preaching life*) provides the clue here—these initial chapters are about 'the life that preaches'. But there follow three chapters entitled *Bible, Worship, Preaching* which, however helpful, do narrow the focus somewhat.

Part 2 consists of a collection of sermons gathered together under the title *The preaching of the Word*. Based for the most part on passages from the gospels, these sermons are to be commended for not 'preaching at' the reader. This particular preacher is more than ready to reveal her vulnerabilities. There are also a number of interpretive insights which readers of the *bmj* might find helpful. However, the US context and, in

one or two cases, overt Anglicanism of a fairly sacramental kind (the author affirms seven sacraments) detract slightly from their value to a UK Baptist readership.

This might be a book to put into the hands of enquiring people who would like more than simplicities, but they would need be able to deal with both its Americanisms and its Anglicanisms. So read it first before passing it on to others.

***Seeing in the dark: pastoral perspectives on suffering from the Christian spiritual tradition***

by Christopher Chapman

Canterbury Press 2013

**Reviewer: Bob Allaway**

This book deals with what it says on the cover! In Chapter 1, the author recalls from his Catholic upbringing the perverted view of suffering as meretricious. He disposes of such false views, and suggests some ways forward. Chapter 2, *In darkness and secure*, has insights from St John of the Cross.

Chapter 3, *Jacob wrestling*, ranges over the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, George Herbert and Hadewijch, with a bit of Rabbi Lionel Blue and the Psalms thrown in for good measure. Hadewijch's thought is further developed in Chapter 4, *The hazel in winter*. (I had not previously heard of this 13th century lay mystic, who speaks of God as a lady and herself as a male!)

Chapman intertwines this with his own recollections.

Chapter 5, *Falling down*, reflects on God's judgement (or non-judgement) with Julian of Norwich.

Chapter 6, *A way in the wilderness*, uses William William's *Guide me, O thou* to meditate on the theme of wilderness wandering. I might have expected this to follow Chapter 7, *Out of the land of the slave-drivers*, which couples George Eliot's Silas Marner with the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola.

Chapter 8, *Meeting and separation*, develops the thought of Simone Weil and Thérèse of Lisieux, along with some of the poets already mentioned.

In Chapter 9, *Fruit from the tree*, he introduces Etty Hillesum (another writer I had not come across) and then looks back over what has been learnt in previous chapters.

Each chapter concludes with material 'for reflection' (questions to ponder, prayer exercises). Reading at speed for this review, I could not make use of these. I look forward to reading it properly.

One might expect practical advice in Chapter 10, *The support we need*, but it is more a reflection on his ministry as a spiritual director. Finally, he gives potted biographies of the writers mentioned, in *A cloud of witnesses*.

One of the pleasing things about this book has been not only discovering new spiritual guides, but finding out new aspects of those I thought I already knew. Seeing its title, I wondered if this book could be given to those going through dark times. I suspect most would find it too intellectual and requiring too much work. However, I reckon it would provide excellent material for a week's guided retreat.

