You are the journey and the journey’s end.
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I wonder how many of you guessed what is being shown in the picture on our front cover? Almost unbelievably it is part of an ancient Roman road (probably strictly speaking Romano-Byzantine) in North Syria which runs from west of Aleppo near to the monastery of St Simon Stylites (see p.13). I visited it in 1981 with my husband, and in our photo album we have an alternative version of the scene with (slightly incongruously) our car and myself also in the frame. The model of the car was a Renault 5 and I was a distinctly younger and thinner model in those days. However I opted for the picture of road – pure and simple.

The theme of this issue of The Reader is ‘Time and Place’. I think ‘Place’ has come off slightly better than ‘Time’ – though several of our contributors have creatively managed to weave the two elements together. We hear about some powerful places: Banda Aceh (near the epicentre of the tsunami), the Arctic tundra, Cairo – and Grantham. Two of these contributions link the places they are reflecting on with what has become a significant date in our recent history – 7/7, a day whose infamy is, like 9/11, marked by becoming such an abbreviation. They have pertinent remarks to make in the context of such a time.

The original impetus for the choice of such a theme however was the awareness that with Advent 2005 we begin the Year of Mark in the Common Worship lectionary. Mark, to me, is a Gospel in which ‘place’ is very important. The desert, Galilee, the mount of transfiguration, Jerusalem, the tomb. What weaves these diverse places together is a different kind of place – ‘the Way’ that Jesus walks and encourages his disciples to join him in treading. That Roman road in Syria has always spoken powerfully to me of such a ‘Way’. We are being invited – or perhaps even impelled – to step out in faith upon it. And when we do we will find we are not alone. The evocative lines adapted from Henry Vaughan catch this: ‘You are the journey, and the journey’s end’.

At the heart of this issue is a creative piece of writing in which Karen Elsworth has sought to link the ‘journey’ of Mark’s Gospel to places near where she lives in Kent. We hope this may encourage you to develop something similar in the places where you live. I cannot think of a better way to introduce the spirit of Mark’s Gospel to a group. We would relish hearing from you if you do attempt something similar in your localities. It is my hope that we will return again to Mark’s Gospel in the coming issues of The Reader. His seems to be a Gospel that speaks in a particular way to the difficult times and places we experience at the beginning of our twentieth-first century.

I wish you all a blessed Advent and a happy Christmas.

Clare Amos, Honorary Editor
Place in the Christian Scheme of Things

Rt Revd John Inge is the Suffragan Bishop of Huntingdon. His inspiring book A Christian Theology of Place poses important questions for twenty-first century living. This article draws from the book to focus particularly on the importance of place in the Bible and Christian tradition.

The Western world, according to the report Mission-shaped Church, is now best described as a ‘network society’ in which ‘the importance of place is secondary to the importance of flows’; where ‘locality, place and territory… are just one layer of the complex shape of society’. There is some truth in this assertion. Our society lacks what has been referred to by a social geographer, Anne Buttimer, as ‘place identity’. Writing that since the Second World War we have de-emphasised place for the sake of economic values such as mobility, centralisation or rationalisation. She declares: ‘The skyscrapers, airports, freeways and other stereotypical components of modern landscapes - are they not the sacred symbols of a civilisation that has deified reach and derided home?2

The question that is not often asked is whether this is a good thing. Should Christian theology welcome this ‘deification of reach and derision of home’ – or raise a prophetic voice against it? I suggest that the trend presents considerable human problems. Michel Foucault observed that ‘the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space,’ an anxiety mirrored in the our era has to do fundamentally with space,’ an anxiety mirrored in the dreams of modern men and women is that of the seat that cannot be found. The consequences of the ‘loss of a sense of place’ run deep into the psyche. Such anxiety is not just to do with a lack of rootedness; it is to do with absence of sense of destination, too. People do not generally, I think, consider themselves to be on a journey somewhere: the once powerful metaphor of pilgrimage sheds no light on their lives. Zygmunt Bauman characterises the self in postmodernity as either a vagabond or a tourist:

The vagabond is a pilgrim without a destination; a nomad without an itinerary. The vagabond journeys through an unstructured space; like sander in the desert, who only knows of such trails as are marked with his own footprints, and blown off again by the wind the moment he passes.3

How has this development come about? I have tried to show in my A Christian Theology of Place that this de-emphasising of the significance of place in the twentieth century is associated with not only the neglect but also the active suppression of a consideration of place during the past three centuries. However it has happened, late modernity has seen an unprecedented loss of place and it is not only as a result of the unfettered market economy playing out its effects on the affluent. Elie Weisel has described the twentieth century as ‘the age of the expatriate, the refugee, the stateless – and the wanderer.’ Millions of people have been forcibly uprooted during it and could anyone seriously suggest that this has been anything other than dehumanising?

The hunger for place

In some circles freedom from placedness has certainly been celebrated. The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, one of a very small number of biblical scholars to acknowledge the importance of place, refers to Harvey Cox’s 1965 publication The Secular City in which the latter extols the virtues of the city by citing two of its major gifts as anonymity and mobility. Against Cox, Brueggemann observes that ‘more sober reflection indicates that they are sources of anomie and the undoing of our common humaneness.’ It is, he goes on, ‘rootlessness and not meaninglessness that characterises the current crisis. There are no meanings apart from roots.’ Thus the failure of the ‘urban promise’ is that it does not recognise that there is a human hunger for a sense of place which it cannot meet.

In colluding with an ignoring of the importance of place, Christian theology has inadvertently capitulated to one of the most dehumanising effects of secular modernity. This is surprising in view of the fact that place is accorded some considerable significance in the scriptures. One only needs to open the Bible at the beginning of Genesis and read a few pages to be left with the impression that place is important to the writer. The second creation account revolves around place: the Garden of Eden is not just the location where the drama happens to unfold, it is central to the narrative. This image of Eden resonates with our deepest dis-placed selves within human consciousness - ‘the laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy’, as Eliot would have it.

After the fall, God’s relationship with his chosen people is still bound to place, the Promised Land. The land for which Israel yearns and which it remembers is never unclaimed space; it is always ‘a place with Yahweh, a place filled with memories of life with him and promise from him and vows made to him.’ Possession of the land was of overriding importance to the people of Israel but this land is not just a piece of ‘real estate’: it is a place with memories as well as hopes, with a past as well as a future; it is, in other words, a storied place.

God, people and place

The fact is that if God had to do with
Israel in a special way, then he had also to do with this historical place in a special way. This insight might be expressed by positing a three-way relationship between God, his people and place: Biblical faith as it is presented in the Old Testament suggests that it will not do to leave any one of these out. It will not countenance a high view of place such as that represented by the genius loci tradition, which suggests that God prefers some places to others, nor will it allow us to believe where we are does not matter. God, people and place belong together. As often as the scriptures speak of ‘possessing the land’ they speak of ‘walking in the ways of the Lord,’ of ‘harkening to God’s voice’ and ‘keeping all the words of the law.’

Place is not inert. Place, rather, offers opportunity and challenge and it would seem that it was place which enabled the people to be established by God as a ‘people holy to himself.’ The scriptures speak of ‘possessing the land,’ ‘walking in the ways of the Lord,’ and ‘keeping all the words of the law.’

Walter Brueggemann suggests that the Bible is thus addressed to the central ‘people holy to himself.’ The scriptures speak of the people to be established by God as a place which enables the people to be established by God as a ‘people holy to himself.’ The scriptures thus witness against that strand of Greek thought which sees place simply as an inert container which has no effect on human relations. Responsibility to the land as well as to the Lord is important in this three-way relationship. The Lord, people and place are inextricably woven together in harmony: ‘And because you hearken to these ordinances and keep and do them, the Lord God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love which he swore to your fathers to multiply you.’

As Belden Lane observes, the God of Old and New Testaments who ‘tabernacles’ with God’s people, is always made known in particular locales. When Paul celebrates the ‘scandal of the gospel’, this is a reality geographically rooted in Jesus, a crucified Jew from Nazareth, of all places. The offence, the particularity of place, becomes intrinsic to the incarnational character of Christian faith. This biblical insight has been acted out in the Christian tradition: those who have held to biblical faith have encountered God in particular places, and these places matter. Donald Allchin expresses it thus:

To speak of spirituality is to speak of that meeting of eternity with time, of heaven with earth; it is to recover a sense of the holiness of matter, the sacredness of this world of space and time when it is known as the place of God’s epiphany. There is a geography of holy places, the places where the saints have dwelt, Oxford and Athens, Canterbury and Cernica, St David’s and Zagosk, places whose beauty has been revealed by lives which have been open to God in such a way as to show that this world is not a system closed upon itself.

A geography of holy places: the Bible recognises it; and medieval Europe was criss-crossed with pilgrimage routes to places associated with divine disclosure which constituted an ‘alternative geography,’ a sacred geography, of the sort suggested by Jacob’s experience at Bethel: ‘Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ As the Bible understands it, such encounter initiates a process of movement towards transformation in our understanding of the place and the community in which the story of the place is told, so that the location becomes ‘a place where prayer has been valid’, in TS Eliot’s phrase. Elsewhere Eliot writes:

In the Old Testament there is no timeless space, but there is also no spaceless time. There is rather storied place, that is a place which has meaning because of the history lodged there. There are stories which have authority because they are located in a place. This means that biblical faith cannot be presented simply as an historical movement indifferent to place which could have happened in one setting as well as another, because it is undeniably fixed in this place with this meaning. And for all its apparent ‘spiritualising,’ the New Testament does not escape this rootage.

As the place and the community in which the story of the place is told, so that the location becomes ‘a place where prayer has been valid’, in TS Eliot’s phrase. Elsewhere Eliot writes:

For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints Shall enrich the earth, shall create holy places.

Place is generally an important part of religious experience: Paul’s conversion happened not anywhere, but on the Damascus Road. The philosopher Heidegger focuses our attention on the way in which places are ‘constructed in our memories and affections through repeated encounters and complex associations’ and ‘place experiences are necessarily time-deepened and memory qualified’ and this, I would say, can be true of a community of faith over generations as it is with an individual. The story of a place is inextricably bound up with the community associated with it. I have argued that the most constructive manner in which to view place in the Christian scheme of things is sacramentally and I cannot rehearse those arguments here but I want to stress that in the Biblical witness we have a powerful weapon against the dehumanising effects of a loss of recognition of the importance of place in our society.

Place, worship and a new world

For Christians, at the very least, places of worship should be viewed in much more than baldly utilitarian terms. In the light of the pattern of God, people and place which emerges in the Old Testament, we should recognise that churches have the potential to root us in our salvation history and human experience of God’s self-revelation in the past. They can remind us, too, of the presence and activity of God in the world in the here and now: that the world is not a system closed on itself. We must beware an idolatrous attitude to place, of course – for ‘here we have no abiding city’. However, we need to recognise that places are the seat of relations or the place of meeting and activity in the interaction between God and the world so that place is a fundamental category of human and spiritual experience. As well as rooting us in our tradition and reminding...
us of God’s activity in the present, places of worship, as those who built our cathedrals well understood, can draw us on to out heavenly destination. The Bible would have us recognise this eschatological importance of place.

The consumption of all things in the New Testament is represented in the Book of Revelation by the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem, a place. There is an important strand of the Biblical witness which expresses salvation in terms of place: ‘There are many rooms in my Father’s house; if there were not I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you.’ Jesus tells his disciples. The biblical witness recognises that it is, in fact, difficult for human beings to envisage salvation in terms other than place. Further, I suggest, the Bible points towards our ultimate destiny which is to be emplaced, where the nature of the places in which we will find ourselves in God’s kingdom will be a transcended version of the places of the here and now.

Central to the biblical witness and Christian faith is belief in resurrection. In reinforcing his commitment to this John Polkinghorne, with Bishop Tom Wright, rejects a dualistic notion of soul and body and suggests, in accordance with Hebrew thinking and modern insights, that we appear to be animated bodies rather than embodied souls. Observing that the material of our bodies is changing all the time and that there are very few atoms of our bodies left from among those that were there a few years ago since, ‘eating and drinking, wearing and taw, mean that they’re continually being replaced,’ he concludes that:

I suppose that it will come from the transformed matter of this present world, for God cares for all of his creation and he must have a destiny for the universe beyond its death, just as he has a destiny for us beyond ours. This is why the empty tomb is so important. Jesus’ risen body is the transmuted and glorified form of his dead body. This tells us that in Christ there is a destiny for matter as well as for humanity. In fact, our destinies belong together, precisely because humans are embodied beings.

Though Polkinghorne’s thoughts are, by his own admission, speculative, they are significant coming, as they do, from a distinguished scientist. Those who might want to dismiss them as romanticism should remember that until recently the idea that human beings were made from stardust would have been treated similarly. We now know that it is fact. Polkinghorne’s thesis is consonant with the declaration of Stanley Hauerwas that ‘the ultimate eschatological hope … is the real me is an immensely complicated pattern in which these ever-changing atoms are organised. It seems to me to be an intelligible and coherent hope that God will remember the pattern that is me and recreate it in a new environment of its choosings, by his great act of resurrection. Christian belief in a destiny beyond death has always centred on resurrection, not survival. Christ’s Resurrection is the foretaste and guarantee, within history, of our resurrection, which awaits us beyond history.

Polkinghorne reminds us that we are talking of resurrection into a new world and that this is different from resurrection into the old one since the scriptures talk of a new heaven and a new earth. It is, he tells us, the pattern that signifies, not the matter that makes it up. However, he is clear both that this new ‘world’ will be a material one and where the ‘matter’ of which it will made up will come from:

1 Mission-chapled church (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), 6
2 A Bultmann, Home, Reach and the Sense of Place’, in A Bultmann and D Seaman (eds), The Human Experience of Space and Place (London: Croom Helm, 1980) 174
3 M Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’ in Diacritics
5 Z Bauman, Postsmodern Ethics (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 240
6 E Casey, Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place World (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 7 (1993), xiv
8 H Cox, The Sacred City (New York: Macmillan, 1965)
10 ibid, 84
11 Genesis 2
13 Brueggemann (1978), 5
14 Deuteronomy 8
15 Deuteronomy 17:1
16 Deuteronomy 20:9
17 Deuteronomy 7:12-13
18 W Brueggemann, (1978), 187
19 BL Lane, Landscape and Spirituality: a tensions between place and placelessness in Christian Thought’ in The Way Supplement 73, Spring, 1992
20 AM Allchin, The World is a Wedding (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1978)
21 Genesis 28:16-17
24 ibid, 26
26 John 14:4
28 J Polkinghorne (1994), 93
32 The biblical witness recognises that it is, in fact, difficult for human beings to envisage salvation in terms other than place. Further, I suggest, the Bible points towards our ultimate destiny which is to be emplaced, where the nature of the places in which we will find ourselves in God’s kingdom will be a transfigured version of the places of the here and now.

The real me is an immensely complicated pattern in which these ever-changing atoms are organised. It seems to me to be an intelligible and coherent hope that God will remember the pattern that is me and recreate it in a new environment of its choosings, by his great act of resurrection. Christian belief in a destiny beyond death has always centred on resurrection, not survival. Christ’s Resurrection is the foretaste and guarantee, within history, of our resurrection, which awaits us beyond history.

would have us acknowledge the ultimate importance of place by virtue of its promise of emplacement. So, at the conclusion of our final journey the end of all our exploring may be ‘to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.’

not that individuals will go to heaven but that heaven will fully and finally pervade earth. It is that ‘the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.’

Place is important in this scheme of things since, put simply, if we are to have bodies then we must have somewhere to put them. If the ‘pattern’ of our material human identities can be remembered and recreated, so can the places of this world. Polkinghorne points out that if the old creation was ex nihilo then the new creation will be something different, a creation ex vetere, for it will be the transmutation of the old consequent upon its free return to its Creator. He adds that ‘I struggle to grasp that deeply mysterious notion, but I am convinced that it is central to a consistent and convincing eschatology … There are hints of this in scripture: in Paul’s amazing vision in Romans 8 of a creation ‘subjected to futility’ that will ‘obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (8:20–21).’

Seen in this perspective the biblical witness...
Praying in time and space

Canon Andrew Nunn is Canon Precentor of Southwark Cathedral and Warden of Readers in the Diocese of Southwark. Here he introduces the new Common Worship: Daily Prayer.

Finding the time to pray is one thing – finding a place to pray another. But when you have done both of those things – found the time, found the place – then the question is how do I spend my time, how do I use this place? The answer will depend on many things. There is such a rich tradition of prayer of which we are the inheritors, there are so many different ways to pray, we have different needs in prayer and different desires within us to pray at different times of the day, of the year, of our lives. Added to this we know that prayer is the life blood of our relationship with God, the daily constant place of encounter, the timeless moment that breaks into our present reality. Prayer – informal or organised – is vital for every Christian but perhaps even more so for every one engaged in ministry.

If you were to ask me what provided the foundation to my relationship with God I would have to answer, the Daily Office. The Eucharist is critical for me but the Office even more so. It is the fulcrum of the day, of my day, just as it is the fulcrum on which the life of the church turns. The Office is the prayer of the church, the prayer of the faithful that never ceases as ‘o’er each continent and island the dawn leads on another day’.

When Archbishop Thomas Cranmer put together the Prayer Book, at the heart of it lay a Daily Office. In the post-Reformation Church of England there would have been no daily celebration of the Eucharist as some of us now enjoy. For many Holy Communion would have been an irregular part of their spiritual life. Instead the core of the public ministry of the Church was Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. For the minister this was and still is a daily canonical obligation, but so is the tolling of the bell to inform the parishioners that ‘they may come to hear God’s word and to pray’.

So Cranmer very much created a people’s office, a form of prayer for the whole church.

Renewing the Daily Office

Earlier this year Common Worship: Daily Prayer was published in its definitive form. Since 2002 we had been using the Preliminary Edition of the new form of the Daily Office. It was published in this two-stage way in order to give us the opportunity to try it out and suggest improvements. It seems that that is what many of us did.

As someone who relies to such a large extent on the Daily Office, as the bread and butter of his prayer life, I was delighted when the Preliminary Edition arrived. After using the Daily Office in the ASB for many years I had become bored with the lack of options built into it, frustrated that it did not respond to the seasons of the year, irritated by the barren language that was used and impatient for change. Like many people that impatience had led me to try other forms of the Office and particularly Celebrating Common Prayer. This form of the Daily Office, produced by the Anglican Franciscans, did what the ASB and the Prayer Book were unable to do, or did not attempt to do. The Prayer Book has that constant, eternal quality about it – basically it is always the same – and in that way speaks in a certain way of the eternal and immutable nature of God. The ASB lacked the beauty of the language of the Prayer Book which still has the ability to carry the soul on prayer to another place and time and did not offer anything in compensation.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer (CWDP) is very much built upon all that is best in Celebrating Common Prayer (CCP) and we have much to thank the Franciscans for in helping us to a position where we were able to see what the Daily Office might be like in the church as she now is and for the spirituality of our age. In language that is richer, through texts which reflect times and seasons, through adaptability, the new book encourages us to find time and space and pray.

For those who have never tried CWDP then I would strongly encourage you to do so, for those who are wedded to CCP take a look at what the Church of England now offers, and for those who invested their ten pounds in the Preliminary Edition and are reluctant to spend twenty on the new book I would say, grasp the nettle and do it. Why do I say these things?

Structured for our needs

The first thing that CWDP helps us to do is to create a structure of Daily Prayer that meets our needs. This may seem to be putting things round the wrong way. Surely our prayer should be about responding to God, worshipping him alone, not meeting our needs, our requirements! That’s true – but I am a realist. St Francis de Sales was a great encourager of people in their quest to live the Christian life – but in a realistic way. In his ‘Introduction to the Devout Life’ he wrote “The practice of devotion will need to be adapted to the capabilities, jobs and duties of each individual. For example, it is not appropriate… for a tradesman to spend the entire day in church as if he were a religious.’

Though we might like to, not all of us can find the time or the...
place to say a three-fold office of Morning, Evening and Night Prayer. So CWDP provides what is called ‘Prayer During the Day’ – and this is where the book begins, a simple adaptable office that stands alone and can be said when you can say it, in the way that you would want to say it, with psalms and readings as appropriate. For those who can find more time during the day CWDP of course offers the three-fold office to which can be added ‘Prayer During the Day’ as simply that, a short office that can be said at Midday.

The second thing that CWDP gives to us is Daily Prayer that reflects the life of the church. One of the things that is great but also frustrating about CCP is that material is included which reflects the seasons of the church’s year but that this is embedded into the weekly pattern – so Sunday is always Easter, Friday is always Passiontide and so on. There is a certain appropriateness about this but in my opinion what this does is lose the sense of Ordinary Time, which of course is half of the year. CWDP separates out the ‘ordinary’ days of the week and the seasons. This results in a much stronger character to ordinary time and a richness to the seasonal material. This style of provision applies to ‘Prayer During the Day’ as well as Morning and Evening Prayer and, to a certain extent, Night Prayer.

Thirdly, the material for specific feast days and for saints days has been both enriched and simplified; the number of canticles available for use has increased; the material for intercession is so much better than before and six ribbons are bound into the book so you need never lose your place again! Added to this is the fact that all of this material has that ‘Common Worship feel’ so that it becomes not just a service book, but a wonderful resource to enrich the rest of the worship that we offer and to help us as we create liturgies for the places in which we minister.

Of course there are some things which are not brilliant – like much of Common Worship it can be very wordy and there are so many options it can be quite difficult to organise especially when saying the Office with others. Some might point to the complications and complexities of using this kind of material as being so much against the spirit of Cranmer.

I was amused when I re-read part of the Preface to the Book of Common Prayer 1662 entitled ‘Concerning the Service of the Church’ which was the original preface to the BCP and contains the mind of Cranmer when he put together the new liturgy for the church. Cranmer wrote the following about the pattern his new Prayer Book was replacing: ‘Moreover, the number and hardness of the Rules called the Pie, and the manifold changings of the service, was the cause, that to turn the book only was so hard and intricate a matter, that many times there was more business to find out what should be read, than to read it when it was found out.’

Well, perhaps we have to apologise to the good Archbishop as we seem to have gone back to a situation that is slightly more complicated than the one he envisaged. But I think it is a price worth paying. This is an Office book that can sustain the prayer life of the Christian, can feed us as we journey through the year, a knapsack of prayer to take on life’s journey, a book that responds to time and place.

Surely our prayer should be about responding to God, worshipping him alone, not meeting our needs, our requirements!
Banda Aceh — symbol of our inter faith agenda

Rt Revd David Gillett is Suffragan Bishop of Bolton in the Diocese of Manchester. He has a specific national responsibility in the Church of England’s inter faith relations, and has taken a lead role in preparing for the Christian-Muslim Forum in England.

The devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean cost countless thousands of lives and changed the lifestyle of millions more in that region of Asia. For the early weeks of this year it rightly dominated our TV screens — but then, as with most tragic stories it faded into the background.

Little did I think that that 6 months later I would be part of a group sponsored by the Foreign Office looking at the progress of the relief work in Aceh province at the northern tip of Sumatra — the hardest hit of all the tsunami lands where over 160,000 died.

In the middle of July we stood in the devastation of what was once Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh province. The water still lapped around the buildings and the hundreds of UNHCR tents, which are homes to many thousands. About every two weeks, still a high tide breaks through the shattered sea defences — they and the pumps to drain the land are yet to be put in place. As I stood there I recalled those frequent biblical images of the power of the sea and the way it symbolises those seemingly uncontrollable forces that can overwhelm us.

New perspectives on our Creator God

Back on Boxing Day we learnt (or were reminded) that our planet is a growing, changing and evolving world; that the continents on which we live today are, in part, the result of similar and much greater earthquakes, eruptions and tsunamis over millions of years. In July I was standing on one of the less stable parts of the surface of the globe which is made up of tectonic plates that shift and ‘renegotiate’ their relationship with each other. I was seeing one of the emerging new landscapes, like those many others over the centuries where lands have been changed dramatically by the raging of the sea. And although this eruptive activity brought the continents as we know them into being many ages ago, I was reminded that this activity is ongoing throughout history.

My New Year theological musings now had extra force. The separation of the sea and the dry land (Genesis 1.9-10), while substantially complete, still has a provisional nature about it. We were seeing something of what is meant by the first chapter of Genesis and its talk of the swirling chaos and chasm — part of the cataclysmic drama of how our world is created and shaped and brought to greater stability and order.

And as I spoke with some of the survivors in Banda Aceh, I recalled St Paul’s words about the creation groaning in travail, like a woman in labour, longing for the time when the birthing process will be over. We look forward to such a time of resolution and redemption in the new creation. Perhaps, when the tsunami hit, our view of God was too domesticated and tame, and our picture of the world too ‘finished.’

A place given by God

Of course, these New Testament reflections would not be in the minds of the survivors in Banda Aceh because they, as the victims, were nearly all Muslims. But in the conversations I had with them I certainly witnessed deep and courageous faith in God. These survivors are disproportionately male for, when the tsunami hit it was not a holiday in Aceh. Many of the men were fishing at sea, and rose above the waves, and others were working on higher ground away from the coastal strip. It was the elderly, the women and the children who were at home as the sea overwhelmed them. The story we heard had a common theme as the men said, ‘I lost my wife and all my children. My house is gone and now I must begin all over again.’

One man’s words stayed with me and caused me to reflect further on the one creator God whom both Christians and Muslims worship — and our place in his world. This man also had lost all his family but expressed his profound faith when he said, ‘I will rebuild my house and, if another tsunami hits again the next day, I will rebuild it again’. He expressed his absolute conviction that God had put them there, it was their land, and it was their task to look after it. I was reminded again of the words from Genesis, that it is our task to ‘subdue the earth and fill it.’ It provided a stark reminder that, as Muslims and Christians together, we recognise the sovereignty of the one creator God, and that our dependence upon him is far more total than we, on our more stable part of the earth’s surface, often remember. Muslims speak of man as khalifa, God’s representative and vice-regent in creation. The opening chapters of Genesis long ago outlined that mandate for the whole of humanity: we have a responsibility to
work together as co-workers with God whether we are Christians, Muslims, or of whatever faith, or none.

In Banda Aceh they need 200,000 new homes built; in July around 300 were well on the way to completion. Muslim Aid from England had raised the money for 150 of them. I had the immense privilege of speaking at the opening ceremony of the first house to be built – along with Sir Iqbal Sacranie (General Secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain) who is one of the Trustees of Muslim Aid. I was deeply moved when he also asked me to cut the ribbon together with him.

The experience of cutting that ribbon hand in hand with a Muslim friend spoke volumes to me (and I think to others there). We were symbolising commitment from both our faith communities to act as co-workers in God’s ongoing work of creation in a world where our earth is still being formed; working together in such a needy world which God loves and longs to bring to perfection.

**Talk and action are both important**

Our small group was in Aceh province at the end of an international conference in Bali (further south in Indonesia) sponsored by the Indonesian and UK governments on inter faith relations – there were delegations from over thirty countries from Europe and East Asia. We had travelled there 10 days after the July 7 bombs in London: we were there when the second lot of bombs failed to detonate. At the conference other delegates – especially from the international Muslim community – kept expressing their shock and sympathy to those of us from the UK.

At the conference we had exchanged many words and made practical commitments to work together as faith communities for mutual understanding, peace, and reconciliation in each of our countries. The dialogue concluded with an agreed Bali Declaration, (the full text of which can be found on the Foreign Office website).

It was a successful conference, but it was the visit to Banda Aceh which demonstrated the full extent of the demanding agenda we have as faith communities together. The conference reminded us of the first part of that agenda – our need to engage in open dialogue and relationship with each other in such a way that we can face honestly our differences, including the darker sides of our own traditions which need our united attention. The second part of the agenda is equally important – our duty to join together, particularly as Muslims and Christians, (the world’s two largest faith communities) in working with the God, in whom we both believe, to promote justice, peace and the common good.

**At the conference we had exchanged many words and made practical commitments to work together as faith communities for mutual understanding, peace, and reconciliation in each of our countries.**

A place in all our ministries?

Both of these concerns have been at the very forefront of my ministry over the past eighteen months. And I have become increasingly convinced that this agenda must be there for all involved in ministry today, lay or ordained, though it will have a different weighting for different people, according to God’s particular calling. For many it will not be one of their top priorities (though for some it will), but we cannot avoid it wherever we are today.

I have had a longstanding concern for inter faith relationships dating back to the very early days of my ordained ministry and recall many dialogues and friendships with Hindus, Jews, and Muslims over the years. But it has come as one of God’s surprises that the latter part of my stipendiary ministry has as one of its major constituents the issue of Christian-Muslim relationships. Over the past year and a half, I have been chairing the Implementation Group which is preparing for the Christian-Muslim Forum in England. Ours is a joint committee of Muslims and Christians, set up at the initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, following a year’s consultation with communities around the country, the result of which was a clear desire to see such a forum established. The Forum will consist of equal numbers of Muslims and Christians, eight religious leaders and twelve experts in various areas, and will be ready for launching officially in the New Year.

Meanwhile it is my hope that we can discover more and more ways of developing relationships with Muslims in this country. There is so much ignorance of each other in both of our communities, whereas people of faith need to be at the forefront in breaking down the myths and fears that still affect so many. Myriads of questions float around for us to consider: some of them we will, hopefully, be asking ourselves – and acting upon:

- How many of us have invited a Muslim to speak to our congregation about their faith?
- How often have we spoken together of the similar challenges we face in our society where the media often portrays religion in such a negative or stereotypical way?
- Can we provide opportunities for young people from both communities to talk about some of the issues, political and social, which concern them deeply as people of faith?
- What issues in our neighbourhood would be better solved if we worked together as part of our service to God and neighbour?
- Especially if we have only a few Muslims living in our parish or neighbourhood, what steps are we taking to learn how to understand the place of Islam in the west, so that we can help form healthy attitudes to this vital topic which affects the future of our society?

The list could go on – and there will be those who resist asking such questions. There will be others who believe that we are diluting our Christian faith by being concerned with such issues. Nothing need be further from the truth! I find that, as Christians engage with Muslims, so we think more deeply about our own faith and are called to a renewal of our own commitment to God whom we know through Christ. And while my own conviction in the centrality of Jesus Christ in the God’s eternal purposes, is as deep as ever – and deepening – my life is being enriched by the encounter with others whose tradition, while having many points of convergence, also leads me forward in that rich exploration of difference which is deeply characteristic of God’s creation.
Cairo

I travelled from Grantham to Cairo and back to find out for myself something of Islam’s past and present. I wanted to have a better understanding of Islam and its present impact on us. In Cairo Egypt’s past is vividly present, the layers deposited by each successive civilisation and religious faith: pharaonic Egypt at the Pyramids; classical Egypt in Coptic Cairo with its ancient Christian, Jewish and Roman buildings; Islamic Cairo, the rich legacy of Mameluke and Ottoman dynasties; Cairo of the British and French colonial period. All are woven into the Cairo of today, the teeming city of 18 million people at the crossroads of North Africa and the Middle East.

You smell the past and present: dung and petrol fumes, Nile water, spices and perfumes waft, as every traveller’s tale will tell you, on the warm evening air. Penelope Lively, the writer, grew up in Cairo and says that in the Nile Valley past and present do not so much co-exist as cease to have any meaning.

Grantham

Grantham is a modest, red brick, working town in middle England. As in the Nile valley, so too in the Witham valley, past and present overlap. Something of the Grantham of our Saxon, Viking, Norman, medieval and Victorian predecessors is present to us in the town as it is today, not least in the stones of the parish church. Islam and its faith have not so far impinged directly on Grantham in the past or the present. The town has a tiny Muslim population, so we have few natural opportunities to get to know Muslims as neighbours, colleagues and friends within the life of the town. Even so, the events of 9/11, the recent bombings in London and the situation in Iraq have stimulated people here, including a good number of Christians, to try to be better informed about Islam and to be able to interpret what is happening.

There – and here

One member of the congregation said to me that she used to think of issues to do with other world faiths as definitely ‘over there’, with little relevance for the local scene in Grantham. Now, she says, we live every day with the impact of Islam on all of us, as a faith, as a way of life and as a political entity. In the West, wherever we live, we have been woken up to the fact of Muslims as our neighbours, nationally and internationally, if not locally as well.

For Christians there is the added dimension of the fascinating and tantalising relationship of our faith with both Islam and Judaism, the three Abrahamic faiths. Like wary cousins, the three faiths and their adherents see in each other inescapable family likenesses but the differences and the divisions are emphatic and go deep. How are we to understand this awkward relationship and what are the chances of promoting a helpful and creative dialogue between Christians and Muslims, given the volatile times we live in?

A journey of exploration

Three months’ study leave earlier this year has given me the opportunity to begin to address my own ignorance about Islam and to find out firsthand something about Christian–Muslim dialogue and collaboration in the UK and in Egypt. Three weeks in Cairo gave me some vivid snapshots of a predominantly Muslim society with the small, indigenous Coptic Christian presence. I also spent time visiting Leicester, not far from my home in Grantham, to get a feel of what is happening to Muslims and their faith in the context of life in a Western democracy.

The two illustrations on this page show the church tower and spire in Grantham and the minarets of Cairo. Silhouettes of time and place. Time in Grantham is marked by the chiming of bells of the clock in this tower of St Wulfram’s. I can recall no great clocks in Cairo. The passing of time is marked there, by the voices of the muezzin from a hundred minarets (are some of them scratchy recordings?) calling the faithful to prayer five times each day and night. And these hours of prayer are set not by the clock but by the sun. The pulse of time in Egypt is different.

The working day in Cairo is punctuated for Muslim men with the interludes of prayer. My guide around a small museum next to the great Ibn Tulun mosque politely invited me to rest for a few moments in the cool of the shade of the garden while he joined his colleagues in prayer by the summerhouse. Sitting nearby them I joined in the prayer, silently and in my own way. The day happened to be April 25, the Feast of St Mark, traditionally the first Christian evangelist to Egypt and Bishop of Alexandria. I sat in the shade and thought of Mark and of his Egypt,
part of the cradle of Christianity for six hundred years until in 642AD Arabs, energised by the new faith of Islam, swept across North Africa. The Coptic Church survived and in Egypt Christians and Muslims have lived as uneasy neighbours ever since. The period of prayer came to its end and my guide returned to fetch me. In conversation he asked me about my view of the events of 11 September 2001 and said how distressing he had found them as a Muslim.

Almost everyone I spoke to in Egypt from sheikhs to taxi drivers used the words ‘since 9/11’. This is one envelope of time we all belong in, Westerners and Arabs, Muslims and Christians. Post 9/11 is the time we all inhabit now. I was struck by a conversation with three young Muslim women (all of whom incidentally work for a Roman Catholic refugee organisation) about the reasons for Muslim women wearing the hijab, the head scarf. These three were smartly dressed in contemporary style, brightly coloured jackets and trousers with long sleeves and high necks according to the custom for observant Muslim women who prefer not to wear the full covering of the burkah. These young women were thoughtful and articulate about women’s rights under Islam. They explained that they were under no direct pressure from parents or clerics to be covered and conform in this way. They chose to do this and they were proud to be part of a country which was making itself distinct from Western culture, even if Egypt would never be free of political and economic ties with the West.

Three weeks later I was walking through Grantham town centre on a warm Friday evening, the streets filled with young men and women many of whom had already had more than enough to drink. The contrast with the restrained behaviour of the Muslim courting couples standing quietly talking together, hardly holding hands in the cool of the evening on the banks of the Nile, could not be more telling. The district of Zamalek, around the cathedral in Cairo, felt safer and more enjoyable to walk around in the evening than Grantham on a Friday night.

One of the three young women with whom I had been in conversation in Cairo said: ‘Before 9/11 we did not think much about being covered. Since 9/11 we are more self-conscious about our Muslim values and practices. We find that we are explaining or defending our way of life more, to people like you. 9/11 has made it all an “issue” and a political one in a way that it was not before.’ If that is true of women living in a mainly Islamic country, how much more true would it be for Muslims living in Europe or the USA?

As these young women show, Egypt has over the last twenty years gradually become more conservative in observance of the precepts of Islam. Mr Mubarak, President for twenty six years and up for ‘election’ this autumn, has striven to maintain Egypt as a secular republic, free from the direct political influence of Islamic activist organisations like the Muslim Brotherhood. The people however are sending a clear message that whatever the official political line the Muslim faith is to be lived out with absolute seriousness.

Muslims and Christians in Egypt
Given these strong convictions on the part of the Muslim majority, have relationships between Muslims and their Christian neighbours in Egypt, become more difficult and problematic? A member of staff at the Bible Society of Egypt told me that in his childhood, forty or so years ago, he played happily with Muslim boys, almost unaware of the divisions of faith. Christian and Muslim families would visit each other, attend each other’s weddings and funerals. He said that this was almost unheard of now. Muslims, perhaps under the influence of the banned activist Muslim Brotherhood, were discouraged from everyday contact of this sort with Christians. There was little open hostility, he said, just a preference for no contact. He regarded this as very sad and an unpromising atmosphere in which to try to foster inter faith dialogue or collaboration.

A Coptic Evangelical minister in his eighties recalled the old Egypt of the 1950s, ‘a place of old friendships where Christians and Muslims were Egyptian brothers and now all that has gone.’ He told me how he had been confronted in his own office by a Muslim fanatic with three guns, intending to shoot him. All three guns were loaded and all three failed to fire. Sheikh Fawzy, spokesman for Sunni Islam on inter faith matters at the influential al-Azhar in Cairo, emphasised that the need for open and constructive dialogue between Christians and Muslims (and Jews) was now more urgent than ever. He regrets a strong tendency since 9/11, in the press on both sides, to stereotype and demonise the perceived enemy. ‘Muslim equals terrorist. Islamic equals fundamentalist.’

Almost everyone I spoke to in Egypt from sheikhs to taxi drivers used the words ‘since 9/11’

On the other side of the megaphone war Christianity is inextricably linked in the Muslim mind with the West as perceived through Muslim eyes, with its materialist and secularist values, relativist and corrupt moral codes and standards. It is also now linked with the Bush administration in the USA, with the failure to resolve the Palestinian question and the invasion of Iraq. Plenty there for Islamist polemists to get to work on!

The Sheikh was emphatic that there was nothing in the Qur’an that could justify the actions of a suicide bomber. Christians and Muslims must pray together and work together to exert influence on the powers that be to achieve justice for all. He warmly supported all forms of inter faith contact and conversation, whether it is the formal meeting of theologians and leaders exchanging learned papers at al-Azhar or the informal gatherings of young Christians and Muslims in the Cairo area, meeting to learn about each other’s faith and allowing friendships to grow across the faith divide.

Friendship is everything
‘Friendship is everything in these difficult times’, said the Sheikh. It is the most effective means of breaking down barriers of suspicion and distrust. Bishop Mouneer Hanna Anis, Anglican Bishop of Egypt and North Africa, agrees, These two men both speak warmly of the friendship they share. Both have taken key roles in an important formal dialogue and link with the Anglican Church in the UK agreed in 2002 through Archbishop Carey, and enthusiastically taken up by Archbishop Rowan.
refugees, sending back the profit as our small contribution to their impressive enterprise. These are small initiatives. Each grafts us further into the network of live relationships across the faiths, offering more and varied opportunities for meeting and friendship. ‘In these difficult times friendship is everything’ said Sheikh Fawzy.

As people of faith both Christians and Muslims live, pray and work in a dimension that transcends the limitations of time and place. Christians believe that we are ministers of a gospel of reconciliation between the one God and all his people. ‘God has drawn us into this ministry of reconciliation’ (2 Corinthians 5.18). It was encouraging to meet Canon Andrew Wingate and see his patient work encouraging inter faith friendship and collaboration in Leicester, especially between the Umar mosque and neighbouring St Philip’s church. In his recent book Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful Andrew Wingate states our shared task under God in these words: ‘The aim is not to create a new religion, as some people wrongly assume when they hear the term “interfaith”. Rather it is to enable all Christians to engage with sensitivity with these realities. The call is to remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which includes loving our neighbour who is Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jewish, learning from them and sharing our faith with them in word and action.’ A challenge for the twenty-first century wherever we live.

The way forward?
What might be a way forward for dialogue? It appears that both Christians and Muslims feel comfortable with their joint sponsorship and support for practical dialogue because of the clear benefit to the locality and its people. The more formal dialogue of leaders and theologians is in many ways much harder work, requiring the security of the kind of firm framework we see in the Lambeth agreement of 2002. I wonder if inter faith dialogue is not more part of a Western, Christian agenda with which the Muslim leadership politely complies. If Western Christianity is so compromised and suspect to Muslims, how much commitment will a Muslim leader bring to the dialogue relationship?

Islam has at its heart a fundamental sense of integrity, that is, a vision expressed in the Qur’an that it is possible to integrate the religious, social and political life of the individual and of the whole people. I have a strong impression that Muslims will respect in dialogue Christians who believe and are seen to believe that their own faith has a similar integrity and internal coherence.

One such leader was Pope John Paul II. Two of the Muslim taxi drivers whom I met spoke with real regard – and quite unprompted by me – of Pope John Paul II who had died two weeks earlier. In their eyes the Pope was a great leader. They knew why Egypt had proclaimed three days of official mourning for him after his death. In John Paul II Muslims saw a strength of conviction and leadership that spoke to them of the integrity of the man and of the faith he proclaimed.

As Anglicans we can be thankful that Archbishop Rowan Williams speaks and acts with an inner confidence and with spiritual and theological integrity in a way that resonates with Muslims in dialogue. Such manifest faith in the one God can open up sacred shared ground on which Christians and Muslims can stand together. In his lecture at al-Azhar in Cairo on September 11 2004 the Archbishop spoke about the consequences of the faith we share. ‘The greatest challenge of our world today is how to react to circumstances in a way that is faithful to God’s will… So when the Christian, the Muslim or the Jew sees his neighbour of another faith following the ways of this world instead of the peaceful will of God, he must remind his neighbour of the nature of the one God we look to, whose will cannot be changed and who will see that justice is done. Once we let go of justice, fairness and respect in our dealings with one another, we have dishonoured God as well as human being.’ Let us hope that such words show us a way forward in a Christian-Muslim dialogue growing in trust and confidence at all levels.
Douglas Fishlock became a Reader in a City of London church while he was teaching at the London Hospital Medical College in the 1960s. The incident described occurred while he was working for the University of Manitoba in the Canadian North. At present Douglas is licensed in the Diocese of Exeter.

It was a freezing cold day, desperately cold – not like an English winter but the real thing. The wind was blowing across the pack ice of the Hudson Bay, coming from the north-east. We stood solemnly whilst the icy blast threw up eddies of dry snow that played about our still feet. I could see the great bay beyond the edge of the cemetery. Those interred in this land are buried in the permafrost, the frozen soil that never thaws though it be spring or brief hot summer. Graves were always dug in the few warm weeks when it was possible to pierce the crust and delve deep enough. Someone in the township had to decide each year how many graves would be required during the next long winter, if ‘freeze-up’ started in September ‘break-up’ might make it by June.

July and August would see a great change in the tundra, miles of grasses, sedges and stunted willow bushes, sandworts and horsetails, bog-orchids and buckbeans, yellow cress and cuckoo flowers, arctic avens and minute azaleas. A thousand wild flowers bursting out to enjoy the brief summer and a million mosquitoes covering the wetlands like a great mist. Nature’s response to all this is to send in the birds, wonderful birds, birds of great migrations, birds of rarity, birds everywhere: arctic loons, oldsquaws, rarity, birds everywhere: arctic loons, oldsquaws, in the permafrost, the frozen soil that never thaws though it be spring or brief hot summer. Graves were always dug in the few warm weeks when it was possible to pierce the crust and delve deep enough. Someone in the township had to decide each year how many graves would be required during the next long winter, if ‘freeze-up’ started in September ‘break-up’ might make it by June.

They will leave their ancient denning sites and make for the sea

Estuary. Belugas, greyish, intelligent, playful, move into the river in their hundreds delighting the hardy tourists who come north each brief summer season to see Nature’s birthday party.

But today is not a celebration, neither does the landscape show any signs of life. Many townspeople are gathered around the small burial ground, some stand just by their trucks, others brave the wind and stand supportively near the grave. Solemn faced native men bear the coffin, one I recognise as the inebriated relative who heckled me as I conducted the short church service, but now outside he is steadier. It might have been better if an Indian had directed the whole affair but there were no volunteers and in any case the family wanted an Anglican burial. The words are said, the coffin is lowered into the hard earth bearing the broken body of a young native woman and end their winter fast. They will leave their ancient denning sites and make for the sea. They will be fiercely hungry and cause concern and danger in the streets of our township, but once the sea is frozen again they will be off to hunt for seals. Beautiful creatures seals, but hunted ruthlessly by the great white bears whose very survival depends on it.

I see the crowd dispersing, the trucks and automobiles start up each one visibly spewing out a stream of condensed hot exhaust. The vapours rise and are borne away. ‘What is your life?’ asks St James ‘You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes’ (James 4.14). As I begin to leave I see her now turning from this scene. A middle-aged woman, regular at church, sober and industrious, she came to the service and then to the burial. Alcohol destroys the people it enthrals and among its many slaves are the dispossessed of the North. Many struggle to overcome its grip but most accept its lordship and spend their shortened lives under its power and influence. This woman is not one of them but her son is now in the township gaol accused of killing his girlfriend. Under the fiery god’s flame he is alleged to have blown off her head with a shotgun. His mother has paid her respects, she has faced the townsfolk, she has stood near the bereaved family and now she must return lonely to her home. There she will pray earnestly for her son that God may forgive him. ‘It is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgement’. Death, resurrection and judgement the great biblical themes. While the world weeps for its failures and tragic losses the faithful pray for forgiveness, and if there is no God to forgive us then there is no hope of a new beginning and the spring will never come.

Earth to earth’, I remove a glove, the fingers of the right hand instantaneously go numb. I have already ground beneath my foot some hard soil to crumble it, I bend to pick it up. ‘Dust to dust’, the wind scatters the fragments of soil over the coffin. ‘Ashes to ashes; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection’. The blessing is proclaimed in a louder voice to include some of the crowd and then it is over. I say a few words to the grieving family; words are necessary but always inadequate, we want to ease the burden, to comfort and reassure but we cannot prevent a heart breaking by merely speaking. Time will pass, the spring will come, the polar bears will break out of their ice caves and introduce their newborn to the world.
Stability: the virtue of staying in one place

**Canon Alan Amos OBE**, Trust Chaplain of the Medway Maritime Hospital, who has previously worked in Lebanon and Syria, reflects:

Near to the Roman road, which is featured on the cover of this edition of *The Reader*, not far from the city of Aleppo, stands the remains of an ancient monastery.

At the heart of these ruins is the base of a column, which supported the structure upon which St Simon the Stylite (known as Simon Stylites) lived for 36 years up to his death in 459AD. The Stylites were an extraordinary offshoot of Eastern monasticism, regarded as living martyrs, spiritual heroes who testified to the victory of Christ over death and over the sinfulness and weakness of human nature. Many were the disciples – including kings and politicians – who journeyed out to seek their wisdom. There was, perhaps, something ‘romantic’ about being a Stylite, living an impossible life to the glory of God, being a living martyr for Christ in the age where the death of martyrdom was no longer a common fate among Christians.

In the Western Church, a more moderate monastic movement emerged, which would stand the test of time. For St Benedict, ‘stability’ was at the heart of the monastic life. It is the first of the three vows that are now made at a monastic profession, together with ‘conversion of life’ and ‘obedience’. The commitment to stability is a commitment to a community, a community consisting of those who will seek together a profound conversion of life. This commitment enables spiritual energy to be released and channelled to great effect, and the work of prayer and worship which transforms both ourselves and our world to go forward. Trusting above all in God’s steadfast faithfulness, the members of the community normally expect to remain together in one place.

**Staying still for God**

But what does this have to say to us, who are neither Stylites nor Benedictines? A great deal. I remember well how, some four years ago, I reached the decision that I would not look for any further moves in the remaining years of my ministry, but stay put in my work as a hospital chaplain in Medway. I remember the physical sigh of relief with which I welcomed with my heart the decision that I had come to. Now I would be free of the distractions that plague at least some of us: the sense of having to look and plan for a move elsewhere – where perhaps we know not! – which makes it so difficult for us to give the best of ourselves in the place where we are.

One of the strengths of Reader ministry in the Church of England is that often it goes along with long-term service in one place. It is easy to underestimate the blessing this can bring to the Christian community – and to the individual who has this kind of dedication. In the past, it was incumbents who frequently spent the majority of their lives in one parish, and regarded this as a calling rather than a failure. They were then truly the parson, the ‘person in place.’ Though it was by then exceptional to find such a person, when I was a student I got to know a vicar in Melling, Lancashire who had looked after the same parish for fifty years, baptising, marrying and burying through a couple of generations. Today, there is far more pressure on clergy to move on, and staying put may bring criticism. But Readers often outlast several incumbents, and need the grace – which is often quite considerable – to adapt to and even cherish the different ways and eccentricities of a succession of vicars. Perhaps Readers can be rather taken for granted in the community in which they serve, because they are often rooted there. If this has been your pattern, when you reflect back on your ministry I hope it brings you quiet satisfaction to think of, and give thanks for, all those whom you have known and served in one place.

Readers often serve a variety of local churches, and may move and be licensed in another benefice. This can bring about new and creative opportunities for ministry. In the final analysis, as we have seen from the Benedictine way of life, our stability is not about being in one place, but being in God’s hands. Our hearts are ever restless, as St Augustine puts it, until they find their true rest there. God is our Rock, the Psalmist tells us, and it is in God alone that we find our security.

It is often when we sing in worship that we draw near to the truth, and appropriate it to our hearts. Robert Bridges’ great hymn ‘All my hope on God is founded’ expresses it well.

*Pride of man and earthly glory,  
Sword and crown betray his trust;  
What with care and toil he buildeth,  
Tower and temple, fall to dust.*

*But God’s power,  
Hear by hour;  
Is my temple and my tower.*

As a hospital chaplain, I find comfort in the thought that Herbert Howells wrote the beautiful tune ‘Michael’, to which this hymn is sung, out of great pain and suffering at the death from polio of his son, aged nine. The words of the hymn had clearly reached out to him, and helped him in his inner struggle. They offer to us the only stability which is truly and gloriously available, in every time and season and in every place.

*I am grateful to Mother Mary John, Abbess of St Mary’s Abbey, West Malling, for helpful advice about stability in the teaching of St Benedict.*
A time to...

Remember the powerful biblical poem ‘For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to...’ (Ecclesiastes 3.1-9)? Now, many people would say, is the time to Make Poverty History. Bishop Michael Doe, General Secretary of USPG, reflects on some days last summer when poverty dominated the world’s agenda – and reminds us that we dare not forget the scandal of poverty as Advent draws near.

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

The Time: July 2 2005
The Place: Edinburgh
The sun shone as nearly a quarter of a million of us gathered in The Meadows and walked through the streets calling on the next week’s G8 Summit to Make Poverty History. The worldwide campaign has been unprecedented. ‘Never before have so many people come together’ we were told, ‘fully united in demanding action to end poverty, with a roar for justice that they felt was impossible to ignore’. The aims of the campaign have been clear: more and better Aid, the cancellation of International Debt, and Trade Justice. Only by radical action on all three fronts do we have any chance of achieving the United Nations ‘Millennium Development Goals’, and in particular to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and to reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five.

The Time: July 7 2005
The Place: Partnership House, London
It was an ordinary day in the USPG offices near Waterloo until the emergency vehicle sirens started to sound and the ambulance station across the road went into full alert. We’d started the day praying for the G8 leaders at Gleneagles, and London having just won the 2012 Olympics contributed to a feeling of hopefulness. All that faded away as news came in of the people killed by the suicide bombers on London Transport. Staff were advised that it was safer to stay inside, until we were all forced out by a bomb warning on a bus parked just outside. Global Solidarity, Faith and Action, Sin and Death, all seemed to take on a different perspective.

The Time: July 8, 2005
The Place: London
As soon as the G8 Communiqué was published, the Make Poverty History coalition, of which USPG is a part, issued its response – in summary, so far so good, but much more is needed. On Aid, ‘too little, too late’: much of the promised increase is over five years and is money already pledged. By 2010 a child will still die every 3.5 seconds just because they are poor. On Debt, the Finance Ministers’ decision to cancel all multilateral loans was good, but it only releases a tenth of the estimated $10 billion which is needed. And most disappointing, words but no promises on Trade Justice so that any real action is still left to the World Trade Organisation: no date for ending export subsidies which destroy the livelihoods of poor countries, and no commitment to let those countries protect their own economies. Some better news on HIV/AIDS, with a commitment of treatment for everyone who requires it by 2010. But nothing on climate change, which is already impacting on poor countries and will seriously undermine efforts to eliminate poverty in the long term.

The Time: Now
The Place: Here
For all the seeming other-worldliness of what Advent says about future judgement and the end of all things, the central message is of the God who is here and the God who is now. In his incarnation, God is born into our time and our place, and so the death of a child through poverty becomes not a challenge to our application of the Gospel but a theological fact in its own right. The prophets tell us that judgement comes when we forsake the pursuit of justice and forget the poor. In the great Advent parable of the Sheep and the Goats Jesus reinforces that warning. As he said in the synagogue in Nazareth, the good news for the poor and the liberation of the oppressed is not for some future time but is for Now. Even in the book of Revelation, when the things of this world have passed away, there are trees alongside the river which flows through God’s new city, and their leaves are ‘for the healing of the nations’. It is for these reasons that the struggle to make poverty history must go on.

Prayer
(Linked to Luke 4.16-21)
Jesus, living Word of God,
Your promise of good news is timeless,
Still you offer it to renew our world today:
You offer release for those imprisoned by debt and poverty,
Life for those who know only death and despair.
Provoke us by your Spirit, so we no longer linger and delay,
Quicken us with the vision of a world transformed,
Challenge us to make hope real for all,
So that God’s kingdom may be celebrated in our time,
And poverty be turned to history. Amen
(Claire Amos/USPG)
On the Way: an introduction to Mark’s Gospel

Karen Elsworth is an ordinand training for the Anglican ministry at the South-East Institute for Theological Education, Chatham, Kent. Karen’s reflection on Mark’s Gospel, ‘reading’ the story of the Gospel alongside familiar sights and landscapes in her locality, was designed with a church study group in mind. What about doing something similar in the place where you live and minister? It would be an ideal way to help introduce the Gospel of Mark – the lectionary Gospel from Advent 2005. If readers are inspired by Karen’s reflections to do something similar we would enjoy seeing any photographs which may be the ‘fruit’.

Introduction

Mark’s Gospel uses a great deal of symbolism and the themes of journeying, breathless activity and being followers of ‘the way’ are important to this writer.

It felt appropriate therefore to encourage people to reflect on the Gospel by means of a walk from the village of Goudhurst to the Parish church of St Margaret’s Horsmonden, a journey of about two miles through the Wealden countryside of Kent.

At regular points along ‘the way’ the Church of St Margaret was visible. In terms of the reflection the Church symbolised the passion of Christ. Such prominence was fitting, given that Mark’s Gospel has been called ‘a passion narrative with an extended introduction’.

The pilgrim has fourteen stations to visit. At each site prose is read to highlight a particular aspect of Mark’s theology and recurring themes and some points of scholarly interest to stimulate reflection.

People were invited to gather at Station 1 at an agreed time, bringing with them a picnic, and a small Bible or copy of Mark’s gospel. The pilgrimage took about two hours; including time for a symbolic celebration meal. The pilgrimage/study terminated at St Margaret’s, a church situated in the middle of the rural countryside, so some means of returning home had to be arranged. The ongoing nature of the journey was therefore highlighted as people were then offered the opportunity to continue to meet the risen Jesus on the homeward journey and in the midst of their own homes and lives.

Station 1

Station 1-View of St Margaret’s

Station 1-Introduction

Our exploration into Mark’s Gospel takes the form of a pilgrimage, a journey, an active participation in the learning process because this is the way the gospel is written. Right from the very first word there is a sense of breathlessness and urgency. The Greek does not have ‘the beginning’ as does our translation, but there is ‘Beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ the son of God’. It is as if Mark has no time for good grammar, he is urging us to get on, to move quickly, time is short, let’s go! Things happen ‘immediately’.

Mark is also known as ‘a passion narrative with an extended introduction’. The Pharisees begin to plot his death from Mark 3.6; therefore our journey takes place always with the final destination in view. St Margaret’s church is our symbol of the passion, for throughout the narrative of Mark the passion is always the back drop, the road leads there. It is as if Mark is saying to all pilgrims, we too will have our passion. ‘The way’ will lead to suffering.

It is generally acknowledged that Mark’s Gospel was the first of the Synoptic Gospels to be written, and was probably in circulation by 70AD. This means that Mark formed the basis for Matthew and Luke; who used it, supplemented it and adapted it. It is helpful to bear in mind that Paul’s letters were written before Mark’s
Gospel. Unlike Paul’s letters the Gospel is not a statement of theology, but a narrative of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This way of writing was ground-breaking in its time, it was unique. Mark does not think for us, he outlines what has been seen and heard and lets us make up our minds. Who is this Jesus?

The name ‘Mark’ is a later addition and the earliest reference to the gospel comes from Papias (130AD). Papias claims that Mark wrote as Peter’s assistant in Rome, but there are grounds for questioning this.

The Gospel is set in Galilee and its nearby regions; this is seen as ‘friendly’ territory. Jerusalem by contrast is the place of conflict. At the end the disciples return to Galilee, their homes, and so will we. Let us begin our journey now as we follow in ‘the way’…

Mark continues to tell the story. A major theme of the Gospel is that very question – ‘Who is this Jesus?’. But we shall find it is the peripheral people along the way who most readily recognise Jesus for who he is.

Station 2
We reach our second station at a crossroads. Mark begins his gospel with the baptism of Jesus by John. No long nativity narrative for him, this is where it begins. Up to this point Jesus lived an inconspicuous life, up to these cross roads he had the choice not to go the way of the cross, but Marks begins with the declaration from God that ‘you are my beloved son’ (Mark 1.11). Through the Gospel we will have similar declarations, but then the ‘who are you?’ questions fade for awhile as

Station 3
We find ourselves at the water treatment works just outside Goudhurst. There is a strong whiff of sewage. This station is here to symbolise the early clash between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. There are many reported exorcisms and healings through the Gospel. It is as if a war has begun. The evil spirits recognise who he is and Jesus has full authority over them again we are being asked the question ‘who is this man?’ He is able to command the demons and heal all kinds of diseases.

Station 4
We stand at a road sign showing a bumpy road ahead. Jesus faced much opposition. He was misunderstood by the Pharisees, or perhaps he was perfectly well understood, but they could not accept what he was saying. Often the disciples want him to go one way but he reminds them that is not the way he must walk; his is a lonely journey. We must expect similar misunderstanding at times. There will not be glory as followers of ‘the way’.

From this point we can see our destination. St Margaret’s church stands in the distance as a reminder of the journey towards the cross.

Station 5
We stand now at a newly ploughed field. In Mark’s Gospel there is a lot of talk of seeds. There are also two feeding of multitudes recorded in 6.30-44, 8.1-9; two sayings about bread in 7.27-28, 8.17-21. The parable of the sower (Mark 4.1-20) can be read in many ways, but for our purposes we draw attention to the need for the seed to die in order to bring fruit,” and also the difficulties encountered by some seed as it is entangled by weeds.
The recurring themes of the journey toward suffering, discipleship and the abundance of the fruit of the kingdom are evident here. Mark 4.11-12 are worth highlighting ‘the mystery of God’s kingdom is given to you,’ Jesus replied but for the people outside it’s all in parables, so that ‘they may look and look but never see, and hear and hear but never understand; otherwise they would turn and be forgiven.’ This can be read to suggest that it is only those who have begun the journey, who are on the road that will understand ‘the way’. Those on the periphery, the bystanders, will not understand only by listening or watching. They have to take part in the story to understand the kingdom and who it is that speaks of the kingdom.

Station 6
We stand looking towards the Church, towards the cross through a barbed wire fence. We see a pattern in Mark where the apostles are given a glimpse of who Jesus is, almost get the point and then get it wrong. In fact they don’t really look good in Mark’s gospel. In chapter 8 just before the high point of the transfiguration Jesus has performed many miracles including the feeding of the 4000 and the healing of the blind man. Note again the symbolism of the blind being made to see ‘and he saw everything clearly’ Mark 8.25; this can be a spiritual sight restored; immediately after this is Peter’s declaration of ‘you are the Christ’ in (Mark 8.29). It seems as though they have finally got the point, then Jesus predicts his death and Peter steps in and gets it wrong again, needing to be reprimanded ‘get behind me Satan’ (Mark 8.33). Once again the focus is on Jesus’ final destination.

Station 7
We stand at the midpoint of our journey, on a bridge. At this station we look at the transfiguration as Mark sees it. Here we are reminded of Christ’s baptism by John, the Father affirms him in almost the same words as used at the baptism Mark 9.7. In chapter 8 just before the high point of the transfiguration Jesus has performed many miracles including the feeding of the 4000 and the healing of the blind man. Note again the symbolism of the blind being made to see ‘and he saw everything clearly’ Mark 8.25; this can be a spiritual sight restored; immediately after this is Peter’s declaration of ‘you are the Christ’ in (Mark 8.29). It seems as though they have finally got the point, then Jesus predicts his death and Peter steps in and gets it wrong again, needing to be reprimanded ‘get behind me Satan’ (Mark 8.33). Once again the focus is on Jesus’ final destination.

Station 8
We stand at a house undergoing restorations. There are further healings, encounters that Jesus has with individuals who learn at first hand who he is. There is repetition of the same themes, ‘look at what this man does, who is he?’ He makes people whole, the demons obey him, and again there is a blind healing, that of Bartimaeus.

Station 9
We stand at a blocked entrance next to a view of the church. James and John fall in the trap of wanting a place of importance in the kingdom (Mark 10.35-45). Jesus makes it clear to them that this is not ‘the way’ of the kingdom. Here is another example of the disciples getting it horribly wrong.

It is the marginalised people who get the message first hand. Bartimaeus calls him ‘Son of David’ and Rabbi. Mark shows us that those who Jesus travelled with daily often missed the point, but the marginal people like Bartimaeus and the Syrophoenician woman know the answer to ‘who is this man’.

Once again Peter, representing the other apostles, gets it wrong and Jesus has to remind him that it will not be as they think, the cross is the destination.

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things out a bit all would be well, this is not so here. Jesus has come to overturn the old completely, to allow access to God for all!

Station 12
We stand looking at a bridge with reflections in a pond. As we near our destination, the question ‘who is this man?’ gets louder. We find in Mark 12.36-37 a quote from Psalm 110 ‘the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies at your feet’ David himself calls him Lord. How then can he be his son? The question now; whose Son is the Christ? Who is he reflecting?

Station 13
We are now at the church and will have a meal together. The group have arrived at their destination, the last thing they do together is an act of community, sharing the Passover meal. Jesus says to them, ‘This bread is my body, this wine is my blood’, the parallel with the Passover sacrifice of Moses in Egypt will have been seen by the disciples, but they still refused really to accept the obvious.

Station 14
Inside the church there is a bare cross and the music of St Matthew’s Passion by JS Bach, is playing. People are invited to meditate on the passion, for as long as each wishes.

As people emerge from the church into the light the following is read: ‘The end of Mark’s gospel felt so unfinished, ending with the Greek word “gar” which means “for”. This was such a terrible grammatical ending, that in the second century other writers finished it off properly! Recent scholarly insights indicate that not only was Mark 16.8 where Mark’s gospel originally finished, but it is where Mark intended to finish. The point Mark is making is that this is not the end; the resurrection is the beginning of a new adventure and journey for each of us who chose to follow ‘the way’.

We on this pilgrimage find ourselves in the middle of a field, we have to make our way home the journey continues from here, just as Mark finishes with an unfinished sentence, so…’

On the Readers website there are available several prayers which can be used in association with a ‘Mark walk’. There are also downloadable versions of the photographs which accompany Karen’s article.

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1 New Testament Lecture Notes, Clare Amos, SEITE
2 Mark as Story: D Michie and D Rhoads
3 Mark for Everyone: Tom Wright SPCK 2001
4 New Testament Lecture Notes, Alan Le Grys, SEITE
5 New Testament Lecture Notes: Alan Le Grys, SEITE
6 Mark for Everyone: Tom Wright SPCK 2001
7 Mark for Everyone: Tom Wright SPCK 2001
8 Sowing the Gospel, Mary Ann Tolbert: Fortress Press 1989
9 New Testament Lecture Notes: Clare Amos, SEITE
10 Mark for Everyone, Tom Wright SPCK 2001
11 Sowing the Gospel, Mary Ann Tolbert Fortress 1999
12 Seizing the Gospel, Mary Ann Tolbert Fortress 1999
13 New Testament Lecture Notes, Clare Amos, SEITE
14 New Testament Lecture Notes, Clare Amos, SEITE
Swanwick 2005: A successful balancing act

There are a number of national Reader gatherings – conferences, residential AGMs and so on – as the years go by. Whenever we go to Swanwick, things seem to go well and 2005 has been a ‘Swanwick year’. True to form, this year’s conference was generally regarded as a success.

Our main speaker was Bishop Graham Cray of Maidstone, author of Mission-shaped Church. This is a remarkable book, not least because it is officially a report from a working group of the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council. Any book with a provenance of that kind would not ordinarily be expected to be a work that is both salutary and inspirational. But it is – and that is due in no small measure to the vision and enthusiasm of Bishop Graham. Both these attributes were abundantly clear in his very professional presentations. He inspired us, certainly. But his vision taught us not to hope for some kind of unattainable utopia, with churches miraculously fulsome more of people living in an England of warm beer and spinsterly cycling to Evensong, as it was once famously described. Rather we must become alive to the needs of today – the world of 24/7 life – to present the Gospel, itself unchanging, to a society which is now in constant change. Perhaps that sounds platitudinous: Bishop Graham made it really exciting.

Acting on Acts
The first plenary session on the Friday evening was a Bible study, led by Canon Beau Stevenson who though described on the programme as coming from Oxford, clearly started

life somewhere ‘across the pond’. He took the story of Peter and Cornelius and used it as an example of the way in which we need to achieve balance in the understanding and exposition of scripture. We must of course understand the text ourselves, but we must also make sure that the story as we present it meets the needs of other hearers too. Beau spoke of the need of an airline pilot to align himself with the coloured landing lights in order to bring the plane down safely. Are we sure that the lights of our understanding are in proper line with the understanding of the world around us?

Saturday evening at such events is often the time for laughter. And so it was with Robin Gamble (Diocesan Missioner for Manchester) in charge of proceedings. But at the back of the fun, there was still a picture of the mission-shaped Church. Robin’s home parish in childhood had been a place for fun – apart from in worship. The message for today was clear. Worship today, for today’s society, simply cannot always be solemn if it is to present the gospel effectively.

Any conference of the kind that took place at Swanwick is so often made by the discussions that take place in groups, both formally and informally. There were two slots in the timetable for more formal seminars, but of course it is quite hard to report on these because in the very nature of things they will all have been different. I certainly cannot pretend that all the seminar groups were equally successful. Some people were a little concerned that their group concentrated too much on discussion of what were essentially complaints – but equally others were thoroughly heartened to find that fellow-Readers, often from the other end of the country, faced and overcame common problems.

Perhaps this is really the most important factor in any national conference. Participation makes us all feel that we really are not isolated or, worse, deserted, which it can be hard not to feel at the end of a barren evening service for a congregation of six.

Ministry and music and more!
Throughout the weekend, the talking sessions moved seamlessly into worship – at least, that was the theory and I reckon the aim was usually achieved! The final act of worship was a Eucharist on the Sunday morning. It was celebrated by Revd Nick Watson, Warden of Readers for the Diocese of Derby where Swanwick is situated, and the preacher was Bishop Graham Dow of Carlisle, Chair of the Central Readers’ Council. He spoke of the variety of ministry both within and without the Reader movement, encouraging us to see this not as a threat, but as a manifestation of the changes that being Mission-shaped and alive to the Gospel is bound to bring about. Through prayer we can each discover our place.

We owe the staff at Swanwick a vote of thanks for their quiet efficiency, which enabled the inevitable blips (like the shower that would only spray horizontally, or the fact that the chapel organ was not actually in the chapel) to be overcome. They are justly very proud of their new Derbyshire Ellington – or Liszt – without anyone sitting at the keyboard.

I hope and believe that most people left feeling that their ministry as Readers had been affirmed. If I am right, then Swanwick 2005 can justly be regarded as having been successful, and the number of people who want to go back there in 2008 or 2009, rather than waiting until a further five years have elapsed, suggests I may be right.
God’s Word to God’s World’ is the modern adaptation of the original slogan of what was originally the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society (BCMS). Crosslinks was founded as BCMS in 1922 and 80 years on appointed its first lay chairman, a Reader from the Diocese of Carlisle who, unusually, lives just across the border in the Diocese of Blackburn.

But David’s own links with Crosslinks go back to when it was less than half its present age, to the mid-1950s. During National Service in Germany David had been sent as a signaller to work at an RAF airfield, within thirty seconds flying time from the border with the East, where Vulcan bombers were based. There was no chaplain. David was then a Baptist.

There were two other Christians, one a Methodist, the other a Presbyterian. They met weekly for prayer and Bible study under the auspices of the Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Scripture Readers Association (SASRA). They prayed for a chaplain.

One evening an officer turned up at the base. ‘You don’t call me sir. You call me Sam.’ Sam was an Anglican, the Reverend Samuel Cooke. He said, ‘I hope you’ve been praying for me. I’ve been serving in Burma with the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society. I’ve just joined the RAF and been sent to be your chaplain.’ At that they all knelt down and prayed.

Sam had three RAF stations to cover and clearly needed help. He asked if any of the three was a Reader in the Church of England. Coming from other churches they didn’t know what he meant. So he explained. Within the month they were all licensed by the Senior Chaplain on his visit to the station! David still speaks of the loving care he received from Sam and his wife Gillian and from others involved with SASRA, particularly during his basic training at Catterick where to be a visible Christian was to be the object of the Sergeant-Major’s venomous expletives.

A Lancashire lad
David had come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ through the Boys’ Brigade in his home town of Burnley in North-east Lancashire. When he started to work as a Post Office Telephones Engineer in neighbouring Colne after National Service he reverted to his roots, joined the Baptist Church and started the first Boys’ Brigade Company in the town as he enjoyed working with young people. He had wondered about a call to ordination as a pastor but was not convinced.

By this time he had married Kathleen and they had a child. In 1968 their second, Simon, was born. One night he seemed to have a bad cold. By morning he was dead. This was a great test of faith. It made no sense, yet ‘the Church was wonderful. People prayed with us and for us and gave us great support’. This tragedy changed David’s life as he felt called to exchange telephones for people. Six months after Simon’s death he was appointed a trainee probation officer in Stoke. He had told the appointing officer of the personal disaster but added that he ‘had a firm belief in God and God’s grace was wonderful even though it was a frightful experience’. ‘You realise there’s no future for people with your views in the Probation Service’, came the reply. David says that probably the boldest words in his life challenged that assertion but he still got the job.

A few years later he obtained a secondment to Lancaster Prison housed in the old Castle, which in its time had witnessed witches’ trials and had housed no less a person than George Fox, founder of the Quakers in the mid-seventeenth century.

There was no full-time chaplain and so David found himself having to tell prisoners of family deaths. A son had died. The prisoner flung his fists in the air just missing David and hitting the wall instead. ‘You don’t fucking understand’, was all he uttered. David told of his loss and brought them both to tears.

The Probation Service had come about through the London Police Court Mission, which had official recognition thrust upon it by chance. One day a magistrate asked a missionary to care for somebody in a cell. The first unofficial probation order was made. The role of the probation and after care officer was, when officially established, to ‘advise, assist and befriend’.

David moved twenty miles south in the 1970s to be senior officer with a team of six in Preston Prison. In the 1980s I was a BBC Radio producer and as we were both members of the General Synod David invited me to meet one of his lifers, also called David. This proved to be my most moving interview in thirty years with the BBC. I called the half-hour programme Life for David. David told me of killing a woman, being convicted, and imprisoned. He was given a Bible and read it in his cell. Through incarceration he came to Christ, repenting and believing. On release he wanted to minister. Towards the end of his sentence David Mills invited the other David to worship in his church at Burton-in-Kendal. What became of the lifer in later life David does not know.

Back in Burton, David had founded another Boys’ Brigade Company in 1981 which now has 35 boys, three of whom are waiting for a call to Buckingham Palace to receive Duke of Edinburgh’s Awards. Twenty-five years on David was appointed MBE for his...
services to young people in Cumbria and this month (November) will be at the Palace to collect it. When I ask for the secret of successful youth work David mentions activity and adventure. Last year Burton reached the semi-finals of the national football and quarter-finals of the Boys' Brigade table tennis championships. They sail narrowboats, camp on Dartmoor, and ski in Scotland, the Alps and now in Canada. But they also receive Christian teaching which leads some to Confirmation. It sounds a bit like the words of St. Francis ‘preach to the people and, if you must, use words’.

Crosslinks across the world
It was that place of many words, the General Synod, which opened the door to Crosslinks. As David had had no contact with the society other than that Forces link thirty years earlier, he puts it down to divine guidance that the Appointments’ Committee chose him as the Synod’s man on the Crosslinks council. He was invited to help select mission partners of all nationalities and later to chair the finance committee. Then, two years ago, he became the first lay chairman working closely with the General Secretary, Andy Lines, on a painful reorganisation which led to redundancies. Andy comes from an unusual background; he is a former tank commander but was also a mission partner in Latin America. Since his appointment he has travelled extensively including to Myanmar (Burma), once a key area for the BCMS but now hostile to Christian work.

The society sees its role as ‘crosslinking’ worldwide. Some mission partners never come to Britain, some never leave. Indians may go to Africa but Christian Asians in this country work with other Asians in Britain. There are also associate mission partners who are not on the payroll. David himself hopes to visit Crosslinks work in East Africa this winter. There are financial stresses but ‘the Lord has been good to us with new avenues of income from Anglican churches’. He says he’s been ‘blessed to meet so many people who’ve given their lives to share the Gospel’.

David ended our interview by mentioning two, Colin and Hazel Maunsell, partners in Ethiopia where in 1934 BCMS had a vision to revitalise the 1600-year old Orthodox Church. Mr and Mrs Alfred Buxton settled in Addis Ababa and established a Bible School. By 1961 the Society had translated the Bible into Amharic, authorised by the Emperor Haile Selassie. Colin and Hazel have spent the past fifteen years producing a four-year daily Bible Study Every Day with God in Amharic as well as the earlier workbook Study of the Bible.

The week before I met David Mills, Colin Maunsell had died. In spite of a poor prognosis from throat cancer, after treatment in Britain Colin and Hazel had been determined to return to their work in the horn of Africa. As they said at the time, ‘We need to see God’s way defined for maintaining the work of Crosslinks in literature over the next twenty years. We give thanks to many Ethiopians who have contributed and pray that God will raise up others in the years ahead.’

Ron Black, Secretary of Readers for Newcastle Diocese, takes up his position as Vice-Chair of CRC this month. Clare Amos met Ron to ask him a few questions about how he sees his role.

Clare: First, why did you want to be Vice-chair of CRC?

Ron: I have had a diocesan role in Reader ministry for a number of years – and found it a useful way of helping to make a contribution. I see the role of CRC Vice-Chair as a kind of extension of this: it is a platform upon which I can hope to make an impact for Reader ministry in general, by being part of a structure which promotes and supports it. I am a great believer in the basic things that Readers do – preaching and teaching.

Clare: What are the strengths and weaknesses of structures like CRC – or the diocesan Readers’ Board?

Ron: When I first became part of the diocesan structures it felt a bit like a ‘club’. I found it important to try and open things up, even though it was sometimes quite difficult to get people to come on to committees. I saw part of my function as Secretary of the Board to try and stay in touch with people after they were licensed – it was all too easy for them somehow just to disappear into their parishes. I saw it...
important to offer support to them – to help to make them feel part of a wider whole. At one point there wasn’t a pastoral care system in place for Readers, but we worked at that. We set up a counselling system they could use, and we tried to make sure the CME for Readers was available to everyone – including those who worked full-time. As regards the national CRC body, I have been a member of the CRC Executive for a number of years, so I am aware of what it can offer. I am impressed by the way that first John Field and then Wendy Thorpe have made the training of Readers much more effective as a result of their initiatives and hard work. I feel that there is an important advisory and consultancy role for our national Reader structures.

Clare: How long have you been a Reader and what led you to offer for Reader ministry?

Ron: I have been a Reader now for almost 25 years. I am not a life-long Anglican: my maternal grandmother was an Irish Catholic and my grandfather a Glasgow Protestant. I was born in Scotland, but we moved to the North East of England when my father became a dairy farm manager in the region. I went to grammar school, but finished my formal education at 15. It was during that time that I was confirmed as an Anglican. After leaving school I initially worked for my father (I have ploughed a field using a horse drawn plough!), but after a few years started working for a plumbers’ and builders’ merchant and was in that business for most of my working life, mostly in middle management. My wife has always gone to church; I re-started attending church again a year or two after we were married. I was impressed by the Reader, George Stewart, who ministered in the parish. It was George who encouraged me to consider training as a Reader.

Clare: What changes have you seen in Reader ministry over the years?

Ron: I believe that the breadth of Reader ministry has expanded. Readers are well placed in society to do all sorts of work outside the church. This can and should bring a richness to their preaching ministry. I have found it fascinating to have, as part of my Reader ministry, the roles of chaplain at the local ASDA supermarket, associate chaplain of the Metro Centre in Gateshead and at the Control Centre of the Nexus Rapid Rail Transport system. These chaplaincies have opened my eyes to the potential for Reader ministry in this area.

Clare: Why should anyone now offer for Reader ministry when the training for NSM or OLM is much the same yet the scope in ministry so much wider?

Ron: I think of Reader ministry as a preaching and teaching ministry that can connect much more with people in the street and the workplace.

Clare: How can Reader ministry attract more under 50s to its ranks?

Ron: That is only going to be possible if the people who are already in it really identify with what is happening in the church and world today. We certainly need younger people.

Clare: What is your goal as Vice-Chair?

Ron: To do as good a job as I can. I am not a political animal. I don’t like church politics. I am quite at ease with a range of churchmanship and feel it is important to be as inclusive as possible. I am not an academic. I see my task being to promote the ministry of Readers as best I can.

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Clare: Is there anything else you want to add?

Ron: I am very impressed with the quality of The Reader magazine over the last few years. It is a fine production. I would like to be re-interviewed for the magazine about two years into the job.

Clare: Thanks, and that’s a date!

As well as Ron a new National Executive Committee has now taken office. There are some old faces, but we are delighted to welcome several new ones as well. Here are the names and home dioceses of the various people involved:

Chair: Bishop Graham Dow (Carlisle)
Vice-Chair: Mr Ron Black (Newcastle)
Elected Wardens: Revd Nick Watson (Derby) Revd Joanna Coney (Oxford)
Elected Readers: Mrs Julia Francis (Hereford) Mr Ron Edinborough (Exeter) Mr Charles Flynn (Sodor and Man) Mr Andy Lie (Newcastle)
Committee Chairs: Mr Nigel Holmes (Editorial – Carlisle) Mr John Ashwin (Selcyn – Chichester) Miss Ann Richardson (Website – Rochester)
Officers: Revd Alec George (National Moderator for Reader Education – St Edmundsbury and Ipswich) Dr Alan Wakely (Secretary – Oxford) Mrs Barbara Coleman (Deputy Secretary – Southwell) Mrs Clare Amos (Editor, The Reader – Rochester) Mr Morgan Bunday (Website Editor – Ely)
Readers need to know their Bibles. But they also need to know how to use their Bibles in their ministries. And that second issue, the ‘hermeneutical’ one, is often much more difficult and challenging to tackle than the first.

From time to time in The Reader we publish longer book reviews. Humphrey Prideaux’s detailed review of David DeSilva’s important introduction to the New Testament deserves the space it has been given not least because it raises significant hermeneutical questions about the use of the Bible in Church life and ministry today.

I am hoping, however, that this will be the beginning of a conversation, in which you, our readers, will also get involved. The February 2006 edition of The Reader will have as its major focus issues of education and training. It seems appropriate therefore that the topic of biblical study – with Reader ministry in mind – is aired. Please read Humphrey’s review, and, of course, if you can, get hold of the book by David DeSilva, and send us short (ideally not more than 300 words) reflections on your views about the use and authority of the Bible in ministry. Does it matter, for example, if there are a variety of perhaps contradictory viewpoints expressed within the New Testament on particular issues? How do we deal with the difficult and unpleasant bits? In the spirit of Humphrey’s review I am hoping that we will get the chance to hear a variety of differing opinions. Please get me your thoughts by the end of December if possible.

I have to confess to a vested interest in this subject. As part of my work for the Anglican Communion I am Secretary to the Anglican Communion Working Party on Theological Education. There will be an article about this Working Party (hopefully not by me!) in our February 2006 edition. One of the issues that we have ‘circled’ so far, but I suspect we will need to reflect on in more depth if we are to tackle our brief and mandate with the seriousness it deserves, is the question of the understanding of biblical authority within Anglicanism. To hear the thinking of ministers, such as yourselves, will be an extremely useful way of beginning to ‘open up’ this essential question. 

Clare Amos, Editor, The Reader

An Introduction to the New Testament
David A DeSilva
IVP. £22.30 hbk. 0-8308-2746-3

David DeSilva is Professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary, Ohio, USA, an evangelical college of 800 students of 70 different denominations.

(Query: are any of them Catholics or Orthodox?) DeSilva himself is United Methodist, having written books about the intertestamental period and the social and cultural context of early Christianity. It is a sign of the development in New Testament studies that IVP can publish a major work which does not cling to the literalist agenda of earlier generations of some evangelical scholars. At the same time it is a sobering reminder that the powerhouse of English language scholarship is now firmly American, both Catholic and Protestant, leaving British scholars as minority contributors. Indeed some British scholars (for example, Nineham) are absent from the author index of the book.

The book is written in clear English with a clear structure. DeSilva gently and carefully takes us through the scholarly positions in disputed areas. He constantly encourages us to make our own decisions on the evidence. When he hints at his own position it is not always the conservative verdict I expected. For example the author of the Fourth Gospel is probably not the apostle; he seems to favour Lazarus as the Beloved Disciple. The Johannine discourses may be later meditations. The Pastoral Epistles may not be by Paul; in fact he tries gently to persuade those who find pseudonymous authorship abhorrent to accept the practice. His whole approach is one of open dialogue with a creditable lack of polemics or distortion of the positions of others.

There are various features which make this introduction different from some others. It contains many worthwhile illustrations. More importantly DeSilva encourages interactive work on the text. He does this in a series of Exegetical Skill Exercises. In these he covers a variety of approaches, some new to me: literary context, comparative material, parables, rhetorical criticism, social-scientific criticism, ideological text, epistolary analysis, ritual, post-colonial criticism and cultural studies, feminist criticism, intertexture, argumentative texture, redaction analysis, repetitive texture. In this way he shows the breadth of methodological approaches in modern scholarship.

In addition to his chapters on the various New Testament Books, DeSilva includes major discussions of ‘The Environment of Early Christianity’,

A worthwhile purchase

This book is a worthwhile purchase both for newcomers and for experienced Readers. However I have some personal unease. I am not concerned that DeSilva’s conclusions are often conservative and traditional, because he does give us the arguments on both sides of the debate. My disquiet is that he is almost ‘too nice’ about the New Testament. This is particularly noticeable in the sections of each chapter labelled ‘Ministry Formation’. Since these are an unusual addition to a New Testament Introduction they deserve some further comment.

I am reminded of one of J Philip Wogaman’s books on Christian Ethics; a reviewer said that it was strange how his Christian Ethics ended up similar to twentieth century American liberal and democratic values with emphasis on justice, equality and the individual. Similarly at the start of the twentieth century Schweitzer found that nineteenth century biographies of Jesus were a reflection at the bottom of a well of the authors themselves.

The book’s sections on ‘Ministry Formation’ are wider than the title suggests. They are, rather, homilies not just for ministers but for all disciples individually and also as a gathered community in a church. However they tend simply to give DeSilva’s commendable exhortations on being a Christian today – faithful, prayerful, service, compassion, tolerant but firm in the faith, moral, personal integrity. If we extracted these sections and deleted the references to the specific books we would have a seamless unified account of how he sees a Christian’s life in the faith, moral, personal integrity. If we support today – freedom of choice and expression, dialogue, democratic accountability, openness and tolerance – these are the result of developments in the West over the last 200 years; they do not naturally flow from the pages of the New Testament.

There is another danger when we blur the distinctions to be found in the pages of the New Testament. The radical challenge of the gospel can be lost, the cutting edge blunted. For example in the 2004 American election the Christian Coalition, according to The Times, distributed 30 million leaflets comparing the two candidates. In essence they supported the Republican Party. This seems to be the tendency of most, but not all, American evangelicals. Yet America’s military might and use of enormous fire-power are difficult to support from the gospel. Similarly two social concerns highlighted by these groupings are the sanctity of the family and the integrity of private property and possessions. To claim that these priorities are based on the New Testament is to marginalise some of the most uncomfortable and challenging of Our Lord’s gospel. I should add that I have no evidence from DeSilva’s book that he himself falls into this dangerous trap!

Over 50 years ago Professor CH Dodd warned the churches that the divisions in Christianity were not between churches but within each church. We Anglicans currently know this all too well to our cost. DeSilva’s scholarship tends to one side of the divide. However, his gentle and careful approach is a good witness of how we may continue together without walking apart from one another.

One plea: can publishers cease having pages where they use black ink on a grey background!

HUMPHREY PRIDEAUX
For your bookshelf

**The Monarch history of the church**

**Vol.1 The birth of the church**
1 85424 658 5

Ivor J Davidson

The Monarch £12.99 each pbk.

The arrival of the first two volumes of this scholarly but readable work is greatly to be welcomed. Volume One sets the first three centuries of the church in the context of the Roman social, intellectual and political structures which would so greatly influence its development, and follows events to the coming of the Emperor Constantine. Volume Two centres on the Christological disputes of the patristic era and provides an excellent analysis of the theological and political issues involved. Two chapters deal with Britain, cutting through pious tradition and legends to uncover ascertainable fact, debunking on the way some present day romanticising of Celtic Christianity.

Professor Davidson avoids the trap of concentrating on Rome and Constantinople but traces the story through Armenia, Ethiopia and other non-imperial areas whose traces the story through Rome and Constantinople but the trap of concentrating on its bare essentials.

Simon Coupland

Monarch £7.99 pbk.
1 85424 712 3

A reader on preaching

Edited David Day, Jeff Astley, Leslie J Francis

Ashgate £18.99 pbk.
0 7546 5009 X.

Stripping preaching to its bare essentials

Simon Coupland

Monarch £7.99 pbk.
1 85424 712 3

A reader on preaching is not written by a Reader, as the title may suggest, but is a collection of essays on aspects, both practical and theoretical of the preacher’s craft. I do not see this weighty volume being of wide interest to the average Reader, unless he or she is undertaking advanced academic study in preaching, for the text is dense and academic. But the book is not necessarily unreadable; there are even jokes (see p. 134). The section that interested me most, entitled ‘Preaching Scripture’, was certainly worth the read, if hard work. Others will find sections such as ‘Preaching and Worship’, or ‘The Woman as Preacher’ equally valuable.

Stripping preaching to its bare essentials by Simon Coupland, on the other hand, is highly recommended to all. The author is clearly passionate about preaching and anxious to share his energy and enthusiasm for the craft with all. While there are no concepts and ideas that most experienced preachers will not have already come across, we all need to be reminded about ‘Perspiration and inspiration’, and ‘Handling hot potatoes’, to quote but two of the ten chapter headings. Personal experiences are used liberally, but this book is no promotion for the author’s ministry. The style is immensely readable, leavened with wit and humour. Some like me will question the author’s interdict on using the same sermon more than once, but there are wise words on the proper use of others’ material, and on not expecting too much, nor too little, of our hearers. There is a very firm chapter entitled ‘Lying in the pulpit’, which warns against the temptation to employ dishonest material, however well intentioned one’s aim. For both the trainee Reader and those of longer experience this book (which closes with a short practical bibliography) is highly recommended.

Richard Carter

An introduction to Christianity

Linda Woodhead

CUP £16.99 pbk. £45 hbk.
0 521 78655 x pbk
0 521 45445 x hbk.

The reaction of Readers to a volume entitled An introduction to Christianity is likely to be that it is not for them; they have moved beyond an introduction. They would be wrong; Linda Woodhead’s title is unduly modest. She has written a thought-provoking survey which combines information and judicious interpretation. The book falls into two parts of unequal length; the shorter written by over 180 contributors, rather more from the British Isles (77 if my analysis is correct) than from USA (71) with a sprinkling from Europe and other parts of the world. Scarcely any aspect of Christianity is omitted: church history, doctrines, spirituality, the Bible, ethics as well as the arts, science and education are all included. The Guide is enhanced with maps and tables, over 100 black and white illustrations and 20 colour plates. It has a complex system of cross-referencing and each article is equipped with a comprehensive bibliography. The book concludes with over 50 pages of Who’s Who of great Christians including contemporaries, a ten-page time chart and a glossary of terms. The articles are authoritative and well written and any Reader is likely to become engrossed as he or she follows the references from article to article. A handsomely produced hardback of 1350 pages: it is extraordinarily good value for money. Any Reader will want access to it. If you are seeking a Christmas present for your parish priest or a fellow Reader here is the ideal answer – and you can hope they reciprocate!

Peter Watkins
This is a new edition of the work first published in 1995. It is especially recommended to Readers working in areas where there is a considerable Muslim population.

ALAN JONES

Jesus, man or myth?
Carsten Peter Thiede
Lion £6.99 pbk.
0 7459 5147 3

This book is mis-titled. For Carsten Thiede there is no question that Jesus is a man, but what sort of man? A literalist/fundamentalist view is taken. The Jesus of the Gospels is the historical Jesus. Inconsistencies between the Gospels are ignored. Much is made of the role of Nicodemus in John 19.38-40, but the contrasting story in Mark 15.42-16.1 is not mentioned. Other authors are criticised for lack of evidence, but here, the most questionable statements are made without offering a shred of evidence. We are told that we know Jesus spoke Greek, but not told how we know. This seems to be a book for the general reader but, sadly, there are no indices, bibliography or guidelines to follow up. For Readers, if you accept the author’s view of the Gospels you don’t need to read this book, if you don’t accept it, it isn’t worth your reading it.

ROBERT BEVAN

Psalms
Adrian Curtis
Epworth £14.99 pbk.
0 7162 0585 8

All life is to be found in the psalms and Dr Curtis has written a book which will help us to find it. He begins with an account of the origins and purpose of the psalms, including the influence that Israel’s neighbours had on them. He deals with the metres, theology and interpretation of the psalms. After this valuable introduction the book continues with a detailed examination of each psalm. The series to which this volume belongs is based on the Revised English Bible, but it could be used with any modern version as the author comments on any significant alternative rendering. A single introductory or final sentence often gives a helpful insight into the heart of the psalm.

The book does not set out to be a devotional commentary but gives the reader the background necessary for understanding and treating the psalms as the inspiring texts they are. In particular the author tackles the major problems which the modern reader faces, for example how to understand the repeated calls for vengeance on Israel’s
enemies. I recommend this book for the individual, for the leader of a study group or for a preacher. The psalms deserve careful study and exposition and this is the best book on the subject which I have seen.

KEN ADAMS

**Imaging life after death**

Kathleen Fischer

SPCK £9.99 pbk. 0 281 05717 6

I now know three Christian approaches to life after death. One is a literal interpretation of the biblical slivers of information. Another is a more liberal approach. It balks at embracing the medieval pictures (or even Stanley Spencer’s) of incinerated or worm eaten flesh being knitted up into a recognizable body again, and hence favours a more poetic or philosophical approach to the nature of resurrected life. And then there is Kathleen Fischer’s approach. Kathleen is an American theologian and psychotherapist who for many years has counselled people approaching death or those grieving for them.

Her book is in three sections, “What survives death?” “Do relationships continue beyond the grave?” and, “How does life now relate to life then?” Each section has five chapters and is arranged for a fairly intellectual group study. It includes Bible verses, material from other faiths’ scriptures and secular literature, wisdom from her own psychotherapeutic experiences, plus interaction with quantum physics, findings from research into brain function, animal behaviour and other areas of human science. Readers who enjoy philosophy and are at ease with Jewish, Hindu and Sikh wisdom will find this a stimulating source book for group discussion – or you may prefer to read it yourself then pass on selected insights when visiting dying or grieving people.

CHRISTINE MCMULLEN

**Indoctrination, education and God**

Terence Copley

SPCK £14.99 pbk. 0 281 15682 x

This book is about the relationship between education, secularism and institutional religion. The author has 15 years teaching experience, leads research into religious education and trains teachers taking the post-graduate certificate in education. He examines the effect of secularisation in religious education. Education is itself a soft target for ideological conquest. Does the teacher have the right to indoctrinate children into religious belief? There is a comprehensive review of religious education in our post-modern and politically correct society yet one where positive attitudes to the Bible still exist. There are challenges and encouragement here for all teachers involved in all levels of religious education. They will recognise the past trends, set as detailed analysis. Hopefully most will want to take a bolder stance in their approach to teaching this subject.

DAVID FARRANT

**A Companion to the New Testament**

AE Harvey

CUP £24.99 pbk. £50 hbk. 0 521 7834 X (pbk) 0 521 78297 X (hbk)

Those fortunate enough to have been taught by Anthony Harvey or attended his lectures will know that he combines two qualities: academic rigour and clarity. This second edition of his A Companion to the New Testament is both rigorous and a model of clarity. Unlike larger commentaries or other single volume introductions to the New Testament the technicalities of scholarly debate have been kept to an absolute minimum, but the reader can be assured that the commentary is well informed. This is the great advantage of the Companion. It has a strong narrative of its own and whereas other commentaries are rather fragmentary and sometimes mix long introductions with verse-by-verse analysis this volume tackles the text immediately and highlights the relevant word or phrase in bold whilst discussing a passage as a whole. The great advantage is that the reader has a sense of the narrative coherence of the gospels and letters which is ideally suited to preaching preparation or for personal Bible study.

Those who have used the first edition will note that the Companion now uses the NRSV – the NEB is now redundant and the REB has failed to capture a wide readership. It is a good choice. Of course there are frustrations with a volume of this size. Some of the more radical alternative approaches are absent and whereas the introduction acknowledges the importance of first century Judaism on the composition of the New Testament, there is no reference to Gnosticism or to other possible religious traditions. By and large the Companion takes a fairly conservative view of the historical development of the texts but leaves ultimate decisions about such matters to the reader.

MICHAEL WILCOCKSON

**NEW BIBLE STUDY COURSE**

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**Unmasking Methodist theology**

Edited Clive Marsh and others

Continuum £12.99 pbk. 0 8264 7129 3

The title of this book suggests something of a conspiracy – at last Methodist theology has been rumbled! A better title would have been ‘Revealing Methodist theology’ or even ‘Identifying Methodist theology’. The argument of the book is that Methodism shares with other churches the ecumenical creeds and the scriptures as a source of authority. Its distinctiveness lies in its ethos and practice rather than in any peculiar theological position. Methodist theology is sung in the hymns of Charles Wesley, revealed in social and political action and exemplified in church structures, in the ordained ministry and in its extensive use of local preachers.

These essays emanate from a research project sponsored by the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist church. Part one offers “the fruits of some historical digging”, part two is concerned with specific theological topics and emphases whilst part three provides reactions from Methodists outside the British Isles and from ecumenical partners – Martyn Percy
All Readers need books of classics from the Church. The many ideas in this short writing indicate as such. Tom Wright’s much longer in progress: references to the book are necessary and welcomes challenges to the doctrine: We believe in God (1987), We believe in the Holy Spirit (1991) and The mystery of salvation (1995). The introduction provides useful references to the genesis of the documents and their connection to the older reports Christian believing (1976) and Believing in the church (1981) – and makes the important observation that these three reports were universally formed at very distinguished panels of theologians of varying traditions. Unless the original three reports are already on your bookshelf you should certainly acquire this volume with the next book token your PCC gives you or in default of it. If you buy it for yourself, you are sure to find this a contemplative. Apart from detailed biblical theology, (as there are truly inspired passages are, only those who already know the concept of irrational enmity. The author tries, largely successfully, to show that in the darkest moments there is light. This is a gem of a book! Anthony Phillips is not afraid to explore the concept of ‘godforsakeness’ and some passages are truly inspired and inspiring. For any Christian who is troubled at times about his or her faith, (and are we not at times?) the words here are surely an encouragement. The sentence ‘only those who already know and experience God’s love can encounter his shadow side’, I have found particularly useful and in my ministry to others. Well produced, plenty of biblical quotations, solid biblical theology, (as would be expected from this author) and an important new look at a difficult theme. Readers should find this very useful book and well worth the price.

Contemporary doctrine classics from the Church of England

The Doctrine Commission

CHP £20 pbk. 0 7151 4045 0

All Readers need books of sound doctrine: their sermons should rest on firm foundations. This chunky book contains reprints of three authoritative Anglican summaries from the Doctrine Commission: We believe in God (1987), We believe in the Holy Spirit (1991) and The mystery of salvation (1995). The introduction provides useful references to the genesis of the documents and their connection to the older reports Christian believing (1976) and Believing in the church (1981) – and makes the important observation that these three reports were universally formed at very distinguished panels of theologians of varying traditions. Unless the original three reports are already on your bookshelf you should certainly acquire this volume with the next book token your PCC gives you or in default of it. If you buy it for yourself, you are sure to find this a contemplative. Apart from detailed biblical theology, (as there are truly inspired passages are, only those who already know the concept of irrational enmity. The author tries, largely successfully, to show that in the darkest moments there is light. This is a gem of a book! Anthony Phillips is not afraid to explore the concept of ‘godforsakeness’ and some passages are truly inspired and inspiring. For any Christian who is troubled at times about his or her faith, (and are we not at times?) the words here are surely an encouragement. The sentence ‘only those who already know and experience God’s love can encounter his shadow side’, I have found particularly useful and in my ministry to others. Well produced, plenty of biblical quotations, solid biblical theology, (as would be expected from this author) and an important new look at a difficult theme. Readers should find this very useful book and well worth the price.

Standing up to God

Anthony Phillips

SPCK £9.99 pbk. 0 281 05689 4

This thought-provoking book contains six studies of biblical texts selected because they feature people who ‘find themselves facing his (God’s) irrational enmity’. The author tries, largely successfully, to show that in the darkest moments there is light. This is a gem of a book! Anthony Phillips is not afraid to explore the concept of ‘godforsakeness’ and some passages are truly inspired and inspiring. For any Christian who is troubled at times about his or her faith, (and are we not at times?) the words here are surely an encouragement. The sentence ‘only those who already know and experience God’s love can encounter his shadow side’, I have found particularly useful and in my ministry to others. Well produced, plenty of biblical quotations, solid biblical theology, (as would be expected from this author) and an important new look at a difficult theme. Readers should find this very useful book and well worth the price.

Evangelism in a spiritual age

Stephen Croft and others

CHP £11.99 pbk. 0 7151 4054 X

If you are concerned to see God’s kingdom grow in our society, you will be encouraged and energised by reading this book. It makes an excellent companion to Mission-shaped Church but is more accessible. The first section tells about research done in Coventry Diocese in 2003 among people who are not even fringe members of any church. Their comments and beliefs are very clearly laid out. The second section reflects on their responses and pinpoints some of the lessons we need to learn if we are to communicate effectively with today’s people in today’s culture: the importance of listening, the community as key to contemporary evangelism. Particularly helpful is the chapter suggesting achievable ideas for the local church – some more suited to small churches and others possible for larger congregations. The research is of good quality; the analysis careful and the reflections are objective and challenging. Order your copy now!

Mentoring Marriages

Harry Benson

Monarch £7.99 pbk. 1 85424 699 2

This book is challenging, thought provoking and down to earth. Its premise is that couples can learn marriage through the support of more experienced married couples. Their role is to point out destructive habits and encourage positive ones in those they mentor. It explodes marriage myths such as ‘happy ever after’, ‘soulmates’ and ‘irreconcilable differences’. It tackles cohabitation, money and sex. It especially promotes the use of relationship inventories. Surprisingly the Christian principles are reserved for an appendix. Yet the book is all the stronger for this. It tackles real life head on and only then reverts to an apologetic defence. First the book shows how research confirms the value of marriage; then how God designed it. There is the recurrent use of the term ‘tricks’. This might seem off-putting and trivializing but Harry Benson means the word to suggest fun activities with immediate impact.
The approach is humble yet informed, practical yet rooted in scripture.

ERIC LESEE

P Cafe Theology
Michael Lloyd
Alpha International £6.99 pbk. 1 90407 476 6

What a difficult book to assess. In 372 pages it includes sections on basic Christian concepts from Creation to The Final Victory of God, with a concluding chapter on The Church. The foreword indicates that it is from a series of talks given by the author and it does show symptoms of this, with a good deal of wordiness and repetition which could usefully have been better edited. It seems to be intended for both committed Christians and those new to the faith. Some aspects seem very simplistic, but others very profound and thoughtful. It contains some wonderful ideas and some that I found really irritating, though I loved some of the small cartons that occasionally appear. I probably wouldn’t buy it, but equally I probably shall dip into it from time to time.

WENDY AIRD

W Daily Prayer
CHP £20 hbk. 0 71512073 5

Since prayers matter more than statements and debates, the publication of Daily Prayer is of special importance. This is a box packed with tools of every sort, scalpels, needles, spoons, forks and hoes. Time and perseverance will be needed to discover all the contents provided for Morning and Evening Prayer each day. The two Offices are comparable to those we know but enriched by much fresh material. Most of this is scriptural so using the book often feels like praying the Bible. There are short alternatives to the fuller versions that will be a special help those leading frantic lives. The typeface and the layout are worthy of the content. It is to be hoped that many Readers and the quiet majority of worshippers whose loyalty and dedication sustains the Church’s life will, in a few years’ time, be handling copies of Daily Prayer worn and battered by constant use.

NORMAN CHATTFIELD

B H The Bible: a history
Stephen Miller, Robert Huber
Lion £12.99 pbk. 0 7459 5176 7

This is a comprehensive overview of both the compiling and impact of the Bible from the very first beginnings of written language to the use of scriptures today. The chapters are mostly large double page spreads with illustrations, timelines, and quotations. The book’s category divisions are the Old and New Testaments; how translations were made; printing and its impact; and scholarship, research and the missionary field from the Enlightenment onwards. It is a broad ranging book with detail in each of the short chapters to set contexts or ‘by the way’ illustrations for preaching or Bible study, although further reading might be needed to really explore a topic in depth. This is particularly so in the ‘Modern World’ section on social issues such as slavery, and the various genre of biblical criticism. It is a beautiful coffee-table style book: a valuable thank-you present, or a fine gift to a Reader about to be licensed.

PETER JACKSON

And finally . . .

SPCK has published two hardback books which would make attractive Christmas presents. They are Incarnation by Alister McGrath (£9.99 0 281 05593 9) with six full colour illustrations and A celebration of autumn by David Adam, (£9.99 0 281 05716 8) mostly poems and occasionally prose about autumn with colour illustrations to match.

Lectionary reflections Year B (SPCK £8.99 pbk. 0 281 01528 9) completes the publication in book form of Jane Williams’ trilogy of pieces, which originally appeared in the Church Times, based on the Common Worship readings for Years A, B & C.

The Canterbury Press publishes The mystical language of icons by Solrunn Nes, an art historian and freelance writer and lecturer. Each icon is illustrated and described and the book provides an authoritative introduction to iconography.

Betsy by Jean Hatton (Monarch £8.99 pbk. 0 8254 6092 1) is a well-researched biography of the prison reformer, Elizabeth Fry. Rabbi Lionel Blue has written an autobiography Hitchhiking to heaven (Hodder & Stoughton £8.99 pbk. 0 340 78661 2). It is an engagingly frank account of a varied and extraordinary life.

Among Grove Books likely to be of interest to Readers are B 34 by Ecclesiastes Doug Ingram (1 85174 579 3), B35 Qumran and the Jewish Jesus by GJ Brooke (1 85174 587 4), B36 Four witnesses, one gospel? by Andrew Gregory (1 85174 595 5), E 138 The moral vision of the letter to the Hebrews by Greg Forster (1 85174 596 3), Ev.70 Leading ordinary churches into growth by Alan Howe (1 85174 592 0), R21 Spiritual discipline and leadership formation by Matthew Porter (1 85174 597 1). They are available from Grove Books, Ridley Hall Road, Cambridge, CB3 9HU each £2.75 including postage and packing.
Gazette of newly admitted and licensed Readers

**BATH AND WELLS**
1 OCTOBER 2005
*Admitted and licensed*
Janet Caudwell, St John, Frome and Woodlands
Peter Crawford, Barrow Gurney and Flax Bourton
Andrew Douglass, Wembdon
Mark Elliott, Christ Church, Bath
Kay Friend, Congresbury with Puxton and St Ann, Hewish
Madeleine Harding, Wells Cathedral
Lucy Hemsley, Blagdon with Compton Martin and Ubley
Stella Jackson, Chard and District Team Ministry
Susan Kellagher, Martock with Ash
Penny Mimmack, Batheaston with St Catherine
Eleanor Oelmann, St Saviour, Bath with Swainswick and Woolley
Nigel Padfield, Alcombe
Sylvia Phillips, Wraxall with Faliland
Vivienne Picken, Porlock
Michael Pulvermacher, The Quantock Towers
Anne Purdon, Bathampton with Claverton
Robert Robinson, East Clevedon with Clapton in Gordano, Walton Clevedon, Walton in Gordano and Weston in Gordano
Larry Schenk, St John, Glastonbury and St Benedict with Meare
Michael Turner, The Camelot parishes
*Licensed*
Michael Ford, Axbridge with Shipham and Rowberrow
Tom Hamblin, Chard and District Team Ministry
Michael Hawkins, Ilminster
Peter Richardson, Locking Castle
Richard Stableford, Worle Team Ministry

**BRISTOL**
8 OCTOBER 2005
*Admitted*
Philip Ashby
Peter Rushton
*Admitted and licensed*
Lee Barnes, Holy Trinity with St Gabriel and St Lawrence and St Jude, Easton
Rachel Battershell, Christ Church, Swindon
Adrian Bright, St Philip and St Jacob with Emmanuel, Bristol
Stephen Britton, Wick with Doynton and Dyrham
Martin Brown, Christ Church, Downend
Heather Bunting, Ashton Keynes, Leigh and Minety
Sue Farrance, Christ the Servant, Stockwood
Michael Graham, Stapleton
Tanya Lord, Bedminster
Elizabeth Mellor, Stoke Gifford

**DURHAM**
17 SEPTEMBER 2005
*Admitted and licensed*
Ann Almond, Castleside
Susan Bell, St Hilda and St Columba, Darlington
Michael Bicknell, Pittington, Shadforth and Sherburn
Dawn Cummings, Herrington, Penshaw and Shirey Row
Ann Moss, St Oswald, Durham
Rosamund Stocks, High Spen and Rowlands Gill
Teresa Sutton, Conventional District of Woodhouse Close, Bishop Auckland

Henrietta Metters, Hullavington, Norton and Stanton
St Quentin
John Metters, Hullavington, Norton and Stanton
St Quentin
Teresa Michaux, Christ Church, Swindon
Peter Moore, Alveston and Littleton on Severn with Elberton
Margaret Morgan, given permission to officiate
Jennifer Neale, St Peter, Bishopsworth and St Oswald, Bedminster Down
Richard Pendlebury, St Matthew and St Nathaniel, Kingsdown
Alice Pettit, Malmesbury with Westport and Brokenborough
Ron Pool, St Paul, Chippenham with Hardenhuish and Langley Burrell
Margaret Russell, St Martin, Knowle
Gillian Sawyer, St Mary, Shirehampton
Gillian Sayers, St Luke, Brislington
Jessica Smith, All Saints with St John, Clifton
Eryl Spencer, St Andrew, Chippenham with Tythernton Lucas
Valerie Ward, St Andrew, North Swindon
Rebecca Waring, Hanham
Barbara Wood, St Paul, Chippenham with Hardenhuish and Langley Burrell
*Licensed*
Stephen Burgess, Wick with Doynton and Dyrham
Helen Hyatt, Malmesbury with Westport and Brokenborough
Lucy Crawley, Archdeaconry of Bristol
(Network Church project)
Patricia Willson, St Philip and St Jacob with Emmanuel, Bristol

Michael Ford, Axbridge with Shipham and Rowberrow
Tom Hamblin, Chard and District Team Ministry
Michael Hawkins, Ilminster
Peter Richardson, Locking Castle
Richard Stableford, Worle Team Ministry

Larry Schenk, St John, Glastonbury and St Benedict with Meare
Michael Turner, The Camelot parishes
*Licensed*
In Memoriam

The deaths of the following Readers have been notified to us:

**Birmingham**
Frederick Andrews
Raymond Burston
Stan Elliott
John Fair

**Carlisle**
Martyn Cundy
David Pigeon

**Chester**
Derek Cox
FP Haslam
R Hollinghead
M Pratt
FH Temperton

**Coventry**
PA Aston
Roy Tankard

**Derby**
Terence Gledhill

**Durham**
Les Knowles
GR Bull

**Exeter**
Arthur Murchie

**Hereford**
John Shepherd
Hugh Stanford

**Lincoln**
Rosemary Watts

**Liverpool**
JH Macfarlane

**London**
Peter Ford
Edward Kelly

**Manchester**
Harry Hoyle

**Oxford**
Muriel Wilkins

**Rochester**
Kenneth Roy
Dennis Seymour
Pam Winnett

**Sheffield**
Mr N Thorley

**Southwell**
Mr D Lawson
Mr JD Maleham
Mr RB Skidmore

**Worcester**
Mrs MI Macfarlane

We give thanks for their work and witness and remember those who grieve.
Gleanings

Themes coming up
To let you know what is planned for 2006. The February issue will focus on training issues, bearing in mind the developments linked to the ‘Hind Report’. We have commissioned a substantial number of articles for this already. But (see p.23) we are particularly inviting you to share your reflections on questions of biblical interpretation and authority – especially with Reader ministry in mind.

The May 2006 issue will focus on ‘Communion’ (understanding this term fairly widely). The August issue will look at ‘Readers and the world of work’ and have a special report on the conference for younger Readers, and the November issue will explore Birth and Death (bearing particularly in mind the involvement of Readers in funeral ministry). For all these three issues we would welcome contributions appropriate to the relevant theme – please be in touch with me with any suggestions as soon as possible.

Paying for it!
At £5.00 (including postage) for a subscription of four issues The Reader must be one of the best value publications in England. Janice Milbank, the administrator in The Reader office writes: ‘For those Readers who pay direct to CRC for magazines, subscriptions will become due in January 2006. The price will remain the same as for 2005 at £5.00. Please make cheques payable to “The Central Board of Finance”.’

Christina Baxter CBE
Congratulations to Dr Christina Baxter, Principal of St John’s College, Nottingham and Reader in the diocese of Southwell, who was awarded a CBE in the Birthday Honours earlier this year.

Congratulations
Congratulations too to Maurice Bird who retired earlier this year after celebrating 40 years service as a Reader in Norwich diocese – all his ministry in fact being in one parish – Pakefield.

Eyes and ears
A further reminder! The staff of The Reader (indeed the staff of the CRC office as a whole) is tiny, part-time, mostly working either on a voluntary or honorarium basis, and with more than enough to do. We rely on you, our Readers, and particularly the diocesan wardens and secretaries, to let us know news about individual Readers which, within reason, we are glad to publish. We haven’t got the time and resources proactively to discover that x is celebrating a particular anniversary or y has been given a special honour. There is nothing quite so irritating to receive as a letter which begins, ‘I can’t understand why you didn’t mention such-and-such or so-and-so’. The answer is simple – I didn’t know about it, because nobody told me! We do need you to be our eyes and ears – remembering that the copy deadline for issues is about 10 weeks before publication date (I can sometimes squeeze things into Gleanings at shorter notice – but can’t guarantee to do so.)

And covers
The comment has been made that it would be good to have some covers of The Reader which show Readers engaged in their ministries. It is in fact quite difficult (particularly on our budget) to get hold of really good quality photos of people ‘doing things’ (whether leading worship, offering pastoral care, teaching etc). But we thought it would be fun to try and create a ‘montage’ cover at some point next year of a number of Readers exercising their ministry in various ways. If you have a photo that you would like to have included please send it in as soon as possible. Postal and electronic addresses are given in the inside front cover. We cannot promise to return photos.

Conference on the Holy Land
A brief mention of a conference which may be of interest to Readers. On 26 January 2006, at the United College of the Ascension, Selly Oak, Birmingham there is a day conference entitled The Holy Land – people of faith working together for peace. Running from 10.00am–4.00pm it includes a variety of speakers with different viewpoints. Cost £20.00. To book please contact Joan Marks on 0121 415 6810 or email joan.marks@bham.ac.uk

Teaching resources
We have had positive feedback to our last issue – which focused on Paul, and which contained a fairly sizeable resource on the Letter to the Romans that might help you if, for example, you were needing to lead a teaching activity in your church. One correspondent commented that we had solved the problem he had been wrestling over – what could he do in a house group he was scheduled to lead this autumn! Karen Elsworth’s reflection on Mark in this issue is a further resource. We will try and include similar teaching resources to help you in the coming issues.

With Christmas in mind
Two recently published books that you might like to know about. Jane Williams has written Approaching Christmas a beautifully thoughtful reflection about celebrating Christmas which draws on her experience both as the daughter of missionary parents living in India and as the wife of Rowan Williams and the mother of two children. Published by Lion at £9.99, it is a book to treasure personally and to give as a gift.

Jim Rosenthal, Director of Communications at the Anglican Communion and a Reader in London Diocese has co-written a book entitled St Nicholas: A Closer look at Christmas. Jim’s enthusiasm for St Nicholas was shared with readers of this magazine in an article published in autumn 2004. The book is a veritable feast of information about the celebration and veneration of St Nicholas in many parts of the world. It is obtainable from Amazon (and various book shops).
Dear Friends,

In mid-September, I travelled down to Carmarthen in West Wales with two other Readers. This may seem a little odd: Wales is outside the Church of England, after all! The purpose of our journey was to visit Bishop Carl Cooper of St David’s who has kindly agreed to be the keynote speaker at the Conference for Younger Readers next year.

One thing he said struck me with particular force. ‘In order to preach God’s Word, you must first love God’s Word’. At a superficial level, this is blindingly obvious. However, I feel there is sometimes a risk when we are involved in analysis, exegesis and interpretation of biblical texts that we can forget the extent to which the words are dear to us, and bring us inspiration and spiritual nourishment. A balance must be achieved here, and I felt that Bishop Carl’s remark was salutary. I certainly look forward to discovering what he will have to say at the Conference at London Colney next summer.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find a list of the new members of your National Executive Committee, which took office when the new General Synod was sworn in this month. I look forward to working with them, but I would also like to pay tribute to all those who are retiring. There is insufficient space to mention them all by name, but I want publicly to offer the thanks of the Reader movement to Gloria Helson, for her five years’ service as Vice-Chair, and many more years before that in various other capacities. It has been a joy to have such a helpful and responsive person to serve and to work with. Have a happy and fulfilling retirement, Gloria, with our love.

With best wishes to you all,

Alan Wakely,  
Secretary, Central Readers Council.

PS In October Mrs Barbara Coleman who has been assisting in the CRC office for the past three months was formally appointed Associate Secretary of CRC. Barbara lives between Derby and Nottingham, and is licensed in the Diocese of Southwell. Her appointment marks the first time a national officer has come from the Northern province – albeit from the extreme southern end of it.

Normally she will be in London on Wednesdays and Thursdays, staying overnight, so the phones may be manned from a surprisingly early hour on Thursdays!

As well as her parochial duties, Barbara has been busy in the deanery and diocese. She has recently left some of her deanery duties, but retains her positions as Diocesan CME Officer and editor of its Reader newsletter.

Barbara has a Master’s degree in theology. She is also a qualified nurse, and as well as nursing has been a Health Visitor and a Nursing Home manager during her working life.

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