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‘Politics,’ I hear you saying, ‘What a way to start the year off!’ Well like it or not, we cannot avoid politics! Indeed as Christians it is our responsibility to think about how power and authority should be exercised. Politics, in one form or another, is integral to the development of the people of God in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament we discover that Jesus is not shy of such issues. Asking a trick question (so modern, isn’t it?) his questioners wanted to trap him into taking sides (See Matt 22: 15–22). The Pharisees should not have been asking such a question in the first place, as the coin they proffered was a symbol of an alien and idolatrous political system. But ask they did and in asking failed to recognise God’s kingdom, the kingdom Jesus had come to announce. So let us not sidestep thinking about this, or seek to trip one another up just because our ideas are not the same as the next person’s. Politics is an inescapable aspect of our lives as Christians as we seek the proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom of God.

David Landrum, Senior Parliamentary Officer for Bible Society, opens this issue of The Reader by asking the question ‘What would Wilberforce do?’ and in this year when we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Authorised Version of the Bible, Nick Spencer enables us to think about how the Bible has helped form our nation over many centuries. Then there are the more lighthearted contributions which also contain a message: ‘Five reasons why Christians shouldn’t be involved in party politics’ by Andy Flannagan and ‘New man about the house’ by Sheila Walker. Another contributor is Nigel Holmes, a former BBC producer and one time chair of The Reader editorial committee, who helps us think about ‘Religion on Television’. Paul Bickley, Senior Researcher for Theos, the public theology thinktank, is very up to date. Writing against the background of student protests over fees and a string of WikiLeaks revelations, his article is entitled ‘Now we know what ‘the new politics’ looks like’.

I have introduced a new series of articles with a new logo, called R4R – resources for Readers. These, and the lengthy ‘Need to know more?’, should give you plenty of ideas for further explorations of your own! Finally Bishop Robert asks a question to which he would like your reply. Talking of replies, I have had some good feedback about recent issues of The Reader magazine. Keep your comments coming, as I enjoy hearing from you even when I am not sure I agree! Anyway, who said we should all agree! Just like politics, we need to share our perspectives as we seek the kingdom of God together in 2011.
Across the world the demand for the Bible is immense and growing fast. Through a network of indigenous Bible Societies, the work of translation, publication and distribution continues apace. In every continent (including Europe), the church is growing. Providing scriptures in an accessible ‘heart language’, Bible Society are working to see a day when the Bible’s God-given revelation, inspiration and wisdom is shaping the lives and communities of people everywhere.

When the Bible is not available or there is no understanding of its value, we call this Bible poverty. But what about our own culture? Here, most people can afford to buy a Bible in a version that suits them. Indeed, most homes contain a Bible. So what’s the problem? It seems that, as we emerge blinking from the spiritual carnage of the last secular century, our Bible poverty in the UK presents a challenge that is more associated with credibility than availability. In education, arts and the media other, seemingly less demanding influences, hold sway, and it’s clear that most people simply don’t see a place for the Bible. It’s ironic that, in the year that we are marking the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, as we celebrate it’s huge contribution to our national identity and culture, we have conveniently forgotten to acknowledge its message and its author.

Perhaps nowhere more keenly is this often wilful neglect of the Word of God felt than in political culture, as the ‘art of the possible’, politics has always been a controversial pursuit. Indeed, it was John Milton who once observed that: ‘there is no art more cankered and slubbered with aphorising pedantry than the art of policie.’ Despite this truism, politics remains vitally important, and the application of the Bible to our political systems, processes and language over the centuries produced arguably the most stable and just form of democracy in human history. However recently colonised by secular humanist ideals, our once envied political culture is now discredited, facile and mechanical. Lacking the kingdom vision for a better way to live together, it simply manages social, economic and cultural decline in the most efficient way possible.

For most of our recent history, with a few exceptions, many Christians have tended to see politics as something of a ‘dirty business’, an ‘earthy trade’. Such a view has often limited Christian involvement in politics to either voting or protesting. Although both are legitimate and valuable ways of engaging, simply putting a cross in a box every five years or waving a placard occasionally has seen the influence of Christianity in politics being eclipsed by other worldviews – particularly secular humanism. This privatisation of our faith (and all faith) results in a ‘Sacred-Secular Divide’ in which the voice of biblical wisdom is muted. We then get bad laws, social and cultural disintegration etc and blame ‘those in charge’.

But what if the Bible calls God’s people to roll up their sleeves and get involved? What if, rather than shouting from the
sidelines, God wants his people to be salt and light ‘within’ politics and government – even in alien, pagan cultures? It’s often a surprise to many believers who have lived under the myth of secular ascendency, to discover that the Bible has numerous examples that confirm the Lord’s interest in politics. People like Joseph, Daniel and Nehemiah all governed with integrity in difficult, often hostile cultural contexts. It seems that, alongside rebuilding Jerusalem, we may also have a responsibility to demonstrate the kingdom in the very heart of Babylon. So, before we leap to blame ‘those in charge’, mindful that all authority comes from God, we would do well to heed Archbishop Desmond Tutu who astutely observed that: ‘If God’s will is not being done in politics, whose will is being done?’

Bible Society was established by William Wilberforce and others over 200 years ago within the environs of Parliament. This is because our eminent founders understood that God is very interested in government – the right ordering of our relational priorities. These relational priorities are naturally public because, as Bishop Tom Wright pointed out ‘the Bible is public truth’ – true for all people, at all times, in all places. In other words, the worldview that the Bible proposes has obvious and inescapable consequences for how we do politics.

Today our advocacy work echoes the words of Psalm 127 that are written into the floor of Central Lobby in the Palace of Westminster: ‘Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain’. This historically (literally) grounded truth that we need the Bible to realise good government is finding new purchase in politics today. There is a renewed interest amongst young Christians to get involved in politics, and with our focus upon influencing political culture with the Bible, we are keen to support this new awareness so that it makes the kind of impact that honours God and provides healing in our world.

As secular solutions continue to be found wanting, there is encouragement from history that it is possible to make the Bible an important point of reference for our political leaders. It was William Wilberforce who transformed our national life by challenging Christians to take the Bible seriously – and to make it public. In 1823, his illustriously entitled book helped to shatter the religious hypocrisy of the day: *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country as Contrastcd with Real Christianity*. Although our contemporary context is very different, the need for biblically serious Christianity in the public square is the same. Supporting the Christian community through the official All-Party Parliamentary Group ‘Christians in Parliament’ (www.christiansinparliament.org.uk) and working closely with the Christian party groups, the policy community and thinktanks, we are seeing God’s people rise to the challenge of engaging their faith in politics. Practically, on a day to day basis, Bible Society help to provide administrative support for the events and activities of Christians in Parliament. These include weekly Bible studies and monthly worship meetings in the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft, prayer meetings, evening receptions, delegations, debates, and the annual National Prayer Breakfast. This ‘community development’ work is accompanied by encouraging more effective and extensive Christian engagement in politics; and the development of biblical worldview and language of communication in politics.

‘Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain’.

The growth of the parliamentary community is being accompanied by a developing interest amongst young Christians to get practically and prayerfully involved in politics. Keen to throw fuel on this new fire, we have developed the SUSA resource. Named after a city in the Bible from which we get a Prime Minister, a senior civil servant, an activist and a lobbyist (can you name them?), it is a web portal ‘one-stop-shop’ for all things political. Helping Christians to get more extensively and effectively engaged in politics, it can be found here: www.susa.info

A current feature on the SUSA site is the Partisan Project. These are a set of three booklets that explore the role of Christianity in the three main parties. Launched with the authors, MPs, theologians and party activists at the party conferences, they look at the historical influence of Christians in the Conservative, Labour and Liberal-Democrat parties, and discuss the theological roots and the challenges for today. Making the case for participation over protest as the main mode of engagement in politics, they will become valuable assets for Christian influence in conventional politics in the years ahead. They can be downloaded free at: www.susa.info/resources/partisan

During his recent visit to the UK, Pope Benedict stated in his address to Parliament: ‘The central question at issue, then, is this: where is the ethical foundation for political choices to be found?’ The Bible has an unmatched track record as such an ethical foundation, and Bible Society are committed to inspiring and equipping God’s people to carry the Word of God (implicitly and, when necessary explicitly) into the important mission field of politics. We are under no illusions that this cultural transformation is a long, hard slog. Yet, we are encouraged by what is happening in Parliament and nationally. By God’s grace, salt and light are increasing, and it seems that as the secular tide recedes, God is doing a new thing in politics. Are you?

Dr David Landrum is Senior Parliamentary Officer for Bible Society
Celebrating the political Bible

The year 2011 threatens to do unto the Bible what 2009 did unto Charles Darwin. Four hundred years after the publication of the King James Version, every major public figure is queuing up to praise the Good Book’s sonorous prose. Even those who hate what it stands for are willing to laud it to the skies. ‘Not to know the King James Bible,’ opined Richard Dawkins, ‘is to be in some small way barbarian.’

There are limits. Praising the Bible is fine but only if a) we are talking about the King James translation and b) we concern ourselves with its impact on our language and literature and culture. And yet, both conditions are curious. The first seems ignorant of the fact that, elegant as the KJV is, it owes much of its power to the words of William Tyndale whose translations eighty years earlier stand as a watershed not only for the English Bible but for the English language.

The second limit – the Bible as literature – is not so much curious as ominous, subtly enervating scripture. It is informed by a kind of leisure-time attitude to Christianity, in which the religion and all its trappings (beautiful prose, moving music, uplifting liturgy, etc) is tolerated so long as they remain leisure pursuits. Knowing the Bible is fine – necessary even – if you want to understand your Milton, Monteverdi or Michelangelo. But you shouldn’t take it too far beyond the museum or music hall.

In particular, you shouldn’t let it anywhere near the corridors of power as we all know what happens when political minds get infected with biblical ideas. The political (as opposed to literary or cultural) Bible is largely invisible, recognised, if at all, as symbolic of the kind of pre-modern barbarism from which we have thankfully escaped.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible is probably the single most influential document in our political history. Just as it is impossible fully to understand Donne or Blake or Eliot without some biblical knowledge, it is impossible to understand our political history or the root of our political freedoms.

This is not for a moment to claim that we owe all our political freedoms either to the Bible or, more broadly, to Christianity. We do not. Indeed, some moments of political liberation, such as the Great Reform Act of 1832 which did away with Rotten Boroughs and extended the franchise (slightly), were obtained in the teeth of Christian, or at least episcopal opposition. Instead, it is simply to say that the legacy of the Bible on national politics has been as immense as it has been complex.

In as far as there is any clear pattern to it, the influence of the Bible on British politics has been two-fold: it has orientated us towards political order on the one hand, and towards political freedom on the other.

The thrust towards order is clear and well-known. In as far as it has a proof text it is Romans 13:1: ‘Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.’ From the very earliest days, political authority was allied with and justified by religious authority. To rebel against the king was to rebel against God. The argument was popular throughout British history but reached its apex in the first half of the sixteenth century, when ideas of political resistance that had been developing in Catholic thought in the later middle ages were swept away by the Reformation and replaced by a Protestant theology of total and unquestioning obedience.

This theology was first introduced by Tyndale himself whose Obedience of a Christian Man was uncompromising in the attitude it demanded from subjects to their rulers: ‘Neither may the inferior person avenge himself upon the superior, or violently resist him, for whatsoever wrong it be.’ Yet Tyndale also insisted that everyone, down to the ploughboy, should be able to access the Word of God in their own tongue, and acted on his intentions by producing a New Testament translation (he was killed before he could complete the Old) in a prose that was and remains unparalleled in its elegant, accessible simplicity.

Tyndale’s New Testament was the most significant political text of the English reformation, not so much because of what it said but simply because of its existence. By giving everyone access to society’s founding documents, it threatened to change everything. Small wonder that within a couple of years of erecting authorised translations in parish churches across the country, Henry VIII was attempting to rein in the impact, passing an act which stated that ‘no women, nor artificers, prentices, journeymen, serving men of the degrees of yeoman or under, husbandmen, nor labourers shall read the Bible or New Testament to himself or any
other, privately or openly. It was a case of shutting the stable door too late.

It wasn’t simply the fact of the English Bible that stood on the side of political freedom, however. There was a long-standing tradition, dating back to the earliest Christian centuries in Britain, which drew from scripture justification for political disobedience. In as far as this thrust had a proof text it was Acts 5:29: ‘Peter and the other apostles answered and said, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”’ Kings may well have been God’s ordained, but they were also firmly under God’s judgment. ‘Whether you will or not, you will have him as a judge,’ the Anglo-Saxon monk Alcuin warned King Ethelred. God legitimated their authority but he also limited it, that limitation being grounded in the idea that those in authority were charged with securing and protecting the common good or wealth of their people. Like Old Testament kings, English (latterly British) ones were under the law, their authority depending, to a large degree, on the extent to which they obeyed and implemented God’s commandments. In time this would develop into full-blown resistance theories – first with the Church as the body that could pronounce on the state of royal authority and then, after the Reformation, with that locus of resistance being shifted to the individual’s conscience.

This idea of negative freedom, ie freedom from political tyranny, was matched by ideas of positive freedom, ie freedom to act and live well in society. Such freedom to fulfil human potential was, of course, a central tenet of the gospel and it informed ideas of just authority for centuries. Kings, even in the earliest days, were judged (or, at least, were going to be judged) by the condition of their people, often the poorest and most vulnerable of their people. When a group of missionary bishops wrote to King Aethelbald of Mercia in 747, they praised him for his charity in explicitly biblical tones: ‘We have heard that you give very many alms,’ they said, ‘and we rejoice greatly in this; because those who bestow alms on the least and needy brethren will, according to the evangelical truth, hear from the Lord on the day of Judgement the merciful sentence which says, “As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.”’

It was to be a thousand years, however, before such sentiments really began to cut deep within the political conscience. Christian radicals in the early nineteenth century were hemmed in on both sides. On the one hand were Christian authoritarians who deemed all movements towards political or economic emancipation were suspect or revolutionary in intent. On the other were atheistic radicals who thought that all such claims for emancipation had to be ‘secular’ for fear that they were otherwise merely cloaks for an established, authoritarian agenda.

There was a long-standing tradition, dating back to the earliest Christian centuries in Britain, which drew from scripture justification for political disobedience.

Treading this tight-ropes, Christian radicals found an immensely powerful political agenda in the words of the Old Testament prophets, of several New Testament letters (in particular James’) and supremely in the life and teaching of Christ himself. Here lay the resources for political reform, to attack the supposedly iron laws of political economy, to campaign against workhouses and factory conditions and the atrocious treatment of chimney sweeps. Here lay much of the rhetoric and power of the Chartist movement, at least in its early days.

Such political radicalism was not, of course limited to radicals. The best known and probably the most impressive Christian political campaign of the time, perhaps of all British history, that against the slave trade, was steered by some of the most establishment and authoritarian Christian politicians of the day. Yet their resolute insistence that slaves were made in the image of the same God and redeemed by the blood of the same Saviour as those who abducted and transported them was so influential and so threatening that it earned them the accusation of being Jacobins themselves. The radical impact of the Bible could be felt across the political spectrum.

None of this is to suggest, as some Christian radicals did, that the Bible was simply a politically revolutionary book or (at the risk of repetition) that its thrust was always towards political freedom. Throughout British history its impulses towards freedom and order have been held in continual tension and although most individual Christian politicians and thinkers could be found closer to one or other end of the spectrum, the overall cumulative effect has been dynamic, forging a politics that recognises and struggles with the ineradicable imperfections of human communities.

Ultimately, human nature being what it is, the twin impulses towards freedom and order are irreconcilable on earth. No politics, however well intentioned or conducted, will deliver paradise. In its place, we are left with an agonistic idea of politics, in which wholly legitimate impulses towards political order and political freedom – towards the harmonious community and the liberated individual – vie with one another. In such a light, politics becomes an ongoing, irresolvable enterprise in which legitimate but irreconcilable needs and objectives are negotiated.

It is a kind of politics that can promise much, but not everything. In an age of conspicuous political scepticism born in no small measure from political hubris, it is a message we would do well to recapture.

Nick Spencer is Research Director for Theos, the public theology thinktank: www.theosthinktank.co.uk

Freedom and Order: History, Politics and the English Bible will be published by Hodder & Stoughton in May 2011.
New Man about the House:

a not-for-publication diary

WEEK 1
I nearly didn’t stand.

Even my mother said that anyone capable of going into politics would never want to.

Politics, after all, is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies. According to Groucho Marx, anyway.

It’s so much easier to be a grouch than to be gracious; to blame than to pray and get involved; to keep a scapegoat handy rather than take responsibility and go out into the wilderness yourself. I know. I had a pretty good line in cynical repartee myself when I was trying to run a small business. They have a lot to answer for, right? When they do something, they’re interfering; when they do nothing they’re negligent. When they ask our opinion they’re passing the buck; when they don’t, they’re out of touch and autocratic.

As I sit looking out of my office window at the end of my first week, I find myself asking why? Why this impulse, no, this compulsion, in spite of it all to accept the poisoned chalice?

But I do know why... If science is thinking God’s thoughts after him... if literature is catching the echoes of his words... if art is glimpsing his vision... then politics is surely exercising his delegated authority... for better or worse.

I’m reminded of Daniel’s prayer after God had given him insight into Nebuchadnezzar’s dream:

‘Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings, He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding...’

Results, outcomes are not my responsibility: they are his. My responsibility is to be humble enough, wise enough, to ask for wisdom and courageous enough to act on it. Please, God.

When they do something, they’re interfering; when they do nothing they’re negligent. When they ask our opinion they’re passing the buck; when they don’t, they’re out of touch and autocratic.

WEEK 2
Was encouraged to be invited to a Members’ prayer breakfast this week. A fair number there, and every colour of the rainbow; (well, red and yellow and green and blue....) Still not sure I can totally understand how anyone can be a Christian and a ** but I’m beginning to see how hard it would be to have a genuinely Christian political party, when on many issues there are sincere, well-informed Christians on both sides of the debate. Is capitalism right, for example, because it encourages individuals to fulfil their potential – or wrong because it can in so doing neglect the needs of the poor? Is socialism right because it cares for the needy, or wrong because individual enterprise is stifled by ‘big’ government?

Of course it would be easier if things were black and white. Or would it, I wonder? Is it only in wrestling with the hard choices, the lesser of evils that we grow in our understanding of ourselves, of society, of God? That we become more, or less, truly human?

And how much longer will I have the luxury of this kind of philosophising in a world that is driven by economics, a multitude of conflicting agendas, a mountain of paperwork, late nights and no decent coffee?

My third letter yesterday from my very own ‘Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells’ about her boundary dispute. Where are my priorities? Where is my secretary?

Made me think, though: this isn’t just about the Potters’ Yard development, it’s...
the whole issue of planning procedures and the power of the big developers. Why do we need so much new housing? Do brownfield/greenfield designations really mean anything? What about the clout of the major supermarkets? How to get anyone to think beyond what may appear to be the short-term benefits?

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good news to the poor...’ Who, really, are our poor? And how, Lord?

WEEK 3
My first constituency surgery this week. What a mixture! They say it takes at least ten encouraging comments to outweigh one negative one: and of course the ratio is usually the other way round. One lovely couple came to say they pray for me every week, and was there anything special I needed them to pray about? So I did mention the ‘End of Life’ debate coming up at the end of the month; assisted suicide, euthanasia – it’s such an emotive issue; hard for people not to judge solely on the basis of individual experience. And is it a case of ‘killing’ or of keeping artificially alive? Is there a significant difference? Where is the line? Is it a case of ‘slippery slope’? Is there such a thing as the sanctity of life? I read the other day, ‘God is holy; life is not’. Oh for more time to think! And pray.

But then there were quite a few who came to say their bit about the expenses scandals, M’s affair and the unemployment figures. No surprise – though it came as a bit of a shock to realise just how far the media seem to have distorted the picture, and how many rely simply on the latest soundbite to form an opinion. A place in the Sun, ha!

And there’s still so much confusion about the different layers of government; time and again I found myself saying, talk to your local councillors.... I only wish more Christians would get involved at that level, too; plenty of openings for divine common sense, not to mention a ministry of reconciliation!

‘Let us consider how to provoke one another (no problem there!) to love and good deeds (now you’re talking), encouraging one another...’

WEEK 4
What a week. Of course I knew there would be redundancies, but I never thought AK would go to the wall. Brian was near to breakdown when I visited; not just their own people, but all their contractors. They blame the government cutbacks on major public building projects: but what can the government do if the money isn’t there?

Then there was the fallout from the employment tribunal; talk about high on heat, low on light. Just as I thought the tensions were easing. It does make me wonder if multi-culturalism can ever really work; not that I dare say that without being accused of racism. In fact I sometimes wonder if a politician can ever say anything without being misrepresented or taken out of context. Maybe wait a bit before I agree to a Today interview.

And then Carrie reminded me about the bill for the roof. What with that and seeing the kids through uni..... Say what you like, an MP’s salary really isn’t that great.

She also asked if she could book me now for next year’s wedding anniversary.

******! Sorry, Lord.

This is more than just love in action: it’s bringing something of the kingdom of heaven to earth.

WEEK 5
Churches Together asked me to speak to them about Christians and Politics – an hour with time for questions. Had quite a good debate about the difference between social service – looking to relieve needs – and social action: working to deal with the causes of need, to transform the structures of society. The first, perhaps, belongs more to the church; the latter to the politician. Both are necessary. There’s also something about the difference between what individual Christians might do, and what the church as an institution can do: was it Archbishop Temple who said that the church lays down principles; the Christian citizen applies them, using the machinery of the State. The church cannot say how an issue is to be tackled; it does not have that expertise. But it can and should say that it must be tackled.

They asked if all these postcard campaigns really achieve anything, or are they all just binned? I reckon they do count – that’s what D says, anyway; though an individual, informed, well-written letter will count for more. As I said to them, I was elected to represent you – so I do need to know what you think about things; yes, there are bound to be conflicting views, and in the end I have to make my own decision – but the opinion of my constituents will be a highly significant factor.

As P said, perhaps with the coalition government and so much talk of returning responsibility to society, this is the time to be celebrating the value of cooperation: and for the church to remember that it has the highest rate of volunteering of any organisation in the UK, and therefore a huge amount to offer. This is more than just love in action: it’s bringing something of the kingdom of heaven to earth.

‘Your will be done: on earth, as it is in heaven.’ Kingdom values. Value added. Maybe that’s what Christian MPs are all about.

WEEK 6
Kingdom. Made me think about my maiden speech; thought I’d go for the environment debate next week: ‘Saving the earth – whose vision?’ We’re supposed not to be too controversial, of course... and that’ll be an ongoing issue. How clearly to nail my Christian colours to the mast?

Be good to mention vision, though; what is it they say? ‘Without a vision the people perish; and where the prospect of perishing seems pretty remote, the people mess around...’. If we don’t take ‘green’ issues seriously, much of the rest will be pretty academic: but how on earth do you persuade people to make them priority? Agreeing is one thing; action is another. For evil to triumph, it only needs good men to do nothing and all that; and when action may involve sacrifice...

Could the church do more to show the way? It’s all surely part of the salvation, the ‘shalom’ that constitutes the good news?

J wasn’t too happy that I’m going to miss tomorrow’s session; but I must get home at a reasonable hour this weekend and spend some time with the family. No use defending the principle if I’m never there to put it into practice; I’m a husband and father before I’m an MP. Or am I? J doesn’t agree! But her kids are grown up.

God has called me here: I am sure of that. So we’ll make it work. We must. By the grace of God. What was true for Paul can be true for me, Lord? ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ But I sure don’t envy those who try to do it on their own.

PS Carrie said the Vicar was asking how best they could support me – bless him! Felt like giving him a copy of my diary – there must be enough things here to keep them going for quite a while!

PSS Dozens, I reckon.

Sheila Walker is a Reader with the Otter Vale Mission Community in Devon, and a freelance writer (most recently, Contemporary Reflections based on the 3 years of the lectionary, published by Kevin Mayhew). She has taught, edited, worked for the Careers Service and is currently ‘cover girl’ at the local library.

How many ‘prayer points’ can you find? It’s a good exercise – whenever we read the papers or listen to the news...
Religion on Television

The Royal Wedding in April will attract the largest television audience of the year but Nigel Holmes, a former BBC Producer, wonders why at other times television appears to marginalise religion and broadcasts very few services of worship.

The BBC Radio 4 Today programme wondered whether I would be willing to go to Television Centre the next morning. It so happened that I was at the Anglican Communion Office in London talking to Clare Amos, former Editor of The Reader, when I took the call on my mobile. Clare is the Director for Theological Studies for the Communion. Mixed emotions flowed. What an honour to be thought worthy of the 8.15am slot so coveted by politicians but also great apprehension lest I am not able to do justice to my concerns over the state of religious broadcasting, with the Head of BBC Religion and Ethics, Aaqil Ahmed, the first Muslim to hold that key office defending the Corporation’s record.

That was one year ago, although it is eleven years since first I raised that issue in the General Synod of the Church of England. At that time Ernie Rea, a Presbyterian minister, was in charge of religious broadcasting. The other noticeable difference this time was the level of opposition evident on the secular websites. The humanists, and not just the few known names, have become increasingly active in challenging not only Thought for the Day but the very existence of religion in the media. Perhaps this was a response to the greater coverage my motion attracted not only on Today but a full page in The Independent, as well as the whole debate being shown subsequently on the BBC Parliament television channel.

I was directly challenged to defend my position on the web, which led me to state some facts. Over the past twenty years the percentage of output on the BBC’s general television channels (excluding News, Parliament and children’s) which is classified by the BBC itself as religion, has halved. That is a fact. It is also a fact that, when asked, more than 70% of people in this country describe themselves as Christian. Our culture is imbued with Christianity; our national institutions are founded on Christian principles. Every month some 3-4 million people worship in Christian churches and every year 85% of the total population enters a church.

When religious programmes are made to high production standards, effectively scheduled and well promoted, they build audience. Recent examples include Son of God, which doubled the number of viewers for its time slot on BBC 1, The Passion, seen by more than 5 million, and A History of Christianity. Mel Gibson surprised Hollywood with the commercial success of The Passion of the Christ. A series on the work of the nuns of Helen House, Oxford, a children’s hospice, achieved the highest Appreciation Index - 95 - for any programme ever broadcast on BBC 2. Songs of Praise still reaches 3.4 million even though it’s no longer broadcast in peak time.

BBC Local Radio religious programmes regularly attract the largest audience share of the week and Good Morning Sunday has the third highest on BBC Radio 2. Sunday on Radio 4 draws 1 million before 8am and Sunday Worship a most impressive 1.7 million. This suggests to me that religious current affairs and worship could attract a significant following on BBC television given the chance. Correspondence in the Radio Times last year (2010) would appear to support this. One correspondent, Ernie Savage, pointed out ‘the fact is that in secular France, a public national television channel, France 2, devotes its Sunday morning schedule to religious matters and that this includes a broadcast of Mass, although there are programmes by and for members of other Christian denominations and non-Christians’.

People are intrinsically interested in the human condition; they are engaged by moral and ethical dilemmas. Where were the television programmes which should have investigated standards in politics and finance in the past couple of years? In Britain the interplay of the major faiths has huge significance for the future of our nation. Worldwide, religion bears an increasingly important role in global affairs. It is vital to our understanding of international politics. Yet the cuts to BBC World Service religion were particularly severe and seem unlikely to be reinstated, given the forthcoming loss of funding from the Government for overseas broadcasts.

Back in the late 1990s, as a council member of what is now the Church and Media Network, I discovered that whilst the total output on BBC 1 and 2 had increased by a half over ten years, religious output was down by a third. BBC network religious radio hours had fallen by an unprecedented 15% in a single year, the last for which figures were then available.

In this country religious broadcasting has traditionally been well represented in the mainstream. I was a BBC radio producer for thirty years, a member of the General Synod for twenty-five, and was aware of the almost imperceptible steady sequence of losses of such series and the marginalisation in timing of others. The very act of tabling a motion in the General Synod eleven years ago attracted publicity. It is perhaps not all that often that Prophecy Today and Private Eye devote space to the same topic. Religious broadcasting proved to be the exception. At the time of the debate Private Eye ran this amusing little piece under the heading: BBC Attacks Church of England – by our religious staff – Sir Clifford Longley-Richard: The Church of England is accused of sidelinig religion in a shock report compiled for the BBC.
Sir Greg Dyke accuses the church of ‘trivializing important issues’ and ‘dumbing down the content of services’. And then reflecting on Joan Bakewell’s resignation from Heart of the Matter: ‘How to Make a Bakewell Tart – 1. Put her programme on very late at night. 2. Leave there for twelve years until Bakewell boils over. 3. Remove from television and allow to simmer gently.

The timing of Joan Bakewell’s resignation from BBC religious television was no coincidence. It was intentional that she spoke of the BBC’s ‘neglect’ of religion in the week prior to the Synod debate in 2000. Just over ten years on she has become a working peer. I feel sure she will be an advocate in the Lords for public service broadcasting, almost 90 years after the BBC was established.

The relationship of Church to Corporation was close from its founding by John Reith. His very first advisory council – that for religion – survived until three years ago. Mr. Reith lived in Westminster and one day in every day there are some amongst those who “listen-in” who listen for the last time before passing on into eternity.” Five thousand signed the petition and the Daily Service was born and is now the longest-running radio programme in the world.

In the Church of England General Synod debate last year I quoted the words of the present Director-General of the BBC, Mark Thompson, just before he took up that post. He said, ‘It’s true that there is an enormous prevailing prejudice inside broadcasting about religion. It’s not really based on hatred of religion – I’m sure that exists to some degree as well – but there’s a presumption that religion is boring ….I’m in favour of mandating religious programmes on television because it’s the only way of offsetting the prejudice and making sure that religion, which is a big part of many people’s lives – and goodness knows a big part of our world – is represented…Religion is pretty interesting and it is by no means obvious that religious programmes get tiny audiences. It’s an enormous, growing topic….It’s a mistake

Over the past twenty years the percentage of output on the BBC’s general television channels, (excluding News, Parliament and children’s) which is classified by the BBC itself as religion, has halved.

March 1923 this young man, only 33, invited the Archbishop of Canterbury to dinner. In his autobiography he says that to his Anglican wife the Archbishop was not far removed from the deity. Randall Davidson was that Archbishop and at the dinner party Mrs. Davidson asked John Reith the memorable question, ‘Do we need to open the windows for the wireless to receive?’ As the valves began to glow and the music play, so the Archbishop’s heart was slowly warmed by the allure of this new medium. So for half a century and more, a really rather cosy relationship continued between this country’s oldest and youngest national institutions.

However it was a spinster lady, not an Archbishop or even John Reith himself who, 85 years ago, sowed the seed of the Daily Service. Miss Cordeux of Watford produced a leaflet and petition form headed ‘sufferers and others listening-in. It began ‘How many are there who “listen-in” who long to hear something daily of God and His love’ and went on to speak of the ill and the aged with a lovely, charmingly dated style. ‘Since there is such a wonderful opportunity of bringing peace and hope, dare we, any of us, any longer withhold them? Almost to assume that religion is naturally something just appealing to a minority’. (Not Just on Sunday, ITV, 27 June 2006)

Six years ago a report commissioned by the then Board of Governors of the BBC strongly affirmed the importance of religion on the air, in both news and general programmes. Their successors, the BBC Trustees, need to ask why BBC radio gives so much better coverage than BBC television and, as ITV has left the field and Channel 4 has not replaced its commissioning editor for religion, should the BBC shoulder greater responsibility for keeping the rumour of God alive? There is a danger that the creative core of specialist television programme makers could be lost.

Has my campaigning made a difference? Certainly BBC Radio represents religion more effectively than a decade ago. But Channel 4’s religious output has fallen in five years from 76 to 49 hours per year. However there are reasons for hope. The BBC carried 174 hours across all its television channels in 2009/2010. Last November Panorama exposed radical views in Muslim schools, at Christmas a four-episode drama The Nativity was given prominence and in January Radio 4 marked the 400th anniversary of the Authorized Version of the Bible with 28 quarter-hour readings. Notable by their absence are programmes for younger audiences; The Story Keepers on ITV reached half the 4-9 year olds in Britain a decade ago. In a nutshell my hope is that the Corporation and other broadcasters will once again prize religion in television.

Ironically, a televised service of worship will attract the largest audience of the year when the Royal Wedding is broadcast from Westminster Abbey on 29 April. Yet the weekly televised worship we long enjoyed has disappeared; these days services are screened only at major festivals.

Finally, putting my head above the parapet has led me to appear in front of the camera myself on a few occasions, once sitting on the GMTV sofa. I arrived at the South Bank studios, went into make-up, awaited my turn to be shepherded into the studio and chatted away about the state of religious broadcasting. Then I left, paced it across to the tube and up to Euston, found a seat on the train, was somewhat hot and sticky, took my handkerchief out of my pocket, mopped my brow and was rather puzzled at the dirty brown colour of the handkerchief. Nobody had mentioned removing the make-up.

For more information see the broadcasters’ websites and those of The Church and Media Network - churchmedia.moonfruit.com and Voice of the Listener and Viewer – www.vlv.org.uk

Nigel Holmes is a Reader in the Diocese of Carlisle and a former Chairman of the Editorial Committee of The Reader

The royal wedding of Elizabeth and Philip in 1947 was broadcasted
Now we know

what ‘the new politics’ looks like  

Paul Bickley
is a researcher for Theos
By 30 November 2010 the country was already in the grip of winter. London’s overstretched transport network had ground to a near halt. Thousands of commuters had been unable to complete their usual journey that morning.

But thousands of student protestors had managed it. There had been as many as seven or eight separate and quickly moving demonstrations across the capital and a series of occupations in other university cities. These culminated in violent scenes in Trafalgar Square. At some point during the evening the word ‘revolution’ was spray painted on the plinth of Nelson’s Column, among other less polite epithets.

Whitehall and Parliament Square were closed to traffic and demonstrations, and numbers of police officers congregated near crowd barriers. If, on that evening, you happened to be making your way towards the tube station through snow and wind, you would have been treated to the unusual experience of hearing Westminster Abbey’s two oldest bells ringing audibly before evensong – on an ordinary day their tones would be subdued beneath the chorus of evening traffic. Unusually peaceful, but also eerie, the scene was a cross between a harsh winter in Dickensian London and a Wild West movie.

What those two cultural motifs share is the sense of societies on the edge, where the structures of public authority maintain a thin veil of order over bubbling public resentment, sometimes expressing itself in outright violence. Apt then in this era of austerity. Retrenchment of public spending across Europe has been sparking unrest all over the continent. Ireland, Greece, France, Spain and the UK are grounded in the need for nation states to prove to their creditors on the international money markets that they are capable of pulling themselves up by their fiscal bootstraps. People are not just protesting about the issue of spending on this or that public service. Their concerns are broader, global, political and philosophical in nature. Individual policies are related to fundamental questions of how the state relates to international capital markets. Protests are questioning power of finance and big business over both state and civil society. These debates are getting much ‘bigger’ than the issues.

NEW POLITICS, OLD QUESTIONS

While ideology has not been in the foreground, most anti-cut groups see coalition austerity as a neo-liberal ideological attack on the active state – for instance, the idea that higher education for all is necessarily a matter of public good such that it would warrant the guarantee of access by the state. Cuts must be resisted, because to cut public spending is to kow-tow to the logic of the market, and allow it into spaces where its presence is inappropriate – education being a good example. Ideologically, they take the view that the state is a kind of ‘eudemonic machine’, the guarantor of fairness and equality.

Against the protestors align the realists – including a number of politicians who find that government is a less easy place to than opposition. They might be of the right or the left, and so might disagree about the role of the state but they nonetheless agree on the priority of securing economic growth. The realist left, for instance, recognise that once one is wedded to the state as the primary means through which to secure the human good, then you are wedded also to making the economy grow moderately quickly. New Labour synthesised economic neo-liberalism with socially liberal sentiment around welfare, mirroring this paradox perfectly. It abandoned the ‘means’ (a planned and partly nationalised economy) but stuck by its ‘ends’ (conceived generically as ‘social justice’). The new means was globalised, open capital economy fuelled domestically by consumer spending and hopefully successful enough to sign the cheques for public spending. The realist right would allow markets to distribute resources, but the common good is best served again by a growing economy, open to globalisation and global trade.

Debates, then, that are ostensibly about what we pay for out of the public purse in the 2010s, are actually the oldest of political debates – the role of the state, vis-à-vis the market, vis-à-vis civil society – recast in the light of an increasingly global politics. But there are two things at stake here, and the church must be alive to both. One is ‘the issues’: the church must take a theologically informed position on the questions at hand. The other is the question of how the church should act politically and what forms of action are appropriate to Christian witness – in short, what part does the Church have to play in the politics of protest and resistance?

THE CHURCH AND THE OLD ISSUES

The church, present at a very local level in the communities which will suffer the loss of public services, faces the challenge of teaching, serving and discipling its people in the age of austerity. Naturally and rightly,
it will always tend to stand on the side of the vulnerable and marginalised, and will also want to speak out of a broader theological critique of the dodgy economic practices, especially where the profit has ultimately benefited individuals while risk has been borne by the tax-payer. In other words, it would share much of the critique of a distribution of power that would see public institutions like universities disinvested while financial institutions flourish, supported by the tax payer, without any indication that they themselves have learnt the value of reciprocity or are cognisant of the common good.

In some senses, it is therefore entirely proper for the Church to be part of a coalition of resistance. John Sentamu, reflecting in *The Sun* on the welfare state and the need for government to continue to invest, quoted Archbishop Temple: ‘the first time anyone had set out to embody the whole spirit of the Christian ethic in an Act of Parliament’. And the Archbishop only allowed himself two and a half cheers for the Big Society agenda, refraining from the full three until he can be sure that the language will not be used as cover for cuts.

But the public pronouncements of clerics look rather pale in comparison to the Common Wealth Statement – signed by theologians of reputation like Chris Rowland and Timothy Gorringe, and assorted church leaders – which was launched in November 2010. It is a sweeping (one might say rambling) denunciation of the notion of the ‘Big Society’ as a rhetorical cover for the cuts and calls those spending cuts ‘an unjustified attack on the poor’, the ‘victimisation of those on the margins of society’ and the ‘corrosion of community’, all in aid of the ‘distorted ideology’ of ‘false worship of markets’. The statement, and the coalition behind it, calls for Christians to ‘support and work with local anti–cuts alliances and the national co-ordinating bodies facilitating resistance to the cuts’. This group and others like them would align Christian witness with the student protestors and trade unions, and therefore identify the justice envisioned and evoked in prophetic biblical literature, and the denunciation of accumulation of wealth, as best reflected by a more active state, in the sense of a state as a provider of services and an economic referee. They elide the state with the public, or the community.

In this, we encounter the danger of simply baptising the ideological positions that already exist in wider society. Consider that before the banking crisis, the financial sector was contributing 25 per cent of the UK’s corporate tax revenues and 14 per cent of total tax (and this in spite of widespread tax avoidance). In short, the sheer expense of Britain’s expanding public services had ensured its dependence on the very kind of economy that student protestors would object to. It is therefore somewhat incoherent to join anti-capitalist sentiment – theological or otherwise – with campaigns against public spending; it is ‘capitalism’ which has been signing the cheques for the burgeoning service state. As theologian John Milbank recently put it, ‘there is something now rather pathetic about erstwhile radicals who think that the most “leftwing” thing to do is to try to shore up crumbling state enterprises that are in themselves merely flimsy defences against the rapacities of unconstrained profit-seeking… in reality, state provision is completely subject to the vagaries of national fortune and the preparedness of tax-payers to pay.’

One important Christian distinctive lies in its ability to understand that both the state and the market are provisional and limited and that to treat the activity of the state as the very substance of ‘the good’, rather than one element of it, is theologically – not to say politically – misguided. Again, for Milbank the crucial thing is to acknowledge and speak of ‘the manifest failure of both state and market to meet some of our most fundamental human needs… both institutions think and operate in materialistic, instrumentalist terms that cannot supply the currency of tacit trust and unwritten tradition that is required in order for any social formation to operate’.

THE CHURCH AND THE NEW POLITICS

Finally, where does the church sit vis-à-vis new models of political action?

As always, it is incumbent on the church to ‘seek the welfare of the city’. Most would now accept that this begs at some level of political involvement, but the practices of politics and the city – the *polis* – are changing.

What I have called the ‘new politics’ is an emerging phenomenon and one which may yet subside again into the ennui which has blighted recent years. No conclusive analysis can yet be offered, but there are various reasons, some theological and some practical, why the Church should not necessarily sit too closely with the politics of protest.

First, the student protests have occasionally been self-consciously and deliberately violent. Prominent Marxist philosopher Slavoj Zizek has encouraged students in this, on the basis that it pulls attention. This, in fact, is not a new form of politics but a departure from politics, symbolic not of a hope of change but of despair in the idea of peaceful protest. At its worst, it is a disavowal of the idea of the common good – a violent attempt to push one agenda at the expense of any other.

Second, it is deeply indisciplined. This is a factor both of using social media as a primary mode of organisation (social media reaches many, but only superficially) and the nature of the movement as an indistinct coalition of interests. When asked if they could identify violent protestors, very few people actually know who they are. This means the new politics is vulnerable to a very practical criticism – that without the kind of discipline inherent in, say, the civil rights movement – it will be ineffective. On a deeper level, however, the solidarity of this movement is not the solidarity of long term relationships and shared lives and shared locality, but a solidarity of resentment and anger. This may turn out to be short-lived and brittle. In contrast, the kind of solidarity that churches build is constructed around real relationships and built over many years. It is often gloriously ignorant of social media – because of this it may seem outdated, but will likely be more enduring.

Civil society is under huge pressure from the failures of market and state. Ultimately, it will need not angry individuals with a Twitter accounts, but enduring institutions with an alternative set of values and practices, to resist and renew effectively.

**Paul Bickley is the Senior Researcher for Theos, the public theology thinktank**
Politics in Worship?

It’s not very English!

Jonathan Chaplin
is Director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics

It used to be said that the two things the English never liked to discuss in public were religion and politics. To discuss them together was a serious deviation from the norms of polite discourse. To do so in church was unforgivable.

But that was then. Today, it seems, the English seem to be talking about religion and politics all the time, for good and bad reasons. The bad reasons are well-known, but among the good ones are that the church is now recognising that Christian faith has wide-ranging public implications, and is beginning to speak and act accordingly.

In the Church of England, it is often senior Anglican clerics or official bodies that take the lead in this area. But how well-equipped are ordinary lay folk in parishes up and down the country to speak and act out of a considered Christian perspective on public life? There are, of course, some who do that very well, but my guess is that the majority remain hesitant about how or indeed whether to do so.

There are many reasons for this hesitancy, but here I’ll discuss just one which seems to be badly neglected, namely what happens – or doesn’t happen – in our worship. Aside from statutory prayers for government and royal family, many churches struggle to know how to integrate political concerns into the regular rhythms and practices of collective worship. The result is that the primary occasions of spiritual formation for most lay people send the clear, if tacit, message that such things are unimportant.

In some cases, of course, some churches don’t struggle with the question at all, supposing that such concerns are either a distraction from ‘the Gospel’ or are simply ‘too hot to handle’. The first group need to be challenged to actually read the Bible, which is simply bursting with political themes and messages for those whose interpretive vision has not been skewed by a narrowly individualized and internalized view of what following Jesus means. The second group have a quite legitimate concern about causing needless political conflict within a congregation. Certainly, churches should avoid giving their official backing to stances which are ephemeral party-political positions, or which betray a consistent slant towards just one party.

Let me suggest three ways in which those responsible for leading worship can legitimately place political themes at the centre of the normal rhythms of a liturgy instead of leaving them at the periphery.

The first is prayer. Some concrete proposals:

- preface a reading of state prayers with an extended introduction, naming before God some key issues of justice or conflict or crisis facing the nation or the local community
- select or write suitable prayers on key issues, varying the thematic content so that all major areas are covered over a season, and customizing choices to suit your church’s special links to local needs, overseas mission agencies, NGOs, etc.
- encourage children to write and read such prayers – they often speak with a wonderful directness and simplicity about issues of injustice
- include public issues on prayer bulletins or email prayer alerts
- encourage home groups to pray regularly about public issues, especially local ones
- pray for members of the congregation who are involved in public life.

The second is singing. Our taken-for-granted spirituality is shaped more deeply than we know by the songs and hymns we sing week by week, year by year. But sadly too many of these reveal the narrowness of vision I mentioned above. They reinforce an introverted piety or a privatized reading of the Bible – the complete opposite of the all-of-life ‘kingdom vision’ conveyed in Israel’s book of praise, the Psalms. We need to wean our congregations gently off these and introduce them to a theologically more integrated and more challenging – more biblical – musical diet.

Such resources are available for those who are prepared to spend a bit of time finding them. A church may well need to consider purchasing a new hymnbook or compiling a new songbook. Our hymns and songs should be filled with rich, dynamic, inspiring, and unsentimental lyrics which allow us to lift the aching needs of our society and our world before God in songs of hope and expectation, repentance and lament, proclamation and intercession, challenge and exhortation.

The third is preaching. I’m not going to suggest we make every sermon ‘political.’ The Bible doesn’t have to be made political. It just has to be unmuzzled, and the implications for justice, peace, wealth and poverty, conflict, accountability, nationhood, oppression and liberation will come tumbling out of the normal exegesis and exposition of the text. If this never happens, or only rarely, then something has gone seriously wrong at the level of our homiletics and hermeneutics (this should give ministerial educators and curriculum designers’ serious pause). If you need convincing, try reading any of these books (there are dozens more) and then arguing the case that it is possible to expound Scripture faithfully without engaging seriously with political questions:

- Jamie A Grant and Dewi A Hughes, eds., Transforming the World: The gospel and social responsibility (Apollos 2009)
- Alan Storkey, Jesus and Politics (Baker 2005)
- David Mcllroy, A Biblical View of Law and Justice (Paternoster 2004)

The church’s praying, singing and preaching have to be about many things, of course. Its gatherings should never be dominated by politics. But in view of the strange invisibility of public issues in much of our regular corporate worship, there is plenty of room for a liturgical rebalancing.

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As Christians, how does our faith influence our engagement with society? Church leaders and even influential atheist philosophers, quoted above, regularly assert that Christian faith is woven into the fabric of British society, that Judaeo-Christian values have bound British society together. Yet, Christian involvement in the public sphere often seems restricted to a very narrow set of ‘moral’ issues, such as homosexuality and pro-life issues, and even then is regularly dismissed as out-of-touch and irrelevant. Despite our belief in a sovereign God, we appear to have accepted the liberal secular humanist assertion that our faith has no relevance to the challenges facing modern society and amounts to nothing more than an individual spiritual experience. Protestant reformer Martin Luther would rebuke us: ‘If you preach the Gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues which deal specifically with your time, you are not preaching the Gospel at all.’

How should we respond? The Jubilee Centre is in the bridge building business, seeking to connect the world of the Bible with the world of contemporary society. Biblical scholars often fail to connect with the modern world. Social reformers often fail to take the Bible seriously. The Jubilee Centre has a fine track record in avoiding both dangers. (Rev Dr Chris Wright, International Director of the Langham Partnership)

Over the years the Jubilee Centre has explored the importance of this relational agenda for modern society across a wide range of topics including economics, criminal justice, care for the elderly, asylum and immigration, the environment, sexual ethics, and education. For instance, taking seriously the Bible’s warnings against the practice of charging interest on loans, we have explored practical alternatives for today’s interest-based financial systems, such as non-debt forms of house purchase in place of mortgages. Lease-to-buy or shared-appreciation arrangements, in which banks take equity stakes rather than give loans, would share the risks and returns of price fluctuations more fairly and effectively between lender and borrower. The Church could also model interest-free (or inflation-free) grant-making – and not just of money: eg by maintaining a community larder, or paying heating bills (cf. Deuteronomy 23:19: ‘Do not charge a fellow Israelite interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest’).

On the environment, rather than jump on the narrow agenda pursued by most environmentalists, we have explored the broader biblical vision for social sustainability. This suggests that people’s commitment to their local communities (as evidenced by where they live, work and socialise, versus factors such as the length of their daily commute and distance from immediate family and other relatives) brings benefits far greater than those assessed simply by traditional economic and environmental measures.

On sexual ethics, while our society defines sex legally and culturally as a matter of relevance only to the participating adults, which therefore requires only their consent, we reason that the Bible insists there are a number of levels of relational impact. These range from that of the couple themselves, through their families and communities, up to that of society as a whole. Consequently, since the Bible prioritises flourishing families and communities rather than the selfish autonomy of individuals, it offers community consent of relationships as a healthy pattern for genuine intimacy (whether sexual or not).

On education, our current area of research, we contend for instance that the best education promotes the life-long development
of character and wisdom, not just the acquisition of skills and knowledge. In addition, it should involve families and the local community as closely as possible. We are working together with a wide range of Christian organisations engaged in teaching and schools to develop a variety of resources to be used by church leaders and educators within the church (school and Sunday school teachers, school governors, etc.). Our resources will also encourage everyone in the church, whether parents or not, to take up their community educational responsibilities.

A RELATIONAL AGENDA
This last illustration highlights a key facet of our approach: to work, wherever possible, in partnership with others. We believe that by ourselves our impact on society would be negligible. However, we believe there is great potential for making a positive contribution to the collective witness of the church through working in partnership with others who are also actively engaged in social reform.

‘Too few Christians have heard the Jubilee Centre’s call to action or begun to engage in conversations and hard work to develop and implement the ideas they are developing.’ 
(James Skillen, President of the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C.)

Ultimately, the Jubilee Centre’s vision is for a movement of organisations, churches and individual Christians to advance a coherent and positively stated biblical social agenda that is of benefit to the whole of society. We work towards this by equipping key partners who share a commitment to the relational framework for society in the Old and New Testaments and by promoting research and the development of resources that examine biblical social teaching and seek its application to modern public policy and lifestyle issues. Thus, we seek to maintain a balance at three levels of engagement: between academic research and accessible resources, between public theology and practical application, and between public policy and the decisions each of us face in daily life.

Our regular resources include a Christian perspective each week on news and social trends via our blog, a monthly electronic and quarterly printed newsletter, and our quarterly peer-reviewed Cambridge Papers. These seek to make a strategic Christian contribution to public debate by exploring the continued relevance of biblical teaching to a range of contemporary issues, and to equip Christians to respond to the ideas which are shaping our society. Recent papers have considered issues as diverse as witchcraft and covert power, eschatology and politics, and euthanasia and assisted suicide. Popular past papers include ones on liberation theology and the abolition of the slave trade, postmodernism, equality and human rights, and Islam, Islamism and Islamic terrorism.

‘Cambridge Papers has maintained a consistently high standard of Christian reflection on contemporary issues.’
(Rev Dr John Stott)

In addition, the Jubilee Centre publishes occasional Bible studies, reports and books, the fruits of our ongoing research. Wherever possible, these are made available free via our website. Of greatest significance in the past year, we published a report on cohabitation trends and a book on whole-life discipleship. Based on data from almost 30,000 cases, the report revealed a number of unexpected findings, including the fact that people who cohabit before getting married are 60 per cent more likely to get divorced than those who do not first live with someone, be that the eventual marriage partner or someone else. Another striking finding was that children born to married parents are more than ten times more likely to be living with both parents when they are 16 years old than children born to cohabiting parents.

The discipleship book, Free to Live: How to live for Christ in an age of debt, was developed as a companion volume to our earlier public policy-focused book Jubilee Manifesto: A framework, agenda and strategy for Christian social reform. It encapsulates the breadth of more than 25 years of biblical research by the Jubilee Centre into how we spend our time and money, how we live and work, and how believers could more effectively be ‘salt’ and ‘light’ in their communities. We are now working with a number of churches to develop an accompanying discipleship course that we hope to make freely available via our website in the coming year.

Ultimately, the Jubilee Centre exists to equip and serve people such as readers of The Reader as you seek to influence society according to biblical principles. We would therefore invite you to sign up for our free mailings and, at the very least, connect with us online – you can follow our activities on both Facebook and Twitter. If there are particular topics that you would like to see addressed by Cambridge Papers, let us know. We would also welcome any contributions to our debate and research – not least your comments on issues discussed on our blog.

So, help us explore the biblical vision for society and be a part of the movement for change. Find us online at www.jubilee-centre.org or else contact us at Jubilee Centre, 3 Hooper Street, Cambridge CB1 2NZ or on 01223 566319. Dr John Hayward can also be contacted at j.hayward@jubilee-centre.org.

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Five reasons why Christians shouldn’t be involved in party politics

1. IT’S A DIRTY GAME. THEY’RE ALL ON THE MAKE. THEY CAN’T BE TRUSTED

No-one should be trying to defend the excesses exposed during the MPs’ expenses scandal, but we must keep our ears open to all sides of the story. The media have a vested interest in publishing what is tragic and scandalous, at the expense of the honourable and mundane. While fixating on the small number of MPs who grossly betrayed people’s trust – perhaps about 50, we didn’t often hear that there were approximately 600 still working hard to do an incredibly difficult job. People often ridicule MPs and councillors en masse as money and power-grabbers, but when you ask them about their own local MP they always say, ‘Oh, she’s wonderful. She does a lot of good work for the community.’ We always seem to have a blind spot for this herd thinking.

The other angle on the story is how demanding the role of an MP actually is. For the vast majority, they have to work in two very distinct geographical locations, with two different groups of people. This split means that they have to work hard to hold family life and relationships together and there is the added pressure of 24 hour media scrutiny of everything they say and do. We also grossly overestimate their ability to effect change, creating unrealistic and unfair expectations. For example, as a GP, when someone comes into your surgery, there is a basic unspoken understanding that their problem will be medical. This means that through her training and experience the GP will be able to accurately deduce the problem. There are also ready tools to hand, such as prescriptions for drugs and referrals to specialists. However, when a constituent walks into an MP’s surgery, the situation is very different. Their issue may be anything from planning permission, to internecine neighbourhood strife, to third world debt. The breadth of understanding required is huge, but also bear in mind that an MP holds no official post of responsibility in their locality. They do not run any of the local councils. They are not the chief constable, or the tribal elder. Any impact on situations that they have comes through influence and relationship. But as we all know, relationships take time to build. Having observed many MPs at work, I want them better resourced and better staffed, rather than the opposite. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want overworked, underslept, stressed out, media-hounded, family-absent people making my laws.

Finally, if we truly desire to see the political system ‘cleaned up’, it is much more likely to happen when those who have that passion become involved. As yet, my bath has never got cleaner because I have stood beside it, shaking my head wearily at the state of it and speaking cleanliness over it (though I keep praying!). It gets clean when I get into it and clean it. Our engagement or lack of it reveals how much we really care. Will we simply critique like Pharisees, or serve like Jesus? The salt and light thing really works. Light does illuminate darkness. Salt does preserve the meat.

For those who say through our involvement in the political system we will inevitably be corrupted by the system, I have news for you. We are inevitably corrupted by the system. To pretend that we can as Christians simply sit outside the systems of our world is pure nonsense. Every time you fill a car with petrol, you are supporting some very questionable Middle Eastern states. Every time you shop at a huge supermarket, you are endorsing the destruction of high streets and enabling questionable treatment of food suppliers. Every time you pay for a newspaper, re-order your broadband, use your local library, visit your GP, renew your house insurance, you are more deeply imbedded in the disturbing, complex, yet redeemable (and which will inevitably be redeemed) structures of our world. You can’t avoid it. You ARE part of the system and you are supporting it by your mere existence. The question is not whether or not we should get involved. We ARE involved! The question is whether you sit passively just letting it all happen, or whether you act to change things.

2. BUT I CAN’T AGREE WITH EVERYTHING THAT THE PARTY STANDS FOR

You’re right. You can’t. But I put it to you that you probably don’t agree with everything that your spouse or partner believes, and you certainly don’t agree with everything that your church believes, yet you covenant together. We find common cause for the greater good. Instinctively we know that we are communal beings, designed in the image of our Triune God to interact and work with those whom we are not like.

But there is one party where I agree with 100% of their policies. It’s called the Andy Flannagan party. And it has only one member, and sadly it’s me. That is the philosophical thick end of the wedge.

To effect change we need to cooperate with those with whom we may not necessarily agree on everything. In fact, that is where the excitement is. That is where prayer and faith is required. Our ideas and presuppositions are challenged, sending us back to scripture and causing us to flesh out the word. And it is an incredible missionfield.

The more obvious point is that if there are policies that we disagree with in a certain party, then how will those policies be changed unless people like us get involved in making the arguments? Your voice is heard much more clearly when you whisper from a place of relationship, rather than rant from a distance.

3. THOSE MEETINGS ARE SO BORING

What? You mean discussing Trotskyism with four senior citizens in a cold community hall, and arguing over whether there are enough
members present to re-elect the treasurer for the seventeenth time, (who presides over a turnover of £37.42) isn’t your idea of a fun night out. Kids these days!

The thing is, Jesus never called us to comfortable situations, where there were always soft seats, donuts and ever-flowing fairly traded coffee. He mentioned something about taking up a cross, which sounds a bit like hard work. He mentioned something about persistent prayer. And he didn’t just talk about it. He fleshed it out in his life. Obedience to his Father and his call always came before comfort or expediency.

The obvious point to be made here also is ‘How will these meetings ever change unless as Christians we bring our optimism and creativity to the table?’ As Christians we are used to meetings! We are hopefully used to thinking about team as well as task. Therefore we bring a relational edge to meetings which might not otherwise be there. We are also used to turning up on time (roughly!) and doing what we say we’ll do before the next meeting. Believe me, if you turn up to these gatherings bringing some of these values and carrying even a shred of optimism and enthusiasm, you will find yourself straightaway in the top 5% of local political operatives. You will find yourself being offered roles and responsibilities very quickly.

A great example of this is what happened to Gavin Shuker. Gavin was born and bred in Luton. Having attended his local comprehensive school, he won a scholarship to Cambridge University. While at university, he felt a strong call to return home to Luton to plant a new church out of his Cambridge background. He convinced about ten other Cambridge graduates to follow him to Luton (not the easiest job in the world!). For the last six years they have been serving their community in Luton, slowly growing and seeking to bring the kingdom in every aspect of local life. As part of this, some of them joined the local Labour party. Their youthful enthusiasm caused a stir, and before long Gavin was organising the website and database of the local party. Gavin was then also given a part-time job working with the then MP, Margaret Moran. His leadership and communication skills were being noticed, and when Margaret Moran fell in the expenses scandal, Gavin decided to stand for selection. To cut a long story short, the end product of the whole process is that in Luton South, a 28-year-old church leader is now their MP.

Sometimes people will nod with a smile and say that it’s great that you’re ‘involved’, but that they can’t divert any time or resources in that direction. If you believe that Christianity is merely an escape ticket for a disembodied heaven, then of course you won’t invest as much time in caring for the environment or addressing structural injustice. Why would you? Any time spent doing that would inevitably mean less time telling people about their need of Jesus. The argument goes – helping the poor is great – in fact – bless you, you are a great example of compassion, but actually what is eternal is more important. Fair enough. If that’s what you believe. Some of us believe this intentionally, while some of us just believe this by default from years of presumption. Now I wholeheartedly believe that people do need Jesus, but I also believe the bigger story needs telling.

Tom Wright’s writing on this topic is extremely helpful. He speaks of our misunderstanding of heaven, which has been based more on medieval art and writing (such as Dante) than on scripture. A recent surge of ‘folk understanding’ of heaven is illustrated by the hugely popular ‘Left Behind’ novels published in the United States. When Jesus speaks of heaven he is not speaking of a disembodied place which our ‘souls’ float off to, but the sphere where God’s reign is total. This is the sphere of heaven. There is also the sphere of earth, where sadly his will is not exclusively adhered to yet! This makes sense of his prayer – your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Think of the famous Mastercard symbol, or any of the Venn diagrams that confused you at school. We experience and pray for moments when ‘heaven touches earth’ – moments of grace and beauty and compassion and truth, where God’s will is done. These are in the intersection of that diagram. One day however these two spheres will be fully fused! The new heavens and new earth combined.

Our attitude to the planet and its structures, as economics and ecology mix inextricably, are formed by whether our mindset is one of moving on to the next place, or one of renovation. Our God is a God intent on renovation. He has a plan for this place and it is good. This place is the next place. It will be transformed. And incredibly we are called to be part of demonstrating what this next place will be like right now, which surely involves change within and through political structures.
Working with local churches to stop sham marriages

The UK Border Agency is working with the Anglican Church to help identify and prosecute people taking part in sham marriages. This is an area of immigration abuse that has hit the headlines recently after Reverend Alex Brown and two accomplices were found guilty of facilitating hundreds of sham marriages in East Sussex. The trio were caught after a large-scale investigation by the UK Border Agency and the police.

A sham marriage typically occurs when a non-EEA national marries an EEA national or British citizen in order to try and gain the right to live, work and claim benefits in the UK. This is known as obtaining leave to remain in the UK by deception. A marriage certificate alone does not give foreign nationals the right to live and work in the UK, their relationship has to be genuine and the UK Border Agency can refuse to grant leave if it has evidence that a marriage is not genuine. The non-EEA national will usually pay a facilitator to organise the marriage whilst the EEA national or British citizen may receive payment.

Criminal gangs are often behind sham marriages where they target both churches and Register Offices. Specialist immigration crime teams, made up of immigration officers and seconded police officers, have been set up to tackle all types of immigration-related crime, including sham marriages. Around 100 officers seconded from the Metropolitan Police are at work in the London area alone.

The specialist teams work with the Anglican Church to help them spot suspected sham marriages and fraudulent identity documents. Church ministers are urged to contact the agency or the police if they have suspicions about couples who approach them seeking to marry.

The UK Border Agency has conducted many successful operations where churches have supplied information involving a marriage they believe to be suspicious.

If a marriage is suspected to not be genuine, UK Border Agency officers will, where possible make arrangements with the vicar or parish priest for a visit. But in some cases it is more appropriate for officers to carry out an unannounced visit.

Following a UK Border Agency operation, the people intending to get married will be arrested and questioned separately. If inconsistencies are found the UK Border Agency may refuse to grant leave to the non-EEA national. If a criminal offence has been committed prosecution may follow.

David Wood, UK Border Agency organised crime lead, said:

‘Whilst the sanctity of marriage is important – our policy is clear, if we uncover evidence that a wedding may not be genuine we will investigate, and if appropriate, take action against those involved. Our immigration crime teams are targeting the criminal gangs that profit from organising sham marriages. We aim to identify the organisers and destroy their criminal business. Offenders are often involved in other forms of criminality – sham marriages are not just about getting a ticket to the UK.

We do not expect vicars and church officials to be expert in immigration law or spotting forged documents – that’s our job. But if they have any suspicions about whether a relationship is genuine, we would urge them to get in touch with us.’

Anyone with information about suspected sham marriages should contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 where anonymity can be assured.

CASE STUDY: SHOLA BANSI YAYA

Shola Bansi Yaya, a 23-year-old male Nigerian illegal immigrant and his fake bride Adejumoke Aриyeye, 24, were arrested for plotting to stage a sham marriage after they arrived at a church for a meeting with a vicar on 8 December 2009.

The court heard how Yaya entered the country illegally in 2003 and approached the vicar at St Peter’s Church, Morley, Leeds in October 2009 to make arrangements to marry Maria Da Grava Correia Tavares Da Silva. However, his marriage application aroused the suspicion of the Registrar to the Bishop and Diocese of Wakefield, who reported the marriage request to the UK Border Agency.

UK Border Agency officers from the immigration crime team launched an investigation into the planned marriage and discovered that many of the details and documents supplied by Yaya were forged, including his UK address and immigration status. The court also found out that the woman Yaya had taken to meet the vicar was not Da Silva, but was Ariyeye who was fraudulently using Da Silva’s Portuguese passport.

A wedding date was set for 12 December 2009, but on Tuesday 8 December a meeting with the vicar was staged by the UK Border Agency at the local church. When Yaya and Ariyeye (claiming to be Da Silva) arrived at the church, they were arrested by officers from the immigration crime team. Further investigations by the team enabled them to trace Da Silva to an address in London, where she was arrested on 20 January 2010. She admitted becoming involved in the scam after she had been offered £500 in exchange for her identity documents.

During the interview, Yaya claimed he was introduced to Da Silva in London and he paid her £3,000 to arrange a sham marriage to her. He claimed that Da Silva had subsequently refused to take part in the marriage unless she was given more money, at which point it was arranged for Ariyeye to act as a stand-in.

Yaya was jailed for 12 months after plotting to stage a sham marriage. Da Silva and Ariyeye both received suspended 12 month sentences too.
It’s not often you hear a sermon on Matthew 10:34 ‘I have not come to bring peace but a sword’. Yet it is precisely this verse that inspired Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini to make what many film critics consider the finest ever film about Jesus – Il vangelo secondo Matteo (The Gospel According to St Matthew).

Pasolini was a Marxist who, like Antonio Gramsci, thought that artists could create popular national myths that would further the Marxist cause. One day, so the story goes, Pasolini was trapped in a hotel room and began to flick through the Gospel of Matthew and realised that he wanted to tell the story of Jesus in a way that was consistent with ‘not peace but a sword’. The result was not only the most artful of all the Jesus films, but the most political.

The film goes to some lengths to portray this class struggle. Pasolini cast everyday people - most of whom had no prior acting experience - in almost every role. Their ordinary, often craggy, faces and their meagre costumes contrast strongly with the disciples of Hollywood Jesus films with their perfect teeth and their poorly veiled good looks. The cast are instantly recognisable as normal people.

In contrast, the ruling classes appear more refined, wearing dominating, tall hats, vaguely reminiscent of powerful skyscrapers. They are often shown on higher ground than the ordinary people, or at least separated from them in some way (such as opposing sides of the river Jordan).

However, it’s not just the portrayal of the disciples and Pharisees that give this film a political, Marxist edge. Jesus himself is portrayed as a man on a mission. He marches (rather than floats) around the barren countryside shouting his message over his shoulder to the disciples as they struggle to keep up. Indeed, the camera often acts as one of the disciples, lagging behind Jesus on the road. When Jesus moves to Jerusalem, the camera takes its place among the crowd, firstly as he preaches in the city and then later at his trial. In other places however it detaches itself from this perspective, most significantly as Jesus is nailed to the cross. Instead of focussing on Jesus, as might be expected, the camera focuses on the (political?) revolutionary who is being crucified with Jesus.

What’s most surprising about such an uncompromisingly political version of Jesus’ life is that it is written, almost without exception, using words only found in Matthew’s Gospel. Whilst the brand of politics Pasolini wants to showcase is perhaps a little forced, his film certainly highlights the fact that Jesus was such a strong critic of the power structures of his age.

Resources for Readers

Lynn Ling, Business Manager, says: ‘This move gives Magnet editorial independence and makes the magazine far more accessible to readers outside the Methodist Church.’

A new website www.ourmagnet.co.uk provides a platform for future developments including sales of poster sets, resources packs, booklets and cards.

The first such resource is a worship resource and poster set for Advent, with four glossy A2 posters by the Chinese artist He Qi and worship material by Stella Bristow, known for her creative approach to worship and the author of Sensing God.

For further information please contact Lynne Ling on 01279 658768 or email lynne@ourmagnet.co.uk

Magnet Resources
PO Box 10378
Bishop’s Stortford
CM23 9FT

Each issue is themed and also carries worship and other material relevant to the church season, and images and stories relevant to the season of the year. Recent themes have included Identity, Certainty and Doubt, God Talk and Survival.

It is edited by a team of volunteer editors working in a collaborative way. Jane Dowell says that volunteering for Magnet is ‘the best thing I have ever done’ and Patricia Goacher, responsible for the selection of poems and prayers for the meditation pages says: ‘Being involved with Magnet is enriching and exciting. It offers a unique opportunity to be creative, to learn from others and make new friends.’

Restructuring at Methodist head office level led to the decision to ‘go independent’ which was taken by the volunteer editors and management group in October 2008. Lynne Ling, who had been a management group and editorial volunteer from 1993 to 2002, was appointed Business Manager and Mark Howard, the Magnet designer since 1991, acted as business consultant.

The new charity, Magnet Resources was incorporated as a limited company in May 2009 with charitable status granted in July 2009. The Methodist Church made transitional funding available and the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes and Methodist Council signed a transfer agreement with Magnet Resources just before the end of 2009.

CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE MAGNET NOW SEEKS WIDER READERSHIP

Magnet magazine, which until the end of 2009 was published by the Methodist Church, is now published by its own independent charity, Magnet Resources, with the aim of reaching a wider ecumenical audience of both men and women. It has a committed readership of 13,000 each quarter and is produced by a team of volunteer editors.

Magnet started in 1987 as the magazine of the Women’s Network of the Methodist Church and since that time it has provided challenging material to encourage, enable and equip people to take their full place in the life of the church and society. It is known for its colourful and thoughtful meditation pages, its seasonal worship resources, insightful and stimulating features, Bible study and prayer focus. It is of value both to individuals in their personal spiritual journeys and to leaders of worship, Bible study and house groups.

Lynne Ling, is Editor of Magnet

People buying the latest issue of Magnet
Slumped in his desk chair, James let his mind wander through the following day’s family service. He was preaching on Mark 12:41–44 – The Widow’s Offering. He sighed heavily; if he had a penny for every time his congregation had heard him speak on giving, he could cover the church’s budget deficit on his own. James was always inspired by the widow’s sacrifice, but he needed a fresh way of presenting it – something that would engage the distracted children and teenagers, the busy professionals and parents, as well as the scholarly students and senior citizens in his congregation.

Just as the idea of storytelling dropped into James’ mind, his daughter jumped onto his lap. ‘We’re watching a really funny film, Daddy. Come and see!’ She grabbed her father’s hand and, leading him to the living room, introduced him to animated supervillain Gru, voiced by Steve Carell. Despicable Me captivated the whole family, but none more so than James, who found a scene ideal for illustrating Mark 12:41–44 – three orphans present Gru with a piggy bank containing the few coins that amount to their entire savings.

Tools for Talks is a website that helps Bible teachers to do what James did – use popular culture to communicate God’s unchanging Word in this rapidly changing world. The site is updated weekly and contains thousands of quotes and suggestions of clips from the latest films, TV, news, music and books, along with suggestions of how these can be incorporated into sermons. Tools for Talks is produced by the Damaris Trust, a Christian educational charity passionate about connecting biblical Christian faith with contemporary popular culture.

CHURCH INTO CULTURE
How do Christianity and culture relate? Contrary to popular opinion, culture didn’t originate in 1920s Hollywood, Renaissance Europe, or even in Classical Greece. It began in the mind of God. He made us to relate with him and with others, and he made us creative so that we could respond to those relationships and our world. Every human still bears God’s relational, creative nature.

But all too often the culture we now witness is stained by the selfishness of our ambitions, the brokenness of our communities and the exploitation of our world. By usurping God’s rightful place at the centre of our lives, we have twisted culture and defaced it. Where does that leave us? If culture is both awful and awesome, how can the Church engage with culture without endangering its holiness?

The truth is that culture cannot be avoided; it’s part of the essential fabric of life. The Chambers Dictionary defines culture as ‘the
the whole man, including his intellect. If Christianity is really true, then it involves beauty and truth. Whilst the media will always find themselves. However, we have a more compelling reason to actively involve ourselves in culture. Jesus himself demonstrated a positive engagement with it. He was moved by events in his community (John 11:35), he drew on cultural traditions to illustrate his message (Matthew 13:34-35) and he challenged the inconsistencies of false ideologies (Matthew 22:18-22). Jesus prayed that the Church would continue to walk the tightrope of being ‘in’ the world, yet not ‘of’ it (John 17:16-18):

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (John 17:15-18)

**Whilst the media will always contain elements that need challenging, it will also yield much that we can celebrate.**

Jesus sent us into the world as ambassadors for his kingdom. One aspect of this role is the responsibility to redeem culture to its former glory through the truth of God’s Word. As ‘the light of the world’ (Matthew 5:14), churches are supposed to exemplify culture as God intended it in the communities in which they find themselves.

Humanity still bears God’s likeness, and so the arts are littered with aspects of goodness, beauty and truth. Whilst the media will always contain elements that need challenging, it will also yield much that we can celebrate.

Theologian and philosopher Francis Schaeffer wrote:

‘If Christianity is really true, then it involves the whole man, including his intellect and creativeness. Christianity is not just “dogmatically” true or “dogmatically” true. Rather, it is true to what is there, true in the whole area of the whole man in all of life.’

It is not enough for us to either condemn or conform to our culture. Jesus’ way demands a more involved process, one that prises open each cultural expression, revealing its truths, discarding its lies and refining its half-truths.

**CULTURE INTO CHURCH**

Coming from a pulpit, wouldn’t pop culture sound out of place? The Bible suggests not. Acts 17:16-34 features Paul preaching to a pluralistic, pagan audience, not unlike the permissive post-modern people churches are now struggling to reach. He was ‘greatly distressed’ (v 16) by their idolatry, but he made it his mission to understand their worldview. He looked at their philosophies (v 18, 22), objects of worship (v 16, 23) and literature (v 28); he commended what was good (v 22, 28), corrected what was wrong (v 24, 29-31) and filled in what was missing (v 23, 25-28). Paul incisively used cultural references in his talk to identify with his audience and enable them to relate to his message.

Similarly, developing an awareness of mass media, popular science and post-modern philosophies enables us to better understand our neighbours – to grasp their questions, frustrations and longings. The gospel is relevant to every culture, but it must be communicated in a way that people of that culture can understand.

Quentin Tarantino has said that cinema is the new church. People sit in rows whilst a story is presented from the front, which contains spiritual and moral messages designed to transform the audience in some way.” Director, screenwriter and producer Zach Snyder (Watchmen, Legend of the Guardians) gave a lucid illustration of comic-book sermons:

‘When you read a comic book and at the end you go, “Where am I morally?”, that right there is pop culture. It’s like a bubblegum wrapper that has the meaning of life on it.’

Pop culture expresses worldviews, but it also shapes and reinforces them. Thus, it is vital that churches delve into films, literature, art, theatre, music and current affairs, in order to offer guidance to those embarking on a spiritual journey through these media.

Jesus offers another paradigm for drawing on culture whilst preaching. His parables conveyed profound truths through memorable but recognisable scenarios. To those who were hungry for truth, these stories illuminated complex concepts like the kingdom of heaven. Charles H Spurgeon once said, ‘A sermon without illustrations is like a room without windows.’

Our culture is replete with stories, told in the cinema, through music, on the television and in books, not to mention the real life stories presented in the news. Of course these stories are not to be given the same credence as Jesus’ parables, but, if used appropriately, they can illustrate aspects of God’s truth. In a multi-media context, these are invaluable resources for understanding and being understood by people today.

**THE COSTS OF KEEPING UP WITH CULTURE**

Investing ourselves in the culture around us is not a cheap activity. Physically, it takes time and money to watch the latest films, listen to new music and keep abreast of current affairs. Emotionally, it can be distressing to see and hear things that reflect the sinful condition of our society. Mentally, it involves deep reflection in order to discern which elements are praise-worthy and which deserve criticism. Spiritually, it might cause us to question our faith and expose us to temptation. Socially, it could result in us clashing with friends who interpret pop culture differently, or the time we spend researching pop culture may clash with other commitments.

Wanting to engage with the culture around us is all very well, but what if we don’t have the time, money or energy to source and sort through all the potentially useful illustrations in contemporary culture? It can be difficult enough to keep up with one or two spheres of culture that we’re interested in, but when you put on top of that the broad spectrum of interests represented in our congregation, the feat seems insurmountable.
A CULTURAL TOUR GUIDE

Tools for Talks is specifically tailored to help lighten this load. In the words of one subscriber, ‘Tools for Talks provides me with a great time-saving resource to help me communicate the gospel in a way that people can understand.’

With thousands of quotes, lyrics, statistics, downloadable clips and news stories at one’s fingertips, illustrating a sermon needn’t be a chore. Tools for Talks researchers collect and catalogue new illustrations every week in order to free up speakers to spend more time on Bible study, confident that they can source up-to-date quotes and clips at toolsfortalks.com.

Each Tools for Talks illustration comes with background information and suggestions for use. This ensures that speakers are well informed about the film, song, programme or celebrity they are citing and offers inspiration for how the quote or clip might be integrated into a sermon.

The aim, as another subscriber succinctly put it, is to ‘see culture with scripture lenses, rather than scripture with culture lenses.’ With this in mind, every illustration includes a selection of relevant Bible verses, from which the suggestions for use are derived.

In addition to illustrations, Tools for Talks provides a range of Bible study tools to help speakers select and reflect upon the passages for their sermons.

NEW AND IMPROVED TOOLS FOR TALKS WEBSITE

Now is the perfect time to begin making use of Tools for Talks, since it has just been relaunched. The website now offers a range of new features, designed to make the site even more useful to preachers, teachers and pastors.

The site now benefits from an improved, more intuitive search engine. As well as being able to search for illustrations by theme and by individual titles of films, books, songs, programmes and personalities, you can now search by Bible passage too.

The homepage has a new look, making it easier to navigate. The addition of a featured articles section enables subscribers to immediately find the site’s most topical and popular illustrations.

Tools for Talk News, a free update email, not only announces what’s new to the site each week, but offers exclusive free illustrations – even to those who are not yet subscribers. This update also highlights cultural trends across the mass media.

A FLAVOUR OF TOOLS FOR TALKS

This month last year, Tools for Talks published the following illustrations:

- Short downloadable videos on prayer featuring RT Kendall, Matt Redman, Nick Pollard and Jayne Newton
- Quotes from musician Elton John, psychologist Linda Papadopoulos and former Japanese POW Alistair Urquhart
- A newspaper article entitled ‘Does winning the lottery make you happy?’, along with quotes from a millionaire who donated his fortune to charity
- Quotes from the film Percy Jackson & the Lightning Thief
- A downloadable video exploring the idea of trust, as expressed in the film The Time Traveler’s Wife
- Lyrics from the Lostprophets’ new album Where We Belong

With Valentine’s Day, Mothering Sunday, Lent and Easter on the horizon, why not check out Tools for Talks to glean some brand new, culturally relevant illustrations.

The Damaris Trust would like to offer Readers a 20% discount on a Tools for Talks subscription. Simply visit www.toolsfortalks.com/reader.

Holly Price works for the Damaris Trust as a writer and editor.

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1 www.culturewatch.org
2 Tony Watkins, Focus: The Art and Soul of Cinema (Damaris Books, 2007) p. 8
3 Francis Schaeffer, Art and the Bible: Two Essays (InterVarsity Press, 1973) p. 16
4 Nick Pollard, ‘Mission in Partnership with the Film Industry’
5 Charles H. Spurgeon, Sermons in Candles: Lecture No. 1 in The Spurgeon Archive
6 UCCF Staff Worker James Murkett
The Readers conference this year took preaching in the Internet age as its theme. At one level it was immensely useful for preachers to learn about the best of the resources available to them online. But at a more profound level we needed to reflect on what it means to lead worship for congregations who themselves are mostly online or who are fast acquiring the technology to do so and for whom the Internet has become a major source of information. How does this impact preaching itself?

Whole societies around the world are struggling to adjust to the emerging forms of human connection. It isn’t just a problem for the church. These changes are bound to impact on how Christians gather and worship. Any attempt to marginalise the Internet as something separate from our life in Christian community is bound to failure. This article is an attempt to explore some of the major changes coming from the development of the Internet, giving examples and suggestions for how it could extend Reader ministry.

I include mobile phone usage as there are now indications that mobile phones are becoming the primary way to make use of the Internet, even overtaking voice calls. In the UK there are more mobiles in circulation now than adults. So whatever reservations we may have now about the Internet being used by a mere 70% of the population, the growth of smart-phones is a reminder that soon almost everybody will have a pocket device capable of accessing the Internet.

When the worldwide web arrived it took the form of glossy containers (websites) into which those with something to say poured information hoping that thousands would come along and view it. However this is not how the Internet is mostly used now. Treating the Internet primarily as if it were an information resource is as misleading as describing a sermon as the transfer of information between a preacher and a congregation. This was briefly the Internet as a broadcast medium. As soon as people found the means to connect with each other without needing email addresses, professional websites found themselves jostling alongside amateur websites, blog diaries, and chatrooms. And this was years before Internet platforms such as Myspace and Facebook arrived making interaction with friends and strangers effortless. People now use the Internet as a mass connection device, re-patterning their lives in different social groupings which are so varied and complex that this would have been impossible without the Internet as an assembly kit.

1. GATHERING AND ORGANISING

The primary role of the Internet is helping people to gather and organise in groups of shared interest. You are doing this even if you only use email! Internet communication is fast and cheap and the cost is the same whether you connect with one person or thousands.

This is good news for those of us who preach and lead services. It’s worth reminding ourselves that the preacher is not a broadcaster, but a gatherer; the church is the gathering of those who have been called. This meaning has been lost to modern preaching. Church services start and end at predetermined times with the process and content regulated – culturally attuned to the stopwatch, the printed schedule and the factory whistle. This is not the only way of doing church. It wasn’t how congregations gathered two centuries ago and there are signs that congregations are finding it increasingly difficult to turn up on time. The people gather for the sacraments, prayer and the preaching of the Word. Response to the Word needs to be ongoing, flowing out of the services.

Treat the the Internet primarily as if it were an information resource is as misleading as describing a sermon as the transfer of information between a preacher and a congregation.

With the Internet we have other ways to gather people. We have the means to engage those who come occasionally, and those who don’t have the confidence to come at all. If the threshold of a church building has become an insuperable barrier to so many, then we can use the organising powers of the Internet to share and include those who aren’t inside the building on a Sunday, and to communicate
with those who come to services before and afterwards. Or will a church which claims to be in fellowship with all the saints stubbornly require participation at particular places and times?

If you look at the websites of many London churches that target young singles you will see the names of group leaders together with their mobile numbers. That is an example of how gathering can begin.

Think of the potential for creating live linkups with churches in other parts of the country or even other parts of the world. Using Skype – a free download onto any computer which would allow audio and video linkups in real time, churches can explore live partnerships in ways we could never do before. I once used texting to link a Sunday school learning about the transfiguration with a party of climbers (their mothers) ascending Snowdon at the same time!

As a body of around 10,000 Readers, the Internet could be the means to enable us to engage with each other more when practically this is very often impossible to gather more than a few dozen.

**CREATION AND SHARING OF SOCIAL OBJECTS**

The second thing the Internet does supremely well is the sharing and distribution of social objects. A story is a social object. So is a photo album, or a film clip or even a sermon if it’s a good one! Social objects are the currency which enables groups to form either around particular social objects, such as a cup of coffee, or by passing them from person to person across a network of social connections. That’s what you do when you mail a website link to someone. Against expectations most of the social objects shared on the Internet haven’t been professionally produced. Anyone can make them with a little enthusiasm and spread them as valued contributors bringing fresh fires people already gather around and join – and seeing who gathers. Or finding what people want to share what they have created with us to ask us to help them with their questions.

**Used sensitively we can use social objects of many kinds to share, attract and dialogue with a much wider spectrum of people.**

Last year I was away for the weekend with a group of men from local churches on a canal boat. The organist had brought us photocopied hymns so we could sing in harmony every time we went through a mile long tunnel! On the Sunday morning someone had the bright idea of sharing it with members of the congregation who hadn’t been to church in months, one of whom was housebound and the other in a hospice, using mobile phones held up while we sang to them and those with them.

At the Reader conference Cliff Harris explained how he arranges for those who couldn’t get to church to read Compline to each other over the phone. There must be hundreds of other ways in which we could share content with people which they would in turn share with others.

The levers of change have moved away from institutions to people power. If we want to bring about change in our society then we need to become adept at lighting small fires – and seeing who gathers. Or finding what fires people already gather around and join them as valued contributors bringing fresh fuel to the fire.

**RESHAPING PERSONAL IDENTITY**

The third area where the Internet is changing our society is reshaping identity, and this can be positive. On the whole the church has acquiesced in the privatisation of faith often in the face of aggressive secularism. I regularly meet Christians who tell me they are unable to say that they are Christians on the Internet because this would be unacceptable in their places of work which make use of Facebook and MSN.

The reason I began to use Facebook was to engage with my work peer group. My blogs and website had been aimed at the same people. When first my vicar and then my church friends arrived on Facebook I had a decision to make. Should I partition my work from my faith or let the different worlds merge? Now on a daily basis I post within sight of over 1,000 people. Those I communicate with include the whole gamut of friends, colleagues and fellow Christians. I have had to avoid jargon and to choose topics which are accessible to my entire constituency.

The MIT anthropologist Grant McCracken has talked about how the Internet is changing our sense of identity – are we different people online wearing a mask? Or are we finding new ways to integrate our different selves? When others tag me in photos I have to decide if I control my identity as I see myself or if I am willing to be portrayed as others see me, sometimes not always flatteringly!

This shift in identity is significant. Most people in this country are within reach of Christians. However they may not know that they are Christians, so deeply ingrained has the idea of privatised faith become. The Internet has the potential to make the ordinary lives of Christians far more visible and transparent to their friends, colleagues and neighbours. This is a vast opportunity and we need to grasp it.

**IN CONCLUSION**

To paraphrase the words of the psalmist ‘The Internet is the Lord’s and everything in it.’ The Internet represents such a vast outpouring of human creativity it is something we need to embrace, not just as a communications channel but as a territory to be invaded by the kingdom of God. It is wide open to be shaped by the participation of Christians. It is a huge asset to ministry and is as much part of our care as the parishes in which we live and work since so many of our friends and neighbours are spending more of their time there.

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**John is a Reader at St Cuthbert’s, Rye Park in the St Alban’s Diocese. He works as a marketing consultant and market researcher. You can read his blog on [http://paab.typepad.com/furtherandfaster](http://paab.typepad.com/furtherandfaster). He’s also happy to discuss the issues about the negative aspects of the Internet. Email john.griffiths@paab.biz**
I recall the emotions within me as I approached the prison gate on the day of the interview for the job of part-time Church of England Chaplain. What would that entail? How would I, or even could I, cope with the prison environment? How would I react to face-to-face contact with convicted criminals? Many such questions came to mind and not all were answered at the interview, nor could they be answered then; only experience on the job could do that. Having successfully completed the interview I commenced work in late November 1999 and have worked there ever since, including a thirteen week stint as chaplain in charge during an interregnum.

Ten years ago chaplaincy was predominantly provided by Christian chaplains of all denominations, C of E, Roman Catholic, Methodist and also other non-conformists with the occasional visits from visiting ministers of faiths other than Christian. During the ensuing years the requirement has been changed by the increasing influx of prisoners of faiths other than Christianity. There is increasing availability of chaplains who are not Christian. The biggest single non-Christian group is ‘Nil’ followed by Islam which, excluding ‘Nil’, is larger than all the other non-Christian groups put together. This trend has changed significantly the space requirement to provide adequate cover for services for all faiths. Where a chaplain for a given faith is not available the duty chaplain, usually Christian, covers and where necessary the particular chaplain of the required faith is informed at his next visit. I use the male tense in this case because faiths other than Christianity have male chaplains. When a visiting chaplain of a faith other than Christianity is not available to take the worship service then a prisoner of that particular faith who has security clearance takes the service.

When I joined the chaplaincy team at HMP Camp Hill my role was to be a religious minister dealing with spiritual needs of prisoners and staff, all of whom were mainly Christians or of no faith. Over the past ten years two main changes have taken place, both of which have had a profound impact on chaplaincy. Firstly there has been an increasing need to provide pastoral care for the families of prisoners. The contact covers the deep pastoral needs of those who are close to the prisoners but do not comprehend fully what prison is like or even why their loved ones are in prison. It provides also pastoral support, which in the past would have been provided by churches on the outside, but with the marked decline in church attendance over the ten year period this is rarely present, and if present is no longer sought.

The second change is in the increase in ethnic minorities, resulting in a significant increase in prisoners whose faith is not Christian. The greatest increase is in the number of prisoners who give Islam as their religion. Even within Christianity there has been a move away from Protestant denominations. This move is partly because there is a move away from Christianity in general in this country, but mainly because the ethnic mix in the population of England and Wales as a whole has changed due to the effect of our membership of Europe and immigration from across the world, because of wars or the hope of a better life in this country. For whatever reason a big change has occurred and results in a wider range of ministerial and pastoral care being needed. It has increased also the need for more space to accommodate services for other faiths, particularly Islam. In Camp Hill that space has been made available by using the chapel not only for Christian services and classes but also for Muslim Prayers on Fridays and their study classes in the week. The same applies to services and meetings of other world faiths. This has meant a large degree of working together to ensure there is no conflict of interests. Apart from a few Christians and Muslims complaining, there has been a smooth move to the new regimes. It is interesting to note that the main objection to sharing facilities has come from prisoners of no faith. The fact that the chapel is owned by the

People associate with people, before they associate with systems, be they religious or social systems.
to work from the principle of establishing what every faith has in common with other faiths, without minimising the essential differences between the faiths. For chaplaincy to work, in or out of prison, we need to realise that at the basic level people associate with people, before they associate with systems, be they religious or social systems. We are all human beings, born by the same process and all destined to die at some time. What we have in common is far greater than our differences. Race, colour and creed are differences that need to be acknowledged and accommodated, but they are all part of human beings basic humanity. In dealing with people, first and foremost we are dealing with members of the human race and as such they need to be treated as human beings and not some inferior form of life. Each person should be treated with respect, and of course that works both ways, because to gain respect each person needs to respect others. This for a Christian requires putting into practice the Great Commandment as recorded by Mark\(^1\) to ‘love neighbour as self’, even though they may not truly reciprocate that love.

Another parable which is applicable to Prison Chaplaincy is the parable of the lost sheep. Luke\(^2\) demonstrates the desire of Jesus to find the lost sheep despite the difficulty in doing so. The same applies metaphorically to the sheep of other folds. In other words, the calling of the Christian chaplain is not only for the care of Christians, but for the care of everybody, whatever the creed, or lack of creed, and whatever the race or colour, and whatever the crime!

One of the statutory duties of the chaplaincy role in prisons is to visit the segregation unit on a daily basis, which provides an opportunity for greater contact with the prisoners located there. By definition segregated prisoners have less association with other prisoners and fewer creature comforts and no televisions (except for the ones on Rule 45, segregated for their own safety). The daily visit is often an opportunity for getting to know better the prisoners there, for understanding their problems and often to discuss life after prison. To do that it is important to talk on topics that interest them, music, football, boxing and other sports, politics and many other things. In this way we can establish what their interests are and where possible to provide help and advice. The provision of books, religious and other books, crosswords, puzzles and the like is often possible and in this way their practical needs are satisfied and a greater rapport is established, which sometimes leads to dealing with their spiritual needs. It is important to be able to respond quickly to questions and in words that they can understand, without talking down to them.

Working in prison with a team of professional officers and staff and contributing in a positive way to the rehabilitation of prisoners is a very humbling experience, in an environment where one’s views on one’s faith and on the world in general are tested and refined. Overall it is a privilege to be able to observe at close hand the effects of crime on families as well as on the prisoners themselves. This enables chaplains to contribute in a positive and realistic way to the ongoing debate of crime, its causes and possible solutions.

John Honeychurch is a part-time postgraduate student in the Criminal Justice Department of the University of Portsmouth and a member of the chaplaincy team in HMP Isle of Wight/Camp Hill.

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1 Mark Chapter 10, verses 29 and 30
2 Matthew Chapter 25, verses 34–45
3 Luke Chapter 10, verses 25–37
4 Luke15, verses 1–7

Prison service and is not a Christian Church has helped in making the necessary changes.

Despite the significant increase in time spent on pastoral matters there has been also a significant increase in questions on religious topics. The publishing of the Da Vinci Code, the recent media coverage of Darwin and other high profile coverage has given rise to many questions of the type ‘What do you think of …. ?’ This requires chaplains to be widely read both in their theology and in secular matters. The questioners need to have their questions answered when they ask them, not days or even weeks later. This aspect of the job is for me exciting and very rewarding. It helps my having a background in science and having worked for many years in industry and consultancy, as well as having studied theology, including pastoral theology (coupled with many years of sermon preparation!).

The multi-cultural nature of prisons provides the opportunity to observe and study the problems and opportunities inherent in our society at large, highlighted within the confines of a prison. Without acquiring knowledge of other faiths and cultures the job of chaplain would be very difficult, if not impossible. The techniques required are wide and are as much to do with sociology and psychology as they are to do with theology. To survive it is necessary
My particular version of this was the trek from Waterloo station along the road parallel to the Thames Embankment ending at the Lambeth Palace Library. After the busy noise of traffic all was peaceful within, and the staff were always helpful and efficient while helping my research. I was researching there to improve my skills and knowledge as a Reader.

Bishop Martineau noted that the Reader’s examination was only ‘meant to stimulate the reader to further study and not to mark the end of his studies.’ Many years ago the Archbishop’s Diploma for Readers helped to serve this purpose up to its unfortunate demise.

I had been informed about the Lambeth Diploma, or Student in Theology (STh), as a prized alternative to a university degree in theological studies. Apparently by the Ecclesiastical Licences Act of 1533 Archbishops of Canterbury have the right to present degrees and this had been utilised by Archbishop Tait in the nineteenth century to inaugurate Lambeth MAs.

Indeed there is a hoary joke that the men who graduated BD were known as ‘brothers in divinity’ whereas the ladies who achieved the STh were ‘sisters in theology.’ There was truth behind this, for Archbishop Randall Davidson had set up the qualification in 1905 as an opportunity for ladies to gain a worthwhile and acceptable award to assist in any theological work they were involved with. There was the added bonus that home study could proceed while the student was engaged in normal full time work. From 1945 men were allowed to participate and work towards the Diploma. It was specifically aimed at giving teachers in Secondary schools a chance to obtain theological skills and knowledge.

In 2002 I began studying for the STh. One factor that appealed was the opportunity to offer a thesis of some 30,000 words rather than sitting for an examination in various subjects with a smaller dissertation involved. This examination route was one I had successfully followed before and so I opted for the thesis challenge.

The problem that emerged about following this method was that a supervisor was required to oversee the work as it proceeded. Although two secretaries of the Archbishop’s Examination Council worked to find such a scholar it was over six years before they succeeded. Meanwhile I had been beavering away in the Lambeth and other libraries and taking vast amounts of notes. Here I add a personal note of hard won advice – always check that you have the full details of your references. The amount of time I spent in chasing up lost or partial citations taught me this crucial lesson!

Eventually a supervisor was discovered. In this I was most fortunate. My topic involved Tudor Catechisms and Professor Ian Green is the outstanding scholar in this field. My sessions with him were full of interest, information and stimulation. I learnt much from his prolific use of the red pen, embodying correction and wisdom.

Finally the material was presented for scrutiny and I was gratified to learn that the eminent Professor Eamon Duffy was one of the examiners who had passed my work as satisfactory. The culmination of my study was the presentation of the award by the Archbishop of Canterbury at a service in the Lambeth Palace chapel.

Home study is usually a lonely occupation and it was interesting and affirming to meet with the other three candidates and to learn a little of their study journeys. The Palace staff and the Director of the Archbishop’s Examination in Theology and the Registrar were all most helpful and encouraging throughout the event. The day concluded with afternoon tea, albeit without the cucumber sandwiches. The Archbishop was most gracious and hospitable mingling with the guests and absorbed in many conversations. Altogether it was a memorable occasion to acknowledge our shared achievement.

There are many avenues of further study available today with exciting curricula on offer. I would encourage any Reader who is seeking to widen his knowledge of the amazing God we serve, and the story of his frail followers in the historic church, to search for courses which will meet their need and enable them to be more able witnesses to the truth as it is in the Lord Jesus.

Jeff Morgan is a Reader in the Diocese of Bath and Wells

You may have heard me say that I believe the heart of Reader ministry is that Readers are lay theologians, bringing the Word to the world. Before the annual Selwyn College Course ended last August I gave an undertaking that I would do my best to find ways of enabling Readers to develop their study of academic theology. It’s not that academic theology is all there is to being a Reader but anyone who says it doesn’t apply probably ought to think again about Reader ministry.

I made this undertaking because I believe that theology matters: Phillips Brooks famously described preaching as ‘the bringing of truth through personality’; good preaching is theology from a person who is on fire for the Lord. For eight years I was Vice Chair of a Primates’ working group ‘Theological Education for the Anglican Communion’ and, in that role, was partly responsible for setting standards for lay education and the education of ministers of different kinds across the Communion. You can find a concise rationale for theological education on the Anglican Communion website at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/teac/rationale.cfm and you can find the ministry ‘grids’ at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/teac/grids/index.cfm – look particularly at those for Lay People and for Licensed Lay Ministers.

So now it is over to you. If you have a serious suggestion as to ways in which we can encourage Readers to engage seriously with theology, either through courses or distance learning, or ..., please let me know via the CRC desk at the Ministry Division, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ. If you have a good and workable suggestion, please write a letter rather than emailing because it’s too easy to send emails and most of us think much longer and harder before paying for a stamp! Thank you,

+Robert Sodor as Mannin. ●

The Rt Revd Robert Paterson is Bishop of Sodor and Man and Chair of the Central Readers’ Council
Reviews for THE READER

Anglicism
Stephen Spencer
SCM
£16.99 pbk
9780334043379

The topic, covered in this new SCM Study Guide, is vast and uncertain: what exactly is Anglicanism, now that the circumstances which gave birth to the Church of England and the British Empire have disappeared? Using the theme of ‘discipleship’ Stephen Spencer divides his book into three main parts, starting with Protestant understandings of Anglicanism as they developed, then looking at Catholic understandings, and ending with Anglican involvement in the Enlightenment and its successor philosophies. Each chapter ends with questions for reflection and a useful bibliography. He concludes, in a fourth section, that in spite of its ‘fractiousness’ there is in Anglicanism a ‘surprising unity of life that also points forward to the coming of a wider ecumenical unity of all God’s people’. At the end I believe it is a textbook useful in any kind of ministerial training. It offers a rebuttal to all who predict the inevitable fragmentation of the Anglican way.

ADRIAN ROBERTS

Jesus and the Land
Gary M Burge
SPCK
£12.99 pbk
9780281059522

This book looks at the attitude of various people to what is commonly called The Holy Land or Palestine. It starts with an examination of the Old Testament passages on the land from the Exodus onwards, then turns to the views of the Jewish Diaspora on the subject. Jesus’ teaching is discussed for one chapter, and then views of the author of the fourth Gospel, the Book of Acts, Paul, the author of the Book to the Hebrews, and is brought up to date with varying Christian approaches to the issue of the Holy Land/Palestine. The book is well written and researched. If a Reader were to preach on the subject of the land of Israel then this would certainly be a worthwhile text to study, along with Gary Burge’s earlier Whose Land? Whose Promise! The book would also be of use to someone visiting Israel in order to understand the links between biblical history and modern politics.

JON REYNOLDS

Bridgebuilders
Malcolm Torry
Canterbury Press
£19.99 pbk
9781848250369

This book is sub-titled ‘workplace chaplaincy – a history’ but it goes beyond this to explore how Christian faith relates to the world of work and economics which determines so much of people’s lives. The author traces the profound changes that have taken place in the Church’s relationship with working people, and looks at the challenge of an increasingly secularised society. Though many chaplains named are ordained, Readers also play an important part in industrial mission, both as chaplains and as associates, and several are named. The book could be a useful starting point for discussion on how we all contribute to the Church’s faithful understanding of people’s working lives.

IAN YEARSLEY

Children’s Spirituality
Rebecca Nye
CHP
£8.99 pbk
9780715140277

Spirituality is not an added extra but inherent in childhood and is to be nurtured. This challenging statement is thoroughly discussed with opportunities throughout to rethink attitudes to children and offers many practical suggestions. The importance of recognising a child’s spirituality is emphasised by considering prevalent Christian thought and imagery as well as citing examples in which children facing crises reveal extraordinary depths of spiritual understanding. The UN 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child is used to reflect on ways in which we might either ‘use’ children in church or offer more transient experiences (such as a visit to a theme park) rather than providing prayerful listening. Until now I had thought my own church scored highly on a child friendly rating but using the six letter SPIRIT checklist I realise we have some specific work to do. Rebecca Nye confirmed some previous thoughts but has jolted me out of complacency. Enriching, refreshing, encouraging, said the foreword – and surely essential reading for anyone who may interact with a child of any age.

CYNTHIA WHITTLE

Curating Worship
Jonny Baker
SPCK
£10.99 pbk
9780281062355

This book is an interesting review of some amazing examples of curated spaces. It starts by exploring the concept and then records interviews with a number of individuals involved in alternative worship. The discussions cover a range of topics including idea sources, practical implementation and the challenges of working collaboratively. Much of the first part relates to the art world and exhibitions of which I have neither experience nor understanding. Therefore, whilst intrigued by the title and excited at the opportunity to be stretched in leading – or indeed curating – worship, I struggled at first to be engaged. Moreover, whilst the interview style offers raw presentation of material direct from curators, that is naturally motivating, it makes it hard to order my reflections and learning. However, it was worth persevering with the book; I would like to experience some of the spaces described, particularly in being open to God to speak in surprising ways.

LINDSAY TANNER
T

Sexuality in the New Testament
William Loader
SPCK
£12.99 pbk
9780281058846

Although you may hope this book gives guidance on sexual behaviour to students and preachers – it doesn’t. It picks from the scriptures every reference to sexual behaviour and includes chapters on marriage, adultery, divorce and remarriage. It even asks the rhetorical question ‘Has sex a future?’ It mentions the flesh and celibacy and compares passages from the Old and New Testaments. The one conclusion in the Scriptures is that adultery is wrong. However this book also goes into homosexuality and prostitution. The aim of it is to educate not to preach. There is an index of ancient and biblical sources which is very useful if you ever speak on the subject. The author refers to our modern world in a forward where he compares the past with the present especially contraception. This book is not bedtime reading but it should be useful if you find yourself leading a discussion on some of the well known stories like David and Bathsheba or a like David and Bathsheba or a

CHRIS PORTEOUS

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For All That Has Been, Thanks
Rowan Williams and Joan Chittister
OSB
Canterbury Press
£12.99 pbk
9781848250178

This little book of reflections contains some gems, simply written, readily understood, earthed in real life and always mind-expanding. Taking the root meaning of ‘Alleluia’ as ‘All Hail to the One That Is,’ the authors build a series of profound and direct meditations on some fundamentals of regular life, wealth, poverty, conflict, suffering, faith and doubt. Joan Chittister’s homely, even chatty style draws on some rich everyday stories, pointing always to the positive. Rowan Williams expands more fully into a compassionate and inclusive universe with space for good sinners, flawed saints, holy egoism and a God who ‘writes straight with crooked lines.’ Resting securely on his origins in the West Wales which my family and I have made our home, he exhorts us to be thankful for our personal past, present and future. Each short piece finds the alleluias to express thanks for what is beautiful, good and true. Rich fuel for thought and for life and a great source for sermons, prayers, meditations and other Readerly activities.

ALAN KERSHAW

W

Gazing on the Gospels Year A
Judith Dimond
SPCK
£9.99 pbk
97802811061884

The sub-title ‘Meditations on the Lectionary Readings’ amply describes this delightful book, the third in the series. Years B and C have already been published. What makes it so special is the author’s method of arranging each week’s reading on a framework based on Clare of Assisi: Gaze on him, Consider him, Contemplate him, as you desire to imitate him. As we gaze with Judith on the Gospel for each Sunday, we are led to envisage the biblical scene, then to consider its implications and to contemplate our response. A prayer guides us into imitation. The author’s lively insights into the Gospel background are sure to inspire both those preparing sermons, and those wishing for guidance in their private devotions. I would have been happier were there cross references to Old and New Testament lessons, but the title makes it clear that this is a companion to the Gospel readings, and as such it succeeds brilliantly.

RICHARD NEWNHAM

W

Pathway of Peace
Rachel Hickson
Monarch Books
£8.99 pbk
9781854249692

Rachel Hickson has composed another book of pastoral prayer and readings in a style that many Readers will already know, with Bible verses, reflections and prayers, all attractively presented with illustrations of gardens in flower and beautiful landscapes. She provides a forty day programme designed to bring peace to troubled hearts. Some of her observations are wise and while many devout Christians will find this helpful, most Readers will encounter people with problems that are far more profound and long lasting than can be treated in such a short time. If one has a teenager on drugs or a spouse with Alzheimer’s, forty years will be a better time scale than forty days.

PETER THORNTON

T

I Am Your Father
Mark Stibbe
Monarch
£9.99 pbk
9781854249371

This book about fatherhood is divided into three sections: ‘The Wound’ describes the need for good human fathers, showing the deficiencies of today’s society in this area, ‘The Scars’ examines the problems that can result from poor fathering, and ‘The Healing’ shows how necessary a relationship with our heavenly Father is for healing these wounds. Mark Stibbe weaves his own personal story of being an orphan with many other examples, some well known names, some ordinary people. With the help of diagrams and lists he breaks things down into easy-to-focus-on and memorable points. For example, the signs of a bad dad, and a good dad. I found this book

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REVIEWS

a compelling read and feel that it will definitely enable Readers not only to draw closer to God themselves, whatever their experience of fatherhood, but also reach out bearing understanding and hope to those whose lives have suffered from the lack of a loving father.

LIZ PACEY

Jesus the Temple
Nicholas Perrin
SPCK
£17.99 pbk
9780801045387

This is an interesting book on a fascinating subject. It is born out of an idée fixe expressed by the title. The author, a former research assistant to Tom Wright, ranges widely over inter-testamental, New Testament and early Christian sources in search of evidence and support for his near-obession. Some of these sources appear to be used selectively. This is not a book for anyone beginning a quest for the historical Jesus but, if like me, you are an enthusiastic seeker, it is a book you should read, even if you don’t end up agreeing with all of it.

EP Sanders, in ‘Jesus and Judaism’, long ago convinced me that Jesus was counter temple, believing that it needed to be replaced. Nick Perrin has not quite convinced me that Jesus thought it should be replaced by himself, but I await, with interest, the two promised sequels.

BRIAN GARDNER

Jesus Wars
Philip Jenkins
SPCK
£12.99 pbk
9780281063338

Subtitled ‘How four patriarchs, three queens, and two emperors decided what Christians would believe for the next 1,500 years’, this book examines the history behind what we accept unquestioningly today as orthodox theology about the humanity and divinity of Jesus. In fact it was wrestled out of constant battles theological, spiritual and political over the first four centuries of Christianity. The author asserts that, ultimately, what emerged was shaped largely by politics, geography and military success: therefore today’s accepted doctrine on this vital matter was arrived at by mere accident unless ‘we follow a tradition of seeing God’s hand in the apparently shapeless course of worldly history’. Although written in an interesting and accessible style, the academic complexities of the subject, and the sheer volume of scholarly and well-researched detail, combine to make this book unlikely to appeal to the average reader or, indeed, Reader!

DEREK BALDWIN

Lift Up Your Hearts
Andrew Davison, Andrew Nunn, Toby Wright (eds)
SPCK
£12.99 pbk
9780281061495

That this is a hardback with a durable cover gives an indication that it is not a book to read once and then put on a shelf but rather something that might become a regular companion. With the subtitle, ‘A Prayer Book for Anglicans’, it is not just a structured collection of prayers but also by way of the accompanying text, to quote the introduction, ‘an exercise in theology’. The compilers regret that many Christians no longer have a series of prayers committed to heart that they can draw on when times are hard and extempore prayer seems impossible, and hope that their collection might provide a source for memorisation. That the anthology is built around the structure of the Eucharist comes as no surprise in a book sponsored by Affirming Catholicism and the Society of Catholic Priests. Some of the commentary may well jar with those of us from other traditions but this rich tapestry of prayers, old and new, can and should be warmly embraced and used by all.

JOHN KNOWLES

Pastoral Supervision
Jane Leach and Michael Paterson
SCM
£18.99 pbk
9780334043256

This is a handbook on pastoral supervision, the fruit of many years of practical work by the authors, who draw on their rich vein of experience. It comes through as they engage with the various stages of the supervision process, with individuals, groups and teams. They are at pains to point out the different types and styles of supervision. There are plenty of exercises for the reader, whether as supervisor or supervisee, to apply to practical situations. The application of the authors’ academic and pastoral knowledge establishes their credibility in a much needed and often neglected area of work. It will appeal to Readers who have a pastoral supervisory responsibility, or who are in a situation where they are in need of practical pastoral support. The book is well presented and thought out, and is commended to Readers who want to work effectively in the pastoral role.

HUGH MORLEY

Let My People Grow
Ed. Mark Greene
Authentic Media
£7.99 pbk  DVD
9781850786719

The subtitle ‘Making disciples who make a difference in today’s world’ immediately attracted my attention. The book is a resource from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity and its seventeen chapters are written by different authors from varied backgrounds. Sections on foundations, reflections on Scripture, and wisdom from earlier generations are followed by pastoral perspectives, questions of leadership, human diversity, and learning from current practice. The postscript suggests that there is no one model for disciple-making, but vision, research and development, and training are vital ingredients. Each chapter begins with a couple of very useful questions for reflection and ends with notes and suggestions for further reading. I found it an informative and challenging read. Even if you do not want to read the book from cover to cover there will almost certainly be sections which strike a chord and make you want to delve deeper.

LIZ PACEY

The Road to Bethlehem
Louise Cross
CWR
£7.99 pbk  DVD
9781853455650

‘The Road to Bethlehem’ is a colourful storybook/DVD package for younger children, retelling the birth of Jesus, based on Luke 2:1-20 and Matt 2:1-12. Picture pages are in bold, bright colours with additional quirky illustrations on text pages. The DVD (7 minutes) charmingly animates the pictures as the story unfolds with music and sound effects. I particularly liked the spider running up a column in Augustus’ bathroom. Louise Cross, a church children’s worker, tries to make language vivid and contemporary. Mostly she is successful but some of the voices she uses are dubious stereotypes, particularly the Wise Men. Also, for storytelling convenience, Augustus’ palace appears to be somewhere near Bethlehem! This pack could be used with individual or small groups of children or as part of All-Age Worship but would need plenty of explanations and development to bring out a greater sense of wonder. It would be suitable for Epiphany as, unusually, it ends with the Wise Men visiting a toddler Jesus in a Bethlehem house.

APRIL McINTYRE
Saints and Heroes
Frank Field
SPCK
£12.99 pbk
9780281061877

Frank Field is an idealist. He writes about idealists: Archbishops Frederick and William Temple, Bishop George Bell, Eleanor Rathbone and William Beveridge. All are driven by Christian principles, more or less, if not manifestly by Christian doctrine, and all are passionate social reformers. The bad news first; the book is stitched together from lectures, reviews and addresses given over the past fifteen years with only the essay on Beveridge being new, and therefore lacks coherent structure. Frank Field’s style is diffusely and occasionally repetitive, and he assumes some previous knowledge in his readers. An index would have been helpful. The good news is that we are introduced to five great figures from the past century or so. Though clearly not faultless, they are seen as heroes, in the style of Thomas Carlyle. This is a refreshing reminder of an almost-forgotten approach to human greatness. Our current celebrities do not all work tirelessly for the good of their fellow creatures. In summary this book is instructive but of marginal value to Reader ministry.
DEEREK WOOD

The Polkinghorne Reader
Ed. Thomas Jay Oord
SPCK
£12.99 pbk
9780281060535

This collection of Polkinghorne’s writing has been well selected and woven together by Professor Oord to give a comprehensive compendium of the former’s highly influential thought in the field of science and religion. Polkinghorne touches on all the major doctrines of Christianity with an essentially orthodox approach but without denying major scientific discoveries. One could be pedantic and say there is nothing new here but it is marvellous to see a first class mind at work and a wide range of subjects presented in a single package. As more of a student of theology than science I found some chapters hard to get into for example Chapter 2, The Nature of the Physical World and chapter 3, The Human Nature, but some immediately accessible and highly enlightening. If this is a subject that is your interest then this book is virtually essential, unless you have all his books already!
JOHN MUNNS

The Worship Mall
Bryan D Spinks
SPCK
£14.99 pbk
9780281060252

Bryan Spinks provides a masterly sociological survey of the many different kinds of worship available to twenty-first century Christians. Using the analogy of a shopping mall to demonstrate the wide range of choice available, the author shows how churches, of different traditions and denominations, have developed contemporary, responses to contemporary culture. He demonstrates that the shopping mall calendar is much like the liturgical calendar and that young adults now often shop for worship rather than continue with a particular denominational allegiance. This brings religion into consumerist competition with the leisure and entertainment industries. The book describes the main kinds of modern worship from emergent and liquid through blended and multi-sensory to charismatic and post Vatican II liturgies. Professor Spinks suggests that Christian music from the mid 60s onward has focused on personal holiness and sentiment, rather than on social justice and a traditional sacramental experience. He aptly quotes Graham Kendrick: ‘The microphone has profoundly affected church worship culture’ whilst pointing out that Praise and Worship songs are often selected according to the number of beats per minute at which they are played. This is not a resource book but uses case studies to help all those who plan or lead worship to address the question of how to create worship worthy of God that appeals to those who regard themselves as post-modern.
RONA ORME

Wonder, Fear and Longing
Mark Yaconelli
SPCK
£8.99 pbk
9780281063765

Modestly described as a book of prayers this goes a lot further by using several routes to lead the reader into prayer. It is divided into chapters dealing with all those emotions and life experiences common to everyone from love, fear and suffering through to wonder and gratitude. Each chapter begins with a story from the author’s experience who then invites the reader’s response through scripture, prayer, meditation and contemplation. He also introduces many ways of praying using colours or imagining oneself into a passage from the Bible. All of this, as the author says, will seduce, cajole, trick and playfully entice your heart into expressing the prayer you long to pray. Above all the aim is to enable the reader to pray from the heart using their own experiences. This will be of value to all who seek to pray better and also for those called upon to assist others to pray.
MARIE PATERSON
Gazette of newly admitted and licensed Readers

**BRADFORD**

Admitted and Licensed 25 September 2010

Paul Bartle ........................................... Barkerend, St Clement
Linda Gibson ...................................... Eccleshill, St Luke
David Mallard .................................... Eldwick, St Lawrence
Jacqueline Randall ............................. Shipley, St Peter
Sylvia Walker ...................................... Ben Rhydding, St John

Licensed
Rosamund Dannenberg ........................ Burley in Wharfedale, St Mary
Brian Aspey ...................................... Sutton with Cowling and Lofthouse
Daniel Bavington ............................... Giileswick, St Alkelda
Glyn Price ......................................... Burton-in-Lonsdale

**CHELMSFORD**

Admitted and Licensed 9 October 2010

Rose Braisby ...................................... Great Waltham, St Mary & St Lawrence with Ford End, St John the Evangelist
Sue Diplock ........................................ Walthamstow, St Peter in the Forest
Catherine Elliott ............................... Barkingside, St Laurence
Laura Garnham .................................. Warbness, All Saints
Carole Goddard ................................ Epping Team Ministry
Anne Harvey ..................................... Broomfield, St Mary
Theresa Lowe ..................................... Lichfield Way Villages
Hayley Morris ................................... Great Ilford, St Andrew
Elizabeth Price ................................. Chingford, St Peter & St Paul
Cheryl Ramballi ................................ Stratford, St John w Christchurch & St James
Chris Sheppard .................................. St Mary at Latton Harlow
Sandra Sykes ..................................... Great & Little Leighs w Little Waltham
Ruth Whitworth .................................. Great Clacton, St John the Baptist
Susan Wise ........................................ South Benfleet, St Mary the Virgin

Licensed
Sally Barton ...................................... Woodford, St Mary w St Philip & St James
Christine Fox-Springbett ..................... Woodford Bridge, St Paul
Cyril Salvador ................................... Walthamstow, St Barnabas w St James the Greater
Terry Streamer .................................. Halstead Area Team Ministry
Robin Whitworth ................................ Great Clacton, St John the Baptist

**CHESTER**

Admitted and Licensed 16 October 2010

Ian Abram .......................................... Grange, St Andrew
Duncan Goodwin .............................. Whitegate, St Mary & Little Budworth, St Peter
Ronald High ...................................... Baddiley, St Michael & Wrenbury, St Margaret with Burdym, St Mary & St Michael
Frances Ireland .................................. Latchford, St James
James Kemp ....................................... Davenhams, St Wilfred
Gail Miller ........................................ Elworth, St Peter & Thorn Croft Young Offenders Institution
Andrew Morris .................................. Tattenhall, St Alban
Anne Thompson ............................... United Benefice of Crewe Green & Haslington

Licensed
Molly Dow ......................................... Romiley, St Chad
Jeanette Lewis .................................... Weston, All Saints & St Mark with Shavington
Anne Mandy ....................................... Capeshome, Holy Trinity, All Saints, Siddington and Marton, St James and St Paul
Michael Riley .................................... Sale, St Paul
David Shercliff .................................. Bredbury, St Barnabas
Dorothy Woods .................................. Nantwich, St Mary

**CHICHESTER**

Admitted and Licensed 2 October 2010

Angela Brooke .................................. Broadwater Parish Team Ministry
Garry Butler ..................................... Broadwater Parish, Worthing
Susan Chance .................................... Hollington, St John the Evangelist
Diana Goodwin ................................. Cowden with Hammerwood
Adrian Grainge .................................. South Bersted, St Mary Magdalen
Susan Greener ................................. Old Heathfield, All Saints and Broad Oak, St George
Anita Haigh ....................................... Eastbourne, St Mary the Virgin and Eastbourne Deanery
Robin Holford ................................... Clayton with Keymer
William Howkins ............................. Easebourne, St Mary
Nicol Kinrade ................................. United Benefice of Bury with Houghton and Coldwaltham with Hardham
Hugh Lowries ................................... Poyning with Pyecombe, Edburton and Nyetimber
Patrick Pollicott-Reid ...................... Poyning with Pyecombe, Edburton and Nyetimber
Simon Quail ..................................... Rudgwick, Holy Trinity
Jonathan Rotheray ............................ Slaugham and Staplefield
Rosemary Towse ............................... North Bersted, Holy Cross
Ruth Walker ....................................... Dallington Rural Deanery

Licensed
Alan Currer .................................. Poyning with Pyecombe, Edburton and Nyetimber
Lynda Lynam .................................... Bexhill, St Barnabas
Linda Shepley .................................. Chichester, Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity

**DURHAM**

Admitted and Licensed 16 October 2010

Elisabeth Brown ................................. Cambridge, St Philip
Sharon Clark ..................................... Great and Little Abington, Hildersham, Balsham, Weston Colville, West Wickham and West Wraxall
Duncan Keys ..................................... Linton Team Ministry

Licensed
Patricia Highton ................................. Marham

**ELY**

Admitted and Licensed 23 October 2010

Susan Belfield ................................. Bere Ferrers with Bere Alston
Christine Channon ............................ Budleigh Salterton
Sandra Collier .................................. Hatherleigh, Meeth, Exbourne and Jacobstowe
Anne Dunlop ................................... Cathedral Church of St Peter in Exeter
Wendy Emlyn ................................... Brixham Team Ministry
Jillian Hobbs ..................................... South Tawton with Belsone
David Huntley .................................. Plymouth, St Andrew and Stonehouse, St Paul
Lynn Flint ......................................... South Molton Team Ministry
Sidney Humphries .............................. Littleham Cum Exmouth and Lynstone
Alison Rowe ...................................... Ashwater, Halwill, Beauchworth, Clanton, and Tetcott with Luffincott
Alan Steel ........................................ Otter Vale Team Ministry
Karen Wainwright ............................ Dolton; Idlesleigh with Dowlow;
Monkokehampton

Licensed
Richard Frost ................................. Pinhoe and Broadclyst Team Ministry
David Halpin .................................... Two Rivers Team Ministry
Audrey Hill ...................................... Otter Vale Team Ministry
J Clive Jobbins .................................. Ashreigney, St James

**HEREFORD**

Admitted and Licensed 28 June 2010

Marjorie Brooks ............................... Bridgnorth, St Mary Magdalen

29 June 2010

Susan Gaulton .................................. Ford, St Michael
Stephen Jones ................................... Ford, St Michael

**LICHFIELD**

Admitted and Licensed 4 September 2010

Susan Ammann ................................. All Saints with Christchurch, Burton-on-Trent
Julie Atkins .................................... Burslem, St Mark
Andrea Beech ................................... Pennfields, Wolverhampton
Andrea Beeston .................................................... Pennfields, Wolverhampton
Lynn Brough .................................................... Bucknall Team Ministry
Karen Davies ................................................. United Benefice of Crichtons with Dudleston and Welsh Frankton
Marlene Ferns ............................................... United Benefice of St Peter, Caverswall, St Andrew, Weston Coyney & All Saints, Dillhorne
Nicola Grey .................................................. Benefice of Uttoxeter Area
Stephen Hammersley ................................. Breerton and Rugeley Team Ministry
Philip Harper ................................................... Codsall
Jeanne Hughes ............................................. Benefice of Crichtons with Dudleston and Welsh Frankton
Olyl Passant .................................................. Cheshawine, Childs Ercall, Hinstock, Sambrook and Stoke on Tern
Karen Peach-Robinson ....................... St Mary and St Luke, Shareshill
Christine Violet Tough ............................................ Perton
Janine Wright ............................................... Pennfields, Wolverhampton

Licensed
Susan Gibson ........................................... Shawbury and Moreton Corbet and Stanton upon Hine Heath
Ian Host ...................................................... Brewood, St Mary and St Chad & Bishopwood, St John the Evangelist
Joy Leathers .................................................. Denstone, All Saints, Ellastone, St Peter, Stanton, St Mary, and Mayfield, St John the Baptist
Clive Lilley .................................................. Meir Heath, St Francis of Assisi & Normanot, The Holy Evangelists

LINCOLN

Admitted and Licensed 9 October 2010
Betty Groves ................................................. The Ancaster & Wilsford Group
Carol Jones .................................................. Welton, St Mary's
Jim Lewis ...................................................... Croby, St George
Mike Ongyerth .............................................. Crowland, St Mary, St Bart and St Guthlac
Sue Kitchen .................................................. The Burgh Group
Peter Cook .................................................. The Middle Rasen Group

Admitted and Licensed 8 September 2010
Carmen Buchanan ........................................ Bethnal Green, St Barnabas
Hazel Gilbert ................................................. Hackney Marsh Team Ministry
Modupe Kenku ............................................. Poplar Team Ministry
Michael Williams ............................................ Tufnell Park, St George

LONDON

18 September 2010
Olyve Johnson .............................................. Euston Road, St Pancras
Hesther Lewis ............................................... Tottenham, St Philip the Apostle
Wendy Markland ........................................... West Kilburn, St Luke
Julie Okpala .................................................. Stonegrove, St Peter
Angharad Parry Jones ....................................... West Hampstead, St Cuthbert

NEWCASTLE

Admitted and Licensed 4 October 2010
Lorna English .............................................. Newcastle, St John Grainger Street
Davina Radford ............................................. Prudhoe, St Mary Magdalene
Peter Ryder .................................................. Newcastle, Riding Mill
Roger Styring ................................................. Newcastle, Walkworth and Acklington

NORWICH

Admitted and Licensed 4 September 2010
Margaret Blackshaw .............................................. Burlingham, St Edmund with Lingwood, Strumpshaw with Hassingham and Buckenham
Frank Cliff .................................................... Great Yarmouth Team Ministry
Brenda Greig ................................................... Attleborough with Bristhorpe
Henry Hicks .................................................. Ashill, Carbrooke, Ovington and Saham Toney
John Long ..................................................... Rackheath with Salhouse
Gillian Persicke ............................................... Norwich, St Giles

Licensed
Julie Richardson .............................................. Spawton and Sporre
Susan Wells .................................................. Cromer

PORTSMOUTH

Admitted and Licensed 25 September 2010
Rachel Abbey ............................................... Fareham, Holy Trinity and St Columba
James Blake .................................................. Hambledon, St Peter and St Paul
Richard Brown ............................................. Clanfield, St James and Catherington, All Saints
Melanie Evans ............................................. Petersfield, St Peter and Burton, St Mary
Sandra Hagan .................................................. Havant, St Faith
Sheila Sharpe .................................................. Bridgemary, St Matthew
Gillian Smith .................................................. Wroxall, St John

RIPON AND LEEDS

Admitted and Licensed 4 October 2010
Patricia Ambler ............................................. Moorallerton, St John the Evangelist
Kathleen Barker ............................................. Harrogate, St Mark
Dolores Hewitt ............................................. Benefice of Hawksworth Wood
Christopher Ives .......................................... Harrogate, St Mark
Janet Kramer .................................................. Headingley, St Michael
Sarah Orme .................................................. Meanwood, Holy Trinity
Carolyne Pepper ............................................. Benefice of Leeds, St Aidan

Licensed
Ann Whitfield ............................................. Oulton, St John with Woodlesford and Methley, St Oswald with Micklethwaite

SALISBURY

Admitted and Licensed 9 October 2010
Roy Brown ..................................................... Trowbridge, St Thomas and West Ashton
Keith Budgell ................................................ Vale of the White Hart
Yvonne Buckland ............................................ Bride Valley

Licensed
Eileen Berger ................................................ Bishopstrow and Boreham
Philip Doughty .............................................. Bridport and Valeys Group Ministry
Elizabeth Lang ............................................. Redhorn Team
Brian Martin .................................................. Upper Stour
Katherine Venning ......................................... Upper Wyley Valley Team

SOUTHWAKE

Admitted and Licensed 18 October 2010
Christiana Awuegbe ........................................ Merstham & Gatton United Benefice
Martin Calderbank .......................................... Putney, St Margaret
Toni-Nicola Clark ............................................ Wallington, Holy Trinity
Anne Currie .................................................. Redhill, St Matthew
Julie Dunstan .................................................. West Dulwich, All Saints
Paul Harris .................................................... Tooting, All Saints
Cicelyn Hinds .................................................. South Norwood, St Mark
Joy Middleton ................................................. Cheam Team Ministry
Jillian Priest .................................................. Cheam Team Ministry
Eileen Ross ................................................... Telford Park, St Thomas the Baptist
Sheila Tunstall ................................................ Battersea Fields
Paul Wynter .................................................. Lewisham, St Mary

SOUTHWELL AND NOTTINGHAM

Admitted and Licensed 9 October 2010
Christian Blainey ........................................... Mansfield, St John with St Mary
Christopher Asquith ........................................ Mansfield, St Barnabas, Chilwell, Christ Church and Nook, St Barnabas with Inham
Lesley Cohen .................................................. Sherwood, St Martin
Richard Davis ............................................. Gisburn, Christ Church and Nook
Joanne Harley .................................................. Aspley, St Margaret
Jane Haywood .............................................. Hucknall Team Ministry
Jane Hopkins .................................................. Cinderhill, Christ Church
Marcel Leaver .................................................. Ravenshead, St Peter
Anna Leyden .................................................. Lenton Abbey, St Barnabas, Chilwell, Christ Church and Nook, St Barnabas with Inham

Licensed
Andrew Pointon ............................................. Hucknall Team Ministry
Graham Robinson ........................................... Blyth, St Mary and St Martin, Ranskill, St Barnabas and Scrooby, St Wilfred
Michael Ross .................................................. Bramcote, St Michael and All Angels
George Russell ............................................. Lenton Abbey, St Barnabas, Chilwell, Christ Church and Nook, St Barnabas with Inham
Stephanie Smart ............................................. Rainworth, St Simon and St Jude and Bilborough, St Barnabas with Inham
Christopher Smedley ....................................... Nottingham, All Saints, St Mary and St Peter
Catherine Taylor ............................................. Bestwood, St Matthew and St Philip
Anthony Webb .............................................. Aspley, St Margaret

WAKEFIELD

Admitted and Licensed 26 September 2010
Mandy Aspland ............................................. Meltham, Christ the King
Martin Bailes .................................................. Lupset, St George & Thores, St James
Kate Currie .................................................... Thornhill, St Michael and All Angels
John McDermott ........................................... Rawther, St James
Linda Musgrave ............................................. Ossett & Gawthorpe, Trinity Church
Simon Scott ................................................... Norland, St Luke
John Seabridge .............................................. Lepton, St John
Need to know more?

CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS
http://www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk/contact_us/

‘In 2001 the recognised Christian groups in the three main political parties came together to set up this joint initiative. As Christians in Politics we believe the time is ripe for many Christians to move beyond single-issue campaigning to full involvement with the mainstream political parties, believing that kingdom values should infuse every area of public policy, as the yeast works through the dough. We are following a call to be salt and light, seeing politics as service and mission, following Jesus’ model of incarnation and involvement’
http://www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk/contact_us/

CHRISTIANS IN PARLIAMENT
http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/

CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
http://www.ccfwebsite.com/home.shtml

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CHRISTIAN FORUM
http://www.ldcf.net/

CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT
http://www.thecsm.org.uk

BISHOPS IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS
http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/bishopsinlords
http://www.susa.info

CHRISTIAN TODAY
http://www.christiantoday.com/

SUSA
Salt and light in politics and government is an organisation which encourages and equips Christians in the UK to become more extensively and effectively engaged in politics and government. Project SUSA is led by Bible Society with support from 24-7 Prayer (see below). The initiative is endorsed by Christians in Politics, the official cross-party organisation for Christian groups in the main UK political parties. SUSA has a great collection of research, reports, videos, books, podcasts and links to help you understand how your faith and politics match up

ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS ROADSHOWS, MARCH 2011
SUSA has teamed up with Christians in Politics and a group of leading Christian organisations to share the message that engagement in politics as followers of Jesus is ‘biblical, missional, and possible’. Speakers will range from MPs and peers through leading activists to ‘ordinary Christians’ who are inspiring examples of leadership and service in their own communities. Information from the SUSA website: www.susa.info

24-7 Prayer in the UK has been involved in Parliament since 2004. They pray with Christians in Parliament every Thursday lunchtime in Portcullis House (the new parliamentary building opposite Big Ben). This mostly involves Christians who work inside the parliamentary estate (support staff, researchers, interns, etc) and is all about supporting each other to be a witness in the jobs that they do. 24-7 Prayer is an interdenominational movement of prayer, mission and justice that began with a single, student-led prayer vigil in Chichester in 1999. It has since spread to more than 100 countries. The movement has given rise to numerous new initiatives, communities and ministries particularly focusing on the poor, the marginalised, students and those outside the reach of normal expressions of church. The missional communities, inspired by ancient Celtic monasticism, are generically known as Boiler Rooms though they may also be known by a local name – such as Houses of Prayer. More information from: http://uk.24-7prayer.com

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND
http://www.ctbi.org.uk/

In November 2010, members of the networks of CTBi met to reflect upon the Church in the public square. The presentations are available as MP3 downloads:

Proclaiming the Christian Mystery in the Public Square
Most Rev’d Vincent Nichols, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster

Speaking with a forked tongue? Christians in the public square
Professor Gavin D’Costa, Professor of Christian Theology, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Bristol.

Doing Justice in the Public Square
Revd Dr Kathy Galloway, Head of Christian Aid Scotland

JUBILEE CENTRE RESOURCES
Jubilee Centre home page:
http://www.jubilee-centre.org/
Jubilee Centre blog:
http://www.jubilee-centre.org/jubilee/blogs.php
Jubilee Centre resources:
http://www.jubilee-centre.org/resources
Jubilee Centre news pages:
Jubilee Centre support pages:
http://www.jubilee-centre.org/engage/support_us
Jubilee Centre on Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/pages/Jubilee-Centre/65705019864
Jubilee Centre on Twitter:
http://twitter.com/JubileeCentre

DID YOU KNOW...

CHRISTIANS DESERT THE MIDDLE EAST
Christian minorities in Middle Eastern countries are shrinking as they flee persecution and as Islamic populations outbreed them. The Independent called the Christian flight an exodus ‘of almost biblical proportions’. Nearly half of Iraq’s Christians have left, mostly in October 2010 via Bible Society’s regular e-mail updates to which you can subscribe.
The deaths of the following Readers have been notified to us.

**Chester**  
Sheila Hooper  
Brian Maydew

**London**  
David Royce  
John Shaw

**Manchester**  
William (Bill) J Baker  
Kenneth Hunt

**Norwich**  
Jennifer Adams  
Cynthia Chitsiga  
Albert Davis  
Mr D G Jones  
Mr A L Lawrence  
William Trudgeon

**Southwark**  
Arthur Featherstone  
Norma Glyde  
Ted Halon  
Eric Holman  
Michael Stratton  
Eric Tripp

**Southwell & Nottingham**  
Mrs Gill Sprake

**St Albans**  
John K Taggart

**Worcester**  
A J Wormington

**Monmouth**  
Edward Leake

May they rest in peace.

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**Gleanings**

One Reader wrote to me to say that she very much looks forward to reading every issue of The Reader. However she felt that she must write in response to the article on the Holy Land study tour (Tony Connell, Winter 2010) as together with her husband she also joined a study tour arranged by CMS to Palestine/Israel. She says ‘Tony refers to Israel’s security wall built following attacks by suicide bombers. This gives the impression that this is indeed a security wall. It is in fact continuing to be built as a separation wall which encroaches more and more into Palestinian land, dividing Palestinian homes from their farmland thus causing economic hardship. The checkpoints severely restrict movement, and Israel continues to illegally occupy the Palestinian Territories building more and more settlements (UN resolution 194). Bethlehem is now almost entirely encircled by the wall. Tony is right that the place is an ‘enigma’ which will ‘never leave your memory or your heart’. We met some wonderful Palestinian Christians who asked us to make sure that the true story is told.’

On the subject of book reviews, another Reader says ‘In response to your request for comment on the books reviewed in the Winter 2010 edition, I would say that I find the range of books reviewed and the reviews themselves very useful - especially because they are generally so frank, practical and to the point. Indeed, I find the whole of the magazine useful reading and I am continually impressed by its quality.’

Another Reader writes that he read the review of the book *Living with Jesus*, and saw this comment: ‘One of the joys of being a Reader is the opportunities we have of moving across parish and deanery boundaries to serve as worship leaders, deacons, preachers and teachers in different spiritual traditions’. He comments that this is not his experience and he does not think it is the experience of other Readers in his area and would be interested to know the experience of others.

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**Last Word**

Elsewhere in this issue the Bishop of Sodor and Man writes about where the Reader movement should be going from here, following the discussions surrounding Reader Upbeat. An academic symposium to be held at the end of November should help him crystallise his thoughts before making a presentation to the House of Bishops.

One of the issues is about our licences. Who else besides Readers should be licensed, and are there any Readers who perhaps should not have a licence at all? Let’s deal with the first point first. We as Readers receive licences (and not mere authorisation – there is a difference) because we have theological training and through that are granted the authority to preach and lead public worship. There are some other people who are licensed as well. They are not very numerous, but include for example the officers of the Church Army, and a number of Anglican monks and nuns.

Any discussions about the importance of licences, as against simple local diocesan permissions, will necessarily include these other people, and so they are being ‘invited on board’.

The second point is more contentious. I don’t actually think there are very many Readers who should not be licensed – but I think there may be a handful. The ‘gold standard’ of a licence implies thorough training to a high academic standard, a willingness to maintain standards by further study once licensed, and to accept the disciplines that being treated in this way could require. It is just possible that a very few Readers whose ministry is not primarily catechetical might welcome working under the more relaxed standards of a local diocesan authorisation.

The question of licences will be part of the future agenda. The thoughts above on the subject are mine alone. What are yours? If you feel concerned about these issues, please let the CRC Executive know through our office in London.

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Alan Wakeley  
Secretary,  
Central Readers’ Council
Enjoy a break at Lee Abbey!
Conference, Retreat and Holiday Centre in beautiful North Devon

Conferences to resource church leaders during 2011 include:

14-18 March (Mon-Fri)
Judy Howard
Lent Retreat: O God, you search me and you know me
Focus on: silent retreat.

25-29 April (Mon-Fri)
Ian Paul, Dean of Studies, St John’s, Nottingham
Living in three dimensions
Focus on: living with purpose, bearing suffering, living lives of praise.

23-27 May (Mon-Fri)
Keith Ward, Professional Research Fellow in Philosophy of Religion
Responding to the new atheism
Focus on: a Christian response to Dawkins et al.

19-23 September (Mon-Fri)
Bishop George Cassidy, Chair of Lee Abbey Council
Professor G. Harrison, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, Bristol University
Pastoral care in today’s church
Focus on: coping with today's increasing pastoral needs.

30 September-2 October (Fri-Sun)
Dr Michael Ward, Chaplain St Peter’s College, Oxford,
et leading expert on C.S. Lewis
Planet Narnia
Focus on: God's creation viewed through the Narnia Chronicles.

3-7 October (Mon-Fri)
James Catford, Group CEO of Bible Society
Life with God
Focus on: how to achieve kingdom living as a family, community, and nation.

10-14 October (Mon-Fri)
Revd Dr John Polkinghorne
The friendship of science and religion
Focus on: the dialogue between science and religion. Topics will include the search for truth, creation and prayer and providence.

For full details of these and many other exciting conferences visit www.leeabbey.org.uk
Tel: 01598 752621 Email: relax@leeabbey.org.uk