Readers’ Robes from J&M

The Reader online www.readers.co.cele.anglican.org

Perspective always depends on where you are standing. I learnt this when I was at Art School years ago and what is true in two dimensions is true for the rest of life too. Perspective helps us to understand. I am looking at and how to interpret what we see. Some ‘perspectives’ we consider in this issue include atheism, business ethics, assisted suicide, debt and family life, and politics and ‘spin’, so there are plenty of opportunities to see how these authors view these challenges.

Late summer is a time of ends as well as new beginnings. We have two articles that help us think about celebrating harvest – the end of the year of growth in the natural world. Meanwhile, we also anticipate that which is new, and we will soon be focusing on Mark’s gospel as the theme gospel in the lectionary for “Year B”. Two members of The Reader editorial team have produced an important article ‘Up to the Mark’ which takes a careful and very helpful look at commentaries available to us. Preaching is however not only the way of using words. Another one is story telling. The first issue next year will be entitled ‘Stories and storytelling’ and therefore I am inviting you to consider writing a story and sending it to me for possible publication. It should be based on biblical material and needs to be around 900 words maximum. Please send it to me with your contact details by mid November at the latest, and include a note about the age range you intend – younger children; junior school or secondary age children and of course adults. You may even think of story telling as a way of communicating with those with learning difficulties – I leave it to you.

Meanwhile, the final issue for this year is entitled ‘Meet the author’ and hopefully will profile some interesting people and encourage you to expand your reading. Kirsty Anderson, our Reviews Editor, has been enjoying being involved in researching this.

Looking further ahead, themes for later in 2015 include ‘Chaplaincies’ and John’s Gospel. I should be especially interested to hear from any Readers who would like to consider making a contribution to these, and particularly from those of you who work as chaplains in various contexts. However I am also happy to receive proposals from potential writers for articles on any topic relevant to Reader ministry. So thinking caps on please!

Meanwhile, open this up and consider the perspective you find! Yours in Christ,

Heather Fenton
Editor

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Every culture has its ancient creation myth and this is atheism’s. As if it happens, it’s only about 150 years old but like all good creation myths it seems older than it really is.

The belief that atheism is basically all about science and reason runs deep and has an enviable indifference to evidence. I was recently told by an interviewer that you couldn’t believe in God these days because of the Big Bang. The fact that the Big Bang theory originated with Monseigneur Georges Lemaître, a Roman Catholic priest, and that it was long resisted on account of seeming too theistic in its implications were not, it seems, known.

The reality is that the history of atheism, at least in the West, has little to do with science or philosophy and rather more to do with politics. Christianity was the foundation of early modern European culture. Belief in God determined the way people lived, the way they were governed, and the way they structured society. It regulated their days, weeks, years, their births, marriages and deaths. It told them what to hope for and what to fear. It legitimised communities, kingdoms and empires. It explained the past, present and future, earth, heaven, the heavens, human origin, purpose and destiny. It was the key in which all life, human and natural, was composed (if not necessarily played). The implications for atheism were clear. To undermine religion was, in the words of the English Chief Justice in 1676, ‘to dissolve all those obligations whereby the civil societies are preserved’.

The problem was there were many who did want to challenge God because, in his varying ecclesiastical guise, underpinned the status quo and its greater or lesser levels of political, social and moral oppression. Grasping this helps us understand why atheism took different paths in otherwise similar countries, and why we do better to speak of atheism than of one, holy, catholic and apostolic atheism.

Because Christianity played subtly different roles in different countries, atheism took different paths. The rigidly authoritarian Catholic ancien régime in France created the angry atheism of Baron d’Holbach and (the priest) Jean Meilas. By contrast, Britain’s comparatively tolerant political settlement and its rational, anti-enthusiastic, self-satisfied established churches provided the soil in which the sceptical, almost agnostic, unbelief of David Hume and Edward Gibbon grew.

The political disappointments and intellectual repression of early 19th century Germany helped turn the philosophers Georg Hegel’s young disciples away from his (questionable) Christianity towards a highly influential, intellectual atheism which placed humanity, rather than God, at the apex of history. By contrast, the often brutal state orthodoxy of later 19th century Russia produced Europe’s most revolutionary and anarchistic atheists, some of whom were prepared to stop at nothing to see God overthrown.

Finally, across the Atlantic, the ‘wall of separation’ that the Founding Fathers erected between church and state, effectively prevented the development of atheism altogether. If you want to know the reason why atheism was the dog that didn’t bark in what became the most self-consciously modern, scientifically-developed country on the planet, this is surely it.

Of course, it was never as straightforward as one kind of atheism per country. Indeed, as the phenomenon grew, it was easy to find angry atheists, sceptical atheists, violent atheists, ritualised atheists, philosophical atheists, libertine atheists, nihilistic atheists in any country you choose. Where and when they appeared, and how, and in what numbers had precious little to do with ‘science’ or evolution, let alone the Big Bang, and everything to do with the kind of countries that underpinned the kind of religion, they confronted.

And so it is today: the eruption of the so-called New Atheism over the last ten years, and which has captured headlines, is transparently a socially and politically-driven phenomenon, a reaction against the scaling up and down of what numbers had precious little to do with ‘science’ or evolution, let alone the Big Bang, and everything to do with the kind of countries that underpinned the kind of religious circumstances, were supposedly inevitable process of global secularisation and, more importantly, the emergence of a politically-muscular Religious Right in America, and more murderous political Islam across the globe. The New Atheists, spiritual descendants of the French philosophers who were equally contemptuous of the religious ideologies which were deeply anti-theistic because (aspects of) contemporary theism gave them good reason to be that way.

Even at their most prominent, however, the New Atheists never occluded other kinds of atheism. During the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, the British columnist Polly Toynbee wrote an article in which she claimed that the ‘tyranny’ of the monarchy ties in to its religious roots, that the monarchy is a secular state but in its spiritual power…subjugating the national imagination, infantilising us with fake imaginations and a bogus heritage of our island story’ It was a courageous piece to publish when pretty much everyone else was in a good mood. More to the point, this was an unashamed Old Atheism, a relic of the secular sub-Marxist creed that hung around dark alleys and pub back rooms during the late Victorian period.

Religious atheism is another important strand in the mix, with roots that go back to the second quarter of the 19th century. This was a time when philosophically-minded German atheists decided that Christianity, was simply a misguided attempt to celebrate man, and ritually-minded French atheists independently put similar ideas into practice, trying to replace Catholicism with something more ‘rational’ (they failed).

This kind of religious atheism went through various different incarnations, from the baroque lunacies of Auguste Comte’s Religion of Humanity to the rather more muted and even melancholic example of the Ethical Unions and Ethical Churches of the late 19th century. Today it still exists, although in rather various forms. The British Humanist Association, which has its origins in the Ethical Movement and behind that the Religion of Humanity, offers non-believers ceremonies, funerals and memorials officiated over by accredited humanist celebrants’ in a manner that pays silent homage to its quasi-religious origins. The BHA is somewhat nervous about admitting this religious debt. Not so others. Alain de Boton’s recent best-selling Religion for Atheists openly invites non-believers to steal forms of life and practice from religions.

The so-called ‘atheist churches’, which have enthusiastically thrown open their doors, first in North London, then in several other cities in Britain and elsewhere, have taken him at his word, gathering, singing, and sermonising every month or so.

Still another strand of atheism, although rather better known on the continent than in the UK, is a kind of nihilistic atheism, which takes the big ideas of the secular age rather than God, at the apex of history. It is somewhat more seriously than do other athe creeds. One of these big ideas is Nietzsche’s ‘Death of God’ in which the ‘same disease that killed God has withered away ideas like Truth, Reason and Humanity’, and where ‘far from triumphantly emerging, once Christianity had died, from the religious debt. Not so others. Alain de Boton’s recent best-selling Religion for Atheists openly invites non-believers to steal forms of life and practice from religions.

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After that, the attacks increased in frequency until one day the rebel was able to show the people what they had long known themselves. The monster had never actually existed. It was just a tale told by the very clever men to keep themselves in riches, and power. Slowly the truth spread and although some very clever men still cling to riches and power, and some very stupid ones still believe, eventually, wonderfully, the world is set free.
Business ethics
A catholic perspective

It is alarmingly easy to bring to mind significant issues that fall into the broad category of business (or more generally organisational) ethics. The mis-selling of PPI, phone hacking at the News of the World, the horse meat scandal, tax avoidance, the fixing of the LIBOR rate and, of course, the global financial crisis in 2008 and the subsequent economic impact – behind each of these lies a failure of ethics. A recent report by the influential Chartered Management Institute acknowledged as much: ‘We do not face a crisis of politics, of religion or of economics; we face a crisis of ethics’.ii

It is also alarmingly easy to be critical of such activities without offering much by way of a serious critique or constructive ways forward. As Christians, and as Readers called to bring to ‘the world’ and our faith into conversation with each other, where do we go from here? There is, of course, useful resources available from an Anglican perspective – Richard Higgson’s work at Ridley Hall, Cambridge under the banner of ‘Faith in Business Ethics’ and a Reader in the Diocese of Durham.iii

A Reader in the Diocese of Durham.

Of course, there are criticisms that can be directed at CST. As noted, the teaching is formed from a combination of a wide range of documents and contributions over an extended period of time. As such, it does not offer a fully systematic account. But it is also not only ‘the common end of every human being and of the whole species, but also the ultimate cause of all good’.iv It but also has a human dimension: the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their full employment, since no one should be left to their own devices, provided of course that they also recognise the principle of solidarity and their responsibilities to others.

In combination, solidarity and subsidiarity should lead to the common good. This idea begins with a theological dimension: it seems to me, provides a human dimension: the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their full employment, since no one should be left to their own devices, provided of course that they also recognise the principle of solidarity and their responsibilities to others.

solidarity recognises that we are all social beings, connected to and dependent upon each other, and hence with responsibilities to others.

Managers are similarly encouraged to exercise a duty of care not only for the direct economic objectives of their firms, but also for wider economic efficiency, care of capital (since capital represents the means of production), and care for the dignity of workers. Being responsible for finite goods – which thereby introduces an ecological perspective in taking care of creation – is also incorporated, and there is evidence of support for a stakeholder, rather than shareholder, understanding of the purpose of the firm. So while CST as fundamental to Catholic ethics with its organisation, it offers a convincing theological and social ethic. Its use would enable not only a serious critique of the kinds of issues with which this article began, but also some pointers as to what principles might be adhered to. And this should help in suggestions as to what might be done to restore our economic life together to a point where it contributes systemically to the common good.

Geoff Moore is Professor of Business Ethics at Durham University Business School and a Reader in the Diocese of Durham.

ii See www.ridley.cam.ac.uk/centre/
iii See www.transferringbusiness.net.
iv See www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/

v See www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/pages/about-justin-welby.html.
vi Durham University’s Centre for Catholic Studies is in the process of appointing to a Chair in Catholic Social Thought and Practice.


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The issue of assisted suicide is, in public consciousness at least, a fairly modern one. Modern medicine and diagnostics have provided us with the ability to predict, with some degree of accuracy, the outcome of our diseases. Hence, according to some at least, we have the ability to determine the end of our lives. The ability to ‘commit’ or complete suicide is regarded as a right which must be permitted for those who, due to disability, usually as the result of illness, are prevented from killing themselves. Thus, the concept of assisted suicide has appeared on the political agenda of many western countries. In the UK, the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill, brought to the House of Lords by Lord Falconer (http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2013-14/assisteddying.html accessed 18th March 2014), is still before Parliament. In Belgium, children have recently been permitted to request and obtain euthanasia (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/europe-26181615 accessed 18th March 2014). It seems that only in Germany and Austria, both countries with recent memories of genocides, that euthanasia is not being debated (James Roberts, ‘At the hour of our death,’ The Tablet 22 February 2014, pp 5-6).

We need a little clarity as to what, exactly, February 2014, pp 5-6). It seems that as Christian ministers, however, we are called to consider a theological response to these proposals and, indeed, to the whole question of end-of-life issues. The medical professions can only take us so far. The ethos of assisted suicide is a major question for which, often, medical personnel do not feel equipped.

The problem we face is that of how best to respond to world events such as assisted suicide an expectation of peace, but what they expect is non-existence. The hope for peace is a hope for something that can be experienced, but the expectation for non-existence is, of course, a circumstance which precludes the experience of peace. The outcome of this consideration for an atheist advocate of assisted suicide seems to be, therefore, that the hope for peace as it were, smuggles back in to the proposition that such beliefs are, at best, ungrateful to the goodness of the Lord which Augustine himself had to face. His suggestion, coupled with traditional church teaching that suicide is not an option for the Christian, nor permitted by the church, scripture or tradition, can help us to find a position which is both theologically sound and can advocate compassion in desperate situations.

As ministers of the Gospel, Readers need to be prepared theologically before difficult pastoral questions arise. It may be that some in our churches have been convinced by the public debates over assisted suicide and think any emerging questions are separable in the circumstances. One person commented to me that we can put our pets to sleep gently, but we cannot do the same for people who are desperately ill, and that the difference seems unfair. With the advance of modern medicine and its ability to keep people alive for longer, end of life issues such as assisted suicide are going to remain, in one form or another, debated in the public domain. Augustine can help us gain a Christian perspective on the matter. The issues facing us are complex, and, of course, not exactly those which Augustine himself had to face. His argument, which I have summarized above, is, firstly, not one to be used in a pastoral situation, as he did not. The awful situations which Christians in Rome found themselves in in the early fifth century should, he suggested, be treated with due seriousness and the victims treated with compassion. Similarly, today, people facing terminal illness should not be subject to a theological theological discourse about suicide. They are in dire need of love and care.

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When we look at our society today, what do we see? To be sure it’s a confusing picture. Things seem to be fluid, even contradictory. Many of the things that we have come to rely on, even depend on, seem to be changing. Sometimes it can feel like the ground is shifting beneath our feet, and making sense of it all, gaining a reliable perspective, can be difficult. Our public leaders, experts and commentators don’t help to clarify things. Politicians are always keen to ‘spin’ different views of reality. Economy offices are not only on the causes and solutions of our problems, but also on whether the problems are actually problems at all. And the media? Well, I think it’s fair to say that there’s a daily scrum for our attention, for our views of what’s happening in society and for our views of what should be happening.

In these confusing times, this is clearly important for Christians to try and develop a way of life that corresponds with reality. So, if we’re serious about valuing truth above opinion maybe the question we should first be asking is: what does God see when he looks at society? Seeking this kind of perspective is often associated with the idea of ‘worldview’. Although rooted in faith (even for atheists), worldviews should:

- be rational (supported by evidence);
- give a satisfying and comprehensive explanation of reality, and should provide a satisfactory basis for living (individually and collectively).

In short, a worldview locates us in the story of life and provides answers to the big questions.

For the Christian this means seeing life, the universe and everything through the lens of the Bible, on the basis that, as the former Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright affirms, the Bible is ‘public truth’. By this he means that it is true for all people, in all places, at all times. Whether people are conscious of it or not, and regardless of any other ideas or philosophies, the Bible claims to be the real world.

In the Bible God, or an angel of God, asked people like Jeremiah, Amos, Zechariah and others the question: ‘What do you see? God is not seeking visual help here. He doesn’t need spectacles. No. He is seeking to confirm his view of what’s really happening through his people. He is giving them his eyes.

So, apart from specific revelation, how do we gain God’s perspective on what’s happening on a day to day basis? The great evangelical theologian John Scott urged Christians to engage with society ‘by double listening’ – holding a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other – and looking for the connections and disconnections between the two. On this basis, what are the issues we see when he looks at society? Seeking this first be asking is: what does God see when he looks at society? Seeking this should first be asking is: what does God see when he looks at society?

The Alliance sees this as an exciting time for the church in the UK. We want to encourage Christians to provide hope, vision and practical help through an emphasis on public leadership in the decades to come. That’s why we’ve been busy mapping Christian social engagement across the UK, collating the stories of what is actually happening and developing training for churches through www.thepublicleader.com. Our aim is to foster a culture of public leadership in the UK church so that Christians are playing a key role in delivering real and lasting civic renewal.

Even so, as we emerge from the failed experiment of the secular century, our Faith in the Community report also found that secularism is still a dominant position for many local authorities. Although they increasingly appreciate the role that faith groups are playing in regenerating our towns and cities, many council employees don’t really understand the language and nature of faith. At the Alliance, we see addressing this widespread religious illiteracy is an urgent educational task for the church.

Last year, the Alliance produced the public report entitled: Faith in the Community, about strengthening ties between faith groups and local authorities. From a survey completed by 155 local authorities it showed that faith groups are delivering a huge and diverse range of services across the UK. Everything from food banks, debt counselling, street pastors, education, welfare etc. Even anger management courses and dog handling! The report looked at capacity issues, recruitment, knowledge of religion in local authorities, and barriers such as perceptions about evangelism, exclusivity and equality. It found that such perceptions were widespread, and that partnerships with faith groups were greatly appreciated. Most notably it illustrated that this valuable and in many cases vital work
One of the constant challenges we face is to understand the mission of the church. God’s people, in our ceaselessly changing cultural environment. This article is to remind us that the Gospels – written for the Christian community – provide us with a valuable resource for deepening our reflection on our mission. We will concentrate on Jesus ‘sermon’ in Nazareth which only Luke provides (Luke 4: 16 – 30). The indications before and after about Jesus teaching in their synagogues indicates that Luke saw this as an indication of the message of Jesus (see 4:15, 44) and thus of greater relevance than simply a one-off sermon in Nazareth! There are several Gospel passages which provide us with apparently direct insights into the disciples’ mission and so warrant close consideration by our churches today for our mission. These include, Luke 9: 1-6 (compare Matthew 10: 1-5; Mark 6: 7 -13), 10: 1 -12: 24; 45 -50 and Matthew 28: 16 -20; John 20: 19 -23. Even with these (as indeed also with Acts) we cannot take them as simple models to be copied. To make one obvious point, according to Matthew the disciples are to restrict their mission to Jews (10: 5-6), but that was not a comprehensive restriction but for that specific time as Matthew 28: 19 demonstrates. Maybe we need to be even more careful with Jesus’ own mission mandate, but equally it would be folly to disregard this as a source of reflection for our mission today. So we turn our attention to Luke 4: 16 -30.

Perspectives on Jesus mission: our mission

David Spriggs is a freelance writer and editor

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In this very specific place at this very specific time Jesus was growing, working, relating, loving and caring as part of God’s mission, in a rather insignificant town called Nazareth. Plate put up so to commemorate him to his benefit but on this occasion his life. Then even Jesus and Nazareth went together.

As our passage indicates, even before Jesus started to preach and heal, let alone before this sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth, his mission was well underway. So for thirty years he carried out God’s purposes and mission by being there. In this backwater of a place, in this insignificant small town or village in the north, where people spoke with strange accents, God’s son was carrying out God’s work not by what he said or did but by who he was and who he was becoming! The first contribution that Jesus, or us for that matter, can make is through being there – even in a place like Nazareth. He, and we as his disciples, can reshape the destiny of the places where we are. But only if we are different!

Luke 2: 41-52 tells us that Jesus was deeply embedded in culture. Like most people he made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, with all that implied about sharing in the life of a rural community and participating in the history of his people. But it also tells us that he grew up there, learning, learning to question, learning to be obedient. We know from his links to his father Joseph that he would learn the trade of a carpenter. He also, sometime after his twelfth birthday, learnt of death with the bereavement of his father. This brought him, as the oldest son, profound responsibilities for his mother and siblings. Through the ordinary events of life Jesus was carrying out God’s mission; at work, as well as at the synagogue. In this very specific place, at this very specific time, Jesus was growing, working, relating, loving and caring as part of God’s mission, a rather insignificant town called Nazareth. This is what the incarnation means. He came into our neighbourhood! But not only did he live there, by being there he transformed it. That is why Nazareth today is what it is. Jesus is associated with it. He did this, not only by being part of his culture and community, but also by being different. He knew that he was there for another reason than simply belonging to Nazareth. In Jerusalem he had to be ‘in my Father’s house’ (2: 49) and dedicated not by family, or town boundaries, not even by the oppressive Romans, but by his knowledge that God was his true father so he was there for God’s purposes. This makes it understandable why he associated himself with the local synagogue. By our standards it is a recalcitrant (whether ‘Soul Saviour’ or glorious liturgy complete with grand choral singing). Reciting the Shema (Deuteronomy 6: 4-6), uttering some blessings, listening to scripture in Hebrew and then to a commentary on the reading with a few psalms thrown in, that was about it, week in and week out. The people were very ordinary too, but Jesus was there because he recognised the need to worship with God’s people to sustain his daily life for the mission of God. That’s why we need to think carefully about how we can be with God’s people ‘as a custom’ (Luke 4: 16), as often as we possibly can, so we can grow as well as receive to sustain one another in our Christian living.

How can we live – at work, in our street, at the supermarket and football match, in the coffee shop or pub – in such a way that we affirm the importance of our location and its people, its culture and also know that we are living here for Jesus of Nazareth? How can we grow up and grow old, learn and learn of suffering as well as joy, in such a way that God shines through us? How can our church – its worship and its activities – bring Christ into our neighbourhood? Just as Jesus transformed Nazareth’s reputation by being there, so we can transform our place by being ‘here’ for Jesus, along with all the other Christians.

If we live well for God here we carry out his mission with every breath we take, not by doing anything special but by being ordinary for God.

DISCERNING GOD’S MISSION

Verses 14 -16 of Luke 4 provide insights as to how Jesus arrived at his understanding of his mission. There are three key features which can help us discern God’s purposes for us. Clearly the synagogue mated – being with other believers is important for us. Partly this is to ensure that through worship we are in tune with God. But equally this is important for discerning our misogynacies, opening our hearts and minds to God (inspiration) and encouraging us to keep walking with God. We need one another.

He was very familiar with the Scriptures. Here he could find his way to the right chapter of Isaiah in a scroll. Scrolls are much harder to navigate than a book! But this is even clearer in the story of his temptations in Luke 4: 1 -13. Each time satan tempts him he uses scripture to discern the temptation to choose another kind of mission! Like Jesus we need to know the scriptures thoroughly – not single verses or special promises – but the whole sweep of it:

- Discover the intentions and purposes of God, not only to redeem human kind but to restore his whole creation (Genesis 1 and Revelation).
- Be deeply aware of the true character of God – holy, righteous, faithful, compassionate, forgiving and, above all, LOVE.
- Discover that God’s purposes can appear rather different at different times. So our mission may not be precisely the same as that of Abraham, or Isaiah or even Jesus.

But equally Jesus was dependent on the Holy Spirit (verse 18).

Jesus was aware of, and alive, in the Spirit (see Luke 13: 45; 1:27; 3:21-22; 4:14). But here he tells us he was ‘anointed’. This takes us back to his baptism (Luke 3: 21 – 23).

Anointed means we are approved of; scripture 23 speaks of ‘head anointed with oil’. God is showing everyone that he is chosen

In the next issue David will explore the content of Jesus’ mission as indicated in Luke 4: 16 – 30.

1 There are several more-extensive discussions of this passage which warrant careful consideration. These include D Bosch Transforming Aktion, Orbis 1991, pages 89, 100 – 113 (Bosch explores the implications for poor and wealthy and vengeance with peace and forgiveness), H Pocket and V Ramachandran, The Message of Mission, WCC, 2003, pages 157 – 171 (Here the emphasis is on the freedom Jesus brings but it also focuses on the praxis agenda.) I take a different route by exploring the passage in the context of Luke’s Gospel. It seems to me imperative that this passage is read in the light of what the Gospel reports Jesus went on to do.

2 See eg John 14:16; Acts 2: 36
THEME

Egypt with a promise of freedom.

They were led out of the norm. They had inherited the debt of sceptical. They knew nothing different. They were slaves. (You can, of course, read a then slaves. And their children's children for them as slaves. And their children were Israelites asked the Egyptians to take over got increasingly difficult, eventually the family', the Israelites, grew in number. Life him. They had wives. They had children. and fair. To lend and to borrow is to be drawn into real relationships that the lending and borrowing of money becomes destructive. And so we come full circle. What can we learn from the Israelites as they tried to find ways to ensure the slavery of the debt trap is not perpetuated? What can you do to spread the message of human flourishing.

THE WORLD TODAY

The Children's Society has carried out substantial research into the impact of debt on children, outlined in The Debt Trap. The evidence shows that when debt gets out of control it can damage children's well-being through the undermining of human relationships. At its most pernicious, debt can result in parents having to cut down on essential goods they need for their family, breaking the relationship of trust between parents and children. When debt escalates to the point that it undermines, rather than reinforces, mutual human flourishing, that we know that money has exceeded the theological role it is supposed to fulfil. Our research reveals that:

- Far from being immune to the impact of family debt, every aspect of children's lives, from access to necessities through to family relationships and school experiences, can be affected.
- The presence of a child in a household makes it more likely to be hit by an unexpected bill, but means a more limited ability to reduce spending in the wake of such an income shock. Under these circumstances, families are often trapped in a situation where they have little alternative but to take out credit to pay for necessities.
- 10% of parents say they have taken out credit in order to buy food for their children. This is part of a debt trap, with families subsequently finding that maintaining repayments on these credit commitments means their children are missing out compared to their peers.

Our analysis found that debt exacerbates the financial and psychological pressure families suffer. The impact of this debt trap on children is of real concern, yet neglected in previous analysis. Children face the emotional, physical, educational and social consequences of the debt that traps their families. They are unable to flourish, to be fully human, when they are concerned for their family, their reputation, their present and their future.

CASCADE

The Israelites were bearing a burden incurred by their forebears at a moment of desperation and poverty. God's response was to raise up Moses to lead them to freedom from its ongoing and oppressive consequences. The biblical prescription around lending and borrowing recognises mutual responsibility and vulnerability, the need to trust and to accept. The challenge today is to balance these considerations to develop a truly Christian economic framework. How can hard work and enterprise, responsibility and generosity be encouraged and predatory economic interactions stopped? Children and young people bear a very heavy burden: the burden of misfortunes and choices for which they bear no responsibility. Unless we want injustice to cascade down, the generations, we can do nothing to prevent the well-being of our children, we need to heed the call of Scripture and place money at the service of human flourishing.

CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH

Where children are bearing the brunt of an indebted situation, it is clear that power is being abused by the creditor, even if it is unintended. Where this is happening there is a compelling moral case for the church to step in. The challenge to the Church is to balance the pragmatic with the prophetic. The call on the church for discernment, to understand when the church must spend time and effort to care for those who have been hurt by problematic debt and when to challenge a system that allows the problem to persist at the expense of society as a whole.

And so we come full circle. What can we learn from the Israelites as they tried to find ways to ensure the slavery of the debt trap is not perpetuated? What can you do to spread the message of this research?

- Use The Children's Society's free Bible study, sermon and worship resources to inform your congregations.
- Invite people to sign up to pray with us for children facing poverty, neglect and the impact of debt.
- Sign up to our debt campaign action.

As the church engages with issues surrounding the impact of problem debt on children, you are invited to join us in this prayer.

WHY THE DEBT TRAP REPORT?

The DEBT TRAP report offers much more detail about the research and analysis mentioned in this paper, including case studies and statistics. You can read the whole document and add your voice to the campaign at www.childrenssociety.org.uk/debt.

Learning from Scripture

THE BIBLE STORY

There was once a young man. He had many brothers. He even had a colourful coat. His brothers were jealous of him and plotted to get rid of him. The man was lucky. He was saved from a dastardly death and taken to live in Egypt. One thing led to another and his brothers ended up in Egypt with him. They had wives. They had children. Their children had children. And ‘the family’, the Israelites, grew in number. Life got increasingly difficult, eventually the Israelites asked the Egyptians to take over their land and, in return, they would work for them as slaves. And their children were then slaves. And their children's children were slaves. (You can, of course, read a much fuller version of this story in the Hebrew Bible books of Genesis and Exodus.)

In Exodus 22:25 we read a direct teaching on lending money, on putting people into debt, ‘If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them.’ In the story of the Exodus, we read the story of a people, a people who went from landowners to slaves in response to an economic downturn. They became debt slaves, working to pay off a debt owed by a previous generation.

HUMAN FLOURISHING

Central to the law of the post-exile community is the notion that they do not make each other debt slaves or exploit each other in pursuit of money. One can only imagine that this is a direct response to the years spent entrapped by debt. Key to this is the relationship between lender and borrower as fellow members of the people of God. Scripture has much to say about this relationship and much of the detailed economic legislation in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus relates to debt slavery. Jesus picks up the same message when he announces his purpose and mission: ‘... to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’. (Luke 4:18-19)

The Bible doesn’t prohibit all lending, but offers clear guidance on the terms of borrowing and lending which are just and fair. To lend and to borrow is to be drawn into real relationships that demand we negotiate a common life in which my flourishing depends on the flourishing of others. When we work in mutually supportive partnership, the lending and borrowing of money is good and a genuine expression of human solidarity and inter-dependence. However, there comes a point in relationships of credit and debt where the purpose of money, to enable human flourishing, gets lost. When this happens, the impact on relationships mediated by finance becomes destructive.

A BIBLE STORY

When another man came along and told the people they could be free, they were sceptical. They knew nothing different. They had grown up as slaves. Mistreatment was the norm. They had inherited the debt of their forefathers and continued to pay the price as debt slaves. They were led out of Egypt with a promise of freedom.

Help us, loving God, to see beyond the smile of the child who misses weeks at school, to the embarrassment of the parent who cannot afford their child’s uniform.

Beyond the bullying in the dinner hall of the child who lives too little for lunch, to the ache in the parent who goes hungry for the sake of their child.

Help us, loving God, to set aside the stereotypes and stigmas.

Inspire us to work to ease the burden on children and their families trapped in seemingly never-ending debt.

THE DEBT TRAP report offers much more detail about the research and analysis mentioned in this paper, including case studies and statistics. You can read the whole document and add your voice to the campaign at www.childrenssociety.org.uk/debt.

WHO BEARS THE BURDEN?

Theology papers offer a consideration of the theological background and challenge of debt, including examples of the experience of individual church communities facing up to the burden of family debt. You can access the document at www.childrenssociety.org.uk/debttoday.

The Children’s Society’s monthly prayer email offers a reflection and prayers for you to use in personal and congregational worship. Sign up to have these sent direct to your email inbox at: www.childrenssociety.org.uk/prayeremail.

Mo Baldwin is Communications Manager for The Children’s Society Church Partnerships team. She worked with David Barclay, Luke Bretherton, Angus Ritchie, Sam Rosoyten and Nigel Varndell to compile WHO BEARS THE BURDEN?.

Amen.

Learning from Scripture

THE CHILDREN’S SOCIETY

The Children’s Society has recently published a series of theology papers, ‘Who bears the burden?’ considering the impact of debt on children and families. Mo Baldwin offers this summary and reflection.

Learning from Scripture

Add your brick to our wall of support and help us end the damage to children’s lives caused by The Debt Trap

www.childrenssociety.org.uk/debtrap

Amen.

Sign up for prayers in your inbox

www.childrenssociety.org.uk/prayer

Follow us @ChildsSocChurch

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Amen.
Hurringah in harvest.

To everything a season... and a time to every purpose under heaven.

In his Hurrying in Harvest, the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, living awhile in beautiful north Wales, writes warmly of this present time of year:

“...and a time to every purpose under heaven’

My gut – and the prevailing gloom of our age – says that I/we probably are busier than ever, or feel we are. From some angles, this is a mystery since we have access to so many instant, quick-fix or easy-operate time-saving devices, and some everyday tasks and routines have greatly lessened. And yet... time still slips through my fingers and I miss the stunning skies. Complicaciam or more the order of the day. I make instant coffee and struggle ten minutes with the dishwasher; I whip off an email, but get side-tracked by another 26 unsough messages in my inbox, then skip to renew my virus protection online. It seems ever more difficult to ‘do one thing’, as so many daily procedures connect with others, or with systems which are fast but generate more options or obligations for us very rapidly. So we are busier, in this possibly uncanny sense.

Do we just indulgently ourselves by thinking we are busier than we are? Notions of frantic busy-ness maintain a sense of our own importance and pride, and may inhibit us from adapting our programme to other possibilities and new life. Can I easily think my days and diary are full, and this is a good thing, just as my time seems fully occupied at present. Many of us are under pressure and know exactly why. Speed is increased, offer the world in one hour in the harvest field, just enjoying the Lord’s presence, foregoing extra coffee. Often we find ourselves very distracted by certain twentieth century attractions; where the wellsprings of life? And many activities, or risk being side-lined; or colour? Or has much passed us by, as we juggle times on our schedule, cover for others and rush to our hectic holidays or BBQs?

In what sense is time for all I want and need to do? Time is clearly a moving commodity whose conditions change as the year rolls on. Is there opportunity for all those things I might enjoy just now, might observe if my awareness only registered them? What about all those things I perceive I cannot fit in before winter? Prayer and preparation for future ministry, tidying up, invitations I could send and respond to? Some of these will get scrambled through whatever, but deep down I may feel guilt and dissatisfaction because I know I gave quality attention to very little. Were my aims then not integral to God’s purpose – or His design for us under heaven? Does my backlog of significant tasks and general attention deficit mean I myself am off track? Hopkins wrote so joyfully about harvest time: ‘...for all my walking home from a fishing trip. Maybe I have rarely had time for fishing or any equivalent open-ended recreation, even when duties slackened somewhat in August?’

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We plough the word and scatter...?

‘Not the Good Samaritan again!’ was the title of a session on preaching when I trained. At least the Good Samaritan comes around only every three years – other festivals present themselves rather more frequently – like harvest. Maybe, like the five ways of approaching the story of the Good Samaritan (from the viewpoint of the robbed man, the Levite/priest, the Samaritan, the inn keeper and the donkey), we could have four ways of approaching harvest – putting ourselves into the shoes of the farmer, the grain, the combine harvester or the consumer. But what about harvest in an urban setting? And are there other ways in which we could legitimately interpret the concept of harvest? Here is a motley collection of approaches to the theme, exploiting the breadth of what harvest might mean. Most of them rely on a degree of interaction between leader/priest or preacher and the congregation, lending themselves to all-age services. I have added readings that pick up an aspect of the particular angle pursued; you may well think of others.

TROLLEY DASH 1 (Ecclesiastes 3:9-13)

Think of the different sections in your local supermarket – what sort of produce, and what quantity of it, you want to harvest. Draw up a list of what you might mean. Most of them rely on a degree of interaction between leader/priest or preacher and the congregation, lending themselves to all-age services. I have added readings that pick up an aspect of the particular angle pursued; you may well think of others.

TROLLEY DASH 2 (Psalms 67)

Think of the different sections in your local supermarket – what sort of produce, and where do they come from? Again, have a variety to hand, preferably with their labelling: an avocado from Israel, milk from the local dairy (?? French cheeses, South African raisins, Californian peaches, Italian pasta, Belgian chocolate, Australian wine, Russian vodka and Chinese table decorations.

The instructions in Deuteronomy are a blueprint for life in the Promised Land, going into much detail of what people owe to each other and to God. A couple of chapters after our reading come the blessings and curses that follow, depending on people’s obedience to this blueprint, and these blessings and curses are very much material in character – ‘the fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock...’ (Deut 26:4). We are left with the indelible impression that the land and everything it produces belong to God, and if they are misused and taken advantage of, then will it work for us and continue to yield their fruit for our benefit. The principles of cause and effect apply to the natural and moral realm, though this is not always obvious in the short term.

ONE LAST ONE ABOUT FOOD (Mark 4:26-29)

Tell the fairy tale of the farmer who argued with God about the weather. 1 From your congregation, elicit stories/experiences/anecdotes of what they grow and how it has gone right or wrong (as I am writing this, our allotment is under a foot of water for the reh time since Christmas). Winkle out what we need to successfully grow and harvest our food: seeds, soil, warmth, water, freedom from pests and diseases, oil to transport, storage etc. How many of these factors are under our control? How far are we dependent on other people, some of them long distance, and how far are we dependent on factors which nobody can control, e.g. the weather?

Our autonomy is skin-deep, we rely on many others and supremely on the faithfulness of God to provide for our daily needs. Find a way to illustrate this. I would have a finished cake and a cake mix to hand as a visual aid: what is the difference? The mix needs the heat of the oven to finish it – it may have the finest ingredients; unless it gets some heat, it won’t turn into a cake. Whatever we do, however hard we work, the completion and success of our work are a gift from God. Then let them have a piece of cake.

‘THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE WITH YOU’ (Deuteronomy 24:19-22, Ruth 2:1-9)

Rather than an all-age talk, I would want to preach this as a family talk. The passage in Deuteronomy is an elaboration of an earlier command in Lev 19:10 which offers dignity to people who live in poverty.

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We need to engage with the principle that we are stewards of what God has given to their owners. What might it look like for us not to go back for ‘a sheaf we have overlooked’? Could it be to plan our budget in such a way that there is some left for those who are in need? Or to could mean buying some extra suffering and donating it to the local food bank (now there’s a use for those BOGOF (buy one get one free) offers).

I would finish off with two thoughts. Firstly, Living in a relationally affluent part of the world, it is easy to feel a kind of generically guilty when we think of the millions who suffer deprivation of one sort or another. However, the people (and governments) of this and other first world countries are often hugely generous when it comes to supporting the victims of disasters. We can be sure that God takes notice. Secondly, Deuteronomy and the Hebrew Scriptures in general remind us that individuals exist in a community, the welfare of the individual and that of the community are linked. We do not belong to ourselves, and we have not earned our place in the world, we were born into it. ‘What do you have that you did not receive?’ is not only true with reference to spiritual gifts. All of us are beneficiaries of what God has done for us, however the reminder in Deut 24:22 ‘Remember that you were slaves in Egypt’.

HARVEST OF GIVING (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

The concepts of sowing and reaping do not only apply to paddies and other vegetable matter. Every time we part with something in order for it to achieve a particular end, it is sown – after a fashion – in the hope that it may be harvested. The local museum may have a selection of questions, e.g. (i) How was harvest celebrated when you were younger? (ii) What was your work? (iii) What is the achievement that gave you the greatest pleasure? (iv) What have you learned that only came to pass when you had lived a rich life? (v) How has God changed over the years; in what way do you feel the years have yielded a spiritual harvest?

LOCAL CONNECTIONS (Try Genesis 2:4-15 for a generic text. ‘Working and taking care of the garden’ is one way to sum up everything we have done throughout the history of human kind, through at times we have done more working and less taking care.)

If your locality has a historical link to a particular trade – be it wood and leather like mine, or hop farming like the town on the other side of the hill – this can be a good starting point for illustrations of harvest and what it may mean. The local museum may yield information and materials, and with some luck there are links to what the children have done at primary school.

AND FINALLY

Many charities publish harvest-themed resources on the web; all you need to do is google ‘harvest services’, and you will find rich pickings.

Gertrud Sollars is a Reader in the United Benefice of Buxted & Hambledon. She is Wardens of Readers in Guildford diocese and Vice-Chair of the Central Readers Council.

1 Thanks are due to the Guildford Readers who have been willing to share their ideas, in particular Joan Simon and Andrew Partridge.

2 If you don’t know it, here is an outline: A farmer argued with God about the weather, accusing him of never getting it right – too much sun, or too much rain, or not enough, too much rain, or not enough. etc. So God said, OK, for one year you can dictate the weather, and the farmer did. He was a sensible man, he made sure there wasn’t just sunshine but also rain, and frost in winter. When the crops grew, they looked fat and healthy, with strong stalks and thick roots. The farmer was so pleased nobody was praising the farmer and his wise weather-making. Harvest approached, the harvest was brought in, but when it was time to thrash, there wasn’t a single grain in any of the hocks – the farmer had forgotten about the wind, and none of the crops had been pollinated.

HARVEST OF YEARS (Luke 2:22-40)

This will take some preparation, or rather priming people beforehand. Most churches have a number of older people, and at least some of them feel they have little left to contribute. But they represent a wealth of experience and wisdom gathered over the years, and they are for us a link to the past. Set up two or three interviews and pick a selection of questions, e.g. (i) How was harvest celebrated when you were younger? (ii) What was your work? (iii) What is the achievement that gave you the greatest pleasure? (iv) Have you that you did not receive? (v) How has God changed over the years; in what way do you feel the years have yielded a spiritual harvest?
Fresh expressions of church are having a major impact on growth in the Church of England — according to an ongoing study by the Church Army’s Research Unit.

Between January 2012 and October 2013, researchers spoke to the leaders of 518 fresh expressions in the 10 dioceses of Liverpool, Canterbury, Leicester, Derby, Chelmsford, Norwich, Ripon & Leeds, Blackburn, Bristol and Portsmouth. These dioceses were chosen to reflect variety in context, geographical spread and different standings towards fresh expressions.

The research programme is investigating factors related to church growth within the Church of England. The fresh expressions meet in all kinds of venues at various times, of the week, and in very different geographical settings. The world of fresh expressions of church is described as one of ‘varied and smaller communities’.

The study results were presented by George Lings at the Faith in Research Growth Conference in London. The research in the 10 dioceses also highlighted:

- An estimated 24.5% of those attending fresh expressions of church are already members of a church.
- 35.2% of people who used to belong to church but who left for one reason or another while 40.3% are those with no previous church background at all.
- The fresh expressions of church, on average, were found to make up 15% of the dioceses’ churches and 10% of the attendance.
- 52% of the fresh expressions are led by people who are not ordained, 40% are led by people who are formally authorised.
- Two out of three lay leaders are women, two out of three ordained leaders are men, but the men are more likely to be paid and the women working voluntarily.
- There are at least 20 different recognisable types of fresh expressions and the average size is 44.
- They can be found in all traditions in the Church of England. The fresh expressions meet in all kinds of venues at various times, of the week, and in very different geographical settings.
- The world of fresh expressions of church is described as one of ‘varied and smaller communities’.
- 78% intentionally encourage discipleship, not just attract ‘attenders’. Over a third have communion services and a third have had baptisms. Half are taking some steps towards responsibility for their finances and two thirds for how they are led, very few have formal legal status within the Church of England.

The majority, 66%, either continue to grow or maintain the growth gained. Of those surveyed, 25% did grow but are now shrinking while 9.7% have come to an end. Growth patterns vary according to a wide combination of factors, including the kind of fresh expression, social area served and frequency of meeting.

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Readers are in the fortunate position, unlike most priests, of not having to move from their parish when they retire. Our ministry can continue in the same place – unless we choose to move home at the end of life, the pattern and focus of one’s ministry changes, at least that has been my experience. I was admitted as a Reader in 1983 and became a Reader-in-charge of a Reader-in-charge of a Reader-in-charge of a Reader over five churches, five schools, a large area of social housing and a stipendary ministry team that had just been reduced to one. It wouldn’t be possible for me to be a suburb governor’ but ‘which school do you want to be a suburb governor of?’ Every Sunday morning my husband or I led an Eucharistic service and preached in one church while the Rector celebrated communion in another. I also took a monthly service in a village some miles away where, with a multiple service rota stretched as far as it could go. As I prayed, I felt the time was right to hand over all my diocesan responsibilities.

By my 60th birthday, I was extremely thankful I had done so. My ministry at that time included being the Mayor of Salisbury’s chaplain of the Civil Service and an active Foundation Governor of the Local Comprehensive. When my husband developed cancer, which became terminal a year later, I wanted and needed to cut down my working hours in college and time given to my ministry. Divorce led me to step back from everything apart from preaching and leading worship on a Sunday which, with Gerald out of action, was needful – and from even that in the final weeks of his life. After his death, surrounded by the loving support of so many people, I resumed my role as a school governor and took on new responsibilities at work, as full-time Head of the Maths Department. I had no official ministry role in college, yet often found students and staff being encouraged to seek me out by colleagues who thought I could be of help to people facing bereavement, terminal illness, or complicated relational problems.

I thought and prayed a lot during that time about the future – about God’s purposes for my life when I retired from work at 65. I had loved teaching, loved seeing people who came from all over the world, and no belief in their own ability, grow in self-esteem as they discovered that they weren’t stupid after all and begin to enjoy it. I loved seeing people gain confidence in their ability to pursue their dreams of becoming whatever they had their hearts set on. But I realised that it was time for that chapter of my life to close and to prepare the way for the new. When my husband was to be fully present and available in the parish all week, in a way that had never been possible while working.

For many years I had felt drawn to one day being involved in funeral ministry, and I shared that with my vicar – important for me to talk about one’s dreams and hopes for ministry in retirement with one’s incumbent and/or spiritual director. They aren’t meant for readers – and vocation in retirement is likely to vary as much as any other stage of life – with active grandparenting central for someone or quality time given to other things. Family circumstances, our health and energy and interests will all be different – as will the local needs and the opportunities open to those who want to make serving their local community and church their prime focus of this stage of life.

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As it happened, my incumbent’s retirement from the parish coincided with my retirement from teaching and I took my first funeral the day after his leaving service. We were proud of having the youngest churchwardens in the diocese – all around 40 years of age but some or quality time given to other things. For many years I had felt drawn to one day being involved in funeral ministry, and I shared that with my vicar – important for me to talk about one’s dreams and hopes for ministry in retirement with one’s incumbent and/or spiritual director. They aren’t meant for readers – and vocation in retirement is likely to vary as much as any other stage of life – with active grandparenting central for someone or quality time given to other things. Family circumstances, our health and energy and interests will all be different – as will the local needs and the opportunities open to those who want to make serving their local community and church their prime focus of this stage of life.

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The...not so secret...life of a Reader

Liz Pacey is a Reader and a regular contributor to The Reader

Maundy Thursday 2008. Well into Reader training and on placement at St Michael and All Angels church in East Hull. I knelt in the quiet in the side chapel. Suddenly I saw myself with a notebook in my hands and knew beyond doubt that God was calling me to be not only a Reader but a writer as well.

May 2014. I arrived at the centre where a ladies’ club had booked me for an afternoon talk. ‘Reading, ’riting and absolutely no ’rithmetic, was to be my theme. I now get invited out to speak quite often and this autobiographical humorous talk is always popular. The group leader and I looked at each other, both with that ‘I know you from somewhere but where’ glint in our eyes. Pennies dropped simultaneously.

When I worked as a home visitor for Hull and East Riding Institute for the Blind (known as HEIRIB) I used to visit her mum. Her look changed to one of puzzlement. What would I know about reading and writing she mused? I put on my best ‘all will be revealed’ smile.

This chance encounter occurred round about the time I was getting the brain into gear to write this article on where Reader ministry has led me. And it made me see with new eyes just how the many different strands of my life have come together. How many people will know a little about each one of us, but very few will know the lot.

So, to fill in some of the pieces of the jigsaw of my life: Back in the early ’70s, halfway through a degree in English literature, God called me to become a nurse, then subsequently a midwife. And I responded without question. Although I have to admit there were times walking down that particular career path when I did wonder if God had been having an off day when he called me.

Finally in 1995 I moved on to the home visiting at HEIRIB. I felt very comfortable with my new working life. The call to be a Reader came during this time. I found the course challenging and fulfilling. It was so good to be ‘riting again. And reading. Mostly. And no ’rithmetic in sight. Hooray.

Writing was becoming increasingly important to me. Working on an assignment to design a course for Mothers’ Union made the hands stand up on the back of my neck. What was God saying here? I thought about giving up the day job to become a freelance writer. This coincided with a bit of a rough patch at work, and I very nearly handed in my notice with a flourish, and leaving off for the nearest garret. (I’ve been since the East Yorkshire branch was set up in 1991) and a freelance writer. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I thought. When I got home I malled them and after a lot of sending samples of my work and ‘auditioning’ by writing two trial pieces, I got the job – to write two weeks’ worth of notices.

And with these words came peace. Prayers had certainly been answered. It was actually some four months later when I did take the step of leaving my job. In the meantime I sought out possible markers, and received in particular a very encouraging e-mail from a certain Heather Fenton.

From leaving work, things did not go quite according to plan. I’d had the idea that the number of hours I had given to my job would now be set aside for writing. Two days after I said my fond farewells to work my husband had a heart attack. I was so grateful that I had the time at home to be with him. Thankfully, he made an amazing recovery, but of course the writing had to take a back seat for quite a while.

During the next few months there were times when I wondered if I’d misread the signs. Despondency set in, and embarrassment followed as people asked me how the writing was going. However, I had written God’s word that night down in my journal, and I was able to go back to that for reassurance. And even words jumping out at me from the cover of my copy of Writing Magazine. “You can be a writer” and ‘A little skill… a little talent… and a LOT of determination’ kept me going. I’ve still got those cuttings on the notice board next to the computer.

My first accepted piece grew out of one of my essays. I had an article about the Mothers’ Union published in this very magazine. Then, I was staying with my friend in Scotland, and she came in one morning waving Scripture Union’s Daily Bread. ‘This could be you,’ she said. The writer was a member of the Association of Christian Writers (as I had since the East Yorkshire branch was set up in 1991) and a freelance writer. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I thought. When I got home I malled them and after a lot of sending samples of my work and ‘auditioning’ by writing two trial pieces, I got the job – to write two weeks’ worth of notices.

More commissions followed as I flung the net out. By this time I had moved on with some of my Reader colleagues to undertake the BA in Ministry and Theology at York St John University. Another life-changing moment was approaching. An assignment loomed. The task was to put on a spirituality event. By this time I was getting quite a local reputation as a Knitwit (and no… it wasn’t anything to do with the standard of my preaching).

Could I incorporate my love of knitting into this assignment? I was already on a learning curve realising that knitting could be a very spiritual activity. Once again the Mothers’ Union came to my aid and Hull Deanery gave me the opportunity to put on the day event entitled ‘Knit one, pray two together’ which was to involve teaching, reflecting, worship, prayer, knitting, chatting and eating together. The day was a success. Although I’m not sure which got more exercise, our needles or our tongues.

In the following year my working life took on a new twist as I was able to adapt this day event and present it in other venues. My small business, Knitrpiration! was born, with the help of a (SYOB) ‘start your own business course’ with the Princes Trust Initiative for Mature Enterprise (PRIME). Many years ago my mother dubbed me the ‘eternal student’… and I really wouldn’t want to disappoint her. PRIME courses are absolutely to be recommended. Meeting up with, and working and learning alongside, a group of people of similar age with so much life experience behind them and such fantastic hopes and dreams for the future was something I would not have missed.

Since then I feel as though I have been on a bit of a roller coaster. I sit back for a slurp of my coffee as I consider my many mission trips. God has led me since I embarked on Reader training. I smile as I read the words on my mug: ‘I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength’. To trust the colour was right.

To see the beauty of the unfolding pattern. To be able to come back with new hope and determination. The real or imagined faults, the unjoined ends. Hard then to see the beauty of the unfolding pattern. To trust the consider just right. Finally to realise that, although the work didn’t necessarily come out quite as I was expecting, it was beautiful in a different way.

Thank you God that in both my knitting and in my life you see the things that I don’t yet understand. I thank you for the wonder of new creation wherever I might wonder of new creation wherever I might. I don’t yet understand. I thank you for the wonder of new creation wherever I might wonder of new creation wherever I might.
Commentaries come in all shapes and sizes, and which one is best for you is largely a matter of personal choice. Our research showed that there are over thirty currently available, so we can only cover here what we hope is a representative sample from as broad a range as possible. No doubt we have missed some people’s favourite standby! We have restricted our coverage to books which are currently in print or obtainable second-hand. For simplicity’s sake we have divided the discussion into: i) academic, ii) in-depth and fairly detailed, iii) accessible to non-specialist readers, iv) books about Mark’s gospel, and v) lectionary resources.

i) ACADEMIC COMMENTARIES

These are either based on the Greek text or make frequent reference to it, as well as providing a detailed discussion of the historical and cultural background to first-century Jewish thought and life, including the Jewish context of the Old Testament. Extensive bibliographies, indexes of source materials and biblical references should be standard features. These commentaries are intended for serious biblical scholars with some familiarity of methods of hermeneutics and exegesis. The language is therefore quite technical, but should give you a detailed understanding of what the text actually says.


France’s approach is to show that Mark was a theologian whose primary aim was to strengthen the people of God in a time of persecution – Lane therefore seeks to tease out the intention of the author so that we can understand why the gospel was written as it was. There is a useful thematic index as well as an index of names and places. There is a select, although not very comprehensive, bibliography, but perhaps a more significant inclusion is the discussion of the different endings to Mark’s gospel.

France’s commentary is a detailed discussion of his own translation of the Greek text in which he sees the structure of the gospel as a ‘drama in three acts’.

In following this structure he draws out the two central themes of the nature of Christ and the role of discipleship. An index of Greek words and phrases is included but not one of themes, names and places. The bibliography is detailed and inclusive, making this commentary a valuable tool for anyone undertaking an academic course of study.

Also very helpful are the two volumes of the Word series of commentaries – volume 1 is by R A Guelich (Thomas Nelson, 2010) and volume 2 is by Craig Evans. The advantage of this series is that the commentary and explanation of the text is dealt with separately from the discussion of the finer points of the Greek text.

We should also include here the classic by Ched Myers Binding the Strong Man (Orbis Books, 2008) a very detailed and interesting treatment of the political and social background, and Ben Witherington III The Gospel of Mark: a socio-rhetorical commentary (Eerdmans, 2001). Don’t be put off by the title – he treats Mark’s gospel as an ancient biography of Jesus, with a life-changing message. Although fairly technical it is actually not too heavy a read.

Finally, although academic commentaries tend to be relatively free of confessional bias, Donahue and Harrington The Gospel of Mark (Sacra Pagina series) (The Liturgical Press, 2002) offers a modern translation written by Catholic biblical scholars, and a commentary which is based on inclusive methods and perspectives, shaped by the Catholic tradition.

ii) IN-DEPTH AND FAIRLY DETAILED

These may refer to the Greek text but don’t take that as their focus, so they are less technical in that sense but may still be quite detailed in their content.

Also very helpful are the two volumes of the Word series of commentaries – volume 2 by R Alan Cole Mark (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (IVP, 1961, second edition, 1989). The first hundred pages provide an introduction with brief discussion of the authorship and dating questions, but it is mostly devoted to an examination of the main themes of the gospel and a history of critical interpretations down to the 1980s. Next comes the Commentary, splitting the chapters into short sections. After a general exegesis, line by line comments follow on individual verses and problems of interpretation. Frequent reference is made to the original Greek text, in translation rather than the Greek alphabet, though no overall translation is supplied. It’s good on social background but confines itself to Mark’s text with little reference to parallels in other parts of Scripture. No modern applications are offered, which means the book hasn’t dated in the same way as some. The bibliography is short and now out of date, as it contains nothing published after 1986.

David E Garland Mark: The NIV Application Commentary. Zondervan, 1996, (includes Scripture index and subject index). Taking the text of the NIV in sections usually of about 10 verses, the ‘original meaning’ is presented in a concise way, with footnote references to sources and historical Greek words where necessary. This is followed by two further sections ‘Bridging Contexts’ and ‘Contemporary Significance’, which are generally twice as long as the first section. ‘Bridging’ tries to draw out the timeless elements in the parts of the gospel directly related to first-century problems; while the ‘Contemporary’ section then goes on to amplify these findings, helping the preacher to identify modern problems or situations that are truly comparable to those faced by the original audience. If there are several legitimate ways to apply a passage for the modern Christian, then all the differing viewpoints will be given space. The discussion of the prohibition of divorce in Chapter 10 for example, covers 10 pages. This book will not provide a ready-made sermon, but will give you many ideas and insights to get you started.

David France The People’s Bible Commentary. Mark. (B & H, 1996) is described as ‘a devotional commentary for study and preaching’. At first glance this book might seem too lightweight to be worth buying. It is often helpful to have some further excerpts from commentaries and literature as an illustration, to be read out in your sermon as an illustration and would not breach copyright.

There is also a very detailed (and expensive!) series for the RCL produced by Westminster/John Knox called Feasting on the Word. There are volumes for each liturgical year with several essays by leading biblical scholars for each set of readings. You can use the books as they come, but there is also an editorial board. If you use the RCL and this approach appeals, there is plenty of information at www.feastingontheword.net.

iii) ACCESSIBLE TO NON-SPECIALIST READERS

These commentaries are good resources if you don’t have the time or don’t want much more analysis of textual variations of meaning between the gospels than Barclay. This is a book designed to be of use to the working preacher: each passage of around 10 lines is followed by a brief exegesis, which is then followed by an equal amount of text on contemporary applications. The book ends with a brief study guide that could be used for small group work.

Dick France The People’s Bible Commentary. Mark. (B & H, 1996) is described as ‘a devotional commentary for study and preaching’. At first glance this book might seem too lightweight to be worth buying. No text is supplied and the exegesis for each passage of around 5 lines is kept down to about 100 words. But each passage ends with a question or prayer for meditation, many of which are directly relevant to a modern application of the passage. This might make the book a useful source of inspiration if you needed a theme for a homily at very short notice.

IV) BOOKS ABOUT MARK’S GOSPEL

It is often helpful to have some further background information which isn’t linked to specific passages but looks at the gospel as a whole.

Tom Wright Mark for Everyone. (SPCK, 2003) is designed to be approachable to the un-churched, and assumes no prior knowledge of the Bible or Christian theology. Wright’s main aim is to communicate the excitement and pace of Mark and he supplies his own translation in modern, idiomatic English. The commentary is short but fastens unerringly on the central emotional truths of the passage in question. This is a useful reference for those who like to paraphrase their text into modern language.

William Barclay The Gospel of Mark (Daily Study Bible series) (St Andrew Press, 1954, revised 1974). Designed for personal devotion, with Barclay’s own translation. The commentary on each section of text is twice as long as Wright’s and contains much more social context. The language of the translation now feels stiff and old-fashioned, but Barclay was very well read and employs many short literary quotations that can still come in handy as illustrations. No bibliography is given though, so following up a quote would be time-consuming.

Donald English The Message of Mark (Bible Speaks Today series) (IVP, 1992) is a commentary on the NIV text, and much more analysis of textual variations of meaning between the gospels than Barclay. This is a book designed to be of use to the working preacher: each passage of (usually around 10 lines) is followed by a brief exegesis, which is then followed by an equal amount of text on contemporary applications. The book ends with a brief study guide that could be used for small group work.

Karen King says that Mark’s gospel is aimed at a very specific audience – a group of Jewish followers. It is often helpful to have some further background information which isn’t linked to specific passages but looks at the gospel as a whole.

One example is John Vincent (ed) Mark – Gospel of Action (SPCK, 2006). This is a collection of essays by a number of writers who are actively involved in ministry giving their responses to the challenges and ‘calls to action’ raised by Mark’s gospel.

Ched Myers and others (Say to this Mountain: Mark’s story of discipleship) (Orbis Books, 1996) have combined to produce a popular-level version ofBinding the Strong Man (see above) making it more accessible, and also set out in a format which lends itself to group study.

David Rhoada, Joanna Dewey and Donald Dirzke Mark as Story: an introduction to the narrative of a gospel (Fortress, 2012) discuss the genre of Mark’s gospel in terms of narrator, settings, plot and characters. If you wanted to run a study course on the basis of this book it helpfully includes a number of exercises and questions for study.

V) LECTIONARY RESOURCES

These are not commentaries but provide reflections and resources linked to the lectionary readings. Some are linked to the RCL and others to the Common Worship (CW) lectionary, so check before buying. The two reviewed here are both for the CW lectionary.

There is also a very detailed and expensive series for the RCL produced by Westminster/John Knox called Feasting on the Word. There are volumes for each liturgical year with several essays by leading biblical scholars for each set of readings. You can use the books as they come, but there is also an editorial board. If you use the RCL and this approach appeals, there is plenty of information at www.feastingontheword.net.

Ronald W. Dale Windows on Mark, an anthology to amplify the Gospel readings for Year B of the lectionary. (Kevin Mayhew, 1999). If your bookshelves are small, investing in this book will save you much space, as Dale has cherry-picked excerpts from commentaries and literature as an illustration, as well as some asides by John Wesley, Barbara Brown Taylor, Ted Hughes, Rabindranath Tagore and Graham Greene. The passages are mostly short enough to be read out in your sermon as an illustration and would not breach copyright.

Jane Williams Lectionary Reflections Year B (SPCK 2005) is a collection of columns first published in the Church Times. These short pieces are very useful. Williams often discusses various alliterative sets for the day, showing how each illumines the others.

Kirsty Anderson is the Reviews Editor for The Reader magazine and Marion Gray is Chair of The Reader Editorial Committee. They are both Readers in the Diocese of Southwark.
Construction of a story

‘Our modern world defined God as a “religious complex” and laughed at the Ten Commandments as OLD FASHIONED. Then, through the laughter came the shattering thunder of the World War. And now a blood-drenched, bitter world – no longer laughing – cries for a way out. There is but one way out. It existed before it was engraven upon Tablets of Stone. It will exist when stone has crumbled. The Ten Commandments...’ – Cecil B. DeMille

DeMille is of course supremely famous for his cinematic interpretation of the story of Moses, and it is interesting to see the light that this quotation (from his autobiography) sheds on his motivation for telling the story. He famously said: ‘Give me any two pages of the Bible and I will give you a picture; but this truth also hides a very considerable skill and art in the film-makers’ portfolio – an understanding of story form. The ability to convey a story, to take the listeners or viewers on the journey that leads to action, is the focus of almost as much discussion and writing in the film industry as the film scripts themselves. It dates back to Aristotle and well before the film medium was even dreamt of.

The economic drive to ensure a sound return on investment for big movies has often meant a drift to formulaic solutions in film-making. However, DeMille said that he would not ‘dumbed-down’ the story, because ‘you’re not sure whether you’re awake or dreaming’. The theme for the film is ‘what is reality’. The utmost use of illustration can achieve a similar purpose in the spoken word, especially if it can be revisited powerfully later on, but it all depends on the clarity of the theme.

Clarity and simplicity are elusive qualities and the oft quoted ‘If I had the time, I would have written you a shorter letter’ springs to mind. Simplicity should not be confused with a ‘dumbed-down’ approach, but rather something that will enable, rather than confuse, the story telling. An image-dominated culture may not deny the importance or significance of words, but it does call us to use them wisely. ‘Why is it?’ a newsreader friend of mine asked, ‘that we can give the regional news in less time than the average set of church notices?’

To express this arc the film-maker is not so intent on describing events, as making the audience take an emotional and psychological journey. Laurie Hutzler, script consultant and LA film guru says ‘folk don’t go to the movies to think, they go to feel!’ This may uncover ethical issues in the mind of the speaker, but there is no doubt that feelings lead to action, and that the great commandment is to love God with all our heart and soul, as well as with all our mind.’

Aristotle said of writers that ‘Beginners succeed earlier with the diction and characters than with the construction of the story’ and we could return on another occasion to a more in-depth analysis of film structure. For now it may be well to remember that incarnational faith is always both words and images, and the world will experience this most powerfully in the interaction they have with you and the lives of the community you are speaking to.

1 Blaise Pascal, though often attributed to Mark Twain. Cf quoteinvestigator.com
2 Matthew 22:37
Paul and the Law

Brian S. Rosner

This book is one of a series called ‘New Studies in Biblical Theology’ written for ‘thinking Christians’. It does not claim to be an academic treatise, but rather a popular introduction to the biblical teaching on the law. The book aims to illuminate the different genres like parables, miracles, stories, historical events, and key figures. It also explores the broader social and cultural context in which these teachings were given.

Connecting Worship and Theology

Matthew Swires-Hennessy

This book explores the interconnection between worship and theology, showing how the two are not separate but are expressions of the same underlying principles. It demonstrates in a reader-friendly style how the scriptures, hymns, prayers and the lives of believers inform each other, illustrating the importance of a holistic approach to worship and theology.

Under a Broad Sky

Ronald Blythe

Blythe is an East Anglian countryman, and a very fine writer. As a fellow reader, he serves three county club libraries with a weekly diary “Word from Wurmwoodford”– the back page of the Church Times – he connects past and present, and presents a view of the English countryside and life in the Cotswold hills. His readers include the Earls of Oxford, the Duke of Devonshire and the Bishop of Oxford. He has written extensively on church, history, and poetry.

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The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries and Today
Anthony C. Thistlethwaite
SPCK, £35.00 pbk
9780281069392

As we have come to expect from Anthony Thistlethwaite, this scholarly and thorough treatment of the Holy Spirit from Old Testament times up to the present day, suitable for anyone studying the Bible or theology at an advanced level. It is by no means light reading and assumes some knowledge of the relevant literature. There are extensive footnotes and a detailed bibliography, making this an ideal accompaniment to a serious study of pneumatology.

The book can be read on two levels as a straightforward historical account of thinking about the Holy Spirit over the ages – and as such it is admirable in its detail and depth of analysis. It can also be read as a Christian response, as an attempt to develop mutual dialogue with Pentecostals and those influenced by the Renewal movement. This is seems to be important because it has become necessary, in the author’s eyes, to ‘reach across a dangerously widening chasm of church practice’ (Preface).

If you believe the church would benefit from a broad understanding of the different ways in which the Holy Spirit is seen to be at work in its members, then you would find this book interesting and stimulating. Thistlethwaite has given us a 2 Corinithians 12:3 style account of pneumatology since Old Testament times.

MARION GRAY
1. Training and the exercise of public lay ministry vary widely across the dioceses.

This is a fact, while there are thousands of traditional (and happily so) Readers across the Church of England and the Church in Wales, there are also growing numbers of people serving in other authorised lay ministries. Sometimes Readers are involved in training for these; sometimes Readers are asked to take on additional roles (e.g. leading a parish) for this reason, and come to have additional training. There is a theological case to be made for developing more lay ministries; and with decreasing numbers of clergy the role of the lay is becoming more important.

2. Initial training for Readers varies across dioceses; yet the same core basis is for life, and it is quite common for Readers to move between dioceses.

Although Common Awards make it theoretically easy to ‘standardise’ Reader Training across the dioceses, the reality is that the numbers for Initial Reader training; there are a number that have developed and teach their own ‘in house’ course. It was argued that Readers are licensed under Canon Law and therefore their training should be standardised; however, this does not take into account the different requirements of different parishes and dioceses. It was pointed out that in some parishes, what is needed is not a theologian trained to diploma level, but a well informed Christian who can lead worship well. In addition, there is evidence (especially in Fresh Expressions of church) of different ways, and how people are going to be equipped for their roles.

3. Readers are lay theologians, people ‘who can bring God into the world, and the church to the world. We need people ‘who can bring God into the world.’

Julian Hubbard, the Director of Ministry, was present at this discussion and contributed to it. He expressed willingness to ensure that in the review of funding for ministry training, the provision for lay ministry change? Lay ministry has changed and is going to continue to develop; lay people with all sorts of training (and none) are involved in ministry in the Church. The question is who is responsible for these developments, whether they will continue to happen locally and in diocesan provision in the wider Church – or is some nationally agreed and structured way, and how people are going to be equipped for their roles.

4. Are the structures of the governance of Reader ministry, as we have them today, helpful? should we be linked more closely to Ministry Council which currently looks after ordained ministry only?

Institutional change is difficult to achieve, as it needs to be agreed across the dioceses. It was said that it is difficult to formulate a strategy in an institution as diverse, dispersed and stressed as the Church is at the moment. It is also true that the areas of the Church that are growing, e.g. Fresh Expressions, are often the ones that are least institutionalised, telling us that Reader Training is part of a larger picture of change in Fresh Expressions of church.

At the same time, the Church of England is already engaging in a major review of the way in which resources for ministry education are distributed, and there is an acknowledged need for national understanding of episcopally licensed roles and some form of central education – given the scale, the Church Ministry do move between dioceses.

God and the moneymakers Faith and the battle against exploitative lending

Inspired by the Archbishop’s vision, The Church Credit Champions Network to help churches to engage on the issue of debt in their community and then train and support them to improve access to real alternatives, such as credit unions. The network is being piloted in London with plans to roll it out to other cities across England. http://godandpolitics.org.uk/2013/11/28/the-devastating-cost-of-payday-lending-and-the-christian-response

RESOURCES

ARocha News@arocha.org.uk

NEW WEBSITE AND RESOURCES

The Jubilee Centre has a new series of short pamphlets which are being written by Guy Brandon and others. These pamphlets unpack modern-day issues from a biblical perspective and will form their ‘Route Finder’ series. The initial ones will be on debt and interest and the Sunday issue. http://www.jubilee-centre.org

MUSIC

The Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) is launching a new course for clergy and lay worship leaders to give them more confidence in managing music. Strength for service will take place in mid-September in Salisbury, Wiltshire. It’s a three day course for those in training or in the early stages of their ministry. This particular course would also be relevant for anyone wanting to boost their knowledge and confidence in parish music matters. Tuesday 16th – Thursday 18th. Further details and booking can be found at: http://www.rscm.com

WORLD WAR ONE CENTENARY

Silent Night Carol Services. A HOPE initiative, services start at 08.30 and others are available in Fresh Expressions of church (WFC) and some in Fresh Expressions of church (FEC) of different parishes and dioceses. It was pointed out that in some parishes, what is needed is not a theologian trained to diploma level, but a well informed Christian who can lead worship well. In addition, there is evidence (especially in Fresh Expressions of church) of different ways, and how people are going to be equipped for their roles.

1 Note the ‘1715
3 See the article on Common Awards by Eeva John in The Reader 14.2, p32-3
Website Latest

A t the 2013 AGM, comments were made that our shop window on the web looked a little dull and dated. Since then, the website has had a make-over and facelift, and at the time of writing (which is several months before the time of reading), all major systems, links and pages are up and running nicely. So why should you have a look at the website (www.readers. cofe.anglican.org), if you are a Reader, a trainee Reader or anyone interested in Reader matters?

1. because it is a quick way of keeping in touch with the Reader world and what is going on in it,
2. because there are resources and information which you may find useful,
3. because you can ask your questions (about Reader matters) and find answers to questions you didn’t think of asking on the forum. If (like somebody I know well) you signed up to the forum several years ago and have forgotten your user name, the editor (morgan@bunday.co.uk) will be happy to remind you.

A propos the forum, here is some inside information: the editor monitors use of the forum and publishes the results with the aid of a traffic light system. If people signed up to the forum reach 10% of the Readers in a particular diocese, the light for that diocese goes from amber to green. At the moment, there is only one dioceae still in the red, and tacit prevents me from naming it.

The forum isn’t the only place where you can make your mark. The editor is always pleased to receive good quality pictures of Readers doing interesting things (and they don’t have to wear a blue scarf for it) and contributions to the Resources page. There is a page giving you news of Reader ministry around the country and in the wider church – that is only as up to date as we all make it. Go on – blow your own trumpet!

These pages are a new regular feature where we can share any news or items particularly relating to the work of the CRC

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Introducing...

Jeff Heaton, Associate Secretary of the CRC

I f anyone had told me a few years back that one day I would appear in “The Reader” magazine I would have laughed and said “The what magazine?” It was only in 1997 that I started to attend the Anglican Church. Having been brought up in a Christian family, in The Salvation Army, I was baptised and confirmed in 2000. At that time I didn’t even know what a Reader was, even though we did have one, I thought he was just another member of the clergy. Also I wasn’t going to get involved – I’d done all that before, led a Sunday School, a youth group and other things. I was going to sit in my pew and not get involved. I had a busy job as a Sales Director for a multinational company and I didn’t have time. But God has a way of getting at you and I joined the choir then the PCG then became Churchwarden (there’s a pattern developing here) before I accepted God was calling me to ministry in some way. It was on a diocesan pilgrimage to the Holy Land that, in one of a series of conversations with a Reader, walking round the Garden of Gethsemane, she said “You ought to be a Reader!” and that was it. Although it didn’t take another 12 months before I did anything about it. I was licensed as a Reader in 2011 after the obligatory three years training but continued to do a fourth year of study to get my Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry. The highlight of graduating, apart from being able to prove to my children that they were not the only ones who could get a degree, was the degree convocation ceremony where I can say, if only for a minute, that I shared the stage in York Minster with Archbishop John Sentamu and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

My day job nowadays is somewhat different and I work as Project Co-ordinator and Administrator for Christians Together Calderdale. This is an ecumenical group working particularly with the marginalised in society that runs a number of projects including a Food and Support Drop-in, Family Gathering and Saturday Gathering which are Fresh Expressions (the former being for families attending the Food and Support Drop In) and Inn Churches providing a meal, a bed and breakfast for street sleepers in the winter months.

My connections with CRC started after the conference in 2012 when I met some of the Conference Committee and agreed to act as bookings secretary for the 2014 conference and AGM. I took over as Associate Secretary in January this year and am still learning the job – so please be patient with me! Not surprisingly with my background I am committed to and passionate about lay ministry. There is no doubt that in coming years the use and nature of lay ministry will change. I would hope to see the CRC at the centre of and helping to drive this change with Readers taking their part as lay theologians working at the margins of church and society in a whole range of roles in parishes in pioneer ministry, as chaplains, evangelists etc. perhaps even providing a leadership presence in parishes working closely with other lay and ordained ministries.

Jeff Heaton is a Reader in the Joint Benefice of Thornhill & Whitley Lower in the Diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales and is Secretary of Readers for the Wakefield and Huddersfield Episcopal Areas
I recently attended a church I had never visited before on what happened to be the Sunday when the name of the new incumbent was announced. His predecessor had been in charge for well over twenty years, following which there had been a long interregnum. We were asked to pray for the new priest as he prepares to take up his post. I did, and frankly I reckon he will need all the prayers he can get.

However, this was not a church on its last legs. There was a sizeable congregation of various ages, who were very welcoming to me and other strangers, and there was evidently strong provision for children. But it was also difficult to avoid the feeling that things would have been exactly the same twenty years ago. There was a cantor whose voice had once clearly been wonderful, but was now rather less so. One of the servers had to be helped up from a kneeling position because she could not manage it alone and one lesson was read from a pew because the person reading could not move to the lectern. Twenty years ago all three of these people would have had no difficulty with their tasks, and probably the regular congregation will barely have noticed problems developing over the years.

Now this is sad, but it simply represents the passage of time. Nonetheless when the new priest comes his first impression may be the same as mine. Perhaps he will want to change much which could upset many of the “old stalwarts”. There was no Reader in this particular situation, but frequently there is, and he or she is almost always expected to represent continuity and hence to resist change. And of course, all too often new clergy are actually over-full of new ideas, wanting to sweep away much that is of value, and paying little attention to the spiritual needs of those who have served the church so well for very many years. Getting the balance right is really very difficult, and it is a situation in which we as Readers can often be a real help, provided we are ourselves able to view the situation objectively. But objectivity is hard to achieve and much prayer is needed to achieve the constant gradual renewal that should be the hallmark of all Christian people whether as individuals or in groups.

Alan Wakely
Secretary,
Central Readers’ Council

CARLISLE DIOCESE
Newly admitted and licensed Readers – 9 November 2013:
Alison Armstrong-Squires – Brigham, Great Broughton & Broughton Moor
David Bamford – Lanercost with Kirkcambeck & Walton
Sheila Clark – Moreland, Thirnby, Great Strickland & Cliburn
Robert Cox – Stanwix
Linda Dean – Kirby Ireleth
John Hazlehurst – St Mark, Barrow-in-Furness
Allan Johnson – North Barrow Team Ministry
Lorna Tampling – Lanercost with Kirkcambeck & Walton
Susan Whittaker – Beacon Team Ministry
Licensed – 12 May 2013
Janet Beer – Stanwix
Licensed – 25 May 2013
Lindsay Nevin – Broughton & Duddon
Licensed – 30 September 2013
Linda Hunter – Holy Trinity, Kendal

Bath & Wells
Angela Tippett
Dr Michael Elwin
Griffiths Poole
Frank Ball
Birmingham
Frank Robinson
Jean Elkin
Blackburn
Kenneth Longley
Eric Bamber
Jenny Mercer
Chelmsford
Noel King
Chester
Jill Rogerson
David John Hall
Chichester
Geoffrey Starling
Derby
Bryan Cogley
Durham
Patricia Jean Watson
Catherine (Katie) Ross
Ely
Mrs Sharon Clark
Guildford
Derek Berry
Hereford
Jenny Williams
Liverpool
Clifford Henry Green
Mrs A Hall
Manchester
Jeff Han
Menmough
Mr DJ Willis
Mr D Taylor
Portsmouth
Richard Hind
Mrs Jean Price
John Towns
Rochester
Charles Hooper
Laure Woodard
Sir John Bee-Shaw
James R Cheesman
A.G. Carruthers
St Albans
John Ware
Margaret Leng
Martin Horton
Sheffield
Mrs Dora Walsh
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CRC NEWS
NEW DESIGN
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