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Welcome to another edition of our magazine! Our theme is ‘Meet the Author’ and the people chosen represent a cross section of the endless possibilities! Three of them were chosen by me, and three by Kirsty, our Reviews Editor, to whom I also offer my thanks for all her hard work. The articles make interesting reading, and give us some insight into the lives and experiences of the people concerned.

Once again a number of articles have been written by Readers. Margaret Tinsley has written about C.S. Lewis – an author I should love to have met, and in good Church Times fashion, would not mind having the opportunity to question him further about his life and times as well as his work.

Tom McLeish, a Reader who is Professor of Physics at Durham University, is the author of a recently published book entitled *Faith and Wisdom in Science*. Tom tells us that in this book he has ‘tried to explore a Biblical approach to the cultural purpose of science by drawing together what it feels like to do science now, with a scientist’s reading of (scriptures) ancient wisdom tradition’. Interesting!

There are some seasonal contributions. Another Reader, Liz Pacey, tells us of the old Mexican tradition of *Pasada*, which has found new life in recent years. It involves passing a Nativity set from family to family in the run up to Christmas, but I won’t tell you more – you can unwrap the idea for yourself!

Patricia Wilkinson, a GP and a Reader, is interested in what makes people ‘sick’ and how different personality types affect how we respond to each other and to God. She has decided to share some of her insights in her article entitled *Personality and Prayer*, and offers some practical insights about teaching people in a way that fits in with their own personality type and accompanying preferences.

So you can see there is plenty of writing going on all over the place. Long may it continue! So here is a challenge for the new year. Could you write an article for *The Reader*? Think and pray about it – even if you have never done anything like that before. Or if you are a published author, why not hone your skills? If you are very quick you can still submit a short story for the story competition which will appear in the next issue, entitled *Stories and Story Telling*. After that the summer issue will focus on Chaplaincies, so any chaplains or aspiring chaplains out there, get pen to paper or maybe fingers to keyboard these days!

So I look forward to hearing from some more of you…!

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Jane Williams is a lecturer who has written a number of books as well as being the wife of Archbishop Rowan. She teaches theology at St Mellitus College, she is also a freelance writer and editor, is the author of a number of books, including *Lectionary Reflections*, *Approaching Christmas*, *Approaching Easter*, and *Angels*. Most recently she has appeared as an interviewee in Julia Ogilvy’s *Women in Waiting: Prejudice at the heart of the Church* (Bloomsbury, 2014). This article is drawn in part from that interview, reproduced here by kind permission of the publishers.

‘I grew up in South India. My parents were missionaries there for the Church Missionary Society and I was born there and lived there until I was about eight. I’m one of five sisters, so it was like a Jane Austen family and I think I’ve always assumed that the world was largely feminine. Although my father was a very strong personality, it was an overwhelmingly female household. I went to a girls’ boarding school in the hills so I never really had the feeling of either competition or inferiority to men as I was growing up. But it was quite a shock when I came to read theology at Clare College Cambridge. ‘Being a Christian and growing up in a Christian family was and is a really important part of my life and kept me going through some very tough times at boarding school because God was the bit of the family that came with you wherever you went. I was very much aware that God was part of our family culture for me and I wanted to find out whether that’s all it was or whether I actually believed in God myself. I think that’s why I decided to study theology. I thought if I gave it a kind of rigorous going-over I would find out if I still believed it at the end. I found I did and I realised that a big part of my spirituality is the intellectual excitement of God. Studying theology has never been a distraction for me. I realise that isn’t the same for everybody but for me it has really deepened my faith to explore it like that, I do strongly believe that if a faith can’t be examined then it can’t be a real faith; if you think God is going to disappear if you ask difficult questions about Him then that’s not a God worth having.

‘Of course it is just faith and, in the end, there isn’t a logical argument that proves the existence of God and I would want to argue that that says something about the nature of the God I believe in. If you could prove the existence of God then we wouldn’t have any choice about believing in God, and the Christian faith has always said that God leaves us free to relate or not to relate. So the fact that there are going to be unanswered questions is part of the nature of God. But I also think that either God is truth or God isn’t truth, and if God is truth then there is no truth of which God is afraid. Therefore we do need some Christians who are not afraid to ask questions and to come up against blank walls occasionally. I don’t think that’s everybody’s calling but it’s exciting for me.

‘It was quite unusual to be a woman in Cambridge when I was a student there. I suppose I hadn’t ever realised before that
Men had brains. Even my father didn’t really count because he was my father. For me to realise that men are complex human beings and have feelings and emotions and thoughts just the same as women did was really quite an eye-opener, and quite an intriguing insight into how it’s possible in a very male culture for men not to know that about women. It’s quite interesting that I came at it the other way round. I was the only theologian in my year.

Women and men are different become stereotyping, but does that mean that we have to say that women and men are the same?

‘I would call myself a feminist, but I’m clear that I’m a feminist because I’m a Christian. God calls women to be disciples of Christ, just as God calls men. Women can’t be disciples just through marriage or through relating to men who are disciples: our discipleship is about personal call, just as it is for men. Despite the Synod’s vote in favour of the consecration of women as bishops earlier this summer, I believe there is still a fairly deep level of confusion, incoherence even, in the Church of England about what kind of decision it is to admit women to the threefold order. Has the nature of priesthood changed fundamentally? What is the meaning of the fact that women and men are different?

‘Despite these unresolved issues, as I was at pains to point out to Julia Ogilvy in my recent interview, a number of women have now achieved senior positions in the church. If you look around the business world they may say that everything’s equal, but you don’t see it. I don’t think that women now serving as archdeacon, deanery or senior incumbent level have necessarily ‘bought in’ to a male church culture; people – of either sex – who hear God’s call to the ordained ministry as it is claimed in the Church of England need to be able to flourish in it and love it as it is, even while longing to see it change in some ways.

But church culture doesn’t change fast, so I wouldn’t want women bishops to be castigated for not changing things overnight.

‘Just over a decade ago The Church Times approached me to ask if I would write a series of Lectionary Reflections for them. This was brave of them, as I’m not ordained, and I don’t preach a great deal, so they had little evidence that I might be able to do this. I found it a great format: it really concentrates what you want to say. I’m learning to preach, but I really prefer writing. I certainly wouldn’t claim a lifetime of immersion in the Bible: I have read it pretty much daily all my life, but not always intelligently or attentively. The Lectionary Reflections are, from that point of view, a good spiritual discipline: preparing to write them requires you to pay deep attention, and lay yourself open to scripture, if you are to hear anything and try to pass it on.

‘Then it was suggested that I might try to reach a wider audience with books that would include classic religious pictures and scripture as well as reflection. I have a sister and a nephew who are artists, and who see all the world in ways that I, who am basically a wordsmith, just don’t. They attend to very different things. So I have always been aware that for many, many people the visual is a necessary part of learning and understanding, and that was the point of books like Faces of Christ: pictures can convey meanings with an economy that is harder with words. As with Approaching Christmas and Approaching Easter, the picture research was all done by the publisher, although they gave me options and suggestions. In the case of Angels, the artist, Linda Baker Smith, worked from my text and produced the wonderful paintings in response. I do feel passionately that anyone who is willing to start to think and pray and open themselves to God is doing theology; it must never become the preserve of academics. When working on my book about angels I discovered that Christians and non-Christians could get excited talking about angels across all kinds of different divides and faiths. And so I thought it was interesting to help people think, what is it about angels that you find attractive? And it does seem to be that sense of being cared for. And I’ve had so many touching letters from people describing their experiences of angels and they are all of that kind of nature. I find it very moving.’

‘Of course it is just faith and in the end there isn’t a logical argument that proves the existence of God and I would want to argue that that says something about the nature of the God I believe in.’
First of all Nick, would you please tell us a little about the think tank Theos and what your role is there?

Theos was set up with the support – the warm spiritual support rather than the hard financial support – of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster in 2006. We’re here to offer a thoughtful, reasonable, faithful, and intelligent Christian voice in public life. We publish essays and reports, conduct research, and hold talks and debates on Christianity in Britain today, all with the hope of showing that the Christian faith is part of the solution to our problems, rather than a problem itself. Whether we succeed in doing that is not for me to say!

How did you come to be involved with Theos?

I worked to two other Christian think tanks – the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity and the Jubilee Centre – before I joined Theos and before then my background lies in quantitative and qualitative research. I was originally asked to write Theos’ inaugural report, Doing God: A Future for Faith in the public square, and then to apply for the job of Research Director. It was too good an offer to refuse.

How did your background (uni; home; church etc) help prepare you for this work?

I read Modern History and English at university which was a great privilege and joy and I guess prepared me for my work in as far as it taught me to read texts and to pay attention to words. Writing has always been very important to me and although, like any good arts graduate, I would have liked to have been a world-renowned poet, what I do comes a close second.

Equally important, I was brought up in a non-Christian home – my parents were and are somewhere between atheist and agnostic. I only first really encountered Christianity seriously aged about 18 (and no small part of that encounter was through literature). I think that means that I always have a non-Christian audience in my mind when I write, and try to take nothing (including the reader’s sympathy) for granted. I know I don’t succeed in this but, as T.S. Eliot once wrote, every attempt to use words is a different kind of failure.

What do you find most stimulating and most problematic about this role?

There is some form of stimulation in pretty much everything I do but the most stimulating aspect is undoubtedly writing or co-writing our publications, watching an essay or collection come together, from the first tentative thoughts to the volume in the hands (I’m still rather old media and like the feel of a book. I suspect kindles are a sign of the Fall). That is often hard work – especially in wide ranging collections with numerous authors – but it does allow me to think through big ideas and then try to articulate them in a way that is both penetrating and accessible.

The more problematic aspect... well, every job has its niggles but I suppose there is an inherent tension in what we do between what is important and what is newsworthy. Theos serves as a kind of bridge between the academy and the polity, or the academy and the media, and the two don’t always have the same agenda. That means that while there are sometimes projects we would like to do because they are inherently interesting, we avoid them because we know there would be minimal wider interest (and/or because we can’t fund them). Conversely, there are areas we avoid because, while they may grab the headlines (and we all know what they might be), we have nothing particularly serious, different or profound to contribute to the debate. At its best, it can be a creative tension, but it’s a tension nonetheless.

‘Doing God’: A Future for Faith in the Public Square was published to coincide with the think-tank’s launch in 2006. Since then Theos has published nearly 50 essays and reports, authored by academics, researchers, theologians and social commentators, four major books and a number of other research papers. Could you please tell us something about these and which you consider to be the most significant?

Broadly speaking we have two kinds of publication – research reports, which examine the role of religion (in general) and Christianity (in particular) in contemporary life, and essays, which offer a Christian perspective on a contemporary issue.

In the first category, for example, go Turbulent Priests, our report into the political activity of the last three Archbishops of Canterbury; Voting and Values, a big piece of work looking at whether and how religion has, does and will affect voting behaviour; and Andy Walton’s great report on whether there is a “Religious Right” emerging in Britain, as so many have intimated.

In the second category, there would be publications like Jonathan Chaplin’s work on Multiculturalism; Trevor Cooling’s work on what a Christian vision for education looks like; my recent piece on How to think about religious freedom; and Clifford Longley’s forthcoming work on Just Money: How Catholic Social Thought can Redeem Capitalism. These are big questions – multiculturalism, education, religious freedom, economics – that demand serious and careful Christian attention. I hope that is what we provide.

Of course, that’s an overly neat division and not everything fits into it. We have published a number of collections, on Religion and Law or The Future of Welfare, for example, which are more discursive and serve as platforms for intelligent debate – from Christians and non-Christians – on key issues of the day. And then there are books, like Freedom and Order, which looked at the political influence of the Bible in Britain, from the earliest times right the way up to Blair and Brown, or my recent book on the history of atheism,
Atheists: the Origin of the Species. These are much more substantial volumes (most of our essays and reports are quite short because we recognise that people often only have limited time) and they give us an opportunity to go into a big issue at much greater depth.

What books are you waiting to write now?

I’m taking a rest from writing just now, partly because I am about to start a part-time PhD at Cambridge looking at the theology of the state, the welfare state in particular.

It seems to me that this is a massive issue – we rarely recognise the utter transformation of the size, scope and purpose of the state in the last century, even in the last 50 years – and it is one that we keep on running up against at Theos. What should we expect government to do? Many political theorists and commentators think that we are witnessing the early stages of a significant retrenchment of the state (though many are also sceptical: for all her rhetoric not even Mrs Thatcher reduced its size, though she did of course massively change its role). Either way, it’s a big, important and fast-changing issue. More to the point, it’s an issue that (I think) has received only limited attention from political theologians and I hope to try to rectify that in some small way.

Looking at the demise of our ability to relate to our British Christian roots more generally, what effect do you think this has had on our society?

That’s a huge question! Bishops and others have been saying for decades (nearly a century in fact) that Britain has been living on the Christian capital accumulated by previous generations for many years now, but that it is now fast running out. The metaphor might be a bit crude in places but it certainly has something going for it.

Our dominant culture is one of liberalism, which while in its political form is healthy and necessary, when allied to both social and economic forms, becomes problematic. The individual – his choice, her freedom – becomes sovereign. Yet that is no foundation for the common good. The result is that things today are better for me but worse for us.

Christianity is an ‘us’ religion. It understands that humans only flourish, only really live, in secure, long-term, unconditional relationship. But liberalism can act like a solvent on these, the result being a people that is freer, richer but unhappier.

I don’t want to exaggerate how much better things were in a more thoroughly Christian society. Often they weren’t. And let’s not forget, Christians have been bemoaning the thinness of the nation’s faith since the 8th century (the Venerable Bede was vexed about it, for example). But I do have fears about our direction of travel. To quote from David Marquand’s recent book on the future of Britain, we are in danger of sleepwalking into a “seedy barbarism” – lovely phrase.

How can people connect with Theos?

There’s tons of material, including virtually all our publications available free of charge on our website, theosthinktank.co.uk. I’d love people to download, read and engage with it.

I would also love it if they felt able to join us as a Friend or Associate, and spread the word about our work. Theos has a mixed economy of funding but absolutely central to that are our Friends and Associates – individuals, churches and other organisations who get what we are trying to do and support us. We rely on them and really couldn’t do what we do without their commitment.

Do you have any contact with the Reader movement besides writing for our magazine and helping us to think about all these important issues raised by Theos?

It’s one of those magazines that stack up on my desk un- or only partially read, alongside Prospect, Standpoint, The Tablet, Third Way, etc. How much I never get round to reading depresses me.

In good Church Times fashion, if you had to be shut in a church with someone else, who would it be and why?

The obvious answer is my family members (though I am not sure whether they would say the same thing). Personally, it would be my former best man, who is now a vicar in Sheffield – a chap of the highest erudition, intelligence, faith, and wit. Theologically, it would be F.D. Maurice, one of the genuinely innovative minds of the 19th century. But if I am allowed to be more fantastical it would probably be T.S. Eliot or maybe George Orwell – writers whom I revere, though not necessarily the easiest people to get on with. We’d need to have the church key just in case.
As a consequence they were determined that their children would get the most out of their education. I could read *The Beano* but only if I also read *Look and Learn*. We were taken to the library from an early age and I came to see books as friends. I enjoyed reading that allowed my imagination to play: exploring the strange worlds of planets that moved around remote stars or being Robin Hood’s best friend in Sherwood Forest. Though we went to church there were no religious books at home. I read the New Testament for the first time when I was fourteen. I was in my imagination again, following Jesus along the way as he taught and healed and called people into his company. As some reality kicked in (I was never going to be Roy of the Rovers or meet Robin Hood after all) I thought I would either be a teacher or be a priest – not that I dared tell anyone about the latter. I studied history at university; everyone told me that university was going to be this wonderful, liberating experience. Perhaps my own desire to write began here.

Despite all this I was accepted for ordination, on condition that I first completed my degree. The following years gave me the opportunity to make new friends: fellow students first but also fellow travellers across time and place: Bede, who introduced me to the daring of the early Christian missionaries; Julian of Norwich, whose common sense and gentleness calmed and reassured me; the vulnerable humanity of Michel Quoist’s *Prayers of Life* and the creative play of the poetry of George Herbert and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Writing was their generous gift to me: they wrote from the heart and from their experience, and they gave me words and imagery to express my own see-saw journey with God. Perhaps my own desire to write began here.

Whilst working as a priest I trained as a spiritual director, firstly at St. Beuno’s Spiritual Exercises Centre in North Wales and later at Heythrop College in London. Accompanying people as they sought to listen to the Spirit and find meaning and path within the jumble of their thoughts, feelings and experiences seemed about as close as I could get to my sense of what my life was for. Over time my responsibilities have changed, but seeping through the cracks of whatever my job description has been I’ve found myself alongside others in this way. After nine years I left the Catholic priesthood: a step I never imagined myself taking. But I no longer felt able to represent the church’s teaching on who could and who couldn’t receive communion. Jesus sat down and ate with tax collectors and sinners, but the church of the time seemed unable to deal with the messy reality of many people’s lives. I came to a day when I knew I couldn’t go on. The experience of leaving was like jumping out of an aeroplane not knowing whether a parachute was attached to my back or if it would open before I reached the ground. Though it was the fruit of my own choosing, my income, role, home and life map had been rolled up and taken away. Nor was there any easy or comfortable place
within the Church I had grown up in and served. I didn’t know what came next. But kindness from family and friends sustained me, not least from June who I went on to marry. I went, unsuccessfully, to a number of job interviews. The day before our wedding I was accepted for a post with the Anglican Diocese of Southwark, and there, in different roles, I have stayed. I have been Spiritual Formation Advisor for the Diocese for nearly five years, working with local churches and groups in initiatives to do with growth in prayer and Christian discipleship.

I had often thought: ‘one day I will write a book’ but then been defeated by the sense that I had nothing fresh to say. Or perhaps it was more the fear that I did have something to say but it might not be received well by others! The draw to write deepened when studying for an MA in Christian Spirituality at Heythrop College. I chose to write my dissertation on suffering, drawing on the writings of a 13th century spiritual guide and poet, Hadewijch. She drew on a wide range of imagery to express how we ‘meet’ difficult experiences and in so doing encounter Christ within them. I’d grown up with a lop-sided view of Christianity that went something like ‘the more miserable you are the better God is pleased’. But what I had discovered through experience was that Christ makes his home with us in struggle and pain so that we might move with him towards freedom and joy. Hadewijch, in her own time, shared her experience and understanding to make the journey of others who followed a little easier. I felt the pull to do the same, drawing not just on my own experience but on that of other travellers across time and place.

In writing Seeing in the Dark I drew on imagery from the Christian spiritual tradition to explore the part struggle and difficulty play within human growth and our experience of God. Sometimes a picture expresses the mystery of our experience more helpfully than words can alone. Thus John of the Cross used the image of ‘night’ to express what it is like to be in a place where it seems we can neither manage nor understand what is happening to us. Julian of Norwich gazed at the servant Christ ‘falling down’ into the depths of our difficulty. The poets George Herbert and Gerard Manley Hopkins drew on the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with God to express their own inner turmoil. In the hymn Guide me O thou great Redeemer William Williams imagined walking through a trackless wasteland with pilgrims across time, and then glimpsing a hidden Promised Land. Hadewijch wrote of the seasons we pass through on our life journey. The philosopher and spiritual seeker, Simone Weil expressed the experience of God’s seeming presence and absence as the meeting and separation of friends.

From the first I knew that I didn’t want to write an abstract and purely academic analysis of suffering. Nor did I want to write just for those who support others, though I have included a chapter for those who come alongside people in the contexts of spiritual direction and pastoral care. Struggle is not reserved for the few. We all wake to difficult days. Things happen that for all our effort will not be managed nor understood. God will not stay in a convenient box, always doing our bidding. And yet these experiences have the capacity to draw us out of the narrow confines of fear into the liberty of the love of God. I hope what I have written is practical and relates to what it feels like to be somewhere you’d prefer not to be. Though suffering is in the subtitle, the pages of Seeing in the Dark tell the story of hope.

Canterbury Press was the second publisher I approached with an outline for a book and a sample chapter. I was surprised and overjoyed when the proposal was accepted. I agreed to complete the manuscript in six months. Finding gaps to write alongside work was challenging but as those of you who have written essays will know: there’s nothing like a deadline to concentrate the mind. A further six months followed where the text was prepared prior to publishing. I developed complete punctuation blindness through proof-reading. After a while you cease to know what on earth to do with a comma!

It still seems somewhat strange to see my name on a book cover. Though I recognise there’s a lot of ‘me’ in the writing I also know that any wisdom or insight within the pages are what I’ve received from others; it was my task to pass it on. The feedback I’ve been happiest to receive has been from those who’ve told me they have found practical help in what I’ve written: a picture that helps make sense of the place where they are or the opening up of a path in what had seemed a dead end. I’m gladdened when hope finds a home in the reader.

I intend to begin writing again later this month. This time my theme will be growth: how it happens in the natural world and how we allow God to bring it about in our own lives. The shape isn’t quite clear yet, but it will come. Sometimes, if you are willing to stay with darkness and not run away, you will begin to see.

The book began as a course of lectures when I was Gresham Professor of Divinity. (Gresham College provides around 140 free public lectures every year within the city of London). This provided a thoughtful audience with some specialists in it. I was very humbled when Sister Wendy Beckett came from East Anglia, in her wheelchair, for a couple of them. She of course knows far more than I do and has done so much to alert people to what is worthwhile. The book is intended for the same kind of thoughtful audience but I think specialists will gain something from it, for what I have done has not been attempted before, that is, look at the whole sweep of Christian art from the German Expressionists to those working now.

I first started looking at art seriously during vacations from Cambridge, when I went with a few friends in an old car, camping in the open, to look at galleries and museums all over the continent. A month or so doing this every year was a wonderful way of opening our eyes. As time went by, I became aware of the challenge presented by the whole modern art movement to artists who wanted to relate in some way to traditional iconography. Over the years I gradually became aware that more people had tried to meet this challenge than was at first apparent.

In the 1930s David Jones said that he and his contemporaries were acutely conscious of ‘the break’, by which he meant the fragmentation and loss of a once widely shared Christian narrative and set of images. In this book I wanted to look at some of the artists associated with the birth of modernism such as Epstein and Rouault as well as those with a highly distinctive understanding of religion such as Chagall and Stanley Spencer. The rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral after the war produced a revival of confidence in the commissioning of work by artists such as Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland and...
I think most people think of art as representing something, but modernism took off on the basis that it does not represent anything but exists in its own right. This attitude, combined with the naturally conservative nature of parts of the Church of England, may in part explain why relatively little modern art is being commissioned for church settings. But it is worth noting that Jacob Epstein’s Ecce Homo, now in the bombed ruins of the old Coventry Cathedral, which aroused huge antagonism when it was first produced, received a lot of support from the clergy.

In the 1940’s that remarkable man Walter Hussey, through his sensitive and careful (and cunning) approach to his Parochial Church Council, had their support both for the Graham Sutherland and the Henry Moore in the church.

And some good modern work is being commissioned. For example, St. Dunstan’s, Mayfield, commissioned a piece by Maggi Hambling which went up last year. Called Resurrection Spirit, it hangs high above the central altar, well placed to be seen as people enter the church. For Maggi Hambling herself, the work is very much about the human spirit being able to soar. For others its angelic, bird-like quality might bring to mind the Holy Spirit. But it also has Johannine resonances.

In St. John’s Gospel the cross, resurrection, ascension and coming of the Holy Spirit are all part of one movement to the Father, of one process of revealing the Divine Glory in Jesus. So the soaring upwards of the human spirit is taken up into that movement of the human to the divine, made possible in Jesus, and through whom the Holy Spirit comes to us, making our glorification possible.

As Pamela Tudor Craig has rightly commented in the Church Times, St. Mary’s Iffley “is the place to seek if you are looking for the best that we have done and can do today.” As well as a fine window by John Piper, there is a stillness about Peter and Jesus that permeates the whole scene. A fuller discussion of Wagner’s painting can be found in my earlier book (2004) and on Wagner’s own website.

If a visit to St Mary’s, Iffley (a wonderful mediaeval church), is not possible, other churches well worth a visit include St Matthew’s, Northampton with works by Graham Sutherland and Henry Moore, or All Saints Church, Basingstoke which has a head of Christ by Elizabeth Frink and windows by Cecil Collins.

In the last chapter of the book, I try to give an impression of the vibrant contemporary scene, illustrating works by Fenwick Lawson (his wooden Pieta, 1981) now in Durham Cathedral, Peter Ball’s Pietà and Crucifix at Winchester Cathedral, as well as the work of Peter Howson, Nicholas Mynheer and Mark Cazalet amongst others. Our contemporary artistic life is by no means as secular as many people imagine, and I hope my book will demonstrate the range of approaches and styles currently in use.

The Image of Christ in Modern Art
Ashgate 2013.
Reading for inspiration

The story of how I began my writing career is rooted in my infancy, and amply illustrates the importance of parents reading to their children. I was five years old when my mother gave my father a leather bound book titled Great Short Stories of the World, and this became the source of all bedtime stories for me for the next few years. Oscar Wilde’s The Selfish Giant (British), Guy de Maupassant’s The Necklace (French) and Anton Chekhov’s The Bet (Russian) were among my favourites, and my father never failed to bring them to life for me.

The point is that all these stories encompass great themes which convey a message, a moral compass: selflessness versus generosity of spirit for the giant who closes his garden to the local children; pride before a fall for the woman whose self-esteem demands that she borrows a valuable necklace, then loses it; wisdom and isolation in the case of the lawyer who, for the sake of winning, loses all. Being the only member of my family with an interest in Christian faith (the result of my convent schooling), these messages had a profound effect on me.

By the time I was ten, we’d moved from inner London to leafy Surrey, and my mother, who saw books as nothing more than collectors of dust, had consigned my father’s collection to the large loft of our new home. A natural introvert and avid reader, I failed to live up to my parents’ love of sport and socialising. So the space and solitude of that attic, combined with unlimited access to Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens, became my daily delight. Along with Enid Blyton, of course, and my weekly comic, School Friend!

Before long, I was writing my own stories, and when my father began to subscribe to Argosy (a short story magazine) I made my first submission. The tale, titled The Haunted House, was a mystery, with the protagonist – the ghost of a dog – revealed only at the end. Had I mentioned my age – fourteen at the time – who knows, I might have been published alongside H E Bates’ The Darling Buds of May.

As it was, I received my first rejection slip.

A move to Salcombe, Devon, unearthed a book my father had won as a prize while a schoolboy. Entitled The Yellow Pup it told the story of a young boy’s meeting with Jesus, and there and then, beneath the bedcovers, I made a commitment. Sadly, with little support, it was to be a further ten years before I was to become a true follower. Happily, though, the Father never let me go.

Engaging with life

My writing in those intervening years was confined to journaling. I’d worked, briefly in my teens, for American author, Paul Gallico and, as his ‘amanuensis’ (his word in the testimonial he subsequently wrote for me), had not only met the real Ludmila (daughter of Baroness von Falz-Fein and inspiration for the book, Ludmila) but liaised with the film producers of his book, Flowers for Mrs Harris.

More evocatively, I was involved in his serialisation of the heartbreaking stories of those who perished in the sinking of the Princess Victoria, the ferry that plied between Stranraer and Larne. Wandering among the mimosas in his Salcombe garden, Mr Gallico would dictate to me for most of the day, and I would then type up the results in the evening. I doubt that anything could have been more provocative in engaging my mind in the meaning of life; in what we call ‘God-incidences’; and in the suddenness and finality of death.

Far from home, with three children and a faltering marriage due to my husband’s infidelity, the first fifteen years of my adulthood were spent in writing angst-filled hidden diaries. Where had I gone wrong? How could I put it right? Where was God in my life?

Thanks to Billy Graham he was, actually, right back at the centre of things. But far from restoring my marital relationship, my church...
under a pen name to protect my ex-husband, conveyed a message of trust in God, forgiveness and perseverance as I recounted the story of my fifteen year marriage to a philandering non-believer. Divorced but not Defeated was more a message of hope and failure – my own as I slid into bad habits – and God’s grace and faithfulness until, eventually, I realised that I had been delivered from the slavery of Egypt into the promised land.

At about this time, I read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and understood it to be my commissioning verse from God. Passionate about comforting others with the comfort I had received from him, I found the volume and tone of the ‘fan-mail’ I received as a result of my books incredibly humbling. Men and women from various parts of the world wrote to me confessing that my suffering was theirs, too; that they had never known any other Christian to have experienced the same sense of rejection and dejection as I had described.

Only one was critical about my confession of loneliness, telling me that Jesus should be enough. I wrote back to her, pointing out that even he, in the Garden of Gethsemane, had yearned for the support of his disciples.

In response to Sally’s desperate pleas for help, and three failed attempts to get her clean, I turned again to writing as my means of solace. The resulting book, Where is my Child? was swiftly followed by Second Marriage, both published by Kingsway, under my own name.

I joined the Association of Christian Writers and, following a writers’ conference in Corfu with my husband, had the privilege of Adrian Plass inviting himself to dine at our house. Speaking engagements followed, and a commission from Hodder & Stoughton to ghost-write the story of a Devon woman whose addictions were so severe that she was more a message of hope and failure – my own as I slid into bad habits – and God’s grace and faithfulness until, eventually, I realised that I had been delivered from the slavery of Egypt into the promised land. 

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The necessary research at the World Health Organisation and Glaxo.

The Last Mountain became a Sunday Times No. 4 Bestseller, and was to earn me the title of a ‘best-selling author’ when introduced at a conference at Lee Abbey by Edward England. Uncomfortable with the connotation, it was a label I refused, and it earned me a reprimand from my then minister, David Coffey.

‘Don’t hide your light under a bushel,’ David told me. ‘It isn’t yours to hide.’

Taking that to heart, I went on to write Stepfamilies, a how-to book published by Lion Hudson, and found myself on a national tour of speaking events, plus radio and TV appearances.

Meanwhile, believing God to be telling me that I had been acting as a cushion for my daughter every time she threatened to reach rock bottom, and pointing out to me that he was that Rock, I had to take a different stance. Telling my daughter that we loved her but could no longer help her was the hardest thing I have ever had to do. But within months, God showed that he had future in his hands.

For five years, during which she put herself through college and graduated, she was drug free. Her death, in suspicious circumstances, left her father and me with a dilemma. The Coroner’s verdict was to have been damning but, with a good deal of sleuthing, I was able to produce enough medical evidence to prove she had, indeed, been drug free. A single morphine tablet had been put in her drink. Should we take out the private prosecution advocated by the police we asked ourselves? Or should we give time to our other two daughters?

To find the answer, I read my latest book, A Painful Post Mortem, written as a novel under my pen name, Mel Menzies, to protect my grandson. This book, too, has had a profound effect on readers and raised money for charity.

Continuing this trend, my next book, a soon to be published crossover novel, is the first of a mystery series set in Exeter’s Cathedral Yard. Presented with a client whose husband has been put in her drink. Should we take out the private prosecution advocated by the police we asked ourselves? Or should we give time to our other two daughters?

To find the answer, I read my latest book, A Painful Post Mortem, written as a novel under my pen name, Mel Menzies, to protect my grandson. This book, too, has had a profound effect on readers and raised money for charity.

Merrilyn recently retired as Chair of the Association of Christian Writers.
HEATHER: Can you tell me something about your early years and what influence you think they have had on your ministry as a writer, retreat leader and spiritual director?

TONY: I’m the youngest of five children and grew up in Barnsley in Yorkshire. My father worked at the local colliery, as did my two brothers, but it was his hope for me that I would not have to follow in his footsteps. I passed my 11-Plus exam and went to the nearby Grammar School. During my teenage years I was converted through the Methodist Chapel in our village and knew almost at once that God had a plan for my life, so after A levels chose to go to Bible College rather than University. I guess my father was a bit disappointed at my choice of career path, but he soon came to terms with it.

As for the writing, I can remember sitting one day in English class and thinking I would like to be a sports journalist, so there must have been something stirring within me even then. Still, I had passed fifty before I put pen to paper (well, got on the computer) with the intention of writing something for publication.

HEATHER: Quiet Spaces had a series of three issues entitled Sit, Walk and Stand. I decided on these titles because, as a young Christian, I was very influenced by the Chinese Christian Watchman Nee. I gather you know about his life and works. How did this come to happen and has he been an influence in your own life?

TONY: I think I first came across his book, ‘Sit, Walk, Stand’ when I was at Bible College, but it was later that I began to read more of his writings and to grasp what he was teaching. Evelyn and I joined Overseas Missionary Fellowship in 1975 and went to work in East Malaysia. God had given us a love for the Chinese people, and we spent eight very exciting and fulfilling years working there amongst both Chinese and indigenous people. It was in this context that I began to read more of Watchman Nee’s work. I was deeply influenced by his three volume work, The Spiritual Man, which helped me to understand how as human beings we are made of three parts – body, soul and spirit – and that spiritual growth is largely dependent upon knowing how God works in each of these dimensions. Later on I read and devoured The Normal Christian Life which I still feel is a must read for anyone wanting to be strongly rooted in Christ.

HEATHER: Four of your recent books have come to my attention. These are Rhythms of Grace, Mentoring for Spiritual Growth Servant Ministry and Working from a Place of Rest. Rhythms of Grace I gather grew out of your growing personal desire to know God more deeply. A contemplative approach to this did not come easily for you because of your evangelical and charismatic background. What would you say to someone else who had the same background and wanted to take a similar route?

TONY: Two things led me to seek a more contemplative approach to spirituality. The first was seeing friends in ministry experiencing burnout and knowing how exhausted I was myself most of the time. I thought, ‘There must be a better way to live than this.’ The second was a growing hunger for intimacy with God that was missing from my life despite my evangelical and charismatic background. I was invited by Joyce Huggett to have a silent retreat at her centre in Derbyshire. I went reluctantly and with some apprehension, but to my surprise God met me in a deep and life-changing way. I learned the value of stillness, silence and solitude in restoring one’s soul, but I also over time discovered my true identity as God’s beloved child. I see the contemplative dimension as the third strand in the ‘rope’ of a healthy spirituality. Since then I have been passionate about helping others in Christian ministry nurture their inner life and maintain their intimacy with God despite their busy lives.

I would say to anyone who finds themselves at such a place in life – either because they experience burnout or because they find themselves longing to know God more deeply – to explore contemplative spirituality. Rhythms of Grace might be one place to start as it came out of my own journey and seems to have helped others make sense of what they are experiencing.

HEATHER: As someone who also does some spiritual direction, or mentoring, with individuals, I recognise that one’s own spiritual life provides a basic resource for this. So the book Mentoring for Spiritual Growth I guess springs out of your own experience of being alongside individuals. Could you please tell me a little more about this and the retreat work with which I know you are involved?

TONY: My experience in overseas mission taught me the importance of mentoring others as it was instilled within us that our job was to work ourselves out of a job! That is, following the principle of 2 Timothy 2:2, the aim of Christian ministry is to develop the next generation of leaders. That ideal has always been deeply
imprinted on my heart, and as I look back over my life I can see that I have always enjoyed spending time with individuals who were keen to grow in their faith.

As I discovered the contemplative dimension and began to lead retreats it became a natural thing to offer individual time to retreatants. I was amazed how hungry people were for this, and how transformative it could be when in the context of time away from normal surroundings people were able to share their deepest thoughts and be truly listened to.

Seeing how effective this practice was, and yet knowing how rare it is in both evangelical and charismatic traditions, I wanted to write something that would help people with this background understand why it was important, and then how to go about it.

HEATHER: Working from a Place of Rest is an interesting title which begs some questions before you even open the book! I gather it is about ministerial burn out amongst Christians at all levels, and so this would include Readers. Could you please tell us something about this book, the experiences from which it springs and the advice you would give to people in these circumstances?

TONY: I'm not sure now where the title came from. Did I make it up or was it locked away in my memory from something I had come across earlier? Anyway, it is an expression that conveys the truth that it is God's work we are involved in, and he will help us to do it. The book looks at the story of Jesus at the well of Sychar recorded in John 4, where according to verse 6 we find him sitting and doing nothing because he is tired from the journey. He was not afraid to stop and rest, and because he had time to spare he got into conversation with the Samaritan woman. She is deeply touched, and tells the villagers, who also experience a spiritual awakening. A mini-revival takes place because Jesus was apparently doing 'nothing'.

Of course Jesus was actually doing 'something'. He was listening to the Father's voice, alive and alert to what he was doing. He saw that this meeting was a divinely orchestrated event, and he responded accordingly to a God-given opportunity. The book reminds us that it is permissible for us to rest on our journey, and that in Christian ministry God is the initiator and we are the responders. This means we can be 'at rest' because we don't have to make things happen; the work truly is God's, and he invites us to join him in what he is doing.

HEATHER: The title I am most interested in personally is Servant Ministry. It seems to me that this is an approach to ministry that has long been neglected, and in some cases even seen as a place which should be avoided as it is equated in peoples minds with exploitation and potential burnout. Could you explain more about this understanding of the basis of ministry of any sort, which is what I believe it to be?

TONY: Servant Ministry is a practical exposition of the first of Isaiah's Servant Songs (Isaiah 42:1-9). Here we have a portrait of Jesus as the True Servant, and his servanthood is the pattern for our own. I am deeply convinced that all Christian ministry is based on servanthood – first towards God, then to each other in the Christian community, and then outwards towards the world in its need.

To be a servant is not to be a dogsbody or a doormat because we are primarily serving God, not people, so we have boundaries and take care of ourselves. But it does mean we are not to lord it over others but exercise leadership in humility and with gentleness as Jesus did. True servants are secure in their identity, knowing themselves to be loved by God. Knowing themselves to be loved, they can love others freely.

HEATHER: Finally Tony, what books are you considering writing in future?

TONY: I'm patiently waiting for 'Deep calls to Deep' to be released in early 2015. It looks at some of the psalms of lament, those heart cries that we read about in the more difficult psalms. I have chosen four that were written 'out of the depths' and which deal with some of the issues people face in their journey with God – failure, depression, unjust suffering, and the loss of God's presence. I am especially delighted that each psalm is accompanied by a story from real life, stories of people known to me personally who have had to walk some difficult paths but who discovered God was still with them even when they were 'in the depths'.

The subtitle for the book is 'Spiritual formation in the hard places of life' which expresses my conviction that God will sometimes lead us along some difficult paths so the life of Christ may be more fully formed within us. I think this message is urgently needed in the Western church where many see faith as an insurance against pain and discomfort, and quickly blame God if things don't work out well for them.

Tony Horsfall is a retreat leader based in Yorkshire who leads retreats at a variety of places in the UK. To find out more about his retreats see his website at www.charistraining.co.uk. His books are published by brf. He was interviewed by Heather Fenton, the editor of The Reader, who also used to edit the brf publication Quiet Spaces.
CS Lewis

‘A movement from hard-core intellectualism to one of the great champions of the Christian faith.’

Margaret Tinsley teaches English and is a Reader

Words which sum up one of the ‘greats’ of literature and theology, whose works have been enjoyed by children and adults, Christians and those of no faith, and whose popularity continues long after his death: C S Lewis – clearly an author worthy of close consideration. Clive Staples Lewis was born in November 1898 in Belfast. Disliking his Christian names, he insisted on being called Jack. His early years were tranquil but shattered by the death of his mother from cancer when he was ten: ‘all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable disappeared from my life.’

Schooldays were not very happy for Lewis, either at Wynyard School in Watford, later nicknamed ‘Belsen’ or Malvern College. He fared better with private lessons from his father’s old headmaster. Study at University College Oxford, to which he had won a scholarship, was interrupted by service in the army, but he returned to take his degree and become a fellow of Magdalen College, lecturing in English.

Those early Oxford days were instrumental in re-establishing his faith, which he had lost whilst at school. The reading of G K Chesterton’s Everlasting Man and discussions with friends were influential and he notes one remarkable moment: ‘I was going up Headington Hill on the top of a bus. Without words and almost without images, a fact about myself was somehow presented to me. I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out.’

Then came the unforgettable night when, alone in his room in Magdalen, ‘I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most deserted and reluctant convert in all England.’ Even so, he found church wearisome ‘the time-wasting notices, disagreeable hymns’ but belief in Jesus grew and he found support in his group of friends, the ‘Inklings’, which included J R R Tolkien, who met to talk and read aloud their compositions. He found he could convey his views, views which were to be prolific in his writings as a Christian and apologist, where he felt he was ‘turning Christian doctrine... into the vernacular, with language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand.’

This was exemplified in the Screwtape Letters, first published in weekly instalments in The Guardian, an Anglican newspaper. The elderly devil, Screwtape, mentors young Wormwood, as he tries to secure control of the ‘Patient’. Inevitably, his efforts are pitted against the love of God: ‘We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in; He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over.’

Both moral failings and God’s love are clear to the reader and it is a book which has remained in print and sold over a million copies. Lewis also became highly respected as a preacher. In one of his best-known sermons ‘The Weight of Glory’ preached in St Mary’s, Oxford in 1941, he looks to the ultimate goal of all Christians, to reach heaven, to be with Christ, hear the divine accolade: ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant’ but shares the reality of the world where ‘the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is Monday morning’. This means we must think less about our own potential glory and more about those around us.

Not only was Lewis a gifted preacher but also a broadcaster, with his series of radio talks on Christianity, subsequently made into the book Mere Christianity. Again, he felt his best service was to ‘explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times’. He deliberately tried to be non-denominational for, although he felt ‘we are rightly distressed and ashamed at the divisions of Christendom’ he also believed ‘it still appears an immense formidable unity.’

But there are two other aspects of interest—perhaps the best known.

Firstly, his personal life: his marriage and subsequent love affair with American Joy Davidman Gresham, immortalised in the play and film Shadowlands. What began as a friendship and a civil marriage of convenience to allow Joy to stay in England ended in the bitter-sweet romance of a growing love and then Joy’s succumbing to cancer, a Christian marriage at her hospital bedside, then some months of happiness while the cancer was in remission before her death in 1960. All of this led to Lewis writing A Grief Observed.

Secondly, that series best known to the world at large: the Narnia books. Those adventures of a group of children in a land beyond this one, in some other time, entered through a wardrobe or in a picture, a world where animals talk and Aslan, the lion, is a God-like and saviour figure. The stories, while...
enjoyable on a superficial level, are deeply Christian; they have attracted the comments of many writers, recently Rowan Williams among them. There are specific Bible allusions and interesting parallels. Lewis made clear:

‘I did not say to myself, let us represent Jesus as He really is in our world by a lion in Narnia.’ I said let’s suppose that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as he became a man in our world, became a lion there, and then imagine what might have happened.’

These tales of Susan, Peter, Edmund and Lucy, who find adventure when evacuated to a professor’s house, and who engage with the different world of talking animals like Mr Tumnus, have delighted, enchanted and even converted. One of the most moving scenes is in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe when the lion, Aslan, goes to his death to save Edmund who, by his own fault, has got into the grip of the White Witch. Then the children see the important thing: ‘The stone table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end: and there was no Aslan.’

‘Who’s done it?’ cried Susan. ‘What does it mean? Is it more magic?’ ‘Yes!’ said a great voice behind their backs. ‘It is more magic.’ They looked around. ‘There shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane, stood Aslan himself.’

He explains to them ‘though the Witch knew Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know… if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards’.

While many respond positively to the Christian message of this series of books, some pick holes in Lewis’s theology, arguing that the Trinity is not properly represented. But, we have seen in the quotation above, the willing victim put to death for the sins of others and the Deep Magic which restores them, seemingly the equivalent of God’s plan for salvation, and in so many of the books the Holy Spirit is represented in the restoring breath of Aslan, particularly as he walks beside Shasta in the Darkness, in The Horse and his Boy. Aslan’s personality is such that even non-believers accept him and even find faith in him.

In the last of the seven books, The Last Battle, the world of Narnia comes to an end and the children, killed in a train crash, move into the reality – the Christian promise of eternal life. Lewis was deliberate in this choice of ending as he felt the church ignored the idea of the world coming to an end. And why seven books? Lewis once told a friend that he must write three or seven or nine books as those are ‘magic numbers’. Seven itself reminds us of the seven deadly sins or seven cardinal virtues, for a start.

Each of the books makes an enjoyable, individual read but the sum is so much greater than the parts. For instance, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe has, inexplicably, a lamp-post in the middle of the forest; read The Magician’s Nephew and the explanation is there.

Lewis was a prolific writer. In addition to the books mentioned above, there are many essays and other non-fiction and some science fiction. The latter is represented in a trilogy: Out of the Silent Planet has earth cut off as a result of sin; Perelandra depicts a pre-fallen universe, where natural and spiritual co-exist in the perfection of the garden of Eden; the third volume That Hideous Strength returns to earth and the result of continual and wilful sin is evil on a worldwide scale. In all, the reader can see how the wicked sow the seeds of destruction. In his role as teacher of literature he produced seminal works like The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition or A Preface to ‘Paradise Lost’. But it is the Narnia books or those that express Christian faith in clear, straightforward terms that are so useful – and enjoyable – to the Reader, books like The Great Divorce, Surprised by Joy, with its autobiographical content, The Four Loves, A Grief Observed, God in the Dock. Indeed, all still provide interest and enjoyment in the present-day.

CS Lewis died in 1963, leaving a legacy of books, lectures and sermons. His finest achievement was the ability to look at an old truth and give it a relevance and vitality in a secular age; he was an intellectual who could speak great truths to the ordinary people of his generation. He still has the power to excite and educate as he expounds the Christian faith.

Canon Margaret Tinsley is Reader at St Peter’s Church, St Albans and Head of English in a St Albans Secondary School.
Perspectives on Jesus mission: part 2

LUKE 4: 14-30

In the autumn issue we explored the beginning of Luke’s account of Jesus’ sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, recognising that this whole passage is significant for understanding the church’s mission today. We focused on two main points. Firstly, that Luke hints at the importance of ‘Presence’ as a dimension of mission. Jesus grew up in Nazareth and went to the synagogue ‘as was his custom’. Secondly, we looked at the implied process by which Jesus discerned the nature of his mission, primarily through his knowledge of Scripture and the Spirit’s guidance and enabling.

In this issue we focus more on mission as proclamation which leads us into the more direct content of the passage. (Isaiah 61:1 -2. Quotations are from the NIV 1992).

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me, to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

Much was made of this passage with the Jubilee 2000 Campaign, with its apparent reference back to the ‘Year of Jubilee’ in Leviticus 25:8 – 55. Many see in Nehemiah 5 the attempt to implement this command in a specific context. Here there is no mention of the ‘fiftieth year’ but the principles inherent in the Jubilee legislation are being acted out in ‘faithful improvisation’.

Many interpreters would wish to link Luke 4:14-16, through its Isaiah reference, to this concept. Jesus is announcing a year of jubilee, which may by now have developed messianic connotations. It is about God restoring his people to their land, the new restoration from exile and so on. Another observation which is made is that Jesus stops his quotation short. The next line in Isaiah reads:

And the day of vengeance of our God and continues To comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion.

These words certainly support the view that this passage was being understood to indicate the restoration of Jewish rule in their own territory; the reversal of the Exile. But many would see in the brevity of Luke’s quotation a clear indication that Jesus was challenging this nationalistic reading. This position is, of course, supported by the two stories Jesus tells later (see Luke 4:25 – 28) which challenge any sense of nationalist favouritism from God!

However, things are not quite as simple as this. To make an obvious point, if Jesus only read part of the first two verses of Isaiah 61, it was a very short reading for a synagogue reading. Maybe Luke was indicating which passage was being read, as, for instance, when we quote the first line of a hymn or song, but still expect the congregation to sing it all! Even so, it could still be intentional that Luke stopped his quotation where he did. If so, the anti-nationalist and pro-universalist reading can be maintained.

More noteworthy is the fact that Luke seems to be quoting the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) whereas we know it was the norm for the scriptures to be read in Hebrew.

The Hebrew text is rather different.

- To preach good news to the poor. (A1)
- He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted. (A2)
- To proclaim freedom for the captives (B1)
- And release from darkness for the prisoners, (B2)

To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour...

In this translation it is probable that two main claims are being made and not four. If we recognise the prevalence of parallelism in Hebrew discourse then we have two points being made: 1) about helping the poor or broken hearted (A1 and A2 are saying the same thing) and 2) about setting captives or prisoners free (B1 and B2 are saying the same thing). In Luke’s version it is more natural to read it as either a general statement (good news to the poor) with three examples of this (freedom for prisoners, restoration of sight for the blind and release for the oppressed) – probably in the context of Luke’s Gospel – we would think of demonic oppression, or indeed four categories poor, prisoners, blind, oppressed. The most obvious difference is that in Isaiah 61 darkness indicates the darkness of the prison rather than physical blindness. But this apparently small verbal difference leads to recognising a different structure, and so to the feasibility that Luke does not have ‘the end of Exile’ in mind.

I think this difference is important for Luke because in his gospel he goes on to show how Jesus actions this ‘manifesto’. There are many scholars who wish to read this passage as literally as possible, and so read it politically or economically. It is, of course, true that in the end Jesus’ mission would undermine Roman
and all authoritarian rule and there is much in Jesus’ teaching which challenged the prevalent view that wealth was a sign of God’s blessing (and so the ‘righteousness’ of the wealthy person) and the need for the rich to give to the poor and so on. I would certainly not wish to deny the validity of these aspects of Christian mission, nor indeed of ‘peace-making’.

However, this is not the way the gospel indicates Jesus went about fulfilling this proclamation. Immediately after Nazareth Jesus is releasing the oppressed from demonic possession and a ‘high fever’, as well as many demons. This is followed by two episodes about forgiveness (Peter and the paralytic). The gospel continues by profiling Jesus’ healing ministry. As far as I can see there is no instance of Jesus setting prisoners free, the only possibility would be Barabbas! In fact Barabbas is not named in Luke but referred to as ‘the one they asked for’ (23:25). Nor is there any account of Jesus giving to the poor or releasing someone from their financial debts. What there are are many stories about Jesus healing people and affirming people, through this.

If we take two stories to illustrate this it may also serve to illuminate who Jesus was referring to by ‘the poor’.

In Luke 7:1 – 17 there is the account of Jesus healing the centurion’s servant and raising to life the widow of Nain’s son. These provide a mirror image of the widow Elijah aids by raising her son and the help that Elisha provided to the captain of the Syrian army (see Luke 4:24 – 27). So they may be of special significance in the context of the gospel. Initially the centurion does not appear to be ‘poor’. As he himself realises he has authority and power (capacities which the poor lack). He has servants and he has money – he helped to build the synagogue. He was even well thought of within the Jewish community. However, there is one respect in which he was powerless and so poor. His favoured servant was dying. What he did have, however, was the humility to ask Jesus for help – he acknowledged his poverty – his need. Jesus saw in him a profound faith and so his ‘poverty’ was overcome and he was released from his oppression. The widow is more obviously poor. She is already a widow and so economically and socially disadvantaged. Now her protector and provider – her only son – has died. The response of the crowd is significant, ‘God has come to help his people’ (7:16). The year of the Lord’s favour has arrived not with release from Roman occupation but by the restoration of a dead son to his mother and with this release from stigma and social and economic oppression.

What I suggest is that these two stories, as well as many others, indicate that Luke certainly and Jesus probably read the quotation from Isaiah metaphorically and not literally/politically. This, in the light of this approach, I consider it highly likely that certainly Luke and probably Jesus understood the fulfilment of the Isaiahic passage not politically, or even primarily socially, but in terms of his healing ministry. If so he understood it metaphorically.

This does not mean that the other dimensions of understanding are irrelevant for the church or if activated are a betrayal of the Gospel or deviation from it. They are legitimate readings but so also are those which emphasize the factors of acceptance, forgiveness, restoration and so on. Renewal of purpose, education, release from depression, help with broken relationships can also be included in the wider remit of preaching good news to the poor as a result of the new activity of God through Jesus Christ.

What I do think we need to note is contrary to the more social readings which emphasize the impact on a whole community, Jesus seems to focus his activity on individuals. He does not intentionally seek to challenge or change the social and political structures. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, over time proclaiming the gospel to the poor will undermine economic injustice and inequality. But his mission does not tackle the structural issues head on.

In conclusion I would offer two further thoughts about mission as proclamation. First, all of this indicates that Christian proclamation is not and can never be a matter of words only. If we proclaim a new regime it means a different set of activities; if we announce a new benefit it would be strange if it were only a matter of words – the proclamation entails the availability of new resources and so of a better state of living for those who are entitled to it. What is proclaimed here is the impactful activity of God in Christ. Proclamation is not fulfilled by preaching alone! It requires beneficial, appropriate and gracious actions. Secondly that whereas Jesus ‘proclaimed the year of the Lord’s favour’ or the presence of the Kingdom of God, we proclaim the Christ who has inaugurated the kingdom. If so he understood it metaphorically.

Through this sermon in Nazareth I think we can ascertain many insights for the church’s mission today.

What is proclaimed here is the impactful activity of God in Christ. 

Proclamation is not fulfilled by preaching alone!

In Luke 7:1 – 17 there is the account of Jesus healing the centurion’s servant and raising to life the widow of Nain’s son. These provide a mirror image of the widow Elijah aids by raising her son and the help that Elisha provided to the captain of the Syrian army (see Luke 4:24 – 27). So they may be of special significance in the context of the gospel. Initially the centurion does not appear to be ‘poor’. As he himself realises he has authority and power (capacities which the poor lack). He has servants and he has money – he helped to build the synagogue. He was even well thought of within the Jewish community. However, there is one respect in which he was powerless and so poor. His favoured servant was dying. What he did have, however, was the humility to ask Jesus for help – he acknowledged his poverty – his need. Jesus saw in him a profound faith and so his ‘poverty’ was overcome and he was released from his oppression. The widow is more obviously poor. She is already a widow and so economically and socially disadvantaged. Now her protector and provider – her only son – has died. The response of the crowd is significant, ‘God has come to help his people’ (7:16). The year of the Lord’s favour has arrived not with release from Roman occupation but by the restoration of a dead son to his mother and with this release from stigma and social and economic oppression.

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Reflections for Posada and around the crib

Liz Pacey is a Reader and a regular contributor to our magazine

OPENING CAROL
Hark the glad sound! the Saviour comes!

MARY
READ Luke 2: 1 – 7
Lord, take me back to Bethlehem
That I might dwell awhile with Mary.

Imagine Mary... after all the trials she has endured over the last few months. All the uncertainty. The long journey to reach this place. And now she is here, with Joseph and all the other characters in this marvellous story. She should be tired and dishevelled but surely it is not only the presence of the angel that casts a heavenly light on her; the joy of any new mother fills her. The moment she has longed for: beholding the tiny person now just a finger's touch away. Her soul magnifies her Lord.

PRAYER
Lord, may I be as willing to answer your call as Mary was. She was visited by an angel who left her in no doubt what was to happen to her. Sometimes I'm just not quite so sure what you are calling me to. Sometimes I don't believe I can do what you ask. Fill me I pray with the quiet confidence of Mary, and may she be my example as I seek to follow you.

Hear Mary speak to you:
Pause for reflection

CAROL
Mary's boy child

JOSEPH
READ Matthew 1: 18 – 24
Lord, take me back to Bethlehem
That I might dwell awhile with Joseph.

Imagine Joseph. In some ways all this has been harder for him than for Mary. He can only stand and watch as the child grows within her. As she comes to terms with what is happening. He must feel as though he is clutching at straws in trying to unravel his thoughts, his feelings about this miracle which is about to happen. Think about him working with wood, carving and creating. Concentrating on what he knows to help him through his questioning.

PRAYER
Lord, when I can only stand and watch and wait as those I love go through their crises, grant me the strength of spirit that Joseph had. Help me to offer myself to you to be used in any way I can be. Simply being there for my loved ones is probably the hardest thing to do yet at the same time the most important, the greatest gift I can give them.

Hear Joseph speak to you:
Pause for reflection

DONKEY

CAROL
In the bleak midwinter

DONKEY

CAROL
Little Donkey

INNKEEPER

CAROL
Lord, take me back to Bethlehem
That I might dwell awhile with Mary's trusted donkey.

Imagine the donkey. A devoted being. No questions from him as to what all this is about. He doesn't need to understand. Just gets on with the job he has been given. Unswervingly, pushing through his tiredness, he completes his task, with no thought for himself. The donkey: an animal so important to Jesus at crucial times in his life, just being there when he is needed.

PRAYER
Lord, may I have the patience and loyalty of this donkey. Even when I don't understand what is going on around me I pray that I will go steadily forward always keeping my eyes on you.

Hear the donkey speak to you:
Pause for reflection

INNKEEPER

Hear the innkeeper speak to you:
Pause for reflection

Lost in wonder,
The old Mexican tradition of Posada has found new life over recent years. During the evenings leading up to Christmas Day, ‘nativity sets’ of Joseph and Mary travel round parishes visiting a different family or place each night. The evening Mary and Joseph arrive provides a great opportunity to invite guests around to share together the true meaning of Christmas. Finally the characters are welcomed into the church just before Christmas.

3. More resources can be found at: www.churcharmy.org.uk/posada/

More resources can be found at: www.churcharmy.org.uk/posada/
'The bells of waiting Advent ring…' Yes, I often wonder what the signs of this approaching season say to each of us. Some dread the lengthening winter darkness, others the stresses of the season, and the slide of the year into nothingness, while for some it is a happy, high point of the year.

**COMING**
To me these bells ringing in mind and heart often suggest undue pressure, and possibility of disappointment. Christmas is nearly upon us, and we have so much to complete beforehand: cards, presents, meal plans, regular plus seasonal commitments, arrangements for next year. Will I make 25th December in sound mind? And will I also experience his coming in significant ways as I long to do, or will we once again rush through the whole period of this spiritual journey feeling that all the deeper nourishment has passed us by? If one is in ministry of any sort, these forebodings are likely to be very real, and the schedule extremely full, perhaps threatening to become fuller if one dares to divert from the norm and consider offering some richer experience to others, however focused on life-giving opportunities and challenges. If I respond more genuinely, am I going to be even more overloaded?

**PRIORITISING**
It seems vital to make a priority of living with the coming that is Christ’s Advent, not squeezing it into a corner where I may engage with it if and when I am not too tired. Before Advent starts, it could be important to anticipate some overwhelming by planning this time ahead with reminders of his special entry into our lives: time for an Advent book or discussion group; daily reflections on Emmanuel; moments to gather up seasonal pictures, candles and natural things to guide my thoughts; a relevant poem a day – since poetry can touch us where other influences can’t reach. These ideas are just a fragile beginning, and may easily get interrupted as days accelerate towards Christmas. Some special high spots, planned and diarised, may prove more sustainable in holding us to the Christ of Advent.

Much of what follows here could be held out to others in the parish as well as to ourselves as a guide to preparation for Christmas – or simply as a basis for a voluntary ‘how-to’ discussion group, where participants share their own ideas and family traditions, and maybe then invite others to join them where appropriate, or to try the suggestions described in their own context.

**INITIATING EVENTS**
Why not plan for some specific event to focus one’s thoughts on the ‘long expected’ Jesus? Attend a Quiet Day, or some refreshing activity, such as a Christingle service, Messy Church session, or something truly ‘alternative’? Or stage something of your own? You could aim to mark the four Sundays of Advent (God’s people, the Prophets, Mary and John – or Hope, Peace, Love and Joy) at home with a self-made wreath and quiet, or just read the appropriate Scriptures from the Lectionary reverently each week. If no suitable events exist in your area, consider asking someone unexpected to organise and lead something on simple lines, with an Advent poem or prose, Bible reading(s), music, quiet, prayer together, and refreshments.

**PRAISING**
As in my own prayer, what about choosing a psalm to keep alive the idea of God coming with a new reign on earth? ‘Let the rivers clap their hands, and the mountains shout for joy together, at Yahweh’s approach, for He is coming…’ (Psalm 98). Many other psalms spring to mind, including 96, 97, 113 and 147, but a personal choice will be far more compelling to you and your household. A New Testament verse could be substituted, like my favourite ‘the Dayspring from on high has visited us’ (Luke 1:78 KJV) – or some words of prophecy, such as ‘How beautiful on the mountains…’ (Isaiah 52:7ff). Ways of staying with these texts – for they are not simply words, but a kind of spiritual feast – include writing them out; decorating and sketching them; maybe adding computer graphics, if you daren’t attempt your own. They can become a joyful springboard to imaginative prayer.
CELEBRATING IN STYLE
Why not hold an Advent Party of some kind? Christmas parties are familiar to us, often without Christmas content and associated with excesses of eating and drinking, sometimes held too early or too long after the event, or awkwardly sandwiched between other busy things like family lunches and weekend clear-ups. Yet a simple gathering to celebrate exactly this season, with friends, folk from church or associated groups, and neighbours enjoying cake, candles and simple activities for all ages can truly bring it alive. This can amount to low-key outreach, or that much neglected thrust of deeper traditional Christian teaching for adults. Some friends of mine make the season special as follows: one weeknight about eight days before Christmas, they invite others in to read/tell stories (nothing too racy or horrific), with some naturally selecting a story associated with the season/faith-events. Others I know have a lovely Sunday tea with candles and Advent readings for friends and neighbours. It seems a shame not to exploit the very powerful opposition between our darkest time of year and the liturgical message we believe in: ‘Arise, shine out, for your light has come.’ (Isaiah 60:1). In the southern hemisphere it would be light all the way, at its most intense just before 25th December, so celebrations could go accordingly, with enjoyment of natural light and the fading importance of darkness.

JOINING OTHERS
How about finding activities outside church circles to support our intentions to enter better into Christ’s coming? The less commercialised, the further from shopping activities or reminders of such imperatives, the better. My preference would always be to seek out one or more of the following: Christmas concert or play (any type); performance of Handel’s Messiah; recitals of gentle, reflective music in meaningful places; appropriate film; a favourite ballet or show that taps into the deeper patterns of life, death and meaning. Ideally the chosen events(s) will make your heart soar, provide energy – and remind you very persuasively of “the reason for the season”.

CONNECTING WITH NATURE
As mentioned, there is profound contrast in the northern hemisphere between the long hours of darkness and the influx of Christ’s light. I think we need to keep connected with both, so as to enjoy our good news: the overwhelming mystery of lengthening darkness, and the delightful daily returning of light and beauty outdoors, short days often poignantly accompanied by birdsong and prematurely blossoming flowers. These processes arouse great questions: “Have you ever… given orders to the morning…? Which is the way to the home of the light, and where does darkness live?” (Job 38: 12 & 19) How much more then might we think about the coming of the Light of the World?

So – to do this effectively some thought is needed, when in December it is dark nearly 16 hours a day. Personally I aim to go outside whenever possible: sit by the window observing daylight’s fluctuations; savour full light and sunshine whenever they appear. Above all, one watches the different moods of the darkness from twilight to deep gloom to black… and to half-light once again. Remember that the life God has given us is always good, whether it is mainly dark, or mainly light around us. Thus we can enjoy the light in the middle of the day as if it was summer – or the special light of spring or autumn, if you find these lovelier – and then enjoy coming home to cosy indoor pursuits as dark sets. The pattern is all part of God’s creation and His coming to us, even if we need the help of a diary to catch the part of the lightshow offered at this stage of the year. Health and vitamin counts benefit from such practices too.

OFF-LOADING WHERE WE CAN
It seems sensible, if seeking and following an Advent rhythm, to expect a crescendo as the key days draw near. Yet for most of us, the final three or four days before Christmas tend to whizz by in flurries of activity, outrites at weather and other little accidents and hindrances. After that it becomes easier. I know I would like this time to feel very different, so a more recent aim has been to remove as many strenuous or stressful activities as possible from those days just before Christmas, and to add, if feasible, something surprising and refreshing like a walk in the woods or under the stars. Overall I determine to reduce the number of rushed activities, or to scale them down, allowing relaxed time for Carol Services, seeing neighbours, or just being quiet around Christmas itself, to drink in what it is all about.

If most of these leisureed things are impossible in this window, what about Boxing Day, 27th or 28th for special reflection, enjoyment, taking stock of Christ, my life in him – and the life of the world? He has certainly not disappeared, even if turkey and tinsel have, or I was far too busy when He touched down? These days after Christmas, though no longer part of Advent, often vanish on chores and ‘catching up’ somehow, when they could, if necessary or desirable, be pools of refreshment to us.

NEW ADVENTURING
My final life-saver for the winter celebration is to carve out a few days’ holiday, either soon after Christmas or over New Year, usually somewhere where the beauties of creation and the pattern of activities allows opportunities for lavish reflection on the generosity of our so-rich God becoming poor among us on our earth. In country walking, in the moving light upon the sea, or twilight in the bird sanctuary, my sense of WHO made this Coming, and the meaning of that Coming is further hollowed out in the heart and cleansed, just as the storm-felled tree trunks are washed by rocking tides on the seashore. These are all ways to ‘give thanks with a grateful heart’, and to welcome, not shrink from, the days of His coming (Malachi 3:2). The crucial discovery is how to ‘intentionally’ (used in the Ignatian sense of acting with a serious, strategic determination to achieve desired goals purposefully) choose at least a few approaches that fit one’s humanly limited possibilities, but can perhaps push out the boat just a little further – into the stilling waters of contemplation and wholeness.

1 From T.S Eliot ‘The Journey of the Magi’
Have you ever been to prayer evenings, quiet days or similar and not found them helpful? Not because of anything being wrong with them as such but more because you feel as though you are being asked to do things or pray in a way that it ‘not for you’, certainly that day and perhaps not at all. There is a danger that prayer, especially in church or group settings, becomes ‘monochrome’, one size fits all.

Factors like churchmanship, upbringing, previous experience and what is going on in your life at this particular moment all have an influence. God is not limited by personality type. One size definitely does not fit all! Even people with seemingly the same personality type can find different things helpful in prayer. We can only come before God as we are, as who we are.

The groups I use are as follows, in no particular order:

CONTEMPLATION (MYERS-BRIGGS NF):
These are the people who need very little to enter into God’s presence; a CD, a word, a focus or sometimes just space and time not necessarily silence. They will not be restricted to lists.

DOING (MYERS-BRIGGS SF):
These are the people who need to do something concrete or creative. They will take part in all the activities on offer whether it is moving, sticking, drawing or similar. These may be the hardest people to involve in prayer evenings as they don’t want to be bored by ‘just sitting there’.

LIST (MYERS-BRIGGS ST):
These are the people who are good at working their way through lists, for other activities.
come up with four separate strands, although sometimes the ‘contemplation’ part is an overall view. Taking these strands, I then fit them to the various slots. I have a box of craft resources and stickers. The internet is a good source of pictures and readings. Bible readings, if needed, are usually printed out, although there are Bibles available. I use a lot of coloured paper and often have a different one for each section. There is always plenty of spare paper, pens etc available. I set up four different areas as above using separate tables, depending on the space available. We then start the evening with prayer, the Bible reading that is relevant and I share a few thoughts. If it is a ‘new’ group I may explain something about personality and prayer. I will then introduce each area and invite people to use things how they wish. There are no right or wrong ways to use the materials provided. If God chooses to take them off in a different direction that it fine. I also encourage people to try something different. Some people head for a certain area and stay with that; others prefer to look at every area before deciding; others will try one or two different areas. There will be a CD playing quietly in the background. I aim for about one hour or just over, although this does vary depending on the circumstances. After about forty minutes or so I invite people to come back together and give an opportunity for people to share what God has been saying. We then finish with a prayer and/or the Grace. People are free to take any of the materials away with them.

What do I do while everyone else is participating? I actually usually read a book or the Bible or draft an article or similar. I find it very difficult to take part in something I have put together. You could say that I ‘do’ the activities while putting it together. I can also keep an eye on what is going on, and the time, and respond if anyone seems to want someone to pray with them.

So what about a practical example? ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.’ Matthew 7: 7-8 (NIV).

**Contemplation:** There was just a table with the words ‘Ask, Seek, Knock’ printed on card and a single lit candle.

**Doing:** ‘Knock and the door will be opened to you.’ There were two pictures, printed on separate pieces of paper. One showed a closed door, the other an open door. People were invited to consider whether the door they were knocking on was open or closed and what might be on the other side. Then use stickers, drawing or writing to represent this and see what was revealed; if there was anything unexpected or that God wanted to show them.

**Lists:** ‘Ask and it will be given to you.’ I printed out question marks with space to write in the upper part. I then wrote in various topics in the spaces for which people could pray. Each question mark had a different theme and there were also some blank ones for people to fill in themselves.

**Thinkers:** ‘Seek and you will find’. I used the reading ‘Dear Friend, How are you today? I just had to send a note... Your friend Jesus,’ which was printed out. (This is a reading about how Jesus is there in the ordinary every day things e.g. meeting with friends, a sunset etc. but we don’t acknowledge or realise this. There are various versions available on the internet, for example at knowjesus.com/Encourage_letter.shtml). Questions invite people to consider whether we miss God in the ordinary, or whether God is saying something that we have missed, or how we can hear God more. On this occasion we finished with the Lord’s Prayer.

This is only one example. The way I set things out is not meant to be rigid or the ‘only’ way to do it. Sometimes the distinctions between the groups blur or I use a different number of stations. After all we have a God who is not bound by human constraints or boundaries and will meet us in whatever way he chooses to and/or is most helpful for us this particular time. The important thing is we come close to him in prayer and are not be afraid to try something new or different, so that we can hear what he wants to say to us and his church.

Patricia Wilkinson is a Reader at St John the Baptist, Baxenden in the Blackburn Diocese. As a GP she is interested in what makes people ‘tick’ and how different personality types affect how we respond to each other and God. And if you were wondering, she says she is a Myers-Briggs ‘NT’ and finds everything except lists helpful and uses them all at different times!
Faith and

‘What sort of title is that?’ was one reaction to this new book; ‘Isn’t it a contradiction in terms?’ was another. But they reassured me of the need to write it. In my university job I am daily reminded that practical theology is at best side-lined and at worst there is widespread assumption that science has rendered Christian faith untenable. As an Anglican Reader, it is painful to see how science somehow frightens the church into an inability to celebrate and engage with it as God’s gift. Surely no healthy Christian thinking in a ‘science and religion debate’ is possible if ‘science’ and ‘theology’ are held apart? What, then, does science look like when it is placed entirely within the Kingdom of God?

The story of the book began a very long time ago. In 1993 I was asked to give a talk to the Leeds diocesan conference on ‘Science and Christian belief’: Clergy and lay, young and old, employed and homemakers – the meeting was gloriously diverse. But the sense that this issue really mattered in the church for mission, in teaching, in worship and more, came over again and again. It set me on a path of conversations with congregations, small groups, apologetic discussions in evangelism, academic theology, reflections on how scientists really work, and lots of reading! Faith and Wisdom in Science is not meant just for church people, nor just scientists, nor just those interested in history or in science media and policy, although it tries to say something for all of those. There will be challenges for every sort of reader, as for the writer, but I hope that it may help congregations and the wider public alike to think about science with greater confidence, and ultimately in the light of God.

Science itself is troubled in ways that do not initially appear to be connected with religion. It saddens me that, as Jacques Barzun complained as long ago as 1964, ‘Science is not with us an object of contemplation’. In spite of some wonderful progress in public engagement, science is still not entertained as a recreational aspect of human culture, running as deeply as music, art or story. John Keats complained in Lamia that science (he called it ‘philosophy’ then) ‘unweaves the rainbow’, disenchanting the world. Many people today would not see science as central to culture. But if it were, we might not only find new recreation, but also avoid the disastrous political relativism which infects current public debates that rely on scientific evidence. The flashpoints tend to be the ‘troubled technologies’ – those that seem to threaten our delicate relationship with nature: climate change, GMOs, gene-therapy, geo-engineering. Why are we so bad at cooling the discussion of science-based policy? Perhaps this is because high-profile leaders, when it suits them, have increasingly chosen to undermine conclusions of scientific consensus. Could it be that this increasingly dangerous ambivalence towards science is related to our continued cultural misgivings over its role and status?

At this point I was helped very much by a team of researchers at my current university of Durham. They had looked hard at the troubled Europe-wide debates around ‘nanotechnology’, and made a remarkable discovery. Although the discussions were nominally focussed on technological risk, my colleagues found that unseen, but very deeply held, stories were the real power behind the arguments. More recent social science analyses of other tense public debates have confirmed that such hidden and powerful ‘ancient narratives’ are often at play. Philosopher Jean-Pierre DePui has identified three: ‘Pandora’s Box’ – the narrative of evil, ‘Be Careful What You Wish For’ – the narrative of evil, ‘Don’t Mess with Nature’ – the narrative of the sacred. Objections to new technologies typically ride on the back of these ancient narratives – science has no old story of its own to tell, to guide it. As a result the disputants end up talking past each other and nothing is resolved.

It doesn’t help that when we teach or discuss science, it is very rarely in the context of history. This may be the reason that science has no ‘ancient narrative’ of its own on which to draw. Yet even turning the pages back two centuries can begin to difuse the ‘scarness’ of science. The very word ‘science’ can itself be difficult because it comes from the Latin scio – ‘I know’, a knowledge-claim. An earlier name, ‘Natural Philosophy’ draws on gentler, Greek, roots – philo – sophia – so ‘love of wisdom to do with nature’. A humble, yet deep, questioning and re-imaging of the natural world, called by many names, is as old as any aspect of human culture. We should revisit the heritage of our natural philosophy more often. The probing nature-poetry of ancient Wisdom literature, the atomic notions of the Epicurean, the imaginative theological discourses on nature in the Church Fathers, the perceptive natural science of the 7th century northern English scholar Bede, as
Faith and Wisdom in Science

much as the later Arabic commentators on Aristotle – all these and other ancient voices have much to teach us. We have forgotten, as they knew, what science is for. This amnesia is dangerous – because if we forget the purpose of science, then it can then be recruited, or repressed, in the service of any agenda.

Reawakening a narrative of purpose beneath science cannot avoid drawing on religious heritage. Restoring faith in science cannot bypass the understanding of the relationship of Faith with science. Here we are not helped, as we noted at first, by the current oppositional framing of the ‘science and religion’ question. The discussion seems to be coloured by the loudest, most extreme and least informed voices rather than the most pressing questions. It also focusses on perhaps the most deceptively difficult Biblical material – the highly formalised creation story of Genesis 1, for example, rather than the rich seam of ancient ‘Wisdom Literature’, in which we find the most powerfully articulated stirrings of desire to comprehend nature. There are many ‘creation stories’ in the Bible: in Proverbs, the Psalms, the Prophets – I lost count in working through them for the book. Perhaps we ought to draw on all of them for our thinking about our relationship with creation, rather than just the one we find first?

In Faith and Wisdom in Science, I have tried to explore a Biblical approach to the cultural purpose of science by drawing together what it feels like to do science now, with a scientist’s reading of this ancient wisdom tradition. We visit an account of randomness in sandpiles and turbulence (‘the earthquake’ and ‘the storm’) alongside a trail through the achingly beautiful nature poetry of the Book of Job. I have often suggested to scientist-colleagues that they read the catalogue of nature-questions in Job 38–40, to be met with their delight and surprise. Job’s questioning of the chaotic and destructive world becomes a source of hope, and a type of wisdom that perhaps science can do that too. If it can, it would mean that science, far from being irreconcilable with religion, becomes a profoundly religious activity itself. That is exciting for the servant task of the church within the world.

A clue can be found in St. Paul’s admirably brief summary of the church’s purpose: ‘We have the ministry of reconciliation’ (2 Cor 5:11). It’s a great starting point for anyone needing to explain what Christianity is. Everyone knows about broken relationships and the need to heal them and in Christ we have the source of healing the most fundamental relationship of all. So the strong motif that emerges from the question in the book is the idea of science as the practice of reconciliation of our broken human relationship with nature. Science has the potential to replace ignorance and fear of a world that can harm us and that we also can harm, by a relationship of understanding and care. The foolishness of thoughtless exploitation can be replaced by the wisdom of engagement, with strong consequences for environmentalism.

Nor is such ‘narrative for science’ confined to the political level – it has personal, cultural and educational consequences too that might just meet Barzun’s missing sphere of contemplation. A theology of science that recognises the strands of faith and wisdom within it suggests explorations that begin to answer some of the other questions we had, the ones that didn’t look ‘theological’ at all at first. Can science be performative? Could anyone enjoy it at an appropriate level in the same way that we can all, in our own ways, enjoy music? Could it even be therapeutic? I recently visited a group of churches in Leeds which had decided to hold their own science festival. Everyone was encouraged to contribute to a festival exhibition of

objects from their homes or workplaces that they thought told a science-related story, and to write a little about it. There was a tangible rightness about talking about these material aids to making sense of nature, in the nave of a parish church. George Steiner once wrote ‘Only art can go some way towards making accessible, towards waking into some measure of communicability, the sheer inhuman otherness of matter...’ Perhaps science can do that too. If it can, it would mean that science, far from being irreconcilable with religion, becomes a profoundly religious activity itself. That is exciting for the servant task of the church within the world.

Tom McLeish is Professor of Physics and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research at Durham University, and a Reader in the Diocese of York.

Faith and Wisdom in Science is published by Oxford University Press and is available from bookshops in hardback and ebook form, from ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/academic/history/9780198702610.do email pvc.research@durham.ac.uk

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Quotable quotes for The Reader

If you have no map, you can end up having an adventure that can end up leading anywhere.

Paracanoeis Anne Dickins reflects on overcoming a spinal injury to become a world-class sportswoman. (BBC Sport, 10th July 2014)

Suggestion
You could use the quote in a talk about control and ambition. Anne learnt about giving up control the hard way, but she also experienced the joy that followed once she accepted her circumstances and found a new sport to challenge her abilities. Sometimes we can be so sure of our plans for our life – we draw out a map and know exactly where we’re going and when. But when circumstances wreck our plans we’re shattered and confused. How might life be different if we lived by trying to find out God’s plans for us?

Who do you trust? How do you know? By how they appear, or what they say, or what they do?

Middle East peacemaker Nessa Stein (Maggie Gyllenhaal) asks hard questions in the opening voiceover to her drama The Honourable Woman. (BBC, August 2014)

Suggestion
You could use the quote to talk about trust. Nessa’s question is a legitimate one – how do we decide who we trust? People will let us down; they are only human, with all the flaws and weaknesses that entails. Do we trust people after they’ve broken our faith in them? The only one who will not break our trust in Him is God. What is the difference between trusting God and trusting people?

Beautiful things don’t ask for attention.

Photographer Sean O’Connell (Sean Penn) in fantastical adventure film The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (Twentieth Century Fox, 26th December 2013)

Suggestion
You could use the statistic to encourage the parents in your congregation to spend more time interacting with their children – perhaps especially fathers, for whom our culture does not always portray this as a priority. We are given just a few years to nurture and guide our children before they’re adults and making their own decisions – now is the time to invest in our kids, and it’s time God expects us to use wisely.

Fathers today spend seven times as much time interacting with their children than their fathers did forty years ago.

Statistic reported by The Week magazine (22nd June 2014)

Suggestion
You could use the statistic to encourage the parents in your congregation to spend more time interacting with their children – perhaps especially fathers, for whom our culture does not always portray this as a priority. We are given just a few years to nurture and guide our children before they’re adults and making their own decisions – now is the time to invest in our kids, and it’s time God expects us to use wisely.

‘Cause you get lighter the more it gets dark/ I’m gonna give you my heart.

Coldplay in ‘A Sky Full of Stars’, from their sixth album, Ghost Stories (Parlophone Records, 16th May 2014)

Suggestion
You could use the lyric to talk about the hope which God offers in troubled times. It may actually be when life is hard that this hope shines brightest – God is someone who ‘gets lighter the more it gets dark’. How might our experiences of suffering enable us to see God more clearly? How might this encourage us to ‘give him our hearts’, and trust him through difficulties?

There’s a very interesting reason why a prince could not turn into a frog – it’s statistically too improbable.

Atheist thinker and writer Richard Dawkins, speaking at the 2014 Cheltenham Science Festival, tells parents to discourage their children from reading fairy stories. (The Telegraph, 5th June 2014)

Suggestion
You could use the quote to talk about different kinds of truth, and the value of the truths hidden in fairy tales and fiction. Dawkins dismisses stories about princes turning into frogs on the basis that this is statistically unlikely to happen in real life – but he misses the point. Just as Jesus taught spiritual truths by telling invented parables, profound truths about the real world can be found wrapped in the fantastical packaging of fairy tales and other fiction. As Christian writer and thinker G.K. Chesterton famously said (paraphrased by author Neil Gaiman): ‘Fairy tales are more than true – not because they tell us dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten.’

Most of today’s movies are telling us death doesn’t matter. And it’s hard to imagine a more inhuman observation than that.

Journalist Alexander Huls criticises modern superhero films for their predictable ‘resurrections’ of supposedly dead characters. (The New York Times, 18th April 2014)

Suggestion
You could use the quote to talk about the importance of acknowledging death and suffering. Our culture tries to gloss over the reality of death, providing easy reassurances, like the certainty that blockbuster films will never kill their heroes. Parts of Christian culture, too, may relentlessly focus on healing and resurrection without leaving room for uncomfortable realities. The hope offered by Jesus doesn’t erase the pain of loss that all of us will experience at some point. How can we hold on to this hope, whilst also making room to genuinely grieve?

Hundreds more illustrations, including new stories, statistics and suggestions for clips from films currently in cinemas, can be found on the Tools for Talks website run by Damaris. You can get a 20% discount on a year’s subscription to the site at: www.toolsfortalks.com/reader
For example, food is a hot topic in film at the moment. Hundred Foot Journey is currently on release about a talented Indian chef who opens a restaurant in France, and has to contend with the haute cuisine establishment across the street. It’s a story of culinary success and tragic loss.

In last year’s Reel Issues Pitch competition, two pitches, Joe Hardy’s Laban Bakeries and Nicholas Crum’s The House with Teeth. Both drew on the food theme for fresh angles on the Bible, one retelling the account of Laban and Jacob, the other revisiting the temptation of Jesus.

In the recent movie Chef Carl Casper packs in his job at a top restaurant and finds himself adrift and broke. Then his wife’s past boyfriend gives him a hand out – an old beat up taco truck. And Carl rediscovers what he loves about cooking and food – the way it connects him with others. He throws his heart and soul into what he does best and in the process passes on his passion to his son. However when Carl’s son wants to serve a slightly burnt sandwich Carl is dismayed. He wants to do the best he can, not serve substandard.

He tells his son that he’s good at cooking and he wants to share it with him. He gets to touch people’s lives with what he does, it keeps him going, and he loves it. He wants to serve the best he can. Involving his son in the cooking and serving process becomes a bonding experience for the two of them, bringing their lives together in an unexpected but powerful way, and changing their relationship for good.

Food enabled Jesus to touch people’s lives too, and he loved that. Whether feeding thousands, as in John chapter 5, sitting down at wild parties with sinners, as in Matthew chapter 9 verse 10, or having a one to one with you and me. (Revelation 3:21) food was a vital way of connecting people with the kingdom of God. He involved his disciples in the production and distribution on at least two occasions, and no doubt that was an experience which drew them closer to Jesus and enabled them to get to know him better. Then, having given away free bread, and wine, he asked his friends to keep on sharing bread and wine and told them to remember him whenever they did so. Sharing food – a sign that we share our lives with God.

When Jesus was asked about the most important aspect of serving God (in Matthew 22:37) he said, in effect, ‘Don’t be substandard, love God with everything you’ve got – heart, soul, strength – throw it all in.’ That was an old, old saying from the writings of Moses. (Deuteronomy 6:4&5).

Food can be a great way of demonstrating the goodness and generosity of God, and film makers have put that challenge right up there on the silver screen. For a great film about food and grace, you can’t beat Babette’s Feast. If you’ve never had the chance to watch it, it’s a perfect choice for entertainment after an agape meal.

Dave is a freelance writer, speaker and blogger who is also working with Bible Society to offer The Pitch to the wider church. To find more about him see davehopwood.com You may like to think about inviting him to explore film and the Bible in your parish!
The Shepherd and the King

words: Traditional/Eleanor Farjeon (adapted)
arranged by David King

composer: Alan Tiltman
tune: Coleg y Groes

A note from The Reader editor.

This is a fantastic poem which has been set to a tune written by Rev Allan Tiltman, a cleric in St Asaph Diocese. It is lovely as a solo, as I know from my own use of it in services around Christmas time. It could also be the basis of a short seasonal meditation, or for a small group to sing in a carol service. The tune is called Coleg y Groes as it was written whilst staying here in the retreat house.
Voice coaching, mentioned in a recent issue of The Reader, can be of great help I am sure but did you know that there is another option to help you to improve your speaking skills? The Association of Speakers Clubs (ASC) has a network of clubs all over the UK, and for the modest sum of thirty-six pounds annually, you can have access to a local club and its meetings, usually twice a month.

ASC clubs provide a place where you can (alongside others) hone and expand all aspects of public speaking – sermons, presentations for work, and all manner of speaking to, and with, others. Some people come for work reasons, others for social (you could practice a wedding speech), and some, like myself, to work on their sermon delivery. This has been absolutely invaluable to me. Each speaker is given a very positive evaluation of their talk, with very constructive feedback to improve connection with their audience, and to make the whole experience more satisfying and enjoyable.

There is a Speakers Guide, which encourages participants to work on different aspects of speaking. For example: vocabulary and creative use of language; use of the voice – pitch, pace and expressiveness of tone; the use of humour and gestures; and the best ways of making sure your hearers do not fall asleep! There is also the chance to have a go at speaking spontaneously for a few minutes – upon a topic given in the moment. This is good fun and promotes confidence in the skills of thinking on the spot.

Above all, ASC clubs provide a really supportive environment to help you make your talks/sermons even more memorable, and encourage you to think about, and practise, aspects you might never have thought of! I find it hugely enjoyable and an invaluable resource for my Reader ministry. I find the other members are so encouraging and easy to be with. There is likely to be a club near you – why don’t you give it a go?

More details can be found at the-asc.org.uk. Or do contact me if you would like to find out more. Sylvia Walker scwalker@talktalk.net

The Blessing of the New Year from Carmina Gadelica

This poem was repeated the first thing on the first day of the year. It was common throughout the Highlands and Islands. The writer has heard versions of it in many places.

The Carmina Gadelica is a collection of prayers, hymns, charms, incantations, blessings, runes, and other literary-folkloric poems and songs collected and translated by amateur folklorist Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) in the Gaelic-speaking regions of Scotland between 1855 and 1910.

God, bless to me the new day
Never vouchsafed to me before;
It is to bless Thine own presence
Thou hast given me this time, O God.

Bless Thou to me mine eye,
May mine eye bless all it sees;
I will bless my neighbour,
May my neighbour bless me.

God, give me a clean heart,
Let me not from sight of Thine eye;
Bless to me my children and my wife,
And bless to me my means and my cattle.
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Reviews for THE READER

Haphazard by Starlight
Janet Morley
SPCK £9.99 pbk (2013) 9780281070626

‘An apple a day keeps the doctor away’, my mother would say. A poem a day in Advent and Epiphany nourishes the soul on its way is my conclusion after reading Janet Morley’s new anthology. Readers of her Lent one The High Time will be familiar with her practice of choosing a wide range of poems connected to the season and of writing a commentary on each before posing a question or idea for reflection. Her poets include U. A. Fanthorpe, from whom the book’s title comes; Emily Dickinson, Larkin, Hopkins, T.S.Eliot, and many others. Her close readings of the poems are excellent and draw us in. I gained fresh glimpses of God at work in poetry, sometimes startlingly so. Beware, though, of the daily task becoming stodgy, whilst acknowledging that music styles will vary according to taste. Some may find the ideas and arguments in this book hard-going at times, but nevertheless if it encourages a resurgence of the use of the psalms in our public and private worship it will have done its work.

MARIE PATERSON

Beyond the Edge
Andrew D. Mayes
SPCK £10.99 pbk 9780281071142 (2013)

Andrew Mayes has written a most interesting and engaging book full of spiritual adventures and of potential learning, subtitled Spiritual transitions for adventitious souls. I am a great fan of Arnold van Gennep’s theory of liminality which holds out hope of moving to a new place in life if we are helped to cope with the big changes or painful disasters that happen to most of us. Mayes uses this concept of growth through transition to explore the risky places where Jesus went or took his disciples to, and shows that in a time of separation or exile ‘...we rediscover the heart’s new home’. Linked to each part of this zigzag journey is information about the geography and archaeology of the Holy Land and how this knowledge can deepen our own spiritual lives. Mayes then gives a wealth of detailed exploration of different ways of praying. Teresa of Avila and George Herbert, the desert fathers and Gutierrez, are there amongst many others. Each chapter has questions for reflection, which could be used alone or in a group, a prayer exercise and a short list of books for further study. The chapters are well referenced and an appendix offers ten models of spiritual directorship. The book is a good read for anyone and it could be a stimulating book to use for group study, especially in Lent or approaching Holy Week – though which six of the ten chapters to use in Lent would necessitate some hard choices!

CHRISTINE McMULLEN

Finding God in the Psalms
Tom Wright
SPCK £9.99 pbk 9780281069897

Resulting from a request for some meditations on the psalms at a conference, this book sets out to encourage ‘all Christians to weave the Psalms into the very heart of their devotional life’, observing how in many Christian traditions they are often neglected or marginalised. Without getting too bogged down by Wright’s theological and intellectual arguments, the book is set out in three sections each dealing with ‘time, space and matter’ and what happens at the ‘crossing point’ of these three elements. By relating the psalms to the Temple theology, particularly in regard to the longing of the exiled Israelites to return to the Temple, Wright shows how they also point to Jesus as the living Temple. Each section has considerable quotations from the Psalms with a commentary. Wright is also keen to emphasise the double power that poetry set to music has in worship, whilst acknowledging that music styles will vary according to taste. Some may find the ideas and arguments in this book hard-going at times, but nevertheless if it encourages a resurgence of the use of the psalms in our public and private worship it will have done its work.

MARIE PATERSON

The Message of Jeremiah
Christopher J.H. Wright
Inter-Varsity Press £12.99 pbk 9781783590322

The author has produced a superb book representing as it does a rigorous and scholarly work on the weeping prophet – the cry of Jeremiah – the second longest book in the bible. He has accorded to it the highest ideals of ‘The Bible Speaks Today’ series namely to expound biblical text with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life and finally for it to be readable. This book is much more than just a commentary, it comprises a detailed work of reference beginning with a lengthy review of the historical framework against which Jeremiah is called to minister God’s words and work within a collapsing world. The book divides into a series of chapters progressively defining chapter and verse of the experience and writing of Jeremiah, each then concluding with an excellent opportunity for digestion in theological and expository reflections. Jeremiah is a book full of human intrigue and conflict yet serves as an object lesson in how God unpicks the chaos of human devastation and futility, and through the power of divine love renews and re-establishes order. Indeed the author has done the sacrificial Jeremiah proud. His book is highly recommended to everyone.

S. JOHN HAZEL

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Andrew D. Mayes
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CHRISTINE McMULLEN

How to Be Wise
Rod Garner
SPCK £9.99 pbk 9780281068937 (2013)

I imagine it is our commonest wish – ‘How to be Wise’ – and Canon Rod Garner has provided a succinct and readable account of how this may be achieved. In eight chapters our thoughts are led to consider what wisdom is, followed by three chapters of biblical reflections – the Hebrew Scriptures and Ecclesiastes, the wisdom of the Incarnation in the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel and the wisdom of St. Paul. The remaining four chapters cover wisdom and the ethics of reading, of music, of the emotions andLastly silence. It is a personal book; the subtitle – Growing in discernment and love – reflects the human engagement Garner experiences as he grapples with personal issues, his own ‘dark night of the soul’. It is not a long read – but you will return again and again to savour these treasures from the Liverpool Diocesan Theologian.

ROGER THORNINGTON

Creation, Power and Truth
Tom Wright
SPCK £9.99 pbk 9780281069873

Once upon a time there was right and there was wrong. You had to choose. Nowadays we are beset by a swirl of world-views, sometimes overlapping, blurring at the edges and totally bewildering. Tom Wright selects three popular world-views and asks how they relate to the gospel. Neo-agnosticism major on hidden knowledge, the insider track to the meaning of life, spiritual perhaps, but self-absorbed. Neo-imperialism puts power at the centre of its values. But who is to be Lord, Jesus or Caesar? Postmodernism looks rather Christian at first, calling for spiritual values and questioning material progress, but all is relative, so where is Truth? The author steers us helpfuly through the morass (occasionally using a few long words) but reminds us that there are but three of many ‘isms’. We may be tempted to despair, but it is necessary for us, as Readers, to understand what is shaping the world-views of our contemporaries (as well as our own). We need to be clear about what the gospel’s response should be, based on Creation. New Creation in Christ and God’s Judgment in love. And this not just in theory but in practice too. A valuable book; warmly recommended.

DEREK WOOD
The title is a quote from Auden and provides an immediate push for discussion, for these five contemporary poet-theologians actually do a great deal to generate creative Christian reflection. Each has contributed a well-constructed chapter combining personal history and theological analysis and illustrating their individual themes with generous quantities of their poetry. Nearly all the poems are absorbing and provocative and many are published or readily accessible for the first time. The authors confess their sources of inspiration: Blake, Hopkins and Ginsberg frequently feature. I especially appreciated D’Costa’s chapter on divine creation, poetic creativity and the inspiration that comes through liturgy; and Slee’s trenchant but compassionate feminist theology and poetry, augmented with an especially helpful bibliography. But all chapters are illuminating; Pryce provides reflections on the long history of christian poetic imagination from the perspective of an Anglican priest, contrasting with Nesbitt’s strange but moving blend of Quakerism and Indian spirituality; and Shelton contributes to the theology of place through urban-inspired spirituality, reflecting her inner-city work – a perspective which, unlike D’Costa, plays down the role of liturgy. The book is enhanced by a wonderfully thoughtful foreword by Rowan Williams. For lovers of contemporary verse the poetry alone is worth the price, but many Christian teachers will find this book a valuable resource. It is written in a highly academic style which I found hard going in the early chapters; it came alive for me with the description of the painting of the crucified Christ by Vittore Carpaccio, done in 1503; there are illustrations drawn from literature and poetry and other art. The author occupies the new chair of Christianity and Art at King’s College, London and is clearly master of his discipline. If you seek to gain a better understanding of the Holy Spirit in the context of art, it is worth persevering with these ideas, but expect to be challenged.

JOHN FOXLEE

With so many elderly people in our congregations and so many who are ill this is an ideal book to read and an aid to ministering to them. It is about the fullness of life, living life right to the end. In today’s society it can seem that after a certain age people can be classed as ‘past it’ and can add nothing to our world. Each chapter contains the words and wisdom of different people and how they gained help to live life to the full, how they have received help through serious illness and how through their suffering they have helped those around them to grow in their faith. It is encouraging and lifts the spirits.

SHEILA MOSTON

This book follows Goldingay’s recently published commentary on the first 72 psalms. Again, the author’s own translation is followed by his commentary on each of the 78 sections. He often draws illustrations from his own experiences, particularly the expat life in California. All psalm readers will learn much from the book, though you will have to make allowances for the author’s benevolence in the treatment of such harsh prayers as the conclusion of Psalm 137. The new translation throws up some curiosities, as in the opening of Psalm 95, which becomes ‘Come, let’s resound for Yahweh, let’s shout for our crag who delivers us.’ Generally the earlier form The Lord becomes Yahweh throughout and sometimes even Yah. Such things may disturb the reader, but one gets used to it and we look forward to further volumes in Goldingay’s Old Testament series, perhaps with Proverbs coming next.

PETER THORNTON

This fine book differs radically from the numerous other works that tackle the frequently baffling debate between science and religion. From the outset, Tom McLeish – eminent physicist and Anglican Reader – dispels common misconceptions. He shows that science or ‘natural philosophy’ was always located within the Christian tradition, citing old authorities (Gregory of Nyssa, Bede, Bishop Grosseteste) to illustrate how religious commitment is entirely compatible with the search for new scientific knowledge. He demonstrates how the Old Testament is replete with creation narratives (beyond the early chapters of Genesis), illustrating the heritage of scientific wisdom among Hebrew authors. This culminates within the Book of Job. Here, McLeish’s masterly summary and exegesis is a delight, providing an incisive commentary on this beautiful but neglected Scripture. The New Testament passages alluding to creation receive a briefer, but still penetrating, treatment. These perspectives on scientific and biblical knowledge are brought together in a profound concept: instead of a dualistic dialogue between the disciplines (as developed by John Polkinghorne and others), there must be an integrated theology of science. They are both ‘deeply human endeavours’ that seek to heal the relationship between humanity and nature. This insight must open our minds to many crucial tasks facing Christians in the new millennium. The book will be welcomed by readers already familiar with the science-religion debates; but it is especially recommended for those still to engage in this crucial area.

PETER CLOUGH
Recovering from Depression
Katherine Smith
SPCK £9.99 pbk
9780281070756
This short book makes a positive contribution to the debated relationship between Christian faith and mental health. It aims to provide a companion guide for Christians who are recovering from depression. Written in a very accessible style, Smith effectively dismantles some of the barriers that have come to separate faith and mental health issues. The book is based on honest personal experience and is set within the framework of Easter and resurrection; there is appropriate use throughout of relevant Biblical material. The fact that the author is a licensed Reader is an added bonus. I would recommend this book not only to its intended readership but also to families and carers of people who are suffering from depression, including those who exercise ministry to them. The integration of insights from faith and psychiatry is to be welcomed and applauded. MICHAEL FOSTER

Atheists
Nick Spencer
Bloomsbury £16.99 hbk
9781472902962
Spencer gives us an extensive history and analysis of western atheisms from the middle ages, with the odd foray into earlier thinkers. In the process, he presents a long line of men and three women who rejected belief in various concepts of God for various reasons and in various contexts. I found Spencer’s portrayals of his atheists sympathetic in the sense that he shows what motivated them and how their convictions were fuelled. At the same time, as you might expect from a book by the Research Director of a Christian think tank, Atheists also charts the failure of atheism to refute or replace belief in God; it ends by asserting that atheism itself is dependent on belief and has flourished in recent years because so has religion. This is not a quick read, even if the author’s style is light. It is however a scholarly treatment of its subject and is recommended to anyone with an interest in apologetics. GERTRUD SOLLARS

Citizen of the World
Donald H. Dunson & James A. Dunson
Orbis, £10.95 pbk
9781626980457 (2013)
The authors, one a Roman Catholic priest and former professor of moral theology, the other, his nephew, a professor of philosophy, pose a challenging question in this book: how should we live a life of solidarity with those who have great need while we have so much? If that sounds rather heavy, do not be put off. They write in a very readable appealing way. In each chapter, the philosopher makes an argument which the priest enlivens with stories from his own experience. They both draw on a vast number of examples, from literature, politics and current events. The weakness, however, is that they draw no firm conclusion: but then, there may not be one to draw. This book may appeal to those seeking to begin thinking about moral philosophy. It certainly would provide many useful illustrations for sermons. However, to the present reviewer it falls between the two stools of philosophy and practical theology by not going deep enough into either. DAVID BOWEN

The Long Road to Heaven
Tim Heaton
Circle Books £7.99 pbk
9781782792741 (2015)
The purpose of this concise book lies wholly in its sub-title. A Lent course based on the film ‘The Way’. It highlights the topic of Lenten reflection in one’s personal pilgrimage towards the Promised Land and attempts this by mirroring the ever-popular pilgrims’ walk to the shrine of Saint James the apostle at Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. The book divides into four main parts which explain how to organise and structure a Lent course, a section of historical reflection on Saint James the Great and the legend at Compostela, a five-part study course examining the concept of salvation based on the film The Way observing a group of pilgrims walking the way of Saint James. The author provides interesting biblical commentary relevant to each study week. The book will relate to everyone in their daily journey through life with its hardships suffered as we seek to grasp a vision of personal salvation. The work is commended as a study resource. S. JOHN HAZEL

Faithful to the Future
Brother Emile of Taize
Bloomsbury £16.99 pbk
9780567025467 (2013)
Yves Congar (1904-95) was a Roman Catholic theologian of genuine sensitivity and distinction who made a major contribution to Vatican II. This book is essentially a biography of his thinking rather than of his life and at the heart of his belief was the idea that church reform was urgent and necessary in a rapidly changing world. While paying due attention to tradition he stressed the importance of the unknown and the unexpected and the need for Christians to be open to the spirit which leads into the future. Tradition he held to be not repetition but inventiveness and creativity comprising two equally vital elements—one of development and one of conservation. I would strongly commend this book to fellow Readers. The author has been a student of Congar’s thinking for many years and he has captured the essence of his beliefs in a thoroughly accessible and stimulating form. Congar’s writings, as quoted here, are a source of inspiration in calling all christians to be as open and faithful to the future as to the past. ROBERT BEVAN

Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks
Walter Brueggemann
Eerdmans, £10.99 pbk
Brueggemann is one of our greatest living OT scholars, and one possessed of a prophetic imagination. In this short but densely complex book, he compares the complicity of the Jewish elite in their sense of being the ‘chosen people’ prior to the destruction of 587 BCE, to the contemporary U.S. political class’s sense of exceptionalism. Since the terror attacks in 2001, the U.S. has had to undergo a sharp reassessment of its self-image. Brueggemann is excellent on the ways in which, by fully embracing their sense of grief and loss of status, the Jews in exile were able to rebuild their sense of self-worth and religious identity. I was less convinced by his attempts to find parallels for these in modern America. Perhaps a similar book should be written for the British, whose Empire is long gone. KIRSTY ANDERSON

The CRC AGM in 2015 will be held on Saturday 21st March 2015
At St George-the-Martyr, Southwark (opposite Borough tube station)
WATCH THIS SPACE FOR MORE DETAILS!
Ruth and Billy Graham
Hanspeter Nuesch
Monarch Books £9.99 pbk
9780857215369
This biography, sub-headed The Legacy of a Couple, focuses on the very strong, loving and complementary partnership between Billy Graham and his wife, Ruth, who gave up her own hopes of becoming a missionary to encourage and support her husband. She comes across as ‘very down-to-earth, full of life and energy’ as well as a scholar who often provided the theological input for her husband. Nuesch has clearly done considerable research and had access to letters, papers, speeches and articles of which he makes full use. Whilst organised into chapters on aspects of the couple’s relationship and way of life, there is some repetition. For example, the reader is told on numerous occasions what a feisty woman Ruth was. It appears that only the more successful areas of the Grahams’ life is shown; some difficulties encountered in family life are implied yet never explained so one is left feeling that the picture is less than whole. The book is written in a highly eulogistic style which can be off-putting, yet the subjects were clearly inspirational Christians and photographs contribute to an interesting general read.

MARGARET TINSLEY

Encountering God and Discovering our True Identity
John Littleton
Columba £10.99 pbk
9781782181156
In my experience, it is still the case that the Old Testament reading is all too often omitted at the parish Eucharist. This isn’t the place to debate the reasons for this, but a preacher committed to working through John Littleton’s reflections on the first reading set for Year A will find here an accessible introduction to the passages and useful thought starters for sermons. With the exception of Acts readings for the Easter season and six apocryphal readings, the focus is on the Old Testament and on how the reading links to others set for the day or with a particular day in the church’s calendar. Some illustrations and links will not fit the Anglican context but that doesn’t diminish the quality of the reflections. The market isn’t lacking in books of reflections on passages of scripture and whilst this one doesn’t stand out as a ‘must have’, it does merit serious consideration by anyone looking for accessible first reflections on lectionary texts. CHRIS BRACEGIRDLE

Need to know more?

CHRISTMAS 1914 AND 2014
The carol Silent Night was first performed in 1818. This year a new version, specially adapted for Hope 14’s Greater Love initiative, will be sung in sports stadia, churches and wherever people sing Christmas carols. This year marks the centenary of the First World War truce in the trenches. Troops started singing the carol Silent Night in German and in English on Christmas Eve 1914. The fighting stopped and enemies ventured into No Man’s Land to talk and exchange gifts. Some even played football. British soldier, Albert Moren, who was in the front-line trenches near the village of La Chapelle d’Armentieres recalled hearing Silent Night sung during the truce: ‘It was a beautiful moonlit night, frost on the ground, white almost everywhere … there was a lot of commotion in the German trenches and then there were those lights – I don’t know what they were. And then they sang “Stille Nacht” – “Silent Night”. I shall never forget it. It was one of the highlights of my life.’

THE EVENING MAIL, NEWCASTLE
31st December 1914 printed this letter:

‘On Christmas Day one of the Germans came out of the trenches and held his hands up. Our fellows immediately got out of theirs, and we met in the middle, and for the rest of the day we fraternised, exchanging food, cigarettes and souvenirs. The Germans gave us some of their sausages, and we gave them some of our stuff. The Scotsmen started the bagpipes and we had a rare old jollification, which included football in which the Germans took part. The Germans expressed themselves as being tired of the war and wished it was over. They greatly admired our equipment and wanted to exchange jack knives and other articles. Next day we got an order that all communication and friendly intercourse with the enemy must cease but we did not fire at all that day, and the Germans did not fire at us.’

Plans for Silent Night Carols events are taking off around the country in sports stadiums, churches and wherever people sing carols. Ben Cantalon and Nick Herbert were asked to write an extra verse and chorus for the carol Silent Night, which was sung across No Man’s Land by German and Allied troops at Christmas in 1914.

You can listen to the new chorus and download sheet music and chord sheets www.weareworship.com/uk/songs/song-library/showsong/3378 see also www.hopetogether.org.uk/GROUPS/194465/HOPE/Mission_Moments/Christmas/Christmas.aspx

Books for home group study BRF has launched a new short series of books for home group study. The series integrates BRF’s free online discipleship resource, Foundations21 (www.foundations21.net), with a more holistic study approach, providing practical material for group members to take into the days between group meetings.

Church House Publishing have launched two books Anglican Social Theology, and At the end of the day, containing pastoral and theological reflections that provide insights into the Church’s positions on the ‘Common Good’ and assisted dying.

www.chpublishing.co.uk
DIOCESE OF BLACKBURN
Admitted and Licensed 4th October 2014
Anne-Marie Aspden – Warton St Paul
Yvonne Blazey – Blackpool St Thomas
Joan Hayward – Chorley St Laurence
Licensed
James Taylor – Fence-in-Pendle St Anne and Hignam St John the Evangelist

DIOCESE IN EUROPE
Transferred into the Diocese in Europe
Catherine Chambers (PTO) – from St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, 14th February 2014
Jane Quarmby – from Peterborough Diocese, 23rd February 2014
Christine Portman – from Derby Diocese, 23rd February 2014
Jane Randells – from Lincoln, 9th April 2014
Rosamund Wilkinson – from Bradford, 27th April 2014
Maria Makepeace – from Durham, 15th June 2014
Linda Billeness – from West Yorkshire & the Dales, 20th June 2014

DIOCESE OF EXETER
Admitted and Licensed 20 September 2014
Carol Bache – Northmoor Team Ministry
Kenneth Peter Ball – Stokenham (with Sherford and Beesands), Slapton, Charleton with Buckley-Tout-Saints, East Portlemouth, South Pool and Chivelstone
Laura Ford – Brampton Speke, Cadbury, Newton St Cyres with Cowley, Polsimore with Huxham, Rewe with Netherexe, Stoke Canon, Thorverton and Upton Pyne
Joanna Pay – Barnstaple Team Ministry
Mark Ernest Fitzgerald Smith – Buckland Monachorum
Helen Mary Stamp – Thurlstone with South Milton, West Alvington and Churchstow
Licensed
Ruth Jane Beckett – St Matthias, St Mark and Holy Trinity
Jeffery Anthony David Hacon – Shiphay Collaton
Amanda Lewry – Sampford Peverell Team Ministry
Beverley Johnson – Northmoor Team Ministry
Robert Martin Hall – Eggbuckland

DIOCESE OF GUILDFORD
Admitted and Licensed 21st June 2014 by the Bishop of Dorking
Sue Browning – Chertsey St Peter, with Lyne & Longcross
John Cooper (with PTO) – Ashstead St Giles & St George
Paul Fenner – Guildford St Saviour
Kate Hillman – Windlesham St John the Baptist
David Ingoldby – Chertsey St Peter, with Lyne & Longcross
Deborah Lock – Hersham St Peter
Licensed
James Taylor – Banstead All Saints

DIOCESE OF LONDON
Admitted and Licensed on 21st July 2014 by the Bishop of Kensington at St Jude's Courtyard Gardens
Angela King – St James the Less, Pimlico
Sarah Pain – All Saints, Hampton
Betty Peters – St Mark and St Paul, Old Ford
Christopher Saul – All Saints, Hampton
Judith Simpson – St Mary, Stoke Newington
Admitted on 21st July 2014 by the Bishop of Kensington at St Jude’s Courtyard Gardens
Sarah Simpson – Holy Trinity Brompton to be Licensed in September to her new parish

DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER
Admitted and Licensed 6th July 2014
Nick Bebb – to the Benefice of St Anne Tottington with the Revd Hugh Bearn
Mark Critchlow – to the Benefice of Eccles with the Revd Cyprian Yohera
Pat Higson – to the Benefice of Wythenshawe with the Revd Stephen Edwards
Ethel Houghton – to the Benefice of Holcombe and Haskaw with the Revd Paul Sumson
Peter Miller – to the Benefice of St Margaret Burnage with the Revd Ian Thompson
Sue Horobin – to the Benefice of Deeplish and Newbold with the Revd Stephen Watkinson
David White – to the Benefice of Littlerborough with Revd John McGrath

DIOCESE OF ST. ALBANS
Admitted and licensed 6th July 2014 at the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban by the Bishop of Hertford
Richard Butler – to St Peter St Albans
Belinda Copson – to Hitchin Team Ministry
Stephen Fletcher – to Sunnyside with Bourne End
Helen Ford – to Mill End and Herongate with West Hyde
Jacquie Hibbert – to Harpenden St Nicholas
Linda Higgins – to Little Berkhamsed & Bayford, Essendon & Ponsbourne
Fiona Holliday – to Aldenham, Radlett and Shenley Team Ministry
Vicky O’Kelly – to Watford, Christ Church
Sue Oxlade – to Aldenham All Saints
John Rennles – to Woburn, St Mary
Grahame Senior – to Tring Team Ministry
Rachel Wakefield – to Littleborough with Revd John McGrath

DIOCESE OF WEST YORKSHIRE & THE DALES
Admitted 16th May 2014 and Licensed 8th June 2014
Terry Brewis – to the Cleckheaton Benefice
Admitted and Licensed 27 September 2014
Rosanne Anderson – St James, Cross Roads-cum-Lees, Keighley
Tom Chilton – Sutton with Cowling & Lothersdale
Jan Hesselwood – St Michael, Cottingley
Judith Johnson – Ingleborough Team Ministry
Louis Della-Porta – St Mary & St Cuthbert, Bolton Abbey
Margaret Soltys – Shelf with Buttershaw
Peter Miller – to Leavesden All Saints
Sue Oxlade – to Watford, Christ Church
Vicky O’Kelly – to Aldenham, Radlett and Shenley Team Ministry
Belinda Copson – to Hitchin Team Ministry
Sarah Simpson – to Harpenden St Nicholas

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Louis Della-Porta – St Mary & St Cuthbert, Bolton Abbey
Margaret Soltys – Shelf with Buttershaw
John Taylor – St Lawrence & St Paul, Pudsey
Licensed
John Capewell – St John the Evangelist, Bierley
Frances Jordan – St. James, Bolton, Bradford
**DIOCESE OF WORCESTER**

Admitted and licensed 21st June 2014 by the Bishop of Worcester in Worcester Cathedral

Marilyn Dorothy Bishop – Ipsley Team Ministry
Christine Ann Hickman-Smith – Kidderminster East Team Ministry
James Homer – Elmley Lovett w Hampton Lovett and Elmbridge w Rushock; Hartlebury; Ombersley w Doverdale
Rosemary Jane Humphrey – Ipsley Team Ministry
Janice Ann Kear – St John / The Baptist, Claines, and St George, Worcester
Daniel Wijeyaraja Muthuveloe – St Michael & All Angels, Norton, and St James, Wollaston
Linda May Nicholas – Ipsley Team Ministry
Christine Ann Tilley – Ipsley Team Ministry

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**In Memoriam**

The deaths of the following Readers have been notified to us

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<th>Bath &amp; Wells</th>
<th>Leicester</th>
<th>Rochester</th>
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<td>Jim Cranton</td>
<td>Michael Coleman</td>
<td>A G Carruthers</td>
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<td>George Taylor</td>
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<td>Southwell &amp;</td>
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<td>John Hincks</td>
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<td>Jenny Mercer</td>
<td>Margaret Hands</td>
<td>Hugh Proctor</td>
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<td>Bristol</td>
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<td>Derby</td>
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<td>Brian Cogley</td>
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May they rest in peace

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**Stuck for Funding?**

Myland and Adams Fund is waiting to hear from you...

It is reported, probably not apocryphal, that when the late Miss Myland used to attend national Readers’ conferences many years ago she was excluded from their proceedings and instead sat on the steps outside their meeting hall! Yes, we have come a long way from those olden days where misogynistic views held sway in the Church of England. Yet the existence of the Myland and Adams Fund is clear testimony to grace and generosity arising out of an appalling situation where you would expect the very opposite response!

Both the late Miss Myland and the late Mrs Adams (unfortunately not much is known about the two ladies) have left lasting legacies for the ‘good and the training of Readers and their Office’. Where previously they had existed as separate funds, the CRC Executive recently decided to merge them as their respective aims are almost identical.

Is there a theological course that you have wanted to do for a long time? It could be that you have been a Reader for many years and feel the need to do something formal since your initial training? It need not be a degree course, though some of our recent applications have entailed university programmes at Master’s level, but some short-term specialised training in an area or subject that would enhance your current ministry, your engagement with the local community or indeed, to ‘improve’ your preaching.

However there is a major stumbling block! Money! We are here waiting to hear from you. It is a truism that funding for adult part-time study is very difficult to obtain, especially exacerbated in these times of financial austerity. Yet the irony is, also judging from my own experience of having co-founded a charity to fund part-time adult education, that we are not receiving sufficient applications!

Please do visit the CRC website for further information, details of the awards policy and application process. Once your proposed course of study and the cost details are completed on the requisite form, it should be supported and counter-signed by the Warden of Readers before being submitted to the CRC Secretary. While the CRC Executive does not normally award 100% of any amount requested, what we can promise is a very careful consideration of your application and a generosity to match the need!

ANDY LIE is a Reader of more than 20 years in Newcastle Diocese and works as part-time Ecumenical Officer for the URC Northern Synod. He finishes his 10th year on the CRC Executive in 2015.
Many years ago, (I think I was a chorister at the time) I remember a Bishop coming to speak at our Harvest Supper. As he rose to speak, everyone quietened down expectantly. Once there was silence, the Bishop picked up a bread roll from the table and, without making any comment, flung it the length of the room. Everyone looked amazed, if not shocked, and the silence was if anything deeper. Then the Bishop began to speak, ponderously and hardly with the light, witty tones that might be expected at such an event. ‘My text tonight is taken from the fifth chapter of the Book of the Prophet Zechariah – “Behold, I see a flying roll”.’ The gathering erupted into laughter, both of amusement and some relief that they were not going to be subjected to some detailed exegesis of part of one of the minor prophets.

A little after this, I heard someone complaining that the Bishop had acted badly, by poking fun at Holy Scripture, and even though I was barely a teenager at the time, I seem to remember thinking that such an attitude was unfair. The Bishop had been funny. Was that wrong? Later still I discovered that he had had to use the Authorised Version because subsequent revisions render the word ‘roll’ as ‘scroll’, making better sense in the context, but ruining the joke.

Because scripture ‘contains all things necessary for salvation’, it is of course right to treat the Bible with reverence, and to give it particular attention, but I am less sure about the need to use kid gloves, as they were. At the start of the nineteenth century, the poet Coleridge wrote that it seemed to him that the best way to approach the Bible was to treat it initially as any other book. Parts might not seem to be of any great importance, but the Holy Spirit would shine through and speak clearly and vitally elsewhere. Coleridge was criticised for his view, but he pointed out that statements like ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life’ must surely be of more value than the encouragement to infanticide at the end of Psalm 137.

I do not expect everyone reading this to agree with me, but I feel that an openness to new interpretations of scripture is important for those who preach the word. In today’s world, a rigid interpretation of holy texts is perceived by the secular world to be the reason for much that is not merely intolerant, but ghastly. However, from the agnostic viewpoint, a Christian who insists without any qualification that a particular view of a scriptural teaching is the correct one, is no better than those of other faiths who demand acceptance of any one special view of their own sacred literature. Surely at the very least we should be able to say “the Bible says so because…” That might tax our skills of interpretation, but we need to be kept up to the mark!

Alan Wakely
Secretary,
Central Readers’ Council

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