The Old Testament for Today’s World
The newly refurbished rooms are fantastic!
After our week’s stay I felt brand new too! I got to climb cliffs, walk in forests, fly 100 feet off the ground, swim in the ocean and praise God in His awesome creation.
We will definitely return!

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Reading between the lines, you might well have picked up that the CRC is in the midst of some important changes. At the October meeting of the Executive Committee we will be saying a fond farewell to Bishop Robert who has been Chair of the CRC since 2009 and has been a constant source of encouragement and friendship to all in Reader ministry. We will miss him and we wish him and Pauline a long and happy retirement. At the same time we welcome the Right Reverend Martyn Snow, Bishop of Leicester, as our new Chair, and look forward to working with him in the coming months and years. A longer introduction will be included in our next issue – but to be getting on with there is a photo of both Bishops taken at Follow 2016 on page 36.

Follow 2016 was a great event, and not only because it enabled many Readers to meet Bishop Martyn (little knowing he was going to be our new Chair). We are delighted to be able to publish shortened versions of the talks (all on aspects of discipleship) by Paula Gooder of the Bible Society, Mark Russell of the Church Army and Mark Greene of LICC.

The main theme of this issue reflects the significance of the Old Testament for the Christian faith. Obviously we can do no more than scratch the surface in five articles but they each raise important issues and show the relevance of the Hebrew scriptures, which were after all, Jesus’s Bible, for us today. Much of what the prophets had to say was about justice, including God’s response to those who ignore his demand for the right treatment of neighbour and the alien in our midst. Where do you and I stand on this challenge? Hospitality and compassion seem to be in short supply these days. Howard Peskett invites us to dig deep into the text of Isaiah, and Meg Warner encourages us to find lessons for today in the stories of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Jessica Mary Keady’s article addresses the challenging topic of gender-based violence while Andrew Pratt looks at the scriptures as a resource for hymn writers and Rona Orme explores how we might communicate the lessons of the Old Testament to children.

The other articles in this issue all involve leaving the comfort zone in one way or another. Carrie Myers shows how an overseas placement with USPG can challenge our preconceptions, while Chris Hudson finds that encouraging schoolchildren to walk in the footsteps of a local saint can be rewarding on many levels. Reader and pharmacist Alistair Bolt describes taking a break from his day job to work in Sierra Leone, in the middle of the Ebola outbreak. Even a peaceful village in rural Wales is willing to open its eyes to suffering by remembering the genocide in Srebrenica in 1995 in acknowledgment of the responsibility we all share for maintaining peace. The importance of working for peace is further explored by Steve Chalke in his new book Radical, introduced by Peter Clough in an extended review.

We are delighted to have so many articles by Readers in this issue and hope to see many more throughout 2017. The themes for next year are Worship and Music (Spring), Pioneer Ministry (Summer), The Reformation (Autumn) and Spirituality (Winter). Please do contact Heather (on reader.editor@btconnect.com) with your ideas for articles.

This issue has been put together largely by Richenda, our sub-editor, with support as always from Kevin Wild (see his profile in the CRC News section) and other members of the Editorial sub-group. Heather has been out of action partly due to ill health and partly due to preparations for moving house. All being well, we look forward to welcoming her back for our next issue.

Marion Gray, Chair of the Editorial Committee
Richenda Milton-Daws, Sub-editor
Dear +Robert,

I am told that you really will not like this, so I am trying to make it as painless as possible. If you don’t want to read the nice things people have said about you, then you can just ignore the blue side bar which gives the answers that members of the CRC Executive have emailed me in response to my question ‘What is the thing you most appreciate about +Robert?’

However, you must allow us to thank you for the seven or so years that you have chaired and steered the Central Readers’ Council. Readers in the Church of England and the Church in Wales are deeply grateful to you for the encouragement and affirmation you have given us and for the way in which you have invited us to expand our vision and to have confidence in our role as lay theologians and ministers among other lay ministers, within and without the church. We know that you have ‘fought our corner’ in high places and elsewhere, and the impact of your work on lay ministries will last well beyond your tenure as our Chair.

So thank you and Godspeed. May your retirement be long, happy and fulfilled. We will miss you.

with our gratitude, love & good wishes,

[Signature]

on behalf of the CRC Executive and 9000+ Readers

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THE THING I MOST APPRECIATE ABOUT +ROBERT IS

...his patience and his support
...his accessibility and wonderful sense of humour
...the way he has always been prepared to listen
...his willingness to push boundaries and move things forward
...his gentleness
...his undoubted commitment to Reader ministry
...his honesty in telling us when our desires were unrealistic
...the way he has challenged Readers to be forward and outward looking
...the way he values lay ministry as something equal but complementary to and different from clerical ministry
...his acuity of mind, roundness of spirituality, and a heart of care.

---

Bishop Robert with Archbishop Sentamu and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh at All Souls Langham Place on Ascension Day

...and enjoying Follow 2016 in Leicester in July.
Dear Friends,

By the time you read this I will have retired from being Chair of the Central Readers’ Council and also from the day job as Bishop of Sodor and Man. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to Alan Wakely, CRC Secretary, the two Vice Chairs, Chrysogon Bamber and Gertud Sollars, and the whole team. At the time of writing I don’t know who will succeed me but I join you in praying for great times ahead. The future for the Gospel and the Church is lay.

What might I say to Readers/LLMs? Value this special ministry of the Word to which God has called you as ambassadors and envoys of grace. Learn from the past but live in the present. Your origin as a modern movement 150 years ago was to be a bridge between the church and an increasingly secular world, a voice for the Gospel.

One of the gripes I often hear from Readers is that the local priest won’t let the Reader perform as often in church as the Reader would like to. Take that as a gift, an opportunity to use your talents, training, experience and lay-ness to ‘bring God into the conversation’ in places where otherwise the Gospel would not reach.

If you come to our house you might meet our pilgrim. He’s a little over a metre in height and is carved out of a single piece of French oak; he carries with him his bowl and his satchel, and he stoops wearily. On his robe he has the scallop shell of St James because he’s en route to Santiago di Compostela. Beside him, there is an extract from the Liturgy of the Hours of Saint Anthony, concluding with these words: Guard the Word in your heart for this is your treasure.

Pilgrimage, as the Bible generally describes it, isn’t a there-and-back experience, a trip, a holiday or an excursion, but a life lived en route to God; it’s a matter of travelling on to a new homeland. The sixth century Saint Columbanus remarked:

Let us … like pilgrims, always sigh for our homeland, long for our homeland. It is the end of the road that travellers look for and desire … For that road’s end is our true homeland … Don’t let us love the road rather than the land to which it leads, lest we lose our homeland altogether … Christians must travel in perpetual pilgrimage as guests of the world.

En route, ‘Guard the word in your heart’.

- Without the Word, there would have been no creation: the Voice ‘through whom all things came to be’ we worship as Lord and God.¹
- Without the Word there would be neither redemption nor forgiveness: the word of law sharpening the conscience and ‘gave us the right to become children of God’.²
- Without the Word there would be no worship: ‘Come! Let us raise a joyful song to the Lord’ so ‘Listen to him now!’³
- Without the Word there would be no mission, for the Father sent the Word to reconcile creation to himself and to send his Church to continue that work.⁴
- Without the Word, in your hearts and on your lips, there would be no ministry, for the Word is the air you breathe, the treasure you share.⁵

As one of the most interesting post-Vatican II Roman Catholic commentators, Michael Richards, observed:

The Word of God, spoken, heard, thought about, obeyed and continually re-expressed in actions as in words, gives meaning and reality to the life of the Church and of the individual Christian.⁶

So ‘Guard the Word in your heart’, but there is no need to defend the Word from anyone other than yourself, for it is ‘alive and active; it cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword’.⁷ You may be tempted to demote the Word in your priorities, to become harder to hear, to defend yourself against its surprises, to listen too carefully to yourself. Let the Word of Christ dwell in your heart, judge, guide, encourage and equip you.

There are days on the pilgrimage when the sun is out, there’s a gentle, warm breeze and the road winds gently through pleasant countryside. There are also days when the rain lashes down, the wind is biting, the road is steep, the mist is swirling round you and you are stooping and weary. At times like that, the fact that you’re not going to get to a destination today or tomorrow and then turn round and go back home may seem a daunting prospect – but on you walk.

As a Reader you are always en route, one who guards the Word in your heart, ‘for that is your treasure’. Go, pilgrim, pursue your quest!

Go on your way and let nothing detain you.
Take your share of the sun, and your share of the dust.
The heart aroused, forget the ephemeral.
Things do not matter: nothing is true but love.
Do not let your heart become attached to anyone who passes.
Never say, ‘I have succeeded, I have paid the price!’
Do not rest on your achievements: they will return to judge you.

Guard the Word in your heart, for this is your treasure.

[From the Liturgy of the Hours for the Feast of Saint Anthony]

Your own in Christ, + Roger.

¹ Genesis 1:3; John 1:3; 20:28
² John 1:12; Romans 7:13
³ Psalm 95: 1, 7
⁴ John 20:21; Colossians 1:20
⁵ 2 Timothy 4:1-5
⁶ Canon Michael Richards: in The Times, 1 August, 1987
⁷ Hebrews 4:12
On 16th July this year, I was at the De Montfort Hall in Leicester, flying the flag for The Gift of Years and Anna Chaplaincy at ‘Follow 2016’.

I was delighted to be part of a rolling programme of talks in the ‘Departure Lounge’ where more than fifty people gathered to hear how Anna Chaplains – lay and ordained, men as well as women – support people in their later years in a growing number of places around the UK. I also outlined ways in which our spirituality can flourish in later life.

Since then we’ve received inquiries from people living in Chichester, Winchester, Guildford, Abingdon, Bedford, Lincoln and Ely.

Also speaking in the Departure Lounge with chat hosts Rachel Jordan and Simon Dean was Luke Bacon, a young ordinand in Cambridge, and Matt Pitt based in Leicester. They focused on the needs of millennials and suggested what is needed is more mentoring of young people in churches.

Rachel Jordan, National Mission and Evangelism Adviser for the Church of England, described how in churches where there is a high proportion of people in their teens and twenties, such as her own in London, there’s a need for them to be matched with older Christians who can help encourage and nurture faith.

The lively all-day event brought together an inspiring range of speakers including Paula Gooder, the Bible Society’s theologian in residence, Mark Greene of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity and BRF’s Lucy Moore.

Lucy and her team created Messy Church with helpers, while also taking a turn on the sofa to explain why following Jesus makes all the difference to her life. Meanwhile there was magician Steve Price amazing the crowds elsewhere at the festival, together with worship music from Roger Jones, and Pete James and his band.

While festival-goers declared the day ‘a fantastic way to celebrate 150 years of discipleship’, I couldn’t help contrasting this event with the last time I was at the de Montfort Hall (back in the early 1980s) to see jazzman George Melly and the Feetwarmers.

What, I wondered, would the late George Melly – he of the trademark wide pin-striped suits – have made of this diverse gathering of Christians? After all, his Daily Telegraph obituary observed that he died aged 80, having ‘leched, drank and blasphemed his way around the clubs and pubs of the British Isles … and provided pleasure to the public for five decades.’

By contrast, this festival had opened, after fulsome welcomes from not one but two bishops, with an erudite, yet accessible, talk on ‘Being the disciples Jesus wanted’.

The main hall was full for this talk from Paula Gooder, herself a Reader. She commanded the stage, striding back and forth in red wedge power heels as she explained why, in every age, there seems to be a discrepancy between the disciples Jesus hoped for and what he got!

She began by pointing out that the word disciples comes from the Latin word meaning ‘one who LEARNS’. The audience was all ears, and I’d say that out of the five hundred or so people there, from many parts of the UK, the majority were over the age of fifty.

Just about every English diocese heralds on its website the importance of ‘life-long discipleship’, so if we are disciples, this suggests we must keep on learning.

Those most attentive to what Paula Gooder had to say that morning may have been mostly grey-haired but, Lay Ministers or not (yet), they were a lively and forward-looking crowd of ‘disciples’.

I’m heartened by hearing Paula say that Jesus didn’t look for perfect disciples. ‘He wanted the people he called.’ The Bible is full of older people for whom God had a purpose despite their advanced years – Elizabeth and Zechariah, Simeon and Anna – to name just a few. Perhaps there’s a message for today’s Church in there somewhere?

Left to right: Debbie Thrower speaking in the Departure Lounge, Lucy Moore of ‘Messy Church’, Luke Bacon, engaging with millennials and Paula Gooder inspiring us to follow.
Following Jesus: Being the disciples Jesus wanted

Paula Gooder is Theologian in Residence at the Bible Society, and a Reader.

The first disciples were an unlikely band of followers – and yet Jesus knew how to use them to build his Church. We are called to be disciples too and, although we too are far from perfect, he will be able to use us if we are willing to follow him.

What do we mean by the word 'Discipleship'? The concept was familiar enough at the time of Jesus, but he re-defined it. A disciple was someone who learned – and who learned from a master. So, the Twelve learn from Jesus – and they learn by example, by watching him, listening to him and by following him. Discipleship was the primary means of learning after the age of 12 in first century Judaism. A disciple, therefore, is:

- Someone who learns from a master;
- Someone who sees the world from the perspective of the master;
- Someone who asks really good questions;
- Someone who engages in lively discussion in order to understand the worldview of the master.

The master would be chosen by the young disciple – or more likely by his parents. But Jesus turned this model on its head. He chose them. 'Follow me', he said, to the fishermen and others who would make up his band of twelve. He called them to commitment.

Then, when they had learned from being in his presence for a time, they were sent to proclaim his message in the two-fold dynamic of discipleship:

Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' [Mark 1:17]

To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' [Luke 9:59-60]

Jesus' disciples were called – they didn't choose him, or at least some didn't, he chose them. They were called to commitment and they were sent to proclaim. They were also expected to bear the cost of discipleship:

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.' [Matthew 16:24]

Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.' [Luke 9:23]

Jesus expected something else of his disciples too.

He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' [Mark 4:40]

The Greek work used for 'afraid' was not the word phobos (from which we get phobia), but deilos – which means timid. So Jesus expected his disciples to be people who would not be timid. He also expected them to understand – another quality in which they were lacking.

Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. [Mark 6:51-52]

In fact, Mark's account of the stilling of the storm, and the disciples' reaction to it, is an object lesson in how not to be a disciple!

And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, 'Watch out – beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.' They said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.' And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have ears, and fail to see? Do you have eyes, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?' [Mark 8:13-18]

This incident occurs just after the disciples have seen Jesus provide food for four thousand people – and despite this they are afraid, their hearts are hard and they do not understand. And yet, the characteristics Jesus expected of his disciples were that they should be:

- People who are not timid;
- People who can understand;
- People whose hearts are not hard;
- People who can hear and see and understand.

The twelve men he had gathered around him fell far short of this ideal. Yet they were his chosen disciples and he knew how to work with them to build his Church.

What does this tell us about following Jesus today, about being twenty-first century disciples? We should endeavour to be people who:

- Learn from Jesus – finding ways to 'hang out' with Jesus;
- Ask LOTS of questions (even stupid ones);
- Learn ALL the time, and be prepared to go on learning;
- See the world as Jesus saw it – with compassion;
- 'Go tell' the good news of the Kingdom.

Like the original disciples, we will often fall short. But Jesus loves us, and has chosen us. He can work with us if we let him.

This article and the two which follow it are edited versions of the talks by our three main speakers at Follow 2016 last July. You can listen to audio recordings of all three talks in their entirety at http://www.readers.cofe.anglican.org/news_item.php?219
A disciple is someone who wants to learn from Jesus, to be like Jesus, to allow Jesus to reshape their lives. Someone who wants to see the world through Jesus's eyes. This was Mark Russell's message in the second of our plenary talks at Follow 2016.

After fifteen years of being a Christian I do not want to be a Christian any more. Jesus never told me to be a Christian. I want to be a disciple. Not all that many years ago it was a common occurrence to see bumper stickers on vehicles that proclaimed, 'Jesus is the answer'. Someone with a sarcastic spirit later printed up bumper stickers reading, 'Jesus is the answer but what's the question?' The bumper sticker raises a good point. What is the question? People don't ask just the one question. They ask loads of important questions. Do I matter? Why am I here? Is there life after death? What is happening with our planet? Where was God in Orlando or Baghdad or Nice? Can I really know God? Can my life have real purpose?

The woman whose life has been destroyed by sin asks if there is any forgiveness. The man dying of cancer wants to know if there is life after death. The person who has failed God is wondering if there is a second chance. The guy who has lost his partner stands beside the grave and wonders if there is any hope. The skeptic asks if she can really know God. The parent of the rebellious child asks if God can do anything to change her son or daughter.

People are asking a lot of important, serious, spiritual questions, and I am convinced that Jesus is the answer. The problem is the church today has exactly the opposite effect. We often attract the religious, nice and upright people and exclude all those who don't fit. Tax collectors are not popular. In Jesus's day they were hated. They were hated because they represented the domination of Rome over Israel. Every tax collector was a living reminder that Israel was not free. They were also hated because they could collect as much as they wanted, give the required amount to Rome and become wealthy at others' expense. This is the life Zacchaeus was living. And yet Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was.

Zacchaeus had experienced a tremendous amount of rejection in his life. I wonder how many people ever went to his house? And what was the first thing Jesus said to him? His name.

Jesus knows your name. He knows what's going on in your life. He knows what you're anxious about. Jesus knew Zac's name and he knows yours.

Zacchaeus was a short man. He had to climb a tree to see Jesus. People hated teaching often offended the religious people of his day yet consistently attracted the marginalised and the irreligious.

In the main, though, the church today has exactly the opposite effect. We often attract the religious, nice and upright people and exclude all those who don't fit. Tax collectors are not popular. In Jesus's day they were hated. They were hated because they represented the domination of Rome over Israel. Every tax collector was a living reminder that Israel was not free. They were also hated because they could collect as much as they wanted, give the required amount to Rome and become wealthy at others' expense. This is the life Zacchaeus was living. And yet Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. Zacchaeus had experienced a tremendous amount of rejection in his life. I wonder how many people ever went to his house? And what was the first thing Jesus said to him? His name.

Jesus knows your name. He knows what's going on in your life. He knows what you're anxious about. Jesus knew Zac's name and he knows yours.

Zacchaeus was a short man. He had to climb a tree to see Jesus. People hated
him so much they wouldn’t let him past. Zacchaeus had a rough time because he was a cheat. But I think he also had a rough time because he was short. Sometimes we experience rejection because of our physical characteristics. People have a go at us because we are skinny, fat, short, tall, bald, we have to wear glasses, we have a long nose, big ears, and we could go on. What is our rabbit Jesus showing us, his disciples, in this story?

1. Jesus shows us how to love those who are on the edges

Near the beginning of his ministry, Jesus came into the synagogue, unrolled the scroll he was given and read from Isaiah. Surrounded by religious people and leaders he said:

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

He turned to the people and said, ‘Today that scripture has been fulfilled in your midst!’

This was Jesus’ revolutionary manifesto, proclaiming himself as the Messiah and outlining his task on earth. We can filter the rest of his earthy ministry through this text. And because of the Great Commission and Pentecost, it is our manifesto too. Our mission as a church is finding the blind, the deaf, and Pentecost, it is our manifesto too. Our motive must be love. Evangelism is not about winning an argument or getting people to join our club. Our motive must be love.

Evangelism is not about shoring up a crumbling institution or saving the Church of England from extinction. It’s about helping people know their lives matter, they’re important, God loves them. Our message must be rooted in love, and we must be rooted in love. Sadly most people in society think the Church isn’t loving. They think we are a bunch of judgemental so-and-sos.

We know Jesus has changed our life, and we yearn for other people to know his love, his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness, his peace, his hope and his resurrection life. We yearn to be channels of Jesus’s love to those around us.

Jesus recognised Zacchaeus’s brokenness and loneliness. He knew his name, and showed him love. Jesus calls us to that same ministry. Former Archbishop Rowan Williams says: ‘When you see another person, you see someone God takes seriously’. We need to love like Jesus.

Think of the streets around your church building: the town or rural area around you. Think of the families having a tough time, marriages in trouble, kids being bullied at school, people frightened about money, those addicted to drugs, those frightened about cancer or other illness, those scared about their job, or lack of job. Young people frightened by the lack of opportunities. Parents anxious about wayward children. Elderly people facing death alone. All these need to know God loves them, that he can be their source, their strength, their hope.

If I have one prayer for the churches across this land, it is that they would be communities full of people who walk each day with Jesus and try to show his love to those around us. How do you do it? Desmond Tutu shows us: ‘I pray each day. I talk to Jesus, I live with Jesus, I walk with Jesus, I want to be like Jesus, I want to learn from Jesus. Jesus and me are always together’.

3. Your life can change the lives of those around you

Your testimony has power to change lives. You are a living breathing example of the love and grace of God. Use your story, tell it, share it, and show your friends how God has changed your life.

Evangelism is not just telling people about Jesus. Evangelism is living Jesus to them. We forever say ‘Christ is the answer’ to people who aren’t asking a question. We should live our lives as Christians, be real, be honest, and live Jesus with people. We should pray that our behaviour and our lives would prompt people to ask why we live as we do. Then, as Peter puts it, we should always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us.

You might not think you can raise a man from the dead, or open the eyes of a blind man, but you can change the oil in your neighbour’s car. You can take an ill person to the doctor, you can lift litter, you can teach a class in Sunday School. You can bake a cake for a housebound person. You can text someone having a hard time.

Your life may be the only Bible someone reads. You are the Fifth Gospel.

4. People on the margins are sometimes difficult people

Desmond Tutu talked about the Parable of the Good Shepherd. He says we have got it all wrong: Jesus wasn’t white with blonde hair, and cute fluffy little lambs don’t leave the pen and run away. It’s easy to work with cute, fluffy lambs.

The one that runs away is the obstreperous old ram. The one whose coat is ruined from running under barbed wire fences and through hedges, the one who has swum through the dirty pond and stinks to high heaven. Good riddance to bad rubbish, you might say. Yet the shepherd left the ninety-nine well-behaved little lambs to look for this one.

Zacchaeus was an old ram – someone no one liked, no one wanted to be with. But Jesus left the nice, cute, fluffy people to go after the difficult one. Jesus had such a radical inclusive ministry; he always went the extra mile to reach those ignored by everyone else.

Where in your community are the margins, the places where your parish has had little impact? Ask God how he can help you make an impact there.

5. Evangelism always brings change

Look what happens after one visit from Jesus to Zacchaeus’s home. Huge blessing was unleashed on that little community. Why? Because Zacchaeus was changed. He gave away so much of his money to those he had cheated. Think how many people benefitted from Jesus having tea at Zacchaeus’ home.

When people’s lives change, when they find Christ, a revolution of God’s grace changes hearts, and then changes their actions. This has a knock-on effect: changed lives change lives. When you sow the gospel, and people come to Christ, then change in the community will flow from their changed lives – even if they don’t see it themselves. We pray for results, if we see them great, but if not we know that nothing done in God’s name is ever in vain.

To conclude

God wants you and me to be disciples, to be more like Jesus. He wants to use you to reach your friends and neighbours with the gospel. You are the Fifth Gospel. Your life will be the only gospel many people read.

So let’s allow this amazing Jesus to touch our lives, fire our hearts, put a passion in us, to be a radical people, to live the life, to make a difference for him in the lives of others, to learn more from Jesus and sow the love of Jesus into the lives of those around us, and together conspire with Jesus to change the world and bring in the Kingdom of God.
Readers have a unique contribution to make to the Church, precisely because so much of their time and life experience is in places where, inevitably, full-time clergy have less opportunity to go. So today we will focus on our frontlines – the places we naturally go during the week beyond the church, and where we meet people who don't know Jesus – workplaces, school gates, aerobics classes, supermarkets, a whole variety of locations. I hope that you will not only see the rich variety of ways God might work through you in your context but become more aware of the ways he has already worked in and through you, right where you are.

I used to work in advertising and I loved it – the pace, the creativity, the people. And the lunches. I saw God do amazing things in that ad agency … answer prayer after prayer, draw people to himself, heal someone on the tenth floor of an office block, change the heart of a difficult client, guide me through career disappointment, character failure and romantic catastrophe. God at work in an ordinary job, among ordinary people. We can trust God whatever our context.

There is no place God cannot work, no person he cannot work through. There is no task that does not concern him.

God uses ordinary people, like me and you. There is a job for you in the place where God has put you. So let's think about fruitfulness on the frontline – on our own frontlines wherever they might be. Let's ask ourselves:

- How can we be fruitful for God?
- How can we encourage one another?

I'm going to introduce you to a framework that I hope will help you to see how you are already being fruitful and how you might continue to be. As Readers you have something unique to bring to ministering to others, precisely because you are not ordained, because you have life experiences and perspectives that an ordained person usually has not had or not had for nearly as long.

Maybe you don't think you have a frontline. Thelma didn't. Thelma is 93, and a member of a small church in the Midlands. She doesn't think she has a mission field … not until her minister takes her through a DVD produced by LICC, and suddenly Thelma realises that she does have a frontline. It's the convenience store down her road. This is her mission field, a frontline where she can minister to people who don't know Jesus. So, whatever the season and whatever the weather, despite her friends' offers to do her shopping for her, Thelma goes to minister to the people God has given her. She's excited to still be working with God, for God, in his great plans.

Don't we all want to be Thelmas, still going for it with God when we're 93? Of course you might have a frontline without even leaving your home – some people do. Think for a moment about:

- In what contexts do you naturally spend time with people who don't know Jesus?
- Who is there?
- How might you bless the place, the people?

There is no place God is not concerned about. He created the whole earth, all is his. And Christ is not only described in Colossians as the co-creator of all things ... 'For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, things visible, and invisible … ' He is also the one through whom 'all things' are reconciled. Christ restores all things to their right relationship with God – all things, not just some things. This is the wonder and glory of God's plan in Christ, not a partial salvation, not an interim solution, but a definitive, once and for all, all sufficient, redemptive sacrifice that promises the utter renewal of all things.

So this is the big project we are all involved in – working with God to create a context for true human flourishing – in him, with him, for him, to his glory.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven – in my gym.

R
as it is in heaven, in my rugby club as it is in heaven, in my charity shop as it is in heaven, in my workplace, my school, my classroom. In all these kinds of places. So as disciples of Christ we are called to follow him wherever he leads and to seek to be fruitful for him there.

I would like to give you a 6M framework, to help you see how God has been working through you and how he might continue to do so.

### M – How am I Modelling Godly character?

Can I imagine what that modelling Godly character might look like? Godly character involves love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Can I show all (or any) of these to that nauseating rival in the office? To that galactically incompetent teacher or boss? To that appallingly irritating housemate? Even on days when everything goes wrong, the dishwasher breaks, and the traffic is terrible?

In what ways the Holy Spirit has been ripening his fruit in you? In what ways might you pray that he helps some more?

### M – How am I Making good work in the power of the Spirit?

The work we do is important to God. As Paul writes: ‘Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for people, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving’ (Colossians 3:23–24). All things are made for Christ and by Christ. Fruitfulness in Christ's eyes is not just a function of excellence. It’s a function of doing our work for him, in his strength and for his glory, offering it to him and seeking his help in it because we trust that he is interested.

### M – How am I Ministering grace and love?

There are a whole host of ways one can do this: showing consideration, going to get someone a sandwich when they can't get away for lunch, leaving a Kit-Kat on their chair. Sending a card to a bereaved neighbour. Being there, and being loving.

### M – How am I Making culture?

Archbishop Derek Worlock said, 'Culture is the way we do things round here.' Every family has a culture, so does every church and every workplace. Behind the ways things are done are values. Beliefs shape our behaviour, ethos shapes process. Our Kingdom values shape our behaviour and shape a culture on our frontlines that is more likely to help people flourish – to be in line with God’s ways, to reflect the character and purposes of the King.

It is possible to make changes to culture at pretty much every level of an organisation. Let's take an example. Anita was working as a junior research scientist in a large pharmaceutical company. The scientists in her team all worked in single-person labs, on their own. Every now and again one of them would pop out of their lab, scuttle down to the communal kitchen, make a coffee for themselves and scuttle back. No one really talked to anyone else.

You don’t need to be a research scientist to recognise that this was bad for the science (because no one was sharing what they were learning) and bad for team morale because no one really knew each other.

Anita decided to conduct an experiment: what percentage of research scientists will emerge from their single-unit lab at 10.30 on a Friday morning if offered fresh coffee and chocolate biscuits? Her study revealed that 98.37% of scientists will emerge from their single-unit research lab at 10.30 on a Friday morning if offered fresh coffee and chocolate biscuits. And people began to talk to one another about the work they were doing, as well as about the football scores and the coming weekend and or who got fired on this week's apprentice. The relationships got better and the work got better.

Six months later Anita left the company. No one else took the initiative to make coffee at 10.30 on Friday mornings. Six months after that, morale had got so bad that the management hired in a consultancy to run team building exercises. It cost them a fortune – when all that was required was a packet of chocolate biscuits.

### What had Anita done?

- She had identified a negative aspect of the culture she was in
- She did not accept that it could not change
- She looked for a kingdom antidote that might address that negative
- She tried it out – putting in time, investing money and taking an emotional risk. After all, no one might have turned up.

### M – How might I be a Mouthpiece for truth and justice?

Standing up for truth and justice can sound very grand, but it can mean snuffing out gossip at the school gate, making sure the right person gets the credit at work or the wrong person doesn't get the blame, or battling a lie on Facebook.

### M – How might I be a Messenger for the Gospel?

There are lots of things to be said about evangelism on the frontline, and often the discussion revolves around barriers and fears and difficult questions and political correctness. There may come a day to look at those, but it is not this day.

At the heart of any discussion of evangelism are some simple truths:

- God is the evangelist
- God wants to save people
- God is on the case
- You have a part to play, however small.

So, the question is who in particular has God put on your heart? Think of that person, pray for that person, then pray for a next step.

You may not get an opportunity to verbally share the Gospel every day, but every day you get to contribute to God's mission. Every day you get to do M1 to M5, but some days God opens a door, an ear, a heart ...

So, we throw ourselves on God and offer ourselves wholly. Work through me Lord, moment by moment. I can do none of this without you. None of this will bear fruit without you. We seek God’s face to help us discern the way forward, to know where he would have us focus, to help us to grow in fruitfulness, wherever we are.
Do the Patriarchs (and Matriarchs) have anything to say to us today?

MEG WARNER

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Are you an ‘Old Testament’ person or a ‘New Testament’ person? Yes, there really are two types of people!

The problem is that there are a lot of ‘Old Testament’ people out there who don’t know it. They’ve never really taken the Old Testament seriously, and nobody around them has ever really taken it seriously. They rarely hear sermons preached on it, and if they are Readers themselves they’ve never been quite brave enough to tackle the Old Testament, or even considered it as an option. All that incomprehensible begetting and smiting!

So I was delighted to learn that The Reader was planning to carry a number of articles in this issue specifically about the Old Testament. I feel honored to have been asked to write about the Patriarchs (and the Matriarchs … actually, I’m just going to call them ‘Ancestors’). I’m not only a card-carrying ‘Old Testament’ person, but a bit of an Abraham fan too. In my day job I teach Old Testament to university students, but often it is my work as a Reader that most challenges me. I teach lay people and clergy in my own diocese (London), but also get the opportunity to travel to other dioceses, and sometimes abroad, talking to people about the Old Testament, and especially about Abraham and his family. There’s nothing I like better than when someone sidles up to me, slightly apologetically, and says something along the lines of ‘I’ve always been a bit scared of the Old Testament, but I’m going to look a bit closer now.’

What are ‘Old Testament’ people like? The ones I know really like stories. And they like stories to be realistic – gritty even. They are more interested in stories and histories that tell it like it really is, than in those that try to sugar-coat things, to iron out the wrinkles, or to be too pious about it all. The Old Testament has all that, and the stories of the Ancestors have it in spades. The stories of Abraham and Sarah (and their surrogate Hagar), of Isaac and trickster-Rebekah, and Jacob and the four mothers of his children, is that they ring true. And because of that they seem surprisingly modern. They are stories about families and children, insiders and outsiders, sibling rivalry and all the tensions and struggles that go along with those things. They’re stories about many of the same things we struggle with today.

Even though I know this, I still get surprised when a story I’m discussing on one of my teaching journeys turns out to engage with a current issue that is especially pertinent to the place I’m visiting. In May last year, for example, I found myself in Kent talking about immigration and refugees. The story was Genesis 18, in which Abraham offers hospitality to three strangers who turn up at his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham treats them with enormous respect, insists that they stay for lunch and serves them what is, in his context, a sumptuous banquet. The strangers reward him with the promise of a son. What is extraordinary about the story is that there is no indication that Abraham has any idea, when the travellers first appear, that one of the three is Yahweh. In effect he treats them as kings, and discovers in the process that they are God. It is tempting to imagine that this story is a ‘one-off’, but logic dictates that Abraham must have been called on to offer hospitality to strangers many times. Hospitality was a necessary and ever-present responsibility in Abraham’s world. Abraham didn’t, however, treat the strangers as just more unannounced arrivals, but as honoured guests. In doing so, he encountered God. This story suggests to us that we encounter the ‘wonderfulness of God’ (‘Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?’) when we are just going about the ordinary, everyday business of caring for others.

Reading this story on Britain’s immigration ‘front-line’ raised questions about the hospitality we offer to those seeking asylum in this country – including those who arrive here in car-boots or the backs of refrigerated lorries. In what circumstances might these plucky, traumatised people become the face of Christ for us? This question was all the more poignant when we reflected on the fact that Abraham himself was an immigrant – not a refugee necessarily, but an outsider seeking a new life in Canaan. As an Australian, for me this was particularly sobering. The country of my birth is currently a nation of people who arrived in boats hell-bent on preventing other people in boats from being ‘allowed in’ to share in their prosperity. This is precisely the problem that Lot encounters in Genesis 19, the next story. The men of Sodom are not so much lustful as angry that a recent arrival should presume to offer hospitality to strangers in their city (‘This fellow came here as an alien and he would play the judge!’ Gen 19:9).

This is one of the lessons of Abraham’s story. We are all aliens. None of us really belongs, or at least none of us belongs in a sense that gives us the right to exclude others from what has been a gift to us. Abraham and his descendants are told to live in the land that is Yahweh’s gift to them, as aliens, alongside those other peoples among whom God has seen fit to place them. This sense of the story was adopted by St Benedict in his monastic rule. Benedictines still today exercise a ministry of hospitality in which they look to see Christ in the faces of those who come to them for rest and retreat and in which they consider themselves ‘guests’ (or aliens) in their own monastery every bit as much as the strangers they welcome. How might the immigration crisis look if you and I lived like that, truly understanding ourselves as guests in our own country?

Earlier this year, in Cologne, I found myself directly confronted by that very question. I was leading some Bible studies for the Synod of the Diocese in Europe, in the very city in which liberal, welcoming attitudes to immigrants had given rise to simmering tensions. These had erupted into violence and angry protests after a series of sexual assaults against women on
New Year’s Eve had been attributed to the city’s refugee population. Against this background we were reading Genesis 34, the story of the sexual assault (by a foreigner) upon Jacob’s daughter Dinah after she had ventured out from her father’s home to visit the non-Israelite women of the region. The story is traumatic and violent; it seems to be interested in weighing and balancing two alternative responses to the assault on Dinah. The response of Jacob is to be cautious, to wait, to consult, and to seek an outcome that will soothe, rather than exacerbate, the tensions between himself and his neighbors. The response of his fire-brand sons, Dinah’s brothers, is immediate and retaliatory, as discussed in the article by Jessica Keady that follows on page 18.

Perhaps naively, I was trying to emphasise that we ought to be careful about drawing too many direct parallels between the world of the story and our world, particularly in relation to the avenging instincts of Jacob’s sons. A priest whose parish is in Athens interjected and said that this exact situation – brothers violently avenging a perceived assault on an unmarried sister – was one that he encountered regularly in his ministry. It turned out he was not the only one.

If I was naïve, this is not a charge that could be levelled at the Ancestor stories. They do not shy away from difficult questions about how people live together. On the surface it appears that there is a level of acceptance of the violence of Jacob’s sons, but that sense is partly undermined by Jacob’s peace-maker response, ‘You have brought trouble upon me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land … my numbers are few and if they gather themselves against me, and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household’ (Gen 34:30). On the other hand, neither is the story unrealistic about groups of people living together and the dangers of misunderstandings and quarrels between them, and even of deliberate taking-advantage of peaceable inclinations.

And this is one last thing I want to mention in relation to the Ancestors – the issue of looking ‘on the surface’. The Ancestor stories are a bit like a lesson in not judging a book by its cover. ‘On the surface’ these stories appear to fit well with the exclusivist brand of politics that was in the ascendant during the time when they were put together (actually, the kind of politics we’re seeing increasingly here in Britain, but also in Australia and in other places). At a surface level the stories are all about choosing one person over another – usually on the basis of their ethnicity or social class. Isaac is chosen over Ishmael, then Ishmael and his Egyptian maidservant mother are sent away (Gen 21:8-21). Meanwhile the Sodomites are annihilated by Yahweh for their wickedness (Gen 19:12-29), and we discover that those dreadful Ammonites and Moabites had their beginnings in shameful father-daughter incest (Gen 19:30-38). If we look more closely, however, we start to notice other things. For example, even though there seem to be lots of issues in the stories about how Israelites should relate to non-Israelites (who they should marry and so forth) the entire story is predicated on one surprising notion – we are all one big family. Ishmael becomes the ancestor of the Arab nations, Esau becomes Edom and the Ammonites and Moabites are the ancestors of Abraham’s nephew. These are the principal nations surrounding Judah. If you go back to the Noah story, everybody – even the Canaanites and Philistines (Israel’s archetypal enemy) – is descended from Noah. Abraham himself is described, in Gen 17:4, as the ‘father of a multitude of nations’. The apparent exclusivism of the stories is undermined by the inconvenient idea that we are all, when it comes down to it, related. There is no ‘us’ and ‘them’ – only us.

All of this makes Abraham a remarkably interesting figure when we approach questions of inter-religious dialogue. He is not only the father of many nations, but also of the three great monotheistic religions. Last year I spoke about this with a group of clergy and Readers in St Albans Diocese, a part of Britain sometimes associated with Islamist extremism. Abraham is a great ecumenist – it is not only that everybody is related to him, but he has a particular role to play in terms of building bridges with others in the stories. In more than one place he is presented as an interceding prophet (for example, Gen 20:7), but he only ever intercedes for foreigners. This makes him very different from Moses and David who intercede only on behalf of Israel. Abraham seeks justice for the Sodomites, prays for mercy for the Philistines, and cries out for his (Egyptian) son Ishmael at the point where Ishmael is excluded and banished (note that he remains entirely silent in the next chapter when Yahweh tells him to slaughter Isaac).

I hope I have given you an appetite for the stories of the Ancestors. I have been living with these stories for decades now, but they still bring out new things, and resonate with world issues in new ways. Read them and preach about them! You might be surprised to find how precisely they engage with the issues facing your people in your context.

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"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" \[Isaiah 52:7\]

When I was young I used to think that this verse was very odd because most people hid their feet (apart from some ladies who painted their toenails) and did not think that they were beautiful. I did not know at that time that a very popular form of Hindu worship was devotion to the feet (which were sometimes extremely large) of the beloved deity. The Indian Christian poet Purushottama Choudari wrote, 'The Christian worshipper wants to worship the lotus feet of Christ with pure and blameless devotion ... He wants to worship Christ by placing his head under his feet.'

My understanding of this verse has been irreversibly changed after hearing my friend Don Cormack, who worked in the Cambodian refugee camps just inside Thailand during the Khmer Rouge era. Two Cambodian boys had become Christians in one of the camps, but one day they disappeared. They had gone back to their village in Cambodia, saying, 'If WE do not tell our friends at home about Jesus, they will never hear.' The younger boy had fallen sick and died, and his friend, not knowing what to do, wheeled him back, in a cart, covered with a blanket, across the border to the camp. Don met the older boy on a trail and saw the younger boy's feet sticking out under the blanket. He took the feet and the other boy took the head and they buried their young friend right there by the side of the trail. *How beautiful are the feet ...*

Under the umbrella of the Continuing Ministerial Education programme of Truro Diocese (for Anglicans and Methodists) I offered a one-day workshop in which we would read together six chapters of Isaiah, Chapters 50–55. Isaiah is not the longest book of the Old Testament (there are five longer books) but it is the one that is most quoted in the New Testament (412 times according to my computation from my Greek New Testament). I was encouraged to believe that some people would enrol for such a workshop by the fact that I have previously led a day workshop in which we read through the entire Gospel of Mark, another in which we read through Romans, and another in which we read through fifteen psalms.

In my 'blur' advertising this Isaiah workshop I wrote, ‘Because every day we are deluged with information pouring into our house through the postbox and electronically, we are forced to “surf” through all this material, selecting what interests us or what matters, there is a danger that we bring this surfing mindset to our Bible reading also. We can see similar behaviour if we visit an art gallery – there are many people who hurry past the pictures, giving them a cursory glance. But connoisseurs (and devotees) enjoy every intricate detail; they sit and stare; and then stand up and look again from a different angle; then they go away and come back again ... In this workshop we will pay close attention to Isaiah’s words, which have not lost their resonance although written long ago. Through this calm attentiveness we will refresh our souls for ministry and mission; and we will receive help to go on trusting God through troubled times.’

Thirteen people enrolled, a manageable size of group for a conversational workshop. I suggested that, if they had time to prepare beforehand they should read Isaiah 50–55 several times; if they had more time, read Isaiah 40–66; if they had more time still, read Isaiah 1–66! Also they could listen (on YouTube) to Guildford Cathedral choir singing Stanford’s anthem, *How beautiful are their feet who stand on Sion’s hill.* They could also read the Wikipedia article on huge painting *The Raft of the Medusa* by Théodore Géricault and study the picture – various images are available on Google images, some much clearer than others.

Readers of *The Reader* may be interested to know some of the ways we spent six hours reading and discussing these chapters of the Old Testament.

First, I noted that the Bishop of Milan had recommended that the brilliant young convert Augustine should read Isaiah, but he found it too difficult and as far as we know never came back to it! Our first activity was to *write* out the text of Isaiah 50 in its entirety. I don’t think any of us had ever done such a thing before. It slowed us down and forced us to pay attention to every word, which we do not customarily do.

Then we discussed the so-called Servant Songs (including 61:1–4) and how they might provide models for pastoral ministry. Here we referred to Stephen Pattison, Trevor and Margaret Cooling’s workbook, *Using the Bible in Christian Ministry*, and also we discussed Jewish and Christian interpretation of these songs, referring to FF Bruce, *The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes*, and the much more recent book by Walter Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture*.

Professor Moberly (in his Chapter 5 ‘Isaiah and Jesus’) gives two helpful analogies of ‘recontextualisation’, or...
understanding the fuller sense, the *sensus plenior* of Old Testament passages as Christians. One analogy is the detective novel: the first narrative contains all sorts of puzzles; the final narrative (by Poirot or whoever) discloses *architectonically* ‘what the earlier story was all about’ (which was invisible to the characters at the time).

The second analogy is the ongoing task of interpreting the American Constitution, paying attention to its originating context and making new applications in a never-ending dialectic.

Then we listened to the passage Isaiah 51:1–52:12 being read to us (not looking at the text at that time) and compared the experience of *listening attentively* to the experience of reading. For most of history most Christians have experienced scripture as something which they *listened* to.

In this section we also paid attention to the ‘cup of the Lord’s wrath’, ‘the cup of staggering’ as it is used in several Old Testament passages, mostly from exilic times; and the usage of this imagery in the New Testament, especially Mark 10:38 and 14:36 and parallels. Our Lord drank the cup of God’s wrath and judgement so that we might never have to drink it. We also noted how the Revised Common Lectionary, which many of us follow in our churches, quite frequently expurgates or bowdlerises difficult biblical texts.

The rising tide of urgency and expectancy in Isaiah 51 and 52 brings us to the exquisite poem of Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12, which we entitled *The Man of Sorrows*. This is a five-stanza poem, with three verses in each stanza, and the stanzas have 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 lines respectively. At the centre of this remarkable poem – the central verse of the central stanza – is verse 5, which is as clear a statement of the good news in Old Testament terms as any we can find. We worship, as a mouse before a mountain, at the lengths and depths that God in his love goes for us.

Isaiah 54 sets before us two images of the Church and we are invited to sing again, after holding our breath at the servant’s undeserved sufferings in Chapter 53. The first metaphor (vs 1–10) is of a human house, a family; the second metaphor (vs 11–17) is of a material house, a city. The forsaken, bereaved, estranged, barren woman is wonderfully restored by God’s everlasting love. The afflicted, storm-tossed, disconsolate, desolate city is rebuilt in startling, costly beauty into a place of discipleship, godliness, prosperity, righteousness, security and truth. The first fulfillment of these words was in Old Testament times: Jerusalem was rebuilt. But this chapter also applies to the Gospel Age. At the beginning of the modern Protestant missionary movement, on 30 May 1792, William Carey preached a famous sermon on verses 2 and 3 to a group of unknown pastors from five unknown Midlands villages. He ended with the words, ‘Expect great things! Attempt great things!’ A few months later the Baptist Missionary Society was started with the princely sum of £13.2s.6d! We too may use this chapter as we pray for the revival of our Church.

Noting the words ‘Fear not…!’ in this chapter (and in ten other places at least in Isaiah) we talked about how often our intercessory prayers tend to circumambulate in an unhelpful way around the problem or the issue we are anxious about, leaving us at the end more anxious than before. Robert Warren, in his book *An Affair of the Heart* encourages us, and teaches us (in Chapter 5) how to pray a Prayer of Affirmation, of faith and trust.

Finally, in a burst of expository exultation, we dwelt on Isaiah 55, allowing our hearts to be converted, rectified, simplified and freed. We sought to feel God’s embrace, his overflowing provision (water, wine, milk), his abundant forgiveness, his everlasting love, his recreative power, his beauty, his redeeming energy. A lot of contemporary preaching is psychological – but people are starving for the magnificence of God. This chapter enables us to be entranced again by the greatness and the goodness – the Godness! – of God. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, ‘Oh, you who are anxious to learn what it is to enjoy the word, prepare not your ear but your soul; for it is grace that teaches it and not language.’

Derek Kidner’s commentary in *New Bible Commentary Revised* displays incomparable brevity and precision. Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story* does exactly that. Nick Page’s *The Bible Book: A User’s Guide* is a rumbustious, even zany, helicopter tour over the entire Bible terrain. Chris Webb’s *The Fire of the Word* is a wonderful introduction to the meditative reading of scripture. My own Bible study guide has twenty-two studies which have helped many people appreciate Isaiah.

What is the relevance of Théodore Géricault’s *The Raft of Medusa*? The clue is in Michael D O’Brien’s huge novel *A Cry of Stone*.13

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2 The full text of Isaac Watts’ hymn is available at http://cyberhymnal.org
3 Augustine, *Confessions* 9.5.13
4 Published by Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007
5 Paternoster Press, 1968
6 Baker, 2013
8 *Patrologia Latina*, Super Canticum 85.14
9 Second edition, SPCK, 2014
10 Harper Collins, 2008
11 IVP, 2011
13 Ignatius Press, 2009, pp 318f

Bible quotations are from the RSV.
Rape culture describes the normalisation of sexual violence and its link to broad patterns of misogyny, patriarchy and sexism.

Rape and rape culture are at the forefront of our global, civil, social and cultural discourse. There are Twitter hashtags that support rapists, rape jokes, offered for entertainment, judges who defend sentences due to the perpetrator’s age and lack of criminal history, victim-blaming culture that places women’s dress, alcohol intake and/or seductiveness at the forefront of discussion. It is within this cultural framework that sexually violent religious texts are being read, preached and taught.

With rape culture so prevalent in today’s society, how can issues surrounding consent, sexuality, purity culture, and sexual violence, be used to understand and read biblical rape narratives? One of the ways that I have found particularly helpful has been through the work of Rhiannon Graybill (‘Current Focus On: Teaching about Sexual Violence in the Hebrew Bible, Oxford Biblical Studies Online, 2015). She has drawn on the challenges of teaching biblical texts involving sexual violence, alongside the problem of sexual violence in universities. A Telegraph survey, conducted by YouthSight at the beginning of 2015, found that half of female undergraduates, and a third of male undergraduates know someone who has suffered sexual assault or unwanted advances, ranging from groping to rape.

A rape culture reading is not strictly limited to constructing the past. Instead, it intentionally juxtaposes the ancient and contemporary in order to better understand and respond to sexual violence (Graybill, 2015). Consequently, although there is no biblical Hebrew word for ‘rape’, this does not mark its absence from the text. Instead, many of the features contemporary commentators identify as central to rape culture – including female sexuality, male dominance, defilement, purity culture – appear in the Hebrew Bible.

There are several descriptions of rape or threatened rape, including the rape threat to Sarah in Genesis 20, the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34, the rape of the concubine in Judges 19–21, and the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. These biblical texts (and others relating to sexual violence) are read and used in all sorts of social and educational settings – whether as teaching texts, research texts, preaching readings or church readings – and need to be read in a way that is sensitive to the world we live in.

Although choosing ‘rape’ in an interpretive moment does not make it the standard for every reader or reading, it does allow readers and interpreters to perform an act of political resistance to ideologies dominant in the biblical period and to assess the possible significance that such ideologies have today. The notion of reading for rape is especially significant in relation to Genesis 34 and how the female and the male are understood and portrayed within the text.

I agree with scholars who argue that Dinah the daughter of Leah and Jacob is raped by Shechem in this chapter. After the sexual encounter, Shechem is so overcome with love for Dinah that he asks his father, Hamor, to assist him with his plan to marry her. When Jacob hears of the ‘defilement’, he remains passive; it is his sons who react strongly. When Shechem and Hamor negotiate the marriage between Dinah and Shechem, the brothers request that all Canaanite males in the town are to be circumcised. While the males lie in pain after their circumcision, Dinah’s brothers attack the city and kill all the males, including Shechem and Hamor; they take back Dinah and abduct the women and the children of the city. When Jacob hears about these actions he condemns his sons. They ask in return if their sister should be treated like a prostitute, and it is with this question that the narrative ends.

When Shechem first encounters Dinah in Genesis 34:2, we are told that he ‘saw her, he seized her and lay with her by force’ (Genesis 34:2, NRSV). The roots of the three main Hebrew verbs that are used here are , and . The verb (meaning ‘to take’ or ‘to seize’) is used six more times in Genesis 34 (cf. vv. 4, 9, 16, 21, 25 and 28), and in nearly all of the cases the reference is in relation to negotiating women as property. For example, ‘give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves’ (vv. 34:9, 16 and 21). The verb has an array of meanings in Hebrew including, ‘lie down, go to bed, lie in bed and to have sexual intercourse.’ It can also mean sexual intercourse with someone, sometimes specifically through force, as seen in 2 Samuel 13:14. The use of the third verb, , is defined by Professor David Clines as ‘to humiliate (a woman sexually) by rape or unlawful sexual intercourse’ (Concise Dictionary of Classical Biblical Hebrew, 2009). Dinah is silent. There is strong linguistic evidence to demonstrate that the use of these three strategically placed verbs conveys an aggressive, sexual narrative between Shechem and Dinah that can be read as rape.

Over the decades scholarship has questioned whether Shechem is depicted as raping Dinah and this question is still not fully resolved. One difficulty lies in modern understandings of rape and the issue of consent, since Dinah’s consent or otherwise is not discussed. There are scholars who have taken a more romantic and/or sympathetic reading of verse 2, especially in light of verse 3, where it is stated that Shechem’s ‘soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her’ (Genesis 34:2).

To take one example, Helena Zlotnick’s characterises Shechem’s treatment of Dinah as one of ‘seduction’ and finds Dinah’s apparent vulnerability at the moment of her “rape” to be ‘puzzling’. Types of exegetical comments that question Dinah’s ‘apparent vulnerability’ and which encase the rape narrative in seductive terms, rather than as an example of sexual violence, could be portrayed as dangerous, especially when read in a larger, modern, rape culture framework. Zlotnick goes on to argue that Dinah is also ‘inflicted’ with the most ‘severe handicap.
that a woman could bear, namely childlessness’ (page 48). This pro-natalist reading suggests that infertility and childlessness are fixed and are built within a discourse of disability. Such characterisation of Dinah is troubling for a number of reasons, not least is the fact that it is not stated in Genesis 34 that Dinah does not go on to have children. As Dawn Llewellyn reminds us, in her work on motherhood and voluntary childlessness in contemporary Christianity1, discourses surrounding motherhood and childlessness are personal and it is ‘intrusive’ to presume how or why a woman ‘might identify in regard to maternality’, based on the presence or absence of children.

There are others who have stated that since Shechem is portrayed as loving Dinah and wanting her to be his wife (Genesis 34:3), then Dinah must not have been raped, since ‘sociological studies reveal that rapists feel hostility and hatred toward their victims, not love’. Such a sweeping rationale seems to justify Shechem’s sexual assault and implies that a woman, or a man, cannot be raped by somebody who loves them. If scholars, clergy, or educators simply refer to reading biblical rape narratives as love stories, filled with passion, romance and seduction, then there is a risk of missing the inherent aggression that lies behind them. To insist that a narrative of rape is really a love story is to repeat the literary violent act; there is a responsibility that we should all share for Dinah, to ensure that she has a voice that contests the way she has been treated.

Jacob’s non-reaction to Dinah’s sexual defilement (Genesis 34:5) is paralleled with his sons’ aggressive and deceitful plan to avenge their sister (Genesis 34:7). Dinah’s defilement is regarded by her brothers as a slight to their honour and threatens the traditional Israelite betrothal and patriarchy. Hamor proposes marriage between Shechem and Dinah and Jacob’s sons agree, but only if all the males are circumcised. As such, Dinah’s married life and any future sexual encounters are something to be negotiated and exchanged amongst men (cf. Genesis 34:8–16). She remains silent.

The male violence continues in Genesis 34:25-30. As they had pre-planned, Simeon and Levi kill all the Canaanite males in the city and take the women and children for themselves. The reader can trace the aggressive nature of the narrative from these two pivotal moments – the moment where Dinah is taken by Shechem, and the moment where she is taken back by her brothers – in both cases she remains silent.

Jacob expresses disapproval at his sons’ actions (Genesis 34:30). The final words in this chapter go to Simeon and Levi, when they ask their father ‘Should our sister be treated like a prostitute (זָנהֹ)?’ (Genesis 34:31). The placement of the rhetorical question by Simeon and Levi at the end of Genesis 34 provides literary and communicative intent for those who are hearing and reading the narrative2. This is how the narrative ends – Dinah is still silent.

Reading for rape in biblical narratives opens up the text and the literary figures, which allows us as Readers, clergy, teachers and/or educators, to query the social and gendered roles of these ancient societies in relation to our own. I have used Genesis 34 as a case study to demonstrate the importance of reading biblical rape narratives in a wider framework that takes into account gendered and sexual violence. When teaching, researching and preaching about sexually violent biblical texts, it is important to avoid sweeping statements that downgrade sexual assault when analysing biblical rape narratives. Dinah’s rape narrative can be used to begin discussions of larger issues relating to rape culture, including gender violence, female sexuality, defilement, purity culture and blame culture, issues that are just as significant to a twenty-first century audience.

Hymns or chants?

ANDREW PRATT

The Revd Dr Andrew Pratt is a retired Methodist Minister and an Honorary Research Fellow at Luther King House, Manchester. He has written over 1,300 hymns and edits the Bulletin of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

Mention of hymns in relation to the Hebrew scriptures perhaps conjures up thoughts of chants, sometimes gloriously sung by a competent choir, at others a source of struggle for those less able. The alternative, that of metrical Psalms, is easier for those accustomed to singing hymns.

Neither of these does justice to the wealth of material that can offer inspiration for congregational song, and both can do damage to the content and intention of the original. Further to this is the breadth of Hebrew scripture beyond the Psalms that can provide inspiration for the preacher.

All of this may seem a long way from singing hymns on Sunday. Hymns can challenge or uplift, comfort or offer praise. It is the task of hymn poets to enable worship as they explore and interpret scripture using their particular gifts and skills. It is down to worship leaders to be discerning in their choice and use of hymns. I hope in this article to give pointers for both writers and leaders of worship as together we plumb this deep resource.

The authority of the Hebrew scriptures

While hymns related to the Hebrew scriptures need not be limited to the Psalms this is a good place to begin. Wherever we start we are faced with a number of problems. First is the hermeneutical one of relating age-old texts in a way which is honest to their origins, while still making sense today. Then there is the need to translate words from one language into another. Added to this is the difficulty presented by the nature of poetry itself.

For our words to be authentic we need to recognise and respect the authority of the Hebrew scriptures on their own terms. The hymn writer Isaac Watts published The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of The New Testament. The word ‘imitated’ is the problem. So often a Christian overlay disregards the original context of the words and damages or reduces their power. We need to do justice to the fact that the Hebrew scriptures formed the Bible with which Jesus was familiar.

I will use the Twenty-third Psalm to help us explore this issue. ‘The Lord’s my shepherd’ is widely familiar. The words are comforting as a consequence of that familiarity, but that very emotion divests the words of some of their power. Perhaps we imagine a shepherd boy singing the words to his sheep. Alternatively we see the word ‘Lord’ and immediately think ‘Jesus’. This last transmutation, in itself, overlays the original with a range of images that were never intended. At the simplest level ‘God is seen as shepherd of the people’.

Guarding the sheep is safeguarding the business, protecting property. Remember how Jesus uses this same imagery to indicate the value of a human life by pointing to the shepherd who values one sheep lost out of a hundred. Today in Cumbria, sheep are shepherded in thousands. I remember accompanying a shepherd on a quad-bike, riding over the fells, looking for those lost or hurt:

Way out beyond the stone clad walls where hills are steep and ravens fed, the quad-bike riding shepherd looks for sheep, distressed or lost or dead.

Ten times a hundred fill the fold, but every shepherd holds a place where beasts are safe, are kept and held, are held by duty, love or grace.¹

That takes us little further than a superficial reading of the English translation. But the term ‘shepherd’ was used of the King. The King was to shepherd the people. ‘The King of love my shepherd is’. That adds another layer to our understanding. Kingship, in those days, was not simply constitutional. The king had the power of life and death over the subjects. Added to this, his power was recognised as being delegated from God. Year on year this was
remembered in a religious ceremony. The king is challenged:

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

(NRSV Psalm 24: 3–4)

So the King who shepherds his people is one who is not false, who is pure and not deceitful. This is a time for self-examination in the setting of public ritual. And then again, this ‘Lord is my shepherd’. The Psalm has as much to say about rulers with delegated authority on earth as it has to say about God. We relate ‘Lord’ to God or even to ‘Jesus’. I sense that with this Psalm, as with many, there is a human element here too. So what was a Psalm of comfort for a funeral might also be used as a test of legitimate authority. The king is one whose power is demonstrated in the protection of his people as individuals. This king is humble. The Psalm is political as well as pastoral. Only when this is recognised can we begin to interpret it in a Christian context. How do those who rule today match up to these ideals?

Here are some words written for the Festival of Christ the King:

Who rules the world just like a king within our present time and space? Who has the power of life and death, of healing or withholding grace?

As politicians seek our votes, exposing or obscuring truth, sometimes their language loses rhyme, while arguments become obtuse [...] 

Who rules our wills, who charms our lives, the powerful, or those hid from sight; the weak, denied, or those abused who hide away within the night?

The least is Jesus in our midst. The least of these is Christ the King. Then let the world turn upside down; the poor must rise and rule and sing.2

Here the idea of Shepherd King informs the text but is never used explicitly.

**Hebrew poetry**

Moving from one language to another can strain and distort meaning. This becomes even more of a test when the structure of the language differs, as English and Hebrew do. Poetry adds the problems of metre and rhyme. Hebrew poetry uses parallelism where themes are repeated in slightly different patterns to reinforce ideas in the same way that rhyme can make English poetry predictable. Decisions have to be made as to whether to follow structure or meaning and how to cope with metre as we write. We turn again to the 23rd Psalm:

‘The Lord’s my Shepherd. I'll not want. He makes me down to lie in pastures green; he leadeth me the quiet waters by’.

Reading this as prose underlines a word order we wouldn't usually use: ‘He makes me down to lie’ where we would normally say ‘He makes me lie down’. The inversion of the words can be defended ‘because this is poetry’. But it is a style of poetry that is rarely used outside a religious context. It distances us from those outside the church.

Singing these words to CRIMOND generates another problem. The tune forces a pause in the wrong place so we tend to sing ‘in pastures green he leadeth me’ instead of ‘He makes me down to lie in pastures green’. And again we would more normally say, ‘green pastures’. We need to break the line, as the punctuation does, but singers rarely notice this so that the latter part of the third line joins the fourth: ‘he leadeth me the quiet waters by’.

This is how it would read with the breaks in the right places:

The Lord’s my shepherd.
I’ll not want. He makes me down to lie in pastures green. He leadeth me the quiet waters by.

Now all of this may seem very esoteric but if our sung Hebrew scripture is to make sense then it is important. Stuart Townend still incorporates some inversions, but his phrasing, allied to the new tune, makes more sense of the words. His use of repetition in the chorus, to some degree, echoes Hebraic parallelism and is true to the Hebrew setting in not overtly merging the Hebrew ‘Lord’ and the New Testament ‘Christ’:

The Lord’s my shepherd. I’ll not want. He makes me lie in pastures green. He leads me by the still, still waters. His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone. And I will trust in You alone, For Your endless mercy follows me, Your goodness will lead me home.3

**Beyond the technical**

One last area we need to address is that of the difficult words of scripture. I was asked recently to preach on Nehemiah 1. The original context of the book links it with Ezra. Taken together the books present a picture which is xenophobic and insular, something which we might not wish to affirm but which is, arguably, understandable in the context of the return from the Babylonian exile. Not, perhaps, something to sing about. Set prior to the return from Babylon, Psalm 137 begins,

By the rivers of Babylon—we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

You may remember Boney M doing a pop interpretation of these words. All well and good until half-way through when they move over to Psalm 19

Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our heart be acceptable in thy sight here tonight.

This is understandable given the gruesome ending of Psalm 137, but when we emasculate the Psalms like this we lose the essence of lament which is embedded into so many of the them and which finds its way into the New Testament on the lips of Christ as he dies on the cross, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ If we have become too sensitive to these expressions we risk losing Hebrew material, theology and sentiment, that seems to be more than ever needed in a fractured world. Marty Haugen wrote these words:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept as we remembered Zion, our home so far away; [...] for us there is no music in this foreign land, the song of God no longer ours to sing. [...] Lord, remember those who raped and crushed our home; how happy they shall be who get to pay them back: the ones who dash their future on the stones.4

Migrants might have need to sing words like these, but where are they to be found? There is still a need for hymns fathoming the depths of Hebrew scripture to be written, and even the harshest expressions of faith need to be preserved.

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1 Andrew E Pratt (born 1948) © 2015 Stainer & Bell Ltd.  
2 Ibid.  
3 Stuart Townend (c) 1996 Thankyou Music (administered in the UK and Europe by Integrity Music, part of the David C Cook family, integritymusic.com)  
4 Marty Haugen (born 1952) based on Psalm 137 © 2003 GIA Publications Inc., administered in UK and Ireland by Calamus
Please don’t do Noah!
Exploring the Old Testament with children

RONA ORME

Rona Orme is a Reader and Children’s Missioner in the Diocese of Peterborough.

Half a century ago children in Sunday School were taught about the main characters in the Old Testament (OT) much as they were taught about kings and queens and important people from history at school. Indeed, they may well have been told the OT stories at their primary school. They heard about what Jesus did and said too, but such was the emphasis placed on the OT that the strength of Samson, the hesitation of Gideon and the courage of Joshua formed a reasonably common currency.

Now, not only does the general population lack a shared knowledge of these stories but many children and young people (and adults if we are honest) who attend church are not being routinely introduced to these heroes and archetypes. Many parishes never include the OT in their use of the lectionary. Messy Church¹ is an exception here with published sessions on Abraham and the Three Visitors, Nehemiah, and Hannah among others. The Open The Book² scheme of assemblies for primary schools also works systematically through both the Old and New Testaments using The Lion Storyteller Bible. The Godly Play curriculum provides a number of OT lessons with the desert sandbox making the accounts of the Exodus particularly popular. However, the level of Bible literacy, and especially knowledge of the OT, is low.

Recent research in neuro-biology³, on the importance of worship and faith formation as an emotional and developmental place of experience, suggests several things:

The brain is wired to process information through story much more easily than by learning facts. It takes much more effort to memorise the Periodic Table or the dates of the kings and queens of England than to re-tell the story of Red Riding Hood once heard. The brain makes more use of emotional experiences than of facts. Children learn to make sense of their life experience through story. Children who have heard their family stories, fairytales and myths, and Bible stories have access to a wide range of material to do this essential work. It helps them to build resilience for the trials of life both as a child and an adult.

When we work with children we help to shape their world view by populating their growing understanding with Bible stories, liturgy, symbols and practice. For example, a child can only make links with communion when they see bread if they have some prior knowledge of the Eucharist. This is a significant need but much Christian education fails to do this effectively.

Each child identifies with a story in a different way on the basis of their own life experiences. Bible stories have multiple kernels of truth and there is no one ‘right’ message. Material in the Bible expands the range of a child’s learning beyond what they have experienced in their own lives. The broader the range of material, the greater the possibility of the child achieving a balance with their experienced feelings. We should keep our own explanations, giving us comfort or a sense of order, out of their way!

We must be aware of the possible emotional experiences that a particular biblical text can evoke in a child. Then we need to consider how to offer prayers, songs and activities that will help children have deeply emotional experiences within that safe space.

Thus a child who has heard the story of young Samuel (and had the opportunity to consider it without too much direction from a leader) will know that God can speak to them individually. The account of David facing Goliath offers the chance to consider courage, self-belief and reliance on God. Jacob putting a rock as a pillow for his weary head and dreaming of a ladder opens up thoughts about the value of dreams or the importance of place.

The focus of Jonah is obedience versus disobedience and the importance of doing what God says. Unfortunately, the spiritual and moral possibilities of the story are often literally swamped by whale-shaped crafts and watery games. Frequently the whale becomes the main focus of the telling rather than an illustration of disobedience and deliverance.

I am less sure about sharing the story of Esther. Some people see Esther as an excuse for offering pampering parties to older girls. Yes, the story may highlight doing the right thing or perhaps something about self-sacrifice, but I am uneasy about what girls will take away from the text if they are not given a clear context for the story.

This brings me to explain why I rarely lead a session on Noah. This story has escaped the pages of the Bible and slipped out of the church and into the High Street. Beautiful arks of all shapes, sizes and materials replete with a range of animals are sold in toyshops, department stores and craft workshops. They are attractive to play with and they re-inforce the idea that the story of Noah is about pairs of animals. Sometimes a rainbow is included in the decoration as an add-on extra, but the story has become commodified. Noah and his ark have migrated into the Early Years classroom where his story is sometimes used as literature or religious education in a cross-curriculum topic on water or weather. The pairs of animals provide young children with the opportunity to practice their counting skills. There is certainly a lot of water and plenty of numbers in Genesis Chapters 6–9!

However, the religious themes are surely obedience and disobedience, salvation and the faithfulness of God. It is hard to draw children away from their nursery or school experience to go deeper into the scriptural account of Noah. And yet, there may be children who need to know that God will keep them safe even if they feel as if they are sinking. Perhaps I need to work harder to strip away the secular

¹ Messy Church
² Open The Book
³ Neuro-biology
accretions to help children access the spiritual blessings (and neuro-biological benefits) of this passage. We also have to face the uncomfortable fact that one theme of the story is about God destroying disobedient people!

Then there are the gory passages (Jael killing Sisera with a tent peg4), the horrific (Jephthah killing his own daughter5), the slaughter (Samuel killing Agag6) and the apparently unintelligible (Abraham being instructed to sacrifice Isaac7). We do not need to have the ‘correct’ explanation for these but we need to allow older children to discuss them. Helpful questions might be ‘why do you think this happened?’ or ‘what can we learn from this?’ It can be helpful to say that we do not understand or that we find the passage upsetting.

Creation is another tricky passage. Older children are well aware of the creation stories of different faiths and the theory of evolution because these are taught in school. This means that some of us are hesitant to share the Judaeo-Christian account of creation. Perhaps we fear that if we offer ‘creation in seven days’, when children are well aware of different possibilities, they may reject all the stories of the Bible. We can certainly emphasise that Genesis Chapter 1 highlights the eternal nature of God, the orderliness of creation in place of chaos, and that the world is good. Dirk Schliephake would perhaps suggest starting with the different elements of creation (light and dark, water and land, vegetation, animals and people) before introducing the idea that God created them. Starting with the idea that God may prompt some children to reject the session (because of their previous learning). They will be more ready to hear about God after sharing general wonder at the beauty and complexity of the world. We also need to include the second creation story in Genesis 2.

As Readers, how do we start to share these important OT stories? A great resource is the *Children of God Storybook Bible*8 by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This is of particular use for children under the age of 7, though it provides a simple presentation of key stories that could be used at all-age services. Equally we can encourage families (and adults!) to read through a children’s Bible that includes all the main stories of the OT in a simple way. These children’s Bibles are often in a 365 format with one story for every day of the year – so everyone could be much better informed by reading one story each day! The *Barnabas in Churches* website has lots of imaginative ways of sharing Bible stories (look under Ideas) if you want to be creative. Otherwise read the story well from a simple translation (such as *Easy to Read*) allowing time for people to process what you are saying. Most of us read too fast for listeners to comprehend.

Children, and adults, will only become familiar with OT characters, stories and themes if we include them in our talks and sermons. We need to share an enthusiasm for the OT. Good questions to ask include ‘what might this story tell us about Jesus?’ or ‘what can we learn about God from this story?’ – even ‘I wonder where you are in this story?’ We can refer back to OT stories when we are preaching on the New Testament.

We can encourage discussion about who is our favourite OT person and why, or which OT person would we not want to meet. We could invite people to make links between what is happening in the news with events in the OT. If children share their joy or sadness about something we can perhaps, after acknowledging what they have just told us, suggest an OT story to read that links with it. Yes, that needs us to have a good and lively knowledge of the OT ourselves!

1 www.messychurch.org.uk
2 www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book
3 I am indebted to the research of Pastor Dirk Schliephake of Michaeliskloster, Hildesheim and to the reflections of Professor Joyce Mercer, Yale School of Divinity
4 Judges 4:21
5 Judges 11:29–39
6 1 Samuel 15:32–33
7 Genesis 22
8 Published by HarperCollins, 2010
A change in perspective

CARRIE MYERS

Carrie Myers is Volunteering Manager at USPG.

The Anglican mission agency USPG runs a programme that offers short-term placements with the world church for people of any age.

Spending time with the church in another culture can change your perspective. After ten months with the church in the Philippines, recent graduate Rebecca Boardman put it like this: ‘I wanted my world view to be shaken and was not disappointed.

You can read more of her story below. This article also looks at the experience of Alf and Christine Green, who went out to Sri Lanka after retirement to help at an orphanage in Sri Lanka. We also hear from Reader Roly Howarth, who spent time with a monastic community in Delhi.

They were all on placement with the Journey with Us programme, run by USPG, which arranges placements of up to 12 months to self-funding volunteers resident in Britain or Ireland, aged 18 to 80. No special skills are required, but placements can be found to match skills and interests if that is what the volunteer wants.

‘It might sound like a cliché, but this programme really is a life-changing experience,’ says Habib Nader, who has been co-ordinating the programme for nearly 20 years.

‘When our volunteers return, they consistently say they received far more than they were able to give. The placements are not so much about work or activity but about being with people, sharing in their lives, having fellowship, and experiencing not so much about work or activity but what the volunteer can give. The placements are not so much about work or activity but about being with people, sharing in their lives, having fellowship, and experiencing not so much about work or activity but what the volunteer wants.

Twelve months in India

Roly Howarth, a teacher, illustrator and Reader from Tulse Hill in the Diocese of Southwark, has spent time in a monastic community in Delhi, India. He has found the experience to be rich with surprises.

He writes: ‘I have three morning alarms. Firstly, the rooster crows; I ignore him. Then there is the azhan call to prayer; I ignore that too, I’m afraid. But I do get up when the chapel bell rings. I wrap up warmly – it’s pretty cold early in the morning in winter – and join the monks for prayer.

‘I have been living with the Delhi Brotherhood Society, a monastic community and NGO connected with the Church of North India.

‘The experience has been a godsend. Having held the same teaching job for 18 years, attended the same church for 30, and worn with the same haircut for 12, I woke up one morning and suddenly realised I had become stuck in my shell – and it was time for a change.

‘This revelation prompted me to have a Different Year, and that’s where USPG stepped in. Its Journey with Us programme provided all the necessary organisation, contacts, support and training I needed – so, with remarkable efficiency, my placement in India had been arranged.

‘It’s been challenging at times, but that is part of what I signed up for. This has also been an opportunity to explore – and it is amazing what crosses your path when you’re open to receive it.

‘I have been in schools to teach and provide teacher training. I have been playing my guitar in schools and churches, and I have been given the opportunity to help a 10-year-old boy who lost his right arm in traumatic circumstances to learn to use his left arm.

‘Being here in India, working within the Anglican Communion in this way, has been a chance to see the church up to its elbows in the life of the community. There have been so many opportunities to share and learn. I think fellow Readers would particularly benefit from this type of experience because of the insights that can be gained into the bridging role between clergy and people, and between church and society.

‘The experience has had a profound impact on me. To external appearances, I have been living in a poor monastery in one of the most crowded and polluted cities on earth, but in experiential terms it has been a chance to delve into God’s treasury where I have all I need in Christ.

‘Having stepped out of my comfort zone, I found I had to rely on Someone More Able, and God came up with the goods! I found myself becoming less judgemental, more patient and a better pastor, and I found I had lots of time to immerse myself in the Bible.

‘What has become clear to me is that this adventure had not been about me working in India, but about God working in me."

Retirement trip to Sri Lanka

Alf and Christine Green, from Christchurch, set out for Sri Lanka, where they spent six months on placement at a girls’ orphanage. It was hard work, but rewarding.

Christine writes: ‘If anyone had said to us that two years after retirement we would be undertaking missionary work in Sri Lanka we would have laughed, but that is exactly what happened.

‘With Alf 67 and me 64 at the time of travelling, we set off with the Lord to spend six months helping out at a girls’ orphanage in a small town called Talawa. This was a completely new adventure for us because we had never done anything like this before.

‘The placement came about after hearing about the missionary work done by people at the church we had just joined in Mudeford, Dorset. We were both inspired to look into the possibility of doing something similar. So Helen, our vicar, put us in touch
with Us and, specifically, the Journey with Us programme.

‘After interviews and training, we found ourselves flying off to Sri Lanka. All we knew at the time was that we would be met at the airport by a priest and taken to the orphanage. But we had no idea where we would be staying or what our role would be.

‘At the orphanage, we were met by 19 young girls, three priests, and one huge culture shock. Our room was very basic, and we shared it with many insects and much wild life.

‘Our duties involved being with the children from lunchtime to bedtime. We were to teach them spoken English, help with their homework, and generally offer support and friendship. Our mornings were free. However, because the orphanage was in such need of repair, we set about redecorating it.

‘We never realised what poverty was until we went to Talawa. There was no piped water, so the girls washed at the well each day; the girls also had to wash their clothes there – they had only one set of school uniform and two sets of day clothes. For meals, we cooked on open wood fires and mostly ate cold rice and dried fish.

‘Yet despite these conditions, these girls were nearly always happy. Indeed, one of the important lessons we learned was we don’t need lots of material things to be happy; these girls expected nothing, yet appreciated everything.

‘This placement was certainly hard work, and tough at times, but it was also the most rewarding time of our lives. We would highly recommend this programme to anyone, especially if like us you are retired. We would urge you to step out in faith and let our Lord and Saviour guide you.’

**Inspired by the Philippines**

Geography graduate Rebecca Boardman, 22, spent ten months witnessing the outreach and development work of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP). The experience taught her how God speaks through every culture, not just our own.

Rebecca writes: ‘At university I studied geography, a large part of which involves looking at how people interact with their environment. But there’s only so much you can learn from being in a classroom. I wanted to have a better understanding of what the world is actually like.

‘I wanted my world view to be shaken and was not disappointed. The reality is that God speaks through every culture and community in the world, not just our own culture. To only listen through our culture is to miss out on so much.

‘In this respect, Journey with Us was perfect because it took me out of my comfortable Christian routines and created a space for new insights to emerge.

‘I spent much of my time witnessing how the church in the Philippines approaches development. They call it “asset-based community development”. You could call it a “glass half full” approach to mission. Rather than focusing on people’s needs and difficulties, the church encourages communities to identify gifts, skills, passions and resources and then make use of them. Ultimately, this leads to economic self-reliance. It is an approach full of dignity and optimism. It is a beautiful expression and appreciation of the unique gifts and abilities that God has given each and every one of us.

‘It is with this mindset and perspective that I have returned to the UK. It has taught me to enter into conversations knowing that everyone has something to offer and that I can learn something from every person I meet.

‘As I explore my next steps, I’m confident God will use my time in the Philippines and all that I learned there for his glory.’

**For more information about Journey with Us, visit:**

[www.uspg.org.uk/travel](http://www.uspg.org.uk/travel)

**Call Habib Nader on 020 7921 2215**

**Or email:** habibn@uspg.org.uk
For four days, 50 local volunteers and church children’s workers have been hosting 550 primary school pupils for a series of creative arts workshops, set in a secluded Northumberland valley amongst the medieval ruins of Brinkburn Priory. The main church building is still roofed, and we have been using it along with its surroundings to explore the life, times and beliefs of Aidan, a significant local saint from the seventh century. There’s been storytelling, drama, music, problem-solving games, and gardening, with craft workshops creating jewellery, clay tiles, calligraphy … and most of it out-of-doors, surrounded by a forest of natural woodland and a fast-flowing stream nearby. If this all sounds slightly idyllic, then it is, providing the organisation’s sorted and the weather holds. On the last day, however, the heavens opened, rain fell, and a highly-efficient Plan B went into action using alternative accommodation inside a ruined manor house.

We have been running Brinkburn Lifepath for six years now, with an ever-changing cast of volunteers and a steady core team (from Scripture Union, Barnabas in Schools, the Mustard Tree Trust and local churches) organising the workshop content and overall theme. Over the years, we’ve explored the ‘lifepaths’ and ministry of a whole series of Northern saints – Aidan, Cuthbert, Oswald, Hilda, Caedmon – but there’s a lot more to it than simply doing history. We’ve been trying to give all our visitors a flavour of the faith and beliefs that motivated these people, with plenty of opportunities to ponder, reflect and ask interesting (and awkward) questions. How could Education be a Gift? What could Grace mean? That’s been a key part of the storytelling, in which pupils are immersed by roleplay in the dilemmas of key figures in the past. There was an element of slapstick and pantomime in some of the drama (often requiring the use of water pistols) but also poignant moments wondering about how we can all show compassion in difficult or confusing circumstances. There were Jesus stories too, because you can’t really do justice to the life of a saint without examining the source of their own motivation, but it all had a local flavour. (The re-enacted story of the miraculous catch of fishes contained more than a hint of life in the herring industry at Seahouses harbour.)

Pupils are organised in small groups, each accompanied by their own staff helpers, but also with one of our Pilgrim Guides (dressed as a Cistercian monk). One regular feature is the Silence Bell. At set times during the workshops, a team member suddenly rings a large bell, and everyone is asked to go quiet, to stand or sit still just for a minute … and listen. It’s a rare moment of peace in a busy day, and children enjoy it. What do they hear? Sometimes during feedback, they report noticing the sound of leaves rustling on the trees, the river running by, or the sound of birds. Once, a child memorably said she heard ‘God.’

We are not ‘doing evangelism’, neither are we trying to. We’ve always been careful to observe the proprieties of not assuming or imposing faith expectations on any of our visitors. But we have maintained an attitude of wanting to explain and share the treasures of our Christian faith, and schools seem happy at the way we manage to strike that sometimes-difficult balance.

By the end of the week, our team of volunteers are pretty tired. There’s a lot of physical effort involved in conducting our little ‘pilgrims’ up and down country tracks, running all the different workshops, and treating each visitor with the attention, care and respect they deserve. Each day, we have to come to it fresh, just as they do, remembering that although we are all familiar with the material we’ve carefully crafted, our visitors are meeting it for the first time. So when we are telling a story, explaining a craft technique, handling questions or just sorting out practical details, everything must be done with a sense of individual responsibility and care that respects and honours everyone.

Some of the best comments from pupils and teachers come towards the end of each day:

- ‘It’s so well organised, the children don’t have a minute to lose the plot.’
- ‘I don’t believe in God, but that story really moved me.’
- ‘That drama’s the best thing I’ve ever seen!’
- ‘I don’t want to go home.’
- ‘Can we come again next year?’
- ‘Can I come again tomorrow?’

A big ‘Thank you’ is due to everybody who contributed to this success, including all those whose financial giving helped to underwrite the week’s costs. This year, one teacher confided to a helper that she had noticed one of her more withdrawn pupils, who never participated in singing at school, enthusiastically joining in with the songs used in the opening and closing sessions. For a brief moment, something had been unlocked making a significant difference to one child’s own Lifepath.
One Friday I received an email inviting me to go to help at an Ebola treatment centre in Sierra Leone. I had a telephone interview on the following Monday, and in less than two weeks I started at the Port Loko Ebola Treatment Centre.

That's the short version. I am a hospital pharmacist at the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital, and several months previously I had seen a notice in *The Pharmaceutical Journal* asking for health service personnel to volunteer to help with the crisis. After speaking to my wife, and getting agreement from the Chief Pharmacist, I applied. I am grateful to my colleagues for allowing me to disappear, suddenly, for six weeks over Easter and appreciate this did not make life easy for them.

NHS staff are recruited for situations like this through UK-MED, which is sponsored by the Department for International Development (DfID). UK-MED has an arrangement with the NHS to pay the employer for the duration of the service of the member of staff. That way employment continues without a break in service.

When the call came, I was asked if I could start immediately, but my Yellow Fever vaccine wasn't up to date and I had already booked a week's family holiday. So it was two weeks later to the day that I actually landed in Sierra Leone.

I had previous experience of working overseas: three years with CMS in Tanzania, six weeks in Sri Lanka, and four weeks in Dominica with CBM, a German eye mission. Applying to help in the Ebola treatment centre seemed a perfectly natural thing to do.

Ebola is spread by contact with body fluids and it kills when the amount of the virus in the body overpowers the body's ability to cope. This means that when people die they are at their most contagious. One unsafe burial can lead to 30 other patients.

The work was preparing a trial drug to treat Ebola. This had proven to be almost totally effective in monkeys, and now it was being tried for the first time in patients, in a trial run by Oxford University. For the technically minded the drug was a viral RNA inhibitor designed against the specific strain of the virus to prevent it replicating.*

There is an international protocol for clinical trials which includes patients giving informed consent. This isn't easy when there are several local languages and communication is through the full protective equipment.

I was not working in the 'Red Zone' – where the patients are – so I was at very low risk of being infected myself. (I was given the all clear on my return to the UK even though I was met at Norwich airport by border guards wearing plastic gloves.)

The tented accommodation site was run by the Danish military with clean water, electricity, internet access, and excellent food, Danish style. Everyone on site had their temperature checked several times a day to make sure they were well. There was an isolation unit on site just in case.

One of the things I found the most difficult was the strict ‘no touch’ policy. Six weeks without any personal contact except for helping people to put on their PPE (personal protective equipment), and then only through two layers of gloves and an impermeable yellow suit.

Attending church was not a possibility. For some of the time churches were closed, but later on the curfew preventing public gatherings was relaxed to allow attendance at church on Sundays, and Friday prayers at the mosques for Muslims. Consider how you may be able to have a communion service when good hygiene dictates that you mustn’t touch anybody else’s food.

Work was seven days every week, with no regular pattern of time off.

This sameness required self-discipline in my private prayer life. I took with me my Kindle on which was loaded the NRSV Bible, the Daily Lectionary, a form of morning prayer, a copy of Reflections for Daily Prayer (based on the daily lectionary readings), as well as theology and leisure reading books including the Narnia Series.

I would recommend this sort of work to anybody.

Thanks go especially to Julie, my wife; Carol Farrow, chief pharmacist at the hospital; all my work colleagues who put in extra hours to cover my time off; Patrick Richmond, the vicar at Christ Church, and all the congregation for their support and prayers.

*The result of the trial was that it was ineffective in humans; this is presumably because they were already ill.
Meifod is a small village in Montgomeryshire, in mid-Wales. Set in a peaceful valley, it has no obvious links with the Bosnian War. But in July 2015 we held a service to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. Preparing the service took us down unexpected paths, led us to draw parallels with what's happening in Europe today – and to find links with our own past.

The idea for the service began round the dinner table, with a Jewish friend telling us about the impact his recent visit to Srebrenica had had on him. Mark Michaels is a member of the South Shropshire Interfaith Forum, and has often talked to local schools and groups about the Holocaust. He was shaken by the scale of the Srebrenica massacre, the on-going painstaking efforts to identify remains and, twenty years on, the rawness of the grief of women whose lives had been shattered.

The Srebrenica massacre was the worst of many atrocities committed during the Bosnian War. As the ethnic and religious conflicts escalated, the United Nations created safe havens for civilian Bosnian Muslims in Sarajevo and Srebrenica. In 1995 Srebrenica was attacked by Orthodox Christian Bosnian Serb forces under General Radko Mladic. Unprepared Dutch UN troops were terrorised, and Bosnian Muslim men and boys were separated from their families, hounded down, and massacred. Over 8000 were killed.

Our first suggestion was that Mark should come and speak about his visit at one of our normal services, but as we discussed this with the vicar of Meifod church, the idea of using ‘Remembering Srebrenica’ as the basis for the whole service began to take shape. We decided that the service should be as near as possible to Srebrenica Memorial Day on 11th July.

From Conflict to Hope
Our aim was that the service – From Conflict to Hope – would help us to reflect on the evils of racial and religious hatred, and to look forward in hope to a tolerant future.

It wasn't an easy service to plan, and we had only three weeks to read, research, publicise, and pray. How much context was needed to give maximum impact to what Mark would say? How best to ensure it was a service and not a history lesson? Was it appropriate to end with a communion that our guest couldn't join in? Was singing a good idea?

The pivotal part of the service was Mark's talk about his visit to Srebrenica, and we led into it by giving a chilling summary of genocides from Biblical times to Rwanda, and an outline of the course of the Bosnian War, including the siege of Sarajevo. We separated these with two pieces of music: William Byrd's setting of Justorum Animae, from the Wisdom of Solomon, and Purcell's setting of 'Remember not, Lord, our offences' from the Book of Common Prayer. After each, the congregation spoke the Srebrenica Prayer:

We pray to Almighty God,
May grievance become hope
May revenge become justice
May mothers' tears become prayers
That Srebrenica never happens again
to anyone, anywhere.

Just before the siege of Sarajevo eleven year old Zlata Filipovic started writing a diary. 'I wanted it to be funny,' she said, 'like Adrian Mole.' But after the siege began her diary was more like Anne Frank's than Adrian Mole's. Just before Mark spoke, a teenager from our congregation read moving extracts from Zlata's Diary.

We followed Mark's talk with a reading from Isaiah 2, and intercessions were words sung to changing images of our broken world. We ended with an Iona Communion on a theme of hope, and the Srebrenica Prayer. The service was followed by a shared bread and cheese lunch in the church, which gave everyone a chance to talk to Mark, and to look at the display of photographs, testimonies of survivors, and articles about Srebrenica.

‘We share the responsibility’
Mark’s description of his visit to Srebrenica was both powerful and moving. He talked about the way bodies from the massacre were dumped in mass graves, but later hastily dug up and moved, to hide the evidence. Work continues to identify individual remains...
so that families can at last bury their loved ones. He met Hatidza, whose husband and both her sons were killed. The identification process has found most of the bodies of Abdullah, her husband, and Almir, her 18 year old younger son, but so far, she has only been able to bury two small bones from the body of Azmir, her older son, who was 21. She stood by the graves of her three men, and talked of her cherished memories of them.

Mark ended by saying:
‘The Holocaust and this genocide are rightly called crimes against humanity. If we as Jews appropriate the Holocaust entirely to ourselves or Muslims do the same for the tragedy at Srebrenica we diminish their importance and their meaning. As crimes against humanity they are just that: crimes against us all. Our world, our society is damaged, and we are all victims of these crimes. But there is another side too: if we are all the victims, then we also share some of the responsibility for a global society that sits on its hands and allows these terrible deeds to happen.’

A long shadow
It’s easy to think of Meifod only as the peaceful village it is today, where everyone chats in the village shop, church and chapel share Women’s World Day of Prayer services, and English incomers are made welcome. But we are in border country, and for centuries peace was fragile.

Our church, dedicated to St Tysilio and St Mary, sits in a four-acre churchyard. The part of the churchyard nearest the road through the village has no gravestones in it. It’s the part we use for the annual village picnic. Local legend says that it is also the site of a mass burial during early border fighting. A field near Meifod is still known as Cae Gwaed – Bloody Field – and another Cae Beti – Betty’s Field, thought to be a corruption of ‘battlefield’.

The thought that Srebrenica could happen in Meifod seems impossible. But it is possible that something like it once did. Today war and persecution are increasingly displacing people from their homes, and attacks on people of a different faith or ethnicity are regular occurrences. It is clear that the horrors of ‘man’s inhumanity to man’ are still with us. We hope that in a small way, our service in Meifod will have made us more willing to recognise the need to offer help and support to people suffering discrimination and persecution, and to prevent it where we can.
Radical: Exploring the Rise of Extremism and the Pathway to Peace
Steve Chalke
Oasis Books 2016. £8.95 pbk
9781910719176

The picture, from a Christian perspective, is therefore confused and frustrating. Religion generally is getting a bad name but, more significantly, violent and hateful crimes against humanity are being committed. Aside from the trauma to numerous individuals and families, the destructive wars of the Middle East are adding, daily, to the world’s massive, seemingly insoluble refugee crisis. Meanwhile the violence of terrorism is breeding violent responses. The world needs a better narrative, a constructive pathway to lasting peace.

Radical, Steve Chalke’s latest book, starts to tackle these immense problems. A Baptist minister in South London, the founder and leading light behind the Oasis Trust (a charity helping disengaged young people), and a special UN adviser on the prevention of people trafficking, Chalke is an important Christian leader. His mission blends orthodox Christian witness with practical initiatives to help people in desperate need, especially young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In Radical, Chalke explores the relatively recent rise of extremism and summarises the worldwide threat from terrorism. He writes in a clear, objective and factual way, providing an invaluable source of authority in an area often confused by imprecise language and prejudice. There are numerous references and pointers to up-to-date research and government statistics, always presented in a way that provides confidence in the analysis. Although the author indicates at the outset that he writes from a Christian perspective, this is no polemical tract.

A significant argument in the book is that there is a strong association between the causes of radicalisation of young people by ISIS and the lure of gang culture in many cities across the globe. As we have seen from recent cases, the world of extremism and violence can attract intelligent young people who feel they have no voice in society. They are frustrated and disillusioned by the shallow priorities of our western culture. This same sense of hopelessness attracts other young people into the equally undesirable and shadowy world of gangs, street violence, crime and drugs.

Chalke argues that current government measures to counter terrorism and extremism have no real answer to this attraction. Indeed, attempts to eliminate violent extremism by retaliation make matters worse, often increasing recruitment. On the global scale, many believe that the rise of ISIS is closely associated with the actions of the United States and its allies in the Iraq war. He comments, ‘The war on terrorism is a new kind of war; a war that cannot be won by governments, guns, planes, drones and traditional armies, however sophisticated they are’. A wider narrative of hope is needed to stop the grooming and brainwashing of new recruits, and to eliminate the ‘glamour’ of violence. The key, according to Chalke, is to address social exclusion and the feelings of powerlessness; we need to build stronger and more effective communities, ones which dilute the risk of extremist recruitment and also negate the power of gangland culture.

The final chapters of this admirable book offer an example of practical Christian engagement designed to do this: a narrative that ‘builds bridges of peace’ within the grass roots of local communities. The Oasis charity’s ‘Inspire’ programme, Peacemaking for young people, was launched in February 2016. It will run for 1000 days, until the centenary of the World War I Armistice. It engages, and aims to inspire, young people through a variety of national projects including the themes of sport, art and music. The object is for young people themselves to identify areas of conflict within communities, and to be inspired through creative outlets to respond to these local problems.

The culmination of this programme will be seen in a series of events and commemorations during the weekend of 9–11 November 2018, events which will embody the crucial themes of remembrance and hope. By helping to promote this programme, and by praying for its success, Christians may – in a small but nonetheless significant way – contribute to the elimination or at least the reduction of harmful radicalisation, violence and terrorism, the deadly things that scar God’s Kingdom.

Dr PETER CLOUGH is a Reader in the Diocese of Canterbury.

More information on: Inspire: Peacemaking for Young People can be found at oasisuk.org/inspire
Born Bad: Original Sin and the Making of the Western Mind
James Boyce
SPCK £9.99 pbk
9780281076024

At a time when the idea of original sin is regrettably disregarded in contemporary culture and, it might seem, even in the church, this innovative, fascinating book offers a welcome and surprising restoration. Neither a theologian nor a Christian apologist, Boyce, an Environmental Studies academic, has written an elegant and compelling history of the Christian doctrine of original sin to illuminate how its pervasive influence has profoundly shaped Western culture throughout two millennia. His sweeping, captivating narrative covers original sin in Christendom and the modern world. He begins with Adam and Eve and takes in Adam Smith, Freud, Marx, Richard Dawkins and Contemporary Evangelism. Even-handedly seeking to understand and explain, not to judge, he sees the features of original sin in all the major liberal ideas in economics, evolution and psychology but tellingly finds in them no compensating features equivalent to the Christian idea of grace. This highly readable book is a creative and unexpected resource for Readers concerned to restore a robust understanding among their congregations of the significance of original sin and a full realisation of its converse in God’s grace.

PETER WRIGHT

Mere Apologetics
Alister McGrath
SPCK £9.99 pbk
9780281075102

It seems a little disingenuous to say so, given the author, but this is a bit of a strange book. Strange because it is not an apologia as such, but it is about apologetics. It was originally published in the US in 2012, so strictly speaking it is not even a new book, although it is not out of date in any way. It was written following a foundational lecture course at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, and was inspired, as you might have guessed, by the work of C S Lewis, about whom McGrath has written extensively. Unfortunately I found the tone a little patronising, and it is also quite repetitive. However McGrath does make a number of important points, for example, apologetics and evangelism are different endeavours and have different objectives – be sure you know which you are undertaking. He also stresses the reasons for doing apologetics and the need to do so, that is, as a non-combative response to atheism. Another important element is the need to understand your audience so that points of connection can be made, and what McGrath calls ‘gateways’ – the ‘means by which our eyes are opened to the reality of our situation and the ability of the gospel to transform it’ (p.129). The aim of the book is not to teach the content of apologetics but to prepare and enable those who are called upon to offer a defence of their faith (most of us at some time or other) to do so intelligently and effectively.

FRANCES BAIN

Things Hidden
Richard Rohr
SPCK £9.99 pbk
9780281075164

Based on talks given first in 1973 at Mount St. Joseph’s College, Ohio the book is subtitled Scripture As Spirituality. Rohr uses a ‘cosmic egg’ diagram to explore his themes covering My Story, Our Story and The Story. He explores a range of topics beginning in Genesis and moving step by step through God’s revelation, sin, his people, morality, and power. The mystery of the cross and the Eucharist provide enlightening challenges. The book is not an easy read but perseverance pays off. The Reader who wants to explore spirituality in depth will be rewarded.

HUGH MORLEY

Nonviolent Action
Ronald J Sider
Brazos Press £12.99 pbk
9781587433665 (2015)

Sider is professor of theology at Palmer Theological Seminary, an ethicist who advocates nonviolent action. He explores examples of effective nonviolent action across history from when the Pope rode unservingly towards Attila the Hun. Sider shows that the effectiveness of local initiatives increases when peace-making teams accompany the oppressed (of all ages) as they march, sit-in, throw eggs, pray or wait in large numbers for the conflict to stop. The value of nonviolent action is that fewer people are killed, it is more likely to succeed than warfare, often leads to a more democratic society and it works against vicious dictators (e.g. Norway). Warfare killed 86 million people between 1900 and 1989. This book must be worth putting into a Home Group study!

CHRISTINE MCMULLEN

Construing the Cross: Type, sign, symbol, word, action
Frances M Young
SPCK £12.99 pbk
9780281075508

It is always instructive to be reminded that the cross of Christ has been understood in a broader range of categories than just those of the main theories of atonement. For example, as Young makes clear, it was the Passover that set the original context for Christ’s Passion. Sacrificial imagery also figures prominently in the New Testament narrative with references to the scapegoat and the Lamb of God, as does a link between the cross and the Tree of Life. Throughout this book, which is punctuated by poetry from Ephrem the Syrian and some of Young’s own poems, the emphasis is on life rather than death. Also we are left with a positive understanding of the cross, which enhances its position at the centre of our worship and as the basis of our life in Christ. Young writes somewhat subjectively, making frequent references to her severely disabled son, Arthur. This is relevant because it is the symbolic nature of the cross as the sign of God’s love that can communicate that love and make connections where words fail or are inappropriate. This book is accessible, interesting and a very good read – thoroughly recommended.

MARY ALBURY

Come, Lord Jesus!
Stephen Motyer
Apollos/IVP £19.99 pbk
9781783394146

Although the subject of Jesus’ second coming is a central tenet of our faith, as Professor Anthony Thistleton notes in his prefatory commendation, it is too often neglected. This is an academic book, but very readable. There are two parts to the book, ‘the biblical frame’, in which three Old Testament passages are explored, and ‘New Testament hopes and visions’ on a series of texts about the second coming, which is the term the author prefers. There is a lot of detailed reading, and I feel inspired by having read several passages, as I am sure others will be. This is a highly recommended book for all who preach or teach.

JOHN FOXLEE
HELEN FONTAINE

Baukham is a well-respected biblical scholar who has also written extensively about ethics and modern life. He is an outspoken critic of the failings of contemporary society and this book brings together a collection of his papers on the theme of the relevance of the Bible today in that context. Only three of the chapters are newly written for this book, and a number of the chapters appear in other books which many people will probably already have; nevertheless it is very helpful to have a handy collection of papers all on the same subject within one binding. As is sometimes the case with a collection of essays and papers written over a number of years, there is some repetition, and a recurring theme is the idolatry which Baukham sees as the chief evil of contemporary life. The earliest chapters were first published in 2003, but none seems dated, and all are worth reading and plundering for sermon quotes. There is much in this book to challenge lazy thinking and to sustain, this time ‘for living in the face of death’. These fifty poems can be read in any order, at any time, by dipping in, or focusing on one poem. Her commentary enlarges our perception of each. They enhance my awareness of dying and its stages and are feeding into my funeral ministry, preaching, and pastoral care. Each poem is an adventure, an experience lived through or imagined. One that inspired me is U.A. Fanthorpe’s ‘The Unprofessionals’, an absorbing unassuming paean to those who ‘come, unorganised, unarticulate’ to ‘sit with you’, ‘answering the phone’ and ‘talking sometimes’ and doing other things ‘until the blunting of time’ – when the bereaved are beginning to cope. Pastoral care and wisdom at their unobtrusive best.

JEREMY HARVEY

Richard Bauckham

SPCK £15.99 pbk
9780281074846

This is My Body

Eds Christina Beardsley and Michelle O’Brien

DLT £14.99 pbk
9780232532067

Many Readers may know someone who is transgender, or at least be aware of the concept from recent news reports. This collection of essays, mainly written by transgender Christians, provides background knowledge and insight into the trans world. The initial chapters cover (trans)gender issues from scientific, social, medical, theological and Anglican church perspectives. The later chapters recount personal stories by transgender Christians, most of whom have transitioned to living in an alternative gender role but some who stay fully or partly in their birth gender role. Inevitably it focuses on trans experience and theology, with only a passing reference to families and children. One or two academic chapters assume a more knowledgeable reader than me, but these can be skimmed if necessary in favour of the readable chapters about the Bishops’ discussions on the topic or personal stories. The book lacks specific pastoral advice but gives trans Christians a voice that they have often lacked within the Anglican church.

S J HAYTON

Janet Morley

SPCK £9.99 pbk
9780281073542

Yet again Morley has edited a superb anthology to inform and sustain, this time ‘for living in the face of death’. These fifty poems can be read in any order, at any time, by dipping in, or focusing on one poem. Her commentary enlarges our perception of each. They enhance my awareness of dying and its stages and are feeding into my funeral ministry, preaching, and pastoral care. Each poem is an adventure, an experience lived through or imagined. One that inspired me is U.A. Fanthorpe’s ‘The Unprofessionals’, an absorbing unassuming paean to those who ‘come, unorganised, unarticulate’ to ‘sit with you’, ‘answering the phone’ and ‘talking sometimes’ and doing other things ‘until the blunting of time’ – when the bereaved are beginning to cope. Pastoral care and wisdom at their unobtrusive best.

JEREMY HARVEY

Mark Clavier

Cascade Books £12.00 pbk
9781498225434

I had some real difficulties with this book because although there were excellent analogies of the spiritual life and our relationship with God, it always came back to a very fundamental view of Eden and our downfall affecting the whole planet. We live in a volatile world with moving teconic plates resulting in disasters which cannot solely be linked to our distancing from God. Likewise our knowledge that some carnivore dinosaurs walked this planet before us does not easily fit with a harmonious creation until we came along. No explanation or alternative view was offered. As one who loves the natural world I could empathise with the author’s delight in the beauty of creation but it did leave unanswered questions. Based on talks given to ordinands, the author’s bias is to those primarily in a priestly role, so although it might provide useful study group material it has limited appeal for Readers.

ROSEMARY BALL

Stewards of God’s Delight

Cascade Books £12.00 pbk
9781498225434

Today’s globalised world shares many of the characteristics of the Roman Empire: migrants, beggars, favelas, the poor thrown off their land by large businesses. Jesus’s message has been sanitised so the author helps us to see afresh its challenge. Smith draws on the work of Tom Wright, Ched Myers and others to look at Jesus, Paul and Revelation, paying particular attention to the socio-economic context that both the writers and readers of the Scriptures experience and draws out new insights from the text, critiquing the inequalities of our globalised world. The churches should not merely cater for spiritual needs but be counter-cultural. The author is a little naive when it comes to New Testament scholarship but he engages in what he calls ‘deep listening’ to the message of Jesus and the New Testament writers. Preachers will find vivid detail about life during New Testament times among those to whom Paul wrote.

DEREK JAY

Befriending Silence

Carl McColman

Ave Maria Press £10.99 pbk
9781594716157 (2015)

There is, among Christians and seekers of no particular faith, a hunger to live lives that are more spiritually rooted. What is hard is finding the how in answer to this hunger. Befriending Silence is an inspiring series of reflections on how the Cistercian monastic tradition can help women and men who are not necessarily part of a religious order draw closer to God in ways which are simple and radical.

One of the benefits of McColman’s book is its down to earth practicality in matters spiritual. Each chapter, covering a range of subjects from hospitality to contemplation, ends with some good suggestions about how to deepen the practice of hospitality, or Bible reading, or humility. The spiritual life is about how God is embodied in our lives. The centre, for McColman, of spiritual living is contemplation: the cultivating of a silent and loving awareness of God. The chapters on prayer and contemplation are particularly fresh. But the book as a whole is a thoughtful, conversational and often moving guide in how to grow in awareness of God’s presence with us and within us.

BEN BROWN
How To Be A Mindful Christian
Sally Welch
Canterbury Press, £10.99 pbk 9781848258457

Empowering the techniques of Mindfulness, Welch provides
the reader with ‘40 Simple Spiritual Practices’. The book begins with a simple explanation of Mindfulness, and what is meant by Christian Mindfulness. It is divided into sections beginning with silence, followed by each of the five senses. Each section begins with a passage of scripture and a short commentary, with an exercise based on each text. Each exercise is designed to encourage the reader to be conscious of what is happening to them in the ‘now’ and ‘to look at each experience of the day with new eyes.’ These exercises range from the very simple, e.g., concentrating on the breath, or more complex, in preparing a meal, or going on a journey or walk. Also included are sections on Pilgrimage, and The Passion. This book would be a useful starting point for anyone leading a Quiet Day or House Group, and a good introduction to those wishing to know more about Christian Meditation, or Contemplation, through the medium of Mindfulness.

MARIE PATERSO

Speaking of Sin
Barbara Brown Taylor

‘By the grace of God, I am being mended, and God has called me to be a mender too.’ So writes the estimable Mrs Taylor in this republished work from 2000. And to be mended, we need to acknowledge and act upon the sin in our lives. But how does the church, in a secular postmodern world, regain the meaning and impact of the nuanced language of salvation in terms of sin and salvation, hope, repentance and righteousness? Taylor devotes a chapter to each of the above five terms, with the underlying theme of Jesus saying to his church ‘You want to do things differently! Great! I’ll help you do that.’ And challenging Christians to do the same with one another by being mutually open about and accountable for our sins. Other than that, in the context of recovering repentance, this provocative work is worth reading for the content of pages 59-60 alone. Buy it because it will challenge your mind, heart and soul. I cannot recommend it enough.

ANDREW CARR

Vanishing Grace
Philip Yancey

This book encourages us to recognise the church’s failings in relation to our lack of grace. The author observes that as individuals and as a body we are now frequently perceived as judgmental and unattractive. He cites evidence of our actions and approaches that contribute to this view. He gives much evidence of a thirst for God and for the good news. His recommendations for change are implicit in the negative examples of our current behaviour and through some positive examples, examples that can be achieved by any personality or expression: pilgrim, activist or artist. Christian and secular perspectives on foundational faith questions and culture are discussed. The book helps us to recognise our failings and will challenge us to act with more grace, which is critical in actually living out what we believe. It’s not light and readers must look beyond encouragement, but the church, including lay church leadership, needs its message.

LINDSAY TANNER

All in the Mind? Does Neuroscience Challenge Faith?
Peter Clarke

The question of the relationship between brain activity and consciousness raises all sorts of philosophical questions, and brings some very important challenges to us as believers in God. While our religious experience may feel very real to us, and we have the Bible in support, not to mention the whole history of the Christian church, we cannot actually prove, in scientific terms, the existence of God. It is therefore not surprising that there are some scientists, in this context, those who study the activity of the brain, who argue that all our behaviour, including our emotions and our beliefs can be explained in terms of what happens inside our skulls, without reference to any external non-material source. Peter Clarke is a Christian, a retired professor of neuroscience, and in this book he presents a survey of the evidence from research and argues that while there may well be a correlation between brain activity and religious experience, there is no evidence to support a causal relationship between brain activity and religious belief, which is based on personal experience, the Bible and the witness of others including the church throughout its history. Clarke’s careful analysis of the evidence shows that faith in God is not undermined by neuroscience, and that we should not feel challenged by a correlation between religious experience, such as prayer, and brain activity since our brains must always be active while we function as conscious living beings.

MARION GRAY

When Faith Gets Shaken
Patrick Regan and Liza Hoekema

This book speaks from within the experience of suffering: that of Regan himself, his family and those with whom he has worked. In struggling to make some sense of suffering he examines the importance of surrendering our will to God, as Jesus did in Gethsemane. I find this part particularly useful as it points to a very human Jesus who, like ourselves, is reluctant to suffer and asks God to show him another way. What good to us would be a ‘Bring it on’ Saviour, one who did not share our human reluctance in the face of suffering? Regan writes, ‘For Jesus it meant suffering the agonising pain of the cross. For us it means surrendering to things we don’t always understand, following Jesus’ example, resting in God’s love, admitting our brokenness, and allowing him to hold us together in his love.’ Packed with theological insight, anecdote and faith, the book is highly recommended to all in pastoral ministry.

REBECCA M. HODEL-JONES

Teilhard de Chardin
Seven Stages of Suffering
Louis M Savery & Patricia H Berne

Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, viewed suffering as a source of positive power, able not only to transform individual lives but also to reach out to influence and benefit the world. Subtitled A Spiritual Path for Transformation, this book initially details his seven stages of outer resistance, inner resistance, prayer, patience, choice, communion, and fidelity. Then come the tools to enable our own transformation.

I found the book as a whole daunting. However, at the back is a very useful index of the prayer forms and spiritual practices used in the various sections, and this gives lots of practical and illuminating ideas that could easily be used in other contexts. Ones I particularly liked included the idea of a bucket list for making a difference, and the prayer for blessing medications. A book well worth investing in, however you choose to use it.

LIZ PACEY
Breathing Under Water
Richard Rohr
SPCK £9.99 pbk
9780281075126

Breathing Under Water: Companion Journal
£9.99 pbk
9780281075140

We are all addicted to something, argues Richard Rohr, even if it’s nothing other than sin. That is the premise taken by this little book. Each of its twelve short chapters, corresponding to one of the steps of the AAS Twelve-Step programme, begins with several quotes from scripture. So the approach is anchored firmly in radical Christianity. Rohr reminds us that addiction is a form of idolatry – putting something that is not God in place of God – and that this always fails to satisfy. But idols can be found in surprising and unexpected places. It takes painful honesty to uncover our own idols – power, comfort, even position within our churches. Such honesty and uncovering is necessary if we are to grow ourselves and, crucially, if we are to help others grow too.

This is not an easy book to read, because it is so challenging. It is exciting too though, not least if we are to help others grow too.

MARION GRAY

Sharing God’s Blessing – how to renew the local church
Robin Greenwood
SPCK £9.99 pbk
9780281072156

This book is the result of research undertaken by the author in collaboration with a number of churches (across several denominations) mainly in the northeast of England. The resources offered have therefore been ‘road tested’ in real parish situations and have been found to be genuinely helpful in helping people move towards a renewed vision of their understanding of what it means to be church in their respective communities. The theological underpinning comes from a deep appreciation of God’s blessings, giving rise to a desire to share the resulting joy with others. The practical approach to bringing about this renewed understanding comes through a series of sessions which are biblically based ‘conversations’ using the lectio divina method of studying scripture. This is best facilitated by a neutral person who, because they are not involved in the situation, can keep the conversation on track without steering it in any particular direction. These sessions are intended to be genuine conversations in which the participants listen to one another, and the role of the facilitator is to ensure that the content of the conversation remains relevant to the core aim of discovering God’s will for this church. By doing so, no one person’s agenda should be able to influence the outcome; also the participants should all feel involved, committed and aware of their own role in the proceedings. This would hopefully play out in increased commitment in the life of the local church, by renewed Christians who have found themselves in a deeper and more meaningful relationship with God – more aware of his blessings to them corporately and individually, and more able to share the good news of the gospel with others, in word and action. If you or your church are thinking about mission this book would be an excellent resource.

MARGARET TINSLEY

Body
Paula Gooder
SPCK £9.99 pbk
9780281071005

How refreshing in the modern day to read a book in which the body is respected, rather than reviled for supposed physical defects. Gooder emphasises the importance of the whole body as she seeks to explore what Paul says about the relationship between body and soul, the post-resurrection body and the spiritual body, all the time stressing the importance Paul lays upon the physical body, and its use as a metaphor for the church, the body of Christ. As in all her works, she presents her ideas in clear and accessible language but there is a real depth of Biblical exegesis. It is an easy and attractive book to read, and optimistic in its message. We must see our bodies as essential to a spirituality that is about our whole person. With its detailed consideration of the writings of Paul and of Jesus’s post-resurrection appearances, this is surely a must for every Reader’s bookshelf.

MARGARET TINSLEY

Received from Grove Books, all £3.95 pbk

B79 Popular Idols: A biblical view on gods, desire and idolatry
Simon Stocks

B80 Paul and the Subversive Power of Grace
John Barclay

Ev 113 Pioneer Ministry in New Housing Areas
Alison Boulton and Penny Marsh

Ev 114 Hosting Mary and Joseph: Posada – an Advent experience for your community, Jacqui Horton and Susanna Gunner

W 226 Accessible Baptisms: A commentary on the alternative Common Worship texts
Tim Stratford

W 227 Evaluating Worship: How do we know it is any good?
Mark Earey
Following through formation: Some very short reflections

Rosemary Walters

Criteria F: Collaboration and Shared Leadership

Readers are committed to developing shared leadership and collaboration. Their membership of the Body of Christ enables them to both accept and relinquish personal responsibility.

Here are the challenges, opportunities and questions the indicators for Criteria F raise for me. What are yours?

The indicators are:

Readers:

- Encourage and enable others to contribute their gifts to the mission and ministry of the Church.

Questions: If I am honest with myself do I really think of my role as a Reader in terms of my ministry with no connections to the actual or potential ministry of others in the congregation(s)? Do I feel defensive about what I perceive as my trained and traditional ministry or am I genuinely pleased and excited to recognise gifts and talents for sharing the Gospel amongst the diverse age groups and various contexts of the community, both inside and outside the church building? Do I look for opportunities to encourage and enable other forms of lay ministry even if it means stepping back from some of my responsibilities for a while?

Opportunity: I could volunteer to help in the mentoring or supervision of other lay ministers under the direction of the incumbent. I could contribute to discussion at Deanery and Diocesan level about the discernment, training and nurturing of lay ministry in a variety of forms, whether licensed, authorised or informal. I could take opportunities to provide constructive feedback to those who are seeking to exercise their gifts in new and established forms of liturgy and outreach.

- Model accountability within collaborative leadership structures.

Questions: What is my attitude to any regular forms of review? Is it a chore or a chance to engage with both lay and ordained members of the church in order to reflect on what is going well in my ministry and what may be less effective or need rethinking?

Do I have the courage to raise any issues about relationships within a leadership group in an appropriate way so that they can be resolved in the interests of everyone, or do I just try and make the best of difficult situations?

Do I ever think what the term 'collaborative leadership' means in my context? Can I recognise any tensions between what I have come to regard as my autonomy in exercising my ministry and the needs and expectations of the leadership structures and the whole community of Christians in relationship where I serve?

Opportunity: I could take some time to refresh my theological understanding of the concepts of authority, leadership and collaboration. How does my reading of the Gospels inform my preaching and practice of these?

I could ask for the chance to devise a short liturgy for the beginning or ending of the next leadership/team meeting in my benefice/parish applying the results of the above. I could talk to members of the congregation who are in secular leadership structures as leaders or members. What can I learn from them? Does this clarify what, if anything, is distinctive about such roles in a Christian community?

For example, possible resources:

Grove Booklets: W 199 How to... Share the Leadership of Worship by Trevor Lloyd and Anna de Lange; P 78

Leadership Teams: Clergy and Lay Leadership in the Local Church by Chris Skilton; P 72

Visionary Leadership In The Local Church by John Leach.

All available from www.grovebooks.co.uk

Transforming Leadership: A Christian Approach to Management, by Richard Higginbottom (SPCK, 1996);


Next time: Guideline Area G: Vocation and Ministry Within the Church of England
Whether you attended Follow 2016 in Leicester last July, or merely enjoyed the photos and reports from the day in this issue and the previous issue of The Reader, you need to know that the day would never have happened without a great deal of work on the part of Julie Batchelor.

Julie first became interested in Reader Ministry as a young mum worshipping in a church in Worcestershire. When she was licensed in 2003, she was the youngest Reader in the Diocese. Later, she moved to the Southwell and Nottingham Diocese, while her husband was training for ordination. Here, she was involved with her local church helping with a credit union and pensioners’ lunch as well as leading worship and preaching. More recently, Julie and her husband have served in the Diocese of Carlisle. She co-ordinates Messy Church, preaches and leads Bible Study groups.

Twelve years ago, Julie first became involved with the Central Readers’ Council. She helped to organise the Younger Readers Conference in 2006, and further conferences in Bangor, Lancaster, Swanwick and Milton Keynes. She also chaired the last of these.

Planning for Follow 2016 started eighteen months earlier and, as anyone who was at De Montfort Hall on 16th July will know, the final result was a triumph. Not only could we listen to an array of excellent speakers, there was also opportunity for direct involvement with Messy Church sessions, singing the new Roger Jones musical from scratch, and visiting a number of stalls including a mobile monastery hosted by Franciscan Sisters. Readers and others throughout England and Wales have benefited greatly from Julie’s imaginative hard work and dedication.

Now Julie’s life is entering a very different phase as she and her husband have begun fostering children. If she brings as much energy and commitment to this as she has done to her time with the CRC, those young people will be fortunate indeed.

Thank you Julie for all you have done for Readers everywhere. Our prayers and best wishes go with you for the next stage of your life.
I was born in Lancashire and for the first eight years of my life lived above our sweet shop in the little Pennine valley town of Ramsbottom. I attended St Paul’s C of E Junior School. I distinctly remember the day our headmaster, Mr Pickles, played a record of Gustav Holst’s Planet Suite by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. I was absolutely amazed by the power, majesty and creativity communicated through the music. My love of an eclectic range of musical genres, no doubt, was influenced by that day in school and even more so by my Grandad, who was a professional musician, playing the double bass (it was enormous!) guitar and banjo. Grandad had also been a professional signwriter. He taught me how to hand-draw the entire alphabet in Gill Sans before I’d even started school! It’s so strange to think I am still carrying on his trade but with completely different technology. Perhaps that’s where my love of typography has come from too.

Mum, Dad and Grandad worked so hard that’s where my love of typography has come from too.

Mum was amazing too. She would spend seemingly endless energy. She modelled the principle of ‘going the extra mile’. Excelling was so much better than just ‘getting by’. I learned that the “pay-back” far exceeded the initial investment of some extra thought and effort. Mum also took me to church every week, Summerseat Independent Evangelical Church. It was there, as a member of ‘Campaigners’ (a boys uniformed group, very similar to Scouts) when I first heard (or understood) that to be in the right relationship with God you needed to willingly give yourself to Him by inviting Jesus into your life. We had just been listening to ‘Chief’ reading an excerpt from Bunyan’s allegory, Pilgrim’s Progress, where Christian had to stick to the very middle of the path in order to pass safely between two frightening, but chained-up, lions. (‘So keep in the middle of the path and you will not be harmed.’) All this made perfect sense to me as an 8-year-old. I prayed a prayer, quietly, in my own mind, asking Jesus to come into my life and live with me. This was definitely done with child-like faith but that faith was very real to me.

When I was 12 we all moved to Cornwall. A sea-change – literally! At the age of 15 I was involved with a Christian youth group comprising of ‘youth’ from many of the local churches. It was at one of their Sunday night ‘squashes’ (meetings) that I heard Jesus died for me, personally. That He loved ME. Knew ME. Was involved with ME. Not just everyone ‘en masse’. This actually knocked me sideways. I had previously accepted what I had been told, by good people, but now it was as if I had seen it in a completely new light. It was now up close and personal. I re-affirmed my trust, faith and love for the Lord Jesus Christ that night. Almost like the ‘grown-up’ version of what had happened a few years earlier.

So, perhaps my Facebook introduction has been explained and if I could pass on one thing I have learned, it’s this: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:5)

Kevin is the owner of Wild Associates Ltd, designers and producers of The Reader Magazine, also the advertising, print and distribution managers.

www.wildassociates.com

Finishing at grammar school I then enrolled at Cornwall College of Further and Higher Education on a vocational course specialising in design and advertising.

The following years saw the inevitable move to London, where I worked in the West End for various advertising agencies and design groups. After gaining lots of experience I set up Wild Associates Ltd. through which we are now serving many clients, both secular and Christian, local and international.

I feel so blessed in my life. So grateful to God for keeping me safe along that narrow path, between all those lions!

Kevin (cheekily) reminding HRH The Duke of Edinburgh of when they previously met in 1978 at a Duke of Edinburgh’s award event.
John Betjeman’s famous poem *Christmas* describes, rather frivolously, the frantic present-buying and other preparations that occupy us in December (if not earlier), and then suddenly becomes more serious, reminding us of the events in Bethlehem that are the reason for all the activity.

He asks ‘And is it true?’ adding that For, if it is, nothing

Can with this single truth compare–
That God was man in Palestine,
And lives today in bread and wine.

Betjeman has been criticised for allowing an element of doubt to creep into his supposed statement of faith. If it *is true* seems to imply that it might not be so. I prefer to think of his statement as being one not so much of faith as of apologetics. He is demonstrating to anyone who is inclined to accept the Christmas story as probably true, that the miracle of the incarnation has a parallel in the way we experience Christ today in prayer, Word and (especially, in this context) sacrament. In short, if you believe in one miracle it is entirely logical to believe in the other.

In many, even most, cases the pulpit may not be the correct place for apologetics. More often than not, the venue will be somewhere like a coffee shop where people are taking the weight off their feet during the Christmas shopping rush, or perhaps a pub already decorated at the start of December with a collection box on the bar for a worthy local charity. We as Readers may feel at home in the pulpit. So we should – but we should also recognise the other opportunities that arise to explain our beliefs. The Church of England has no separate ministry of apologists, but it is a role that is ideally suited to lay people, and especially those like us who have the advantage of theological training. It should enable us to declaim the gospel when it is appropriate, but also to be quietly and intelligently persuasive when that may be more effective. Jesus himself knew this. The parable of the Good Samaritan does not make overt statements about redemption and/or salvation; rather it encourages the use of logical thought to reach the inevitable conclusion. It persuades the hearer of the truth of his or her own thinking process, even if the result is perhaps a little unpalatable and makes demands upon the individual.

Are we ready to be persuasive as well as declamatory?
Discipleship
The theme of Follow 2016 was Discipleship, and all three of the keynote speakers are involved with resources to help you develop as a disciple.

Let Me Go: The Spirit of Lent, a new book by Paula Gooder, is published by SCM Canterbury Press. We will be publishing a review in a future issue of The Reader.

Mark Greene, from LICC, based much of his talk on the ideas explored in his book Fruitfulness on the Frontline (published by IVP in 2014). LICC have now produced a DVD, for use with church groups, and are selling the book and the DVD together for £13.00. You can find out more about this and other resources at www.licc.org.uk.

The Church Army, where Mark Russell is Chief Executive, has a wealth of resources on mission, evangelism and other topics. Go to www.churcharmy.org and click on the Resources button.

Dr Rowan Williams was not with us at Follow 2016, but he too has written for more on the ideas he has shared in his book Fruitfulness on the Frontline, published earlier this year by SPCK, at a price of £7.99.

Exploring the Old Testament
There are any number of resources for students of the Old Testament. You can find a booklist on the CRC website at www.readers.cofe.anglican.org/u_d_lib_res/r29.pdf. You might also enjoy books by two authors on the theme in this issue. Isaiah: Trusting God in Troubled Times by Howard Peskett, was published in 1991 by IVP. Meg Warner’s Abraham: A Journey Through Lent was published earlier this year by SPCK, at a price of £8.99.

If you enjoyed Chris Hudson’s article in this issue, you might want to think about organising a Lifepath day in your locality. Lifepath is a Scripture Union project to help Christians in local communities organise an event to which they can invite local schools. It aims to give Junior school pupils the opportunity to explore the Christian faith through the lifepath of a well known historic Christian with a link to the location and to use this as a springboard to encourage them to reflect on their own lifepath. You can find out more at http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Lifepath/10352.id

Holocaust Memorial Day
Frances Ward’s article is a timely reminder of the need to remember violent events in the recent past, to honour those who have suffered and died, and to reinforce the necessity of doing everything we can to ensure that history does not repeat itself. This is the reason why Holocaust Memorial Day is marked every year on 27th January (the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau).

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust exists to promote awareness, provide education and offer resources. It also chooses a theme for each year. In 2017, the Holocaust Memorial Day theme will be “How can life go on?” This encourages us to think about what happens after genocide, and about our own responsibilities in the wake of such a crime. This year’s theme is broad and open ended, there are few known answers. You can find out more at http://hmd.org.uk
What will the next generation know about the Bible?

More than you might think.

With only 1 in 10 adults in England and Wales actively engaging with the Bible, you might think connections with the word of God are disappearing. However, we’re hard at work bringing the Bible to life for the next generation across the country.

Find out how you can get involved: biblesociety.org.uk/nextgeneration

Bringing the Bible to Life