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Welcome to THE READER

I don't know about you, but the thought of writing a sermon on a passage from one of Paul’s epistles fills me with terror. Especially if the passage is from Romans. With the exception of the Epistle to Philemon (which I love), Paul is never an easy read. Sometimes his arguments appear impossibly convoluted – and here I often find myself using the Bible Gateway website to switch between different translations the better to work out exactly where the line of thought is going. Alas, I have left it far too late to master even a smattering of New Testament Greek, let alone an easy fluency.

So for me, and any of you who feel the same, it is enormously helpful to be able to read the contributions of such eminent biblical scholars as Steve Moyise, Nicholas King, Lucy Peppiatt and Robert Evans. I am grateful to them for sharing their learning with all who read this magazine. And the fresh look at Paul’s metaphor of fruit by Margaret Ives provides a helpful and imaginative framework both for preaching and for small group study.

We are fortunate indeed that the Bible shows us this extraordinary character Paul through two pairs of eyes. We have the body of Letters through which he reveals not only his love of Christ but much about himself, and we have the third person account of the writer of Acts. Peter Clough introduces us to a classic travel book which, despite being eighty years old, can be read as a companion to Acts. Although not in the ‘Theme’ section, it is going. Alas, I have left it far too late to work out exactly where the line of thought is going. I have left it far too late to master even a smattering of New Testament Greek, let alone an easy fluency. And among the things we commit to learning about is the nature of learning itself. When we stand up to teach, we may well be facing people of different ages, backgrounds and cultures – people with very varied experience and learning styles. The best teachers know their students, know what will connect with their students’ experience and have some idea of what the next steps might be to enable growth in faith.

This reminds us that the teacher is a “co-worker” with God. One person sows the seed, another waters the soil but God alone gives the growth. So praying for those we teach is also a core discipline – both general prayer for wisdom and understanding, and specific prayer for individual needs.

I believe this is what Peterson means when he talks of “working the angles”. Preparation which wrestles with exegesis and theology, can seem light years away from the concerns of most of those in our churches. So how do we connect Scripture with everyday life and equip people to live out their faith in every aspect of life?

According to Peterson, “Working the angles” is what we do when nobody is watching. It is repetitive and often boring. It is blue collar not dog collar work … (it is) what all our predecessors agreed was basic in the practice of the calling, to insist that pastoral work has no integrity unconnected with the angles of prayer, Scripture and spiritual direction.

I’m delighted that this issue of The Reader is focused on ‘preaching from Paul’. Resourcing Readers for the ministry of preaching and teaching lies at the heart of the work of the Central Readers’ Council, precisely because it lies at the heart of the calling of the Reader.

However, we shouldn’t underestimate the difficulty of this task. The high quality articles in this magazine which wrestle with exegesis and theology, can seem light years away from the concerns of most of those in our churches. So how do we connect Scripture with everyday life and equip people to live out their faith in every aspect of life?

The first step is reminding ourselves again and again that teachers must be learners. If we are to step into the pulpit, or the small group ‘armchair’, we must commit ourselves to being lifelong learners. That means giving space and time to allow God to speak to us before we ever speak to others.

And among the things we commit to learning about is the nature of learning itself. When we stand up to teach, we may well be facing people of different ages, backgrounds and cultures – people with very varied experience and learning styles. The best teachers know their students, know what will connect with their students’ experience and have some idea of what the next steps might be to enable growth in faith.

I believe this is what Peterson means when he talks of “working the angles”. Preparation which wrestles with the text of Scripture, applies sound principles of pedagogy, draws on learning from other fields (science, sociology, psychology etc.) and applies all this to real life experiences of the people alongside whom we learn and with whom we pray – this is hard work. But this is our calling as ministers of the gospel. There are many easier options and many possible distractions, but I hope this magazine will encourage you and equip you in your work of teaching the faith.
Perhaps the first thing we can learn from Paul’s writings is that there is a time for quoting scripture and a time for not. Romans, the two letters to the Corinthians and Galatians contain nearly one hundred explicit quotations, an average of one per page. Readers who have persevered through these letters get the impression that Paul can hardly make a point without reference to scripture. Of all the other nine letters traditionally ascribed to Paul, there are a total of only seven quotations. Clearly not every point Paul wishes to make needs to be backed up by scripture. Luke has understood this when he contrasts Paul’s sermon in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch,1 which is full of scripture, with the speech at the Areopagus in Athens, where Moses put a veil on his face, namely, ‘to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside’ (3:13). The precise meaning of this verse (and its translation) is debated but what we can say is that it differs from Exodus 34:30, where Moses veils himself because the Israelites are afraid. Second, he sites Moses as a witness to the truth of the gospel and to those who oppose it:

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that ‘the person who does these things will live by them’. [Lev 18:5] But the righteousness that comes from faith says ‘...the word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’ [Deut 30:14] ... because if you acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom 10:6, 8a, 9).2

A more straightforward example comes in 1 Corinthians 10. In order to warn the Corinthians against idolatry and immorality, Paul quotes from the various wilderness rebellions: ‘Do not become idolaters as some of them did’ (10:7) ‘do not question as some of them did’ (10:10). Why? Because these things ‘happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope’.3

Interestingly, the negative example of Israel’s rebellions (1 Cor 10:1–18) is followed by the positive example of Jesus at the last supper (1 Cor 11:17–34). Although this passage has been mined for its eucharistic doctrine (‘Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup’ – 11:28), Paul’s purpose is to counter the selfish behaviour of some, where ‘one goes hungry and another becomes drunk’ (11:21). Paul would not have thought he was quoting scripture at this point (the ‘Gospels have not been written’) but he is citing authoritative tradition about Jesus (11:23). Thus it is not unreasonable to say that 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 offer a precedent underlining our congregational stories and pictures of both the Old and the New Testament.

Another use of scripture by Paul goes beyond the quotation, such as when Paul says: ‘The word of Scripture is not merely a blueprint for our preaching but it can be both a guide and an inspiration, argues Steve Moyise.5

Paul’s use of scripture is not a blueprint for our preaching but it can be both a guide and an inspiration, argues Steve Moyise.

References

3 Isaiah 2:2, 11–12.
5 Ibid., p.176.
come from a seafaring family. My grandfather, a trawler skipper, was a strict Methodist who not only told us stories of his own voyages, but also made sure that we were well acquainted with our Bibles. Long before I knew anything at all about Pauline theology I remember Grandpa reading to us from Acts about that hazardous voyage from Crete and subsequent shipwreck off the coast of Malta. So my interest in Paul began early.

The astounding proclamation that ‘Jesus calls for miracles, Greeks look for wisdom: but we proclaim Christ – yes, Christ nailed to the cross’ convinces me of Paul’s authenticity. He is sometimes accused of having invented Christianity, a charge he refutes when he writes to the Galatians that ‘the gospel you heard me preach is no human invention.’ Indeed, if you really wanted to invent a new religion, would you base it on a particularly degrading form of execution? As he continues ‘I did not take it over from any man; no man taught it me; I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.’ What else could possibly have led him to proclaim the gospel and its challenge to the way we live our lives. As part of the South Lancaster ecumenical partnership I now lead a lunchtime service once a month in a United Reformed church. Since this is an informal weekday service I am not bound by the set lectionary readings and so have the opportunity to devote a series of sermons to a particular theme or topic. Together with the congregation I have explored the ‘I AM’ sayings in John’s Gospel, the parables taught by Jesus in the Synoptics (Mark 23–25) and, turning specifically to Paul, the ‘harvest of the Spirit’ described in Galatians 5 as ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.’ The original inspiration for this latter series came from one of our house groups where we were studying 1 Corinthians. The series has recently taken part in a Prayer Walk through a Quiet Garden I was struck by Paul’s metaphor here of himself and Apollos as gardeners and the Corinthians as God’s garden. The garden of my childhood home also had an orchard, and since some translations designate Paul as ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ I began to wonder whether we might see ourselves as trees in the orchard of God’s garden each bearing its crop.

In preparing the first sermon in this series, it became clear that Paul places love first because all the other qualities he mentions are simply different characteristics of a loving and reverential disposition. If we were talking about precious stones we could say that they were all facets of the same jewel. Or, returning to the idea of an orchard, we could perhaps think of ourselves as trees bearing varieties of the same fruit, as an apple orchard, for example, might yield Cox’s orange pippins, Bramleys or Granny Smiths. In subsequent sermons I tried to explore this in more detail, reflecting on the etymological roots of each word and looking at other biblical references in order to obtain a better understanding.

Joy

‘I wish you all joy in the Lord. I say it again: all joy be yours.’ A dictionary definition of joy is ‘an ecstasy of happiness’, but the joy Paul is talking about goes deeper than this. It is the realisation that, despite all appearances to the contrary, God is in charge and has a purpose for the universe and for each and every one of us. But that each of us is precious in the sight of God. ‘The Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God’s children; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also rejoice. But how can we bear this fruit in today’s world? Some would say there’s not much to be joyful about when we see all that is going wrong. But that’s our fault, not God’s. As Paul is constantly reminding us, many of us are still trapped in our unspiritual natures. If we would just make the leap of faith and trust ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit to show forth God’s love in the world, we would see something amazing happen and always have a deep, inner sense of joy.

Peace

‘There is no anxiety in anything at all about Pauline theology I made sure that we were well acquainted by stating his credentials and then

References

1 Corinthians 1:1–23
2 Corinthians 11:1–12
Galatians 1:4
1 Corinthians 3:9
Philippians 4:4
Romans 8:16
Philippians 4:4–6
James 2:13
Acts 26:2
Romans 3:23–24.
What makes St Paul tick?

Many people today are absolutely convinced that they cannot stand Paul. If this applies to you, Nicholas King explains why it might be time to reconsider.

Generally there are three main reasons for anti-Paul sentiments. Many people think he does not like women (mistakenly, in my view – and in the view of Lucy Peppard, see pages 12–13). He is often quite authoritarian, which we find difficult today. Paul can also be maddeningly obscure, and at times both prickly and defensive.

However there is plenty to recommend him, once you think about it. First, he is a brilliant theologian, and one who thinks on his feet – not at all the kind of theologian who does his work sitting in a library, with his books about him. Paul’s letters each have a specific group in mind, with their own set of problems; and Paul is trying to find a solution for that particular community. He does it with his penetrating mind, always asking what are the implications of the Resurrection to those individual circumstances, and applying his profound knowledge of the Jewish scriptures (often, apparently, from memory) to help him explore the question. Not only that, but he is a translator; that is to say that he is a city boy, at home in Greek (it was probably his first language), and the one who first rendered Jesus’ message, from the Galilean Aramaic dialect which Jesus and his first disciples used, into the language that was understood all over the Mediterranean world in that first century. And, best of all, since all the world loves a lover, Paul was a passionate lover, one who longed to spread that love all over the world. Read him in that light, and see if you agree.

For all that, there is one thing that you should notice: you never have Paul quite penned down; and as soon as you think that you have understood him, he goes laughing away ahead of you. So watch him!

Where did Paul come from

If you are to understand Paul, you must recognise that there are three important elements of his background, and that he had reservations about each of them. First and foremost, Paul was a Jew of the era of the Second Temple, that one which Herod had so spectacularly rebuilt some years before he was born, and which was destroyed some years after his death. Paul remained a Jew for the rest of his life, so we should probably not speak too readily of his ‘conversion’. He reads Scripture thirstily, knows much of it by heart, and can make intelligent use of it to demonstrate how God was at work in the life of Jesus. If he had a reservation, it was that his beloved fellow-Jews had not grasped that Jesus was the fulfilment of their history.

Secondly, Paul was a child of the Greek culture that since the time of Alexander the Great had come to dominate the world. He spoke and wrote that language fluently, and was able to use it in his arguments. But he did not buy into the sexual self-indulgence that often went along with Greek culture (you may, of course, wish to ask what he would have made of our contemporary culture). Thirdly, if the author of Acts has it right, he was a Roman citizen, and towards the end of Romans, he tells his hearers that they must indeed pay their taxes to the authorities, whatever their private misgivings. That is not to say that Paul thought that the Roman system was perfect; for one thing they had crucified Paul’s ‘Lord’, and that meant that their own emperor or ‘lord’ was not the real thing.

Above all and always, however, Jesus, his ‘conversion’, his ‘resurrection’, is the story of God.

From persecutor to champion

There is absolutely no doubt about Paul’s persecution of the Church. He tells us about it himself in Philippians and 1 Corinthians and Galatians, and we hear about it too from Luke in Acts of the Apostles. There are two reasons why he might have done this. Firstly, the ‘Jesus Movement’ was hailing as their Messiah one who was the fulfilment of their history. For all that, there is one thing that you should notice: you never have Paul quite penned down; and as soon as you think that you have understood him, he goes laughing away ahead of you. So watch him!

The consequences for Paul

Then there are four consequences that follow for Paul, and we need to grasp them if we are to understand what makes St Paul tick.

1. The first consequence is that everything is relativised, given what he has discovered about Jesus. So the Torah is relativised: it is not that Law is bad (it is the gift of God, of course); rather the problem is that it is not Jesus; and nothing else can be an absolute for us. So Paul, who would probably have had his difficult times, can write in very strong language, that ‘Look! I am telling you that if you get circumcised, Christ is going to be of no help to you. Tell you on earth that everyone who is circumcised is bound to perform the whole Torah. You have been cancelled out from Christ. You who get justified by the Torah, have fallen away from grace.’

2. Paul realised that Gentiles belong in God’s story, and that he himself is their apostle. This was the upshot of the visit that he made to Jerusalem, with the ‘pillars of the Church’ agreeing that this was indeed his mission in the Church.

3. Bitter experience taught Paul that the message had to be constantly repeated and reinforced; that is why we think of him as primarily a writer of letters. The point about letters is that they have a certain intimacy, and is the best possible substitute for Paul’s actually being there. It seems that he was not particularly good at writing; he tells the Galatians, in self-deprecation, ‘Look what large letters I wrote in my hand’. Generally, there is often a certain weakness in his letters (there are thirteen ascribed to him in the New Testament, and we know that he wrote others). And we even know the name of one of his secretaries, Tertullian, who bravely puts his head above the parapet towards the end of Romans, and greets his friends in Rome.

4. Finally, Paul has come to realise that the whole world belongs to God in Jesus; and that is why he feels obliged to cover the whole Mediterranean in such haste. Towards the end of his letter to Rome, he shares his travel-plans with the members of that Church, and having covered most of the Eastern Mediterranean he now feels obliged to go as far West as anyone could imagine, namely all the way to Spain. Feel the energy that pulses through him as he shares his travelling-plans with his correspondents.

What does this mean for us today?

You might think of the following four points, look out for them as you read Paul’s letters, and try to make them increasingly a part of your life.

• First, it is our task to believe in the Resurrection, to live as though it were true; it should make a noticeable difference.

• Secondly, Paul invites us (though this can of course never be forced) to do as he has done and fall in love with Christ.

• Thirdly, we must try and grasp in our living and our conversations with others what it means to live in Christ, that phrase occurs again and again in his writing. There is something mystical about it; and mysticism is not very fashionable these days, but we may need to rescue the word and bring it into our lives.

• Lastly, our task is the dangerously subversive one of proclaiming Jesus as Lord of all the earth. In days when the Church is increasingly a part of your life.

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y first brush with theology was in my Reader training in the Diocese of London in 1991, and then at Oxford when I began to do years and years of theological study. Although I specialised in systematic theology, I had a love of Paul which never really went away. And so, not the chance to follow a few of my other interests, I found myself gravitating towards Paul and his letters. A number of events then led me to go even deeper into my interest. I found myself leading a theological college and teaching within a largely evangelical constellation, where I was repeatedly asked what I thought about women in leadership. I realised that people required a teachable theology here. In my reading, I found that Paul was being used by both women and men to speak up for women, and I felt that I couldn’t disagree with more. But that is the nature of research.

What have I come to be sure of is that what we think about the Bible’s perspective on women matters, whether we consciously think about it or not. But furthermore it is also behooven upon Christian women in the 21st century to ask why (and I would say that about any Christian belief). How the Bible is interpreted is related to a woman’s place in the 21st century church and society, and in the family, matters for so many spheres of life. It informs concrete relations between men and women, what we teach our children, our understanding of identity, calling, and vocation, and not just who we are in the local congregation, but who we are before God. How do we go about exploring this topic and making our own decisions?

As women, we know that being a Christian means we have joined a predominantly androcentric and patristic story. Christianity was a predominantly androcentric and the Christian means we have joined as women, we know that being our own decisions? A short article cannot do justice to the full picture, so I will focus on just one aspect of what we know of Paul’s female co-workers – that is that when he writes about apostles, prophets, and teachers, he had women in view. The problem we have faced in the past, however, is the history and bias, the silencing of women’s histories, and assumptions regarding the roles of women, have conspired to determine both the translation and the interpretation of scripture that leads us to assume that Paul withheld certain ministries from women.

What are Apostles, Prophets and Teachers?

First, consider Junia, honoured alongside Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:9), hence, the need for these verses to be weighed and tested. Ben Witherington writes, Prophecy is addressed to the whole congregation – indeed to both men and women. Since prophecy involved authoritative exhortation or a new word of God, then it had a didactic purpose. Prophecy is not merely a personal testimony. There is nothing in 1 Corinthians 12:4–14 to suggest that prophecy (or preaching or teaching) were gender-specific gifts.2 Prophecy is given as a gift so that all might learn. John Owen, writing in the seventeenth century, said: ‘so prophecies are the “interpreters,” the declarers of the word, will, mind, or oracles of God unto others. … Hence, those who expounded the Scripture unto the church under the New Testament were called “prophecy,” and their work “prophecy,”’3 Women are clearly authorised to impart revelation in this sense, which in 1 Cor 12:28 Paul even places before teaching in order of precedence.

My final example is Phoebe, the deaconess of Cenchreae and patron leader in the early church. Phoebe is called both a diakonos and a prophet in Rom 16:1–2, diakonos being the word that Paul uses of himself (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6, 6:4, 11:23; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23, 25). This word is sometimes translated ‘servant’ even now. This speaks for itself. Elizabeth McCabe, however, makes the point that Paul describes Phoebe as ‘being of the church in Cenchrea’, the grammar implying a recognised position or ministry in the local church and not just a service. Diakonos can also be used of a courier or intermediary, which fits well with what we know of Phoebe as she was the carryer of the Epistle to the Romans. This task would entailed not simply delivering the letter, but in all likelihood ‘performing’ the letter for the benefit before with words and emotions as if from Paul himself. In other words, we would have read the letter knowledgeable. It seems nigh on impossible to deny that Phoebe would have had some kind of teaching role, given that she is tasked with delivering Paul’s most theologically dense letter. She must have been held in high esteem for her spiritual wisdom and knowledge. Phoebe was also a prophet. In the past this has been translated as ‘helper’, now understood to be a hopelessly inadequate rendition. Word studies lead interpreters to believe that proisteto carries with it connotations of authority and the exercise of authority over others. In its verb form it is translated to preside, rule over, direct, maintain etc. With Paul’s formal commendation of Phoebe to the Romans, the picture that we get is of a woman of a patron of Paul’s, a great friend and co-worker, entrusted with the safeguarding and delivering of sacred word and teaching and doctrine to a strategic church in a key city.

In sum, Paul was someone who clearly raised up women; we could name many more who feature in his letters as sisters, co-workers, and hosts of house-churches. He entrusted them with the spread of the gospel, the nurturing of new believers, instruction in general, and the governance of churches. The heartening shift that we see in the New Testament and in academe is that this is becoming more and more widely acknowledged and recognised. And it is with this background that many are revisiting the task of interpreting his words and doing so from a female perspective. Most significantly, they are finding that these texts do not necessarily speak of blanket prohibitions on women for all time, but can be read in a new light in current contexts. I leave the reader now to enjoy the task of doing his or her own research!

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References

4. Ibid., loc. 92.

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References

4. Ibid., loc. 92.

Dr Lucy Peppard is

Principal of Westminster Theological Centre, UK, and a Reader
There were valid reasons I am sure for this negative response – for these participants were faithful Christians. For instance, social reform tradition has identified Paul with the disempowerment of women in the Church (and for a corrective to this, see Lucy Peppiatt’s article, on pages 12-13. For another, Paul’s rather prickly temperament emerges in several places – he is honest about his feelings.

My counter-offer to those clergy and Readers was a view of Paul’s core theological understanding that informed and transformed everything he wrote. Some of the circumstances of Paul’s congregations are foreign to us. Even some of his social attitudes might even be ones that would displease us.

But when we preach from Paul, we need to know what really drives his teaching, and what must drive ours.

There are some theological principles in Paul’s teaching which we can proclaim yesterday, today and forever. When the earliest Christians put those principles into practice, or now when we seek to do so, some things may not be as universal or eternal as those principles. People can get muddled about what Paul said and ethics if they don’t first get the core of Paul’s theology right, or are not first transformed by what transformed Paul.

The ‘core’ of Paul’s theology

What do I mean, the core of Paul’s theology? He tells us himself when he says ‘I proclaim Christ crucified’ (1 Cor 1:23). We can follow the transformation that brought him to the proclamation of a Lord whose ‘power’ looks like ‘weakness’ (1 Cor 1:24–25); and we can also see how that revelation reshaped patterns of human relationships and ethics in his congregations. It led him to exhort believers to be powerfully weak, giving up and giving way from a position of strength, being ‘subject to’ as in submissive.

Paul’s famous encounter with the risen Christ is not a conversion from a zealous person to a mild one, but a theological transformation concerning the mystery of God. Paul was on an official commission from the Jerusalem Temple (Acts 9:1–20, 22:3–16). There were fellow Jews in Damascus who were proclaiming Jesus as Messiah – but Jesus had been executed by crucifixion. This is an ‘impossible’ thing in the thinking of Paul and the Temple authorities. If you thought someone was God’s appointed king, and then God allows the Romans to give him the shameful death of a rebel, clearly you are wrong and should be brought to the Temple for correction.

God’s anointed could not have been conquered, shamed and victimised. (This is probably what Peter thought too when he rebuked Jesus for speaking about the rejection and death of ‘the Son of Man’: Mark 8:31–33.)

Paul’s transformation on the Damascus Road was not that Jesus fulfilled the role of God’s Messiah in spite of his shameful death. Rather this very thing is the message of salvation, a crucified Messiah (and the very thing he had gone to Damascus to stop them saying). Paul’s whole idea of God’s power and wisdom was turned on its head: ‘God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength’ (1 Cor 1:25).

The pattern of the cross

From this transformation, Paul is able to express a theology of our salvation: ‘Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? … For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his’ (Rom 6:3–5).

More than this, he carries across from the crucifixion of Christ the practical implications of his death for the lives of those who follow him. The character and relationships of believers must be shaped by the character of the cross and self-giving that brought Jesus to the cross: ‘Love is patient; love is kind … It does not insist on its own way … It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things’ (1 Cor 13:4–7).

What did he get that bedrock idea – that we are united with Christ in his self-giving death, and so we imitate Christ in self-giving? It is only a speculation, but I would imagine it was an answer to that question in words of the risen Christ: ‘Why do you persecute me? … For if we have been baptized into Christ Jesus were you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been crucified with him?’ (Gal 2:20).

Although Paul’s exhortation is for all the believers – ‘Wait for another’ – in these circumstances, the force of it is to those of the higher ranks. To be the congregation of God, the Body of Christ, they should be waiting for the poor; because ‘God’s weakness is strengthened through my weakness’ (1 Cor 12:25); and because ‘there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28). It is theology in action: the self-giving of Christ on the cross must mean that Christians do not look after their own interests but the interests of others (Phil 2:3–4) and it can come down to the practicality of waiting.

You too have the Spirit of God

Paul can see this practical theology at work in many other places. It means that Christians who know they are free to do things and decisions, give up any ‘right’ if it offends fellow Christians with more tender consciences (e.g. 1 Cor 8:1–11 & 10:28–33). It comes down to a great injunction to ‘be subject to one another’ (Eph 5:21) – because that is the pattern of Christ’s own subjection.

I am the more impressed by Paul’s radical clarity about not insisting on one’s own wishes and demands, temperamentally quite a bossy person (and I say this as one myself!). It shows in places but it never over-rules the teaching. Like all who are in Christ, Paul has his own rights and authority, but if they impede others, he gives them up (e.g. 1 Cor 9). Moreover, though his commanding attitude is a manifestation of his love (1 Cor 13:5), Paul can see this practical theology at work in his own life.

‘I think that I too have the spirit of God’ . When Paul says this, he is offering a theology into practice.

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In the Steps of St Paul with HV Morton

Henry Vollam Morton (1892–1979) was an acclaimed travel writer who flourished in the interwar decades with a succession of commercially successful books, notably In Search of England (1927), which captured the hearts of a substantial readership, hungry for a nostalgic vision of idyllic, rural England in those politically turbulent times. In the 1930s Morton won further accolades, especially from Christian commentators, with In the Steps of the Master, a book which tracked Jesus’ ministry in the Holy Land. This was followed by In the Steps of St Paul, a more ambitious travelogue covering the great Apostle’s three missionary journeys, as documented in the Acts of the Apostles. Eighty-two years after its first publication, this book is still in print, and still worth studying – and enjoying – for the insights it provides to Paul’s adventurous travels.

There are several reasons why practising Christian ministers can value, and usefully deploy, In the Steps of St Paul. It is not simply because, like all Morton’s work, it is stylistically written, with light, delicate and evocative prose. Like all great travel writers, Morton makes places and incidents come alive in the reader’s imagination, but with this book he does it on two levels. First, he evokes the atmosphere of the Mediterranean lands of the 1st century, when tourism into parts of Turkey, Greece and Syria barely existed, and foreign travel was undertaken, if not perilously, in a spirit of caution, so that visitors anticipated possible discomforts. Morton learned to make his way in the more bucolic regions, ‘Which inn is the least interesting – entomologically?’

But more significant than this period interest is the way that Morton re-creates the way Paul traversed the first century Roman Empire, catching boats and walking the hot, dusty Roman roads. There were no visas, no border checks, and Paul’s command of Greek sufficed everywhere as he went from city to bustling city: all within the unified Roman Empire. By the twentieth century, all that had changed, and many of the great centres of population such as Corinth and Ephesus had fallen into decay and become partly or wholly deserted. It is a tribute to Morton’s skill as a writer that he is able to augment the often very brief descriptions within the Acts of the Apostles and to regenerate the crucial atmosphere of Paul’s time. Using Morton as a guide, Paul’s adventures gain new impetus, and new understanding. The lively text of Acts becomes livelier still; the missionary journeys are invigorated in our imagination. As Morton crosses the Aegean, he thinks of Paul at Troas, ‘wondering if he had seen waves the colour of lead breaking on the rocks, if he had heard the wind screaming over the heights of Metylene, and if he had seen the rain-banks scudding down the Gulf.’

Morton, perhaps wisely, does not give quite so much emphasis to the Pauline epistles. He confesses that he is no theologian, and he only refers to Paul’s letters when they help to illustrate the local conditions. His book is about the actions of Paul the traveller, the adventurer for Christ; we need to look elsewhere for discussion of Paul’s doctrines. Nonetheless, for anyone preaching on Acts, this book is an attractive addition to any commentary. Morton certainly knows his Bible, and the historical context of the first century.

These points are powerfully illustrated in the visit to Ephesus. Chapter 19 of Acts provides a narrative full of incident, narrating the early history of the silversmiths who made the statuettes of the goddess Diana (Acts 19:23f), but for a full picture of this intriguing Mediterranean city we need Morton’s help.

He came by train to the little village of Seljuk, made of Ephesian stone pillaged from the ruined city which lies a mile or so down a dusty road. Walking past the gaunt piers of an aqueduct built by the Emperor Justinian, each pier now a stork’s nest, he came to the site of the Temple of Diana of the Ephesians. In the 1930s all that could be seen was a huge, stagnant pond, thick with weed, home to myriad frogs – who constantly croaked, in Morton’s imagination, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians.’ He admitted that nothing in his Mediterranean wanderings had illustrated the pathos of decay more than the site of this temple, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world, now essentially reduced to a ground plan outlined in stagnant water.

He moved on to the theatre in the ruined city, the scene of the silversmiths’ riot. Although it had been rebuilt after Paul’s time, the structure was essentially the same as it was in the first century, a building that could seat twenty-four thousand people. Morton mused at this point, opened his New Testament, and envisaged Paul’s life in the city:

Despite his hardships Paul seems to have prospered in Ephesus. When the usual opposition of the Jews was moving towards a breach of the peace, he quietly left them and transferred his preaching to the lecture-hall of a teacher named Tyrannus. There he opened his doors to Jews and Greeks – in fact, to any man or woman who cared to listen.

We are not told whether Tyrannus hired his lecture-hall for St Paul for money, or whether he freely offered it when he was not himself using it. It is, however, an interesting addition in the famous Codex Bezae, which is not found in the Authorised or Revised Versions, which states that St Paul had the use of the hall ‘from the fifth to the tenth hour’. This would mean that Tyrannus used the room from early morning until eleven a.m. and St Paul until two hours before sunset. This is in perfect accord with the custom of the time. Schools began in the cool hours of the early morning, and closed before sunrise, and all work ceased during the warm hours of the day, to be resumed again after the sun had lost its strength.

So St Paul must have preached and made his Ephesian converts not at night, as one usually imagines, but during those hours of the day when most people were enjoying a siesta. Then, his preaching over, he may have gone to some horrible den to labour far from the city: all within the unified Roman Empire.

In Search of England

However, a scathing biography by Michael Bartholomew published in 2004 accused him of gross hypocrisy. He held extreme anti-democratic views and emigrated to live in South Africa at the height of the Apartheid era; and there is apparent evidence that he was regularly unfaithful to his wife. Whatever the truth, and whatever flaws Morton may have had as a person, there is no doubt in my mind that his masterly writing will endure, and that it should continue to delight new generations of readers. His travelogues of the biblical lands and locations will always impress as useful and illuminating guides to the New Testament, despite his apparently well-documented flaws as a person. This would not be the first time that God’s Spirit has worked for the greater good via a weak and imperfect vessel.

References

1. In the Steps of St Paul, pp. 331–32. See also the footnote to Acts 19:9 found in many Bibles.
**Key words in the New Testament**

Roger Clarke’s article on New Testament Greek in the Spring issue of The Reader was very well received. So we are delighted he has agreed to take a detailed look at some key Greek words. In this issue, the word is: **ΚΥΡΙΟΣ – KYRIOS**

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Celebrate faith together 2018

At St George’s, Leeds, a number of church members have become involved in working with local Jews and Muslims. David Kibble explains how this has come about and how recently a group of students from the three faiths have worked on a project aimed at celebrating the value that belonging to a faith community can have.

Churches get involved in inter-faith activities for a variety of reasons: the path of St George’s was somewhat different to most. Around twelve years ago the church began to organise pilgrimages to Israel / Palestine. The pilgrimages were primarily aimed at enabling members of the congregation to see for themselves traditional holy sites, but when one visits the two countries one cannot avoid bumping into politics. So we noted the existence of the separation wall and spoke with Palestinian Christians who made us aware of how life for them was difficult under Israeli occupation. Our guides were all Palestinian Christians and, although they are careful about what they say and don’t say, it becomes obvious to us as pilgrims that life for them is often difficult: they sometimes live what we might call a ‘second rate’ existence in comparison to their Jewish cousins. So it was natural for us, on return, to talk about the Israel / Palestine issue with members of the local Jewish community in Leeds. A group of four of us from the church set about to talk with a number of them over the course of three years. During this time we began to see that there was a Jewish side to the Israel / Palestine story. As our archbishop said when he visited the area, you can visit the Holy Land for a few weeks and think that you’ve understood the problem. However, he continued, you can live there for two years and then realise how complex the issue is. That’s what we have learned. In addition to our discussions, nine members of the church visited Auschwitz and Holocaust sites in Israel and Palestine during which we talked with a whole range of people from both sides of the divide.

A few years ago members of the Jewish community challenged us as to what we, as members of the Christian church, could do about the persecution of Christians by Islamic State and by other groups particularly in the Middle East and Africa. A group of us, both Jews and church members, discussed the issue together. We decided that our best course of action would be for us to support the local Muslim community who were already struggling and speaking out against extremism in the name of their faith. This link with Jews and Muslims led us to organise together an event we called ‘Standing Together’, about eighty members of the three faith groups had conversations with one another around coffee tables about issues facing our respective communities. We agreed together that violence has no place in religion.

Enter the students!

Our local Imam suggested that it would be a good idea if we could organise a young people’s version of ‘Standing Together’. So I chaired a small group of Jewish, Christian and Muslim students from the local universities and from local Muslim Youth Groups – both Sunni and Shia. I confess I had assumed that we might agree together to hold a similar sort of event where some people made presentations and everyone talked together. The students listened to my presentation of ‘Standing Together’ intently but then said politely, ‘No, we don’t want to do that.’ What then did they want to do? They formulated their aims very quickly, aims which reflected their own experience:

1. to enable people to see that belonging to a faith community was something very positive; and
2. to show people that our three faiths can and often do work together.

(We noted that this interworking had been particularly apparent after the terrorist attack in Manchester and other subsequent attacks and then following the fire at Grenfell Tower.)

So how would they achieve their aims? They decided to begin by creating a Facebook page which would ‘proclaim the good news.’

In the spring of 2018 the Facebook page was launched with the title Faiths Together. We were aware that religion often got a lot of bad press: this was something we wished to counter. We soon discovered that a lot of good news can be found if you just take a little time to look beneath the surface for it. Taking time to scan faith newspapers and various faith leaders’ Twitter feeds enables us to pull together a regular stream of good news. At the start we found articles about how scientists at the University of Portsmouth concluded that religious faith led to people living a more flourishing life, how Muslims in London had opened a shelter for the homeless following the fire at Grenfell Tower, how Christians and Muslims in West Africa protect one another’s places of worship on Fridays and Sundays, and how members of a synagogue in Golders Green were supporting Muslims in their quest to establish a new mosque. The Muslim girls’ choir which sang at St Paul’s Cathedral at the service for the victims of Grenfell Tower proved popular as did Liverpool fans chanting support for one of their Muslim players on the terraces. Humour can play a part too: did you hear of the Scottish Muslim who gave up Ian Bru for Lent – and, incidentally, gave the money saved to a Romanian respectively to help persecuted Christians? We are gradually building up followers.

A school assembly

Another way of getting our message across involved taking an assembly in a local Church of England secondary school. We had to remember that, despite what some may think, students are actually busy people, so when the school asked us to do four assemblies in a week I balked. I thought we might just about be able to offer three; on the fourth day two Sixth Formers took our script and PowerPoint and presented the assembly themselves. So we ended up with six young people taking three assemblies. Each one had a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim involved in the presentation. The message was the same as before: to show how being a member of a faith community is something – and how the three Abrahamic faiths often work together. The assembly mainly took the form of telling stories like those we had published on the Facebook page but we also used more personal stories. Two young people from St George’s told the story of our fresh expressions church, Lighthouse. The church has around a hundred of those ‘battered and bruised by the storms of life’ worshipping in its Crypt over lunch every Sunday. The story of one of its members who at one stage was living in a car park and shooting drugs ensured us the ears of the school’s students. That’s one of our Muslim students talked about what his faith meant to him and how it had helped a relative through bouts of mental illness. So we didn’t just stick to good news stories about others – we talked about what was good news for us.

After our assemblies we went for coffee in a local café. We talked together for half an hour or so: that in itself was a great experience. We realised that we have a lot in common. I saw how seriously our assembly participants took their faiths; one of the Jewish students had been to a summer yeshiva (school) in Israel and often studied Jewish texts with a local rabbi; another had been on a social action visit with the Chief Rabbi to Africa. One of the Muslim students acted as an imam to other students and had recently visited Muslim communities in Indonesia. Our two Christian young people were working full time with St George’s Lighthouse church.

At the end of our project one of the Jewish students involved gave the following comment to the Jewish Telegraph:

‘I’m delighted to have helped in the setting up of this venture. Being a part of Faiths Together has given me the opportunity to work alongside members of other communities to promote positive messages about our faiths, a third way that is extremely important to show the public how united these faith communities are, and can be, as opposed to the divisive ways the media often, unfortunately, portrays…’

I think he spoke for us all.

Notes


2 Follow our Faiths Together Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/FaithsTogether/
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erusalem is an ancient city which has been both fought and prayed over by the three Abrahamic faiths. It is a city of many visitors, and some of these will make a trip to a large site on a hill outside the city centre. There they will find an attractively designed exhibition complex which deals with more recent Jewish history than that found in the old part of the city.

You start the exhibition in near darkness and move along a long corridor like hall with exhibits either side so that you zigzag your way through the exhibition towards the small light, higher than the entrance, at the end of the corridor and which is the exit. This is Yad Vashem, the official Holocaust Memorial Centre in Jerusalem. The exhibition starts with details of the life of European Jews in the early Twentieth Century. It takes you through the history of European Jewry of the 1930s and 1940s, a world that has long been extinguished, and into the darkest part of the regime with its ghettos and death camps. It details graphically the descent of European Jews into the horrors devised for them by the German Nazis. It concludes with the trials of some of those responsible for what Jewish people call the Shoah (the biblical word for destruction). It is a place both literally and spiritually. Amongst the horror and indignation that I felt over how human beings could treat other fellow human beings in such a manner was an overriding question, ‘Why did this happen?’

Approximately six million of the nine million European Jews then in Europe were murdered by the Nazis, along with millions of non-Jews. It was the culmination of a period of intense hatred and animosity which accelerated (but did not begin) in Europe once the Nazis took power. We are familiar with the anti-Semitism that swept across Nazi Europe in the 1930s, and yet many in Europe aided and abetted them. The Nazis perpetuated a pseudo ideology of racial superiority whereby the lives of non-Jewish Europeans and even of some Jews as sub-human. Many agreement in Germany retreated behind the argument that they were only ‘following orders’ or turned their backs on the suffering of the Jewish people. Relatively few Christian leaders stated whether in Germany or elsewhere in Europe actively helped the Jewish people during their persecution, and silence or indifference often amounted to acquiescence. Many were thereby complicit in the persecution of the Jews through that silence. During the Holocaust there was little desire by many to have regard to the interests of their Jewish ‘neighbour’.

Why was this? Anti-Semitism was not something that only arose with the Nazis, and the origins of anti-Semitism (a word originating in nineteenth-century Germany) in both Europe and Western Christianity have been traced back to the early conflicts between Jews and Christians. In Matthew 27:25 it is said ‘the [Jewish] people as a whole answered Pilate, “His blood be on us and on our children!”’ This and other verses1 have been used to justify Christian prejudice against all Jews and promote the idea that all Jews were responsible for the death of Christ. For this and other reasons Jews in Christian Europe faced discrimination and persecution. For example, in England from 1189 to 1190, anti-Jewish pogroms took place in London, York and other cities and towns in England. In York the Jewish population of 150 were murdered or took their own lives after they were besieged by rioters in York Castle. This was but one of many pogroms (an organised massacre of a particular ethnic group) against Jews throughout Europe over the centuries. Jews were banned from owning land, from practising certain professions and from living from where they chose. The Christian ‘teaching of contempt’ through sermons, teaching and doctrines has been seen as an aid to the growth of the anti-Semitic Nazi ideology in the 1930s. In societies where the church held influence, blaming the ‘Jews’, that is all Jews at all times, for the death of Jesus, was one step away from blaming all Jews for all of the misfortunes in the world. The anti-Semitism latent in some Christian thinking was highlighted after the Second World War by the work of a Frenchman, Jules Isaac. Before the war Isaac had been France’s inspector general for education. He had written well-received textbooks on French and world history. When the Germans invaded France in 1940, he as a Jew along with his family had to go into hiding. The actions of the Nazis against the Jews and the lack of condemnation by Christians led Isaac to ask why this was the case. While in hiding he managed to obtain study and church documents and he formed the view that the Christian hostility towards Jews arose in the early years after the death of Jesus and then continued. Isaac’s Catholic and Protestant scriptural commentaries provided a misleading picture of Jesus’ attitude toward Israel and that this was mostly responsible for the anti-Semitism found in Western Christianity. He set out his ideas in his book Jesus and Israel2 in which he wrote ‘The perennial source of this latent anti-Semitism is none other than the Christian love of teaching in all its forms, the traditional and tendentious interpretation of Scripture, the interpretation which I am convinced is contrary to the truth and love of Him who was the Jew Jesus.’ In his book he set out twenty-one propositions including the following:

1. The Christian religion is the daughter of the Jewish religion.

2. The Gospel and its entire tradition is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition.

3. It is incorrect to say that the Jewish people caused Jesus’ death. The majority of Jewish people no longer lived in Palestine and many were unlikely to have been aware of Jesus’ existence.

4. Jesus preached a Gospel of love and forgiveness. Why would he condemn his own people, the only people to whom he spoke?

5. Jesus named in advance those responsible for the Passion, namely the elders, chief priests and scribes (the four Gospels make it clear that it was the chief priests who acted against Jesus unbeknown to the people).

6. The Jewish people are innocent of the crimes of which the Christian tradition accuses them: they did not reject Jesus, they did not crucify him.

7. It was Pilate who had entire control over Jesus’ life and death, and Jesus was condemned for messianic pretensions, which for the Romans and not the Jews was a crime.

After the Second World War there were still significant levels of anti-Semitism in parts of Europe, as well as a recognition by some Christians of the guilt of the churches for their silence over the Holocaust and the teaching of contempt towards Jews and Judaism. The start of a reappraisal of Christian – Jewish relations was helped through the work of the newly formed International Council of Christians and Jews. This was influenced by the ideas of Isaac and in 1947 the Council produced a document known as Ten Points.3 This repudiated (as did Nostre Aetate some eighteen years later) the notion that the Jewish people were (or remain) collectively responsible for the death of Jesus or have been spurned by God. It warned against the defamation of the Jewish people and the misuse of Christian teaching and Scripture for such purposes. The first four of The Ten Points are summarised below:

1. God speaks us all through the Old and the New Testaments.

2. Jesus was [a Jew] and was born of a Jewish mother. His everlasting love and forgiveness embrace His own people and the whole world.

3. The first disciples, the apostles and the first martyrs were Jews.

4. The fundamental commandment of Christianity, to love God and one’s neighbour, is binding upon both Christians and Jews in all human relationships, without any exception.

In 1965 the Roman Catholic Church published what was seen as a ground breaking document, Nostre Aetate (In Our Time)4 which said that Jews in general should not be held responsible for the death of Jesus. This has helped lead to a further improvement in relations between Jews and Catholics, and several Protestant denominations have since issued similar statements. It is hard for most of us living in a secure and peaceful country to imagine or understand the horrors that so many people experienced during that time. How can we ever fully understand the trauma and legacy that survivors and their families carry. We can try to show respect by acknowledging that history is not repeated. On an individual level it shows us that one needs to consider the fullness of a statement, reflect upon and talk about the role and place of ‘the Jew’ in Scripture. It also indicates that we should be prepared to examine and challenge ideas, theology and ideology, that do not require the satisfaction to look for the interests of our ‘neighbour’. Since he set out his ideas in 1951, Isaac’s book Jesus and Israel has been genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur and now Myanmar, along with countless wars and crimes committed by one group against another and against other fellow human beings. The question remains ‘why’? Why do human beings behave so badly towards one another? Indifference and to neglect of the well-being of others separates us from that which we should truly be. The lessons of the Holocaust can be applied to all peoples, countries and times and help us to better understand and appreciate who is our ‘neighbour’. Isaac’s family did not live to see the publication of his book. He dedicated it to them, ‘In MEMORIAM To my wife and my daughter Martyrs. Killed by Hitler’s Nazis. Killed simply because their name was ISSAC’.

To find out more

If you would like more information about visiting Yad Vashem please contact the CCI office at www.cci.org.uk

You may also find the following websites useful.

www.historicuk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryOfEngland/Pogroms-1189-1190/ (including the following books:


References

1 See for example, John 18:40–41 and 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16.


3 A similar argument is made by John Dominic Crossan, Crossan, J. D., ed. The Historical Jesus, 1993.

4 The full document including the remaining six points can be found within the document A Time for Recommitment on the International Council for Christians and Jews website, www.iccj.org/A-Time-for-Recommitment-The-Twelve-Points-of-Berlin.184.0.html

5 Pope Paul VI, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions Nostre Aetate. The Vatican, 1965.
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hen I was growing up in the 1940s and early 50s, emotional matters were something to be restricted, especially if you wanted to be a man, and in particular an Englishman. Big boys don’t cry. My father and uncles had fought in the war, but didn’t like to talk about it, because it was showing off, not only their own fear, but all fear from something darker. Uncle Ron had been a PoW in North Africa, and Dad had helped open up the camps in Germany at the end of the war. That, Mum said, was one reason he didn’t go to church much. Not that our church was that emotional, although I can remember sermons on the last four last things in a dark church in December evenings were scary enough. It was all very different in the little Methodist Mission where I found a personal faith in my teens, though I sometimes found the visiting preachers, particularly those up the parochial scale, in Bedford, talking about ‘the things of God … how God had visited their souls with his love …’. As a result, the unregenerate flower in church only dates back to the Victorian period.6 At the same time, flowers in church are on the right way. The tears of Mary Magdalene were an emblem of all that was being rejected. ‘Thus in the cool light of reason is not to be trusted,’ wrote John Bunyan, in his famous tract on the Fourth Commandment, ‘When these were both dated turning points, they came in the context of much longer, dedicated, if not always successful attempts to serve God and convert others.

There was a Great Awakening in North America at the same time, linked to Jonathan Edwards. His Whited-Out Anglican missionary preaching. Jonathan Edwards, probably the greatest American theologian, was driven to test the theory of a doctrine that existed in an enormously detailed, and enduringly helpful, Treatise Concerning Religious Affections.2 After the New Testament, this is the best treatment of the importance of emotion in Christianity that I know, though the much more recent book by Robert C Roberts is a shorter and more accessible starting point for the contemporary reader.3 Edwards begins with scepticism – ‘False affections, if they are at all strong, are much more forward to declare themselves, than true.’ (p.137) Like many eighteenth-century thinkers, he missed the point that emotion, if not entirely objectively defined by Dr Johnson in his 1755 Dictionary as ‘a vain belief of private revelation; a false effect’, is often ‘objectively and more communal. In his Parochial Sermons, Newman argued that ‘men may have their religious feelings aroused, without being on that account conscious of the role of feelings may help us to understand the ups and downs in our attempts to follow Christ; indeed, to recognise that some of our emotional attachments to certain practices, and indeed our discomfort with others, have reasons that are less to do with our emotions, subjecting them to spiritual consideration, perhaps with a trusted advisor, is one way. But in all this, the cool light of reason is not be downgraded, either.

Notes and references
1 From Charles Gabbard to the Chief of Sinners, John Bunyan’s testimony, first published 1666.

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Reading and worship, Readers are responsible for managing the emotional temperature of the service. Most crucially in funerals, we are holding the boundary, giving space for grief (even if the family asked for a ‘celebration’ of the life of the departed) but keeping calm and not indulging or succumbing to our own feelings. The extraordinary outpouring of grief at Princess Diana’s death was a sign that we have recalibrated acceptable emotion in our mourning relatively recently. Some grumpy commentators at the time described it as ‘emotional incontinence’.

Whatever your view of changes in the public expression of mourning, and its increasingly tenuous connection with Christian religion, there are times when emotional warmth is positively essential to the reception of the Gospel. One of my Christian heroes, John Bunyan, heard some poor women in Bedford talking about ‘the things of God … how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus … And methought God had visited their souls with his love’. As a result, the unregenerate young man was overcome with ‘a very great softness and tenderness of heart, which caused [him] to fall under the conviction of what by Scripture they asserted.’1 The journey from that moment of emotional recognition to settled faith was not an immediate or straightforward one, but we should note the emotional warmth in ordinary believers that set it on its way. And it should help to dispel the caricature of the pious Puritan. Yes, they did abolish Christmas in the 1640s as a pagan feast, but they cultivated the emotions in their spiritual lives. ‘Passionate Puritans’ would be better.

Subsequent holiness movements, such as Methodism, had similarly emotionally births. John Wesley, already an admirer of the Moravians that comforted him in his first, abortive preaching visit to America, felt his ‘heart strangely warmed’ in a prayer meeting with them in Aldersgate, London in 1738 – though, as Diarmid MacCulloch points out, he had just been to Evenings in St Paul’s, which may have contributed to the emotional atmosphere as well as the reading from Luther on Romans that so impressed him.3 Three days before, his brother Charles had experienced an evangelical conversion, also in London; according to his journal: ‘Still I felt a violent opposition and reluctance to believe; yet still the Spirit of God strove with my own and the evil spirit, till by degrees he chased away the darkness of my unbelief. I found myself convinced, I knew not how, nor when.’2 While these were both dated turning points, they came in the context of much longer, dedicated, if not always successful attempts to serve God and convert others.

There was a Great Awakening in North America at the same time, linked to Jonathan Edwards. His Whited-Out Anglican missionary preaching. Jonathan Edwards, probably the greatest American theologian, was driven to test the theory of a doctrine that existed in an enormously detailed, and enduringly helpful, Treatise Concerning Religious Affections.2 After the New Testament, this is the best treatment of the importance of emotion in Christianity that I know, though the much more recent book by Robert C Roberts is a shorter and more accessible starting point for the contemporary reader.3 Edwards begins with scepticism – ‘False affections, if they are at all strong, are much more forward to declare themselves, than true.’ (p.137) Like many eighteenth-century thinkers, he missed the point that emotion, if not entirely objectively defined by Dr Johnson in his 1755 Dictionary as ‘a vain belief of private revelation; a false effect’, is often ‘objectively and more communal. In his Parochial Sermons, Newman argued that ‘men may have their religious feelings aroused, without being on that account conscious of the role of feelings may help us to understand the ups and downs in our attempts to follow Christ; indeed, to recognise that some of our emotional attachments to certain practices, and indeed our discomfort with others, have reasons that are less to do with our emotions, subjecting them to spiritual consideration, perhaps with a trusted advisor, is one way. But in all this, the cool light of reason is not be downgraded, either.

The term ‘emotional intelligence’ has become something of a cliché nowadays, a ‘soft skill’ that is valued in relationships at work as well as in more intimate settings. It could be argued that it is essential for all ministers, including Readers. Another instance of psychobabble leaking into theology? While I wouldn’t like to undervalue emotional sensitivity as a Christian virtue – and having a heart is clearly a bad thing’ – a little discernment is needed.

I have been arguing that we need to attend to emotion in the way we conceive and conduct our worship, and indeed our personal devotion to God. Emotions, however, are an aspect of the nature of the New Testament. Emotion also has a history within Christianity, certainly British Christianity, as well as in one or other of its counter movements. The conscious of the role of feelings may help us to understand the ups and downs in our attempts to follow Christ; indeed, to recognise that some of our emotional attachments to certain practices, and indeed our discomfort with others, have reasons that are less to do with our emotions, subjecting them to spiritual consideration, perhaps with a trusted advisor, is one way. But in all this, the cool light of reason is not be downgraded, either.

Notes and references
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I was travelling towards Bethlehem to be as well. If some people their sheep, and could have guided them have been visible from the fields where star that led the Magi in Matthew must between them so that, for example, the gospels contain an accurate account stories in this way also meets the second inherent improbability. Using the Bible different ways. The important points elements can be combined in many the accounts are so different that the first appears, because only two of the • contains some contemporary • is true to the Bible; • doesn’t upset the older members of the congregation; • doesn’t bore the children; • includes some contemporary references; • includes some aspect of the story they may not have thought of before; • ends on a positive note – Christmas really is good news!

The first task is not as difficult as it at first appears. There are only two points from the gospels contain the Nativity story and the accounts are so different that the elements can be combined in many different ways. The important points are not to contradict each other, and not to draw attention to the discrepancies between them or their inherent improbability. Using the Bible stories in this way also meets the second objective of not upsetting the older members of the congregation. If the gospels contain an accurate account of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus then there must be some overlap between them so that, for example, the star that led the Magi in Matthew must have been visible from the fields where the shepherds in Luke were guarding their sheep, and could have guided them to the stable as well. If some people were travelling towards Bethlehem to be counted in accordance with the decree from Augustus, then other people must have been leaving Bethlehem to be counted elsewhere, and perhaps this is what some of the stories in the Bible is why it could not accommodate any more new arrivals.

The second and third objectives also fit neatly together; by including some references to the world today you can keep the attention of listeners of all ages. Arrangements must have been made for the actual counting, which must have been done in Roman numbers – and everyone knows how difficult those are. In previous years I have linked the nativity story to the ‘millennium bug’ by describing how the book-keeping in the inn was in a muddle because of the calendar change from BC to AD. It is even possible to draw parallels between the Roman occupation of Palestine and the events leading up to Brexit; for example, the younger people may have gone to Bethlehem more quickly on the new Roman roads, while the older residents remembered Ireland in the past when it had control of its own affairs.

In addition to just recounting the story, it is also possible to include some teaching. Many people today, for example, do not realise that shepherds were treated as social outcasts in the Middle East at the time of Jesus. One way of introducing this is to refer to the smell that must have been created by a group of unwashed sheep attendants arriving in the stable, and the contrast between their social status and the fact that they already knew about the baby because they had been entrusted with the information by the angel. This information was not given to the people you would expect, like King Herod, but to ordinary people – like most of the members of your congregation – a key point to make here.

And finally it is important to make the point that the birth of Jesus is only the beginning of the gospel story. Many of your listeners may only come to church at Christmas, and this may even be the only part of the Bible with which they are familiar. So it is important to capitalise on their interest, by persuading them to come again to hear the next instalment. The Christmas baby is not just a Middle Eastern refugee child with an unmarried mother; it is none other than the maker of the universe, come to live with us, as had been foretold for centuries. So I always end with the sun rising on the morning after the birth, and the innkeeper realising how special the new-born infant is, not just for him but for everyone.

So, every year, the Christmas challenge is to repeat the old familiar story in a new way. A similar approach can, of course, be used for other stories from the Bible, particularly for school assemblies. If you would like to see the version of the Christmas story which I used last year, as a ‘worked example’, contact me at reader@theochc.org.parish. uk and I will be happy to share it with you.

Edward Mynors is a Reader in the Chichester Diocese.

Reader ministry in context

Does your heart sink every year, as Christmas approaches? Edward Mynors suggests some new ways of engaging with your occasional congregation.

As a Reader, I greatly enjoy the challenge that I do for my church.

However, I am also a teacher of physics in a multicultural 11 – 18 school in Birmingham, and this gives me different challenges.

The school is over 50 per cent BAME, so many religions and none are represented in a typical class while the school is carbon-dated to about ecclesiastic.

The school is repeatedly rated ‘outstanding’ but therefore there is pressure on teachers and pupils to retain this grading. Of course working with teenagers always presents challenges, and mental health is currently a high priority. As the Head of years of my faith and work have come together in three particular areas.

1 Just over a year ago, I was asked by two sixth form students to be the ‘female teacher overseeing the school Christian Union (since there was already a male teacher).’ Typically between 10 and 24 pupils come each week, and fall into one of four categories. Some are Christians, often from strong evangelical families and churches. Some agnostic boys come for philosophical arguments. Some pupils are genuinely seeking, and a few come because they enjoy the acceptance and attention.

The challenge is being met by two sixth form pupils who invite speakers, lead sessions, organise the cake rota, and advertise meetings. This year we have a new senior room. My role has been limited to encouragement, oversight, and occasionally stepping in when the philosophical discussions go too far. I also pray, which inevitably feels like the least obvious but possibly one of the most important roles. One challenge is to support the variety of Christian views that may be present in the room, when the individual pupils have been brought up to believe ‘all Christians think like this’.

Doubts are also present. A sixth form pupil, who had been arguing clearly for Jesus during the meeting, asked me privately, ‘Do you mean that my faith is not just psychological?’ I had about 60 seconds to give an answer before the bell rang: I am not sure that I answered it well. Another girl, who we had hoped would lead the CU in the future, emailed me last summer to say that she had decided to stop being a Christian. This was hardly unusual, and I am not sure where my role lies between Christian pastor, and teacher employed by the school, especially when I continue to teach her twice a week. I pray for those who may appear strong to me but are struggling inside and dare not say anything.

Recently, I heard from a student who had never given a talk to a CU before, but had been recommended by her vicar who is also a committed church member, well-prepared and pointed to Jesus. I suggested that she might consider training as a Reader! 2 In class, I teach Physics. My observation is that most non-Christians have little interest in a supposed clash between science and faith. Only once in ten years has a pupil commented, ‘I thought scientists couldn’t be Christians’. However, people of faith worry, I cannot directly share my faith when teaching, but I make it clear that I am a Christian and I try to affirm the right of anyone to have a faith and do science.

Church appears to be a powerful tool to draw practical examples of many scientific applications. When I teach sound and T-loops, I mention my church along with different ways of hearing and a few who bad heard them. My role has been to encourage, and make clear that I am a Christian. I know that union reps don’t want the church to be known as a place where people are not welcome, and that they are familiar. So it is important to capitalise on their interest, by persuading them to come again to hear the next instalment. The Christmas baby is not just a Middle Eastern refugee child with an unmarried mother; it is none other than the maker of the universe, come to live with us, as had been foretold for centuries. So I always end with the sun rising on the morning after the birth, and the innkeeper realising how special the new-born infant is, not just for him but for everyone.

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Is what you do during the week as much of a part of your ministry as leading worship and preaching on a Sunday?

For Stephanie Hayton, it most certainly is.

An interview with David Cranston FRCS, surgeon and Reader; author of John Stott and The Hookses

You are a hospital consultant – a profoundly busy vocation – and an author. How do you also find time for the demands of lay ministry? I originally trained as a Reader in 1976, when I became vicar of All Souls, Langham Place, bought The Hookses in 1954. It quickly became a noted sanctuary of Christian refreshment for John and many others: a retreat centre for reflection, prayer and writing, set within magnificent, unspoiled Pembrokeshire coastal scenery, with its rare birdlife.

He goes on to say: ‘Friends who have visited me at The Hookses have remarked on its remoteness, for it is about a mile from the nearest other human habitation. It was connected to the telephone only in 1996 and to mains electricity only in 1988. Looking through my hermitage window, and surveying the panorama of cliff, sky and sea, and ever-changing colours, friends have also enquired how I can manage to concentrate when working at my desk. I can only reply that I find the view more inspiring than distracting. ‘I never cease to thank God for his provision of The Hookses. Its discovery was a notable example of serendipity, ‘the faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident’, since I found what I was not looking for. Both the hermitage and my cliff-ledge sanctuary have proved a unique refuge in which I have been able without interruption to read, to think, to pray and to write.’

The Hookses occupies a truly spectacular position within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and a 186-mile Coastal Path trail skirts the property just outside the boundary fence, while sheep graze peacefully across the airfield and along the cliff edge.

On entering the village of Dale the driver proceeds around the one-way system to find a small single-track road opposite the church. Continuing up this to a farm gate, the visitor comes across a notice reading ‘No entry without permission’. Hesitantly they go through the gate and find themselves on the taxy-way of the old airfield. There is no building in sight. Driving down 400 yards they then come to a sign which says ‘The Hookses’, and down to the left along a short length of tarmac road there it sits, nestled in its own little valley, on the cliff edge with the vast expanse of the ocean beyond – an approach and a view that has changed little in the 65 years since John Stott first saw it in 1952.

Below the main house and set into the boundary fence, while sheep graze peacefully across the airfield and along the cliff edge.

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This is a reprint of a work of theological writing in the immediate antecedents of the 20th century by a laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, whose erstwhile fame was a result of his fastidiously crafted and thought in the text, but the passage of a century since its first appearance has, in general, slighted, the title has been deeply appreciated by a grieving nation. The editorial essays and footnotes occupy a very large proportion of the print, show a high level of scholarship and are of considerable historical interest. Stuart Bell’s essay makes a valiant attempt to demonstrate that, even after a century, the book has not been lost and is of considerable historical interest. This book is thoroughly recommended.

MARION GRAY

God Among the Ruins
Rags and Bones.

This is a reprint of a work of theological writing in the immediate antecedents of the 20th century by a laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, whose erstwhile fame was a result of his fastidiously crafted and thought in the text, but the passage of a century since its first appearance has, in general, slighted, the title has been deeply appreciated by a grieving nation. The editorial essays and footnotes occupy a very large proportion of the print, show a high level of scholarship and are of considerable historical interest. Stuart Bell’s essay makes a valiant attempt to demonstrate that, even after a century, the book has not been lost and is of considerable historical interest. This book is thoroughly recommended.

MARION GRAY

The Abiding Presence
Parish

Just as we are encouraging priest-in-training, when rural parishioners find their ancient churches designated ‘festival churches’ (i.e. not used very often) along comes this well-researched theological study of an Anglican theology of place. Rumsey’s thesis is based on Jacob’s dream when he fell into a disturbed sleep after cheating his brother and dreamed he saw angels on a ladder set up between earth and heaven. Jacob woke and said, ‘Truly God is in this place.’ Then follows an erudite study of the philosophy, socio-geography and history of the English parish. ‘Parish’ is derived from the Greek, paroikes, meaning ‘those living on the boundaries’ (see Luke 24.18), which, after Jacob, Rumsey sees as the place on the boundary between heaven and earth—a new community. Rumsey says the parish is the place where we belong, it is local, and God is only ever encountered locally, not because He (sic) is local, but because we are.

The book contains three challenges: the viability of the parish system; finding a contemporary response to the mission challenge; and the necessity of reaffirming our contribution to the common good. Reading it is worth the challenge.

CHRISTINE MCMULLEN

Merton’s Palace of Nowhere
Migrants Duggan

This is an honest and moving book, with a message for everyone who has struggled or suffered. It is based on the book of Habakkuk, which tells of the prophet’s despair, questioning, wrestling with God and emerging, as an expression of his faith, from the process. Duggan tells her own story of despair, questioning, wrestling and her emergence as a person. This book is honest and gently emotive. It is not intended to be a happy story, but it is a tremendously encouraging one. Duggan’s chapter on ‘Walking with the wounded’ is particularly moving. The writing is warm and compelling. It could sit a home group as well as an individual. Each chapter contains simple but practical suggestions to help the reader put the message into practice. It is a book of hope, which nearly everyone would benefit from reading. I recommend it.

HARRISON ROWE

According to the Scriptures: the death of Christ in the Old Testament and the New
David Allen

It goes without saying that the doctrine of salvation is at the centre of our faith, but in general too much gets said and written without reference to the Old Testament. In fact, the passion narratives make many references and allusions to the OT, which, when examined in this book, greatly enhance our understanding. Allen concentrates on the passion narratives in the gospels and the New Testament passages which allude to them in the book of Revelation. He is too much devoted to ‘the revealed God who remains hidden’, meaning ‘those living on the boundaries’ (see Luke 24.18), which, after Jacob, Rumsey sees as the place on the boundary between heaven and earth—a new community. Rumsey says the parish is the place where we belong, it is local, and God is only ever encountered locally, not because He (sic) is local, but because we are.

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CHRISTINE MCMULLEN

Death and the Afterlife
Parsons, R. W. & H. Williams

Subtitled ‘Biblical perspectives on ultimate questions’, this is a thoughtful and thorough book. It begins by setting belief in life after death into its context—what did the cultures around Israel teach? These help to dispel some of the myths that often inform people’s understanding of Christian hope. The question of what happens immediately after death is then addressed in the light of different understandings. The chapter on resurrection makes sure that we understand the importance of Jesus’ bodily resurrection, which is way beyond ‘a conjuring trick with bones’ as a former Bishop of Durham once put it. There is a chapter on the teaching of the church, which is not included in this book, but can be found in more recent books, such as those listed in the comprehensive bibliography. There are endnotes rather than footnotes, and the endnotes are often quite long. A real strength of this book is that, although it is clear that the book is addressed to students in ministerial training, so a high level of familiarity with biblical studies is assumed. As an introduction to or leading study groups, or just for interest, this book is highly recommended, so it is a pity it is relatively expensive.

MARION GRAY

Confronted by Suffering

This is a book that seeks to help those seeking their lives in Christ understand the pain they experience as followers of Christ. It is written by a person who has seen the pain of others and who has lived it himself. In the book, he explores the pain of others and how it affects us as Christians. The book is divided into three parts: suffering, joy, and hope. In the first part, the author explores the nature of suffering and how it affects us. He uses examples from the Bible to support his arguments and illustrates how suffering can be a source of growth and learning. In the second part, the author explores the joy of suffering and how it can lead to spiritual growth. He uses examples from the lives of saints and martyrs to illustrate his points. In the final part, the author explores the hope of suffering and how it can lead to greater spiritual maturity. Throughout the book, the author uses personal stories to illustrate his points and to make the book more accessible. The book is well-written and easy to read. It is a book that anyone who is seeking to understand suffering and how it affects us as Christians will find helpful.

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Seasonal resources

Advent and Christmas

Reviews of a number of books for this season are available on the website at www.readers.cofe.anglican.org/resources.php. These include The Art of Advent by Jane Williams (SPCK, £9.99) and Advent for Everyone by Tom Wright (SPCK, £8.99).

David Cole’s Celtic Advent. Forty days of devotions to Christmas (BRE, £8.99) is another alternative.

Embrace the Middle East’s seasonal resource pack. Peace be with us is available free at: www.embraceme.org/news/christmas-resource-pack-order-yours-now

Each pack includes:

• A ‘Christmas peace star’ for everyone to use and take home to hang on their tree.
• Advent candle-lighting liturgy – expressing our longing for peace and the coming of the Prince of Peace.
• Sermon notes and prayers for different points in the service.
• An all-age talk and a children’s activity sheet to help primary school-aged children explore the theme in an interactive way.
• Leader’s guide which suggests ways your church could get involved in giving.
• Engaging posters for display, a sample gift aid envelope and a donation form.
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Embrace Me Bethlehem Carol Sheets, to encouraging congregations to do more than taking collections in church to carol singing in the community with the children explore the theme in an interactive way.

Resources for Holocaust Memorial Day, and suggestions for organising activities, can be downloaded from The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust – www.hmd.org.uk/resources.

This website also gives information about the theme for the 2020 Holocaust Memorial Day, and the opportunity to sign up for free workshops to explore ideas and resources for 2020 activities.

Holocaust Memorial Day – 27th January

Introducing Ruth Haldane

If you had told me ten years ago that I would be working for the Central Readers Council, I wouldn’t have believed it! At that point I wasn’t a Reader, I was living with my husband Graham and three sons in Godmanchester, near Huntingdon, and had a challenging management role in a local housing association. I was very involved in a local church, and during this time I also served as a Chair of Governors in the local primary school, and vice Chair of Governors in the secondary school. While my children were young, I administered a part-time Bible College serving the Eastern Region.

I believe life is a God-led journey, and the exciting thing is that we never know where we are going to be next! We moved up north to Clitheroe, Lancashire, in 2011, partly to be nearer to our sons, daughter in law and now three young grandchildren. Sometimes it is a very difficult journey – our son Jonathan died in 2008 in a tragic drowning accident in Bath; this has been a big part of our life journey. We have been really helped by Care for Bereaved Parents Network, and are now befrienders for other bereaved parents.

So our journey took us to St James Church, Clitheroe, a vibrant, living and loving church, and we became involved. I trained as a Reader, and in 2016 became Deputy Warden of Readers for the Blackburn archdeaconry. In my spare time I am a member of a community choir, and enjoy going to concerts, and walking.

What is on my heart? Two things.

Firstly, a love and compassion for the poor and needy, and those who cannot speak up for themselves – partly outworked in my establishing and running our local food bank for five years, with two centres and seventy-five volunteers, and also being involved with our CAP centre. It has been a privilege to serve those who are in difficulty, going through hard times, and to offer to pray for them – ninety per cent of whom are very happy to be prayed for.

What else is on my heart? A real desire to teach and to preach – to help people experience ‘lightbulb moments’ about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, to see unchurched people come into the Kingdom of God, and be helped to grow and develop as Christians. I believe I have an inheritance in what I do – my father, brother and now my youngest son are all ministers! I felt called to Reader ministry, to continue to build foundations through the initial training, and to have opportunity to follow my calling to preach and teach.

My new role with the Central Readers Council excites me, in that I am looking at CME for Readers in the twenty-first century, including good practice around the dioceses, how we reach the millennial generation and beyond, and the use of online and/or blended learning. How can we teach the faith to the up and coming generations who would often rather google it than listen to an hour of teaching, who prefer learning through interaction and discussion to being taught ‘from the front’? If, as Readers, we are passionate about Reader ministry continuing, then we need to be open to new ways of communicating, of reaching out on our frontlines, and ultimately of seeing people come to a living, growing faith in Jesus Christ. I hope you will join me on this journey: I can’t do this on my own. I shall be setting up various focus groups around the country in due time, to consult on training and methods of training. If you are interested, or have comments on this, please email me on crctpm@gmail.com.

Ruth Haldane has recently been appointed Reader Training Project Manager at The Central Readers’ Council.
Responding to Russell Stannard

During my time as chief executive of the Central Laboratories of the UK Research Councils we had asked Cherie Blair, the wife of the Prime Minister, to open one of the beam lines on the UK’s first dedicated synchrotron which is essentially a high power X-ray machine. The facility was in our northern laboratory at Daresbury. The facility she was opening was for structural laboratory and because of the danger of X-rays the facility is enclosed in a lead lined hatch which contains the complex optics. The local MPs and journalists were out in force and the staff were standing on ladders and the roof of the hatch as she gave her speech. At some stage she said that their son (I think Lee) was asking questions about science and she admitted that neither she nor her husband knew much about science.

At this stage I turned to one of the local MPs (Helen Southgate) and said she should read the Uncle Albert books by Russell Stannard. Helen nodded vigorously and told me she was reading them herself and they were wonderful. On returning to my office near Oxford I went online to see if I could send Cherie a set to thank her for opening the facility only to find they were out of print. At this time I was a director of a small academic publisher so I asked the managing director if he had any ideas of how I could obtain copies. He suggested writing to the publisher explaining the situation. Almost by return I received a complete set which I sent to Cherie thanking her and suggesting she and her husband read the books first.

To my amazement, a few weeks later I heard the Prime Minister on the programme telling the interviewer that the family were now discussing science ‘ Tick’ by the side with the words ‘very moving’. Do pass on our appreciation to the Prime Minister for her support and for the faith that I could obtain copies of the book. Also I would like to know the outcome.

Roger Thornton

Reader, Canterbury Diocese

Letters from Readers

44+ years as a Reader / LLM

The Reader magazine has been going from strength to strength over the years and has become for me a motivating source of practical pastoral theology.

The article in the most recent edition, ‘Awakening children’s spirituality’ was particularly significant … my retired clergy husband read it and put a big ‘Tick’ by the side with the words ‘very moving’. Do pass on our appreciation to Pauline Lovelock.

I note with interest that you plan to mark the 50th anniversary of women in Reader ministry.

I was admitted as a Reader by Bishop Cuthbert Bardside in Coventry in 1974. The front cover of my Certificate of Admission says ‘Mr …’? Clearly the Diocese was still using up old certificates.

Pauline Lovelock

Salisbury Diocese

The Editor replies

Please accept my apologies for assigning Pauline Lovelock to the wrong diocese. She is indeed training for Reader ministry, but in the St Edmondsbury and Ipswich Diocese.

Reader badges

We have new supplies of Readers’ badges, but we need to adjust the prices to make sure they do not sell at a loss. As before, prices include postage and packing. You can order by writing to Central Readers’ Council (Badges), Church House, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3AZ, stating the number of badges, and of which type, and enclosing the appropriate remittance by cheque made payable to the Central Readers’ Council.

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44+ years as a Reader / LLM

The Editor welcomes letters for publication on this page. However, we cannot guarantee that all letters received will be published, and some will need editing for reasons of space, content overlap, etc.
If you read this page in the last edition of The Reader, you will have seen Marion Gray’s farewell, including her hope to hand over to someone ‘younger and fitter and better equipped’ as Chair of the Editorial Committee. Let us keep hoping. However, for the next six months or so it will be I holding the proverbial baby.

I would like to start by saying a huge ‘thank you’ to Marion. Marion – if you are reading this (and I hope you are) – you must stop that self-deprecating stuff. And to everyone else I would like to say how much I have appreciated working with Marion over the last four and a bit years. Marion has steered The Reader through some interesting times and challenging issues, not least through a total overhaul of the business model and a change of editor. She was the driving force behind the questionnaire put to readers of The Reader a few years ago and evaluated the hundreds of responses in painstaking detail; the results were used to shape the planning of the magazine.

I know I am not the only one to find that under her steerage the paper has been getting better all the time. Marion worked with amazing commitment and always with an eye on the quality of the magazine and the way it might support the ministry of Readers; her contribution was at the business end and as a theologian and writer, and she did all this alongside her day job on the Reader training course in Southwark Diocese.

I am sure Marion doesn’t see herself as superwoman, but she has been a super-Chair, and we are much indebted to her for seven years of faithful and committed service through some good times and some pretty hard ones, but you would never have guessed which the hard ones were if all you had to go by was the quality of the magazine. So thank you, Marion, and enjoy the extra space you have gained; pamper yourself!

We find ourselves with a vacancy for the Chair of the Editorial Committee, and in April there will also be a Trustee vacancy that will need to be filled. With the various changes afoot at the Central Readers’ Council, we are hoping to recruit one person willing and able to combine the two roles.

The requirements for a Trustee are that the person is a Reader (or LLM) and that she or he is at least 16 years of age, and also that she or he has a passion for lay ministry and an interest in the current developments at the Central Readers’ Council. To chair the Editorial Committee, we are looking for someone who takes an active interest in The Reader and can keep an eye on the whole process of publishing the magazine, including managing the business side. In addition, the Chair should be a person to whom the Editor can refer when in need of support or looking for a second opinion. Publishing experience is not required, though it might come in handy.

If you know such a person, or if you are such a person, please get in touch with me to talk it over – gertrud.sollars@btinternet.com.

With many good wishes – may God who calls us to his service make us fruitful and joyful in the same.

Gertrud

Gertrud Sollars is a Reader in the Diocese of Guildford and Vice Chair of the Central Readers’ Council.
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