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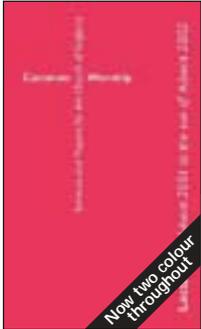
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At the end of his wonderful (and now sadly out of print) little book called *The Psalms come alive*, John Eaton describes God as ‘the One who speaks poetry, who delights to build beautifully, who leads the music, dance and drama at the heart of the world’s meaning.’ Something of that spirit is captured by the extraordinary picture of the Madonna ‘dancing’ with her child on our current front cover.

This issue of *The Reader* has as its focus the theme of education and ‘the Word’. We have chosen this theme because with this Advent the ‘Year of Matthew’ begins in the Common Worship lectionary and Matthew is the gospel writer who most seems to emphasise Christ’s role as a teacher. Indeed the very name ‘Matthew’ seems perhaps to have a link with the Greek word *mathetes* which means ‘disciple’ or ‘learner’. It has long been suggested that in chapter 13.52, Matthew may be punning on his own name and telling us something about himself: that he is ‘a scribe who has been trained (*matheteutheis*) for the kingdom of heaven’.

But as you will soon discover we do not simply restrict our attention to Matthew (in fact there will be more on Matthew’s gospel in our next issue). We also explore the gospel of John – with particular attention to the Prologue. For this is the gospel in which the concept of the ‘Word’ – a concept so important in education – seems to be used as a key to open the gospel.

Our contributors take us far and wide into many different avenues of education – the need for the Anglican church to be a community of learners (*David Ford*), the role of the church in running faith schools (*Rupert Bristow*), and in providing resources for Christian education (*Hamish Bruce*). We look at appropriate methods of training for Readers (*Gordon Oliver*, *Christine McMullen*) and our excellent article on Isaiah by Jo Bailey-Wells, which is based on lectures given this year at the Selwyn course in Cambridge, is not only a helpful resource with Advent coming up but a reminder that in the Selwyn course Readers have access to high quality continuing ministerial education. We even have a contribution from a bishop, David Walker, who is brave enough to share what he has learned during his first year in the episcopate! Alan Wakely, the Deputy Honorary Secretary of the Central Readers’ Council has offered us a meaty exploration of the importance of learning from the history of the church to help us find appropriate paths to tread in the future.

Some of you may be wondering what that dancing child on our cover has to do with the theme of education. Of course, at one level the answer is simple – that youngster grew up to be one of the greatest teachers the world has ever known. (see *quotation on p.3*) Yet it also seems to me that his dance sums up quite a lot of what good education depends upon: a healthy and loving relationship, a willingness to challenge, be challenged, the self-confidence to explore in faith and to allow the spirit to soar, to be an active participant in the process, but with a sense of shape and pattern. The image of the ‘dance’ is perhaps a necessary corrective to overreliance on the verbal in the world of education. As John Sweet profoundly points out for us in his study on the Prologue of John’s Gospel, God’s Word does not need to speak to be heard. In *To a Dancing God* Sam Keen once wrote, ‘There is a time for words. It has lasted from the Reformation to the present...(Yet now) the word must be rediscovered in the flesh. Religion must return to the dance.’ The good news of Christmas is indeed that ‘Tomorrow shall be our dancing day.’ **Clare Amos, Editor**



Anglican Identity in England

by David F Ford



I have seen the Church of England in recent years from various angles, ranging from being a Churchwarden in inner-city Birmingham, through a variety of parishes, several diocesan conferences for clergy and laity, General Synod, the 1998 Lambeth Conference, and now St Bene't's in Cambridge. I have been struck again and again by the gap between, on the one hand, the perceptions gained through that close involvement and, on the other, impressions coming through the media and casual conversations. I was usually encouraged by what I saw and learnt directly of the Church of England, whereas most of the other impressions were largely unappreciative. I do not think this is just because of 'media bias' or prejudice. The reasons are deeper – something to do with the nature of the Church of England. So I want to try to describe, in brief, my own appreciative conclusions about Anglican identity in England.



Wisdom through historical experience

It is an identity based on wisdom through historical experience. The basic point is that it is a complex identity, even messy. This gives endless scope for criticism and misrepresentation, but it can also be appreciated as a strength with considerable potential. It cannot be understood without a little history.

The history includes appreciating the Church's first millennium and a half. In particular, it is a classic and I think enduringly important characteristic of Anglican tradition that we identify strongly with the early Church during its first six centuries or so. I would argue that any vision for the future which disowns or plays down this formative period is unwise. That does not exclude fresh interpretations and critiques. But they need to lead us

inside the dynamics of the shaping of the church and its theology, in all their messiness and their religious, ethical and political complexity. It is about a wisdom formed in and through the contingencies of history.

If I were choosing just one lesson for us to learn from this period, it would be what Averil Cameron and Frances Young both stress in their fine studies: how the church engaged with all dimensions of the Roman Empire's culture; how it used multiple strategies, and was inventive and often opportunistic in its communication; and, above all, how its permeation of the Empire was closely tied to the immense amount of energy, resources and dedication it applied to education – learning and teaching the faith – at all levels.

The Reformation period, up to the seventeenth-century Anglican settlement, is the most critical one for what is most distinctively Anglican. I think it is hard to over-estimate how crucial this still is. The Reformation, together with the horrendous religious wars that followed it, was the founding trauma of modern Europe, and in England included the Civil War and the execution of Charles I. In this period, Christianity not only discredited itself but failed to ensure the flourishing of societies. Large parts of Europe were devastated. We live in the aftermath of this failure, in which Christianity has been tried and found not only wanting but destructive in the public realm. Christianity gave rise to fragmentation, dissension, confusion and war as never before in its history.

But that was not all. There was at the same time an intensive attempt, on both the Protestant and Catholic sides,

to re-identify the heart of Christian faith, to reappropriate its basic dynamisms. All parties tried to refashion history in conformity with their ideas – Lutheran, Calvinist, Puritan, Roman Catholic. Anglicanism was a response to this lively and deadly conflict. It was a settlement, a Catholic and Reformed Christianity allied with historical realism. Anglicanism is a Christian response to Christian failure and to Christian renewal. We do not

There is a great deal to repent of, but it is important to try to become somewhat clearer than we usually are about what there is to be grateful for.

go for complete theological blueprints: they run the risks of the Thirty-Years' War or the Civil War. We make settlements; settlement after settlement. I do not claim this

is unique to Anglicanism; it is obviously a dimension of every church. But there is something to be learnt for the future from the way that, at its best, our Church has tried to learn from the traumas of history, from conflicts between rival ways of ordering the church, and the need for settlements which value the flourishing of state and society and try to repair damaged history. There is a great deal to repent of, but it is important to try to become somewhat clearer than we usually are about what there is to be grateful for. The last Lambeth Conference brought home to me the urgency of this need. There was quite a poignant gap in the Conference between, on the one hand, the widespread sense of Anglican family feeling, especially seen in the celebrations of the eucharist, the Bible studies and the small group discussions and, on the other hand, a striking inability to articulate it in convincing ways. In the absence of convincingly Anglican ways, true to the complex interweavings with history that have made the Communion what it is, other



more articulate theologies, together with what I would call well-packaged ideologies, rushed in to fill the vacuum. In the process, there was an uneasy feeling that something precious was not being done justice to.

Pointers for the future

Three points for the future. What needs to be said today about this identity? I will suggest a few basic points with the future of the Church of England in mind.

1. God is the secret of the common good, salvation, peace and any worthwhile future; and our first call is to worship God, to love with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength the God who loves us, and to invite others to gather with us. Right worship is connected with a good society; we should not be surprised if a society which focuses its desires on things other than God goes wrong; but we should be all the more dedicated to worship and prayer on its behalf, and to summoning it to worship for its own good and for the good of all. It is right that we continue to put such an immense amount of time, energy and resources, in buildings and clergy, into regular worship.

2. We still need to try to make settlements for the common good and to mend damaged histories, both personal and social. Each family is a settlement; so is each school, each parish, each city or county council, each business, each diocese, each life. Well-ordered, faithful lives in well-ordered, just institutions, constantly shaping appropriate settlements and trying to improve things incrementally: that is not a sensational slogan, but it is one of the deepest needs if church and society is to flourish. We need to seek constant renewal of the wisdom that leads to such settlements in all the changes and overwhelmings of our time. Anglicanism was born to meet such a need in overwhelming times.

We need to have a fresh start in sustaining and renewing this complex identity.

3. The identity of our Church, which is centred in worship and tries to serve the common good, has many dimensions. We need to have a fresh start in sustaining and renewing this complex identity. I see this as an ecology in

which every level is vital, but some levels are far more vulnerable (and their importance far less obvious) than others. My own experience in the church has been of a series of 'conversions' to one level after another – parish congregation, small group, local community, diocese, nation, and global communication. And I have found myself convinced of the crucial importance of institutions of various sorts for the church to fulfil its two basic types of task: building up worshipping communities; and doing 'chaplaincy work' that serves the flourishing of individuals and institutions in the contingencies of life and death.

Plus one more

There is a further point which has increasingly impressed me as perhaps the single most urgent matter if the worship, faithful lives, and various institutional levels are to thrive. It is the one noted above concerning the early centuries of Christianity: the priority of teaching and learning the Christian faith.

In a knowledge-based, information-rich 'learning society', permeated by many media, a church like ours, which is so interwoven with society and tends to be suspicious of rigid boundaries, needs to be especially alert, thoughtful and creative in how it teaches and learns the faith. How do we and our children 'learn Christ' today? How can we be literally disciples, *mathetai*, learners? How can we have educational settlements that improve the situation in every family, home group, parish, school, diocese and university?

Futurology

The Christian version of futurology as we journey into the new millennium is not to speculate about this and the other points in terms of trends and numbers. It is rather to do two things. First, to pray about them – both in gratitude that appreciates what has been given, and also in urgent intercession. Second, to be learners who lead faithful, worshipping lives in the church and for the world. That is what will make most difference in the third millennium, as in previous ones.

Dr David F Ford is Regius Professor of Theology in the University of Cambridge. This article is slightly adapted from an original article which appeared in *franciscan* magazine in January 2000 and is copyright to that magazine.

Prayer and Reflection on 'Education'

Jesus,
through your roots in a Jewish home,
remind us
of all we owe to our families and friends,
and of all we have gained from our
culture and environment.

Through your discoveries of faith
in synagogue and scripture,
show us
how important it is to know God as our
father and friend.

Through your questioning and wondering
as a bar-mitzvah boy,
give us an appetite
for searching and enquiry
so that our minds are open
and our hearts tolerant
in the quest for truth.

Led by you
to thankfulness
life and truth
as children of God,
let our lives
resound with new songs
and our lives ring with joy,
for you are indeed
Immanuel,
God-with-us,
yesterday, today and for ever.
(@ David Jenkins, from 'The World in the World' edited by Donald Hilton, NCEC)

He never taught a lesson in a classroom... he had no tools to work with, such as blackboards, maps or charts... he used no subject outlines, kept no records, gave no grades, and his only text was ancient and well-worn...

His students were the poor, the lame, the deaf, the blind, the outcast – and his method was the same with all who came to hear and learn...

He opened eyes with faith... he opened ears with simple truth... and opened hearts with love, a love born of forgiveness...

A gentle man, a humble man, he asked and won no honours, no gold awards of tribute to his expertise or wisdom... and yet this quiet teacher from the hills of Galilee has fed the needs, fulfilled the hopes and changed the lives of many millions... for what he taught brought heaven to earth and revealed God's heart to humankind.
(Anon)

Discovering Doors in Dudley



David Walker has been the Suffragan Bishop of Dudley in the West Midlands for just over a year. Previously a parish priest, he here reflects on what he has learned and discovered during his first year of episcopal ministry.

It begins like most other things that come into my office with a request (by phone, fax, email or letter) requesting my availability. Available to do what? Open a church extension, preach at a Patronal Festival, meet with a priest to discuss her career or his parish. In this case the request is to write an article for *The Reader*. But the situation is the same. Here is a one off opportunity for me to say something to you in the hope that it may strengthen, encourage or sustain you in your ministries. So if you ask me, and I am often asked in this first year of life as a Bishop, what is the difference between this and my previous ministry as a parish priest, then it is the quantity of significant one off encounters that I have which comes first to mind.

If I miss anything of parish life it is the week by week continuity. Working with the same small group of clergy, Readers and volunteers within the benefice, travelling as part of a Christian community as it seeks to discern God's will and to be faithful to his call. Gone are that sea of familiar faces in the pews with whom I could build on what I or one of my colleagues had said last week. Gone too the comforting knowledge that if I get it wrong this week, lose my place, mess up the liturgy, then they and I will be back next week when with any luck it

will be better. Bishops get no second chances. Preach a bad sermon or mess up a pastoral encounter with a priest and my reputation in that parish or with that person is sealed.

A door-keeping ministry

It is a style of ministry that needs to be underpinned theologically. And I am attracted to the biblical concepts of the door and the doorkeeper. We may be inclined to think of the doorkeeper rather negatively, like the dark suited, muscle-bound night-club bouncer whose chief duty is to prevent undesirables entering. My own image is more that of the cinema commissioner of the 1950s, resplendent in robes even brighter than those of a bishop in full convocation dress. I can picture him standing by the door, charged with the task of welcoming, encouraging and perhaps even enticing passers-by to come and enter into a new experience. Literally and figuratively the doorkeeper is there to open the doors. It is an image Jesus builds on when he refers to himself as the door of the sheepfold. A door through which the sheep can pass in both directions as they seek either safety from danger or new grass to eat and somewhere to roam.

Sometimes the doors I am asked to open are literally that. A classroom extension at one of our church schools will enable a better quality of education, which will in turn lead to further open doors for those children in years ahead. More often they are the doors that open in our minds when we think about the gospel or about our discipleship and ministry in a new way. The crucial point is that I am opening up doors which others will then walk through. I have to then leave them to continue their journey forward, hoping to meet them again at a future door somewhere further along the Christian road. And as they pass through, I consult my diary and my street atlas to work out where and when is the next door I am called to stand by.

One of the doors I am called upon most frequently to open is that which leads into a new phase of ministry for a priest. This is not simply a matter of facilitating the move from one parish to the next – there are often important moments of transition midway through a parochial post. It may be as part of a formal scheme of Ministerial Review.

It may be a request from a priest or minister to spend some time together looking at some aspect of the current job or career. Through the conversation together doors are opened and perhaps even a particular one chosen.

Having for many years encouraged vocations to Readership in my various parishes I have often attended the Diocesan Admission Service in support of a candidate whose gifts I was expecting to be released in a new way in my benefice. It was a humbling experience this summer to be the Bishop presiding at such a service and to admit a dozen new Readers to begin the next stage of their ministries in parishes across the Diocese. Preaching on such an occasion challenges me to find words that might open the doors to that new ministry a little wider. The same is true of officiating at a service to inaugurate a Local Ministry Team. Much has gone on before my involvement and much remains after but how can I in a few minutes give affirmation, encouragement and perhaps a little direction to what will follow?

For any parish one of the most significant doors to be opened is that which faces the church people during an interregnum. It is a time of great opportunity but also of considerable apprehension. Attracting the right person via a process that leaves everybody owning the decision reached can be far from straightforward. The process often concludes with the opportunity for me to preach at the new Incumbent's Induction Service.

Seeing the excitement and anticipation on the faces of priest and people is one of the most rewarding any Bishop can experience. There is a profound symbolism in handing over the legal document with the words 'receive the cure of souls which is both mine and yours' and then in walking the new priest to the main door at the end of the service to shaking hands with the congregation as they pass outside to begin the next phase of their pilgrimage.

Readers at the open door

As I reflect upon the nature of door keeping in my current ministry the more I see it was also a significant if under-acknowledged factor in my life as a parish priest. However much the continuity of work with known

I pray that... those who minister can resist the pressure to be closers of doors rather than openers.



congregations may appear to dominate, the cutting edge of mission in parish life is through the opening of a door to someone at a particular moment of their life. For a brief period, sometimes no more than a single meeting, an intensity of encounter takes place and as a result of that encounter a new possibility of a way forward emerges.

It was a door-keeping ministry I was able to share fully with our Readers in the parish.

The majority of pastoral contacts outside of the congregation are in any parish occasioned by the major events of life: birth, marriage, sickness and death. The occasional offices of baptism, marriage and funerals are not chores to be squeezed into the busy ministerial week but incredibly privileged opportunities to be alongside an individual or family and to offer an open door for them. We cannot make the journey through that door with them, all we can do is to hold it open and pray that through a succession of such doors and doorkeepers the way to a rich and rewarding life of faith may be found. The scripture puts it quite simply, one sows, another reaps.

I pray that, in the name of Christ,

those who minister can resist the pressure to be closers of doors rather than openers. I hope that we shall never, through lack of sufficient trust in God or through the narrowness of our beliefs, be guilty of constraining God's children to be simple clones of ourselves. The door to the sheepfold is not simply the way in to safety; it is also the way out to graze and to play, as again the scripture makes clear.

I can think now of one of our Readers running an open group for young mothers and toddlers; of another co-ordinating a team of bereavement visitors and of a third preparing families for baptism. In each case there were those individuals who they, and I, would have longed to have accompanied further along their journey. It is the same brief pang of regret that I feel now when I leave the new priest and congregation to begin their ministry together and pack my episcopal robes back into the boot of the car for the journey home. But then, as now, my task and yours is to be there at the moment of opportunity, to open the door, to hold out the invitation and to allow those who will to pass through and then continue their journey beyond.

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Educating for a new Millennium

Rupert Bristow, a Reader with a key management role relating to Church schools shares his vision.



The Archbishop of Canterbury (far right) enjoys a presentation by children at the opening of new school buildings (left) for Deal Parochial Church of England Primary School, September 2001

It's an interesting time being a Reader. It's also quite an exciting time to be involved with Church schools. Put the two together, and there is never a dull moment.

I first became a Reader when I was commuting to London from Folkestone. I headed up all the support services for the 22,000 students at South Bank University (the former South Bank Polytechnic). Of course that included a chaplaincy and it was during my time at South Bank that I became involved with Southwark Diocesan Board of Education, chairing its Higher Education Committee. My weekend commitments as a Reader, first in undertaking the training and later carrying out various duties in my parish, proved to be a welcome and fulfilling counterbalance to my work in London. Little did I realise that these interests would lead to a full-time job in the Church. ...

A whole new world

Having deliberately made the switch to my present post, as Director of Education for Canterbury Diocese, a whole new world has opened up which I believe the Church has only recently fully realised is a major asset and a major mission opportunity. The General Synod of the Church of England hit the nail on the head when it stated unequivocally in November 1998 that it believed that Church schools 'stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation'. More recently, the report of the Church Schools Review Group for the Archbishops' Council, chaired by Lord Dearing, entitled *The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the New Millennium* has given chapter and verse (as well as nuts and bolts) to this notion. It is a blueprint for our activity with Church schools.

Of course, I am only too well aware that the Church has been quietly getting on with the provision of education ever since the huge development of Church schools in the middle of the 19th century and even when the state began to play the major part in statutory provision following the 1870 Education Act, the Church has

remained a significant partner with the state in public sector education. Publicity over recent months, most of it good but some of it critical, has thrust Church schools very much into the limelight once again.

For the most part, high academic standards and good spiritual and moral values within the Christian context have been hallmarks of Church schools and are the main reasons why they are so popular amongst parents. At the same time, charges of exclusiveness have occasionally been made and the whole principle of faith-based schools has been questioned following some of the summer disturbances. My experience is that the best of Church schools are probably the best education we can get anywhere, but being a Church school is not an automatic route to success and much depends on how the Church can support the professionalism of the staff and the dedication of governors in getting the recipe right. Distinctiveness and inclusion are the watchwords today.

In this context, I can see Readers having a growing role in how the Church, at a parish and benefice level, can provide the necessarily expert and education focused (as well as pastorally sensitive) input that can make all the difference. With clergy having more and more parishes to look after and the development of the ministry leadership team approach, I see Readers in our Diocese playing a full part in rotas for leading acts of collective worship in schools (still a wonderful opportunity for engaging children in the Christian message). As active governors – of county as well as Church schools – Readers can also have a quiet but creative input into the educational process of our children.

My own experience as the first lay Director of Education the Diocese has ever had, may be of interest. My predecessors had, I believe, many more preaching engagements than I have had. That may well have been because they were better preachers than I am! However, there is also a measure of misunderstanding about what I am

able to do or not do as a lay Director. I do not widely advertise the fact that I am a Reader, but I usually do get invitations to preach on Education Sunday and it is sometimes a surprise to people when I arrive in my robes and with a Reader's scarf. I am not really complaining as it does mean that I can play a full part in my own parish/benefice as a Reader, which helps to reduce the feeling of working weekdays and weekends for this great organisation, the Church of England!

Looking to the future

So what of the future for Church schools and, more widely, the stake of the Church of England in Education at all stages, from nursery education through to higher education? We are lucky in Canterbury Diocese to have one of the premier Church Colleges in the country, Canterbury Christ Church University College, of which I am a governor. It is exciting that the College has recently opened a campus in Thanet, in the North East tip of Kent, which previously had no higher education institution. In driving this forward, from conception to opening within eighteen months, there is more than a hint of the drive that led to all those Church schools in the middle of the 19th century. This spirit, along with the popularity of Church schools amongst parents and the willingness of the Church of England, despite all its financial difficulties, to get behind Church schools in all sorts of ways, bodes well for the future.

Much now depends, as it always has done, on those in the pews and in leadership positions in our churches to make full use of the opportunities to direct the Church's energies in support of our Church schools. By the same token, we in Diocesan Education Teams have to make the most of our links with modernised local government to ensure that the partnership between Church and state, Diocese and local education authority, is alive and well and remaining creative. As a Reader, I feel privileged to be part of this process.



Helping children learn

Hamish Bruce is the Publications Officer for the National Society, an official Church of England organisation which provides Christian educational resources for children in churches and schools and has close links to Church House Publishing. Hamish is also a Reader in the Stepney area of the Diocese of London and here shares something of his excitement about 'helping children learn'.

Exploding vegetables and disappearing rabbits

As a primary school teacher in Hoxton, Hackney, for seven years I watched a succession of clergy and children's workers struggling with one of the most difficult of all challenges. How can we communicate a two-thousand year old story to a group of active children in a way which will both entertain them and help them reflect on its meaning? Some of the visitors relied upon impressive visual aids ranging from paddling pools and parachutes to disappearing rabbits and crazy costumes. On one occasion, a young curate decided to demonstrate the parable of the growth of the mustard tree from a small seed by cooking popcorn in front of an assembly. The result was certainly spectacular and required a strong mop to clean up the results. On another occasion, a children's worker brought in a large marrow for Harvest. Unfortunately, it was slightly riper than he had realised and when it slipped from his hand it exploded on the floor and splattered across the front row of the infants. Other visitors relied upon straightforward storytelling. Often, when it captured the imagination of the children, this could be the most effective and powerful form of communication.

It was frustrating to see the good talks and know that they would only be heard by a small number of children. It was equally frustrating to watch others struggling to find good ideas week by week to interest and motivate the children.

When I subsequently moved from teaching to work for the National Society, I was delighted to have the opportunity to work with authors, many of whom had never had their material published before, on practical resource ideas to help others.

If you have ever puzzled over an obscure Bible reading in preparing for a sermon, tried to think how to communicate effectively to a group of active infants in an assembly or sweat-blood and tears to prepare a Sunday school lesson, you will know the value

of good resource materials. They can spark off a new idea that will often result in a talk or sermon that is entirely different from the original resource.

Two of the most recent projects that I have been working on provide resources that would be relevant for all those who are involved in education - whether in parishes or schools.

Is God there when it's noisy? Or only when it's quiet?

Encounter Christianity is the first of these resources. It's a vibrant new series of books, designed for teaching RE at Key Stage 1 and 2 in a fresh and informative new way. Each book contains stunning visual images and a series of intriguing, open-ended questions that help develop pupils' spiritual awareness and encourage a creative response to the central themes of Christianity. For Key Stage 1 pupils there is a big book *In Creation* and three smaller books *In Journeys*, *In Words* and *In the Making*. Each of the books also includes Bible references and text, teacher's notes and background information.

Another exciting part of the project is the web site at

www.encounterchristianity.co.uk

This free access site includes more information on the books, links to relevant web sites and a number of lesson plans. For Key Stage 1, there are 48 lesson plans written by teachers, headteachers and education specialists that can be downloaded from the web site for use in the classroom or church group. Each of these lesson plans includes aims, background information, bible references, key words, activities and web site links.

The series has proved popular well beyond the original target group. The books sold well at the Greenbelt Festival earlier this year and received good reviews in *Youthwork* magazine. The Key Stage 2 books are due out shortly and will also be accompanied by additional lesson plans and material on the web site.

Getting back to ROOTS

The second of the resources is *ROOTS*, a major new venture supported by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland along with representatives from the Churches and Church publishers in England, Scotland and Wales. It will enable churches to develop and nurture their worship and learning programmes in a flexible and innovative way.

Several significant factors have created an excellent opportunity for the Churches in the UK to develop a new worship and learning resource. The Revised Common Lectionary has become a significant unifying element, and its widespread adoption has ensured that churches across many denominations are now using the same biblical material each week. It is also a time when many Anglican churches are re-evaluating their liturgy and worship, particularly in the light of *Common Worship*.

At the same time, the publication of one of the churches' main resources for worship and learning, *Partners in Learning*, is to cease in autumn 2002. This quarterly publication, published by NCEC and the Methodist Church, provides dated material for children's groups and all-age services and has recently changed to using the Revised Common Lectionary.

What is *ROOTS*? *ROOTS* is designed to meet the needs of churches at the beginning of the twenty-first century, recognizing the changed circumstances in which they serve their communities. There will be two bi-monthly magazines, linked closely to the lectionary, to provide ideas and encouragement for those who lead worship and those who work with children and young people. These will be supported by a web site that will include additional prayers, articles and activities. There will also be a 'fast response' section, which will provide prayers and reflections as an immediate response to a national or international crisis or event. *ROOTS* will be available from May 2002, ready for use in September 2002. More information on the project can be found at www.rootsontheweb.org.uk

To find out more about the National Society or to access a number of interesting educational resources and ideas I can recommend a look at the National Society's own website: www.natsoc.org.uk
The Editor.





Developing Ministry: READER TRAINING IN ROCHESTER DIOCESE

Gordon Oliver, Bishop's Officer for Ministry and Training in Rochester Diocese, explains the philosophy which underlies the well-respected training programme for Readers and other lay ministers in this diocese.

Core Values

The core values underlying our Reader training programmes in Rochester Diocese are based on a theology of representative ministry as focusing particular aspects of the ministry of the whole people of God. Readers, as servants of the Word of God, focus the ministries of preaching and teaching, leading worship, and engaging in pastoral care. They do this as much by what they are as by what they do. This means that a Reader, like any other authorised minister is called to 'walk the talk' – to embody as well as act out what it means to live the call of Christ as good news in the world. This theology of Reader vocation is given practical form and spiritual energy by our other core values – that representative ministries are collaborative, distinctive and disciplined.

Reader ministry is collaborative not only because it is shared with other ministries in a parish leadership team, but because the Word-made-flesh gives the call to collaboration not only within the Christian fellowship, but also with 'the world' in the form of community groups and contexts outside of the church. The fact that Reader ministry is a lay ministry is what potentially gives this collaborative aspect special credibility as 'lived gospel'. Because the Word of God is given to the church as well as to the world Readers are called to practical sharing of gospel action with other authorised ministers.

Reader ministry is distinctive because while other authorised ministries focus the Christian community's action in relation to pastoral care, evangelism, youth work etc, Readers especially focus on learning and teaching the faith and celebration of the Gospel in public worship. Collaborative ministry means bringing together what is distinctive and sharing it, not everybody doing the same thing – that would make the church a spiritual embodiment of matt finish magnolia emulsion paint!

Reader ministry is disciplined because it involves submitting a person's sense of vocation to the discernment of

fellow Christians so that they can call forth a person's ministry, support its formation, recognise it, bless it and share it in action. Reader ministry is enshrined in the Canons of the Church of England – 'canon' means living within a rule and discipline of ministry in a sharing church – that's why Readers are meant to be highly creative, but not just do their own things!

Training

Our training structure reflects this core value that as representative focusing ministry the role of Readers is collaborative, distinctive and disciplined. We have three diocesan authorised lay ministries whose candidates train together in the Rochester training programme: Evangelists, Readers and Pastoral Assistants. The training normally takes three years and consists of two inter-linked and complementary programmes. Year one is called the Faith and Ministry Course (FMC) and is foundation programme in Christian theology which is taken by people who think they may wish to candidate for a lay ministry as well as by people who 'just' want to grow in their faith and understanding. At a 'Ministry Fair' mid-way through year one people have the opportunity to offer themselves as candidates for selection for one or other of the authorised lay ministries or for ordained ministry.

Years two and three are called the Developing Ministries Programme (DMP) and here we concentrate more deeply on major themes of biblical studies, spiritual formation, doctrine, mission, ecclesiology, etc. Candidates for all three authorised lay ministries train together throughout DMP, so the course involves collaborative learning for collaborative ministries all the way through. The FMC and DMP programmes have six, fortnightly, sessions per term for three terms per year.

Reader-Specific Training (RST) takes place in parallel with DMP, meeting 4 – 5 times per term during the intervening weeks. RST also includes an annual residential conference, study days, cross-traditional

church placement, supervised preaching, spiritual journal, etc. Both parts of the programme require the completion of written and practical assignments and assessed ministerial practice. Readers are licensed in the cathedral at the end of year three at a service which is a great celebration of ministries.

Our training programmes for authorised ministries are demanding on the time, energy, spiritual and emotional commitment of the candidates – as well as the support of their families and their churches. We think that people who have worked at this level over this period ought to be able to receive a proper recognition of the work they have done. That is why we have recently negotiated the validation of FMC and DMP as a Certificate in Theology with the University of Wales, Lampeter. We are currently planning to add a fourth year to the programme – post licensing continuing ministerial education (CME) and negotiating this to enable candidates who wish it, to work for a Diploma in Theology. We have arrangements in place for accreditation of prior learning (APL) for people who have already done some recognised theological study.

Formation Not Frustration

We are emphatically not in the business of making training for authorised lay ministries more 'academic' in the sense of detached and useless. That is why our learning and teaching programmes are deeply rooted in practical discipleship and spiritual growth. A fair number of our candidates either already have some theological qualification before they start the programme or don't want any more. A number, who will make excellent ministers, do not feel confident about producing lots of assignments. Course members are able to choose how they will engage with the assessment requirements of the programmes, but normally all are required to participate in the actual programme sessions and day conferences.

We have well over 300 each of Readers and Pastoral Assistants and over 60 evangelists in our diocese at present and good numbers in training. Almost all of our parishes have at least one Reader and a PA or Evangelist. Taken together these lay ministers form a large majority of the licensed and authorised ministers of our diocese and make a contribution to our worship, learning and care that is well worth celebrating.



A Better Way?

Christine McMullen is a Reader and a tutor on the Northern Ordination Course. Her challenging reflections on the nature of ministerial training – asking why Readers are normally trained separately from ordinands – are prompted by her own experience as a trainer.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century pictures of clergy in action portray them as either well dressed third sons distributing food and clothing to impoverished parishioners (see George Elliot's *Middlemarch*) or standing bewigged and gowned in a lofty pulpit declaiming over the heads of their non-participating congregation (see Millais twin paintings of 'The First Sermon' and 'The Second Sermon').

It is rarely like that today. It is no longer a question of the Clergy and the People and *Stranger in the Wings* (1998) names the many ministries the church currently enjoys. We now have both stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy; Ordained Local Ministers and retired clergy with permission to officiate; chaplains and sector ministers; lay and ordained members of religious orders. We have Bishops (male), priests and deacons and a permanent diaconate (male and female); Readers, youth workers, lay pastoral assistants, members of ministry teams and counselling teams and people who can help with Eucharistic administration and take reserved sacrament to people who are sick. We have more retired than active clergy and parishioners can no longer expect to have a vicar in each parish church. We expect that the numbers of ordinands being trained will not replace all the clergy retiring in the next 45 years

Today the expectation of congregational passivity has been replaced by an aim of a trained and confident membership. Accreditation and proper courses are widely held to be essential before Christians embark on any work. This is a change for the church which did not introduce theological colleges until the nineteenth century – though the Dean of Exeter in 1609, the Bishop of Sodor and Man and the Bishop of Salisbury in 17-18th

centuries had been trying. Before that the church relied on clergy being graduates of Oxford and Cambridge universities where all the staff were ordained men.

The whole people of God

Now the whole congregation is urged to think theologically and model an understanding of faith in the Trinity, incarnation and mission.

'Baptism is the basis for being part of the Church. Baptism both provides the basic qualification for ministry and confers on all those who are baptized the responsibility for developing their own ministry' (*ABM Paper 18*)

Derby Diocese produced *A Better Way* when it became obvious that congregations could not rely on having an incumbent of their own and all the baptized would have to work out some new *modus vivendi*. The report says,

'There has to be a better way of organizing the ministry of the Church than merely spreading clergy ever thinner over the ground and lumping parishes together'.

A paper from Sheffield diocese says, 'Struggling with dwindling finances and declining numbers of clergy spread

ever more thinly is not an adequate response. We need a fresh vision' (*both quoted in ABM 18*).

The questions we are left with, as no other generation has been, is what is

special to the ordained ministry, and what training for all its members does the church need?

Currently the Methodist church has combined its lay and ministerial training funds and all potential candidates for ministry have to do a year's Foundation Training (*two years part-time*) during which they explore their vocation and after which some go on to candidate for ordained ministry. Those whose call is to ordained ministry is recognized have another year of ministerial training (*two years if done part-time*). In the Partnership for Theological Education Manchester, Baptist, Methodist and URC students all do a common 'Faith in Living' course and those who use it as training for ordained ministry do additional modules. All Methodist students on Foundation training are expected to have passed their Local Preacher exams beforehand. The Church of England

has not gone fully down this road yet.

At the moment all ordinands approved for stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry receive training in a Theological College or Course, unless their Bishop suggests some other form of training, as some do for older candidates or for those with related professional backgrounds

Many dioceses now have Ordained Local Ministry Schemes and in some cases, as in Wakefield and Manchester dioceses, part of their training is done with Readers and much of it in the diocese. Part of the reason for this is that funding for OLM and for Reader Training is less than for Stipendiary and non-stipendiary training, but clearly in this context it is acceptable for ordinands and Readers to train together.

Yet I have some questions:

1. OLMs are legitimately ordained and Readers are not, yet they train together. Is the difference between the training of OLMs and Stipendiary clergy in content or quality?
2. In some dioceses the Reader Course is the only recognized course for any lay ministry, but the training largely equips people to preach and lead worship.
3. Readers are authorised to do almost as much as Deacons; I have heard voices saying, 'Ordain Readers!' and others saying, 'De-clericalize deacons!' Personally, I want to remain lay because a healthy church needs committed and trained lay people as well as clergy.
4. Sometimes NSM and OLM clergy are made to feel inferior to their stipendiary equivalents – eg not invited to Chapter meetings, not seen as the obvious person to run a parish during a vacancy. Is there and should there be a pecking order within the ordained?
5. How can we prevent clergy feeling threatened by lay ministers? I think about the complex regulations being evolved to implement the Communion by Extension legislation: it could be easier for an untrained lay person to take reserved sacrament to an invalid than for a trained Reader to take communion by extension to a vacant parish.

There are some matters of a sacramental nature that the church keeps to priests alone, but there are many more things which deacons, Readers and other lay people, as well as priests, need to be trained to do. Every member of the Laos, however, needs a growing faith and knowledge to do their part in forwarding God's kingdom.



Leading into Truth?

Dr Alan Wakely is a Church historian. He is Deputy Honorary Secretary of the Central Readers' Council, and is licensed as a Reader to All Saints Convent in the Diocese of Oxford, where he works as administrator. This article does not make any new historical discoveries! Rather, by examining historical examples, chiefly from the nineteenth century, it sets out to demonstrate that God rewards the enquiring mind with new revelations, and can still the disquiet felt by many at perceived attacks on the faith they have received.

Bust of John Henry Newman



For the majority of the twenty Christian centuries, the idea that heretics should be put to death for their beliefs was entirely acceptable. That it is unacceptable today is due in part to an increasingly sophisticated view of the dignity of humankind as the crown of God's creation, and partly to an increasingly questioning view of doctrinal matters which means that the very idea of heresy, or at least its definition, is anachronistic.

During the Tudor period in this country Protestants burned Catholics and vice versa on charges of heresy, largely depending upon who was on the throne at the time. There is surely little doubt that the prime motivation of those carrying out the persecutions was political. It demonstrated a vindictive bloodthirstiness, which was even then at variance with the Christian view of the love of God. Nonetheless, heresy was an ecclesiastical rather than a civil offence, and therefore there had to be a theological justification of the idea that capital punishment by fire was appropriate for those found guilty.

That justification was simple, logical and horrible. A heretic was someone who held perverted beliefs about divine truth. This was a mortal sin, and the heretic's eternal soul was thus imperiled. He or she would burn forever in the fires of hell unless they could be persuaded to recant. So, if they refused to change their views, it was entirely right to put them into fire *now* as a foretaste of what was to come. This would be so unpleasant that they would be bound to recant at the thought of such agony continuing for eternity, and the fire would thus purge them of their heretical beliefs. Unfortunately, they would die in the process, but the Lord would be there, ready to welcome them into eternal bliss as repentant sinners. Thus the terrible punishment of death by burning could be demonstrated to be a kindness in the long term!

I take it we all find such ideas to be offensive. The trouble is that nothing in scripture or the creeds has changed since Tudor times, and on the face of it

any justification which applied in the sixteenth century should still be valid today. Where there has been a marked change is in our interpretation of scriptural and credal statements, and our understanding of the purposes of God. This is why the study of Church History is valuable. It helps us to appreciate that each new interpretation of Christianity is at the very least worthy of our consideration. Study of the nineteenth century is perhaps especially valuable in this context, because it was the time when real questioning was first able to enter church life in the pew rather than just in the university common room.

A kindly light leading us on

On the evening of February 21 2001, I was fortunate to be in the packed congregation at Littlemore parish church, just outside Oxford, for what was almost certainly the biggest service there since its consecration over 160 years ago. The occasion was the 200th birthday of John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman

who had been vicar of the parish at the time the church was built. Within a stone's throw of the church is the 'College' as it is now known – the quasi-monastic house where Newman lived for his last months as an Anglican, and where in 1845 he was received into the Church of Rome.

The service in February was indeed splendid: a high mass with some thirty-odd robed clergy filling the quire and four bishops in attendance. Also included was the world première of a new choral work based on words by Newman with music commissioned from the distinguished composer Arvo Pärt who flew in from Berlin especially for the occasion. In her address, Dr Peta Dunstan pointed out that it was sometimes the frailties in Newman's character that made him so appealing. Newman was often perplexed by religious questions, but he also approved of a constant search for new interpre-

tations of truth, a concept upon which he expanded in both *The Grammar of Assent* and *The Idea of a University*.

Some time after Newman had moved into the Roman Catholic church, he was attacked in an article by Charles Kingsley, which accused him of having ceased his search for truth because he had accepted a whole series of dogmas which he had previously found to be unacceptable, but which as a Roman Catholic he could no longer challenge. Chief among these Kingsley cited transubstantiation. Partly as a response to these accusations, Newman wrote his autobiographical *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. In this he argues powerfully that his belief in some doctrines, including transubstantiation, only started once he had decided that the Roman church was in his view the only church which could claim to have been founded by Christ Himself. The

...each new interpretation of Christianity is at the very least worthy of our consideration.

'ancillary' beliefs then became part of his faith largely as a matter of logic.

Kingsley may well have believed that this argument more or less proved the point he was

trying to make, but Newman's case is that such logic is actually part of an ongoing process of searching for truth. The *Apologia* contains the memorable statement that 'one can have ten thousand difficulties, but not one doubt'.² This seems to me to be a very nice distinction indeed. I cannot help feeling that Kingsley's charges are not entirely unfair, and that the Newman response was another of the endearing failings to which Dr Dunstan referred. Furthermore it can be argued that Newman's ideas about the value of enquiry were not in origin his own.

A friend named Froude

As a Roman Catholic, Newman founded the Birmingham Oratory, where he lived for very many years. In the room which was Newman's study is a breviary which he acquired whilst still an Anglican from the estate of his close friend Hurrell Froude, who died

¹ *JHNewman, Apologia pro Vita Sua Chapter 5*

in 1836 at the age of only 33. Newman treasured this breviary as he treasured his memories of Froude whom he described as having given him the germ of very many of his religious ideas and ideals. It is tempting to speculate that had Froude lived, he might have been seen as the greater man. Although Froude died an Anglican, he was certainly on a spiritual pilgrimage similar to Newman's. Indeed one can argue that Froude accepted the Newman *bête noir* of transubstantiation at a time when Newman certainly did not.

However Froude also held astonishingly modern views (for the 1830s) in some areas – most notably that of Christology where he appears to prefigure Schweitzer's *Quest for the Historical Jesus* of almost a century later.² This seems to be in extraordinary tension with his acceptance elsewhere of highly conservative positions. However, he also provides us with an explanation:

*'...in a case where the arguments seem in any way balanced... the additional presumption in favour of what the Church teaches should be sufficient to decide a prudent man to continue in the things he had been taught.'*³

Is this a 'cop-out' similar to the one of which Kingsley accused Newman? I think not. Froude, unlike Newman thirty years later, clearly allows that any of his views could theoretically be changed – but he accepts also that the bedrock of faith on which the church has survived for (at his time) eighteen centuries cannot and must not be lightly set aside. This is to my mind a great deal more profound than it appears to be at first sight, bringing a valuable sense of balance into discussions of potential new theological insights.

Balanced belief

This balance has continued to be hard to achieve. Less than thirty years after Froude's death, the church was thrown into turmoil by the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Much of what Darwin had to say had been anticipated in learned circles, but his book brought the debate about the creation out into the open, questioning the historicity of the book of Genesis and by extension the rest of scripture too. The details of the furore need not concern us here – but if the Church at large had followed the Froudean maxim, much of the trouble could have been avoided. The new interpretations of scripture which Darwinism appeared to demand should have been looked at dispassionately,

and explained gently to the Church at large, precisely because they *did* involve setting aside the treasured beliefs of most people over eighteen centuries.

What actually happened was an over-reaction of panic which in the following thirty or so years made some churchpeople look very silly indeed. The case of Rowland Williams was an example. He was Vicar of the village of Broadchalke in the Diocese of Salisbury, as well as being vice-Principal of the theological college at Lampeter, now part of the University of Wales, and then, as now, in the Diocese of St Davids. In many ways, Williams was a genuine child of his age: no-one nowadays would be allowed to hold two positions like these at the same time! In fact he lived in Lampeter and it was in his capacity as an academic there that he was asked to contribute to a volume, later to become notorious, with the innocuous-sounding title of *Essays and Reviews*.

Williams chose to write a review of a work by someone else – Baron Bunsen (he of the burner) – which doubted the historicity of parts of the Pentateuch. Williams did not express any new ideas of his own. His crime, for thus it was seen, was merely that he agreed with Bunsen's conclusions. Nonetheless a heresy charge was brought via the Bishop of Salisbury, even though it was in his capacity as Vice-Principal at Lampeter that Williams had written. Two other contributors were arraigned at the same time, although one died before the charges were heard.

There followed a highly undignified and rather public difference of opinion between the two bishops (Salisbury and St Davids) to whom Williams owed allegiance. Salisbury had no particular dislike for Williams, but had felt compelled to bring the charges; St Davids loathed Williams personally but was at least prepared to encourage Froude-like questioning, and thus considered that the charges of heresy were outrageous.

Williams and his surviving co-defendant were eventually acquitted on appeal. Williams himself retired from Lampeter, and went to live in Broadchalke where so far as can be ascertained he was a model vicar for the remainder of his relatively short life. He is now largely forgotten, but his grave at Broadchalke carries as an epitaph a quotation from 2 Corinthians 3.6 – 'The letter killeth, but the Spirit

giveth Life'. Williams is believed to have chosen this himself, and its implication is clear. Jesus himself was prepared to think the unthinkable, and Williams was prepared to do the same by ignoring the letter of the law to enter on a voyage of discovery in the Spirit. The answer might lead to 'no change', but it could also open new understandings and new horizons in the relationship between God and humankind. I might perhaps add that I ran a draft of this article past a Roman Catholic historian of this period (Lewis Berry, of Campion Hall, Oxford), and he made the interesting observation that the epitaph from 2 Corinthians might have been as suitable for Newman. I leave the readers to make their own judgement on this!

Help from history

How can all these incidents from history help us today? We say that surely no Christian of our time would want a human being to burn to death because of his or her beliefs – yet some of the genocide in what used to be Yugoslavia was carried out by supposed Christian upon supposed Christian. There are still extremists, both Protestant and Catholic (and by no means only in Northern Ireland) who are surprisingly willing to yell 'heresy' when their cherished beliefs are challenged – as those who greeted the fire in York Minster as divine retribution bore witness.

We do still face challenges. I have personal opinions about whether or not women can or should be made bishops, about whether divorcees should be allowed to remarry in church, or homosexuals be allowed to marry one another at all. But it would be presumptuous of me to assume, let alone insist, that my views are God's too. Throughout my life, I have understood the phrase 'He descended into Hell' as something to be taken figuratively: physical descent would merely lead to the earth's core. Who am I then to decide that the phrase 'was born of the Virgin Mary' – from the same source – must be taken literally? The imperative, as Froude would tell me, is that I should listen to the arguments, and ask in prayer through the Spirit for guidance, bearing in mind that God may choose this moment to reveal a fuller truth about himself. If he does, I should welcome this, and be open to the new insight. If he does not, the faith of twenty Christian centuries should continue to be mine too.

² LI Guiney, *Hurrell Froude* p 164 ³ Y Brilioth, *The Anglican Revival* p 240n ⁴ RH Froude, *Remains (Volume I)* p 239

Teacher, tell us...

Janina Ainsworth is a Reader in Manchester diocese, and Diocesan Director of Education responsible for 199 schools across 10 local authorities as well as for the Board's work in parishes. The recent diocesan education conference for heads and chairs focussed on pupils' spiritual development, and how this can be assessed, as required by the inspection process. She has been involved in the work that has been done nationally on this issue. In her home parish, she is involved in planning and leading confirmation preparation for young people.

Michael Ainsworth is Team Rector of Worsley, and Moderator of Reader Training for Manchester Diocese. He is currently involved in the third round of moderation across the North West region, which is particularly considering the effectiveness of training in preaching, and the formation of candidates for this ministry.



Together they reflect on how the effectiveness of teaching in areas which are highly subjective and personal can be measured.

Michael: In the 'year of Matthew', with its emphasis on Jesus the teacher, let's begin with the teaching and learning styles demonstrated in that gospel. Many people looked to Jesus to 'tell us...' – some out of a genuine desire for enlightenment, some in order to test or trap him. It was clear that he taught 'as one with authority', and that this was a self-authenticating authority that came from his inner convictions about his ministry. It was not the result of a carefully-constructed RE syllabus or training programme! I wonder how OFSTED inspectors would assess his effectiveness as a teacher?

Jan: Did Jesus really not learn how to teach? He might not have worked to a syllabus but there was a strong tradition that he would have absorbed throughout his own religious upbringing. Although the formal rabbinic tradition came slightly later, Jesus' relation to scripture and his way of using it, even his innovations, were informed by centuries of interpretation and usage. Even the healings and acts of power stood within a tradition, both ancient and contemporary – miracle workers and exorcists were well known in those parts.

It's a shame we don't have access to the ongoing discussions between Jesus and his closest companions: the table talk at Martha and Mary's, for example, or the day's-worth of discussion around the Sermon on the Mount.

I suspect that Jesus was quite sure where he wanted people to go, the ideas he wanted them to grasp and work with – not so far removed from the detailed planning for identified outcomes required of today's teacher. The dialogue with the rich young ruler neatly illustrates Jesus' awareness of the old adage 'Never ask a question to which you don't already know the answer.' That's probably what we mean by a leading question.

Michael: The learning style we see in the gospels, especially in Jesus' use of parables, is to invite people to make their own connections and draw their own conclusions. *If you have ears to hear...*

The learner needs to be open to move onto the next stage, and without that openness will be left behind – *hearing they will not hear...* How does this relate to the task in schools of raising pupils' spiritual awareness, and developing the process in a structured way?

Jan: Jesus and Socrates both knew the value of the skilful use of questions. There are different kinds of questions suited to different purposes, but the ones that stimulate the learner to think, to articulate their own view, to identify their own response and to develop that in consideration of other examples are the questions that lead to real growth.

When inspectors 'inspect' spiritual

development in a school they don't arrive equipped with a 7-point scale against which to measure pupils' level of spirituality. The exercise is much more concerned with identifying the opportunities for spiritual development offered by the school. These are understood in a variety of ways, most of them having something to do with awe and wonder, and encouragement of reflection. A secular account of spiritual growth struggles to get beyond what has been described as 'spiritainment', and is vulnerable to the charge of being little more than an easy emotionalism, a contemporary anti-rationalism, with little regard for either the history and context of talk about spirituality, or any kind of rigour in developing powers of discrimination and discernment.

In the majority of schools inspectors are having to operate with a secular model, and probably would be happy with pupils being invited to consider questions that make them think – the point for reflection. In church schools we would expect the starting points for reflection to be drawn explicitly from the Christian tradition, and we would encourage pupils to respond to and discuss the material as it strikes them. (In practice teachers are often anxious about doing that, having absorbed the message that there are right answers and right interpretations. In the end they are more comfortable telling pupils what the passage means.)

We need to ask questions about how courses are structured – in particular, how biblical studies and work on preaching are integrated.

Michael: Let's think about assessing and measuring, which are something of a modern obsession, both in schools and in ministerial training. They did not go in for portfolios of skills and competencies in Jesus' time! We could, I suppose, try to assess from the gospel records how effective Jesus was in raising awareness both in the inner core of disciples and in the wider group, but it would rather miss the point. Peter's blunders are not recorded in order to show that Jesus had failed in his delivery of the curriculum. But in a world where we have confidence in our ability to measure everything, what are the benefits of applying these techniques to spirituality and personal formation?

Jan: There are some lessons to be learned from schools, perhaps in the area of stating intentions. What do we want to achieve? What do we want to develop? What of that can we check out? What will always remain unsusceptible to assessment? There may be more that we can articulate and view than we think. Some competency models of the curriculum raise interesting issues of assessment – how would you test whether pupils *understand how to manage risk and uncertainty, the wide range of contexts in which these will be encountered, and the techniques for managing them?*

Current RE syllabuses distinguish between expecting pupils to acquire knowledge about religion, and enabling them to make use of that knowledge as part of their own growth and development: *learning about* religion and *learning from* religion. Both aims are appropriate and both need some kind of assessment. It's relatively easy to check if pupils have got the knowledge right; making any comment about *learning from* needs to be much more carefully handled. Different kinds of activities enable pupils to explore the material from a more personal perspective, perhaps through the use of creative arts, or by inviting them to step into someone else's shoes.

How is that kind of work to be 'marked'? Sometimes by comments from the teacher that begin a dialogue with the pupil's ideas, encouraging them to consider a different point of view; sometimes pupils assess each other's work, against agreed criteria; sometimes simply by being displayed for other members of the school community to see and read.

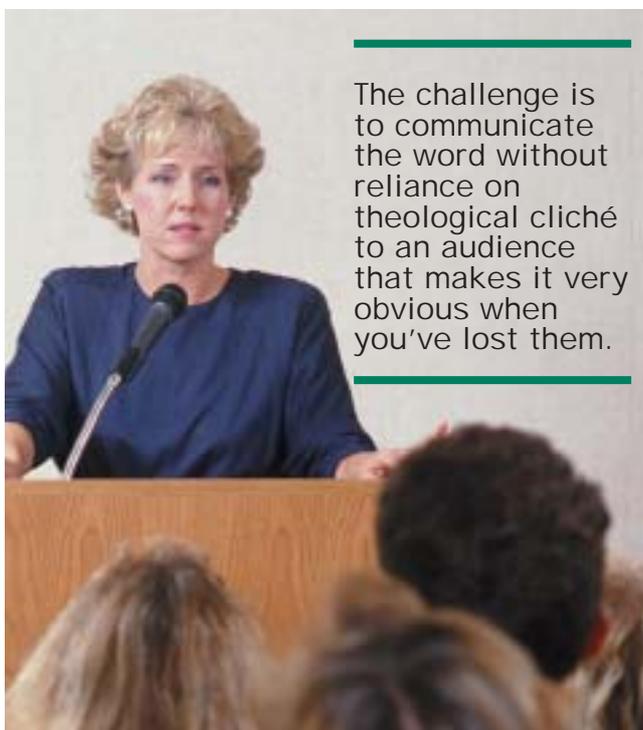
Michael: There are parallels here with Reader training. One of the tasks moderators have been given is to comment on how training courses go about equipping candidates as preachers and communicators of the word. We need to ask questions about the way courses are structured – in particular, how biblical studies and work on preaching are integrated. (In the past, there was often very little connection.) It also means making sure those who are assessing trainees' preaching have a clear understanding of their task, and are themselves trained for it. Courses

vary widely in the way they handle preaching. Very often trainees' own incumbents are seen as the primary resource (alongside modules on 'communication'). They may be supportive, they may themselves be good preachers, but that does not mean they are automatically effective trainers in preaching. As an experienced preacher who (I suspect) did not receive any systematic training in preaching when you were licensed as a Reader 20 years ago, how confident are you that a more systematic approach is bearing fruit?

Jan: It has to be better than my experience! I really have no idea how to assess (that word again) my own preaching, either in terms of what I ought to be

of relating to children and knowing where to pitch an assembly, the range of ideas they will tackle can be limited. We may have moved a bit beyond 'caring and sharing and thinking about those less fortunate than ourselves', but it can still be a very narrow repertoire. Readers (and clergy) may bring a more developed understanding of doctrine and biblical understanding but usually find it difficult to translate that into terms that intersect in any way with children's lives and understanding. The challenge is to communicate the word without reliance on theological cliché to an audience that makes it very obvious when you've lost them.

Michael: Turning finally to the question of 'formation': this is something of a 'buzz' word in ministerial education, and cynics say no-one really knows what it means, let alone how to assess it. There is plenty in the scriptures about being formed 'in Christ' – part of the vocation of every Christian – and there are lists of the various ministries to which some are called; but what is the distinctive character required for these specific ministries, and how is it to be developed? This is a particular issue for Readers who train alongside candidates for other lay ministries on the one hand, and ordinands on the other. They need to develop a confidence and an identity as trained and accredited teachers and ministers of the word. Readers are lay ministers who have to find their place along-



The challenge is to communicate the word without reliance on theological cliché to an audience that makes it very obvious when you've lost them.

setting out to do in a sermon, or what impact, if any, it has. That's probably why I feel at home with sermons/addresses for worship with children. At least you can vary the style and stand a chance of getting a response!

As a result of the Dearing Report on *Church Schools in the new Millennium* we are thoroughly reviewing the Board of Education's contribution to training clergy and Readers in working with children and young people. I hope moderators will recognise the very specific demands of school worship, parade services, pram services, all-age worship and carefully examine how training courses deal with them.

We find the needs of the different groups involved in the work fall into distinct categories. While school heads and teachers generally have the skills

side other lay ministers (some of whom 'do' the same things), and NSMs and OLMs (whose training may have been very similar but are allowed to 'do' different things). Making judgements about how well they are prepared for this role is not easy, yet it is necessary if we take Reader ministry seriously.

I said earlier that the ministry of Jesus was self-authenticating – accepted by many, rejected by others. He grew into this through his constant communion with the Father. Moderators need to ensure that those who come into training as 'natural' leaders within their churches, with an authority that springs from an established commitment and example, are helped to continue to grow, through prayer and study, after the pattern of Christ the Teacher.



Preaching Isaiah

This article is based on a series of lectures given at the Selwyn Summer Course for Readers in August 2001. The **Revd Dr Jo Bailey Wells** was Dean of Clare College, and is now Tutor in Old Testament at Ridley Hall and Lecturer in the Cambridge Theological Federation. She is also Moderator of Readers in the Diocese of Ely and a Bishops' Selector for the ordained ministry.



Detail of Sistine Chapel frieze depicting Isaiah

Surely Isaiah is one of the most important books of the Old Testament for Christians. It is so full of purple passages which are quoted at carol services, in choruses or by the New Testament itself. It speaks most clearly of all the Old Testament literature about God's promised Messiah.

Yet, Isaiah is also one of the hardest books. It should be heard like a mighty oratorio, where Israel sings its story of faith, rather than read at one sitting. There are many different voices, some of which are dissonant; there are frequent changes of style; there are non-sequiturs which leap from one theme to another. The book incorporates a variety of literature – from very different historical settings – which has been edited together to form a single work of prophecy. So, more than most Old Testament texts, it requires an interpretative rendering. In other words, we need help!

It seems most likely that the book consists of three sections (*chapters 1-39, 40-55, 56-66*) written over a two hundred year period from 720 to 520 BC. This spans the successive rise of three superpowers around Judah (the Assyrian empire, the Babylonian empire and the Persian empire) and the devastating experience of exile and return. The different texts may even have originated independently of each other. These features have tended to dominate scholarly interests – except in very conservative quarters – since Duhm first published the 'three source' thesis back in 1892. Thus there are countless

commentaries which focus attention on a single section of Isaiah (without any reference to the rest of the book) with the goal of uncovering the history behind the text.

Such scholarship has served historians better than it has served theologians. Moreover, it has left many preachers confused: because it has assumed that what a text *means* is solely determined by what the text *meant*. Attention has been paid to the historical context for Isaiah, as if the literary context (let alone the contemporary reader's context) were irrelevant.

Arise, shine, a new dawn!

Thankfully, a new era has now dawned. The rise of literary and canonical criticism has proved especially fruitful for the study of Isaiah. It has pointed to the inner consistency of the whole book, whereby a highly distinctive picture of God, 'the Holy One of Israel' is given, first to Isaiah himself, then through Isaiah to Israel, and finally through Israel to the world. This three-fold disclosure follows the three-fold structure of the book: thus demonstrating how the form of the book is integral to its content. It no longer remains a serious question whether one can describe the theology of Isaiah as a whole.

I think of the three sections as the layers making up a cake. These are only visible from the inside, on close examination. Each layer contributes to each 'slice', and the whole is 'iced' together with editorial introduction and explanation. To cut out one layer

of the cake for delectation – as generations of scholars have done – seems messy and even foolish.

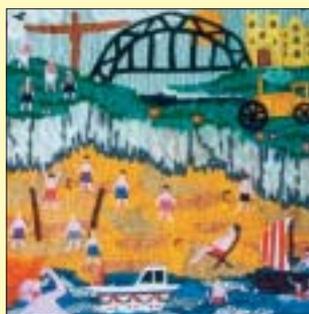
I am suggesting that, to get the most out of Isaiah, we need to engage with both content *and* form (indeed, the two can rarely be neatly separated anyway). We must do this with a historical awareness of the context into which it was originally addressed, and with recognition to the ways in which the words of prophecy have come to speak since. These may be substantially different. Some (presumably, oral) words which were preached by a prophet and heard by the people have now become some recorded words which have been edited into a book and placed within a canon. It is (only) from this book that we preach. Thus we follow Jesus (*compare Luke 4*) in unrolling a portion of the scroll and speaking from it, bringing God's word to a former people to speak afresh as God's word to his current people. And, on the way, we take heed to the New Testament context in which Isaiah is quoted and re-used.

But we also have much to learn from Isaiah's own form about preaching. The role of prophecy in Israel was to speak on behalf of God and mediate his words to his people (*compare Deuteronomy 18.15ff.*). The faithful prophet was the one whose message was not his/her own, but God's. The aim of the prophet's preaching was not, primarily, to be original or to break new ground, but to recall the people back to God, to remind them of the covenant he had made with them and the law he had given them. That is our responsibility also.

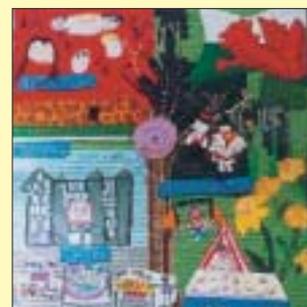
Here is your God!

The remainder of this article focuses on Isaiah 40. I shall seek to expound this passage with particular reference to some of the aspects outlined above, by way of illustration. The task of the preacher is to reiterate the proclamation of this passage ('Here is your

Part of the Millennium Tapestry on display in Norwich Cathedral



Whitworth House Special School, Spenny Moor



Manselton Primary School, Swansea



God') whatever the circumstance; but I hope it may offer some timely inspiration for the approaching Advent season in particular.

The chapter itself is of crucial importance for the book of Isaiah as a whole: it functions as the turning point between judgement and salvation. Here God summons his prophet to bring a word of comfort, based on a word of pardon, to a people who are suffering in exile. Their suffering is not just political and personal but theological: they have a sense of abandonment by God.

God responds by reasserting his covenant relationship with them: 'my' people, 'your' God (40.1). He is not a remote God. Rather, he woos Jerusalem and (literally) 'speaks to her heart' (40.2). As in Hosea, he woos his errant people back to himself, because their time of punishment is over, and pardon has been secured.

How, we may ask, is the prophet so sure? His message of comfort and pardon is based solely on the fact of the living God, the covenant God, God as the Holy One of Israel. As readers of the whole book of Isaiah, we recognise this to be the God whom Isaiah glimpsed in chapter 6, and from whom he himself received pardon.

...we can do no other than to read (and preach) Isaiah 40 through the lens of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, the servant king.

So – in the light of chapter 6 – Isaiah preaches of the God who is coming (40.3-11). All creation is getting ready for this new exodus which will see not only the return of the people but also *the return of their God* back to Zion. The pathway is being smoothed and the 'red carpet' laid for that time when 'the glory of the LORD (Yhwh) will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together'

(40.5). Perhaps we hear this promise too often in Handel's Messiah to recognise how shocking it would have been for the Israelites. Even Moses had to hide in the cleft of a rock; and Isaiah was terrified after his vision of God in the temple: but here it is announced that the living God will be visible to all.

The chapter continues by contrasting the present state of the people – wasted and withered – with the abiding word of God which alone guarantees the royal coming of Yhwh (40.6-8). When he comes, it will be as judge and saviour and shepherd, gathering the lambs in his mighty arm (40.9-11). Much of the rest of the chapter (40.12-26) develops the excitement of 'behold your God' in 40.9 – it declares the nature of God, reminds the people of his deeds and inspires them to join in the celebration. What a blueprint for all preaching!

The last few verses (40.27-31) explain more fully the first two verses. The message of comfort is brought home to a people who have grown weary and depressed. Faced with the pressure of the pagan might of Assyria and then Babylon, Israel had retreated into a form of dualism which was falsely dark, imagining that because something had gone wrong then they'd

fallen out of God's hand and been forgotten (40.27). But Isaiah reminds them, God isn't like that: the creator of the universe is not phased just because Israel has messed up (40.28). The

problem is resolved when God gives his own power and strength to those who need it, to his ailing and flagging people. The shepherd provides for his flock. Therefore, those who wait for him and hope in him will be renewed.

This reading of Isaiah 40 seeks to understand the passage as a devout Jewish 'Reader' in the period before Christ might have presented it. Our aim is to allow the Old Testament to

be itself, first and foremost, before we seek to hear some of the overtones through which we come to abstract it from its historical context and understand its fulfilment in Christ.

Prepare the way of the Lord

So, the second context from which to address this passage surely begins with reference to its proclamation by John the Baptist (*Matthew 3.3; Mark 1.2-3; Luke 3.4-6; John 1.23*). His very use of Isaiah 40 underlines how the Jews of that period, the contemporaries of Jesus, did not believe that the real return from exile had yet happened. Though geographically they were living in their own land once again, they were slaves, still waiting for the wonderful promises of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel to come true. And John the Baptist now repeats the prophecy, declaring 'here is your God' as Jesus approaches and begins his ministry. It is a ministry which follows the description in 40.9-11: Jesus judges the recalcitrant but acts as a loving shepherd to those in need. It is as if Isaiah 40 was the script which Jesus followed in his ministry. Indeed, the chapters which follow in Second Isaiah speak of Israel's representative, the servant king, through whom Israel will be rescued from exile (*compare chapters 42-53*). As we look at the gospels we find that Jesus is not just a herald of glad tidings to Zion; he also shares the lot of Zion in exile. Jesus takes on not only the role of Yhwh, but the role of Israel as well.

As Christians we can do no other than to read (and preach) Isaiah 40 through the lens of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, the servant king. The transition from the Jewish to the Christian reading represents no mere arbitrary fulfilment. It is not that these prophecies were lying around somewhere, and by some exegetical slight of hand we pick them up and lay them on Jesus. Rather, the prophecies of the glorious return of ►



St John Primary School, Coleraine



Kenton Primary School



St Peter Primary School, Bolton



Yhwh were not fulfilled and Israel knew they had not been fulfilled. But the whole of the New Testament claims that this is what was going on in the ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus. This second reading of Isaiah 40 is a reading which is incumbent upon us if we believe that the Old Testament has been fulfilled in a New Testament.

But if we can't rest content with a pre-Christian reading of Isaiah 40, I suggest that we can't rest content either with simply rehearsing the way in which Jesus drew the prophecy onto himself. Exposition which stops here is in danger of sounding like a personal privatised message of individual comfort. That way its demands can be minimised; it can simply sustain our own piety. But when you read Isaiah 40 again you realise what a travesty that would be: this is a message for the whole of creation.

If we apply Isaiah 40 to Christ in the first century, then we must apply it again to the Church in the twenty-first century. The Church is called to complete the work which Isaiah outlines for Israel and which Israel failed to do: to present God to the world. We cannot preach of Jesus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 40 without charging the Church to fulfil

the prophecies which follow in Isaiah 40–66. Just as Israel was not called into being for her own sake but for the sake of the world, so it is with the Church. Ultimately, salvation is not God's gift to the Church but God's gift through the Church, to the world. As we convey that salvation to the world, so God works that salvation in us as well as through us.

Comfort, comfort all people

So, the summons to the prophet to comfort Jerusalem must now function as a summons to us to comfort the whole world. Our task is to be the heralds and to prepare the world for the coming of God once more. We must offer the claims of the loving shepherd; we must announce God's judgement on idolatry; we must remind the nations of the world and their rulers that they are as nothing before the living God. We must do this by preaching the gospel (40.9): but not simply by announcing a message from a safe distance. Jesus came to where Israel was, the place of exile, and suffered the consequences. He embodied the saving painful love of God to a world in dire need.

Thus, 'preaching Isaiah' will itself involve both word and deed; it will involve the declaration of the herald, 'Here is your God' and the demonstra-

tion of that message by our actions. Then may we fulfil the charge entrusted to Isaiah and to all the prophets: to mediate God's word to his people. And after that, God's people may fulfil the third and remaining charge of Isaiah, given originally to Israel and now transferred to the Church: to proclaim and demonstrate our God to the world.

The exile did not lead the Jews of the Old Testament to abandon faith. They may have flagged for zeal, they may have grieved for old times, they may have lacked for assurance. But, in the end, exile evoked a daring articulation of God which no circumstances could undermine.

We ourselves belong to a community of faith which is in exile today, a community which sometimes grows faint or weary. We are fortunate to inherit the experience of our forebears and to receive their daring literature. Let us enjoy our inheritance to the full and *preach* Isaiah. As we do so, we ourselves will be reminded in the process: of the one God who made the world and the one God who yearns to renew the world – by means of the covenant he has made with us. God has proved over and over that he will do this through his people despite our failings, our folly and our inadequacy.

ST. JOHN

Preparing to Preach on the Fourth Gospel

Humphrey Prideaux is a tutor on a non-residential ministry course and priest-in-charge of two rural parishes. Over the past three years he has provided helpful introductions to resources on each of the three synoptic gospels in turn. Now he turns his attention to the Fourth Gospel. In the scheme of the Common Worship lectionary the Fourth Gospel does not have its 'own' year – but frequently appears among Bible readings set for major Christian festivals, such as Christmas and Easter.

Our village church is dedicated to St John the Evangelist. It means that in my Patronal Festival sermon I can focus on the Fourth Gospel without mentioning John the Apostle. I first met 'John' on National Service in the Navy in 1954. My godfather gave me William Temple's *Readings in St John's Gospel* (1939, 1940, 1945)¹ and I loved it and was inspired by it. I still refer to it and it is still in print. Temple is

conservative academically but he is able to soar into the heavens in his exposition. This we have to do when we preach on John – raise ourselves to heaven, to God: 'I ask that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17.20). This has nothing to do with church unity schemes but with God's goal for creation. That

is why down through the centuries John has been called the heavenly or spiritual gospel. However, the view that John is theological but the synoptics historical is false – each gospel writer has their own theological agenda. The great CH Dodd, (1963)² and (1953)³, showed that there are historical traces in John, absent from the synoptics. However even if we grant this the Jesus Seminar (1993)⁴ is probably correct to label all the words of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel black ('Jesus did not say this') except for one phrase 'pink' ('Jesus probably said something like this') and one group of sentences 'grey' ('the ideas are close to Jesus' own'). For a variety of reasons many evangelical Christians find this difficult to appreciate. Many conservative commentators cling both to verbal accuracy and



to the events as historical in John. This does not necessarily prevent deep understanding of what John is trying to say. It can however prevent many Christians from appreciating how little we know about the first hundred years of Christianity or how diverse the small congregations of early Christians were in the Mediterranean world and culture. Not all evangelicals cling to traditional views, eg MM Thompson in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (1992)⁵ is open about author, date, venue and historicity.

Basic Questions

Graham Stanton, (1989)⁶ sums up the position well. We do not know who the author was nor when nor where it was written. Nor do we know the background milieu of the gospel. Some writers today so want to stress the Palestinian background that they almost forget to mention that, like Paul, the author writes and thinks in Greek. The great CK Barrett (1955)⁷ is as usual wide ranging in

his horizons – the Hellenistic world, the Jewish background and the ongoing Christian experience each

contribute to John's thought; in fact the Fourth Gospel is the bridge between the cultures. It is relevant to note that Barrett's main work was done before much research into both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic library from Nag Hammadi. He has not found it necessary to revise his main conclusions in later years.

A further problem is that we do not know if John was aware of the synoptic gospels. These are all important questions but we need to be wary of any commentator who claims greater certainty than is warranted by the evidence. This brief consideration of some of the issues should cause us to beware of using a common but false answer to the question 'Who is Jesus?' Nicky Gumbel in his Alpha Course follows CS Lewis in saying 'Jesus was either bad (*ie* a liar), mad (*ie* self-deluded) or who he said he was (Son of God)'. This argument falls when we appreciate that Our Lord's words in John are the Fourth Evangelist's christological interpretation, not the actual claims of the historical Jesus of Nazareth.

Difficulties

Similarly we need to be aware when commentators try to sanitize texts in

John. First, the obvious tension between John's Christian community and the Jewish authorities gives us some of the most anti-semitic words in the New Testament. 'You are from your father the devil' (8.44). JA Baker (1996)⁸ says the words are 'arrogant, self-righteous and insulting'. (Bishop Baker has also warned us that modern doctrinal discussions in Christology have hardly begun to take account of modern critical scholarship on John). Secondly, John's uncompromising black and white judgement is difficult for us today. We often quote 'For God so loved the world...' (3.16); we tend to omit 'those who do not believe are condemned already'. Thirdly, how much damage is done to inter-community and multi-faith understanding by a rigid application of 'no one comes to the Father except through me' (14.6)? Lastly, even the Remembrance Sunday text 'Greater love has no one than this . . .' (15.13) can mask the restriction within this verse: there is a greater love

...John's uncompromising black and white judgement is difficult for us today.

– dying for one's enemies! Is this what Paul implies in his 'while we were yet sinners... Christ died for us.' (*Romans 5.8*)? Checking commentators on these texts reveals their presuppositions.

The Lectionary

Would it have been better if we had a *four* year lectionary? Does it detract from the synoptics to emphasise John at major festivals? And does not John deserve his own year? Unlike the synoptics, John does not lend itself to being read in small chunks; the discourses need to be read as a whole. Might this be an alternative to our normal use of scripture in worship? For example, might we read all chapter 6 (Bread of Life) and base the service round that reading alone? But chapter 6 itself gives us a further basic question. 'Does John emphasise or ignore the sacraments?'

Making a start

Those who feel their knowledge of John is rusty would do well to start with one of the standard introductions eg Edwin Freed (1994)⁹ or the weightier Raymond Brown (1997)¹⁰; this latter is this great American Catholic scholar's summary of his views as they

developed since his important mammoth commentary of 1966¹¹. The multi-volume dictionaries also provide careful, scholarly introductions, often by major Johannine commentators, eg JN Sanders in the *Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible* (1962)¹², Robert Kysar in the *Anchor* (1992)¹³, or MM Thompson in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (1992)⁵.

Commentators

DA Carson gives us a survey of New Testament Commentaries, 1993¹⁴, though his survey now seems to be out of print. I tried to draft my thoughts before reading his five pages on John. He is a major American evangelical scholar with his own good conservative commentary on John (1991)¹⁵. I agree with his first choice of best buy – CK Barrett⁷.

Barrett is on the Greek text. In the past I have lent the book to ministerial students without Greek and they have appreciated his precision and clarity; the use of Greek does *not* prevent its use by those without Greek. In particular Barrett's discussion of the basic questions gives the actual evidence for his own analysis and conclusions. Leon Morris, Carson's other 'best buy' (1971)¹⁶, is more conservative, 'strictly earthly historical', and 'numerous theological and historical questions are not probed very deeply' (*Carson's words*). Most great commentators have written their 'John'. As with other books of the Bible, Sheffield Academic Press has helped students with its New Testament Guides. *John* is by the Anglican Franciscan scholar Barnabas Lindars, originally published in 1990. It has been published in a new format (2000)¹⁷, but only the bibliography has been up-dated. Lindars' own commentary (1972)¹⁸, emphasises the Wisdom background to John. As always in the Sheffield New Testament Guides, Lindars discusses the main topics raised by modern commentators and indicates the positions of other scholars. He himself, like many others, sees the gospel, and the Letters of John, as products of a Johannine community of Christians.

Length

The problem of the important commentaries is their length. Those of us who have little time for uninterrupted academic reading feel overwhelmed, inadequate and even guilty. Nevertheless, we do an injustice to



ourselves as students of the Word and as preachers if we are content with only the smaller commentaries. The way forward, for nourishment and for preaching, is to focus on a major section of the Gospel – the Passion, the Resurrection, a discourse, a sign, the Prologue and to read that part of a major commentary (the Thomas incident has 34 pages in Brown's commentary!). We have to turn to the German giants for stimulating radical insights – even if their views have not won later acceptance. Bultmann (English version 1971)¹⁹ is a classic; his great theological insights are stimulated by John. Kasemann (1968)²⁰ shows why, justifiably, John was treasured by gnostics but suspected by mainstream Christians at first. John Fenton has a rather dull 'A' level commentary (1979)²¹ but his analysis of John's Passion is excellent (1961)²². The classic 19th century commentaries by Bishop BF Westcott of Durham (1881)²³ have been absorbed by later writers. An earlier twentieth century writer still merits time spent on his classic, Edwin Hoskyns (1939)²⁴; the English is beautifully written and the theological devotion profound. Like several commentators on John his work had to be completed by an editor after his death.

Of the smaller scale books, John Marsh's *Pelican John* (1968)²⁵, is disappointing – it is no classic unlike Nineham's *Pelican Mark*. William Barclay (1955/1975)²⁶, similarly is not at his best on John with his homiletic, Scottish Presbyterian gifts; also he is surprisingly dogmatic in his views.

Finally two more recent works merit serious study. First, the American Alan Culpepper (1998)²⁷ gives us a major work tackling the many issues with insight. The introduction to the new edition of Lindars' *Sheffield New Testament guide* is also by Culpepper. Lastly, John Ashton (1991)²⁸ has produced a large (and expensive), discussion of John – 'elegantly written and important' (Carson). He treats the major issues and themes, appreciating what is best in Bultmann. My ministry students groaned when they first opened Ashton's book. However, they changed their minds after they had used it.

If we can learn to read these important books fast, ignoring footnotes and skimming through long, academic arguments, we shall be able to extract the gold of the Fourth Gospel from the mountains of words written about it.

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Even though Humphrey has now taken us so ably through all four of the New Testament Gospels he is not being let 'off the hook' just yet. He has been lined up to offer similar helpful advice on the Acts of the Apostles – coming in August 2002. Editor.

ST. JOHN



The powerful word: reflecting on the Prologue of St John

For those who have been privileged to listen to him, either as a university student or via the Selwyn course, Canon John Sweet's exposition of the New Testament is unforgettable. It marries scholarship and a profound spirituality. Here he explores for us John 1.1-14, the great Christmas gospel where 'St John explains the mystery of Christ's incarnation.'

'The word of God speaks nowhere more powerfully than when silent on the cross'.

In the beginning there was chaos and darkness, until God's word, 'Let there be light'; Genesis tells of the struggle with darkness, to create a habitable earth. To the Greeks, and to the Enlightenment world, it is the light of reason and knowledge that rescues the world from darkness and gives it freedom and life. A post-Enlightenment world is less sure. The old confidence in science and technology to bring fullness of life has begun to look like the *hubris* (arrogance) which, the Greeks saw, leads to *atr* (delusion, blindness), which then leads on to nemesis (*eg* Chernobyl, and other Chernobyls waiting to happen). How can we open deluded eyes and ears? How get people to see clearly?

In him was life

To St John in the biblical tradition, 'in him was life and the life was the light of all people'. It is life, life that is 'with God', which enlightens: 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (*Psalms 119.105*). The Torah which this Psalm celebrates throughout its 176 verses is teaching, guidance for living, a way of life to be followed. The Rabbis identified it with the Wisdom by which God created the world, and by which he fed and guided his people through the desert to the Promised Land. This Word or Wisdom Christians saw incarnated in Jesus; he was the manna (*John 6.31 ff*), the water from the rock (*7.37-9*).

'The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory'. God's communication with his people is always more than verbal instructions. Like the best teaching it is giving himself, revealing his glory (in Hebrew thought the word 'glory' essentially means 'true being'); it is a drawing out, not a putting in: 'to all who received him he gave power to become children of God'.

Communication as self-giving, education as drawing out: as Morna

Hooker has reminded us (*Beginnings, Keys that Open the Gospels, SCM, 1997*) the Prologue illuminates all that follows – a series of 'signs' and discourses, full of word plays, riddles and irony, which puzzle and provoke the participants (and the reader). In the other Gospels Jesus is a teller of parables, asking questions, not giving answers. John is different, but as CH Dodd pointed out, there are concealed parables like the Apprentice Son (*5.19,20*): the son watches his father at work, who shows him the secrets of his craft. More telling still are the acted parables in the synoptics: hugging children, touching the unclean, eating with outcasts, and the last meal with his friends. Here John again is different, but at the Last Supper he adds the foot-washing, and Jesus' gift to the traitor (*13.26*), giving himself into his power. Then, as in all the Gospels, the teaching of that meal is enacted:

Meanwhile a silence on the Cross
As dead as we shall ever be,
Speaks of some total gain or loss,
And you and I are free

To guess from the insulted face
Just what Appearances he saves
By suffering in a public place
A death reserved for slaves.

(from 'Friday's Child' WH Auden's poem
in memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

We received him not

'He came to his own and his own received him not'. Jesus' whole life was an invitation, but also inevitably a struggle with the darkness, with eyes that could not see – a word 'sharper than any two-edged sword' (*Hebrews 4.13*). This is no gentle Jesus:

When the rich learned Pharisee
Came to consult him secretly,
Upon his heart with Iron pen
He wrote 'Ye must be born again'

(Blake, 'The Everlasting Gospel')

The Prologue announces a story of conflict leading to rejection and disgrace, but disgrace which for seeing eyes is the true glory: 'We beheld his glory, full of grace and truth', God's true being, revealed finally on the cross. John's story questions his world's attitudes. Glory in Greek (*doxa*) is reputation, appearance; in Hebrew (*kabodh*) substance, true being. Flesh was perceived as, if not evil, inferior to spirit; yet here it is God's means of self-communication. Salvation was for the spiritual elite; yet here the elite rejected him, but all who received him he affirmed as children of God.

*The
light of life*

Turning the world upside down

What of *our* world's attitudes? Glory: conspicuous consumption, getting ahead (Humpty Dumpty's 'nice knock-down argument')? Flesh: exploitation, or fear? Salvation: if not elitism, acquiescence in the majority left in darkness?

John's prologue is the key to a story which turns the world upside down. But a Christmas sermon should not be confrontational; rather it should celebrate the God of small things, his only weapon the word made flesh. We have to remind our people, and ourselves, that we are in many respects blind, deluded by the 'ruler of this world', but should celebrate the light which comes not to condemn the world but give it life. The first sign by which Jesus revealed his glory was transforming the water of Mosaic purification, which can merely remove external uncleanness, into the wine which gives life to the party: 'the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (*1.17*). 'I have come that they may have life, in all its fullness' (*10.10*). The acted parables force no one into subjection; there is just the mute appeal, and challenge, of the Word made flesh, in his mother's arms at the beginning and at the end. 'The word of God speaks nowhere more powerfully than when silent on the cross'.



Gospel and Genealogy

As a 'taster' for Matthew's gospel, and with Christmas coming up, **Clare Amos** reflects on something that happened to her quite a long time ago.

There was once a morsel of theological wisdom shared with me by a bishop that I don't think I will ever forget. It was over thirty-five years ago, and the evening that I was confirmed by the then Bishop of Sherborne. I can't remember a word of what he said in his sermon! But I still recall vividly something he mentioned 'en passant' to my family and me as he was chatting to us over refreshments afterwards. It was this: 'The whole of the gospel of God is summed up in the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel.' I suspect what he actually said was expressed slightly more snappily than what I have just written – but that was certainly the essence of his words. They were an eye-opener, and that brief statement that evening long ago has certainly influenced my own biblical and theological thinking ever since. Little did the bishop know that his off the cuff remarks were going to make such an impact.

Dry data?

So often we consider genealogies to be the 'boring bits' of scripture – the parts that lectionary compilers normally cut out so that we can focus on the biblical story and teaching. Yet properly understood genealogies – in both the Old and New Testaments – are vehicles of the story of God's dealings with humanity, and can also shed valuable insights into God's will for our dealings one with another.

Take a closer look at Matthew's genealogy, set out in Matthew 1.1-17. It begins with Abraham, the traditional father of Judaism, and brings us down by a process of what it describes as three times fourteen generations (1.17) to Christ. On the surface it seems so much less inclusive than the corresponding genealogy in Luke's Gospel (*Luke 3.23-38*) which takes the ancestry of Jesus right back to Adam, the first human being.

It does indeed seem that Matthew is intending by his genealogy to emphasise Jesus' Jewish roots and to present

him as the one who will bring about the fulfillment of God's promises both to Abraham and to David. For not only does the genealogy begin with Abraham, but the second section begins with David, and concludes with the end of the Davidic rule in Judah at the time of the exile. And if one starts exploring things a bit more deeply another interesting insight emerges. Because in the Hebrew language the letters of the alphabet also have numerical values and the numerical value of the word 'David' is precisely fourteen – the very number that Matthew has so clearly highlighted for us. (1.17) So the one who will so shortly be born in David's town, Bethlehem of Judaea (2.1) is portrayed in the genealogy by name and number, place and position, as the perfect heir of David, the Messiah who would restore David's kingdom.

Subversive women

How very neat! What a nice orderly way for God to work! Was that the insight which the bishop was seeking to share with me that evening? Far from it! Because in the midst of this intricate and organized pattern Matthew has allowed a surprising untidiness to appear – and it is through this untidiness that the gospel is to be discovered. By and large the genealogy simply lists fathers and sons, since it was through the male line that inheritance and legitimacy was conveyed. But four women creep in – subverting this tidy pattern. And what women! Tamar (1.2), Rahab, (1.5) Ruth (1.5) and 'the wife of Uriah' (1.6) Three of them were Gentiles, one was a prostitute, another was involved in an incestuous relationship, and 'the wife of Uriah' – perhaps even Matthew can't quite bring himself to name her as Bathsheba – was an adulteress. Their stories told in the Old Testament make it clear that all four were far from the passive, idealised vision of Israelite womanhood. They were outsiders who challenged the culture and the mores of their time. They were also worthy forerunners of Mary, the scandal of whose apparently illegitimate pregnancy Matthew will tell us about immediately after this genealogy. It was from women such as these that the Messiah, the son of David, was to be born. Matthew is telling us that it is through people such as this that God inexplicably and scandalously chooses to work. Immanuel is to be discovered among

such as these. How shocking it must have been for Matthew's first readers to realise this. But it is the shock at the heart of the gospel – a shock that we still need to hold on to today, when the Christmas story sometimes anaesthetises us by its very familiarity. That was the insight the Bishop of Sherborne was seeking to share with me on my confirmation day. It is an insight that the biblical scholar Michael Goulder once deliciously expressed in verse – a feast in words that is fun to recall as the season of Christmas approaches and, this year with Matthew's gospel, we sing 'O come, O come Immanuel'.

Exceedingly odd,
Is the means by which God
Has provided our path
to the heavenly shore:
Of the girls from whose line
The true light was to shine
There was one an adulteress,
one was a whore.
There was Tamar who bore –
What we all should deplore –
A fine pair of twins
to her father-in-law;
And Rahab the harlot,
Her sins were as scarlet,
As red as the thread which she hung
from the door;
Yet alone of her nation
She came to salvation,
And lived to be mother
of Boaz of yore;
And he married Ruth,
A Gentile uncouth,
In a manner quite counter
to biblical law;
And of her there did spring
Blessed David the King
who walked on his palace one evening,
and saw
The wife of Uriah,
From whom he did sire
A baby that died,
oh, and princes a score.
And a mother unmarried
It was too that carried
God's son, and him laid
in a cradle of straw,
That the moral might wait
At the heavenly gate
While the sinners and publicans
go in before,
Who have not earned their place
But received it by grace,
And have found them a righteousness
not of the Law.
(© Michael Goulder)



Discovering the Dioceses: Ely in East Anglia



This is the first of a projected series of short articles which will range around the dioceses exploring how Reader ministry is expressed 'where you are'. Potential contributors (who should have some recognised diocesan role in relation to Reader ministry) are invited to contact the editor on Alanclarerobin@aol.com. We look forward to hearing from you! This first article in the series – which focuses on the Diocese of Ely – was written by **Stephen Tooke**, a Reader in Ely Diocese who is on General Synod and is Diocesan Lay Chair. He is a retired police superintendent, married to a priest in whose parishes he serves.

Ely Cathedral (above) and Queens' College Mathematical Bridge (below)

The Diocese of Ely covers an area of contrasts. At one extreme is Cambridge with its groves of academia and 'silicon fen', at the other are the watery marshes and fens of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

In total the diocese contains some 300 parishes, organised into 215 benefices in 14 deaneries and three archdeaconries.

An aversion to patterns of ordained local ministry, has meant that there has been considerable focus on Reader ministry to underpin a shrinking number of clerical posts. As the new millennium begins, Ely Diocese has more active Readers than incumbents and stipendiary clerics. What is more – Readers have played an active part in managing and developing their ministry within the diocesan management structure.

Today, oversight lies with an elected board of Readers with a lay chairman. Representatives are drawn from each of the three archdeaconries and serve a three year term, which ensures fresh approaches are regularly considered. At the same time, there is good integration with the clergy. For 20 years, the Suffragan Bishop of Huntingdon has held the post of Warden of Readers, while three clergy serve as Archdeaconry Sub-Wardens. The model has worked well to minimise the clergy-Reader tensions which inevitably arise from time to time.

Readers Everywhere!

In the early 1990s, the late Rt Revd Gordon Roe, as Warden of Readers, declared the aim of appointing a Reader in every benefice. Today, there are more than enough readers to achieve that vision, but distribution means that there are groups of parishes with large numbers of Readers and



others where Reader ministry is still not practised.

According to current chairman Malcolm Barrett, this is an issue to be addressed in the current three-year plan.

'We are looking to develop a 'Sharing Ministry', whereby parishes with clergy and Readers will support those without these resources,' he says.

The Board today is proud of its professional approach which underpins the 180 practising Readers, as well as the 25 in training. Interestingly, Ely is bucking the national trend with a growth of 5% to 9% annual increase in numbers in recent years.

Last year, Julia Jones was appointed to the post of Reader Ministry Development Officer – a part-time post within the diocesan adult education team. Julia, with a background in adult education, is responsible for delivering both the training programme for those in training, but also underpinning the continuous ministry education programme too. This is done in conjunction with an

education sub-committee which began in the late 1990s.

As well as being the first RMDO Julia has another first to her credit, as in April 2001 she became the first Reader in recent times in the diocese to be appointed in-charge of a group of parishes. This is a pattern which the current Warden, the Rt Revd John Flack, believes will be repeated in a number of other benefices as the diocese undergoes a major review of its pastoral plan. 'Suitable Readers will be able to provide regular parish support while decisions are made on the deployment of priests and the structure of benefices and deaneries,' he says.

Respect

Readers enjoy widespread respect across the diocese. This did not happen overnight, but can be traced back over a decade as a series of chairmen brought particular skills. The 1990s began with Stephen Brooker, then Bursar of Emmanuel College. He brought professional management, introduced a more rigorous admissions approach together with pastoral and spiritual support for Readers. Geoff Dodgson, who succeeded him, was a communicator who developed *The Ely Reader* newsletter and took a presentation on the benefits of Reader ministry to all the senior clerics in the diocese. Julia Jones, with her interest in education took over and developed enhanced education programmes for both those in training and those already licensed.

Now Malcolm Barrett is leading the board on into challenging times. Amongst the plans he is overseeing is the creation of more sub-committees to spread the workload and a new web site will enhance communications. However, Readers as part of a team remains an important part of the initiative and the push to involve Readers even more in deanery chapters and the development of ministry strategies will be maintained. 'Collaborative ministry will be seen as the lifeblood of ministry in this diocese', he insists.

Facts: the Diocese of Ely

| | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| Area: | 1507 sq miles |
| Population: | 610,000 |
| Parishes: | 313 |
| Benefices: | 257 |
| Clergy: | 185 (excluding first curacies) |
| Readers: | 180 practising 31 in training |



For your bookshelf

B H

The Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible

Ed John Rogerson
OUP £25 hbk
0 19 860118 2

This book represents a marriage between coffee table glamour and academic rigour, 24 coloured and 150 black and white illustrations supporting the substance of the text. Academic studies constantly mean new insights for Readers but Rogerson's study goes a stage further; there are sections on *The study and use of the Bible and Contemporary interpretations* including feminist scholarship and three perspectives on liberation theology. Rogerson's own introduction and epilogue make it clear that there always have been a range of interpretations, all of which can be legitimate in context. Listeners to a speaker can engage in dialogue to elucidate meanings but when it comes to written words of a deceased author there is no absolute certainty about the intended meaning; more intriguing is the notion that it is legitimate for readers to take what meaning they will from the author's words. And it is the Reader's role constantly to strive to find and communicate the Word of God in the scriptures. At £25 a family member of a Reader might give this book as a present, enjoy the pictures themselves and indulge the Reader when the academic substance is shared too.

DAVID SELICK

S H

Spaces for the sacred

Philip Sheldrake
SCM £16.95 pbk
0384 028205

Based on the 1999-2000 Hulsean lectures at Cambridge this book is an

exploration of the currently fashionable topic of place (where do I belong?) from a sacramental Christian perspective using an interdisciplinary approach which includes history, philosophy, geography, anthropology, literature, theology and spirituality but strangely does not tackle any biblical material. It is not an easy read (of its 214 pages, 42 are taken up with foot-notes and bibliography) but it fizzes with creative starting points over a wide range of subject matter. The author discusses the concept of space and connects it with church history – Augustine, Francis of Assisi, holy people, shrines, pilgrimages – and notes that place as a revelation of the sacred is an idea with which Catholics are perhaps more comfortable than Protestants. A theological chapter is concerned with the inter-play between catholicity and particularity, between the local and the universal and between the Eucharist and ethics. Monastic life and mysticism are both considered and the final impressive chapter is about place in the modern city. This is a valuable study which however calls for more than average time, interest and thought.

HOWARD SAINSBURY

B

Saint Saul

DH Akenson
OUP £20 hbk
0 19 514157 1

Donald Akenson, the respected historian, writes his rigorous, intellectual critique of the Third Quest for the historical Jesus in a readable modern style. His thesis is that, drawing on richly variant beliefs current in Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity emerged from the traumatic destruction of the Temple in CE 70 by explaining how the Covenant relationship was continued

through them. Unlike the gospels, Saul's letters predate CE 70. Akenson provides reasons for believing that in them Saul – spiky, opinionated, loving Saul, whose Billingsgate outbursts against opponents were tempered by the need to do a deal with those who held power in Jerusalem, can provide biblical scholars with 'a skeleton key to the historical Jesus'. I recommend this book for the author's knowledge of Judaism, his clear thinking and the challenge he gives to Readers to look afresh and with greater understanding at St Paul and perhaps even Yeshua of Nazareth.

GLORIA HELSON

B W

Preaching like Paul

James W Thompson
Westminster John Knox
£12.99 pbk
0 664 22294 3

This is an important book, relevant to the ministry of all who preach, not least Readers. It challenges us and as the author says, 'To suggest that Paul's preaching in a pagan context in the first century is a model for preaching in the 21st century is to invite incredulity and resistance from most contemporary preachers'. But that is what he does suggest – a model, but not the only one. This is a scholarly book as you would expect from a professor of theology – addressing the contemporary state of American churches but it speaks to us too. There are some 300 references to other authors whose views are sympathetically considered and many more biblical references. Don't be put off! A review of recent trends in preaching, concentrating on technique rather than goals, is followed by an analysis of Paul's aims. He combines evangelistic with pastoral preaching to remind his hearers of the fundamentals

of the faith, to build up the little communities with shared distinctive values in a pagan world and calls them 'to live a life worthy of the gospel'. Above all Paul's words are God's not his own. Shared moral values are out of date in our world too, where 'the culture is characterised by consumer capitalism, moral relativism and narcissism'. We are called to be a counter-culture. Finally the author sketches a series of sermons based on Paul's teaching. Why do you preach? What are your aims? What is your strategy for a series of sermons? These are the questions the book prompts.

JOHN TAYLOR

B S P

Into your hands

Andrew Clitherow
SPCK £8.99 pbk
0 281 05353 7

Andrew Clitherow uses the conversation between James and John and Jesus about their place in the Kingdom to shed light on the significance of prayer for those in ordained ministry. He looks at this communication as the means of sustaining the relationship between the priest and Christ, developing and maturing through life as does the conversation between two people in a relationship of love. I found the book interesting and challenging and, as one married to a priest, identified with many of the experiences depicted in the book and valued the insights of the author. For Readers, however, inevitably the book raises the whole question of the distinction between the roles of Reader and priest. Whilst it has much to say to anybody in Christian ministry it is specifically addressed to priests. Anyone would however benefit from its emphasis on being rather than doing.

LESLEY MITCHELL



S P

Perspectives on prayer

Ed Fraser Watts
SPCK £9.99 pbk
0 281 05367 7

If you expect a resource for leading intercessions this book will disappoint you. The eight contributors have a different aim – to broaden our understanding of prayer. These essays began as a series of talks in Cambridge. The subjects include prayer and music, science and prayer, prayer and the body and each chapter has valuable suggestions for further reading. I had to struggle with some of the essays because they presented an unfamiliar perspective on prayer but that is what made the book as a whole worth reading. The essay on prayer and psychology by the editor was particularly rewarding as it defines different types of prayer expanding what is often our very narrow concept of prayer and so provides a gloss on all the other essays. This is a book worth having on your bookshelf if only to help you avoid the frequent shopping list of private and public prayer.

MARGARET CLARKE

B P

In the beginning there was darkness

John M Hull
SCM £9.95 pbk
0 334 02821 3

It is commonly accepted that when we come to read scripture we do so from a particular frame of reference. As John Hull says in the introduction to this book we read the Bible through the world in which we are embedded. However he approaches the Bible with a different frame of reference from most western European Christians, that of a person with a disability and specifically a blind person. This book is the record of, as the author puts it, 'learning to begin a new

conversation with the Bible, this time as a blind person'. In seven chapters he considers a number of Bible passages that make reference to blindness or partial sight and in particular the way that blindness is often equated with sin. While not always agreeing with the conclusions he draws, his comments are always thought provoking and bring fresh insights that as a sighted person I would not have appreciated. Along the way he also gives a wealth of examples of his experience of being blind that can challenge us to think through our view of disability. This is certainly a book which would be of value to any Reader engaged in ministry among people with disability, but it should also have a broader appeal than that.

STEVE RICHARDS

B P

God's touch

Bruce G Epperly
John Knox £9.99
0 664 22281 1

The sub-title – *Faith, wholeness and the healing miracles of Jesus* – is the key to this American publication. Chapters 2 to 12 (of 13) are prefixed by a Bible passage and much of each chapter is an exposition of the miracle in question. This is by far the most useful aspect of this book from a Reader's point of view. It is not a book to read from cover to cover – there are too many repetitions of ideas, phrases and quotations. This is particularly obvious in the exercise suggested at the end of each chapter called 'an experiment in healing and wholeness'. Although the main title refers to God's touch, the exercises concentrate on light and its penetration into our outer and inner self. The format is that of a guided meditation. There are many references to the inter-relationship of bodily and spiri-

tual health and the fact that healing can be achieved through a combination of medication, surgery, meditation, prayer and touch. The author warns against regarding healing as a linear process and believes that 'the healing process is never complete until the patient claims his or her role in partnership with the God of healing'. References to other works appear as footnotes. There is a subject index with highly selective entries (there is no excuse for this in these days of sophisticated word processing) and an index of names in which the only biblical one is the Apostle Paul despite the mention of scores of others.

ANNE JOHNSON

P S

Seeing beyond depression

Jean Vanier
SPCK £4.99 pbk
0 281 05411 8

As one would expect in a book by such an author there are several passages of inspired spiritual writing but as a guide to seeing beyond depression its value is limited. Covering the whole subject of depression in 81 pages is like trying to explore the causes, course and outcome of the First World War at similar length. There is dangerous simplification, for example of the skills needed to listen to the depressed, and the writer's view that almost all depression is rooted in childhood experience. The spiritual passages just make the book worth dipping into by those who already know about depression and want some useful quotations.

LYN FERRABY

P T

No easy answers

Barbara Baisley
Epworth £8.95 pbk
0 7162 0539 4

This book is sub-titled *An exploration into suffering* and the author does this by

looking at the questions of blame, guilt, healing and death in the light of Christ's suffering and the place of the cross, prayer, meaning and acceptance in this experience. Barbara Baisley, a priest who has had cancer for 14 years, writes honestly and personally of her anger and doubts in addressing these questions which form the chapters of this book. For her the worst time was discovering the cancer had returned after thinking that she was healed from breast cancer. This made her determined to find some meaning from her experience and to continue living in the present moment. From her thoughts, and those of other sufferers, she gives us the vision of God suffering in and with his creation. There are no easy answers but we must struggle forward on our journey with God thankful to be alive. This book can help those ministering to others and responding to questions which may be asked. I would hesitate to give it to a cancer patient who isn't a committed Christian although the appendix on practical matters is very good for those facing on-going illness.

MARY ROTHERO

S

Women making a difference

Marigold Best and Pamela Hussey
SPCK £8.99 pbk
0 281 05294 8

An old saying has it that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. The women in this book rock the cradle by helping the disadvantaged to attain a fuller life in Christ in their communities. Unfortunately the book's title sounds sexist. In the communities described men are also involved in building community life. The issues covered in this book have already been extensively



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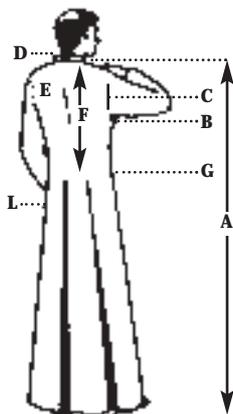
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covered in similar books concerned with community development. However Readers could find sermon illustrations in this book, which could be useful in a diocesan or training college library.

JOAN M BURTON

T P

Choosing life

Jeff Astley

DLT £7.95 pbk

0 232 52368 1

Morally speaking is it more important not to harm someone than to help them? What is your reaction to those who believe that the only reason for helping others is self-interest? No easy answers are given in this excellent book. Jeff Astley challenges readers to reflect on critical ethical questions using the resources of the Christian tradition. Abortion, euthanasia, war, and punishment are among the subjects covered in this slim volume which forms part of a series with the title *Exploring faith: theology for life*. It would be useful in Reader training and for parish study groups. It is an introduction to society's moral debate in the 21st century.

JOAN M BURTON

W P

The Westminster collection of Christian quotations

Compiled Martin H Manser
Westminster John Knox £20 hbk

0 664 22258 7

The compiler of this excellent anthology is 'a professional compiler of reference books and dictionaries'. In this handsome hardback volume he has drawn together over 6000 quotations arranged by theme, drawing on all Christian traditions and on the Bible as well as later sources. Over 200 topics are arranged alphabetically from Ability to Zeal and include theological, ethical and philosophical themes and

there is useful cross-referencing. If you are looking for an apposite quotation or an arresting epigram you are likely to find it here. Readers will discover much to ponder, for example in entries on Preaching and Sermon. One act of obedience is better than a hundred sermons. (Bonhoeffer). Some clergy prepare their sermons, others prepare themselves. (Samuel Wilberforce). Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary use words. (Francis of Assisi). This storehouse of thought-provoking wisdom would be a much appreciated Christmas present for any Reader.

PETER WATKINS

W

The circling year

Ronald Blythe

Canterbury press £16.96 hbk
1 85311 369 7

This collection of sermons originally preached at Mattins or Evensong has been compiled into a charming book, beautifully presented and interestingly illustrated. The writing style is delightful and the recollections of bygone days in a rural parish are evocative. There are also some very good sermon illustrations which I'm sure the author will not mind others borrowing. If you are having trouble writing sermons for an elderly congregation this might be just the book you are looking for. There is however a degree of nostalgia about it which not all will find to their taste.

DEREK REDMAN

H E

Anyone for Alpha?

Stephen Hunt

DLT £7.95 pbk

0 232 52404 1

This is an account of the origins and subject matter of the Alpha evangelistic course, the factors which influence a church's decision to provide a course, the people who attend and



the effect on them. The author describes himself as a sociologist of religion and an agnostic outsider. His research used a small sample of churches in Berkshire and is anecdotal rather than quantitatively precise. The author stresses the influence of the charismatic movement on both the origin and content of the course.

Criticisms which are made by some Christians and by people who attend are noted. It is suggested that most people who attend are already members of a church or in contact with one. Few converts from outside the church are noted.

JOHN TAYLOR

T P

A double thirst

Ivan Mann
DLT £12.95 pbk
0 232 523829

One of the Four Noble Truths of the Buddhist faith states that all existence is bound up with suffering. It has been claimed that all religions make an attempt to come to terms with the irrational and random way that suffering affects human kind. All who preach will from time to time have to speak to people who are bereaved, in a state of shock, grief or trauma. This book meets those needs head on. The author draws on both his own personal tragedies and those experienced in the course of his ministry as a parish priest. His 12 chapters cover such areas as Suffering in ourselves, Sharing the suffering of others, and Suffering and creativity. The chapters are broken up by numerous sub-headings - not a device which makes for easy reading though it helps to pinpoint salient ideas and thoughts. There is much quotation from both classical and contemporary sources, especially from Brian Keenan and Sheila Cassidy. It is curious that

there is no mention of any of recent national tragedies which brought grief and sadness to so many, such as Hillsborough, Dunblane and the death of Princess Diana. Congregations expect to hear something relevant on such occasions.

ROBERT RUSSELL

And finally...

Funeral services of the Christian churches in England (Canterbury press £7.99 hbk 1 85311 399 9) is a new edition substantially revised and reordered of a book first published in 1987. It has been prepared by an ecumenical group representing all the mainline churches. The contents include Anglican and Roman Catholic rites as well as a funeral service prepared by the Joint Liturgical Group, and a selection of 44 hymns. It is intended for use in cemeteries and crematoria.

Revised Common Lectionary Year A begins on Advent Sunday. In *Twelve Months of Sundays* (SPCK £6.99 pbk 0 281 05288 3) NT Wright, now Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey, offers reflections on the principal service Bible readings for Year A. They appeared originally as articles in the *Church Times*.

Also from SPCK comes *A Scripture Commentary Year A* (edited by Leslie Houlden and John Rogerson £20 pbk 0 281 05325 1). This is a substantial work with commentaries on each of the three readings. As the editors write in their introduction 'The tone aims to be decently academic... in the hope of helping [users] to read the passage in terms of its context and intentions.

The entries are emphatically not designed to give instant sermon fodder, rather they offer one element in preparation'.

SPCK also publishes *The Lectionary 2002* (£3.99 pbk no ISBN) which lists readings according to the Common Worship calendar as well as the Book of Common Prayer.

Three recently published Grove books are particularly relevant to Reader ministry: *B20 Preaching with the grain of Scripture* by Stephen Wright (1 85174 466 5); *W74 Developing reflective practice for preachers* by Charles Chadwick & Phillip Tovey (1 85174 466 5) and *P86 Sorrow and Hope: Preaching at Funerals* by Nick Watson (0 85174 467 3). Each costs £2.50 and is obtainable from Grove Books, Ridley Hall Road, Cambridge CB3 9HU.

The world will never feel quite the same after September 11 2001. At the time of editing this November issue people are wondering what direction the future will take. The poem on p.26 is one of the most powerful and thoughtful reflections, written from a Christian point of view, on the events of that day. The author has kindly allowed us to reproduce it - do read and study it.

September 11th, 2001



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**What kind of story is this?**

Is it the Tower of Babel?

Men said *Come, let us build a city,
with a tower reaching to the heavens,
and make a name for ourselves.*

From all nations they came to build the city
thinking nothing was impossible.

*Today, they said, we will go into this or that market,
carry on business and make money.*

Oh? said James, *You do not know what will happen today.*

*What is your life? You are a mist
that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

Is that it?

Or is it the beginning of Judgment?

Four aircraft of the Apocalypse
coming like thieves in the night,
the henchmen of some AntiChrist
making a few practice runs
to raze the new Jerusalem to dust.

And all of this permitted by the Lord,
who has said

*I brought you into a fertile land
but you defiled it.*

You have as many gods as you have cities.

So flee for safety now without delay!

*I am bringing disaster from the north,
even terrible destruction.*

Where then are the gods you made for yourselves?

Let them come if they can save you.

Was it a slaughter of innocents?

Which of us is innocent? Eighteen people died
when a tower fell in Siloam, and Jesus asked

*What, do you think they were greater sinners
than anyone in Jerusalem?*

*No, but I tell you, unless you repent
you will all likewise perish.*

Is that it?

Or is it the story of Job?

An honest man trying his best
when all of his hard-won security
is brought down in a sudden calamity
the hour a building fell on all his family.

His servants break the news to him by email.

Job watches, disbelieving, on TV
his life unravelling in front of him.

Weeping in the ruins of his city,
distraught, bewildered, desolate, enraged.

We rush to comfort Job, and so
we should be careful of our feelings,
not to confuse our sympathy with
the substance of his lasting grief,
as one of those who will be living from now on
on the legacy of an unthinkable change.

Of course it summons up
the ghosts of our own grievings, whether real
or from our worst imagining; but this
is suffering by proxy: it will have
no answers when God asks his dreadful questions
out of the whirlwind of Job's despair.

Is that it?

Or is it Nehemiah,
who would not be defeated
while everyone else sat in their living rooms
watching the TV pundits play *I told you so*

September 11th, 2001

and prove that nothing could be done?
Nehemiah went out to rebuild the walls
with courage and shrewd management,
armed guards on every corner
keeping watch against a new attack –
and out of so much ruin and despair
he forged a new community
stronger and wiser than it ever was before.

Is that it?

It is all of these stories, and something more;
for after the accounting of the dead,
when the insurance claims are settled,
and the markets are back to their normal jittery selves,
we have all seen what Hell looks like. In future
we will avoid tall buildings, slowly move away
from cities, fly less often, view
our fellow passengers with circumspection,
seek refuge in more virtual reality and trade
within the safer evils of the Internet.

We listen doubtfully to our leaders' words
as they struggle to fill their own shoes.

Four planes just flew out of Pandora's box:
and when men armed just with razor blades can bring
the whole wide world up to a juddering halt
we know too much and care too little
to believe that this will be the last time.

The big game of Monopoly is over.

The losers' tantrums have become too dangerous.

Even before our anger cools we see
the moral high ground is just
a pile of smoking rubble. Jesus kneels
and writes with his index finger in
the white dust of Manhattan:

*Let him who is without sin
launch the first missile.*

Who is our enemy

and what can we fight him with?

Where are our allies? Where was God
on September the Eleventh? He was begging
in old clothes in the subway
beneath the World Trade Centre.

He was homeless in Gaza,
imprisoned in Afghanistan,

starving in Somalia,
dying of Aids in an Angolan slum,
suffering everywhere in this fast-shrinking world;
and boarding a plane unwittingly in Boston,
heading for an appointment on the 110th floor.

When the time came he stretched his arms out once again to take
the dreadful impact that would pierce his side.

His last message on his fading cell phone
once more to ask forgiveness for them all, before
his body fell under the weight of so much evil.

We bring our cameras to his massive tomb
for any chance of resurrection, now we know
the kind of story that it really is,
united by this common enemy,
sin's terrorism, that we never dreamed
could bring such devastation. This is war.

We line our weapons up: faith, hope, obedience,
prayer, forgiveness, justice;
the explosive power of love.

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Gazette of newly admitted and licensed Readers

BRISTOL

1 JULY 2001

Licensed

Valerie Peters, St Peter, Henleaze, Bristol

LINCOLN

19 MAY 2001

Admitted and Licensed

Pamela Broughton, The Swinderby Group

Elsie Butler, Waltham and Barnoldby Le Beck

Julie Button, The Ancaster/Wilsford Group

Gordon Coy, The Asterby Group

Paul Darley, St George, Stamford

Marjorie Evardson, The Harbrough Group

Martin Fleetcroft, Holy Trinity, Skirbeck, Boston

Keith Hamilton, St Guthlac, Market Deeping

Natalie Hammond, New Waltham

Delaine Lloyd, The South Lawres Group

Anne Mullett, Waltham and Barnoldby Le Beck

Jennifer Roberts, The West Grimsby Team

Robert Shaw, St George, Stamford

Naomi Smith, St Andrew, Cranwell and Leasingham

Diana Sotak, St Botolph, Boston

Licensed

John Hartley, Ruskington

Ann Marshall Liles, Barrow, Goxhill and New Holland

Glennis Thombs, The Middle Rasen Group

Michael Topott, Moulton

LONDON

1 APRIL 2001

Admitted and Licensed

Suzanne Steer, All Souls, Langham Place, Marylebone

10 JUNE 2001

Admitted and Licensed

Carole Bevis-Smith, St John the Evangelist, Wembley

Loretta Bynoe, All Souls, Harlesden

Christine Hoppett, St Martin, Ruislip

Dorothy Laver, St Matthew, Yiewsley

Francess Lindsay, St Augustine, Wembley Park
Vena Oglesby, All Souls, Harlesden

17 JUNE 2001

Admitted and Licensed

Mark Kenny, St Botolph, Aldgate

24 JUNE 2001

Admitted and Licensed

Barbara Evans, St Giles, Cripplegate

22 JULY 2001

Admitted and Licensed

David Howard, St Mark, Dalston

2 SEPTEMBER 2001

Admitted and Licensed

Jennifer Smith, St George, Headstone

16 SEPTEMBER 2001

Admitted and Licensed

Cecelia Gerald, St Peter, Paddington

WORCESTER

14 July 2001

Admitted and Licensed

Tricia Collett, Clifton-on-Teme, Lower Sapey and the Shelsleys

Mary Cotton, Ripple, Earls Croome with Hill Croome and Strensham

Peter Crofts, St Andrew, Netherton

David Felgate, Malvern Link with Cowleigh

Janet Hewer, St Godwald, Finstall

Terence Jones, St George with St Chad and St Cecilia, Kidderminster

Sheila Lancaster, Badsey with Aldington and Offenham and Bretforton

Susan Richardson, Hanley Castle and Hanley Swan with Welland

Patricia Snelling, Clifton-on-Teme, Lower Sapey and the Shelsleys

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email: relstud@lancaster.ac.uk

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In Memoriam

The deaths of the following Readers have been notified to us:

Bath and Wells

Dr EF Ducat

Birmingham

Mr J Fisher

Bristol

Mr R Connell

Chester

Mr P Butcher

Hereford

Mrs J Taylor

Lichfield

Mr IA Sparkes

Newcastle

Mrs AES Lindsey

Oxford

Mr RW Crook

Ripon and Leeds

Mr D Drew

Mr M Duffield

Mrs D Green

Mr J Hainsworth

St Albans

Mrs B Lea

Southwark

Miss S Alford

Mr CD Hughes

Miss M Yardley

Southwell

Mr EJ Thorpe

Mr JR Watson

Truro

Mr J Cooper

Wakefield

Mr S Naylor

Winchester

Mr W Jolliffe

We give thanks for their work and witness and remember those who grieve.



Gleanings

Common Worship

We didn't receive enough comments to make up a 'Postings' page on *Common Worship* but Ian Yearsley, a Reader in the parish of Putney, Southwark Diocese, told us: 'Of all the funeral services I take, about six out of seven are for people who have only slender links with the Church and with religious faith. When I interview the family to discuss the service, it becomes clear that we shall be doing well if we can all sing "Abide with me", the 23rd Psalm to Crimond, and say the Lord's Prayer in the traditional words.'

When the *Common Worship* funeral service was published I tried to use it as offered, but realised that parts of it were far too heavy for people in this situation. How can you ask people to 'acknowledge that we are all sinners' when they have no concept of what sin means? So probably quite illegally, I rewrote, modified and simplified parts of it. When I reported this, with some trepidation, at a Readers' meeting, there was almost a sigh of relief from others present; and I learnt that clergy as well as Readers were having the same experience.

What we need is a service which affirms the love of God in Christ and the dimension of eternity but which does so for people whose links with the faith are quite tenuous and often amount to little more than a folk-memory. Offering such a service would be one of the most convincing ways of demonstrating the love of God to them.'

Congratulations

Ron Miller celebrates the 50th anniversary of his admission as a Reader in May this year. Ron has ministered in Chelmsford diocese.

Apologies

We had been unaware that the altar frontal in the Millennium Chapel and the National Memorial Arboretum which we featured as our cover last issue was actually designed by St Martin's Vestment – one of our own advertisers. The beauty of the 'Tree of Life' design on the frontal is certainly a worthy 'advert' for their skills.

Appreciation

We have received a letter from Rita Cotgrove, a Reader in St Albans diocese who is registered as blind. Rita regularly listens to *The Reader* which is spoken onto tape by a group of faithful volunteers – so that blind and partially sighted Readers can enjoy the material as well. She wants to express her appreciation to those who regularly undertake the task

of making the recordings – and also to ensure that other people who might find it helpful know that this service is available.

Thanks to the 'Millennium Tapestry' company – which is coordinating the production and display of squares of tapestry designed by school children and young people's groups in celebration of Millennium. They have permitted us to use examples from the tapestry as illustrations on pages 14-15 in this issue. If you want to see further examples visit their website at www.millennium-tapestry.co.uk

A possible record? Southwell Diocesan Reader Leslie Sharp died in June this year aged 95. He was admitted and licensed in December 1928. He had 57 years' active service and was a Reader for 73 years. Is this a record?

Not far behind was Wing Commander Sir Eric Bullus who was admitted as a Reader in Ripon Diocese in 1929, and later exercised his ministry in London, St Albans and Canterbury Dioceses. Sir Eric was a Conservative MP for 24 years and also served as a Parliamentary Private Secretary to a number of ministers. He died in August this year.

Letters page

We would like to start up a regular 'letters page' but feel that we will need someone to serve as a 'letters editor' if we are going to do this successfully. Are there any volunteers? Please contact the Honorary Secretary, CRC, if you would be interested in this position.

Deadlines

A request has come in for us to publicise our 'deadlines'. It is not quite that simple – since there are different deadlines for different sections of the magazine. Both the Reviews Editor and I myself let potential contributors know individually the deadlines we are setting them for reviews and articles. But you may find it helpful to know the following dates for material to appear in the Gazette, In Memoriam and Gleanings sections: 31 August (for November issue); 30 November (for February issue); 28 February (for May issue); 31 May (for August issue).

AOCM Conference. The Association of Ordinands and Candidates for Ministry would like to invite trainee Readers to join them for their 'Day of Worship and Reflection', 2nd February 2002, Birmingham Cathedral, 11am – 5pm.

Workshops: Speakers include: Revd Professor AE McGrath, Father David Houlding SSC, Revd Stephen Conway (Affirming Catholicism), Revd Nicky Gumbell, Christina

Rees, Revd Dr Jane Shaw, Revd Dr Robert Beckford. Plenary Session ('Any Questions' format) chaired by Archbishop Rowan Williams.

Worship: Celebrant and Preacher, Archbishop Rowan Williams.

For more details and to book contact: Mr. Chris Howson, Cranmer Hall, Durham, DH6 1ED.

(Sounds good – wish I were a trainee Reader! *Editor*)



Archbishops' Diploma for readers

At a special service in St Woolos' Cathedral, Newport, on 28 May the Archbishop of Wales presented six Readers (pictured above) with certificates to mark their award of this diploma. They are: Patricia Goode (*Guildford*); Alison Green (*Bath and Wells*); Valerie Hollinghurst (*Chichester*); George Sharpe (*Durham*); Margaret Thomas (*Birmingham*); John Underhill (*Lichfield*)

Nigel Holmes, Chairman, Reader Editorial Committee and member of General Synod, writes:

What makes Deacons Distinctive?

Accredited ministries, lay and ordained, have proliferated in recent years. To the uninitiated and even to the relatively well informed tasks and duties are by no means clearly understood. Readers suffer from a misleading title but as they are so numerous, 10,000, most congregations have met one.

Few however will have encountered a 'distinctive deacon' as there are only 75 in the country and most work primarily in a secular context. Two-thirds are women and almost half are from just three dioceses, Chichester, Portsmouth and London.

In General Synod terms they seem to be able to punch above their weight, even though 25 years ago an ACCM report recommended their abolition. The report before this month's Synod is upbeat. *For Such a Time as This* of political and social change and upheaval, we are told, deacons come into their own but quite how is not so obvious.

The word 'bridge' occurs time after time, 'connect' is another working party favourite and 'clarity' a third. Frankly there is not much clarity as to what should set deacons apart. Unlike Readers they can baptise and conduct marriages but they cannot take charge of a parish as Readers can.

What seems to be lacking is an openness to the possibility of lay deacons such as are found in the Church of Scotland where they are not ordained. Such an office might well fit Readers rather well, still allow for ordained deacons and improve comprehension and comprehensiveness. As it stands, the Report on the 'distinctive diaconate' leaves us wondering where the distinctiveness lies.

*The next issue of **The Reader** will carry a report of the debate this month in the General Synod.*

The Last Word – from Church House

I write this in the immediate aftermath of the horrific terrorist attack in the United States. I suspect that those of us able to do so sat in front of our television sets for hours as soon as the news came through. There are no words to describe the horror of what we saw then and since. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all and to the Readers and clergy of the Episcopal Church as they minister to their congregations. (*see the poem on p.26*)

That evening I attended the Institution of a Team Rector in the deanery. The events of the day inevitably overshadowed what should have been (and was in the end) a happy occasion full of hope for the new ministry and the parish. After prayers and a minute's silence, our Area Bishop quoted some words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: 'Without forgiveness, there is no future.'

Forgiveness is not in people's minds just now – stunned and shocked as the whole world has been. But as the weeks go by and we in our Reader ministry lead congregations in prayers for the peace of the world those words will be very significant, coming from one who understands their meaning so well. I believe that we must also pray for forgiveness for the sins of our world in order that we may indeed have a future.

Life in ordinary

Here in Church House the work of Reader ministry continues. Applications for the national conference in 2002 are being received. I understand from the publisher that stocks of the Reader Diary are nearly sold out and already discussions are taking place for ways in which it can be improved for 2003. The work of editing our *Introductory book on Reader Ministry* is just beginning and it is hoped that it will be published in the spring of next year. Its title will, hopefully, be more eye-catching than the one I have indicated but it is very much a book for those wanting to discover what Reader ministry means for the individual.

The report on the Renewed Diaconate will be debated in the General Synod and it will be interesting to see the reactions of members (see the brief resume in the *Gleanings* section). I hope that Reader members will consider carefully whether they should contribute to the debate.

Would Readers living overseas and others who are direct subscribers to the magazine please note that your subscriptions for 2002 are now due. Do contact the Reader office if you have any queries about your subscription. Details of the phone and fax numbers as well as the email address appear on the inside of the front cover of this issue.

As I wish you a very happy Christmas and pray for God's blessing on your ministry in the coming year, I close with the prayer from Taizé that was used at the Eucharist in Church House the day after the terrorist attack.

'Holy Spirit, we pray to you for the whole human family and for those who are shaken to the depths of their being by these events. You know our longing for all to be consoled. Christ Jesus, inner light, allow us to welcome your love.'

Pat Nappin, Honorary Secretary