

the baptist ministers'
journal



January 2023 volume 357

Interview: A heart for Ukraine

Joshua Searle

Wake Up, Sleeper

John Weaver

Colossians 1:15-20

Paul Beasley-Murray

A Difficult Conversation?

Simon Hollis

Reviews

Of Interest To You

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(all service to the Fellowship is honorary)

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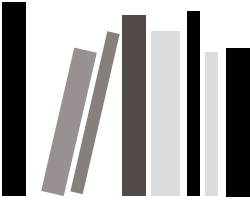
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from the editor

The big issues

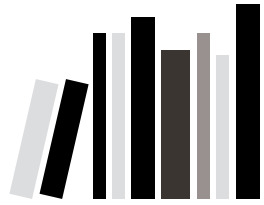
This *bmj* is an issue of issues. The climate crisis: John Weaver, who has for years been drawing our Christian attention to the environment, writes for us in the wake of COP27, while Paul Beasley-Murray gives us a biblical angle on climate care. Joshua Searle, our interviewee this quarter, tells us about Ukraine and comments on Baptist dissent and our loss of the prophetic; while Simon Hollis tackles the intricacies of discussing the same-sex marriage issue in our often-reluctant churches. I am deeply grateful to all these writers for their hard work and courage in illuminating some of our contemporary big issues.

Each of these matters is profoundly important. However, the climate crisis is the issue that we must not forget, or 'park', because it feels too 'big', or too distant. Climate crisis means global crisis. War will not just be between nations, but between us all, for the most basic of resources; and the justice issues that currently absorb us will be universally compromised. Sometimes a great way into the visceral reality of basic survival is to enter a story: novelists such as Doris Lessing (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*, and later, *Mara and Dann*) or Jean Hegland (*Into the Forest*), among others, give us a way in. These novels about environmental collapse are decades old and one can only wonder at the prophetic insights that prompted them. Can we truly listen to such prophetic voices within the work and lives of our churches, or do we allow them to speak, but then quickly refocus on the immediate? Why did I take out my car yesterday? Why did you buy packaged carrots instead of loose ones? Yes, we are all busy, but our God-given planet is suffocating and our diaries are hardly more important than that.

On a different note, there have been changes within the BMF Committee. Tim Edworthy has stood down from the Chair after six years of service. We thank him, and Brian Bishop for taking the Chair for an interim term, while we reconsider the purpose and future work of the BMF. We'd love to hear your views and thoughts about this – please contact one of the Committee (see details on p44).

This Advent, may we be excited again by the coming of the King. He will renew the Earth. For some reason he has trusted us to look after it until he comes. Let us discharge that duty with justice and love, as our Advent commitment. *SN*

the *bmj* interview



Joshua Searle: A Heart for Ukraine



Ed: Joshua, can you tell us a bit about your Baptist life and what you are doing now?

I was blessed to grow up in a faithful household with godly parents. Being raised in the foothills of the Cheviot Hills of my native Northumberland and being immersed in the spirituality of the Northumbrian Celtic saints gave me a powerful impression of God as creator, and an abiding appreciation of the beauty of the natural world. It was while studying

history at Oxford that I became more aware of my baptistic convictions and I made a serious study of Baptist history and theology in the perfect setting of the amazing Regent's Park College! Of all the Christian movements that I read about in church history, it was Anabaptism that made the most lasting impression. I admired the Anabaptists' vision of faith that emphasised obedience to Christ above all other commitments.

My commitment to the radical free church vision of obedience to the gospel has determined the whole course of my life and career ever since. After graduating with a doctorate from Trinity College Dublin, I went to teach at a Baptist seminary in Donetsk in Eastern Ukraine. I then received a call from Spurgeon's College, where I've been working as Tutor and Director of Postgraduate Studies. This September I started my 10th year of service at Spurgeon's and it's a great privilege to be part of this vibrant multicultural learning community in South London. In my wider ministry, I try to put my fluency in German and Russian

to good use by building bridges (through my charity work as well as through my academic research) between Baptists in Britain, Germany and Russian-speaking regions of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Alongside my formal lecturing and administrative roles at Spurgeon's, I'm also active in my local Baptist church in East Surrey.

Ed: We know that you have a heart for Ukraine—can you tell us more about this?

Around 15 years ago, while studying for my masters at IBTS in Prague, I received a clear sense of God's calling to serve in Ukraine. In Prague, I made many new Ukrainian friends—including one very special friend, Varduyi-Rosa, who later became my wife! After we were married, we went to serve at a Baptist college in Eastern Ukraine just before the first illegal Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine in 2014. The Baptist college in Donetsk was occupied and unlawfully requisitioned by the Russian armed forces and the campus was repurposed as a military installation for the vigilante militias of the Russian-backed so-called 'Donetsk People's Republic'. Sadly, all our colleagues, many of whom lived on the campus, were forced out of the campus at gunpoint and were deprived of their homes and livelihoods. My wife and I had already moved back to the UK a few months prior to the Russian invasion, but we remained in close contact with our friends and family in Eastern Ukraine.

Sensing a call from God to help to keep hope alive in the midst of a humanitarian disaster caused by the Russian invasion,

my wife and I, together with a few close friends, in 2016 founded a new UK-based charity, Dnipro Hope Mission (DHM), which aimed to support and equip Baptist churches in Eastern Ukraine in their ministries to their local communities. Since then, I've led several teams (consisting mainly of various combinations of Spurgeon's students and British Baptist ministers!) on short-term mission trips to Ukraine to visit some of our partner churches in Eastern Ukraine, as well as linking up with the central leadership of the Baptist Union of Ukraine, based in Kyiv.

Since the full-scale invasion by Russia in February 2022, the DHM trustees and volunteers have been working constantly to support the life-saving work of our ministry partners in Ukraine by raising funds and bringing the prayer needs of our Ukrainian friends to the attention of Baptist churches here in the UK. There's been a phenomenal response from the UK churches, but there's always more we can do, so please visit our website to see how you and your church can help the people of Eastern Ukraine at this critical time: www.dniprohopemission.org.

Ed: What more do you think British Baptist churches could be doing to support the people of Ukraine?

I'd encourage all British Baptists to stand in solidarity with our Ukrainian Baptist brothers and sisters, especially during this time of war. The Russo-Ukraine war is not merely a war over territory and spheres of influence but represents a clash of ideologies and underlying worldviews in which critical gospel issues

are at stake. The Ukrainians are fighting for freedom and humanity against a violent dehumanising ideology of Russian imperialism. Several Ukrainian Baptist church members and even some pastors are serving in the ranks of the Ukrainian armed forces and many others are serving as army chaplains to the Ukrainian troops. Although Ukraine has dropped out of the news, our Baptist brothers and sisters there need our support and solidarity now more than ever. It was great to see how Baptist churches throughout the UK welcomed Ukrainian refugees at the start of the war, but there have been relatively few Baptist churches that are actively supporting the Baptist churches and the people who have stayed behind in Ukraine.

I hope that readers of *bmj* will consider how they could show solidarity with the Ukrainian members of their global Baptist family, whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed and who are spending most nights sleeping in the corridors of their small apartments to minimise the risk of injury or death from Russian rocket attacks. Have a look at what the European Baptist Federation is doing to help Baptists in Ukraine. Visit the Dnipro Hope Mission website, sign up to the newsletter, pray for the safety of the 'heroes of the faith' who are doing God's work in very dangerous circumstances. And read about the ordinary Baptist ministers who are working constantly to shine the light of Christ into the bleak situation of war and devastation. Maybe you could invite a Ukrainian Baptist pastor to come and speak at your church?

Ed: You have written several books, but the one I really liked (as a theological educator) was *Theology After Christendom*, published in 2018. In this book, you challenge us to be more Kingdom-focused and less church-focused. Do you feel encouraged since you wrote that book?

The book was intended to serve as a theological justification for prophetic ministry in the contemporary world. Although written in an academic style, *Theology After Christendom* was essentially an appeal for Baptists (in particular) to be less concerned with what Christians are doing in churches (sacraments, preaching and arguing with each other about sexuality etc) and to be more interested in what God is doing in the world outside the walls of our churches. There was a mixed reception of the book among British Baptists. Some reviewed the work positively, but others were more critical, especially those who regard the 'sacramentalist turn' in British Baptist life as a positive development. Without wanting to cause offence (and I respect the integrity of those who have a different perspective), this is a view I do not share. The tendency to think of Christianity as a system of belief expressed in church sacraments, rather than a mode of transformed life, has, in my view, inhibited the freedom of the Spirit, suppressed the truth of the gospel and impeded the coming of the Kingdom of God in the world.

It's been encouraging to see how the ideas of the book have found fertile soil in the theological landscape of Ukraine. *Theology After Christendom*

was translated into Ukrainian in 2020 and published by a leading theological publishing house. The key ideas of the book have provoked a lively and fruitful discussion among leading theologians from a variety of confessions, including Orthodox, Catholics, Pentecostals and Baptists. One of my Orthodox interlocutors made the very perceptive remark that my aim in the book was 'to reveal the limits of academic theology in order to make room for prophecy.' It's been especially encouraging to hear from Ukrainian theologians recently about how the approach to theology that I advocated in the book has become especially relevant to the new situation in which the Ukrainian churches now find themselves as a result of the war.

Ed: What would be your key message to Baptists at this time?

To live according to the Baptist vision of nonconformity, expressed in creative forms of prophetic ministry. If I may speak plainly, I think that Baptists have largely become tone-deaf to prophecy. Like many of the established churches, we seem to want theologian-bureaucrats who affirm doctrines and traditions, rather than creative people and critical thinkers who will push the boundaries and shake things up for the sake of the Kingdom. I often find that British Baptists restrict the fivefold ministry of the church by putting all the focus on teachers, pastors and evangelists. From my experience of training Baptist leaders, I've seen how gifted women and men, emerging within our denomination who have been called as apostles or prophets, have been ignored or marginalised. I think we Baptists need more apostolic people who

have the same spirit that inspired Aidan of Northumberland (one of my great heroes of the faith), who was called by God to go out (not just reach out) into the world and to carry the torch of the gospel and to wander for the love of Christ wherever the Father led.

We also need to be attentive to prophetic voices. By 'prophecy' I don't mean listening to people who indulge in facile speculation about the end times or who try to set out an itinerary of future events. Rather, prophecy from a biblical perspective is a Spirit-inspired gift that helps people to see the present in the light of eternity and to perceive God's redemptive purposes in the world. Prophecy is not a matter of passive expectation, but of creative realisation of the best possibilities that will maximise the thriving of God's good creation and the flourishing of all its inhabitants in the light of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. My sense is that within our denomination, the demand is surfacing for new reformers, for prophets and apostles, for committed innovators and principled leaders, who feel liberated to express the ministry of the church in all its fulness and diversity.

Ed: Do you think we are radical enough in our dissent?

I think there's a lot more we could do. Dissent is core to our identity as Baptists, but dissent is not only a historic Baptist principle; it's also an urgent gospel imperative that applies to our lives and witness today. When Jesus invites us to 'repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand,' he's calling us to live in the awareness of another world, where the values and customs are totally different (and often

radically opposed) to those that prevail in this world. However I think that we as Baptists shouldn't just be dissenters for the sake of dissent. I think our Baptist history teaches us that our dissent is at its best and most effective when it arises not simply out of a desire to protest or to be different, but out of a deep and inward conviction concerning our own unique identity and vocation as followers of the Way of Jesus.

Ed: What would be the stand-out characteristic of being Baptist that you would never let go?

In a word, 'freedom'. Freedom has been a recurring theme of Baptist life from the early 17th century to the present day. Christ came not as a lawgiver, but as a liberator and 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom'. I cherish the Baptist emphasis on the freedom of the gospel that enables me to follow Christ without help or hindrance from the church or state. I think that as Baptists, we should regard freedom not just as the liberty of individuals to pursue our own individual happiness and well-being, but also to follow Christ and to submit our lives completely to him.

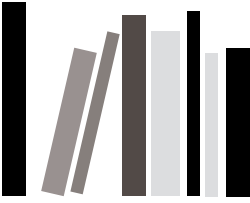
Ed: How can we pray for you?

I was critically ill during the summer and came close to losing my life after severe complications resulting from a misdiagnosed case of appendicitis while I was abroad on a family holiday. I'm still recovering physically and mentally from the pain and shock. The episode was another reminder that life is a very precious, but also very fragile, gift of God's grace.

After 10 years of ministry at Spurgeon's College, I now sense God's call to put some of the skills I've gained in research, teaching, ministry and academic leadership to help with the reconstruction efforts in Ukraine. The people of Ukraine are going to need assistance and solidarity to rebuild their lives and communities after the devastating war. I can sense a movement of the Holy Spirit in Ukraine at this time and I have a powerful sense of vocation to help and serve the church in this beautiful country, which has now become my second home. I pray that whatever tasks God has in mind for us as a family, that he would open doors at the right times and lead me to godly people who can keep me accountable as I seek to respond to this call of God on my life.

Above all, please join me in praying that all sides involved in the Russo-Ukrainian war would acknowledge the authority of the Prince of Peace and that the people of Ukraine would be able to look to the future with a renewed sense of hope.

Ed: Joshua, thank you for sharing with us your passion and convictions. God bless you in your next steps.



articles

Wake Up, Sleeper, Rise from the Dead, and Christ will Shine on You.¹

by John Weaver

Author: John Weaver, now retired, was Principal of the South Wales Baptist College and has a long-standing interest in science and faith and the environment.

Introduction

It's a 'wake-up call', say the presenters of our news broadcasts, and so also proclaim the headline writers of our newspapers. Wildfires resulting from the spontaneous combustion of tinder-dry fields have seen the destruction of dozens of homes across the UK as temperatures reached their highest recorded level in July 2022; a temperature of 40.3C reached in Coningsby Lincolnshire on 19 July 19, exceeding the previous high of 38.7C in Cambridge in 2019. This has been followed by the warmest November on record; a temperature of 21.2C at Porthmadog was a new UK record for Remembrance Sunday, and also the highest temperature ever recorded this late in the year. UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, speaking on 7 November 2022 at the COP27 climate change summit in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt said: 'We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator'

In Pakistan the 2022 monsoon season produced significant rainfall, devastating floods and landslides, affecting millions of people. United Nations officials say it could take six months for the floodwaters to recede in the hardest-hit areas. The floods have affected all four of the country's provinces and approximately 15% of its population. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said, 'Pakistan has never seen a starker and more devastating example of the impact of global warming'. He noted that the responsibility was not theirs, since Pakistan was responsible for less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions and yet was among the countries worst affected by extreme weather events due to climate change.²

It's a 'wake-up call', but many have pushed the 'snooze button' in a vain attempt to go back to sleep and avoid getting up to take action.

After the resignation of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in the midst of the hottest summer since records began, it was depressing to see some sections of the tabloid press headline a glorious summer, hotter than many sunseeker holiday destinations, with pictures of people eating ice-creams or lying in the sun. What was even more concerning were the campaign words of contenders in the Conservative Party leadership race suggesting that they would ignore the 'net zero' target for greenhouse gas emissions because it is unaffordable. However, it was encouraging at COP27 to hear the new UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, state that the UK Government would honour its climate change commitments. Time will tell whether the words spoken at Sharm El-Sheikh will result in action.

While COP27 has seen a welcome agreement on rich carbon-emitting nations giving money to help developing world countries to cope with the effects of climate change, there was a notable lack of agreement on reducing emissions, and with the presence of many lobbyists from oil and gas producers there was even an acceptance of low-emission gas production.

In the summer of 2022 the Meteorological Office called a 'red alert': high temperatures are a danger to health, especially for the elderly and young children. We discovered that the tar on many roads melts at these temperatures, our railway lines buckle, and crops are in need of continuous irrigation, while reservoirs become seriously depleted.

We have known about the likelihood of all these aspects of a changing climate

for at least 20 years, but successive governments have done little to prepare for the current climate emergency. I first wrote and spoke about climate change in the 1990s³ at the time that the late Sir John Houghton formed the John Ray Initiative: Connecting Environment, Science and Christianity (jri.org.uk). Whenever I spoke in public I was certain to have someone during question-time comment: 'But it's not happening; this is false information; we've had warm spells in past centuries; the Romans grew grapes in southern Britain'. I had just such a response at the Baptist Assembly in Blackpool when I was BU President. I also had a Baptist College tutor tell me that I was scaremongering. This is not 'fake news'. How I wish that it was! It is my children and grandchildren who are going to face the damaging effects of global warming.

The Facts

The sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scientific report (released August 2021)⁴ notes the following: it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land; the scale of recent changes across the climate system as a whole and the present state of many aspects of the climate system are unprecedented; human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe; and evidence of observed changes in extremes such as heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, and, in particular, their attribution to human influence, has strengthened.

The IPCC report in 2022 warned that the world is set to reach a 1.5C increase within the next two decades and said that only the most drastic cuts in carbon emissions from now would help prevent an environmental disaster.⁵ It is considered that global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century under all emissions scenarios; global warming 2C above pre-industrial levels will be exceeded during the 21st century unless radical reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades; and many changes due to past and future greenhouse gas emissions are irreversible for centuries and even thousands of years, especially changes in the oceans, ice sheets and global sea level.

Limiting global warming requires limiting the emissions of CO₂ and methane. To keep the global surface temperature rise below 1.5C above pre-industrial levels will require rapid and far-reaching transitions in the world economy: in energy use, land management and farming, urban development and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and in industry. Increased food production for an increasing population adds to the burden placed on natural resources and increases greenhouse gas emissions, with negative effects on land use, soil, nutrients, water, and energy. We see the impacts on ecosystems with the mass extinction of species, and the degradation of natural resources resulting in some places becoming uninhabitable. This is leading to migration, the displacement of people and human vulnerability. It is observed that global climate change is resulting in civil unrest as the need to secure useable

agricultural land and fresh water leads to violence. It is predicted that there will be over 300 million environmental refugees in the next 20 years.

Dr Mike Morecroft, President of JRI and lead author on ecosystems for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change writes that the IPCC latest Assessment Report comes in three parts, each one produced by a separate working group.

The first is all about the physical climate science and was published last summer [2021]. This was followed by 'Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability', which I worked on, at the end of February, and 'Mitigation' (emission reductions and mechanisms to take greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere) in April [2022].

Each of these reports are vast documents, produced by hundreds of expert authors from around the world and thoroughly reviewed by academic and government experts....

An important aspect of our Working Group 2 report is assessing what impacts climate change is already having on people and nature. The evidence of these impacts has grown substantially in the last decade, as has the confidence that climate change is indeed the cause. Examples include increased heat-related human deaths, coral bleaching, tree mortality, and increased areas burned by wildfires....

Around half of the human population is already highly vulnerable to climate change and going forward the risks increase with every fraction of a degree of global warming.⁶

The climate crisis has driven the world to the brink of multiple 'disastrous' tipping points, according to a major study.⁷ It shows five dangerous tipping points may already have been passed because of the current 1.1C rise in global surface temperature. Climate tipping points (CTPs) are a source of growing scientific, policy, and public concern. They occur when change in large parts of the climate system (known as tipping elements) become self-perpetuating beyond a warming threshold. Triggering CTPs leads to significant impacts, including substantial sea level rise from collapsing ice sheets, dieback of biodiverse biomes such as the Amazon rainforest or warm-water corals, and carbon release from thawing permafrost.

The earth may have left a 'safe' climate state beyond 1C global warming, the whole of human civilisation having developed in temperatures below this level. Passing one tipping point is often likely to help trigger others, producing cascades. But this is still being researched and was not included in the current analysis, which presents the minimum effects that can be established. Prof Johan Rockström, the director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, who was part of the study team, cautioned that the world is heading towards 2-3C of global warming.

Catastrophe, Complacency and Courage

While I was speaking about climate change in Belfast I visited the Titanic Experience and learned about three ships involved in that tragic event: the Titanic, which sank after hitting an iceberg (it sank on 14-15 April 1912 with the loss of 1500

lives): a catastrophe. The SS Californian, which was nearby, saw the icebergs, saw the distress rockets, didn't want to get involved, and sailed in the opposite direction, believing that there was no real problem (the Titanic being unsinkable): this was complacency. The Carpathia received the distress call and sailed at full steam, risking its boilers' destruction and rescued 706 passengers from the icy sea: this was courage.

Today we are facing a climate emergency: a catastrophe with more intense and more frequent storms—hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons; melting ice sheets and ice caps; rising sea levels; and droughts and crop failure. Over one billion people face a lack of food and clean water and over 300 million are being forced to leave their homeland because it is uninhabitable. It is the poorest people of this world who are at greatest risk, while it is the lifestyle of the richest nations that has caused and is causing the emergency.

For Christians it is a matter of justice, as it is the poorest and most vulnerable countries that will suffer most.

Ignoring the overwhelming scientific facts, some people still suggest that the climate is not changing and that human beings are not responsible. Some Christians think that it doesn't really matter because God will create a new world. Many people recognise changes in the climate don't think that it is going to affect them because it is happening in countries far away.

Our government speaks of zero carbon by 2050, rejoices in its green agenda, and claims to be a world leader in addressing

climate change. Yet it considers commissioning a new coalfield and North Sea oilfield, removes the legislation for building carbon zero homes, removes subsidies for wind energy and solar energy, and has placed obstacles in the development of further onshore wind farms.

Where is the logic? Where is the joined-up thinking? And what will happen now we have left the EU, and oil and gas from Russia is cut off? The truth is that to address climate change there will have to be mitigation, adaptation, and suffering. The more mitigation and adaptation the less suffering. Being complacent and carrying on with business as usual is not an answer.

Science tells us what is happening: global temperature is rising, ice sheets are melting, sea levels are rising, CO₂ in the atmosphere is rising. Most people now believe the scientific consensus that climate change is happening and is harmful to the world.

This is where science addresses our faith, but science can't tell us what to do: it tells us that if we choose to continue as we are, these will be the results. We see the impacts of our choices being revealed by science. Rises in average global surface temperature will have scientifically predictable results, but science doesn't tell us how to act—this is a value judgement. This is where we have to make the connection between head and heart, between science and faith. It depends on what we believe.

Our Action

Nationally, we can write to our MPs, local councillors; campaign for a circular economy, reduction in plastic use; support environmental organisations; and keep being informed.

Locally many of us feel powerless: our individual efforts seem completely ineffective in relation to the enormity of the problem we face. But as Edmund Burke, 18th century philosopher and politician, wrote: 'No one could make a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do little.'⁸

We can each do as much as we can to live as sustainably as possible: by recycling; limiting our use of fossil fuels; planting trees; and reducing the carbon footprint of our local council areas.

What about Net Zero in our neighbourhood? We say: *I'd like to use my car less but public transport is unreliable; I'd like to recycle more but recycling bins are only collected fortnightly; I'd like to be more energy efficient but the costs of insulating and heating my home properly are too high.* If we've ever had thoughts like these, we'll know that it can be difficult to live a more planet-friendly lifestyle when our local infrastructure doesn't offer the support we need. National leaders can sign treaties and individuals can commit to make changes, but without the crucial middle layer of public services, we can struggle to connect our personal willingness to act with change on a global scale.

We can have a real impact by engaging with our local councils. Local politics may not seem as important as global

conferences, but they have a series of responsibilities that can take the area where we live a long way towards a net-zero future.⁹ Research from the Local Government Association suggests that local authorities have influence over roughly a third of emissions in their local areas. This is mainly due to their responsibilities in four key areas:

Transport. Councils oversee local transport plans and can prioritise decarbonisation efforts. They also play a key role in supporting the transition to electric vehicle use and developing walking and cycling infrastructure.

Buildings. Councils play a key role in ensuring new buildings are energy efficient and old buildings can be retrofitted with better insulation and heating systems.

Waste. Councils are responsible for the collection and disposal of household and commercial waste. They can take steps to increase recycling, implement food and garden waste collections, and improve communications about appropriate waste disposal.

A recent Government All Party Group on Faith and Society has looked at the collaboration between local authorities and faith groups.¹⁰ They come to some very positive conclusions: 91% of local authorities describe their experience of partnership with faith groups as 'very positive' or 'positive'; 93% of local authorities in the survey consider wider sharing of best practice in co-production between faith groups and local authorities to be 'very important' or 'important'. As churches we can partner our local authorities in addressing climate change.

Hope

Pope Francis¹¹ has called for an ecological conversion, whereby we adopt a Christlike approach to God's creation. Yet there is no prospect of this happening without reform of the purpose and governance of corporations. There is a need to move away from the primacy of shareholders and a pattern of working that shows little concern for the environment or even the most vulnerable members of society.

Our moral and spiritual engagement with the effects of climate change amongst the poorest of the world must be attentive to the plight of migrants and refugees, and their exploitation, often as trafficked people. Extreme poverty, social exclusion, and environmental injustice appear together in communities all over the world. A central message of the Bible is loving neighbours and welcoming the stranger and the outcast, especially widows and children. The Old Testament year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) was to include cancelling all debts, setting all slaves free, and recreating God's fair distribution of the land. This was the core challenge of Jesus's mission as recorded by Luke (Luke 4:18–19). On the basis of these verses liberation theologians speak of God's option for the poor and the marginalised.¹²

Christians have a moral responsibility. Christ is not only Lord of the lives and bodies of Christians but Lord of the whole created order. The implications of the resurrection extend beyond the lives of Christians to reveal God's intention to restore the righteous peace, or *shalom*, of the whole of creation. Righteousness and justice, which are intrinsic to the being of God, are also writ large in the material and

moral framework of the creation which God has made, and with which God remains in continuing relationship. Here is a powerful insight into the ecological nature of divine justice, and of created justice.

Net-zero policy was a point of debate in the 2022 Conservative Party leadership contest. There is a strand of opinion that sees net-zero as costly and damaging to Britain's potential economic growth. This flies in the face of the evidence and international consensus. But where does the concept of net-zero come from and does it really matter?

Net-zero is first and foremost a scientific concept, not a political one. Net-zero greenhouse gas emissions simply means that emissions into the atmosphere are balanced by processes removing them. These 'removals' include natural processes, such as tree growth as well as technological approaches which are being developed. Greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere stop rising when net-zero is reached and the climate can stabilise.

The evidence is unequivocal that climate change is already affecting people and nature and that these impacts will increase with further global warming. If net-zero is not achieved, global temperature and the consequent impacts will simply go on increasing.¹³

Mike Morecroft concludes that it is a worrying picture, but it is not too late to avoid the worst impacts. He counsels that there are actions that we can take to adapt to climate change and reduce the risks. Communities can also adapt

in a wide range of other ways, including designing settlements and infrastructure to be more robust to climatic risks, and tackling poverty and inequality helps to build the resilience of local areas.¹⁴

Adaptation is essential, but it has its limits and the need for urgent emission reductions is clearer than ever. The nations of the world agreed at Paris in 2015 to hold global temperature rise to well below 2C and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5C. Working Group 3 found that holding global temperature to 1.5C was still possible, but extremely challenging and it will require the removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, as well as halting emissions as quickly as we can.

The IPCC is commissioned by the governments of the world and reports to them. It identifies problems, sets out options for dealing with them, and provides the evidence for decision making, but it is for those governments to make those decisions and take action. Governments however cannot act on their own—they will need to work with local communities, civil society, and businesses if adaptation and mitigation are to be effective. We can all play our part not just by reducing our own carbon footprints and doing what we can to lower vulnerability to climate change but also by building awareness and knowledge in our communities. One thing stands out across the IPCC reports: we need to see a step-change in action on climate change within the next decade: there is no time to lose.¹⁵

Dave Gregory, contributor to *Messy Church Goes Wild*¹⁶ asks which side we are on in the battle against climate change. There is only a 50:50 chance of keeping global warming below 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. While we have struggled to hear the warnings of the scientists, the whole earth is now crying loud and clear. Observations of the earth's temperature show that the past decade has been the warmest on record. The facts tell us that the earth is already one degree warmer than 200 years ago, and we are increasingly hearing of the consequences for humans and all living things around the world. How we choose to live in the next 10 years will shape the next century. The cost of living and the energy crisis affecting our lives may motivate us to act. Perhaps through it, God may speak to us of the struggle that climate change is already bringing to many, many people's lives. Yet we need more than a reminder. We need God's renewing and empowering.

Conclusion

At the heart of the Christian message is hope. We can speak of the hope of judgement; that there is accountability for our lack of care of the poor and of the environment. This hope is based on God and God's justice and grace, which is not thwarted by human sinfulness. Ultimate hope is in God and is eternal, while human hope is temporal and uncertain. Christians are called to a hopeful discipleship in the light of our ultimate hope in God's promises and purposes.¹⁷ We are called to love God and our neighbours (Matthew 22:37–39), which should include the example that we present in our lifestyle: our attitude to those whom the world often ignores or despises; our consumption, and

especially our use of fossil fuels. In Christ we live as hopeful disciples, restored to our full humanity as God's stewards of creation, embodying the image of God, who has declared creation good and calls on human beings to exercise a godly care of the whole of creation.

In a world where poverty and hunger, forced migration, modern slavery and human trafficking can be a hidden and overlooked blight on humanity, Christian disciples are called to embody an alternative narrative, sovereignty and hope—to express an alternative model of society, where we make space for all to participate and give voice to their concerns. Pope Francis is quoted as saying, 'Too often we participate in the globalization of indifference. May we strive instead to live in global solidarity.'¹⁸

Are we listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor?

Notes to Text

1. 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil' (Ephesians 5:14-16, New International Version).
2. <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/2022-pakistan-floods/> [accessed 15.11.22].
3. John Weaver, *Earthshaping Earthkeeping: A Doctrine of Creation*. London: Lynx/SPCK, 1999, 116-130; *Christianity and Science: SCM Core Text*. London: SCM, 2010, 183-218.
4. IPCC Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, Headline Statement for Policymakers, 2021, pp1-2, at <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/>

IPCC_AR6_WGI_Headline_Statements.pdf [accessed 12.08.21].

5. <https://climate.selectra.com/en/news/ipcc-report-2022> [accessed 15.11.22].

6. Mike Morecroft, *Reflections on the Latest IPCC Reports*, JRI Blog, May 2022, <https://jri.org.uk/reflections-on-the-latest-ipcc-reports/> [accessed 06.06.22].

7. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abn7950> [accessed 15.11.22].

8. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/90880-nobody-made-a-greater-mistake-than-he-who-did-nothing>

9. See <https://www.local.gov.uk/net-zero> [accessed 06.06.22].

10. <https://www.faithandsociety.org/> [accessed 07.02.2022].

11. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si', mi' Signore*, paras 216-221.

12. For example, see Gustavo Gutiérrez in *Radical Christian Writings: A Reader*, Andrew Bradstock & Christopher Rowland (eds). Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, 336–342, based on C. Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to*

Liberation Theology. Cambridge, CUP, 1999, 25–32.

13. Mike Morecroft, *What is Net Zero and Why Does it Matter?* JRI Blog, July 2022, <https://jri.org.uk/what-is-net-zero-and-why-does-it-matter/> [accessed 02.08.22].

14. Mike Morecroft, *Reflections*, JRI Blog, May 2022, <https://jri.org.uk/reflections-on-the-latest-ipcc-reports/> [accessed 02.08.22].

15. Mike Morecroft, *Reflections*, JRI Blog, May 2022, <https://jri.org.uk/reflections-on-the-latest-ipcc-reports/> [accessed 02.08.22].

16. Lucy Moore (ed), *Messy Church Goes Wild: Caring for the World we Live in*. Abingdon: BRF, 2022.

17. See my exploration: 'Hopeful disciples in a time of climate change,' in *Wisdom, Science and the Scriptures: Essays in Honour of Ernest Lucas*, Finamore & Weaver (eds).

18. Xavier University, 'Pope Francis Quotes' [accessed 8 November 2021], <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/quote-archive1/pope-francis>.

Research into Baptist life

Did you know that there is a free-access archive of all available past *bmj* issues, including its predecessor, *The Fraternal*?

These journals provide a lens into the life of Baptist ministers and their churches back to 1907, and could help you in your research. Our friend Rob Bradshaw, librarian at Spurgeon's College, scanned all the back issues that we have been able to locate and hosts them for us on Theology on the Web, which itself is an amazing resource and worth a look. The *bmj* archive does not include the most recent year or two, but is updated periodically.

You can find the archive here:

https://theologyontheweb.org.uk/journals_baptist.html



Colossians 1:15-20 Through a Green Lens

by Paul Beasley-Nurray

Author: Paul Beasley-Murray is now retired from Baptist ministry but continues to write and serve in different ways.

Many years ago I wrote a PhD thesis: *The Lordship of Christ over the World in the Corpus Paulinum*. There I pointed out that when the first Christians declared 'Jesus is Lord', they were not in the first place saying Jesus is my Lord, nor that Jesus is Lord of his church, but rather Jesus is Lord of all in the very widest of senses: he is Lord of the universe. Not surprisingly, one of the passages of the NT which fascinated me was Colossians 1:15-20.

An Early Christian Hymn

The well-nigh unanimous verdict of New Testament scholarship today is that in Colossians 1:15-20 an unknown theologian of the early church celebrates the lordship of Christ. True, Paul does not say that he is drawing upon the composition of somebody else. Nonetheless the parallelism present in these verses convinces many that here we have no spontaneous lyrical outburst on the part of Paul, but a carefully constructed early Christian hymn. If so, then we come face to face with the fact that Paul was not the only theologian of the early church. There were already other Christians at work reflecting on the person of Christ, who as a result came to make some incredibly daring statements about their Master, who had died on a Roman cross less than 30 years before.

My view is that in Colossians 1:15-20 we have a hymn composed originally of two basic verses with a short three-line intermediary verse holding together the two main verses, which Paul took and expanded in his letter to the Colossians.¹ Originally the hymn may have had the following shape:

*He is the image of the invisible God,
the first-born of all creation;
for in him all things were created,
all things were created through him
and for him.*

*He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body, the church*

*He is the beginning,
the first-born from the dead
For in him all the fullness of God was
pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile to
himself all things.*

Using the Green Lens: Exegesis or Eisegesis?

However, in this paper my concern is not with the structure of the hymn, nor indeed with the message of the whole hymn. Rather I am concerned with what this hymn reveals of the early church's understanding of Christ's relationship to

the creation. I am deliberately looking at this hymn through a green lens. I confess that initially I felt uncomfortable looking through such a lens, for neither the author of the Christ-hymn nor the Apostle Paul, when he inserted the hymn into his letter, had a conscious green agenda.

Paul, for instance, was concerned to celebrate the lordship of Jesus over what we often refer to as the 'principalities and powers,' but which Paul here calls 'things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers' (1:16). These are the evil cosmic forces which were believed to hold the whole world in its grip. No, says Paul, Jesus is Lord—he will bring them to heel and 'peace' (1:20) will be restored. This was the theme of that other great Christ hymn in Philippians 2, where Paul talks about every knee—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—bowing. Paul was referring to those powers at the end of Romans 8: 'I am convinced that neither...angels nor rulers, nor powers...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:38-39). It was to these malign cosmic forces that Paul refers to at the end of Ephesians 1, where he speaks of God raising Jesus from the dead and seating him at his right hand 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion' (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Yet I have come to believe that some of the hymn's statements do have green implications. If we use a green lens to look at this hymn, we discover the seeds of creation care are present. Within this new context we are not so much reading into scripture, as reading out.

Significantly the underlying Greek phrase which in English is normally translated as 'all things' (*ta panta*) is much wider in scope than terms such as 'principalities and powers'.

According to Arndt & Gingrich (in the standard *Greek New Testament Lexicon*),² in Colossians 1:20, as also Ephesians 1:10, *ta panta* means 'the universe,' which is defined as 'everything in heaven and on earth that is in need of uniting and redeeming.' Not surprisingly the GNB uses the term 'the universe' in its translation of Colossians 1:20. With that in mind, let me substitute the term 'universe' wherever the phrase 'all things' appears in the hymn: and when we do so the hymn begins to resonate in a new way. Here we have in four statements an amazingly far-reaching description of the cosmic Christ:

*In him the universe was created
The universe has been created
through him and for him
In him the universe holds together
Through him God was pleased to
reconcile to himself the universe*

1. In him the universe was created.

In the words of the NRSV: 'In him all things (*ta panta*) were created' (1:16a). 'In him'—in other words, 'in Christ,' the universe was created. My old PhD supervisor, F.F. Bruce, compared Colossians 1:16a with Ephesians 1:4, where Paul wrote that God 'chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.' Bruce went on to say: 'God's creation, like his election, takes place "in Christ" and not apart from him.'³

2. The universe has been created through him and for him. Literally, 'all things (*ta panta*) have been created

through him and for him' (1:16c). Not only is Christ the mediator of God's work in creation (see 1 Corinthians 8:16; also John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2; 2:10), he is also the goal of creation. All things were created to find their focal point in him.

The tense is significant: in v16b the underlying Greek verb (*ektistaí*) is in the perfect tense, which describes a one-off action in the past which continues into the present; whereas in v16a the underlying Greek verb (*ektisthe*) is a simple Greek past tense, which denotes a one-off action. This perfect tense implies that the creation has a permanent and indissoluble relationship to Christ, a relationship which ever seeks to find fulfilment in Christ.

John Stott linked this verse to Hebrews 1:2, where we read that God appointed his son as 'heir of all things' and commented: 'If the universe, especially planet earth, is destined by the Father for the Son and will one day be given to the Son, how can we presume to squander or spoil the inheritance?'⁴

3. In him the universe holds together.

In the words of the NRSV: 'and in him all things (*ta panta*) hold together' (v17b). Another amazing statement! The word translated 'hold together' (*sunístemi*) was used by the Stoics to describe the 'binding together' of the universe. In the words of Hebrews 1:3, Jesus 'sustains all things by his powerful word.' However, it is important to note that the hymn is not propounding a particular cosmological theory but is rather making a theological affirmation: Jesus is the sole and rightful Lord of creation, who not only set the universe in motion at the beginning of time, but who is also responsible for all

that appears since then. In other words, Jesus is more than a constitutional monarch, holding simply vestigial powers. As the ongoing sustainer of the universe he remains supreme. Jesus is Lord!

Yet even more is involved. The Greek verb can imply not only the 'holding together', but also the 'putting together' of sundered parts. An alternative translation is therefore possible: 'In him are brought together all things.' At this point the hymn looks not only back to the role of Jesus in creation, but also forward to the role of Jesus in the new creation. It may well be that this phrase acts as the lynchpin of the whole hymn, 'binding together' the work of Jesus both in creation and redemption. In the words of Tom Wright, 'Jesus holds together the old world and the new, creation and new creation!'⁵

4. Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself the universe.

In the words of the NRSV, 'and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things (*ta panta*)' (1:20). The apparent universalism has caused great difficulties, for at first sight v20 appears to envisage the salvation of all. Indeed, it was on the basis of this text that the third century theologian Origen talked of even the devil himself being saved. But such an interpretation runs counter to the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. In Colossians 2:15, for example, Paul talks of Christ triumphing over the powers rather than reconciling them.

The solution to the problem lies in an awareness of the Greek verb used. For close examination of the text reveals that the hymn was not talking about 'reconciliation' but 'restoration.' The

underlying Greek verb (*apokatallassein*) is not the usual verb Paul uses when he writes of reconciliation (*katallassein*). Instead it has an additional prepositional prefix (*apo*) which is the Greek equivalent of the Latin '*re*,' or 'again'. This changes the meaning. The hymn speaks about a return to cosmic harmony—on 'law and order' being re-established in the universe. The GNB rightly translates: 'Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself'. Or as Eugene Peterson puts it: 'All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies' (*The Message*).

The Implications of Colossians 1:15-20

The resurrection of Jesus affects the overall destiny of the world as a whole. As I wrote in *The Message of Resurrection*:

For the first Christians the resurrection had cosmic significance. As a result of the resurrection of Jesus the world was no longer the same. In the thinking of the Colossian hymn, for instance, the resurrection is portrayed not as affecting the individual destinies of believers, but rather affecting the overall destiny of the world. The Risen Jesus is Lord of all.

The implications of this thinking are revolutionary. If Jesus is Lord of all, then this means that no aspect of life today can be beyond his jurisdiction. If Jesus is Lord of all, then as Christians we are called to be concerned not just with the affairs of the church, but with the affairs of the world—the struggle for human dignity and for justice, the issues of ecology and the use of

*resources, even the question of space colonization, come onto the Christian agenda!*⁶

At this point I went no further in spelling out the implications. Although green issues were already on the table for many Christians, they were not on mine. The World Council of Churches between its sixth (1983) and seventh (1991) assemblies had appealed to the churches to make public commitments and undertake common action on the threats to life in the areas of 'justice, peace, and the integrity of creation,' but that had not grabbed me. Nor did I pay much attention to the 1994 Declaration on the Care of Creation produced by evangelicals and endorsed by leaders such as John Stott. Significantly with regard to Colossians 1:19-20 the Declaration stated 'God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order'. Then, in 2020, the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation took place in South Africa, the 'Cape Town Commitment'. I confess that only now have I caught up on that.

I discovered as a result of reading *John Stott and Creation Care* that at Cape Town it was agreed that creation care is 'a gospel issue'. Let me quote the full context of that phrase, 'a gospel issue':

The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ (Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:2-3). We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but

for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ. (Cape Town Commitment 1.7a)

Christopher Wright commented 'Ecological action now is both a creational responsibility from the Bible's beginning and also an eschatological sign of the Bible's ending—and new beginning. Christian ecological action points towards and anticipates the restoration of our proper status and function in creation. It is to behave as we were originally created to, and as we shall one day be fully redeemed for.'⁷ Wow, I find that a revolutionary thought!

Notes to Text

1. See Paul Beasley-Murray, 'Colossians 1:15-20: An early Christian hymn celebrating the lordship of Christ' 169-183 in *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to Prof F.F. Bruce on his 70th birthday*, Donald A. Hagner & Murray J. Harris (eds). Exeter: Paternoster, 1980, 169-183.
2. William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th edn. Cambridge: CUP, 1952.
3. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians*. London, 1957, 197.
4. *John Stott on Creation Care*, R.J. (Sam) Berry with Laura S. Meitzner Yoder (eds). London: IVP, 2021, 199.
5. Tom Wright, Paul for Everyone. *The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians & Philemon*, 2nd edn. London: SPCK, 2004, 151.
6. Paul Beasley-Murray, *The Message of the Resurrection*. IVP, 2000.
7. Christopher J.H. Wright, *The goodness, the glory and the goal of creation*. John Stott London Lecture, 23 October 2013, quoted in *John Stott and Creation Care*, 235.

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A Difficult Conversation?

by Simon Hollis

Author: Simon Hollis is associate minister at Stafford Baptist Church.

This paper is written in the context of a 'hot-button' issue currently presenting itself to the national Baptist family, namely whether ministers in sexually expressed same-sex marriages can be included on the Accredited List of the Baptist Union. For brevity, I will refer to this issue as SSM. Within this setting Baptists Together invites conversation focused on 'discerning the mind of Christ, listening well, exploring together, understanding the theological grounds for unity when we are different, and what mutual support looks like in a number of local settings.'¹ In a highly complex and multifaceted debate, I will consider how such a conversation about SSM might take place and what our expectations of this process might be. In taking this focus, I inevitably highlight some matters that may otherwise appear peripheral and exclude others of significance to the wider conversation.

Where? The Baptist Context: How Decisions are Made

Who are the decision-makers in Baptist settings? While the debate about SSM is highly nuanced, the issue is ultimately about whether names are on the Accredited List or not. By whom, in a Baptist context, is such a judgement made? At a legal/organisational level the

answer, while complex, is clear: as an intercongregational matter, jurisdiction lies with the BU Council who approve the MR Rules. Council would usually deal with such matters through its Ministerial Recognition Committee (MRC). In this instance, however, the MRC has unsurprisingly referred the matter back to Council. Following further reflection, it has been recognised that the Core Leadership Team (CLT) of 45 individuals is best placed to enable Council's consideration of this issue.² This in turn has led the CLT and Trustees to reflect on conversations that have already taken place with ministers, local churches, associations and BU Assembly, before determining how to engage in a further process of listening and consultation.³

We shall return to issues of Baptist ecclesiology later, addressing how differences of opinion may be approached. For now, the very description of the process highlights the challenges that community discernment poses for the Baptist family regarding SSM. There is scope for questions of interpretation at an organisational level alone about the remit of, and interplay between, many different agents in national Baptist life; the General Secretary and senior staff, CLT, the Trustees, Council, Local Associations, and

Accredited Ministers. All this structural complexity must then sit alongside the reality that it is the local church meeting that is at the heart of local Baptist life and decision-making.⁴

The Challenges of the Conversation

We now turn to consider the inherent challenges of any debate about SSM. The lived experience of many Christians will be that discussions around same-sex relationships include views that are simultaneously highly nuanced, deeply held, and impassioned. In seeking to understand how conversations may need to progress, it is instructive to consider some of the reasons why this may be so.

First, issues around SSM affect many areas of individual and corporate church life. Wright identifies 'personal, pastoral, hermeneutical, theological and civil' matters,⁵ in relation to SSM and we could easily add organisational, ecclesiological, missional and doctrinal. Secondly, the issues are highly complex in themselves, and it is possible to have sincerely held, but mutually contradictory, opinions. To clarify where differences and commonalities might lie, attempts are often made to set out frameworks of varying possible responses to same-sex relationships. These often serve as helpful starting points for discussion.⁶ The fourfold division of attitudes recently suggested by Fresh Streams leaders of Conservative, Traditional (Open), Accepting and Affirming would be such an example.⁷ The differences typically reflect a spectrum of possible viewpoints, depending on (a) the stance taken as whether actively to address the issue at all,⁸ (b) when, if ever, same-sex activity

may be permissible,⁹ and (c) whether such relationships are responded to with judgement, qualified acceptance or positive affirmation.¹⁰

Thirdly, the debate touches on other key sociological debates within contemporary UK society such as the nature of tolerance, social justice, and aspects of human identity, which are often controversially contested. Fourthly, SSM touches on the most personal and intimate aspects of human identity. The effect of words is powerful (James 3:1-12), and in a controversial area, we tread on delicate ground, usually not knowing the full circumstances of those lives into which we speak. We need to proceed carefully and with respect.

In this context, individual Christians and church may easily find themselves experiencing a significant internal tension between their moral and pastoral theology.¹¹ Even before listening to other voices, the position may be unsettling to both their beliefs and practices: 'to accommodate acceptance of same-sex relationships [may feel] profoundly destabilizing both to Christianity and society as we have understood it!'¹² The Christian may sincerely question how true welcome within community is to be expressed, and 'grace and truth' (John 1:14) are to be embodied, if they understand scripture to say that same-sex relationships are not permissible.

A Way Forward?

I suggest that the complexities and 'hot-button' nature of the issues currently facing national church leadership have some parallels with those facing the

Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and that the biblical approach to conflict resolution provides insight into how a contemporary conversation about SSM might take place. The context for the early church related to the necessity or otherwise of circumcision and the extent to which the Jewish law must be obeyed by Gentile converts.¹³ A comparison may be drawn with the contemporary questions posed by SSM, in that the practice of those being drawn to the early church fundamentally challenged the long standing traditional, cultural, and theological assumptions of its Jewish members.¹⁴ I will draw practical lessons from that approach, but first identify three significant factors that shaped the Jerusalem Council's thinking.

Three Lenses for Approaching a Complex Conversation

(a) A God-Focused Lens. The starting point for any conversation addressing contentious issues is important. The focus of the Jerusalem Council is immediately on God, and 'everything God had done through them' (Acts 15:4). Throughout, it is God-focused (Acts 15:6-11) and decisions are in the context of God's activity (Acts 15:3-4). As Baptist Christians, we too would seek to look first to Christ, 'the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice.'¹⁵ This theocentric approach is similarly the start of the invitation to reflect in the Anglican project, *Living in Love and Faith*, focusing immediately upon the 'Bible that begins with God and the life that God gives.'¹⁶

(b) A Missional Lens. In the growing New Testament church of Acts 15, the expressed purpose is missional, ensuring that nothing makes it difficult for others to

come to God (Acts 15:19). Kerrigan makes the point that the question being posed of the Jerusalem Council was doctrinal and pastoral, but also missional. As the church grows, new questions inevitably arise. While our mission is shaped by our theology, the issues for our theology are shaped by our mission: the two are in dynamic tension.¹⁷ The Jerusalem Council looks to God and listens to others to discern how God's mission is to be served. The three-directional outlook that they adopt is like that recommended for the contemporary church by Cormack, who suggests that the leader should develop a vision that is 'Godward' (Acts 15:7-9; Acts 15:12-14), 'outward' (Acts 15: 10-11) and 'forward' (Acts 15: 28-30).¹⁸

(c) A Transformational Lens. In seeking to approach an emotive issue upon which there were deeply held convictions, the Jerusalem Council was prepared to engage in dialogue that was genuinely open and inclusive (Acts 15:6). Respectful listening is surely key to journeying through the conflict.¹⁹ We should note, however, that this goes well beyond a desire simply to gather information or gain knowledge. Rather it is an invitation to engage in a process that may be transformative for ourselves and others. The Johari window model highlights the areas of our thinking and behaviour that may be obvious to others but not to ourselves, and that dialogue may expand our understanding.²⁰ By listening well to other voices we may recognise some of the lenses that shape our thinking.

Our age, ethnicity, religious and cultural background and lived experiences are all likely to play powerfully into our views

about SSM. This understanding might itself encourage and foster humility as we reflect that our revelation and understanding about this area is still partial (1 Corinthians 13:12). A willingness to engage in conversation in this way requires 'not just humility but also courage, generosity and confidence.'²¹ It is a full engagement with, and respect for, the other—as shown by Jesus on the road to Emmaus, as he first listens to those he encounters, allowing them to share their emotions and questions (Luke 24:13-24). Such conversation provides an opportunity to explore, to be heard and understood, and for the humanity of others to be honoured.²²

Practical Lessons from the Jerusalem Council

First, we might note that the Jerusalem Council meets. A conversation takes place and the church makes a proactive response to a developing dilemma about theology and practice, which has missional implications in its contemporary context. We have noted the strong emotions that can easily arise from discussions about human sexuality, potentially leading to polarisation of views and unhelpful rhetoric.²³ Such too was the strength of feeling in relation to circumcision in Acts 15, the language of the precipitating dispute in Act 15:2, used elsewhere to describe a riot.²⁴ Fear of personal vilification may understandably lead to a reluctance to engage in any conversation at all,²⁵ or indefinitely to 'kick the can down the road.'²⁶ However, whether through fear or otherwise, avoidance is not a realistic option.²⁷ As Huggett identifies, avoidance is likely to lead to a lose/lose situation.²⁸ Cormack

notes that in the management of change a point arises where simply maintaining the status quo is no longer feasible, and the momentum for addressing change becomes inevitable.²⁹ Such was the situation in Acts 15, where Peter has already made smaller adaptations to practice in requiring only baptism (but not circumcision) of Cornelius (Acts 10:47), a stance later endorsed by the wider church (Acts 11:1-18).³⁰ Such one-degree shifts in themselves create new questions and a new context for theological reflection.³¹ In relation to SSM, Baptists Together has previously made accommodations in recognising that churches may want to register for same-sex marriages (but not for ordained ministers). As the situation develops, 'a combination and build-up of 'little things' can create a tipping point for sudden and rapid change.'³²

Even if it were argued that this point has not been reached on SSM, waiting until a conversation is inevitable can have strong practical disadvantages. Not only is a decision then required in a time-bound way, potentially impeding the reflection needed for considered debate, but the personal lives of the individuals who precipitated it may become an unwelcome focus of scrutiny and concern. In such a sensitive and complex area, a proactive approach is preferable, even if this can only realistically go as far as to establish general principles that are to be applied. It is this reflective and proactive approach that the Church of England seeks to model through their courses and material in *Living in Love and Faith*.³³

Having acknowledged the need for a timely conversation, careful thought

is needed about managing the entire conversation. Matters concerning human sexuality are 'too complicated to be tackled through the blunt instrument of adversarial debate, which is the usual method of church or denominational councils.'³⁴ If discussions are not to be avoided, nor are they to be hastily rushed. As Lynne Green notes, 'discernment often takes time.'³⁵ Setting out a roadmap to manage expectations can be helpful, as the BU has done, even where that plan needs to incorporate stages of reflection about the next step forward.³⁶

We may note that the Jerusalem Council begins, not with theological or doctrinal proposition, but by receiving personal testimony from Paul and Barnabas of how God is seen to be at work (Acts 15:4). Starting with personal stories and experience when considering SSM may help ground our discussions and provide a timely reminder that those whose lives we consider are not mere ciphers or academic propositions, but rather individuals made in the image of God.³⁷ An example of the present-day Baptist family adopting a similar approach can be seen in the approach of the Fresh Streams Conference in June 2022.

The Jewish Council listens not only to God but to a range of human voices; in itself a means by which we may often learn God's will.³⁸ The conversation notably includes James, speaking with the authority of the Council (Acts 15:13), but extends also to Paul, Barnabas, and Peter who sit outside of the formal power structures of the church but who can nevertheless speak of God's activity 'on the ground' (Acts 15:7; Acts 15:12). Wisely

it also embraces those with opposing voices, even including those who are actively hostile (Acts 15:2). As we have similarly complex conversations around human sexuality, we too will reflect on the range of voices we listen to, and how they shape our understanding. Engagement with social trends, scientific research and the social sciences and the developing response of religious faith may prove to be particularly helpful in this area,³⁹ as may considering what models we wish to use for theological reflection.

Practically, the conversation about SSM may also be aided by defining terminology and, as the Jewish Council did, clarifying at an early stage what may be unspoken assumptions about theology and the presenting questions.⁴⁰ Nothing should be taken for granted. Terminology such as 'pansexual' may be unknown to some (as may be the concept it expresses) yet be the lived experience of others. What were key issues, appropriate ways of framing debate, or acceptable terminology,⁴¹ even in the recent past may no longer be so.⁴² As noted above, different theological perspectives might helpfully be set out, both to understand differing starting points, but also to clarify where areas of difference in interpretation might lie.

Establishing common ground is then helpful, as the conversation is framed and developed.⁴³ Even in an area where opinions may appear starkly polarised, summarising and listing the issues may surprisingly reveal areas of agreement as well as disagreement. Christians who may reach different conclusions about SSM should nevertheless be able to find common ground in their desire to

be faithful to God's word, to welcome others with the love of Christ and to work to preserve the unity of the Spirit.⁴⁴ As Lasseter and Whalley note, focusing on what we can agree on 'helps to move from being locked in positions to interests held in common.'⁴⁵

Finally, we may note that the Jewish Council's listening extended to God's written word. To the Baptist Christian this should come as no surprise. The Declaration of Principle speaks of the authority of Christ 'being revealed in the Holy Scriptures.'⁴⁶ The difficulty is that even if this proposition is accepted it does not automatically prove determinative in terms of a way forward regarding SSM.⁴⁷ Different Christians can, and do, have differing interpretations and sincerely reach different conclusions based upon the Bible,⁴⁸ with the potential for polarised and entrenched views. As Wright notes, the debate about sexuality has for some, become an issue about biblical interpretation and 'a benchmark or test of the faithfulness of Scripture',⁴⁹ in effect putting at stake a defining issue of Baptist identity.⁵⁰ While strongly arguing for a biblically based response based upon scripture, this paper recognises the practical reality that a range of responses are possible,⁵¹ and that the key issue for Baptists may be how they respond to those who reach a different conclusion to themselves, an issue to which we will now turn.⁵²

What Outcome Do We Expect?

Elmes, in *Sexuality, Faith and The Art of Conversation*, imagines how dialogue about sexuality might take place within the local church. A point is reached,

however, where in 'the group came to acknowledge the unlikelihood of resolving our differences.'⁵³ Savidge-Cole notes that individual views often remain unchanged even after lengthy discussions and careful listening,⁵⁴ although individuals' views may be more likely to change when they encounter the issue within their families or community. If our expectation from a conversation is for resolution in the sense of achieving unanimity or developing a guidebook to deal with every situation, we are likely to be disappointed. Where does this leave us as a Baptist family, and how might our conversation then proceed?

Historically Baptists have had a high respect for the ability of the individual Christian to form ethical judgments,⁵⁵ and this is reflected in decision making by the local church meeting.⁵⁶ Equally, however, as Wright notes that 'although conscience is free it is not anarchic and... the wider church may test the judgment of individuals and congregations.'⁵⁷ Our model of community discernment inevitably, therefore, leads to hard questions of what degree of latitude can and should be allowed where individual judgements differ.⁵⁸ In respect of SSM, 'how much agreement does there have to be to support what quality of cooperation?'⁵⁹ Wright notes the options of the individual sublimating their own views out of wider respect for the communal view, and to preserve unity, along with a contrasting choice of engaging in active dissent, both being potentially appropriate Baptist modes of response.⁶⁰ As with most aspects concerning SSM, straightforward answers do not come readily.

Conclusion

I have sought to argue that conversation and corporate listening, as demonstrated at the Jerusalem Council, is seen in scripture as a way by which God's will and purposes may be discovered and discerned, even for deeply contentious issues. I have suggested that a conversation may not necessarily lead to a resolution in the sense of a uniform agreed position, and that any position taken regarding the way forward will inevitably pose yet further questions for the Baptist family. The process of good conversation may however be a way of 'extending the table' of God's Kingdom, as both we and others are transformed. It is into this growing Christlikeness and welcoming community that our current BU President Hayley Young invites us to move. Quoting Michelle Obama's concluding words in *Becoming*, she writes: 'Let's invite one another in. Maybe then we can begin to fear less, to make fewer wrong assumptions, to let go of biases and stereotypes that unnecessarily divide us...there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become.'⁶¹

Notes to text

1. BUGB, *Baptists Together Magazine* (Summer 2022), 5.
2. The composition of the CLT is set out at 'Core Leadership Team', Baptists Together, https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220600/Core_Leadership_Team.aspx [accessed 19 July 2022].
3. Lynn Green and CLT, 'Mission, Marriage. An Update from Lynn and the Core Leadership Team', 21 June, 2022, Baptists Together, <https://baptist.org.uk/Articles/637884/Mission-Marriage.aspx> [accessed 19 July 2022].
4. The first clause of the BUGB 'Declaration of Principle', Baptists Together, https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220595/Declaration_of_Principle.aspx [accessed 19 July 2022].
5. Nigel G. Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002, 135.
6. See also J. D. Nelson, 'Homosexuality' in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. London: SCM, 1986, 271-4.
7. Mark Elder, *Identifying and Locating Our Position*, Handout at Fresh Streams Conference 8 June 2022.
8. David P. Gushee, *Changing Our Mind: Definitive Edition*. Canton, Michigan: The Spirit Books, 2017, 38-43.
9. Stephen Elmes, *Sexuality, Faith and the Art of Conversation*, Part One. Bookham: Creative Tension Publications, 2017, 21-23.
10. Wright, *Baptists*, 136-141.
11. Wright, *Baptists*, 134.
12. Wright, *Baptists*, 134.
13. David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Nottingham: Apollos, 2009, 421.
14. Circumcision was not only a requirement of the Mosaic law (Acts 15:1; Leviticus 12:3) but also a sign of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14).
15. DoP, https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220595/Declaration_of_Principle.aspx [accessed 19 July 2022].
16. Church of England, *Living in Love and Faith*. Norwich: Church House Publishing, 2021, 11.
17. David Kerrigan, Address and Notes given at Fresh Streams Conference, Stafford, 8 June 2022.
18. David Cormack, *Change Directions*. Crowborough: Monarch, 1995, 248-249.
19. Vivienne Lassetter & Ernie Whalley, *Journeying through Conflict – Part of Life!* Didcot: BUGB, 2004, 17.
20. Rick Lewis, *Mentoring Matters: Building Strong Christian Leaders: Avoiding Burnout: Reaching the Finishing Line*. Oxford: Monarch Books, 2009, 183; Joyce Huggett, *Conflict: Constructive or Destructive*. Stowmarket:

- Kevin Mayhew, 2002, 105.
21. Pat Took, 'Are We Listening?' in *Baptists Together Magazine* (Summer 2022), 17.
 22. Took, 'Are We Listening?', 17.
 23. Wright, *Baptists*, 135.
 24. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007, 495.
 25. Wright, *Baptists*, 136.
 26. As a recent Facebook group has chosen to characterise the Baptist response to this issue.
 27. Rick Love, *Peace Catalysts: Resolving Conflict in Our Families, Organisations and Communities*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2014, 82. See also 'Listening to You', *Baptists Together*, <https://baptist.org.uk/Groups/357132/Listening.to.you.aspx> [accessed 19 July 2022].
 28. Huggett, *Conflict*, 145.
 29. Cormack, *Change*, 124. See also Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004, 6.
 30. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Acts: New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990, 538.
 31. Neil Hudson, *Imagine Church: Releasing Whole-Life Disciples*. Nottingham: IVP, 2012, 97-106.
 32. Phil Potter, *Pioneering a New Future*. Abingdon: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2015, 79.
 33. Church of England, *Living*.
 34. Wright, *Baptists*, 135.
 35. Lynn Green, 'A Precious and Powerful Baptist Distinctive', in *Baptists Together Magazine* (Summer 2022), 8.
 36. Green & CLT, 'Marriage'
 37. See also BUGB, *Listening to Lived Experience*, <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/358188/Listening.to.lived.aspx> [accessed 19 July 2022].
 38. Took, 'Are We Listening?', 17.
 39. Church of England, *Living*, 60-101.
 40. Andrew Goddard & Don Horrocks (eds), *Resources for Church Leaders: Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality*. London: Evangelical Alliance, 2012, 29.
 41. Gushee, *Changing*, 46.
 42. Goddard & Horrocks, *Homosexuality*, 29.
 43. Lassetter & Whalley, *Journeying*, 19.
 44. As discovered by the author at the Fresh Steams Conference in June 2022.
 45. Lassetter & Whalley, *Journeying*, 19.
 46. DoP [accessed 19 July 2022].
 47. Although from a conservative or ultra-conservative perspective it may be argued that there is no room for debate about whether SSM is permissible, and accordingly no conversation to be had.
 48. Beth Allison-Glenny *et al*, 'The Courage to be Baptist', *Baptists Together*, December 2016, <http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/604013/The.Courage.to.aspx> [accessed 19 July 2022].
 49. Wright, *Baptists*, 134.
 50. DoP [accessed 19 July 2022].
 51. Such an argument is advanced by Allison-Glenny *et al*, 'The Courage to be Baptist'
 52. Seun Kolade, 'Listen Actively, Speak Graciously' in *Baptists Together Magazine* (Spring 2021), 25.
 53. Stephen Elmes, *Sexuality, Faith and the Art of Conversation*, Part One. Bookham: Creative Tension Publications, 2017, 155.
 54. Dawn Savidge-Cole speaking at Fresh Streams Conference 8 June 2022.
 55. Wright, *Baptists*, 144.
 56. DoP [accessed 19 July 2022].
 57. Wright, *Baptists*, 146.
 58. Jones explores this issue in the context of same-sex relationships in Gareth Jones, *Coping with Controversy: Helping Christians Handle Their Differences*, revised edn. Carlisle: Paternoster Publishing, 1996, 128-145.
 59. Wright, *Baptists*, 148.
 60. Wright, *Baptists*, 144-145.
 61. Michelle Obama, *Becoming*. London: Penguin, 2021, quoted by Hayley Young, 'Building a Bigger Table' in *Baptists Together Magazine* (Summer 2022), 25.

bmj Essay Prize 2023

The *bmj* invites entries for our Essay Prize from those serving in, or in formation for, the leadership and ministry of Baptist churches or in other contexts. We would like an essay of 2500 words on a topic and title of the entrant's choice that fits into one of the following categories:

Baptist History and Principles

Biblical Studies

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We are looking for clear writing and argument, and preferably a creative engagement with our Baptist life. The prize will be £250.00 and the winning essay (and any highly commended contributions) will be published in *bmj*.

We particularly encourage entries from those in the early years of their (Baptist) ministries, which includes MiTs and those who are not in accredited or recognised leadership roles.

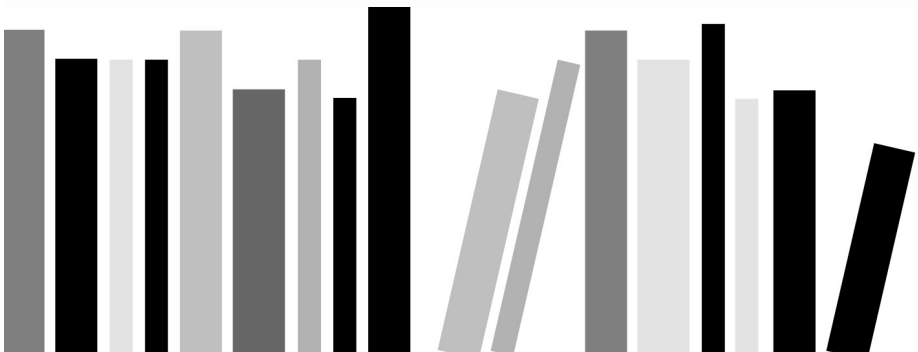
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Entries should be submitted electronically, double spaced and fully referenced, using endnotes not footnotes, to the editor at revsal96@aol.com, including details of your name, address, church, role, and stage of ministry.

Judges will be drawn from the Editorial Board of *bmj* and experienced academic Baptist colleagues. We reserve the right not to award a prize if the entries are unsuitable, of an inadequate standard for *bmj*, or do not meet the criteria.

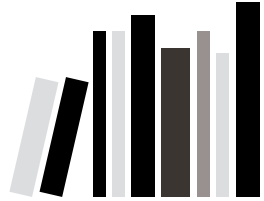
Please share this competition with colleagues to whom it might be of interest.

Contact the editor if you have any queries.



reviews

edited by Michael Peat



God's Not Forgotten Me —Experiencing Faith in Dementia

by Tricia Williams

Cascade, 2022

Reviewer: John Matthews

There are a number of books which reflect on the relationship between dementia and faith. The distinctive nature of this one is its being based on the author's interviews with eight evangelical Christians living with mild to moderate dementia—both single and married—all living in their own homes. Her intention is to understand the faith experience of Christians living with dementia rather than to explain it.

The book explores the nature of dementia, and the questions it raises for faith, especially for Christians of an evangelical tradition. Why especially for these? Because 'where evangelical faith is presumed to be dependent on the cognitive aspects of belief and relationality, such faith is threatened by the advent of dementia' (p3).

In what follows, four key aspects of evangelicalism, which were evident in the interviewees' words, are highlighted: relationship with Christ, relationship with others, mission and the Bible. Throughout the book, Williams seeks to keep in mind Brueggemann's model of orientation, disorientation and reorientation, which she sees as three dimensions of the participants' experience of faith while living with dementia.

After a chapter in which she considers the wider context of the book's focus and explores a range of writing from psychology, theology and research, as well as personal accounts, there follow others on identity, individuals' sense of relationship with God/Jesus, religious practices including Bible reading, prayer and corporate worship, the challenges to faith of dementia, memory, growing faith, present-future hope and the possible implications and ways forwards for ministry, pastoral care and the nature of faith.

Each chapter includes quotes from the interviewees on the subject concerned, with the author's comments on them, expositions of biblical passages (not always related to the participants' experience), and many quotations from other sources, ending with questions for further reflection.

Williams says that 'in a sense the research conversations at the centre of this book are expressions of lament' (p91), but the feelings expressed by the interviewees about the effects of dementia on their faith are more positive than might be expected, stemming from their personal relationship with God/Jesus in the present and their assurance of this continuing beyond death. The Bible and prayer were mentioned as spiritual resources but not communion. Single people had more

negative experiences of churchgoing than those who went with their spouses.

The responses of the participants do not differ significantly from one person to another in most instances, and I am left wondering whether interviewing only evangelicals was a lost opportunity, and if the experience of Christians from different spiritual traditions living with dementia is similar or different.

There are over 500 footnotes, most of which are references to other works, a comprehensive bibliography and a detailed index of names and subjects.

I end with one question from the author: 'What does it mean for the Christian to be formed in the image of God and in Christ when memory and other capacities are beginning to fail?' (p35) and one quotation from a participant: 'It's a matter of knowing you're loved. And because feelings remain when facts are forgotten, it's possible for anyone with dementia...to know they're loved...' (p61).

***The Hidden Unity of the Bible:
The Use of the Old Testament
in the New Testament***

by Pieter J. Lalleman

Faithbuilders, 2019

Reviewer: Bob Allaway

This book does what it says in its subtitle. It covers not just direct quotations but also allusion and echo (p7) and typology. The foreword that might have introduced these things is very brief. We are expected to pick up how they work as we read the individual chapters. Perhaps this is a device to make us read the whole book?!

It is effectively in two halves. In the first, parts of books and themes in the Old Testament are taken up and their use traced in the New. In the second, themes in New Testament books are traced backwards to the Old.

Each chapter ends with a guide to further reading. This reminded me of a book that I had forgotten I had on my shelves, and I found reading the section that Lalleman recommends a blessing.

All in all, this is a book with enough substance to feed a pastor, while it could be understood by an ordinary church member. However, I would query a few points.

He thinks it an 'advantage...that the NIV sometimes makes sentences in Old and New Testament look more similar than they are in actual fact.' But this can amount to downright distortion of the Hebrew. For example, Joel 2:29 (EV)—which he does not consider—should read 'Even on male and female slaves...' (NRSV). NIV (2011) mistranslates it the same as Acts 2:18, though neither Hebrew (BHS), nor Septuagint Greek (Rahlfs) have 'my', nor any indication of variant manuscripts, and this subtly weakens the socially radical stress.

Lalleman admits 'This book contains hardly anything about Jewish customs and ideas after the Old Testament' (p274). However, this means he misses some of the New Testament uses of the Old. In his chapter on Psalm 118, he mentions that the Jerusalem crowd greet Jesus with the messianic v25,26a. But he misses that this is the last psalm in the sequence used at Passover, so it would have been very much in their minds at that time. Also, this

would have been the 'hymn' sung by Jesus with his disciples at the end of the meal, which is also where those words occur in Christian communion liturgy, as far back as we have records. In the next chapter, on Isaiah, he notes that the 'Holy, holy, holy' in 6:3 is taken up in Revelation 4:8. But this was also (and still is) a standard synagogue prayer, in which it combines these six-winged creatures with the four-faced living creatures in Ezekiel, just as in Revelation. (Once again, this Jewish prayer has been taken into Christian communion liturgy.)

In chapter 21, he traces possible links with baptism and communion back into the Old Testament, yet he misses how the Old Testament can inform our understanding of anamnesis ('remembrance' in NIV) in Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25. It is clear from Hebrew phrases translated by this that it is reminding God of his promises, not reminding us.

Lalleman is Dutch, and this book was originally published in that language. There are a number of men called 'Judas' in the New Testament. The most prominent are Iscariot (Matthew 10:4 etc), another apostle (Luke 6:14, John 14:22) and a brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55). The epistle after 3 John is attributed to 'Jude' in English and French translations, and is generally reckoned to be by the brother. However, in German Bibles (and, presumably, Lalleman's Dutch) it is attributed, correctly but confusingly, to 'Judas'. This has led German friends with poor knowledge of scripture to express amazement to me that Judas (whom they assume to be the betrayer) should have a book in the Bible! So when I came across a reference to '1 and 2 Peter and

Judas' (p91) I realised what was behind it. I don't criticize Lalleman for thinking in his mother tongue, but I do his British publisher for letting it slip through.

I could go on querying points, but that should not detract from this being, overall, a helpful, readable book.

Following on the Way: The Acts of the Apostles as a Guide to Spiritual Formation

by Karen E. Smith

Smyth & Helwys, 2022

Reviewer: John Rackley

What is the point of reading the Acts of the Apostles today? Karen Smith, formerly of South Wales Baptist College, believes that we should see beyond an answer that treats Luke's work simply as a history of the first churches. Further, for her, although he has theological purpose in writing, and missiological conclusions may be drawn, both Luke's gospel and Acts signal that his clear intention is to aid and inspire the spiritual formation of post-resurrection disciples.

Her book begins with a helpful survey of what commentaries and articles from the western Christian tradition have said about Acts. This is followed by an explanation of the meaning of spiritual formation. She then embarks on a narrative commentary of the text interspersed with references to a wide range of authors and hymn writers which have reflected on what it may mean to have a relationship with the God of the Resurrection. So we listen to Evagrius, Benedict, Merton, Nouwen, Thurman and Vanstone. In her conclusion she returns to the main theme of what spiritual formation may be and stresses three key features—

the importance of waiting on God with the companion virtue of patience and the essential power of remembering.

So what is spiritual formation? One might think this is about Bible reading, prayer, fasting, discernment, worship, giving to the poor. But the author disabuses us of this within the first paragraphs of her preface. She writes:

From the perspective of Christian faith, spiritual formation is God's work. For Luke, there is no suggestion that individuals may come to faith or grow in the spiritual life by making choices to be better people or trying, in their own strength to adopt a particular lifestyle or keeping spiritual disciplines.

She also emphasises that such formation occurs within a community of faith. Thus, Luke begins Acts by exploring the experiences of the first Christian groupings. This continues with the ministry of first Peter and then Paul, whose experience of opposition is an introduction to what will be a characteristic experience for all Christian believers.

'Well, of course spiritual formation is about the action of God the Holy Spirit,' I found myself thinking. You can't escape this when reading both Luke's gospel and the Acts. Karen's challenge is—so what happened in your church, John? And one might respond—and what happened in your college? And then to Baptist Associations and the Union—so are you communities of spiritual formation?

In this book those of us who only plunder Luke's Acts for keys to present-day church shape and patterns of missionary

endeavour are missing the point. Smith is clear. Luke is telling stories with the express purpose of developing disciples of the risen Lord Jesus Christ together in community. She explores his use of the medium of story both in his historical setting and with contemporary insights into the meaning of stories. For a Christian they can be icons through which we can explore our relationship with God and how a community of spiritual formation may develop.

Poignantly, she dedicates this work to members of her family now deceased and friends who have accompanied her on the Way. I recognised in this a theologian who, over the last decades, has travelled through the whole gamut of how scholarship has treated the Bible text and arrived at a blend of her learning from them. This is most obvious in her narrative commentary. It is long and makes the book substantial.

Many Baptists are the sort of people who need to see it (whatever that might be) in the Bible or through the Bible before they will entrust themselves to an interpretation. This book serves that purpose. But this begs the question: and what will you do with your interpretation now?

This book made me read the text of Acts and I found myself wondering how in today's world, in the words of Mary Lathbury, I may seek the Lord 'beyond the sacred page' while remaining within the communion of saints who first gathered waiting in prayer in a room in Jerusalem.

Finding Jesus in the Storm

by John Swinton

SCM, 2021

Reviewer: Ronnie Hall

This book is about encountering mental health from a Christian perspective. The author is a community health chaplain, professor of practical theology and pastoral care as well as being a mental health nurse, so all these strands have to be brought together. I can start this review by saying this book works really well. The use of non-clinical language helped me as I have no medical background. Equally the theology is well explained and not too technical so the balance is right.

Everyone reading this review will be affected by mental health issues or will know someone who is affected. If we think back, it is only fairly recently that we started talking about mental health more openly in society. In fact, in 10 years of church ministry I don't remember mental health coming up that often, and when it did it was something we just didn't speak about and, I admit, I had no idea what I was doing most of the time. This book would have been helpful at that time to fill the gaps in my knowledge.

The book starts by redescribing mental health. I found that really helpful. I have done a bit of mental health awareness but never from a theological perspective. It is quite dense but well worth going through as it sets a framework around language and concepts that helps the reader understand the case studies that follow. The case studies focus on common mental health issues. The people in the studies are people in our churches or chaplaincy settings. I learned (again) to

watch my unconscious bias and to listen to the story of the person because every story is unique. I learned again that the stigma around mental health is unhelpful and I learned again that a person's mental health can seriously impact someone's relationship with the church and Jesus. I have seen it first hand, and I was delighted to have confirmed, that for some people with depression and anxiety coming to church and pretending to be joyous is impossible.

There is a lot more I could say as I am someone who works with this every day. I can only say to everyone reading this is to learn more about mental health. This is a brilliant book to do that. Even the section about 'demon possession' is worth the money alone. I cannot recommend this book enough to anyone in pastoral ministry.

The Bible and Mental Health

by Christopher C. H. Cook

& Isabelle Hamley (eds)

SCM, 2020

Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

I am currently a member of a church that in June 2022 launched a weekly Renew Wellbeing space where 'it's OK to be not OK'. So it was with great personal interest and anticipation that I began to read this book. I was not disappointed.

The editors have brought together an impressive array of scholars, including themselves, together with Joanna Collicutt, Stephen Barton, Paula Gooder, Walter Brueggemann, John Swinton and Megan Warner, among others. Yet this is not a wholly academic book; it also has a practical purpose in suggesting ways

in which the Bible can be used in the pastoral care of people with mental health issues.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 deals with matters concerned with biblical theology. The stand-out, most thought-provoking, contribution for me in this section is that by Joanna Collicutt on *Jesus and Madness*, in which she helpfully uses a model that distinguishes between what is culturally sanctioned and not culturally sanctioned, and between what is considered merely mundane behaviour and what is bizarre. On this model, what is judged to be 'mad' can easily morph into what is 'bad'—and Jesus was accused on both counts.

Part 2 contains some biblical case studies. Again, I can only mention the contributions that most resonated with me. First, Isabelle Hamley's insightful essay *Patient Job, Angry Job: Speaking Faith in the Midst of Trauma* (not the only essay in this book to look at both mental illness and the Bible in the light of trauma studies). Dealing mostly with the narrative sections of Job at the beginning and the end of the book, Hamley's careful study of the Hebrew text brings out fresh insights and interpretations. Also in this part of the book there are two outstanding contributions from Christopher C.H. Cook: *What Did Jesus Have to Say About Mental Health?: The Sermon on the Mount* and, especially, *The Gerasene Demoniac*, which contains a careful and cautious discussion of whether or not what the New Testament names as demon possession can be interpreted in terms of modern understandings of mental illness.

Part 3 moves us into the practical, pastoral use of the Bible with people who experience mental health challenges. John Swinton's piece stands out here. At the risk of some over-simplification, one of his conclusions suggested to me that while it's OK not to be OK, it's also not OK to try and fix it for people who themselves are feeling not OK. Here Swinton cites an anonymised case study: 'Jane's perspective on abundant life is...not that she has to be freed from depression in order to be with God. Instead, she recognizes that she has to learn to see God differently in order to understand what it might mean to live faithfully with depression.'

Also in this section we find Nick Ladd's *The Formation of Christian Community: Reading Scripture in the Light of Mental Health*, which advocates a helpful new way of reading scripture, a kind of communal *lectio divina*, called 'Dwelling in the Word,' requiring the development of listening skills. This is followed by Megan Warner's essay, *Bible and Trauma* and, lastly, by Nathan White's piece on *Christian Scripture as a Resource for Promoting Resilience*. All very useful stuff.

While much is made of the usefulness of biblical lament in the pastoral care of people with mental health issues, there are some omissions from the book. I was surprised by the absence of any discussion of Ezekiel, his visions, and his sometimes bizarre behaviour. There is also no mention of suicide; of children suffering mental health issues; of eating disorders, addictions, or personality disorders—although the editors would have liked to have included some of these at least. But there is a full bibliography, an

index of biblical references and an index of names and subjects.

This is a splendid book, and I commend it to all who seek to offer pastoral care to people suffering from mental ill-health.

A Redemption Song: Illuminations on Black British Pastoral Theology and Culture

by Delroy Hall

SCM, 2021

Reviewer: Sally Nelson

This book is a disturbing read. Delroy Hall, who was born in the UK to parents who travelled from the Caribbean in the 1950s, spares no punches in describing the lasting multigenerational legacy of oppression and rejection during the colonial period. Drawing insights from Bowles' attachment theory and studies of epigenetics and intergenerational trauma, Hall describes the way in which Black Caribbean heritage people in Britain have been three-times damaged. Forcibly and brutally relocated as slaves from Africa to the Caribbean, they lost their African familial roots, culture and languages. In the 20th century many Caribbeans relocated again to the UK in response to Britain's post-war labour shortage but were met with racism and rejection. Here they still struggle to fit in: they are neither African, nor fully Caribbean, nor White. Hall's book is a lament for a people of lost identity, and he argues that these global experiences have been damaging at the deepest levels to children who have not experienced the oppression first hand.

The book is a collection of essays and it is best to read it that way—not in one sitting, but one chapter at a time. There

is some repetition of material because of the book's genesis, although it is presented as different themes in each chapter. Hall's plea is for a Black pastoral theology that restores the humanity of those so damaged by White people, but one that is British, and not predicated upon the voices of Black theologians in the US whose experience is different. He uses some interesting theological motifs to extend his argument—both eucharist and crucifixion are movingly offered as metaphors for Black experience.

It is vital for White readers to be shocked and challenged by books like Hall's. We cannot grasp the depth of exclusion unless we are told about it, and we should pray and work for a better future. The question that arose for me as a reader is how and what a better future might be. Tragically, Hall declares (p158) that 'Black theology is not arguing for separatism but it cannot afford to join with the White academy... [it] cannot expend precious energy vying for acceptance and legitimization in White institutions that, due to fear, lack of understanding and White dominance, will inevitably and eventually disempower it... Another reason for resisting acceptance within the academy is this: "There is simply too much blood in the water." This leaves me feeling profoundly saddened and unsure what to do next. I cannot change that hideous past, but what can I do? Is it all just too little, too late?

As a woman, and a minister, I have experienced rejection and exclusion most of my life, sometimes subtly or unintentionally, and sometimes explicitly. I believe, though, that things are getting better as the excluding dimensions of our culture are revealed, exposed and

debated. Things are not right for women yet, but I have real hope that they will become better, because I have already seen change in my lifetime. Such hope is less easily found in this volume, which forces me to ask how I confess meaningfully that 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ' (Gal 3:28). I long for the day when we can all receive one another as fellow human beings, and our differences are no longer grounds for evaluation.

Read the book, hear the deep pain, be indicted, ask questions, seek the Lord.

Messy Vintage

by Katie Norman & Jill Phipps

BRF, 2021

Reviewer: Bob Little

It had to happen sooner or later. After the widespread success of the Messy Church concept with young people and young families, it was only a matter of time before this concept was applied to the older generation—and, with the proportion of the UK's population over 60 years of age growing daily, there's a rapidly expanding audience that's ripe for such treatment.

This book—by Katie Norman, a pioneer of Messy Vintage in Jersey, and BRF's National Coordinator for Messy Vintage, Jill Phipps—provides the frameworks for 52 Messy Vintage sessions. These frameworks take their themes from the Old Testament (18 sessions), the New Testament (21 sessions) and Christian festivals (13 sessions). Typically, the framework contains a Bible passage and a focus verse; the aim of the session; things to talk about to introduce the

theme; a practical activity; a 'celebration' or 'message' from the session's thoughts and activities; a prayer, and some song suggestions. This may seem comprehensive in terms of running the session but, in addition, the authors—helpfully—include, as an appendix, a draft memorandum of understanding which can be used when running Messy Vintage in care homes. There's also a useful appendix for use with Messy Vintage helpers.

For those—maybe those 'happy few', as the Bard once wrote—who have never become involved in running Messy Church, there's even a practical guide on how to run a successful Messy Vintage session. This advice focuses on prayer at the preparation stage; venue issues; the craft activity, and refreshments.

For those looking for hand-holding guidance as they embark on serving the older generation in this way, this book should prove invaluable. Its approach is tried-and-tested over many years at the lower end of the age spectrum and should prove a winning—or at least popular—formula with those of more mature years.

Can you review?

Contact **Mike Peat**
on michael3peat@gmail.com
with your details and the areas
you are interested in.

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