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Details of the fellowship can be found
on the inside back cover.

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Editorial

It would be difficult not to have noticed some of the recent commentary on the tragedy of Jade Goody, trashed and then taken to heart by the tabloids and subject to varying degrees of scrutiny by a many commentators. The question was well put by one journalist who asked why it was counted acceptable that some do their dying in the public eye and are reckoned courageous whilst others choose a not dissimilar path and are villified for it. Is it a sort of academic or class snobbery that permit us to feel in some strange sense comfortable with the John Diamond or a Ruth Picardie, but embarrassed by someone who created planet East Angular?

Choosing to die in the public eye: the public reality of death and the hidden face of resurrection. Given that the relationship between choice and obedience in Jesus' journey to the cross is always going to be elusive to those who want to pin cause and effect down too closely, we could say at least that Jesus could not have been unaware that he was going to slide in and out of life unobserved.

However, whilst it is clearly not the only view, Scripture points suggestive markers to the hiddenness of resurrection. The gallows are set in an outside place on a public site where passers by and not just the religious elite make their judgements, bad or good. Resurrection is discovered at a private tomb by a few confused friends in a place void of spectators, and by those who cannot credit the reporting of their companions. Alongside the confidence which surges through the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles comes the memory of something so deeply disturbing that there are no ready explanations or responses ("They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid..." "Thinking him to be the gardener...").

In reading the material offered in these pages I have been struck again by what what we might call "the hidden face of resurrection". An invitation to confusion perhaps - like meeting resurrection through working for the sake of the world with neighbours of different faiths or in questioning the assumptions of a 'honey-pot' approach to growing churches. All sorts of other images come to mind, from Moses' oblique encounters with the presence of God to Jesus' injunction in the garden "Do not touch me...".

Signs of resurrection, whilst real, are often hidden. Messed-up things are all too obvious, in disorder of body or mind, communities in conflict, or the simple failures which mark our days. The hiddenness of resurrection is something that we discover respond to personal, societal or environmental challenge. And the point of hope is that it meets us when we least expect it. As resurrection met those who were only looking to visit a body.

As outgoing editor I thank you for your patience with my failings and your encouragement at many points. I know you will show that same graciousness to my successor.

From action to dialogue?

Nigel Varndell, Reading. Christian Aid's Interfaith Manager invites us to consider how working together on pressing development issues may provide a more fruitful ground for inter-faith relationship than other theoretical approaches to dialogue.

For those of us involved in interfaith dialogue these are interesting times. On the one hand inter-faith dialogue is the current 'in thing' and a rapidly growing scene. Half the 253 organisations listed in the UK directory of interfaith organisations have sprung up since 2000. There is even an interfaith association of animal chaplains, presumably for people faced with issues of animal bereavement who are uncertain what faith their pet practiced. Interfaith dialogue is big business. On the other hand the hysterical media reaction to the measured words of the Archbishop of Canterbury on sharia law last year shows how fragile is this consensus in favour of dialogue. When the debate moves past platitudes into the real and complex issues of how we might live together in a multi-religious society we panic, retreat to the comfort of the nearest stereotype and ask when the archbishop will be setting up his own sharia court. Interesting times indeed!

In the UK it is increasingly difficult to exist in a single faith bubble. I live close to a Sikh Gurdwara, my corner shop sells Qur'anic commentaries next to the semi-skimmed and I share my office with practicing Muslims. At one level inter-faith encounter is not a choice, but a growing fact of life. So how do we approach it?

For some, dialogue is about creating understanding. Greater understanding breeds greater tolerance and a more tolerant society is a better society because it will build social cohesion and reduce communal tensions. I don't want to belittle the importance of social cohesion or creating a tolerant society but I am struggling to find the biblical injunction to 'tolerate our neighbour'. For others, the dialogue has more to do with the clash between mutually exclusive religious claims to truth. If we are right then people of other faiths must be wrong and

therefore we are obliged to demonstrate to them the errors in their thinking.

Both of these ideas are inadequate foundations on which to build a dialogue. They are inadequate because they insist on treating the 'other' as an object. People of other faiths are either a social problem to be mitigated, or a theological one to be solved. If we want solid foundations on which to build we need to treat our fellow conversationalists as partners not as objects or we risk turning dialogue into diatribe.

There is, of course, another model for how inter-faith dialogue might proceed, one that Christian Aid has been involved with for many years in the developing world and one that increasingly we are trying to encourage among faith communities in the UK. It is a model that starts not with the face to face approach of inter-faith dialogue that

addresses issues of divergent understanding but the side by side approach where religious traditions work together in the face of a common issue or concern.

In December 2008 Christian Aid along with the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths hosted a conference in Cambridge where just such a multi-faith approach to development issues was explored. The conference featured case studies provided by Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and World Jewish Relief that relied on different faith communities working together. The challenge was to try and understand what had helped these projects be successful and to see if lessons learned could be applied not just in other development contexts but also in the UK.

The Christian Aid case study involved a Roman Catholic organisation known as the Socio-Pastoral Institute and a Muslim organisation, the Ummah fi Salaam, in the Philippines, who have been working together to address issues of poverty and marginalisation in Pagadian City on Mindanao Island.

The population of Mindanao is today majority Christian (Catholic) but Muslim and non-Muslim indigenous groups still make up a sizeable part of the population. All have been affected in some way by years of conflict which has fuelled violent crime and corruption and has contributed to high levels of poverty. Hundreds of thousands have been forced from their homes. Many displaced people have moved into cities. Today, a climate of mistrust and fear, and a lack of belief that, after all that has happened, things can still change

for the better, often prevents Mindanao's different faith communities working together to improve the situation.

In early August 2008, a long awaited breakthrough was expected in 12 year old peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front who are based on the island of Mindanao. Instead, renewed violent conflict broke out which forced more than half a million people from their homes.

This violence between Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front forms the backdrop to the marginalisation and poverty faced by the Muslim community in Padagian City. The typical Muslim neighbourhood in Pagadian City is filled with about 120 to 200 desolate houses on stilts sunk in a slime of mud and garbage containing plastic bags, broken glass and human sewage. The houses themselves are built with flimsy walls and roofs, battered windows grayed by a combination of sea-spray and mould. A representative house is about 20 square meters small and is occupied by about 16 people from three families who eat only once a day. It was in this community that Christian Aid started funding the inter-faith urban poverty reduction project with Ummah fi Salaam and the Socio-Pastoral Institute (SPI).

SPI was originally set up over two decades ago by a small group of priests and religious leaders who shared a common vision of a society struggling to become a truly human society in the Kingdom of God. The project recognizes that poverty reduction in a situation of conflict and tension can only be successful if

the deeper reasons for the problem are addressed, particularly those related to faith.

The approaches adopted by SPI are shaped by its belief that to achieve social change, it is important to see beyond differences in religions, cultures and traditions towards a universal human spirit. It brings people of different faiths together in dialogue to counter repressive and aggressive religious-political movements that work against democracy, pluralism and diversity. In practice, this involves supporting community leaders to undergo a process of deep personal renewal based on self-transformation, understanding the similarities between different faiths and a progressive re-reading of their own spiritual traditions.

Ummah fi Salaam (Community for Peace), inspired by the teachings of the Holy Qu'ran, encourages people to live together in peace, to tackle poverty, to uphold human rights and demand good governance. Its vision, like that of SPI, is based on the premise that people of different faiths share many important values. According to Maguid Maruhom, who heads Ummah fi Salam, the insights they gain from other religions helps them interpret Islam. It opposes rigid religious doctrine that fuels prejudice and works against democracy, but draws on Islamic tradition to encourage people to become active in their communities, uphold human rights and protect the environment. The organization believes that, like other faiths, Islam is rich in ideas which can contribute to the achievement of equality, peace and justice.

The successes of the partnership between SPI and Ummah fi Salaam over the

years have been dramatic - from defending the land rights of fishing communities to re-building houses that had been destroyed by fire and instituting literacy and health education programmes. All of these have relied upon the ability to bring together Christian and Muslim communities many of whom had lost loved ones at the hands of people from the other faith.

The question for us is whether this example from the Philippines is simply an inspiring example of what can be achieved or whether there are lessons that we can learn from it. I want to suggest that there are three key factors that played a part in the success.

First overcoming the depth of mistrust that existed in this community – beset as it was by violence and death, required a great deal of time. The issues between faith communities here may not be so intransigent but there are still issues that will require time and commitment if we want to make the relationship work. Second the inter-faith encounter was driven not by the need to dialogue but the need to deal with common issues of poverty and injustice that beset the community. It was, if anything, driven by a permanent state of crisis brought on by endemic poverty and social exclusion, not by a need for religious understanding. Finally the encounter between faith communities became real when tangible progress had been made on development issues. Trust between people of faiths was built on the fact that the development project delivered real results to the people living in some of the worst conditions.

I think all of these lessons have validity in a UK context. In the UK there are also issues of trust related to historical problems, issues related to the 'war on terror' and the simple fact that often different religious communities don't meet and interact with each other on a regular basis. But, in issues of development and climate change, I want to suggest that we have a common crisis that we are all facing and I believe that we can do something positive to address these issues. One of the advantages of looking at issues of development and the environment is that the core religious beliefs across different faiths have similar understandings of the integrity of creation and the value of human beings, so they provide common ground for collaboration.

Because of this I want to make two suggestions for how the inter-faith encounter in the UK might proceed. First I want to suggest that we start in that 'safe-space' occupied by development issues and second the encounter should start not in dialogue, traditionally understood, but in common action toward an agreed goal.

In these kinds of unified campaigns friendships are built that are better placed to take the strain of difference. At the end of the day in a multi-cultural and multi-faith society we cannot ignore the fact that there will be disagreements and there will need to be careful negotiations to ensure that not only can we live together in mutual tolerance but also in mutual respect and support. But the trust needed for these difficult encounters cannot be

birthed in those encounters, I think it has to precede them.

Over the last few years I have marched around London with Muslims and Jews as we campaigned on climate change and the role of the World Bank and IMF in developing countries. I have joined Sikhs, Hindu's and Buddhists on platforms standing for global justice and have seen friendships formed in the struggle. Not only that but the friendships have been the start of serious conversations that have not only deepened my understanding of other faiths, but because of the need for self-reflection have also deepened my understanding of my own faith. The process in my inter-faith work has been one that has moved not from dialogue into action, but one that has moved the other way, from common action to real friendship and genuine dialogue.

Ultimately, good development work must happen because it is good development work. Not because it facilitates inter-faith dialogue or has other fringe benefits not related to the central aim. But the reality is that on the ground in places like the Philippines the inter-faith encounter is essential to doing development well and in our campaigning and lobbying for development issues in this country there is no doubt that the combination of faiths and faith based agencies working together has had an impact beyond what it would have done if we had all worked separately.

When this fact is taken together with the realisation that working together has benefits over and above those directly intended, I think we should be

looking for opportunities for the inter-faith and development organisations like Christian Aid to begin working together more closely. It offers the chance not just to do development work better, but to find new ways of approaching inter-faith work that could be fruitful.

At the end of the day a collaboration between the development and the inter-faith sectors could be a marriage made in heaven, though whose heaven it would be is not entirely clear just at the minute.

*"General truths are easily peddled ~
but there is no other way to discover truth
than through encounter with the particular."*

Anon

"The only way as a pastor to be discriminating and aware of the deeply ingrained idolatrous nature of human beings is by learning to love a particular group of people in one place over time. They've got to know you are on their side even if you don't give them what they want you to give. They're not going to know that just from hearing you from the pulpit. You can only convey that to them by being with them, by listening to them, by feeling their pain and suffering, and even by sharing their wrong ideas, but all the time giving witness, whether verbal or silent, to the work of the spirit.

If you're just confronting them all the time, you lose all pastoral sense. I often use the word "story" or "narrative," as a way of understanding pastoral life. The pastoral life is best lived when it is experienced as participation in an unfolding narrative. You can't do the discerning or the criticizing from a standpoint outside the narrative that is the life of the congregation. It has got to be done from within the story. The pastor must understand himself or herself to be one of the people there.

Of course, we're part of the sin in the congregation's story as well. But hopefully, as pastors, we are so well formed by the biblical story of redemption and forgiveness as not to be overwhelmed by the story of the congregation."

*From an interview with Eugene Peterson from the web site religion-online ,
quoted by Mark Moore:*

http://mooreblog.typepad.com/mark_moores_blog/2008/09/narrative-and-pastoral-ministry.html

Minorities and honey pots

Roy Dorey, London, presents a case-study from attendance figures

In looking at recent figures for Baptist Church attendances, an encouraging picture immediately emerges. We seem to be holding our own, in general terms, when compared with recent years. There is a slight increase, but it is not really significant statistically. Certainly when we make comparisons with other parts of the Christian Church we seem to be in a rather stronger position, given the nature of our church as one that is confessional and not territorial. People think territorially, which is why most Baptist ministers have been asked about their parish. Even so, taking the populations of the communities in which we are set, our impact (even though we take seriously our missionary calling) is low. As an example of this the twelve Baptist churches in the London Borough of Southwark have a membership of less than eight hundred, when the borough has a population of about two hundred and fifty thousand. As Baptist churches we engage in membership with substantially less than half a percent of the population, although our impact will be higher. Allowing for the fact that others in the community attend other parts of the Christian Church, separately and together we are actively engaging, in the sense that people are part of a worshipping and witnessing church community, with less than ten percent of the overall population. This is in an area where church buildings are everywhere despite the fact that so many have closed, and have become sites for petrol stations, workshops and

housing. I doubt if Southwark is untypical. We need to grasp that Christians in this country are a small minority. This is not to deny the history of the impact of the Church on society, or its place in relation to the institutions of society. It is to take seriously the fact that few engage with the Christian Church and its truths in a way that influences the way they live their lives, and in a way that draws strength from God's people in fellowship.

The London Baptist Association kindly made available to me their figures for recent years. Out of the 284 churches listed by the London Baptist Association in 2005 43 percent [122] have memberships which are below fifty. 33 percent [93] are between 51 and 100, and 24 percent [69] over a hundred. Just 16 churches have memberships in excess of two hundred, and they are notably in the suburbs. There is a handful of churches which have memberships numbering hundreds, running in two instances to more than a thousand. This uneven distribution is not recent. For decades the larger churches have been in the suburbs, and the smaller in the inner city and on social housing estates. Churches with exceptionally large memberships, but not in their thousands, have been around for a long time also. Well into the sixties an inner city church in South London had a membership in the hundreds. Another inner-suburb church in North London had a similar membership. The name I use for such churches is

'honey-pot churches.' They draw people from a wide area.

It seems important to ask a question about the honey that draws people to those churches. Some years ago a family with grown up children still living at home travelled nearly three miles to a Baptist Church, at least two other Baptist Churches were closer as well as a number of other churches. The father of the family explained that he travelled that distance, with all its implications, because 'it was a ministry of which I approve.' It sums up quite well the explanation I have heard very recently that 'I go there for the teaching.' Another reason for such travel, and not unrelated to the above, is that the congregation is made up of 'people like us.' It was expressed to me as the church they attended was one in which they felt comfortable. A more open version of this is the young man who went to one of the central London 'honey pots' because there were no young women amongst whom he could, perhaps, find a wife, in the village church he had attended for some years.

In the past two decades we have a new phenomenon, and that is the culturally specific churches. Of course we have tended to have this for a long time, but the comparative cultures have been middle and working class cultures. An evidence of this is the mission hall alongside the parish church or established Baptist church. Now we can identify churches that one way or another reflect the territorial culture of West Africa. A local Methodist Church has its main service when West Africans from a number of countries meet, but culturally national churches meet at

other times during the day. In some instances the honey is a form of worship, or the emphasis on a particular theological position. So we have 'charismatic churches' which draw people, like the family who left one Baptist church because 'they did not want their children to grow up a church that did not believe in the Holy Spirit.' We have other churches which see themselves as being a honey-pot, although they would not use that phrase, for those who want what they see as Reformed teaching. So the honey may be good teaching, specialised teaching, particular forms of worship, feeling comfortable, culturally at home, a crowd attracting a crowd, and so on. Perhaps we should rejoice in such places, for certainly people are attending and seem to gain from them.

There are, however, some comments to make on this. For Baptist churches it raises the question about what some call their parish, and some their community. If the village, estate, or town is easily understood in terms of boundaries, it is not so difficult to define 'the community' for which one seeks to be the presence of God's church. Some limits have to be set in terms of using resources, when it comes to pastoral or mission work. Such boundaries are always flexible, for the links with individuals in any defined community are always wider. In a larger town or city there will always be choices that people make about where they attend, and often there is movement across the denominations for other than denominational reasons. In our mobile society people frequently change their denominational base if there is not their first preference available. So a couple moving from a strong Baptist

church in a suburb of London find themselves attending a Methodist church when they move away to a small town.

A problem inherent in the honey-pot approach is that the churches which receive the larger congregations tend to be cut off from their own local community. In some cases the church becomes a place for worshipping which has no real links with the people who live around. Trying then to identify those one is reaching out to is difficult. If one attends such a church one can scarcely expect one's neighbours to drive three or four miles to church for some special event, or take a train or two buses to get there. It increases the potential for Christians to become more privatised as Christian families. A trend which fits the culture of our society.

Another problem created by travelling to worship is the neglect of the churches one passes on the way. Neglect in terms of attendance, but also in relation to the skills that are necessary to sustain a church. Locally, with the church treasurer with good management experience in his work, we looked at the resources necessary to sustain a local church. Apart from financial support, which one can never take for granted, but which a number of quite small churches manage sacrificially to provide, there is the need for a whole range of skills. Churches today operate in a climate of legal constraints which require a wide range of skills to meet. These are the requirements to meet the demands of disability, equal opportunities, employment, taxation, insurance, building care, health and safety, and charitable status legally. Small churches have fewer people to call upon. It is something of

an anomaly that even some of the bigger churches find it difficult to get people to hold essential offices in the church. There is a cultural fit with our society that the bigger a group is the better it must be! It feels good to be part of a crowd on a Sunday, as it reinforces our view that we are not such a minority!

This leads to another factor which emerges with honey-pot churches. They encourage attendance on the 'consumer pattern.' Some speak of people being 'passengers' but it needs more explanation than that. Those who attend such churches are in danger of being 'takers' and not 'givers.' They choose the church as they choose a supermarket, to fit their taste, and to be able to take away what they want. They are in danger of meeting the cultural pattern of our society as consumers, in this case, of the Christian 'goodies' which are on offer.

I realise that this is based on London, and more specifically, Southwark, but I suggest that it is not unrelated to experience in other places. It is my contention that until we recognise that we are a small minority in our society, and we stop engaging with a false sense of success, then we will not take mission seriously. It is not just life amongst the tower blocks that is having little or nothing to do with the church. It is true of semi-detached life, and leafy suburbs. In all localities there is a need which we are sure Christ can meet.

Tell us

We have had names for you:
The Thunderer, the Almighty
Hunter, Lord of the snowflake
and the sabre-toothed tiger.
One name we have held back
unable to reconcile it
with the mosquito, the tidal wave,
the black hole into which
time will fall. You have answered
us with image of yourself
on a hewn tree, suffering
injustice, pardoning it;
pointing as though in either
direction; horrifying us
with the possibility of dislocation.
Ah, love, with your arms out
wide, tell us how much more
they must be stretched
to embrace a universe drawing
away from us at the speed of light.

R. S. Thomas

The spiritual theology of Eugene H. Peterson

Michael Bohenski, Warsaw

*"Hi Mr. Peterson, Eugene. My name is Bono. I'm a singer with the group U2. I wanted to sort of video message you my thanks, and our thanks in the band, for this remarkable work you've done translating the Scriptures. Really, really a remarkable work... As a songwriter, it was very clear to me that you were a poet as well as a scholar. You brought the musicality to God's Word that I'm sure was there, was always there in intention... There have been some great translations, some very literary translations, but no translations that I've read that speaks to me in my own language. So I want to thank you for that."*¹

Not many Christian authors receive tributes from U2 or have their words read out in front of thousands at major music gigs. Eugene Peterson does and has. Peterson was for many years Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Canada. Now retired from full-time teaching, he and his wife live in rural Montana - the US State his writings have helped many of us to visit often... if only in creative imagination. Before his ministry at Regent, he served as founder pastor of Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland for some three decades. In 2004, following a period of sabbatical study largely spent studying the catalogue of his previous work, I wrote an article for the BMJ 'The Pastoral Theology of Eugene H. Peterson.' In it I explained why - with millions of others - I had found *The Message*, his translation of the Bible into the language of America today, such an inspiration, and also examined some of his key writings on Pastoral Theology. Retirement clearly means different things to different people. Bono also said this to him: "And it's been ten years, that's a long time, so take a rest now, won't you? Bye."² He didn't heed the advice. Peterson is a member of the Chrysostom Society - a

small network of Christian authors who '...believe in each other as practitioners of a craft to the glory of God.'³ Having concluded his translation of the entire Bible *The Message*, and seen it published to widespread acclaim in 2002, Peterson has since embarked on another major writing project - this time on Spiritual Theology. In this article I wish to commend this new series by exploring its first three titles.

Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology *London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005.*

The title of the first volume *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* comes from a Gerard Manley Hopkins poem, 'As kingfishers catch fire.'⁴ Those who have read Peterson before will know of his finely crafted prose, his use of stories, anecdotes and 'secular' literature, his self-deprecating wisdom combined with shrewd analysis and all undergirded by expert biblical exegesis and application. All of these elements are in evidence in this first volume. Here are some 350 pages of creative writing, exploring the Risen Christ at work in creation, history and community.

In introducing the book and the series, Peterson explains what Spiritual Theology is: 'Spiritual Theology is a pair of words that hold together what is so often "sawn asunder." It represents the attention that the church community gives to keeping what we think about God (theology) in organic connection with the way we live with God (spirituality).'¹⁵ Underlying the series lies a concern for a rediscovery – or better a rescue - of contemporary spirituality:

'In our times "spirituality" has become a major business for entrepreneurs, a recreational sport for the bored, and for others, whether many or few... a serious and disciplined commitment to live deeply and fully in relation to God.'¹⁶

For Peterson the key to all true spirituality is this: '...identifying life, all life, as God-derived, God-sustained and God-blessed.'¹⁷ This is also, as he repeatedly points out, Trinitarian spirituality: 'Trinity provides these terms, a theological language that enables us to maintain our Christian identity in God's image rather than in what we see in our mirrors each morning.'¹⁸ My first introduction to Pastoral Theology, as I look back, was discovering the writings of the Swiss doctor turned Christian counsellor Paul Tournier. In an appendix to this book, then, I was thrilled to see Peterson pay tribute to '...a spirit of discerning grace that permeated (his) books.'¹⁹ He had heard Tournier lecture forty or so years previously and saw in him the quality – 'a life of congruence'¹⁰ - that best sums up what he himself is trying to communicate through this first conversation in his new series on spiritual theology: '...he wrote what he lived, he lived what he wrote.'¹¹

In the section 'Christ Plays in Creation,' Peterson reflects on sabbath and wonder and the interconnections between them and draws on Genesis and John's gospel in doing so. 'No matter how much we travel throughout the creation,' he writes, 'no matter how many pictures we take of its flowers and mountains, no matter how much knowledge we acquire, if we fail to cultivate wonder we risk missing the very heart of what is going on.'¹² In 'Christ plays in History' he draws on the biblical books of Exodus and Mark and uses them to throw insight on to Eucharist and hospitality: 'All the elements of a eucharistically formed life are present every time we sit down to a meal and invoke Jesus as Host. It's a wonderful thing, really — that the most common action of our lives, eating meals can reflect and continue the most profound of all transactions, salvation. The fusion of natural and supernatural that we witness and engage in the shape of the liturgy continues, or can continue, at our kitchen tables.'¹³ And in 'Christ Plays in Community,' he draws connections between the community of being that is God and our own need to find a place in that community on earth as well as in heaven. With a characteristic side-swipe he pleads: 'If you want to know who I am and what makes me tick, don't for heaven's sake look up my IQ or give me a Myers-Briggs profile or set me down before a Rorschach test. Study me in the company of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'¹⁴ Here he reflects on baptism and love, exploring the books of Deuteronomy and Luke /Acts as he does so. Christ is active in creation, history and community and therefore so must we be:

We are given a few weeks, maybe even months, of indulgence in me-ness, as if we were the sole occupants of the field, but then the long, slow, arduous process of socialization is launched, the development from me-ness to us-ness: there are others in this family, we live in a neighbourhood, the glories of creation open up before us, the adventures and dangers, the surprises and catastrophes of history begin to penetrate our cocooned world, and then — lo and behold! — we find that we are inescapably involved in what is going on and there is no getting out of it. We are participants in the three-ring circus of creation, history, and community, whether we like it or not.¹⁵

Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading

London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006.

Baron Friedrich von Hügel once described spiritual reading as: '...letting a very slowly dissolving lozenge melt imperceptibly in your mouth.'¹⁶ That kind of relish for Scripture and good Christian literature is what Peterson aims to commend in this second volume in the series: 'I want to set the Bible before us as the text by which we live our lives, this text that stands in such sturdy contrast to the potpourri of religious psychology, self-development, mystical experimentation, and devotional dilettantism that has come to characterize so much of what takes cover under the umbrella of spirituality.'¹⁷

Peterson's own love for the Bible and its languages breathes through this study. And yet there is not a hint here of translator's pride: 'Too many Bible readers assume that exegesis is what you do after you have learned Greek

and Hebrew. That's simply not true. Exegesis is nothing more than a careful and loving reading of the text in our mother tongue. Greek and Hebrew are well worth learning, but if you haven't had the privilege, settle for English. Once we learn to love this text and bring a disciplined intelligence to it, we won't be far behind the very best Greek and Hebrew scholars. Appreciate the learned Scripture scholars, but don't be intimidated by them.'¹⁸

In this volume more of the story of how *The Message* was born is told — in pastoral concern for his church community in Bel Air. As he saw many of them overtaken by anxiety and fear in the 1980s — arming themselves with guns, protecting their homes with double locks and alarm systems, he pointed them to Galatians for inspiration: 'As my anger and dismay subsided, I began plotting a pastoral strategy that I hoped would recover their identity as a free people in Christ, a people not "conformed to the world" but living robustly and spontaneously in the Spirit. Galatians seemed a good place to start...'¹⁹ And so he re-translated it into contemporary American language.

His marathon translation feat was, then, rooted in his local church pastoral work: 'There is hardly a page in the Bible that I did not see lived in some way or other by the men and women, saints and sinners, to whom I was pastor, and then, as I looked around, saw verified in my nation and culture.'²⁰ Peterson was determined to translate the Bible into a language that was direct, contemporary and could not be easily dismissed as irrelevant or pious. The docetic tendencies in some as they

read the Bible have little relevance for him: 'Many people prefer to have their Bibles translated in the finest prose and poetry. ... They want to keep the language of the Bible refined and, as far as possible, isolated from association with the sinful world. And they want it printed on India paper and bound handsomely in leather. It stands to reason: The culture in which God works requires protection from the noisy, contaminating world.' He continues however with these telling words drawing on his knowledge of the latest biblical texts used by Bible translators: 'But the Holy Spirit will have little of that. The inspiration arrives in a rough, bumpy, and earthy language that reveals God's presence and action where we least expect it, catching us when we are up to our elbows in the soiled ordinariness of our culture (Ugarit!) and when spiritual thoughts are the farthest thing from our minds (Oxyrhynchus!).'²¹ *The Message*, he explains, is an attempt to do in American English what Tyndale did in English and Luther in German. He also understands that this is what (Baptist) Pastors try to do each time we preach:

'I am very conscious that I am in a vast company of translators — teachers in class-rooms, pastors in pulpits, parents around the supper table, writers in languages all over the world, baptized Christians in workplaces and social gatherings past imagining — all of us at this same work, collaborators in translating the word of God, reading and then living this text, eating the book, and then getting these Scriptures into whatever language is heard and spoken on the street on which we live.'²²

One of the many fine BBC classic drama series of recent years was its interpretation of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* starring Juliet Aubrey as Dorothea and Patrick Malahide as her cold husband Dr Casaubon. Peterson used this book as a set text in his Regent College Spirituality lectures. Casaubon becomes the symbol of learning without life and scholarship without spirituality.²³ Consider here this fine quote: 'The story of the manna gathered and set aside by the Hebrews is deeply significant. It so happened that the manna rotted when it was kept. And perhaps this means that all spiritual reading which is not consumed — by prayer and by works — ends by causing a sort of rotting inside us. You die with a head full of fine sayings and a perfectly empty heart.'²⁴ What is needed instead of such spiritual sterility is to rediscover the art of what previous generations called *lectio divina*:

'If *lectio divina* [divine reading] is to have currency in the Christian community to-day, contemplation simply must be reclaimed as essential in all reading and living of Scripture. It is not an option; it is necessary. The word's very strangeness and remoteness from the ordinary may even be an advantage in recovering its distinctive punch: it administers a verbal jolt to our ears, surprising us out of our hurried, harried, self-defeating addictions to what we have become used to calling fulfilment and the pursuit of happiness... Contemplation means submitting to the biblical revelation, taking it within ourselves, and then living it unpretentiously, without fanfare.'²⁵

The Jesus Way: a conversation on the ways that Jesus is the way
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007.

This is a superb book. It is an exploration of what it means to follow Jesus in the C21st world – drawing on positive examples from the Old Testament and negative ones from the times of the New Testament. Here Peterson is characteristically critical of the Church ethos he knows best – that of contemporary America: ‘The North American Church is conspicuous for replacing the Jesus way with the American way’²⁶ He continues: ‘We can’t suppress the Jesus way in order to sell the Jesus truth. The Jesus way and the Jesus truth must be congruent. Only when the Jesus way is organically joined with the Jesus truth do we get the Jesus life.’²⁷

In the first section of this third volume in the series, ‘The Way of Jesus.’ Peterson looks back to the Old Testament stories of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah and the two Isaiahs (of Jerusalem and of the Exile) to throw light on the Jesus way. From Abraham we learn about faith and sacrifice. From Moses the importance of speech and story rooted in community. In Elijah we glimpse also the prophet in Jesus – separating humanity from its lies and pretensions and pointing them back prophetically to God. Isaiah of Jerusalem reminds of holiness and Isaiah of the Exile about the importance of making dreams come true even when the times are dark. Let me highlight here, however, Peterson’s insights into sin and forgiveness from the life of David who ‘... provides us with a large chunk of the evidence that disabuses us of

the idea that perfection is part of the job description of the men and women who follow Jesus.’²⁸ This observation is followed by a look at the David narrative and at some of his prayers the Psalms. Here, for example, is part of his commentary on the first of these, Psalm 6:

‘The way of imperfection takes us through slums and suburbs, across battlefields and into refugee camps, to hospitals and homeless shelters. We find common ground with the addicts and the abused, the victims and victimizers, the down and out and the up and out. On the way of imperfection we find ourselves following Jesus to the well in Samaria, the sycamore tree in Jericho, the pool of Siloam, the cross on Golgotha There is much laughter and singing and dancing on this way, palm branches and hosannas. But there are also tears and laments, rivers of them, every tear a prayer and not one unnoticed – “my tears in your bottle!” (Ps. 56:8).’²⁹

‘Dealing definitively with sin is God’s business,’ Peterson writes, ‘and God’s way of dealing with the sin business is forgiveness.’³⁰

The second section, ‘Other Ways’, brings the first century history alive. It considers three characters whose life philosophies were and are at odds with those of the Jesus Way. A study of Herod explores among much else the way of power in the context of Greek expansion which gave birth to the language of the gospels and the epistles. Caiaphas is used to illustrate the way of religious careerism. His professional religion is compared by Peterson to the spirit of George Herbert’s beautiful poem about ministry ‘Aaron’... to great effect.³¹

Here too you can read one of the briefest and yet finest introductions to the significance of the Essenes and the Dead Sea scrolls you are likely to find anywhere.³² Finally a character I knew little about - the historian Josephus who betrayed his people to save his own life - comes painfully to life through Peterson's skills and his analysis of the way of opportunism.

A reviewer in *Christianity Today* said this about *The Jesus Way*: 'This is the best book I have read for years... I read this book, a chapter at a time before breakfast, and it made me think, think hard about who I am, the ways I follow, the ways of Christians and the church today. Be sure to read this book, before giving it to someone you love. You will both be blessed.'³³

I agree but, in the light of the first three volumes, would extend this also to the whole Spiritual Theology series.

1 Angela Pancela, 'U2 Connections: Eugene Peterson' by @U2
<http://www.atu2.com/news/connections/peerson/>

2 Ibid.

3 Michael J. Cusick, 'A Conversation with Eugene Peterson' Mars Hill Review Fall 1995/3

4 J. Reeves, ed., *Selected Poems of G.M Hopkins*, (London: Heinemann, 1982), 52

5 E.H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 4

6 Ibid., 27

7 Ibid., 31

8 Ibid., 47

9 Ibid., 332

10 Ibid., 333

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 122

13 Ibid., 222

14 Ibid., 307

15 Ibid., 241

16 E. H. Peterson, *Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), 3

17 Ibid., 17

18 Ibid., 55

19 Ibid., 131

20 Ibid., 165

21 Ibid., 160

22 Ibid., 176

23 Ibid., 56

24 From Julian Green, *Diaries*. Quoted by Peterson, *ibid.*, 109

25 *Eat this Book*, 112

26 E. H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way: a conversation on the ways that Jesus is the way* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007), 5

27 Ibid., 6-7

28 Ibid., 79

29 Ibid., 91

30 Ibid., 99

31 Ibid., 226-7

32 Ibid., 233-8

33 Patrick Forbes writing in *Christianity Today*. Book Review January 2009

Wrongly dividing the word of truth.

Fred Stainthorpe, Willenhall: a reflection on the place of 'misreading' scripture

Congregations have often sung with great enthusiasm the words, "But I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day". They are declaring their confidence in Jesus to keep them in the narrow way. If some of them are Bible students, they may be puzzled later to discover that not all commentators are sure that this is the correct interpretation of Paul's words. Some venture the opinion that he meant, "That which He has committed unto me", meaning the truth and preaching of the Gospel.

A preacher might be glad that this gives him two possible sermons for the price of one, but the man-in-the-pew could ask which is the correct translation. Can they both be right? Would preachers lead people astray if they spoke from the wrong translation?

It seems that the Lord is not quite so particular. He appears to have blessed preaching from "inaccurate" renderings of His word. Two generations ago, evangelists often used King Agrippa's words to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian". In all probability, this has moved numbers of people to make a Christian commitment. For this we can but give God thanks. Later versions, however, give a different impression.

"Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (NIV) This gives less ammunition to the speakers aiming to get a verdict from their hearers and presumably they do not use the verse as much as they once did. Does this mean that God accepts or blesses wrong translations?

The "wrong" translation often seems to be more evangelical or spiritual than the right version. Long ago, I

heard a message given at a women's anniversary from Psalm 45:13 "The king's daughter is all beautiful within". The speaker's emphasis was on the purity of the soul and no doubt evoked a suitable response. Other versions are more prosaic "The princess is in the palace - how beautiful she is" GNB (NIV is similar) hardly lend itself to devotional addresses. Does correct translation, then, blunt our message?

Evangelists have often used the verse in Rev. 3:20 in which the risen Christ says "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him". Doubtless, many listeners have responded and invited Jesus into their lives. Yet careful analysis of these words reveals that He is speaking to the church at Laodicea, who had presumably already done this.

Dr Helen Roseveare, a well-known missionary, attributes her conversion to a verse from Psalm 46. "Be still and know that I am God" Many others have drawn comfort from this verse. Yet the GNB translates it as "Stop fighting and know that I am God" which seems to fit better into the general tenor of the psalm as praising God Who makes wars to cease.

Sometimes the words of an old translation inspire us to produce a sermon. Recently, while thinking about the persecution of Stephen and the subsequent dispersion of the Jerusalem church, some words from the AV came to mind "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee", Ps 76:10a. They seemed to illustrate the way in which Stephen's persecutors had inadvertently helped to spread the message they were trying to extinguish. The Good News Bible gave a similar rendering "Man's anger only results in more praise for you". Listeners appeared to receive the message well. However, when I looked up the NIV, it said "Surely Your wrath against men brings you praise", somewhat different from the GNB. I am not sure how I could expound these words.

Moreover, the meaning of the whole verse differs in the two translations. NIV proceeds, "And the survivors of your wrath are restrained" licking their wounds, perhaps. GNB is more positive "And those who survive the wars will keep your festivals", - licking their lips. Which version is correct? Can they both be right?

One could multiply examples. Isaiah 35:8b (AV) speaking about the road of holiness, says, "The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein", which although comforting, seems at variance with the general tenor of the passage. Later versions issue a note of warning however, "wicked fools will not go about on it" (NIV).

GNB is similar, "no fools will mislead those who follow it". We probably each have our own selections of such erratic boulders.

Probably all of us have been guilty of eisegesis from time to time. I remember Stanley Voke, a highly respected minister, doing so at a Spurgeon's College Retreat, many years ago. "Don't tell your tutors", he said, "but I am taking this verse out of its context". We have sometimes "spiritualised" verses ourselves. "Jesus made as though He was going further" (Luke 24:28) once served me as the subject of growing in the Faith. Many other Christians, Brethren in particular, were experts in this field of spiritualising. For example, Elimelech, who moved from Bethlehem (the House of bread) to the land of Moab, represented the backslider who deserts the fellowship of the Church. Brethren however, were not the first allegorists for Origen, one of the early Christian Fathers, thought that this was the highest form of exegesis and the mediaeval Church flourished on it. It took the Reformation to make us seek first the plain meaning of Scripture. "Spiritualising" sermons

can appear very persuasive to congregations.

Many years ago, in my young Christian days, I heard a well-known preacher give a Gospel address on Paul's letter to Philemon. He said that Onesimus represented the sinner who had stolen his master's possessions and had run away. However, Jesus in the person of Paul, had found him and persuaded him to return to his owner, God. The letter was surety for the slave, Jesus having promised to repay anything that Onesimus owed, namely his sins. Afterwards, I am sure that people said afterwards, "It's amazing what he can get out of the Bible, isn't it?" It certainly was amazing but I dimly perceived that he had interpreted it wrongly. The correct interpretation, outlining the difference conversion made in someone's life, was nothing like as sensational or attention grabbing. Nevertheless, the sermon may have brought some converts, for all I know. Does this mean that the content of the message matters more than the text from which it comes?

The original sermons mentioned above were not examples of eisegesis or spiritualisation. They were honest efforts at interpreting the material which lay before the preacher. No doubt, we could add others. What is one to make of it?

We would all agree that the best exposition can only come from correct exegesis but the latter depends on correct translation. This is a complex process. "Translation is an impossible

task", wrote C H Dodd in the Introduction to the New English Bible. The existence of many contemporary versions of the Bible bears witness to this. Every version depends on the most ancient and authentic manuscripts available at the time, together with the latest knowledge of the original languages, assisted by that elusive quality known as spiritual perception. As time has gone on, many more manuscripts have come to light and we know more about the Biblical languages. While it would be wrong to say that the first translators saw men like trees walking, (although they were nearer in time to the events they described), they did not possess all the critical and linguistic evidence which later scholars had. It seems as though God has overlooked the "times of ignorance" as Paul said in Acts 17.

While all Scripture is inspired by God, translators are not guaranteed the same endowment. Translation is interpretation and even the most up-to-date versions do not always agree on how to render particular verses. Confessional loyalties, personal preferences, even prejudice and obstinacy(!) can determine the final wording, although these are most likely to appear in individual translations. Likewise, the wisest and best-qualified group of translators may disagree about a particular rendering, with a majority wording appearing in the text and another version relegated to the footnotes. Their proponents could justify both readings and preachers might well refer to both or prefer the minority view, with per-

haps equal benefits to their hearers. Perhaps this bears witness to the fact the Scripture is a sort of spiritual DNA containing an incredible richness, which can express itself in different forms. The many-sided grace of God can bless an inferior (or even mistaken) translation. We ought always to follow "the more excellent

way" but if some of us have sometimes taken the "low road", we may draw comfort from a slight misquotation of one of Horatius Bonar's lovely hymns:

"We thank Thee, Lord, for using us,
For Thee to work or speak,
However trembling is the hand,
The verse however weak".

Baptist Assembly 2009

Your attention is drawn to the Seminar arranged by the
Baptist Ministers' Fellowship

Speaker: Revd John Rackley

The Acceptable Outsider.

*A minister's experience of isolation and marginalisation
is inevitable and necessary for the well-being of the church.*

A (tongue in cheek) parable:
for ministers and churches in times of change.

A few summers ago I came across a fragrance that transported me back over 30 years. I was sixteen going on seventeen. We wore long skirts, wedge sandals, love beads, large dark glasses. We probably looked quite daft: but it was the 1970's. Some days we wore 'Love's Fresh Lemon Cologne' (from Boots the Chemist) and others we felt very grown up, very 'student', as we covered ourselves with the sultry musky fragrances that we found in dark incense-laden ethnic shops, and in places like Biba on Kensington High Street (with its marvellous mixture of kitsch for those who only just made it to our teens in the sixties but would have liked to say they had been there).

In a little shop just off the pedestrianised street in a Dorset town, I smelt it all again. Fascinated, I moved from table to table, sampling the scents, marvelling at the packaging – boring my companions silly... But this was it, this was 'me'. Or, rather, it was my teenage image and aspirations!

Of course I couldn't resist the tiny bottle. No doubt over-priced. But worth it. Or so I thought. 'Horrible', said my friends, with a wrinkling of the nose. They don't understand, I thought to myself – they're too *old!* But I didn't wear it then. Perhaps they were right. Perhaps my body chemistry had changed, or something. But I brought it home and put in on my dressing table as in a shrine. And from time to time I sprayed it into the air. And I enjoyed it. On some days I used it as perfume, but only when I wasn't likely to have to go out very soon. And then one day I had been working for a while, and thought 'phew what a pong' (or words to that effect). Cats? Musty tree-stumps with eau-de-unmentionables? Forgetting that I had used the perfume that morning I eventually traced the smell to my wrists. Perhaps it really wasn't as I'd remembered, after all.

It stayed there, on the dressing table. The packaging still made me smile. I still sprayed it into the air from time to time. But I didn't 'wear' it again. Some things you can't re-run in the same way – although you can still appreciate them and be glad for their place.

Books

When weak, then strong: disability in the life of the Church

Faith Bowers, 2008 pp179, ISBN 978-0-9530341-2-3, £10 (incl p&p).

Order from Rev Alison Gidney aggidney@btinternet.com or 0151 639 7520

In the twenty-fifth year of the life of the Baptist Union Initiative with people who have learning disabilities (BUild) it is good to have these two short books by Faith Bowers revised and brought together in one volume.

The author skilfully blends theological insight and practical wisdom, allowing the voices of those with disabilities and those who care for people with disabilities to be heard. The first part deals with physical disability and the second is concerned with learning disabilities. There is a wealth of information and experience here, gained through the everyday reality of living.

What comes across clearly is that people with disabilities are not simply to be the passive recipients of the goodwill and kindness of others but in the church they are people who contribute to the wellbeing of the whole Christian community, including people with disabilities is part of the desire for a healthy fellowship. So, as Faith Bowers notes, these are fundamentally reflections about discipleship and evangelism.

So, what does being inclusive mean? It is more than access for wheelchairs or large print hymnbooks. It challenges us to ask what it means to be human and what it means to be a member of the body of Christ in its rich diversity of difference.

The big new fact since the first edition of these books is the legislation relating to disability that has made an impact on many if not all of our churches' thinking. People must not be discriminated against because of their disability nor be treated as second class. However, as this book makes plain, Christians should not be motivated solely by what the law requires but what the gospel demands. .

I warmly commend this book. If you read the originals when they came out over a decade ago, then read this revised edition with a new introduction. If you have not come across them before, then I encourage you to get this volume, read it and use it to broaden the thinking of your congregation.

As Baptists we owe a debt of gratitude to BUild for its pioneering efforts. May the 50th anniversary be equally a cause for celebration.

Stephen Copson, Hertfordshire

A thousand crucifixions: The materialist subversion of the church?

The Whitley Lecture 2009, Sally Nelson. (36pp) Whitley Publications ISBN 978 0 9539748 8 7 £4

When is a book review not a book review? Perhaps when it is a review of a lecture designed to be presented in a number of locations and, though published prior to its various deliveries, is bound to change and be changed in some way by its reception and the engagement of its author with diverse audiences. You can find evidence of this on Simon Woodman's blog - <http://baptistbookworm.blogspot.com/2009/01/whitley-lecture-2009.html>

We have every reason to be grateful to the Whitley Lectureship Management Committee for persuading Sally Nelson to produce this theological reflection on suffering, disability and personhood. The Introduction to the 36 page publication notes Sally's own contexts of experience as a Hospice chaplain and as mother of a daughter with special needs. Readers of the Journal may recall Sally's honesty in reflecting something of her journey in a previous issue of this Journal.

The reader is introduced, or encouraged to renew acquaintance with a range of scholars and thinkers who have pushed the boundaries of Christian understanding. For this alone we should be grateful. When as pastors and preachers did we last engage with Viktor Frankl or Richard Neibhur, or explore the more recent work of Dorothee Soelle, Miroslav Volf, James Alison, Alistair McFadyen, to name just a few.

Recalling the church to its Trinitarian impulse through which the wholeness of persons takes form in dynamic relationship (involving vulnerable openness to the other, radically expressed in crucifixion-resurrection), this is a properly academic tour. But the specificity of suffering stares us in the face. We are reminded with reference to Stanley Hauerwas ('Suffering Presence') that that "a generic concept of suffering does not really exist: it is always part of someone's story" and we glimpse parts of the testimonies of a Lutheran pastor who has no option but to minister from his wheelchair, a Baptist historian who is mother to a son with Down's Syndrome and an academic theologian whose 'career-path' has been formed in the crucible of a profoundly disabled child in the family. Sally's own lament for her daughter Flora closes the lecture but continues the journey in the spirit of Job who "begins to understand himself as a person addressed by God".

Printed copies of the lecture can be obtained from the Baptist Union at Didcot or ordered online at baptist.org.uk (go to Resources, then Sermon/study Resources). You may participate in the event at The Baptist Assembly, Sat 2 / Sun 3 May 2009.

Hazel Sherman, Worthing

Leading by Example: Peter's Way for the Church Today. By Graham Houston; Paternoster Press 2008 ISBN - 13 978-1-84227-604-4

Your ministry's Next Chapter.

By Gary Fenton. Bethany House Publishers, 1999. pp 156. 1-55661-975-8

At first I groaned 'not another book addressing the shortcomings of my leadership' (and I know I have got them!); then the book cover looked so uninteresting; and even when I did at first skim it I thought the many references to Scotland and to Presbyterian churches might mean it was not quite so relevant to me. However, after reading it more carefully, I knew I had too quickly judged a book by its cover. This is a book that has something fresh to say about its subject and by the end of the book the author clearly encourages readers to take a second look at his book cover and a deeper look at some key truths of leadership found in Peter's epistles.

It is neither a commentary, a self help book nor a manual for every aspect of leadership, but it is a helpful study which opens up important truths from the books that Peter wrote. As a biblical scholar and a leader with lots of experience he encourages us to dig deep into God's word and steers us away from what he calls "Worldly management methodology".

Personally, I would have liked a few more "how to's" but then again the book is not intended to give simplistic approaches and as it seeks to counteract the "7 easy steps to..." type of book, I would be wrong to look for trivial examples. 'Leading by example' is not just for those who minister in the Highlands, but for all who want to serve and lead in a 'Peter.type' way. It is a book which challenged me.

David Hill, Worthing

In common, I am sure, with other ageing ministers, I experienced what I learned to call "mid-ministry sag" as I moved into my fifties. Perhaps it was all the more marked because I am one of those increasingly rare specimens who were ordained very young: 24, to be precise. School; university; theological college - and then launched on an unsuspecting church. (How *did* they let us do it!) I wouldn't call mid-ministry sag - in my case, at any rate - a time of depression. But it was a tough time nonetheless, where problems of energy and motivation were to the fore.

I'm only sorry that I didn't at that time know of Gary Fenton's book, part of a series entitled "The Pastor's Soul": I'm sure it would have done me good. It is not a book of any particular profundity: on the contrary, it is short, full of anecdotes, indeed the very epitome of what Americans call "homely". But it is not to be despised for all that. It is packed with honest common-sense and down-to-earth observations about the pastoral "career".

Written out of a very American context, some parts naturally don't travel too well. But in general the material is thoroughly helpful. There is no triumphalism here. On the contrary, Fenton is disarmingly honest about his own failures and weaknesses. He tackles issues that perhaps we tend not to talk about in our ministers' fellowships: feelings of failure and

under-achievement; jealousy of those deemed more "successful"; the familiar old problems of work/rest/family balance; the legitimacy or otherwise of ambition; the need for ongoing learning and development. He comes across as no fundamentalist, but as a thoughtful and analytical mainstream evangelical.

I can't remember now how I picked this book up - probably from some discount

catalogue. But I have checked on Amazon and it is available there for less than £10. If you are beginning to experience that saggy feeling, I don't think such a relatively modest 'sum would be wasted.

The subtitle is "The best is yet to come". That alone was both a comfort and a challenge. I hope it's true!

Colin Sedgwick, Kenton

Preaching is dangerous because it opens doors to the holy. Whether it occurs in the context of a eucharistic liturgy or a service of lessons and carols, we believe that somehow Christ is present in the Word proclaimed and that our preaching is part of that proclamation. Whether we are guest preachers in cathedrals or long-time pastors of small churches, we believe that somehow we are called to make God's ways known anew to this group of people at this time. And whether we speak in an informal vernacular or painstakingly craft a piece of poetry, we understand that the words we use are only a small part of the message our listeners receive, and that a large share of that message is entirely out of our control. We can be totally misunderstood, ... And sometimes we discover to our amazement that while we thought we were preaching a sermon hurriedly prepared or ill-conceived, one of our parishioners was hearing something life-changing. We can't make that happen and yet we understand that we have a responsibility to prepare and to act as if it might.

Linda L. Clader, *Voicing the vision: imagination and prophetic preaching* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2003), pages 2-3.