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Desert island books

Glen Marshall

Special issue on peace matters

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From the editor

Peace in our time?

What is the right response to the tide of refugees? We would affirm life and not death; we would seek to offer hospitality and not hostility—yet all these are in fact reacting to the symptoms rather than treating the causes.

Peace on earth can be our only goal. When every person is free to live, worship and bring up children without being afraid of a bomb, bullet or curfew. How wonderful if the only reason for travelling across the world were the desire to learn, rather than the need to escape.

For years after WWII, my mother, who lived in London during the Blitz, would visibly jump and shrink if she heard a low flying aircraft or a loud bang. For years, too, she stored bags of sugar and tins of meat in our attic 'just in case'. The effects of war are deep and damaging; and war can take place in our own families and neighbourhoods; in our homes and relationships.

Can we dare to invite the Prince of Peace into our hearts and embrace his call to non-violence?

This issue of *bmj* is offered to us by the Baptist Peace Fellowship, to stimulate our thinking on a variety of issues about peace and the offence of violence in our midst. I pray that it will help us as we approach Remembrance Sunday, and give us new food for thought and prayer in an increasingly violent and complex world. *SN*

If you would like to write for *bmj*, please contact the editor.

Glen Marshall's *Desert island books*



Apparently I'm leaving, for a while, off to a desert island. I've been promised the standard issue, The Bible and Shakespeare, the works. All I have to do is pick three other books to take with me. Mmmm

I write this after listening to an interview on the radio with a man who, after a heart attack, had assured his wife that he had given up smoking—only to be caught by a Google streetview camera while having a crafty drag in the front garden. I mention this because there's a good chance that if you send a camera drone to my island to spy on me you will see me reading something other than the three books mentioned below. Deciding on desert island reading is decidedly difficult. Almost certainly if you were to ask me again in a year, or a month, or even a week's time, I'd come up with a different set of books. At this moment though these are the three that have fought their way to the top of my list.

Karl Barth's *Church dogmatics*. I'd like either a digital download of the whole shelf-busting 14 volumes, or as many pages as can be fitted into a single hardback. Yes, I know he's not the easiest of reads, but whenever I dip into a bit o' Barth it does me a power of good. He's so God-ish. It makes a refreshing change these days for someone to take God so seriously. Too many in the church are in danger of doing the opposite. Whether it's sloppy liberalism or whatever-seems-to-work-evangelicalism, much of what passes for Christian thinking today has about it too much *anthropos* and not nearly enough *theos*. When I'm tempted to take the line of least resistance to keep people happy or find a way of thinking that will be 'successful', Barth drags me back to the utter otherness of our mysterious God. Ultimately we are who we are, think what we think, and do what we do not for the benefit of people, or any other part of the creation for that matter, but for the glory of the creator. This whole venture is about God. Barth, I hope, will hold me to this.

He's also a good choice in the light of my own intellectual journey. It's probably fair to say that the theological trajectory of my life has been left-wards. Mind you when I started off there wasn't much room in the other direction. Frankly I began stomping along The Way as a fundamentalist (of a fairly cuddly variety) and over the years I've travelled through conservative evangelicalism (though I was never happy with that word conservative and the way it constrained creativity and stifled imagination) not, thank God, out into the land of liberalism but to a place where the old map just doesn't seem to work any more. That's another reason I like Barth, he's good at tearing up maps. He created space for the rewriting of theology in the 20th century. Admittedly some of the new lines that people laid down afterwards were a little wonky but I've gained so much from the elegant theological cartography of those, like Hans Frei and the postliberals, who owed so much to Barth, that I really ought to read more of the master himself. This should be the perfect opportunity.

Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*. Speaking of the postliberals, I really wouldn't want to be without at least a little bit of Walt in my life. Brueggemann has probably done more than anyone else to keep my love of the Bible throbbing strong. I remember some 15 years or so ago starting background reading for a series of sermons on 1 Samuel. I decided to take Brueggemann's *Interpretation commentary* to bed. It blew me away! Never before had a biblical commentary kept me awake at night turning page after page. Let's face it: most commentaries are likely to have the opposite effect—but this was different. Brueggemann took the text and its theology seriously, but he did so with such imagination that the whole thing became pointedly pertinent to the 21st century challenges facing my church and our world.

This was my introduction to someone who has been pretty much a constant conversation partner ever since. Whether it's his work on homiletics, (*Cadences of home* is a great place to start) his prayers, or the two volumes of his collected sermons, I hardly ever come away from time with Walt feeling disappointed. The reason I've opted for his Old Testament theology out of the many others I was tempted to choose is quite simple really, it's the one major work of his that I've not yet read. I've sampled it, plundered it, and quoted it but I haven't yet found the time to pull up a seat and tuck in properly. I find myself salivating at the prospect.

Andrew Shank's *Faith in honesty*. If Brueggemann is an old friend, that probably makes Barth a much-admired, wise uncle; in which case there's something of the exotic first date about Shanks. We've not yet met but one of my friends keeps banging

on about how wonderful he is and I'm really quite excited about getting to know him for myself. The friend in question is my colleague and fellow missiology tutor at Luther King House, Graham Adams. Apparently Rowan Williams is bit of a fan too (a fan of Shanks, that is, not Adams, though you never know). Shanks was Graham's doctoral supervisor and is now the subject of a new, third-year BA module at our place. If I've got the picture right, what I think I'm going to like about Shanks is his concern for truth – again something too often demoted down our list of priorities—and the way, apparently, he manages to avoid the pitfalls of both unreconstructed, universalistic, propositional modernism and the sloppy relativism of some forms of postmodernism. He's also interested in the discovery of truth in real world, face to face, flesh and blood encounters.

Another reason I've gone for Shanks is because I'm told he came into Christianity via his interest in philosophy and mysticism and that consequently he doesn't hold a torch for any particular wing of the church. Sounds good to me.

Also, I reckon it's no bad thing to keep on shaking up your theology from time to time by listening to new voices. True, we must be careful not to allow ourselves to be seduced too easily, but attending to exotic accents and novel timbres can help us to hear afresh the voice of the Spirit beckoning us on into more of the truth, just as Jesus promised she would. Here's hoping.

I know some of you might be thinking that Barth, Brueggemann and Shanks make for a pretty heavy mini-library, a kind of theological front row, all serious and intimidating. But that suits me just fine. The last thing I will want to read is anything remotely escapist. The island will give me all the escape I can handle. What I'll need is something to engage me, occupy me. (I've decided it's going to be a benign island, comfortable and fruitful so just living ought not to be too much of a challenge. The desert bit is surely not meant to be taken literally. Surely?) I really hope that when I eventually get

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through my reading and my boat comes in, things will be looking up back here in Baptist land. So it might be best for me to have the kind of reading that's going to take some time.

Which just leaves me to pick a luxury. This is the easy bit, it has to be my saxophone. Not in the way that Yo Yo Ma would no doubt opt for his cello or Vanessa Mae her violin. More in the way that a wrangler might opt for a wild steed. You see I'm determined to wrestle this thing into submission before I die, even it kills me. I love the sound the saxophone makes, even sometimes when I'm the one blowing it. There's something about the intimate connection between breath and brass, the alchemy of offering up my life force in the hope that the instrument will give me back something beautiful. If I'm ever going to get there though, I'll have to put my technique through a serious and sustained workout. Which again, should give you all plenty of time to put the church and the country in good order.

Glen Marshall is Co-Principal at Northern Baptist College.

The Baptist Peace Fellowship

BPF aims to provide a fellowship for Baptists who find that the use of military force cannot be reconciled with the teaching of Jesus Christ and His acceptance of the Cross. We ally ourselves with those who seek nonviolent means to confront and overcome injustice and so work at all times for the things that make for peace in national, community, church and personal life.

We do not believe that we have all the answers but will be led to witness in ways appropriate to the conditions in which we find ourselves. We aim to engage with our fellow Baptists on these issues so that they may come to see that armed conflict does not lead to long term peace. Like the early Christians we endeavour to talk to those whom we meet about the good news of the gospel of the Prince of Peace.

Please see BPF website for details of how to join

<http://www.baptist-peace.org.uk/>

Jesu is Charlie?

by Bob Gardiner

On the day of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*'s offices and the murder of many of its staff, David Kerrigan, head of BMS World Mission, posted a wise and considered response to the killings on Facebook. Here is an extract from it.

I can't speak offensively to my next door neighbours and expect them to remain friends, to be there when I need help, or for them to greet me cheerfully the following morning. If I deliberately provoke my neighbours in ways that may not be illegal but are deeply offensive, and eventually they snap, is it not permissible to ask whether my actions were right? Further, what kind of neighbour does that make me? Am I a shining example of someone building up my community?

Tonight, more than once, I have heard it said that these cartoons were aimed at satirising radical Islam. Maybe so, but they offended millions of 'ordinary' Muslims too, many of whom cannot now say they are offensive because first they have to line up and be heard to condemn the killers. If they even attempt to ask whether there are limits to free speech they risk being branded as the enemy within. Muslims are caught in no-man's land between allegiance to their faith, and their desire to live in Western society. Of course they need to make accommodation for that, and they do. But is it not part of what it means to be a civilised society to do what we can to help them live here in peace?

The question I posed in 2012, and pose today in the wake of the Paris murders, is whether the freedom of speech that we claim we value, is best honoured simply by being offensive? I would rather we use our freedom of speech to challenge the tyranny of all that condemns millions to poverty, that constructs systems embodying injustice that blight the lives of whole generations, that prevents multitudes of people from accessing medical care and education and the freedom to live in peace. But too often we in the West are complicit in these injustices and so we look elsewhere for easier targets.

We are living in a generation when a cancerous corruption of Islam has emerged in the guise of fundamentalist or radical Islam. I want no accommodation to this vile

perversion of so-called faith that has shown itself capable of no more than depraved violence.

But I believe we have been handed a most wonderful gift—it's called freedom of speech. It's ours. It's yours. Here—take it! Use it. But use it well, for it is truly a precious gift.

Until the appalling murderous attack on its offices, few of us had ever heard of *Charlie Hebdo*. But now all of Europe and most of the western world is familiar with its style. I must say that I do not find much of its content funny and some of it is deliberately produced to cause offence. Defending it, Leigh Philips has written:

It's not witty. If anything, it's rather juvenile. In mocking the idea that there should be no graven images of Mohammed, one of Charlie's cartoons was of a naked prophet with a star instead of an anus under the slogan: 'A star is born'. It's puerile, infantile, not infrequently unfunny.

But despite all this, the nonconformist in me wants to assert liberty. I do not believe that as followers of Christ we should be lining up with those who rule by fear and defend their own authoritarianism with violence. I like cartoons: indeed I collect them, and have a number of originals, some of which hang framed on my walls. A good cartoon is likely to have something offensive about it: the whole point is that it exaggerates. The images of politicians and others lampooned are not portraits but often grotesque caricatures. Sometimes animals are used to make the point even more extremely.

I have a nagging suspicion that Jesus had the soul of a cartoonist. He may not have drawn his material with the brilliance of Scarfe, but his parables and teaching are similarly exaggerated:

- *If your eye offends you, pluck it out!*
- *Unless you eat my body and drink my blood...*
- *When trying to remove a speck of dust from your neighbour's eye first remove the plank in your own eye.*
- *Beware of the scribes who walk about the town in their long fine robes.*

Jesus described his own religious leaders as 'whitewashed sepulchres, and broods of vipers'. He tells a story of a widow pestering a venal judge (possibly even slapping him, depending on the translation) until he is black in the face. An appalling king's wedding feast ends with a guest in the wrong clothes being thrown out into weeping and gnashing of teeth. He lampoons people who put lamps under bran tubs. He describes people who won't listen as those building their houses on sand. He tells a story in which it is a Samaritan (a hated and ritually unclean and unwelcome interloper in Jewish society),

Did Jesus have the soul of a cartoonist? His parables were exaggerated...

who turns out to be the good guy, and a priest and Levite pathetically ineffective.

In many of his stories he uses totally unlikely figures to make his point: seed producing yields of 100 fold, servants with debts of billions of pounds. These examples are just a few of many, which spring immediately to mind. Not surprisingly Jesus, too, was accused of blasphemy and crucified as a subversive.

The book of Revelation is full of cartoon images which would have been deeply

offensive in their day: for example, the Roman Empire is portrayed as a whore, an image so potent it was reused against the Roman Catholic church in propaganda sheets of the Reformation. Paul, too, was not always inoffensive when he came to describing some of his own race: he called them dogs and mutilators of the flesh (Phil 3:2). Indeed, Paul observed that he cross itself as a means of salvation was offensive to many.

Following the appalling massacre perpetrated by Islamic extremists on its offices, *Charlie Hebdo* is now a worldwide bestseller: for a short while it has the sympathy of most of the civilised world. A splendid opportunity is offered for it to become a proper satirical commentator on our world, which is sadly in need of some humour, rather than to descend to the kind of 'yah boo, tit for tat' appeals to racism and islamophobia which, while less murderous than the attack launched against the magazine, are nevertheless similarly disastrously grounded in hate, misunderstanding and prejudice. The world is not short of targets which are crying out to be exposed, lampooned and shown to be unjust and pompous.

Let magazines like *Charlie* attack these targets: multinational companies evading tax and exploiting the developing world; those who use violence to try to extend their power; the hypocrisy of the arms trade; yes, the grotesque use of fear by religious as well as political leaders, including terrorists and many western politicians. Indeed, when it uses its cartoons to defend the poor, the meek, the pure in heart, the hungry and thirsty, the peacemakers, the merciful, those who mourn and the persecuted, and to lampoon the rich, the self-satisfied, the violent and the hypocritical, I might be able to wear the badge, JE SUIS CHARLIE; or, even more poignantly, JESU IS CHARLIE.

Bob Gardiner had a career in teaching before entering the Baptist ministry, from which he is now retired. Bob is President of the Baptist Peace Fellowship.

Peacemakers

by Joe Haward

There are certain biblical and ethical concerns that create passionate and detailed arguments among those within Christian communities who are either training for ministry or have recently left college: issues that are continually a source of heated debate within and without the body of Christ. When it comes to a topic like ‘peace’, however, there does not seem to be, albeit from my own experience, the same level of engagement. I am not saying that historically (and today) there has not been a considerable amount of work done on peace, and the ethics surrounding peace, but I do say that many of us seem to think that, for instance, sexuality is a more pressing issue than how we might be peacemakers (although these are actually very closely related).

Recently I was at a Baptist ministers’ gathering, and the conversation and discussion centred upon same-sex marriage and homosexuality. Near the end of the discussion I made a comment about how disproportionate was the amount of our time spent on this particular issue rather than, say, violence. One of the ministers said that violence did not really affect our churches, whereas homosexuality did and that is why we are spending so much time talking about it.

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children of

This comment was an example of how ‘numb’¹ we are to the issue of violence within our society. Peace is indeed a pressing issue for us all, and a commitment to the gospel and the Kingdom is also a commitment to be pursuers of peace within our communities and society.

At the birth of Jesus the angelic host declares,
Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!
(Luke 2:14)

After the resurrection, when Jesus appears to his disciples, he declares peace upon them (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26); and through the famous passage from Isaiah that we read each year at Advent we hold Jesus to be the Prince of

Peace and look with anticipation for the redemption of all things. Indeed, ‘God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross’ (Col 1:20). So peace, and the pursuit of peace, is of real significance to God, so much so that Jesus calls peacemakers ‘blessed’ and ‘children of God.’

That said, however, as a Newly Accredited Minister, peacemaking was not high in my priorities. There seemed to be so many other issues and important things to do, especially when it came to pioneering work and church planting. Yet as time ticked by, as relationships within the community formed, as days were spent in prayer, in reading, in reflection, this theme of peace continued to emerge, fighting its way up through the layers of sentimentality and narcissism that often pervades ‘mission activity’. The community I was ministering in needed nothing more than peace.

This discovery is no surprise, because human history has found that violence is the primary means through which we seek to achieve ways of making things ‘turn out right’. The UK and US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan are but one example of how we believe violence to be the only way that we might secure peace and gain security. Bonhoeffer lamented our confusion of peace and security, saying: ‘Peace is the opposite to security...Peace means to give oneself altogether to the law of God, wanting no security, but in faith and obedience laying the destiny of the nations in the hand of the almighty God’.²

Violence is a part of our daily existence, yet it is so ingrained within our subconscious that we struggle to recognise it for what it is. Walter Brueggemann, in *The prophetic imagination*, sees the role of prophetic ministry as critical of established structures that lead to death, and then to energise people through hope. He says, ‘The task of the prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us’.³ Brueggemann asserts that people become enslaved to ‘the royal consciousness’; and society believes that things are simply the way they have to be. Ultimately the royal consciousness believes that death and violence are a necessary result of the structures put in place to provide wealth, power and peace. Brueggemann says, ‘The royal consciousness...leads people to numbness, especially numbness about death’.⁴ He goes on to say, ‘The task of the prophetic imagination is to cut through the numbness, then penetrate the self-deception, so that the God of endings is confessed as Lord’.⁵ To be peacemakers is to witness to a change of consciousness, to declare that there are other alternatives, that violence is not our only option.

Being a peacemaker, then, is more than simply the desire to end war, it is the desire to see peace realised in all areas of life and society. It is the desire to see God reconcile all things through the peace of the cross.

Jesus’ life, death and resurrection ‘unmasks and thus ends religion based on sacrifice

or retributive violence'.⁶ His command to non-retaliation (Matt 5:38-41), to lay down our weapons (Matt 26:51-52; John 18:10-11) and to take up our cross and follow him (Luke 14:27) is to reject violent cycles of behaviour and to embrace a way of life that emphasises and actively practices the way of non-violence and peace. Yet to live in such a way is at odds with what we have already discovered about the world. Furthermore, it is a calling to the church to retrace its non-violent history,⁷ to seek ways beyond violence and retaliation and actively to pursue peace. Today, with such a dominant culture of violence, the church has an opportunity to be distinctive among the 'nations', displaying and declaring what it looks like to be a community which practises forgiveness, reconciliation, restorative models of punishment, and frontline peacemaking. To be this kind of people is to be a peculiar and distinct kind of people who are not like the people around them. As David Bentley-Hart observes:

*At the high meridian of the 'Enlightenment', the hope of many was that a world freed from the burden of 'superstition' and 'priestcraft' would evolve into a rational society, capable of ordering itself peacefully, harmoniously and wisely...And yet, by the end of the 20th century, wars had been waged on a scale never before imagined, and a number of Utopian, strictly secularist ideologies...had together managed to kill perhaps 150 million persons. Over three centuries, the worst abuse of ecclesial authority in Christian history...caused the deaths of maybe 30,000...but organised irreligion had proved a far more despotic, capricious and murderous historical force.*⁸

Therefore it is to live—like Israel was called to live—the Way of the Kingdom of God, a 'kingdom run not by...strength and connivance but by...faith in Yahweh, a servant nation instead of a ruling nation...a people set apart, different from all other people by what they are and are becoming—a display-people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people'.⁹ Here we have something distinct and important: being in covenant with God changes people, sets them apart as different, with attitudes and actions that are different.

The church is called to be in covenant with Yahweh made flesh, the One who calls His people to non-violence. At a time of increased worldwide political tension, where demonstrations often break out in violence, where children are exposed to violence on computer games and movies, where in our relationships we act violently (physically and emotionally) towards one another: to have a people whose way of life is nonviolent is a powerful and distinct message that points to the God who lives in eternal self-giving love.¹⁰

To live non-violently is first to recognise the fear that all too easily dominates our lives; to acknowledge this fear and then to learn how to trust again—to trust one another, and to see that violence will always erode that trust. We need to trust God

(Prov 3:5a), the one who calls for a day when swords will be beaten into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:4), who makes wars to cease (Psalm 46:9), and who calls on his people to not trust in war, but to trust in him (Psalm 20:7). To live peacefully is not to believe that we will bring salvation to the world, for that alone is God's task. Rather, it is to live faithfully, prayerfully and patiently. As Clement puts it, to

*turn again to the practice of that peace which from the beginning was the mark set before us; and let us look steadfastly to the Father and Creator of the universe, and cleave to his mighty and surpassingly great gifts and benefactions of peace. Let us contemplate Him with our understanding, and look with the eyes of our soul to His long-suffering will. Let us reflect how free from wrath He is towards all His creation.*¹¹

Our task is not to make the world less violent, but to call each other, the church, to live less violently that we might be salt and light in this violent world. To live peacefully is to recognise that it is not up to us to 'make all things new', that people are not commodities to increase our own status, but that we have all the time in the world to care for those that God calls us to care for. To live peacefully is to live as a people shaped by the gospel, a people who follow the One who declares, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons and daughters of God'.

Joe Haward is minister of This Hope Baptist Church.

Notes to text

1. 'Numbness' is how Walter Brueggemann describes a society that has become apathetic to the structures in society that lead to death and oppression. See *The prophetic imagination*.
2. D. Bonhoeffer, *Meditations on the Psalms*, p 49.
3. W. Brueggemann, *The prophetic imagination*, p 13.
4. *Ibid*, p 46.
5. *Ibid*, p 49.
6. J. Denny, *The nonviolent atonement*, p 51.
7. For a robust and comprehensive account of Christian nonviolence see M. Long (ed), *Christian peace and nonviolence: a documentary history*.
8. D. Bentley-Hart, *The story of Christianity*, pp 329-330.
9. J. I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, p 263.
10. The doctrine of perichoresis understands God in eternal love and self-giving relationship, Father, Son and Spirit mutually and fully indwelling one another. This term seems to have first been used by Maximus the Confessor (ca 580-662) regarding the divine and human nature of Jesus. John of Damascus (ca 665-749) seems to be the first to apply it to the persons of the Trinity, although Irenaeus (ca 130-ca 200) and Athanasius (ca 296-373) are thought to have developed the root of the concept.
11. Clement, *The first epistle of Clement*, XIX.

Practice makes perfect...peace

by Craig Gardiner

There's a well-known, if apocryphal story of a young musician asking a Londoner how to get to the Albert Hall. The reply comes back, 'You must practice, practice, practice!' What is true for musicians applies to athletes too, who, as St. Paul advised, must 'train, train, train' with perseverance if they are to win the race (1 Cor 9:25; 1 Tim 4:8). So it should come as no surprise that if Christians are to be peacemakers in a violent world, then they, too, need to enter an arena where the patterns of God's *shalom* are rehearsed again and again. Worship provides such a place. It is where the church can practice making peace. While worship is never simply a performance, it may be useful to think of it, and peacemaking, through these musical metaphors of practice and performance.

By using such imagery, we can explore how a Christian commitment to peacemaking results from the confession that 'Jesus is Lord'. As such, we discover that non-violence is not simply a social virtue, but is part of the character of God revealed to us in Christ. Therefore the practices of *shalom* ought to shape a congregation's life, including their worship. All this leads us to the importance of worship as a rehearsal space for peace.

In thinking of worship, writers such as James K.A. Smith have recently shown just how important its content can be for teaching and forming a church of ethical disciples.¹ He notes that people are

*'liturgical animals', creatures who can't not worship and who are fundamentally formed by worship practices. The reason such liturgies are so formative is precisely because it is these liturgies, whether Christian or 'secular', that shape what we love. And we are what we love.*²

And so, if the church is to be a people who love God and the peace of God then, as Stanley Hauerwas has argued

*the regular, continual pattern of gathering for worship may be viewed as the church's rehearsal. Worship thus becomes a kind of performance before the performance, a preparation beforehand for whatever witness the church might be called to give.*³

Thus worship should become 'why' and 'how' and 'where' the character of individual Christians and the mission of the church are practised. When the time of gathered

worship ends, the people are sent to perform what they love and now have learnt by heart. This brings some serious challenges to the content of worship and to those who plan it. Most importantly it should cause ministers and worship leaders to ask if what they do is consciously rooted in a theology of making peace.

If worship has been deliberately structured to form the character of and shape the mission of a community, those who have rehearsed as Hauerwas suggests will be sent out to perform and in time will reconvene to reflect on their experience.⁴ They will bring stories that celebrate success, confess failure and intercede for perseverance in their witness. There may be much variation, but each story should be asked, ‘how has our living made known the peace of God?’ The answer to that question ought to inform the next ‘rehearsal’/time of worship. The church does all this not simply because in a world riven with conflict, peace seems to be ‘the right thing to do’, but because as Alan and Eleanor Kreider note, ‘when Christians gather to worship God we make peace...because of the nature of the God to whom we ascribe worth—God is “the God of peace” (Romans 15:33; 16:20)’.⁵

This stands in the tradition of the prophets who proclaimed a time when ‘swords were beaten into ploughshares’(Isaiah 2:4). But ultimately the church affirms it to be true because we believe that, in Jesus, we have the greatest revelation of the peacemaking character of God. He is the ‘image of the invisible God’ and Christ reveals a deity that within Godself is a nonviolent community of persons.⁶ As John Dear notes from a conversation with Richard Rohr, “Nothing changed on Calvary”. Jesus was nonviolent before, during and after’.⁷

Jesus’ most famous sermon blesses the peacemakers and instructs them to pray for those who persecute them. His last recorded words to the disciples in Gethsemane were ‘put down your sword,’ a final reminder to love their enemies. At his death, Jesus refused to call upon the angel armies who could have delivered him. After his resurrection, Jesus continues as he left off, returning to those who had betrayed and abandoned him, offering them reconciliation, wishing peace upon them and inviting them, as it were, to see the Passion as something of a rehearsal, a preparation for the next performance of God’s unfolding purposes.

That next performance takes place in what N.T. Wright has called ‘Act 5 of the drama of salvation’. He suggests that after creation and fall, (Acts 1 and 2), when the *shalom* of Eden was lost, peacemaking became core to the prophetic proclamations of Israel and the life of Jesus, (Acts 3 and 4). Now, in the violent world of Act 5, Wright suggests that Christians may know how the play will end, but until the eschaton, they are called to offer an ‘improvisatory performance of the final act as it leads up to and anticipates the intended conclusion’.⁸ We may not know the full nature of such improvised performance, but we do know that in each performance we are an echo of

our future selves,⁹ and of the coming peaceable Kin-dom.¹⁰ Within the discipline of rehearsal, performance and reflection, it is worship that offers the church a space in which to practice, practice, practice all that we might yet become as people who participate in the reconciling work of Christ. After all, it is a peacemaking Jesus whom Christians proclaim as Lord. For the early church to do so was an act of religious devotion and was tantamount to political subversion—to ‘come out’ as a radical body denying the legitimacy of the governing Caesar. It was also, at a spiritual level, to stand against the dominant cosmology of the day, what scripture identifies as the ‘Powers and Principalities’ (Rom 8:37-39; Col 1:16; Eph 3:10-11 and 6:12), and what Walter Wink has taught us to understand as the Domination System—which encompasses all that opposes the true peace that is forthtold by the prophets, incarnated in Jesus and hoped for in the coming Kin-dom. It is the idolatrous inclinations found in global, national, local and personal methods which maintain unjust and dehumanising power relations.

The myth of redemptive violence

The system is enshrined in the ‘myth of redemptive violence’, a narrative that believes that violent means can bring about peaceable ends. The ‘secular liturgy’ of this myth pervades everything from children’s cartoons and Hollywood movies to immigration policies and international interventions for ‘regime change’. It means that the ‘good guys’ (usually us), can legitimately use violence (in many forms including the physical, but also the political and the economic) because that is how we defeat the ‘bad guys’. If Smith is correct, that we as ‘liturgical animals’ become what we have worshipped, then the danger we face is clear. The church must resist such liturgies of the System, and proclaim a non-violent alternative. If not, the Powers will devour humanity’s devotion.

If Jesus shapes the character of our worship then it will compel us to love our enemies. But the liturgies of violence so pervade contemporary culture that they have become normative. As Wink says, ‘No other religious system has ever remotely rivalled the myth of redemptive violence in its ability to catechize its young so totally’.¹¹ The young grow up to be leaders, policy makers and voters, Christian or otherwise, and are largely unable to resist the lure of the myth because they have heard no alternative.

Resistance to the Domination System is not only far from futile, such resistance is the secret of the Christian’s joy.¹² Here, in Act 5 of God’s purposes, the church resists the System of Domination and death and confesses her allegiance to the God of peace and life—‘Jesus Christ is Lord!’ The responsibility for raising an alternative voice, the vocation for its prophetic proclamation belongs, if not uniquely, then primarily to the church. It is the community of Christ which is charged with unmasking the violent System of Domination, proclaiming *shalom*, and working for peace in the world. But to do so with confidence and authenticity the church must first practice, practice, practice that prophetic vocation within the rehearsal space of worship. But the church has often

failed to see the practice and performance of *shalom* as central to its worship.

It might be helpful for contemporary congregations to consider how peace-making disciples may be formed through our preaching, rituals, prayers and hymnody. The early church addressed the challenges of nonviolence and of resistance in the context of its worship.¹³ For the pre-Constantinian church such practices began what was called the catechumenate, an integrated approach to discipleship and worship that socialised pagans into the alternative values of gospel living. Here it re-formed converts in a new worldview, providing them with what Bob Ekblad sees as essential for the church again today, namely a cosmology that takes serious account of ‘the microforces that assault people in forms such as anger, jealousy, lust and greed, labeled by the early church fathers as “passions” or “demons” and the larger macropowers such as legalism, nationalism, discrimination, and the like, labeled by social prophetic writers according to the biblical vocabulary surrounding “principalities and powers”’.¹⁴ A peacemaking church needs to be trained in how Christ and God’s *shalom* challenge the Powers. The catechumenate, or training programme, was often likened to exercise for athletes. This Greeks called this *askesis*. Their regular exercise is like the rehearsal of a worshipping community practising the actions that are required to resist the System and fulfil the purposes of peacemaking God. A new *askesis* is needed, a rehearsal of peacemaking within the church, that will equip and empower people to resist the Powers and truly proclaim that Christ is Lord. This is the heart of worship.

To resist the Powers, those responsible for facilitating worship might ask, ‘how does this help us to fashion *shalom* and confess a peacemaking Jesus?’ Each part of worship should ask, ‘how does this worship enable us to identify, engage and redeem the Powers within and around our congregation?’ How do our prayers, rituals, preaching and hymnody help us to resist the Domination System? For as Alan and Eleanor Kreider note, worship today needs to be evaluated ‘not by how people feel about their “worship experience” but rather by the extent to which worship envisions and empowers them to participate in God’s mission by seeking first God’s Kingdom of justice, peace and joy’.¹⁵

While it is not possible in this short article to offer comprehensive suggestions for practical changes in worship, the following examples might illustrate how churches may become training grounds, rehearsal rooms or ‘schools for peace’.¹⁶

Some churches have recently stopped bringing an offering within worship, arguing that most members give through their bank and that the ‘collection’ sends an unwelcome message to visitors—‘the church just wants your money’. This is understandable, but it is worth asking, where else might anyone witness and participate in an alternative to the pervasive ‘secular liturgies’ of Mammon and the market? Where else are the Powers of money named and engaged, how else might greed be redeemed for the joys of generosity? Of course the church is not unique in

offering alternative liturgies in this way, but if it offers no *askesis* of resistance to its members, will it not have fallen short of its vocation to participate and perform the Kin-dom of justice and peace?

Likewise in selecting our hymnody, those who lead worship might ask, as did one Mennonite pastor, 'Who do you sing that I am?'¹⁷ If in worship we become what we love, then rephrasing Jesus' question to Peter offers a critique of the songs congregations love to sing. For many Christians, songs shape how they understand God and thus how they understand discipleship and mission. Do our musicians lead us in songs that speak about a peace-making Jesus? Do our hymns offer words of lament and resistance against the Powers of violence that rage against the weakest members of a global village or indeed against creation herself? Do they rehearse how the rhythms of *shalom* will be shared by the church within a hurting world?

Baptism might need to be reclaimed as the act by which Christians are inducted into a counter cultural community who have peacemaking at the heart of their worship, discipleship and mission. The consequences of belonging to such a community will need to be expressly explored through discipleship before baptism is offered. At Baptism the whole community would reaffirm their commitment to non-violent living and pledge their ongoing support to those about to be baptised.

The eucharist offers rich opportunities to rehearse the practices of peace and performing *shalom*. Traditionally, communion offers such a space through the 'sharing the peace.' While this has been minimised in even the most liturgical of congregations, it retains deep potential for people to explore the realities of conflict and reconciliation within a congregation, before they are ever sent into the world. More importantly, communion invites a fellowship to remember Christ's death, but not as a simple 'in memoriam.' The recollection ought to affirm that on the night he was betrayed Jesus faced death as he had lived, rejecting violence, praying for his enemies and commanding his disciples to do likewise. Communion might then create space for people to express their resistance to the myth of redemptive violence, a myth that may not be altogether absent from our theologies of the eucharist or atonement. Moreover, it is at the table that Christians are reminded that they are this 'echo of their future selves', that while Christ has died and is risen, so too he will come again, bringing a Kin-dom of peace that is already breaking in among us. The fullness of *shalom* may be 'not yet', but in bread and wine the church is called to inhabit it within the 'now', bringing peace into a violent world.

If much of what has been suggested here seems a far cry from the usual experiences of worship, might any of it really be possible? There certainly needs to be some realism within calls for nonviolent discipleship. Peacemaking is not the place for idealists. Violence will endure and increase. But, as David Cunningham believes, the church can provide an alternative 'school for peace', if it 'tells stories and

habituates practices that allow peaceableness to shape our lives'.¹⁸ The life of the church is shaped by its worship. If we become what we love, then peace with justice, the shalom of God, must be what the church loves. It must learn resistance and confession that is both rehearsed in worship and performed amidst a violent world. To do so we must learn that only practice, practice, practice will help us to make perfect peace. In that way, when the performance of a lifetime is required, or more likely, when multiple performances of nonviolence and reconciliation are needed, the church will be able, with confidence and authenticity to become a God's gift of peacemaking to a violent world.

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Notes to text

1. J. K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).
2. J. K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), p4.
3. S. Hauerwas, *Performing the faith* (London: SPCK, 2004), p98.
4. The metaphor of performance does not permit any notion of 'play acting', but rather, is understood as the Christian community being caught up into the music and 'doubling up the parts.' In other words, the church joins in and performs the music God, as Holy Spirit, is already playing throughout creation.
5. A. & E. Kreider, *Worship and mission after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), p152.
6. David Cunningham has argued that the 'otherness' located within the immanent lives of the Trinity creates a genuine potential for their wills to differ, but because this conflict is never actualised between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there is within God a genuine expression of *shalom*. D. Cunningham, *These three are one* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p241.
7. J. Dear, *Put down your sword* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 2008), p11.
8. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the people of God* (London: SPCK, 1993), p141-143.
9. Tom Wright uses the image 'a shadow of our future selves' in *New heavens, new earth* (Cambridge: Grove Books 1992), p12.
10. The phrase Kin-dom, with evocations of a more egalitarian 'family of God's people', is here preferred to that of 'Kingdom' with its sometimes problematic overtones of patriarchy and associated violence. See A. M. Isasi-Diaz, *Solidarity: love of neighbor in the 21st century*, in S. Brooks Thistlethwaite & M. Potter Engel (eds), *Lift every voice* (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), pp31-40.
11. W. Wink, *The Powers that be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p54.
12. *Resistance is the secret of joy*, PhD dissertation by L. Troch, noted by M. C. Grey, *The outrageous pursuit of hope* (London: DLT, 2000), p 20.
13. For an overview of this see Alan and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and mission after Christendom*, p130-173, particularly 152-155.
14. B. Ekblad, *A new Christian manifesto* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2008), p68.
15. A. & E. Kreider, *Mission and worship after Christendom*, Backcover.
16. The phrase 'schools of peace' is taken from D. Cunningham, *ibid*, p267.
17. A. Tice, *Who do you sing that I Am?*, senior paper, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary 2007, in A. & E. Kreider, *Mission and worship after Christendom*, p157.
18. D. Cunningham, *ibid*, p268.

Domestic violence

By Bob Gardiner

I was shocked, on entering the ministry, to find myself having to deal with issues arising out of past and present domestic abuse. In view of the immensity of the problem in the UK—let alone the wider world—that shock showed my disturbing naivety and the inadequacy of my training. Of course, in recent years, we have been much less secretive concerning child abuse, but I believe domestic violence is in some ways an even bigger issue and one our churches need to take very seriously. The statistics below are just a snapshot of the horrific and all pervasive reality of domestic abuse in the UK and globally.

- Globally, women between the ages of 15 and 44 are more likely to be maimed or die as a result of male violence than through cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war combined (UN 2007).
- Domestic violence is the largest form of abuse of women worldwide, irrespective of region, culture, ethnicity, education, class and religion (UN).
- In the UK, two women each week die because of intimate partner violence (Women's Aid 2010).
- In the UK a woman is assaulted in her home every six seconds (Day to Count 2000).
- Women who are victims of domestic violence are three times more likely to be injured when pregnant (Refuge 2007).
- In the UK, 25% of women will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime (Home Office 2007).
- On average there will have been 35 assaults before a victim of domestic abuse calls the police (Amnesty International).
- The estimated total cost of domestic abuse on the UK economy is around £15.7 billion (Professor Walby 2008).
- Every year 0.75 million children live in fear of domestic violence (Women's Aid)

Dealing with this issue can be very disturbing, and knowing what is the right thing to do can also be very taxing. It is not just a question of wanting to take this issue on board: we cannot in the church turn a blind eye to domestic violence any longer. It is time to stop walking by on the other side. Fortunately there are far more resources available than used to be the case. *Mind and soul*, in particular, has an excellent PDF which can be downloaded, and ends with the following charter for churches.

This Church

1. Understands domestic abuse to be the abuse of a person physically, sexually, psychologically, spiritually, emotionally, socially or financially within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. This can include forced marriage and so-called 'honour crimes'.
2. Holds that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and irreconcilable with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living.
3. Accepts that domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society.
4. Undertakes to listen, support and care for those affected by domestic abuse.
5. Will always place the safety of women and children as the highest priority.
6. Will work with domestic abuse support agencies, will learn from them and support them in appropriate ways, and will publicise their work.
7. Will play its part in teaching that domestic abuse is a sin.
8. Believes in a God of love, justice, mercy, and forgiveness.
9. Will teach what it means to be male and female, equally made in God's image.
10. Will seek to appoint advisors to encourage the use of good practice guidelines and keep the church informed about the implementation and development of these guidelines.

Below are some websites that offer advice, practical help and assistance to ministers and churches.

- http://www.mindandsoul.info/Articles/254821/Mind_and_Soul/Resources/Ending_Domestic_Abuse.aspx
- <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1163604/domesticabuse.pdf>
- <http://www.ccpas.co.uk/Documents/Help-DomesticViolence.pdf>
- http://www.hiddenhurt.co.uk/responding_to_domestic_violence.html
- BMS has a set of resources on gender based violence at bmsworldmission.org/dignity

Peace congregations

by Norman Kember & Alan Betteridge

One of the most useful British Baptist documents in recent decades has been the *Five core values*, presented to the Baptist Union Council in March 1998 as part of the Relating and Resourcing process. Insights were invited during the formation of *Five core values*, and the Baptist Peace Fellowship suggested that under 'Mission', churches should 'explore the possibility and missionary impact' of becoming a Union of 'Peace Churches'

In 1999 we were allowed to make a presentation to BU leaders: the discussion seemed to say, not that it was a wrong concept, but that it was not yet the right time. For the Decade to Overcome Violence, 2000-2010, BUGB used the challenging title, *Following Jesus in a violent world*. They selected domestic violence as a key issue that has often been ignored or hidden. The aim was to help churches to become more aware of domestic violence, including within church life, and to enable them to make progress in providing a safe place for the healing of both the abusers and the abused.

Historic peace churches

The phrase 'peace churches' comes from North America. It is used of three historic Christian bodies whose members have normally stood for radical nonviolent peacemaking, including denying the validity for Christians of participation in civil or international wars. They have said that a peace church is one that believes that the form of power which God has chosen to confront evil and to redeem the world is that used by Jesus, namely the power of the cross, which hungers for justice, is nonviolent, compassionate, courageous, personal and political.

Of the three, the Mennonites are closest to modern Baptists through their Anabaptist roots. Their understanding of Christian peacemaking has extended its scope beyond a refusal to take part in war or in preparations for war—they are now involved in justice issues such as racism, domestic violence, and the violence inherent in the international economic systems that exploit the poor. They have worked in victim-offender reconciliation, mediation and other conciliation programmes. Their peacemaking has moved from 'quietism to activism'.

The peace church with British roots is the Society of Friends (Quakers), which moved from non-retaliation when persecuted to renouncing any form of warfare. They see their

‘Historic Peace Testimony’ as a witness in actions rather than statements. Nevertheless modern statements have come from Quakers, such as ‘We totally oppose all wars, all preparation for war, all use of weapons for violent coercion by force... We equally and actively oppose all that leads to violence among peoples and nations, and violence to other species on our planet...’.

The least known of the three is the Church of the Brethren, originating in Germany in the 18th century but now strongest in the US. Peace for them includes the recognition that war is totally contrary to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. It means a corporate refusal to go to war or train for it. It also involves a non-resistant readiness to suffer at the hands of others rather than to fight. They advocate nonviolent ways to settle conflict rather than use violence and war. They resolve to live in the way and spirit of Christ amid the world’s confusion and strife.

Although there are a number of Baptist Conventions in the US, there is a single Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, which includes Canada and Mexico. It was through our contacts with the BPFNA that we discovered their challenge to individual churches to affiliate with their Fellowship and so learn the benefits of the peace emphasis in all aspects of church life.

Are we already peace congregations?

In our approach to British churches, we decided to talk about ‘peace congregations’ rather than ‘peace churches’, so that all who have some sort of connection with our church communities are included. We also want to affirm all that our churches are already doing to bring peace to individuals, homes, churches, communities and between nations.

Being a peace congregation is lived out:

- where members act as mediators or counsellors, either professionally or in organisations such as Relate, Samaritans, Citizens Advice Bureaux, or Street Pastors;
- where church activities and premises are welcoming to otherwise socially neglected people, including providing space in which they can meet, such as AA;
- where churches join in schemes to support refugees, provide food banks, alleviate homelessness and combat racism;
- where children and young people are guided into careers in the caring professions;
- where churches campaign against injustice, such as through the work of Amnesty and overseas aid and development agencies;

- where churches take part in friendly contact and dialogue at ecumenical and interfaith levels;
- where the Good News of the Prince of Peace is proclaimed, explained and lived.

Further steps

At the BPF we have continued with the idea of peace congregations, hoping that individual churches will come to a place where they want to be a peace congregation even if the BU could not resolve to be a Union of peace churches. The challenge is to give peace issues a higher priority in church programmes.

We always realised that noble generalised concepts do need specific practical steps to facilitate them. Our *Steps to a peace church* describes three levels.

At the **first level** are several items that many churches can say are already important parts of their church life. It means local peacemaking, 'loving our neighbour'. A right handling of hidden conflicts within the church itself and its activities may include mediation (as well as meditation!) courses. The BU has produced a training pack for handling tensions in church relationships (*Journeying through conflict*, 2004). Other concerns include rejecting investment in military manufacture, avoiding war imagery in the language for use in worship, making people aware of the increasing use of war and violence for entertainment in such things as toys, videos, TV programmes *etc.*

The **second level** envisaged a range of new steps to be taken. Loving our enemies involves fervent prayer for peace in a well informed congregation that is kept up to date on the global causes of conflicts. Support for one or more of the peace organisations (some with specific aims like Campaign Against Arms Trade or CND can be very topical) leads to wider comment, expressed to the church's MP(s) and in interchurch circles. There also follows an awareness of special dates throughout the year, like Holocaust Day and Hiroshima Day, and a thoughtful use of Remembrance Day. Few see WWII as an avoidable or unjust conflict. A real degree of sensitivity is called for since some members of a congregation may see their war service as a source of their self-esteem. It is not the aim to alienate people but help discover alternative routes to peace.

Allied to peacemaking is the issue of forgiveness. In recent years there has been increasing discussion of the possibilities and conditions for forgiveness. The forgiveness project has analysed a series of examples of forgiveness (and refusals to forgive) in family and community conflict situations around the world. Churches in areas where people have become victims of murder or injury, as in Tunisia, cannot talk glibly about forgiveness. It is a costly process when people have been deeply hurt.

The **third level** for a peace congregation would be when its normal ministry and ethos

emphasises both active peacemaking and a refusal to be involved in the use of violence to promote national policies. Peace congregations would promote a patriotism based on justice and nonviolence, and which avoids militaristic displays on national occasions. They would argue against the production and possession of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, whether for so-called defence or for national prestige. They would work as far as they could for the diversification of industry so that we become less dependent on the military. Currently it is to military purposes that a large proportion of resources for research and development are directed. We want more of our members to be encouraged to take up peace studies, available in more than one university now, to think about the sort of employment they can take up, and to seek to join the Ecumenical Accompaniers in Israel/Palestine or a Christian Peacemaker Team.

God's Word

To support this process we have produced three sets of Bible studies, each set made up of five outlines. It is inconceivable that a Baptist church would develop its stance on any issue without a careful scrutiny of God's Word.

The first set looks again at *basics* for a gospel congregation: forgiveness (Mark 2), reconciliation (Romans 5), servanthood (Isaiah 53), love (I John 3-4), prayer and worship (I Timothy 2).

The second set concerns *lifestyle* in a congregation of disciples, by using John 13 (the new commandment), Matthew 26 (Gethsemane), Luke 9 (taking up our cross), I Peter 2 (Jesus the Example), and James 3-4 (what sort of congregation do we promote?).

The third set envisages a *visionary congregation*, taking more risks, perhaps to be accused of being unrealistic or revolutionary: Matthew 5 (love for enemies), Romans 12 (the radical 'therefore' after receiving God's mercy), Ephesians 2 (uniting opposites), 2 Corinthians 10 (the different sort of warfare we are called to) and Micah 4 (a vision of peace for this world now).

In recent years there has been a deliberate policy to increase the public presence of the British military in public events, more and more military commemorations, and the suggestion that ex-service personnel could add discipline and purpose if they joined the teaching staff in schools. We now have Armed Forces Day and Help for Heroes (rather than 'Help for Victims of Government Policy').

We need an honest discussion of the role of the armed forces. Perhaps one might question the need for military chaplains to be 'embedded' within the armed services. We acknowledge the work that the armed forces have been able to do in crises such as the Ebola outbreak, but alternative organisations such as *Medicins Sans Frontiers* have been

more effective. This national promotion of military values makes it more difficult for a church to take steps towards being a peace congregation if they are to remain in contact with their surrounding communities. But it also raises peace issues higher up the agenda of discussions at church, in ministerial formation and fellowships, in Associations and in the Union. Which way are you heading—towards greater silence, or deeper debate?

Since we first mooted the idea of a Union of peace churches we have had the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005, controversial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and now the spread of a brutal Islamist ideology. The rise of the ‘Caliphate’ has increased the calls for military intervention by our government. But we must raise the question: ‘Can you defeat an idea by force of arms?’ Then there is a real danger that reactions by government will alienate the Muslim community even further such that the idealistic appeal of IS to Muslim youth, however malignant, is heightened.

These problems should be faced by congregations in communities with large Muslim populations, which may feel increasingly isolated from the mainstream of British life. In such situations, questions of peacemaking are not just theoretical. In all areas we want to encourage congregations to prioritise peace and justice in their corporate and personal lives. We want to suggest to them to widen such concerns. And we want to help them deepen their commitment to peace, taking its consequences further.

Finally we recall the words of Francis of Assisi: *While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart.*

Norman Kember has been active and Alan Betteridge is a retired Baptist minister.

Resources

* The peace congregation resources mentioned here can be found at the Baptist Peace Fellowship website, www.baptist-peace.org.uk.

*Alan and Eleanor Kreider have explored these issues in more depth in *On becoming a peace church*. New Ground, March 2000.

*The stories of Baptist peacemakers have been written up by Paul Dekar in his book, *For the healing of the nations*. Macon Ga, Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc, 1993.

*Important contributions of Baptists in resolving conflicts are described by Daniel Butry in *Christian peacemaking—from heritage to hope*. Valley Forge, VA: Judson Press, 1994.

Telling it as it was

by Alan Betteridge

For the centenary in 2014 of the outbreak of the WWI, Leicester CND ran a project to collect local 'Memories in Conflict', including those of conscientious objectors. As one such (though long after WWI had ended), and having been born and brought up in Leicester, I told my story as part of the oral history archive. I could remember a tiny amount from my father. He had been on a troopship off Gallipoli but without disembarking when the enterprise was called off, and then was injured in France in 1917 (did the German sniper deliberately aim at his leg rather than his head or heart?). I remembered much more of my own boyhood memories of WWII: newspaper stories and news bulletins stuck in my mind even though I was only at infant school.

Conversion and challenge

My conversion to Christ in Leicester in 1950 was followed by a challenge from a younger Christian teenager when it was time for my medical examination for National Service: 'How can you, as a Christian, train to kill others?' So I applied to be registered as a conscientious objector. I remember my parents' reactions (not hostile); the proceedings at the tribunal held in Birmingham (I still have my written statement, centred on the teaching of Jesus); and my eventual exemption from National Service. Then there followed a 'quiet' period, when I did nothing further about my convictions over war and peace.

After several years I joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which had begun in 1914 as a Christian peace movement committed to the enthronement of love in human relationships, whether personal, in society, or among the nations. I became part of one of its affiliated organisations, the Baptist Pacifist (now Peace) Fellowship, which had attracted a large number of Baptist ministers to its membership in the 1930s. I went on to seek to be practical about the issues involved by supporting the Campaign Against Arms Trade when it began in the 1970s, with letters to MPs, stalls and vigils in Birmingham and Coventry, resolutions at Baptist Assemblies, and picking up other avenues of concern like white poppies (see the extra note about this).

In April 2015 the CND project published *Uncovering resistance*. We were able to include as part of the background the input to Leicestershire life that had come over the years from radical nonconformity, such as Quakers (George Fox came from the county), the Churches of Christ (unusually numerous in the area), and indeed Baptists. One man has come to exemplify the dilemma we face in our churches, William Poole of Desford, Leicestershire, whose autograph book and other papers have survived and are now in the Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland at Wigston Magna. I met him in 1962

in Desford; he had been a member of the Free Church (in the Baptist Union) but insisted on refusing conscription in 1916, following, I think, the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about dealing with enemies (Matt 5: 43-45).

He told me how the pastor and a prominent layman called, to persuade him that it was his duty to obey the call of his country to armed service. He refused to give up his understanding of Jesus' teaching, and so went to prison. The deacons asked for a pastoral letter to be sent to 'Mr W. Poole, one of our members, who is in deep water as a conscientious objector to combatant service in the army'. Despite their pastoral concern he never went to the church again on his return home after the war had ended. The once radical nonconformists had now become largely supportive of establishment attitudes, and could not cope with serious dissent.

But my final reflection to the Leicester CND project was this—I never did as much campaigning for non-violent peacemaking as I could. Nor did I pray for peace within communities and between nations as much as I should, as encouraged to do by Paul in I Timothy 2:1-2. If I had joined with others in praying more for those in authority around the world, that we might be peaceably governed, how different might the story of recent decades have been? This is not for me a grand heroic tale of great deeds done. However I have sought to put my ounce of influence on the scales of human affairs on the side of seeking peace, and never on the side of violent conflict.

...is our ounce
of influence on
the side of
seeking peace,
or that of vio-

It will be poppy time again

**In Flanders Fields the poppies blow,
Between the crosses, row on row**

by Alan Betteridge

That poem, written on a battlefield in France in 1915 (during WWI), led to the wearing of red poppies in memory of those who died during those awful four years of carnage. It was claimed to be a war to end all wars, but instead led on to further conflicts, notably WWII. And so the red poppy, first sold in Britain in 1921, is now one way of remembering the military victims of all our wars.

In 1933 the Women's Co-operative Guild produced the white poppy as a commitment to non-violent peacemaking in a world that was preparing itself for more brutal warfare. They believed that conflicts should be resolved without violence and with justice.

The Peace Pledge Union produces white poppies nowadays, from whom they can be bought singly or more cheaply in packs of 25 or 100: PPU, 1 Peace Passage, London N7 0BT (Tel 0870 770 7944 or look at the website, www.ppu.org.uk). The website may lead to the address of an outlet for white poppies near you.

Some of us wear both red and white poppies together on Remembrance Day. We do not wear the red one with pride, as the British Legion has bidden us to do, but with deep sorrow that the destruction and killing caused by war have been part of our nation's story in the world. And don't let us forget that for decades, most of the casualties in modern warfare are civilians, including children and old people.

The TV channels seem to make it compulsory for all participants, especially presenters and newscasters, to wear a red poppy. It takes courage to wear a white one for non-violent peacemaking. I have been making them available at Queen's Road Baptist Church and elsewhere in Coventry for around 25 years now, after seeking the permission of other members of the church's leadership—even though they do not necessarily buy one from me!

Reviews

edited by John Goddard

Psalms redux: poems and prayers

Carla A. Grosch-Miller

Canterbury Press, 2014

ISBN 978-1-84825-639-2

Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

This is a real gem of a book. The author, a URC minister in Oxford, is clear that these poems are intended as an imaginative restoration and refreshment of the ancient texts. That is what the word *redux* in the book's title is meant to convey. She found that she stumbled over the images and metaphors in the book of Psalms, and so sought as part of her own prayer life the discipline of a weekly rewriting of a psalm. She admits that this was for her a process of wrestling that led to the emergence of new understandings of 'the God who gives us life and invites us to flourish'.

Fifty-five psalms have been subjected to this treatment. Also included are a number of other psalms and prayers of her own composition for the days of the week and other times and seasons. Many of the Biblical psalms *redux* bear an obvious relationship to

the original, but with some I did struggle to see the connection. No matter. This is not a book to be read in a single sitting, but one to be read slowly and meditatively, taking each psalm in one at a time. I read one of these poems a day as part of my own praying the Daily Office, and found that they did indeed lead me more deeply into the life of the Spirit and open my heart and mind to perceive new depths in God.

So, not so much a book to be read, but a resource to be used—above all in private devotion, but possibly also in the larger settings of prayer groups and worshipping congregations. Highly recommended.

20 Pentecostal pioneers in Nigeria: their lives, their legacies, vol 1

Israel O. Olofinjana

Xlibris Publications, 2011

Reviewer: Brian Talbot

Israel Olofinjana, minister of Woolwich Central Baptist Church, has previously written studies of the life and work of African Christian leaders in the UK and Europe. His latest book gives a brief account of some of the individuals who pioneered the new Pentecostal and charismatic churches in West Africa.

Some of the names are very familiar, for example, Benson Idahosa, whose prolific church planting activities and advocacy of the prosperity gospel was highly influential not only in Nigeria but also in other countries across the world that he visited on his extensive travels. Most of these figures will be unknown in the UK—and certainly within our constituency.

The author has also included individuals known for work outside Nigeria. Paul Jinadu was one of the pioneers of African Pentecostal churches in Britain. As an appendix he includes an account and analysis of the life and work of Daniels Ekarte (*ca* 1890-1964), a Nigerian who founded The African Churches Mission in Toxteth, Liverpool, in 1931. There is one very brief chapter on the remarkable work of Sunday Adelaja in Kiev, Ukraine.

From the ranks of these churches and others, a remarkable church-planting movement has been witnessed in recent decades in numerous countries including our own. This book is the first volume telling their stories and relating their testimonies to the wider church scene at the time. It is written in a popular style. One minor error—on p138, Mary Slessor was sent out by the United Presbyterian Church, later part of the

United Free Church, not the Free Church of Scotland. I look forward to the second volume.

When I pray, what does God do?

David Wilkinson

Monarch 2015

Reviewer: Sally Nelson

In the average Christian bookshop (yes, I know it is an at-risk species) there will be many books available on prayer. Some are about the many possible ways of praying—from *lectio divina* to speaking in tongues. Some give prayers for us to use. Others encourage us to pray that we might see results, or encourage us in our spirituality. A far smaller selection of accessibly written books is devoted to what we might call the theology of prayer—usually such volumes are of the 'dusty tome' variety. Isn't it odd that we engage in this activity so frequently as Christians but often have quite a poor knowledge of what we do?

Sooner or later, someone will ask YOU—the minister, the one paid to have a hotline to heaven—this very question: when I pray, what does God do? Or variations on the theme.

What is prayer for? Is it to change God's mind? Is it because he needs

our opinions or information to fill him in about what is happening on the earth? Or because, like a trendy parent, he wants us to be involved in the big decisions? It isn't long before thinking about prayer becomes thinking about the God-world relationship, becomes thinking about the kind of God we believe in.

David Wilkinson is a Methodist minister, a physicist and a theologian and has thought very clearly about all the above. He brings to this exploration of prayer his experience as a minister, his knowledge of science, and his theological rigour to produce a readable and informative account that would be of value to any Christian. We are called to pray—and Wilkinson takes that call very seriously, examining closely what the scriptures say to us and holding human experience beside his exegesis.

How does God make things happen? Wilkinson looks at and critiques all the main models—deism, classical theism, open theism, process thought, and also how Newtonian science, quantum mechanics and chaos theory might offer insights to us humans, who would try to think God's thoughts after him.

He also asks how we should pray: how often, in what manner, and so on. Why do so many Christians who clearly love the Lord struggle to pray? Coming full

circle, Wilkinson concludes that prayer is not in fact about what God might do (notwithstanding the title of the book). It is about our relationship with him in the project of life.

This well written and enjoyable book delivers a great deal of clear thinking about science and theology and will gently challenge the simplistic ideas of prayer with which many Christians have grown up, offering a deeper and more mature understanding of what prayer is for. Great for ministers looking for answers, church members with questions, students with essays to write. Read it alongside Rob Ellis's *Answering God*, which will take you deeper into some of the same theological ground.

1 Samuel for you

Tim Chester

The Good Book Company, 2014

Reviewer: Martin Gillard

This book came at just the right time, as I was beginning a preaching series on the life of Samuel and the theme of *Listening to God*. It became a regular reference point alongside my other commentaries as I found its insights useful, explanations helpful, and applications effective for my sermon preparation. If you are thinking of preaching on 1 Samuel, the ~~34~~ life of

Samuel, Saul or the early life of David, this commentary is well worth using.

The aim of the series is to be Bible-centred, Christ-glorifying, relevant and readable. The front cover explains that this commentary and others in the series (*Judges for you, Romans for you, etc*) are for Christians to read, feed and lead. Read it to understand the Bible book better, feed on it as an aid for personal devotions or sermon preparation, and lead with it in the church through preaching or small group Bible study. It is effective in all three areas.

For me the very slight weakness of this book is that occasionally it struggles between being a devotional or an expositional commentary. Some parts of 1 Samuel are dealt with as part of larger sections where the overarching theme is explained, but at the cost of some of the important points in the smaller section. While the exposition throughout is very good, on some occasions it does lean gently to the devotional.

If I were to compare the genre of the commentary, I would liken it to the older William Barclay or Warren Wiersbe style, or to the more recent Tom Wright. There is a short but helpful appendix linking the Psalms to 1 Samuel, but only a brief bibliography and simple glossary.

The best thing was that Tim Chester brought out clearly and regularly the link between the message and meaning of 1 Samuel and our understanding of the messianic claims and character of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will join the other commentaries on my shelves.

Being human: how to become the person you were meant to be

Steve Chalke

Hodder & Stoughton 2015

Reviewer: John Goddard

This is a fascinating exploration of how the story we base our lives on shapes the people we become. 'Each and every one of us lives in search of a convincing story that explains to us who we are; an overarching narrative that supplies us with a sense of worth and direction; a sense of purpose that wakes us up.'

This book will make sense to many middle-aged church leaders like myself, but perhaps its true worth is in the message it might bring to young people in Oasis Academies and church youth clubs, comfortable families and challenging homes.

Steve Chalke shares stories about the central story that has formed and focused his life. He writes of how he

became a Christian as a teenager, and how the Jesus story has shaped and formed him and his work. He writes about the lives we lead in the light of the God who made us and who invites us into meaningful relationships with God and one another. In the process he does challenge some of the assumptions that have characterised some parts of the Christian church, but he does so with intelligence and respect. Chalke's vision of being human—that is, being truly human—revolves around understanding that God is love, and that this love of God is truly revealed in Jesus the Christ.

Making the story of Jesus the story that you live by means '...giving your life to the story that at the very heart of the universe is a God of love who is on the side of all those who are oppressed and forgotten, who feel insignificant and powerless, and who calls us to join in the revolutionary movement to bring hope and real liberation to all.'

I initially reviewed this book on Amazon (having read the Kindle edition). I was undecided as to whether to give *Being human* an Amazon 4 star (I like it) rating, or the full 5 star (I love it), and I was

probably overly generous. There were many moments when I wanted him to go deeper and unpack things further, but I can get that elsewhere. By keeping the chapters short and punchy I think Chalke has ensured that this book is able to be read by a much wider audience. And if just a few readers find themselves entering in to this new understanding of their story, and find themselves offering as much hope, inspiration and challenge as the author has offered, then this will be worthy of far more than 5 stars!

What will Steve Chalke's fellow Baptist ministers make of this book? Hackneyed clichés about Marmite are marching across my mind, but they probably relate more to Steve himself rather than to this slim little book. But at risk of repeating myself, I don't think this book was written for us. However, I might be able to think of several people I should pass a copy on to...

'That's our job—our mission, should we choose to accept it—to punch holes in the darkness of poverty, of prejudice, of loneliness, of intolerance, of rejection, and of hatred; to follow Christ and work with God as agents of change.'

