

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Fraternal / Baptist Ministers Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bmj-06.php

**the baptist ministers'
journal**

January 2016 volume 329

Desert island books

Keith Jones

IGNITE ministry report

Phil Jump

Churches Together 2015

Alison Griffiths

Trident and disarmament

Stuart & Jodie Dennis

An African Baptist

Israel Olofinjana

...plus comments, reviews, settlements

**the baptist ministers’
journal**

January 2016, vol 329, ISSN 0968-2406

the baptist ministers’ journal© is the journal of the
Baptist Ministers’ Fellowship

useful contact details are listed inside the
front and back covers

(all service to the Fellowship is honorary)

www.bmf-uk.org

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or the editorial board. Copyright of individual articles normally rests with the author(s). Any request to reproduce an article will be referred to the author(s). We expect *bmj* to be acknowledged when an article is reproduced.

printed by Keenan Print (keenanprint@btconnect.com)

From the editor

Did he or didn't he?

I have just heard the story of Henry Tandey, which I guess many of you will know. Tandey was the most decorated soldier of WW1, winning the Military Medal and the Victoria Cross for extreme bravery.

The story goes that, towards the end of the war in 1918, Tandey spared some wounded German soldiers in Menin, France. In 1938, when Chamberlain went to Germany to sign the Munich agreement, Hitler pointed to a painting on his wall showing the Menin scene and identified Tandey, a subject of the painting, as the man who had spared his life.

Although this story hit the British newspapers, Tandey was never vilified for potentially changing the history of the world (Hitler was unknown in 1918 anyway). In an interesting spin, Tandey's biographer, David Johnson, believes that the story is not even true—arguing that Hitler made it up as part of his propaganda campaign. Tandey himself seems to have had doubts about the identity of the man he spared.

There are thus two ways to change the course of history. One is to undertake an act that later acquires greater significance than we can ever have imagined. The other is to tell the story of that act with passion.

Did he or didn't he? More appositely: did I or didn't I? A new year gives me time to reflect on the things I have done and not done; the stories I have told and not told.

People may look at Jesus and say: was he or wasn't he? We believe he WAS, but perhaps even more powerfully, we tell the story that he WAS. In 2016 may that story be powerfully in our hearts, and shape our lives. SN

Our book review editor, John Goddard, is stepping down because of church commitments. We thank John for his creative engagement with the section, and bless him on his way. WELCOME to Michael Peat, who has agreed to take over.

Keith Jones'

Desert island books



According to the Myers Briggs Type Indicator of personality, I am basically an introvert—even though I have spent the bulk of my active life in intense engagement with people, especially those engaged in working at the future of the church and doing so in diverse backgrounds and situations.

From being born and bred in the confined world of Yorkshire I have, perforce, by the Spirit of God, been thrust into a much wider world of European and Baptist World Alliance life, which has changed so many of my perspectives on the work of the church and generally on issues in life and on my Christian discipleship. I now find myself back and domiciled in my home city, Bradford (according to the EU, the youngest city in the EU), and in a position to reflect on over 40 years of actual engagement in Christian mission and ministry.

To select three books out of that cosmopolitan experience is not easy. Two rooms of my current home, plus the vestry at Shipley Baptist Church, house my reduced library (50% of my original library?), but I do not want to incur the wrath of the editor of *bmj* by not keeping within her constraints, so here goes.

I start with a thick tomb, *Europe—a history*, by Norman Davies. In my second year at grammar school in Bradford I was taught to learn the names and dates of the kings and queens of England which was, according to my teacher, the foundation of civilised life. Later, doing my GCEs, I was introduced to *Revolution, reaction and reform*, by my then history teacher, David G. Wright, who later became Professor of History at the University of Huddersfield. David Wright turned me from a dates and monarchs student into an events and grand scenario student, preparing me, though neither he nor I knew that then, for my sojourn in Prague and travelling to the countless European nations about whom Norman Davies writes so eloquently.

Europe—a history is a great attempt to unravel the history of this European peninsula by paying proper acknowledgement not only to the 'big' events of the past 2000 years, but to many of the smaller and often ignored (at least by we British) events. This amazing book would allow me to reflect on the landscape of Europe and its peoples and to draw together strands in my own diverse thinking and visits within the panorama of European

life, especially Baptist Christian life, of which I have been a part. He names so many places I have passed through on night trains or glimpsed in a passing, fleeting moment and wondered about and longed to revisit.

May I offer a handful of examples? In the early 1990s I preached in Banska Bystrica in Slovakia. I had to make a late night bus journey in the middle of winter to Bratislava to connect with a colleague. The bus heating did not work, so I spent most of the cold, icy, night shivering. I recall stopping at the bus station in Nitra. There was a castle on top of a hill there. Norman Davies brings this place to light for me. He records that in the 9th century, on the hillside that I saw on a dark November night, a church was consecrated and Christianity moved northward into upper Europe (Davies, p321).

Or, I think of Cyril and Methodius, Apostles to the Slavs, who are especially remembered with a public holiday in Bohemia. They came from the Christian monastery near Lake Ochrid, Macedonia. An area of amazing beauty—and to me the monastery remains a clear image in my mind with its multiple baptistries for the immersion of the believers.

Davies, again will transport me to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the amazing reconstructed fort at Trakai from which much of Europe was ruled in centuries past, all the while reminding me that I am born and bred a European and have had the privilege of growing up and experiencing the Peninsula of Europe which has contributed so much to the cultural, artistic, theological and intellectual life of the world. If it wasn't until the 1300s that Christianity came to Lithuania Major, it always reminds me of Lithuania Minor, part of the old eastern Prussia and the amazing port city of Klaipeda (Memel) where baptistic Christianity took root and expanded into what today we call Poland, Lithuania and Belarus.

I can reflect on the
brothers and sisters
of the past who
struggled to share
the gospel

In all of these places I have been privileged to preach in my life and have opportunity to pause and reflect on those sisters and brothers of the past who struggled against almost insurmountable odds to share the gospel. Here, reading Norman Davies will place these stories in context, together with the added joys of the panels within the text which provide background thoughts on issues as diverse as Abkazia and Taizé.

Davies talks about Huldrych Zwingli on p488, and this leads me into reflection on baptistic theology in the light of those who moved beyond Zwingli to an anabaptistic position, such as Balthasar Hubmaier. While I served as

Deputy General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Brian Haymes suggested I ought to think about reading *Ethics*, the first of a three-volume systematic theology by Jim McClendon of Fuller Seminary, Pasadena. The Anabaptist teaching of Hubmaier seemed to come into contemporary relevance as I read McClendon.

A group of us invited Jim to visit the UK in the 1990s and take seminars in our colleges and at Didcot. What he said made great sense to me and so I would want to take with me to my desert island his combined three volume systematic theology—*Ethics, Doctrine, Witness*—to go on helping me reflect on Christian theology and our worship and mission in this postmodern era. Jim McClendon became a dear friend. His widow, Nancey Murphy, no mean philosophical theologian, was a great help to us at IBTS. We often shared an evening out at a local hostelry discussing theology and ethics! Re-reading Jim's words will surely refine my perspective on Christian believing. It will help, also, as I reflect on his widow Nancey's essays on non-reductive physicalism.

And for my third book (assuming Baylor University Press have produced a one-volume McClendon, as they surely ought!) I turn to Komensky (John Comenius), often remembered as the great educational scholar of the Unitas Fraterium (known in the UK as the Moravian Church) and his classic, *The labyrinth of the world and the paradise of the heart*. I confess I was introduced to Comenius first through a doctoral student at IBTS, Prague, who wanted to extract and remove Jan Komensky from the straitjacket of pedagogical studies in eastern Europe to the arena of spiritual life and reflection and explore his spiritual dimension.

Following our IBTS student, Jan Habl, helped me to encounter the 'Bunyan' of the Unitas Fraterum, the Bohemian Brotherhood. In this work we have a similar journey to that expounded by Bunyan, but one which comes to me with fresh life and relevance. This would be my devotional companion on the desert island.

So, you will see, 15 years in Prague have hopefully made me a true European. I believe I could be sustained on a desert island reflecting on our European history with Norman Davis, trying to sort out my systematic theology with Jim McClendon and engaging in my discipleship journey with Jan Komenius.

A luxury? Why, a 00 model railway layout, solar powered, with roadways on which in-scale Bradford City Transport buses could be placed.

Keith G. Jones has held many significant posts within the denomination, most recently Rector at IBTS (Prague 1998- 2013). He is now 'retired' and serves as Team Enabler, Shipley Baptist Church.

IGNITE unpacked

The *bmj* interviews Phil Jump

bmj: What prompted the IGNITE process?

PJ: There are so many answers to that question that it's hard to know where to begin. One key task within the Futures Process was to consider how and where we should deploy our shared resources; those who looked at the area of ministry concluded that this could not be properly done without asking some deeper and more searching questions about how we understand and enable ministry in our churches more generally. This very much resonated with my own experience as a Regional Minister—not only was I working with people who felt that their particular ministry calling did not seem to be appreciated and embraced by our prevailing structures, but I was also serving churches who either could not afford ministry in the way that we commonly understand it, or indeed were asking whether the traditional role of minister best served their missional needs and vision.

At the time, a review of funding and formation of ministry was already underway, and much of the work that went into that review has been picked up and developed by IGNITE, as have quite a few other reports and papers that have been produced over recent years. IGNITE was formally commissioned as a prerequisite for the appointment of a new Ministries Team Leader. The Baptist Steering Group felt it was important to have a clear vision for the direction and purpose of the team in the coming decades, before appointing someone to lead it.

bmj: Who was represented on the group?

PJ: One of the positive changes that I would want to celebrate is that people have been recruited for the IGNITE project, along with others that have recently been commissioned, through an open process of application. I have to be honest therefore and say that the team was put together, not so much as a representative body, but seeking to draw together the right set of skills and experience for the job. This has included a professional researcher and a Newly Accredited

does the
expected role of
the minister
serve the mission
of the churches?

Minister with previous experience in the selection and development of military pilots. If we seek to set up bodies that are always ‘representative’, I fear we will never completely succeed—the only person who can truly represent my views and perspectives is me—and we can’t put everyone on every council and committee. I guess that not everyone will agree with that, but a good consultation should never be contained by the views of the people who enable it—their job is to find out what others think, and that’s what we’ve tried to do.

We set out therefore to be ‘consultative’ rather than representative and worked hard not only to invite open comment and reflection through the ‘share your story’ initiative, but were proactive in engaging various individuals and groups. We were also able to draw on consultations that had already solicited thousands of responses like the Futures Process, the Formation and Funding consultation *etc.* Much of what we did was to get involved in existing gatherings such as the Newly Accredited Ministers’ conference, or the regular meeting of College Principals—at other times it meant setting up meetings with people who were involved in specific tasks and projects. We were also given time at BU Council and the Baptist Assembly, so were able to draw in quite a lot of people there. Some Associations have encouraged local ministers’ groups to reflect on the IGNITE process and have fed back the thinking that has emerged. I must admit that at times I was disappointed at how hard we had to work to engage people—some who can be quite vociferous on the public airwaves turn out to be quite hard to get a response from when they have the chance to contribute to change.

bmj: In talking to chaplains and other specialist ministers, some have said that they have sometimes felt as if their role was not really considered to be ‘proper’ ministry! Could you say something about the breadth of ministries within our Baptist community today?

PJ: I find that sad, and I think we need to ask some hard questions about why that was, but I would also say that SOMETIMES this is more a matter of perception than reality. It is an important point though, and I do think that the Baptist contribution to chaplaincy has grown considerably in the last decade or so. When I led my first Ministers’ Conference in NWBA (2002) I was very conscious of the one healthcare chaplain who was there, and was at pains to make sure he was included—at some of our more recent gatherings, those who are in various ‘specialist’ ministries have almost outnumbered those in what we might call ‘traditional pastorates’.

I would say two things in response though—the first is that I do feel we are often better at embracing this breadth of ministry than we appear to be. I think this is part of the *raison d’etre* of IGNITE; while our Union has sought to embrace and affirm

various specialist ministries, we have tended to be slower in adjusting our processes and language to reflect this. In consequence, I think people can often be left feeling un-affirmed because this can create a sense of them being 'awkward', when in reality we want to celebrate what they are doing.

But I would also say that this reality was very much in our sights as the IGNITE proposals began to take shape. At the heart of these is what we are calling the Marks of Ministry. This represents a very deliberate shift away from defining ministry in the language of a 'job to be done' towards one of 'a way of doing things'. We have offered a first outline of what we think the Marks of Ministry might look like, and I would invite people to engage with that and help us to refine it—but to be honest I would not be that concerned if people threw it in the bin and re-wrote them. What I am much more concerned to preserve is the concept—defining ministry by the imprint that an individual makes in a variety of contexts and roles, rather than restricting it to any set of immediate circumstances.

bmj: How are these ministries recognised and supported?

PJ: At the end of the day we are a covenant community; we often speak strongly against forms of hierarchy. I support that, but we have to recognise that with this comes the responsibility of recognising, supporting and caring for one another. We have an amazing group of people within my own Association who are involved in what might be called specialist or emerging ministries. We invest a fair bit of time in supporting them, but they also invest a fair bit of time and energy in supporting the work of the wider Baptist community. Their recognition and support often comes by them visiting other congregations and simply telling their stories—this not only gathers support around their ministry, but can often challenge more 'settled' churches to think in new ways about their own engagement in God's mission.

The Marks of Ministry seek to provide a template that will recognise and affirm ministry in a broad variety of contexts, but I hope that it will encourage people to engage with and value their Baptist Identity too.

bmj: Does IGNITE recommend any significant changes to the formation and recognition of ministers?

PJ: I guess it depends on what you mean by significant. One of the startling statistics that we uncovered is that over half of our churches receive ministry and leadership that is not offered by someone who has become a minister through what we might call the 'traditional route' of an Association MR, college formation and settlement. So before we speak of change, I think we need to take a reality check and recognise the

huge diversity in the ways in which churches receive leadership and ministry already. Rather than changing anything, the key thrust of IGNITE is to ask how we can better embrace and support what is happening already.

But even within our established patterns of formation, one thing that struck us again and again is that once you get below the surface there is immense variety, flexibility and creativity in the way that we go about this. But I admit too that this is often not how things appear. I have half-joked that 90% of what the IGNITE report contains is already happening—the key point is that not everyone is doing it, or we’re not telling anyone we’re doing it. I think we have to be honest and say that this in turn has led to a degree of inconsistency in some areas, so redefining ministry around the existing diversity and flexibility will, I hope, lead to a greater sense of consistency and affirmation.

One example of this in practice, is the suggestion that we work with colleges to develop what we are calling Formation Partnerships (if anyone can think of a better title please let us know). At this stage it is very much exploratory, but we are suggesting it because we would argue that in reality, this is what they already are. All of our colleges collaborate with local churches, Associations and mission partners to offer a lot more than just ‘training’—this is why we call it formation. What IGNITE seeks to do is provide a foundation for even greater working together, which in turn would make it easier to provide, for example, portfolio based routes into ministry, or for Associations to draw on some of the ministry training modules to equip church leaders who are doing a really important job in their local context, but are unlikely to seek formal recognition or accreditation. I think people are often disinclined to explore such avenues because they don’t realise it’s possible.

bmj: What impact might there be on churches, associations, and Union?

PJ: I hope that the biggest impact on our churches is that it enables them to experience ministry that in turn helps them develop as effective and healthy missional communities. I want it to inspire and release people to engage in new expressions of ministry that are empowered and not constrained by established structures, and enable them to engage in new and effective forms of mission. For this to happen there needs to be a balance of freedom and flexibility on the one hand, but support and accountability on the other. I would not be so arrogant as to assume that IGNITE offers that in one sweep, but it can begin conversations, inspire creative thinking and help us to explore new horizons together. Frankly, if IGNITE fails to achieve that in the long term, it has been an abject failure.

I realise that this might feel a long way from a set of proposals around, for example, making better use of IT in supporting ministers, but it is an end we must not lose sight

of. If smoother and more effective information management releases Regional Ministers to invest more time in supporting local churches in mission, it is a worthwhile exercise—more worthwhile, dare I say, than writing an inspirational report saying how important apostolic missional leadership is, but then weighing people down with work that prevents them from offering it.

I think we have to face reality. We are in a season right now where many of our churches are going to struggle to afford ministry as we have traditionally offered it. We are faced with a choice—we either try to hang on to things as they are, using what resources we have to ‘keep the show on the road’ and watch many of those churches struggle and decline, or we embrace the situation, find new ways of providing missional leadership alongside more established patterns, and believe that with time those churches begin to grow and flourish again. This is likely not simply to require new ways of supporting ministry, but also re-defining in some contexts what ministry is. I know that not everyone in our Baptist community likes the word ‘leadership’ but we are unashamedly proposing that the way forward includes a clear investment in leadership—leadership as WE define and understand it, recognising that some expressions of leadership are alien to our understanding of the local church as self-determining community of believers. This includes proposals to envision, train and equip a cohort of ministers with particular skills in transition and management of change; able to get alongside other local leaders, mentoring and supporting them to take their churches forward in mission.

This might require us all to make some painful sacrifices in the short-term, but I do not apologise that the emphasis of the IGNITE report is on providing the ministry that our churches and our mission context needs, not developing a Union that serves the needs of ministers. That might make demands of all of us, but I think that’s what it means to be a Gospel people.

bmj: What do you think Baptist church life will look like in 25 years from now?

PJ: That’s a very dangerous question to ask, and one that we have deliberately sought to avoid. Of course I could offer some speculative answers, but the simple truth is that we haven’t got a clue—largely because we haven’t got a clue what British society will be like in 25 years’ time. I think there is a real danger when initiatives like IGNITE try to predict the future and then devise policy and strategy in the light of those predictions—that feels to me like a sure and certain way of coming up with something that within a decade just won’t be fit for purpose—the world is just too uncertain for that. What we have tried to do is set up a way of doing things that is flexible and can anticipate and cope with change. So for example, one proposal is for us to appoint a Coordinator for Training and Formation—someone who can be constantly scanning

the horizon, engaging with the reality of experience and working with colleges, associations and other partners to continually develop our approaches to leadership and ministry. Right now I think that having good response mechanisms is more important than trying to second-guess what the future holds.

bmj: What would you like people to do with the IGNITE report?

PJ: Read it, read it carefully and read it with an openness to God. I am sure that we haven't got everything right, and it can only benefit from informed and considered input from across our Baptist community. So I would encourage people to offer their feedback, but also ask 'how can this enable our church to fulfil its vision?' IGNITE cannot do that for them, but it can help create an environment where people can do it themselves, and even prompt them to support others in their shared endeavours.

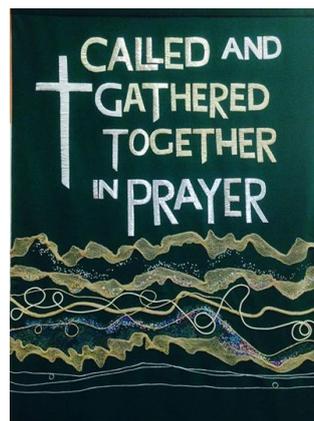
Phil Jump is Regional Team Leader of NWBA and coordinated the IGNITE group.

Churches Together 2015

by Alison Griffiths

Unity is not important, it is indispensable (Justin Welby)

This banner stood at the front of the room during the conference, reminding us of the basis of our gathering: prayer being a dynamic conversation with our Father in which all his children participate. The Pentecostal bishop who presided over the first meeting stressed the need to gather to seek the face of Christ together through prayer and listening to God and each other. This is a familiar pattern of our gathering as Baptists but to witness this on a grander scale embraced by seemingly diverse traditions, was nothing short of inspirational.



Although I have been involved ecumenically for most of my life, I was unprepared for the sheer number of other traditions represented. My view of the church underwent a considerable review. It is simply far bigger and more complex than I had realised! When the Baptists met as a group halfway through the conference, it appeared I was not the only one to be taken aback by the diversity of the church of which we are but a very small part. Churches Together in England has 43 member churches and six presidents, representing the major Christian traditions of the member churches.

The value of differences

As in any church meeting where there are disagreements or misunderstandings, it wasn't without some cost to the participants. To listen as fellow Christians defend their viewpoints is uncomfortable, because it exposes your own tradition to scrutiny and challenges your thinking to go deeper. As well as the formal group discussions, some of the best conversations occurred over meals, waiting for the next session or while wandering from one seminar to the next. I recall talking about the sacrament of communion with a Lutheran minister: can a group of teenagers huddled together in their tent late at night at a festival really celebrate the eucharist with the jelly babies and coca cola they have to hand? One Roman Catholic shared his journey with me: he had left the Anglican church just as he was to be ordained as a priest. In one small group I was surprised by a Pentecostal bishop who articulated exactly how God had challenged him, because I had felt challenged in the same way. These are just snapshots of the conversations that took place. The constant rumble of noise in the dining hall and lounge demonstrated that our diverse church has a lot to say. Everywhere there were small knots of people in deep conversation. There was also a lot of laughter.

In some ways I found I connected more easily with Christians from other traditions than my own. For example, my view of communion is far more sacramental than some of my fellow Baptists, and I would never identify as 'Baptist' before 'Christian'. Having experienced the wrench of leaving a church I love so that I can minister in another because of my convictions, I empathised with the Roman Catholic deacon who had had to leave the church he had loved upon realising he belonged in another tradition. I found more grace and concern for my own ministry situation in conversations with an Anglican dean and Salvation Army officer than I have found in my own tradition. An English Methodist minister shared how her call to ministry was confirmed by a Russian Orthodox priest in Russia and how her soul is stirred by their icons and worship. There is beauty here for her, but also pain, because Methodism is considered to be a cult by many Russians.

This sense of deep attraction and yet deeper division seems a common feature of the ecumenical life. When we speak with one another and share our hearts, the barriers feel artificial, erected wrongly in previous times which can only provoke the question: when will they come down?

Each president spoke briefly to introduce his/her tradition, but the newest presidents from the Pentecostal and Orthodox churches shared in greater depth to aid our understanding of one another through written papers, worship and presentations. The Very Rev Protospesbyter John Nankivel from the Orthodox Church said that future priorities included the need to break out of the tribalism which affects all of us. Statements are made between different traditions but nothing concrete actually happens—our mentality has to change. General Bishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria reminded us that the Christians in the Middle East have been drastically reduced in recent years, many of these Christians are from the Orthodox tradition and we need to pray for the one apostolic church.

For evangelicals there was a clear reminder and justified rebuke that Europe is not unreached as is so often claimed. There are already churches there and our oneness in Christ should bring us together. The Orthodox ended with a plea to continue the conversation. It was clear they felt the pain of the divided church deeply.

Simo Frestadius, Academic Dean of Regents Theological College, said that Pentecostals saw themselves as preaching the authentic gospel from the earliest traditions and at their heart were biblical pragmatists. Jesus Christ is always at the centre of Pentecostalism and supernatural aspect of faith is vital. The expectation of a personal encounter with Jesus as saviour, healer, the coming king, sanctifier and baptiser in the Holy Spirit is classical Pentecostalism even though there are many different strands of this tradition.

When we
share our
hearts, the
barriers feel
artificial...

Pentecostals discern beliefs and practice from the biblical texts but also want to see how they work in practice. Although they can be quite passionate about their structures they will contextualise their practice. The Rev Dr David Muir, lecturer at Roehampton University, spoke of his love of scripture and belief that Pentecostalism, if it returned to its roots, could be instrumental in healing racism in the UK. Pentecostalism was all about celebrating life in Christ and the testimony of transformation.

Diverse styles of worship, liturgy, practice and vocabulary can mask common ground and when we take the time to dig beneath these styles and preferences we can discover unexpected similarities.

The Orthodox priests led us in morning worship and then explained their worship had to involve all the senses as we are physical beings as well as spiritual: hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching. Initially I felt challenged, because in my own tradition the emphasis is usually on the spiritual; but when the Pentecostals led us in worship I noticed we all stood, some people with hands outstretched and I realised that we also expect our bodies to be involved. We do not cross ourselves repeatedly to remind and demonstrate that all our lives are under the cross of Christ as the Orthodox do, but we usually stand to sing, sometimes dance or kneel and we consume bread and wine, light candles and use art. We may not use incense but I like to use freshly baked bread when celebrating communion, the smell when it's torn reminding me of the promise of good food that satisfies and nourishes the body. At times I invite those gathered to smell the bread as they take communion. It was enlightening to recognise some things we do instinctively have a theological basis rather than being the result of mere cultural style or personal preference. I felt enriched and enhanced by the insights of the Orthodox Church.

The celebration of diversity was particularly helpful to grasp. The pursuit of unity is not a 'free for all'. We gather around the person of Jesus and it is in our diverse unity we are a more perfect reflection of him. Christians often assume that unity means uniformity, but this is not on the ecumenical agenda and maybe this point needs to be emphasised more. The focus is on enjoying and appreciating the diversity of the family of God which is the church.

If we remember how Paul compares the church to a body, this makes sense. We don't expect everyone to be the same within our local church so why would the wider church be any different? The varying emphasis put on doctrines, practices and beliefs are all needed to reflect the God we worship. How can any single tradition be experienced or insightful enough to grasp all that there is of the nature of God? It is only when all the different understandings and experiences of God are gathered together that we are confronted with a bigger, more gloriously multifaceted God than we could possibly see by ourselves. Understanding, and even more importantly, appreciating, other Christian traditions leads to the enlargement of our own vision and deepens our appreciation of our creator and Lord.

In engaging with other Christian traditions we learn to handle our particular way of being church with more care, asking searching questions of our practice and belief. Denominational pride is a stumbling block: accepting that we have much to learn from

other Christian traditions is not always an easy thing to do. That it can be exceptionally uncomfortable is no reason to duck the challenge nor is a new obstacle to unity. The Apostle Paul was well aware of how we should approach each other:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...(Eph 4:1-3)

My initial impression of the biggest stumbling block to genuine unity is our unwillingness to adopt an attitude of humility and gentleness to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Little wonder we find this so difficult and countless Christians have shied away from it.

Have we allowed the church of Jesus Christ to become contaminated by our culture and worldly attitudes? When we look at our divisions we can only say 'Yes!' We ape the world when we insist that only our way is the right way, that we can keep our distance, practice tolerance when we should have genuine respect for each other, when we judge another's doctrine insisting on our 'truth' being dominant, when we make secondary issues primary ones and when we insist we have a monopoly on truth, leaving no room for dissent and doubt. When we can only see through a glass darkly (1 Cor 13:12) we should not lightly claim to have the clearest perspective.

It was a privilege to have worshipped and prayed with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ for that short time at the Forum—a promise of the banquet to come in which we will all sit at the same table and share the feast. We pray 'may your kingdom come'—the unity of the body of Christ now is a foretaste of the kingdom that is and will be. When David Cornick, the General Secretary of Churches Together in England, brought the gathering to a close he emphasised that unity is only achieved while walking together and it is cyclical: each generation has to grasp it anew.

What was impressed on me as I left the conference is that a pursuit of unity demands that we are willing to be moved by the Spirit ourselves—transformed by the Spirit into people who will pursue peace, who refuse to accept that there are boundaries to our traditions and who will make the necessary sacrifices for a diverse unity to be a regular, genuine and visible reality. It demands that we work for it. Unity starts with us—we have experienced divorce and the work of reconciliation has started. As Alison Gelder, a Roman Catholic delegate put it, somehow we must not let go of the vision of unity but in the meantime, we must find a way of living in the mess.

Alison Griffiths is minister of Lydney Baptist Church.

Trident and disarmament

by Stuart & Jodie Dennis

Recently we watched the 1983 film *WarGames*, in which a teenager inadvertently causes a military computer to play a ‘game’ of global thermonuclear war. In the last tense minutes of the film, as the computer is searching for missile launch codes, it simultaneously evaluates all the possible scenarios and outcomes of a nuclear war. Just in time, the computer learns that there will be no winner, doesn’t launch the missiles, and concludes that the only winning move is not to play. It’s a conclusion with which it is difficult to disagree! We know there will be no winner in a global nuclear war, and we know it’s a ‘game’ we never want to play. So, why isn’t this conclusion enough motivation for us to get rid of our nuclear weapons?

Jodie: Recently, nuclear defence has been in the news a lot. The hiatus surrounding Jeremy Corbyn’s declaration that he wouldn’t push the button and the upcoming renewal of Trident, due in 2016, mean that we’ve heard a lot about the subject. It feels like an important issue and I think I should get a better grip on what I really know and understand about it? Stuart is happy to talk and debate on disarmament and is very patient with my ‘silly’ questions! As a member of CND he’s committed to disarmament and scrapping Trident. He’s been arrested at Faslane for peaceful protesting and, on a more domestic level, we even have Bin Trident stickers on our wheelie bins!

Stuart: Hopefully those stickers will get people in our street thinking. It’s important to keep the issue on the radar, otherwise, the replacement of Trident will creep up on us and it’ll be too late.

Jodie: It feels like a very personal issue for you, why?

Stuart: When I was younger the song *Mutually assured destruction* by the heavy rock group Gillan got me thinking about the threat of nuclear war and I



realised that it wasn't something I ever wanted to see happen.

Jodie: I can't disagree with that! At school in the 80s we watched the film *Threads*, learnt how to make a shelter, stockpile food, and put sticky tape around the windows. Just in case! Back then I probably thought that, even though nuclear war and the resulting fallout would be horrific, if other countries had the weapons then we should have them too. I could have made a case for multilateral disarmament, but CND and the idea of unilateral disarmament made me feel uneasy. I think that is still my standpoint today: no-one should have nuclear weapons, but I'm hesitant about a unilateral move. In principal disarmament seems like the right thing to do, but I feel unsure about committing to a unilateral decision.

I've listened to a few committed campaigners and their main argument is always to hold up Sweden and South Africa as role models. Both countries have phased out nuclear weapons and come to no harm. But, my worry is that the UK is not like Sweden or South Africa! I don't think we can ignore the fact that globally our historical context is very different: we have an imperial, colonial past which affects how other countries relate to us. I don't think we can ignore our present participation in conflict alongside the US and others: our current military activities affect how people view us, particularly those in the Arab world. We are a bit higher up on the global hit list than Sweden or South Africa. So, how else can you persuade me that we shouldn't replace Trident and that unilateral disarmament is a good idea?

Stuart: Up front let's make it clear that renewal of Trident and unilateral disarmament are two separate issues. Let's talk about disarmament first, and come back to the renewal of Trident.

For me, as a Christian, disarmament is a theological and moral issue. My position is nicely summed up by the Iona Community's Justice, peace and integrity of creation statement:

The use or threatened use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction is theologically and morally indefensible and that opposition to their existence is an imperative of the Christian faith.

There are no circumstances in which we could use nuclear weapons with any just or moral integrity. Who would really want to press the button? Who would really want to cause civilian collateral damage on such a massive scale, as well as such huge environmental destruction. Today's warheads are each seven times more destructive than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima which annihilated 140,000 people. And there are up to 40 warheads per submarine.

Jodie: No disagreement from me on the moral issue, but to ask the silly question: why is it theologically indefensible?

Stuart: My theology tells me that God is the God of life: a God of love, peace, reconciliation and justice. If that's what I believe about God how can I possibly think that God would endorse nuclear weapons, their use or possession! David Cameron has talked about Trident as the ultimate insurance policy. To me this smacks of idolatry, trusting in Trident for our ultimate security. I have a picture in my mind of us all bowing down to Trident like Israelites bowing down to a golden calf. It's about what's going on in your heart towards God and your fellow human beings. Are we in our hearts committing mass murder by keeping missiles which allow us to contemplate the possibility?

Jodie: What about keeping it just as a deterrent—surely the ambiguity is keeping us safe?

Stuart: The reality is that nuclear weapons aren't a deterrent in the way that perhaps they were in the past. Things have changed since the cold war years and the 80s when you watched *Threads*! Today, there is little or no threat from other countries with nuclear capacity. They know the destruction that would be caused and have similar moral dilemmas to those we are discussing. Realistically I don't think that any modern world leader is going to push the button—so we don't need our weapons to deter them. I would say that while politicians tell us that nuclear weapons are a deterrent and good for our national security, what they really keep them for is status: Trident is a status symbol which gives us a position at the top table of the security council.

Jodie: I agree that other countries aren't so much of a threat these days—but what about the threat from terrorism, which is very real?

Stuart: As you mentioned, when you were comparing the UK to Sweden or South Africa, our international activities put us higher up on the global hit list. And, as you say, that threat comes from terrorism. This is a threat which will not be deterred by our possession of nuclear weapons; having nuclear weapons will not keep us safe from an attack by Islamic extremists. If groups like ISIS get hold of nuclear weapons they will use them. Nuclear terrorism is a frightening thought which surely strengthens the case for the abolition of nuclear weapons on a global scale. If there is no deterrent in having nuclear weapons and, if we might even be safer by dismantling our missiles, then not replacing Trident would be a start.

Jodie: Back to Trident.

Stuart: Yes. In 2016 our MPs will be voting on the replacement of Trident. Therefore, we currently have a window of opportunity to campaign against Trident and to lobby parliament to make our concerns known. Last week I met with our local MP and, although he and I disagree on the issue, he knows that a member of his constituency considers the non-replacement of Trident to be important.

Jodie: Why is it a separate issue to disarmament?

Stuart: I can see that it would be possible to want to keep nuclear weapons but not to renew Trident at this time. The economic perspective is hard to ignore. The money that will be spent on renewing Trident in these times of austerity is simply not justifiable—CND calculates that the replacement of Trident would cost about £100 billion. Crispin Blunt MP, chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, has estimated that it could cost up to £167 billion. Defence contracts notoriously go over budget so, who knows how much Trident could end up costing us. Just yesterday George Osborne announced that he wants the treasury to have oversight of spending on Trident. He too is worried that it will spiral out of control!

We all know that our country's budget is over-stretched, and that the Treasury seems to be constantly cutting and belt-tightening to reduce the deficit. At the moment proposed cuts to tax credit cuts could leave many low-income families an average of £1300 worse off each year; use of foodbanks is on the rise; increasing numbers of children live in poverty; we have a national housing crisis; the NHS is underfunded; and public services are rapidly dwindling. Can we justify continuing to impose austerity, particularly on the most vulnerable in society, while spending excessive amounts on, what I see as, a redundant status symbol. Even if you don't agree with disarmament, the economic argument is stacked up against replacing Trident at this time. When thinking about Trident, for me, all the moral and theological issues hold true and are backed up by the economic perspective.

Jodie: I'm finding it harder and harder to disagree with you. I can't say I'm completely won over yet but I will keep thinking about it and considering the arguments. Where would you recommend I go to get more information?

Stuart: Have a look at the Joint Public Issues Team website. You'll find a page detailing the Methodist's call for the elimination of all nuclear weapons, as well a free publication *Better off without Trident*, which is short and easy to digest.

After that the obvious place to look is the CND website. They have a couple of useful publications which are free to download: *People not Trident* and *Cut Trident and its replacement*. Then, if you're convinced and want to swing into action you could sign CND's petitions and look at their ideas for lobbying MPs. If you're feeling really radical you could join CND (or Christian CND) and perhaps come on the Stop Trident Demo with me on 27 February!

Jodie: I'll have to think about that! But at least I feel that I have more to say if someone stops me while I'm putting the bins out! That's a start.

Stuart Dennis is minister at Carey Baptist Church, Moulton, Northampton.

Help, I'm being persecuted!

by John Smuts

Thanks again for the *bmj*—especially Michael Jackson's article on the *Didache* in July 2015, vol 327. I'd love to hear what applications Michael would make for today's church—how about a follow-up, Michael? In this issue, however, I was most struck by the issues raised in *A conversation overheard*, by Dennis Ottoway though. It is possible that I have misunderstood Dennis (and am happy to be put straight) but what follows is my contribution to the conversation...

In many areas I think we are having a crisis of identity as Baptists. One area that Dennis touches on is that of religious tolerance—something historically dear to Baptists since it is so closely connected to our birth. In my opinion, Dennis has lost sight of what religious toleration meant to our Baptist forebears. Men like John Smyth or Thomas Helwys were separatists. One of the main reasons for starting new churches was precisely the desire to preserve sound doctrine. Therefore, while Baptists may have argued over what constitutes that sound doctrine, none would have found odd the desire to preserve it. On the contrary, they sought religious tolerance for the purpose of so doing.

What the early Baptists wanted for society was the freedom to follow religious faith free from persecution—at which point I heartily agree with Dennis' sober assessment of the 'dark side of Christian history'. However, congregational church government was put forward as a way to maintain 'sound doctrine' while allowing religious toleration. Therefore I fail to see the link between seeking a new minister who is 'sound in doctrine' and facing execution for our personal beliefs. Disagreeing with someone is not the same as persecuting them.

So, while we may speak the same language of tolerance as our Baptist ancestors, we often mean something very different to them. In the west we have been breathing the air of philosophical pluralism long enough for tolerance to change its meaning. Helwys, for example, wanted to see religious liberty. Turks and Jews should be free to follow their own religion without any coercion by the state church to convert to Christianity. He did not want them to join his own church though! For him, tolerance meant something like this: I disagree with you (and believe that without faith in Christ you are eternally lost), but I respect your right to worship whatever god you choose. Increasingly tolerance is taking on a slightly different connotation in the 21st century. Pluralists want to say that there is no correct position (of course, the irony is

that pluralists won't tolerate those who disagree!).

About 10 years ago I went to a Muslim-Christian dialogue conference at Cheltenham University. It was an excellent day and very stimulating. One Muslim speaker gave an address on what he thought were the ground rules for interfaith dialogue, one of which was that proselytism must be off limits. In the Q&A I challenged that assumption—surely, by definition, the word 'dialogue' has to include the possibility of changing my mind? Otherwise it is not a dialogue but a monologue. Now, to be fair, I think he was mostly talking about the kind of interfaith engagement that sees the relationship only in terms of evangelism—just seeking more scalps. I hope we all agree that such an approach is unhelpful. Nevertheless, philosophical pluralism does tend to collapse in on itself. Eventually it has nothing to say.

I watched with some interest the recent election of Jeremy Corbyn as the new leader of the Labour party. Understandably there was a fair bit of controversy over those who paid their £3 just so that they could vote. Quite rightly those who were clearly not Labour supporters were excluded from the process. Nobody saw that as Orwellian persecution. The Labour party is a fairly broad church but even they wanted to make sure that only those who were of 'sound doctrine' could vote.

That is why Baptists have always looked for ministers who are of 'sound doctrine'—after all it is simply one of the main criteria listed in Titus for appointing an elder. Or as Jesus put it in John's gospel—'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples'.

John Smuts is minister of Rayners Lane Baptist Church.

Baptist Ministers' Fellowship AGM

A short AGM will take place prior to the BMF Committee meeting on 10 March 2016 at 1100am in Baptist House, Didcot.

If you wish to attend, booking is essential. Reply to Stephen

Copson

Dividing the Word?

by Fred Stainthorpe

Congregations may sing 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 meeting 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 Revelation 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.

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 an admonition from 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' (Psalm 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 GNB 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 and suffers from spiritual famine. They were not, however, 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 process is complex. ‘Translation is an impossible task’, wrote C.H. Dodd in the introduction to the New English Bible. The existence of so 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 perhaps 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.

Fred Stainthorpe is now retired.

Contributions of an African Baptist

by Israel Olofinjana

It is always a good thing to reflect on the life of theologians and ministers in the past who have shaped and influence our thoughts on race, history and politics. One such is the Baptist theologian Dr Mojola Agbebi, whose immense contribution is to one of the defining periods in African history, and paved the way towards African nationalism.

This period in African history has other contributors who fought through their literary skills, oratory gifts and exemplary lifestyles to emancipate Africans from colonial rule. There are four men in this particular, who articulated what would be later regarded as an African theology of liberation rooted in the Old Testament prophetic tradition. All spent their lives fighting for African nationalism.

Rev Moses Ladejo Stone: one of the first indigenous Baptist ministers, who founded the first indigenous Baptist church (the Native Baptist Church) in West Africa.

Dr James E.K. Aggrey: an educationist and exponent of interracial unity.

Bishop James Johnson, one of the first Anglican bishops in Africa and a pioneer of indigenous mission.

Dr Mojola Agbebi: Baptist minister and activist who was involved in bringing about African cultural nationalism.

Mojola Agbebi was born with the Creole names David Vincent Brown at Ilesha (now in Osun State, Nigeria) on 10 April 1860. His father was one of the recaptive slaves

who went back to Nigeria from Freetown in Sierra Leone. This means that his father was a Creole (Sierra Leonean) as well as a Yoruba man (from Ekiti now in Ekiti State in Nigeria).

This dual heritage is important in Agbebi's upbringing in terms of lessons from slavery and its impact on African culture. Part of that heritage was that he changed his birth name to Mojola Agbebi. When he was eight years old, Agbebi was sent to a Church Missionary Society (CMS) school in Lagos. He attended this school until 1874, after which he attended the CMS training school for three years. At the age of 17 in 1877, he became a CMS schoolmaster at Faji Day School, and did this till 1880, when he was dismissed by CMS authorities over matters of routine.

Between 1880 and 1883 Agbebi worked with various church missions such as the Catholic, Methodist and American Baptist mission in Porto Novo in Cameroun. He was later involved with the First Baptist Church in Lagos, founded by American Baptists, becoming one of the native leaders alongside the ordained native pastor, Rev Moses Ladejo Stone. As a result of the mistreatment of Rev Moses Ladejo Stone by American Baptist missionaries, secession occurred, leading to the founding of the first indigenous Baptist church in Nigeria—the Native Baptist Church—in 1888. Rev Stone became the leader of this church and serving alongside him was Mojola Agbebi.

Agbebi introduced to the people of Native Baptist Church the idea of being self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating, which were nationalistic ideas gaining ground among indigenous churches and organisations. He also encouraged the congregation members to retain their native names, wear native dress and embrace African culture and customs. Although Agbebi was a dynamic church leader, his nationalistic spirit and contribution was through his writings. It is said that he edited all newspapers published in Lagos between 1880 and 1914. During this period he worked on the Lagos Times, the Lagos Weekly Record and the most successful Lagos newspaper then, The Lagos Observer.

In 1889, he published a small book entitled, Africa and the Gospel. In this pamphlet, he articulated the creation of African churches. He declared, 'To render Christianity indigenous to Africa, it must be watered by native hands, pruned with native hatchet and tended with native earth...It is a curse if we intend for ever to hold at the apron strings of foreign teachers, doing the baby for aye'. It is no surprise that he supported Rev Stone and the founding of Native Baptist Church.

Agbebi was also a strong advocate of cultural nationalism and to this end he embraced and studied African cultures and religion. In 1894, while he was being ordained as a Baptist minister in Liberia, he changed his name from David Vincent Brown to Mojola Agbebi to demonstrate his appreciation of African culture and customs. It was also in Liberia that he met E.W. Blyden and was awarded the honorary degrees of MA

and PhD for his racial confidence and literary ability. It must be mentioned that Agbebi was already articulating an African indigenous church before he met Blyden, who shared similar views.

It is important to note that the African Church Movement started in Nigeria around 1888 with the Native Baptist Church separating from the Lagos Baptist Church, which belonged to the American Southern Baptists. This was Agbebi's church, as mentioned above, and their example soon inspired other churches to follow. The United Native Church (UNA) comprising of members from the Anglican/CMS church and the Methodist Church followed in 1891. The Bethel African Church seceded from CMS St Paul's Church, Breadfruit, in Lagos in 1901 and the United African Methodist Church, Eleja, Lagos also seceded from the Methodist Church in 1917.

These churches seceded from their parent mission churches for several reasons. First, because of the refusal and ill-treatment of African clergy by European mission organisations. The pronouncement of the failure of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1807-1891) of Nigeria and his humiliation by two younger English clergy demonstrated to Africans that indigenous leadership was rejected. Secondly, the translation of the Bible into African languages from around 1840 meant that Africans could now read the Bible. Many of them saw a contradiction in the European mission's attitude with what the New Testament portrays about Christian character. Thirdly, nationalistic spirit was building among the African elite who had been exposed to western education. Most of the elite were also churchmen who used their education to speak about the injustice many Africans were facing at this time. Finally, the lack of understanding and utter condemnation of African culture and customs by some Europeans made matters worse. This latter point is where Agbebi's advocacy for a cultural nationalism becomes very significant.

Part of Agbebi's cultural nationalism was the change of clothing from European to African clothing. He would wear his *Agbada* (Yoruba clothing) in the cold weathers of Britain and the US. He also did not appreciate the resettled slaves in Liberia who were behaving like Americans in Africa. He told them to disperse into the interior and be absorbed into African culture. In addition, he made attempts to reconcile Christianity with African institutions and customs. He did this by collecting names of African gods to study, instructed converts in local languages and appreciation of African arts and music. Agbebi believed that if European missionaries had taken time to understand African religions and culture it would have helped indigenise Christianity among Africans. In this thought, he predated the ideas later articulated by African theologians such as Bolaji Idowu, John S, Mbiti and Kwesi Dickson.

In 1903, 1904 and 1911, he toured Britain and the US, lecturing on African customs.

One of the papers he presented in London was at the First Universal Races Congress, entitled *The West African problem*. In the US, one of the places he lectured and visited was the University of New York where he received another honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree (DD). In 1908, he married Adeotan Sikuade and they had several children. He gave his children African names as a continuation of his nationalistic ideology. A very sad moment in his life was in 1916 when he lost four of his children.

In 1910, he cofounded with Bishop James Johnson and other nationalists such as Herbert Macaulay (renowned Nigerian Nationalist and grandson of Bishop Ajayi Crowther) the Lagos auxiliary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society. This was a humanitarian and quasi-political group that advocated for the socio-political needs of Nigerians before the British colonial government. Agbebi was the vice-president of this group while Bishop James Johnson was the president. In 1914 when the Native Baptist Church (later Ebenezer Baptist Church) and its Churches reunited with the American Baptist churches they formed the Yoruba Baptist Association, which later became the Baptist Convention of Nigeria. Agbebi was chosen as its first president. He passed away on 17 May 1917, but Agbebi will be remembered as a champion of cultural nationalism and as a church leader who articulated an authentic African Christianity.

Israel Olofinjana is minister at Woolwich Central Baptist Church and also director of Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World.

Select references

Adotey Bing, Jonathan Derrick & Godwin Matau (eds), *Makers of modern Africa: profiles in history*. London: Africa Books, 1991.

E. A. Ayandele, *The missionary impact on modern Nigeria 1842-1914: a political and social analysis*. London: Longman, 1966.

I. O. Olofinjana, *Biography of the Revd Dr Mojola Agbebi*. In G. Richards, *Text and story: prophets for their time and ours*. Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2014, pp18-20.

I. O. Olofinjana, *Reverse in ministry and missions: Africans in the Dark Continent of Europe*. Milton Keynes: Author House, 2010.

J. A. Omoyajowo, *Makers of the church in Nigeria 1842-1947*. Lagos: Nigeria, CSS Bookshop Limited, 1995.

Reviews

edited by John Goddard

Back to the future—a personal reading plan for 2016

Reviewer: John Goddard

Roughly 20 years ago in college I heard a story that I think has been told in one version or another in all of our Baptist colleges over the years. The Regent's Park version involved memories of the much beloved former Principal, Barry J. White, informing a previous generation of students that he could always tell the year a minister had left college by the books that they had on their shelves—the implication being that ministers change from being avid collectors and readers of theology and biblical studies during their ministerial formation, into non-readers who rely on an increasingly distant body of knowledge and learning.

Whether this is entirely fair in general, or accurate for me in particular, I will choose to gloss over! However, the memory of this comment has recently given me pause for thought. I do have a large number of books on my shelves, and many of them have been there since student days. In my case that means that they have already been boxed and moved three times, to be unpacked and shelved in a new church or manse. Some are books I bought fully intending to read, but somehow I've not quite got to them yet. I

will leave those for another article...My focus for now is on those books I did read, and found helpful, moving, provocative and stimulating; books I have recommended to others, but which apart from the occasional search for a useful quote have remained unopened for a decade or more. Do I really plan to read them again? And given the 'warning' from college days, why would I re-read an old book instead of 'keeping up-to-date' with something new?

My reading plan for 2016 includes revisiting some of the books on my shelves. I want to remind myself of some of the writing which opened my eyes to new ways of seeing, and which challenged and changed my patterns of thinking and believing. I am intrigued as to how I will respond to some of these books 20 years on. I have changed. Will I love them more, or wonder what I ever saw in them? Will I find myself learning new things and remembering wonders I have neglected? There's only one way to find out! And so to my choices...

I think I had already bought *The stripping of the altars* by Eamon Duffy before heading to college. It was recommended to me by Fr Philip O'Dowd, a wonderful colleague and friend from my time as a member of the chaplaincy team at the University of Nottingham, immediately prior to my move to Regent's Park College in 1994. I had decided that as well as taking seriously the RPC preparatory reading list I would read Calvin's *Institutes* and a host of sound evangelical works as 'balance'. (Yes, I was insufferable...) But Fr

Philip opened up a whole other world of reading to me, as he spoke gently yet enthusiastically about Catholic authors and scholars. *The stripping of the altars* is, as the subtitle suggests, a study of traditional religion in England in the period immediately prior to the English Reformation. I had studied Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, yet somehow I had never really given a moment's thought to how it would feel to be sat in a wooden pew in a parish church in an East Anglian village. This fascinating book opened my eyes to issues of liturgy and theology, but also to the messy realities of congregational life and the difficulties of effecting lasting change.

I had never even heard of Walter Brueggemann before that first session with David Reimer, all-too-briefly tutor in Old Testament at RPC. David described Brueggemann as the finest preacher of the OT writing today, and sent me to find a copy of *Hopeful imagination*. I sat in the Radcliffe Camera and read this provocative study of themes from the exilic prophets. Even a quick survey of the section titles reminds me of the richness of Brueggemann's writing: *Only grief permits newness, Only holiness gives hope, and Only memory allows possibility*. His conclusion finishes with the comment: 'What is known and trusted is enough to restore vitality to ministry if we have the courage to think through, and act through the mystery of which we are stewards'.

Years before RPC, as a young undergraduate in Nottingham, I had

found Jürgen Moltmann to be a scarily intimidating author—not least because I wasn't sure whether he was quite 'sound'. Perhaps I just needed to grow up a little? While at RPC I was bowled over by the provocative depths of insight in *The crucified God*. I needed to read it to write essays, but I also found it changed the way I preached on the Cross of Jesus. It is time to revisit...

I feel slightly guilty that I can remember precious little about *The New Testament and the people of God*. I read it during my probationary period (NAM in 21st century BUGB speak) and I know I was persuaded by much of what N.T. Wright had to say, but I would struggle today to summarise exactly what that was. It may well be that I have absorbed much of what he said into my own foundational understandings of what the New Testament has to say. I suspect that when I preach on the ongoing reality of exile for the people of Israel in Jesus' first century context, and the kingdom challenge to the oppressive empire of Rome, I am probably echoing things I learned in this book. It's time to find out.

I probably ought to go back and re-read several of Eugene Peterson's books on pastoral ministry, including *Five smooth stones for pastoral work, Working the angles, and The contemplative pastor*. However, it's a later collaboration with Marva Dawn, entitled *The unnecessary pastor: rediscovering the call*, that is the final book on my list. I read this book towards the end of my NAM period. I was transfixed by the provocative title.

Why on earth would I, after three years at college and three years in my first church, want to read that what I had given my life to was unnecessary? I had completely misunderstood. I found myself copying passages from *The unnecessary pastor* into my journal, and I have re-read those comments many, many times since. Will it prove as challenging second time around?

So there it is: my plan for 2016. I'll let you know how I get on. But what would you revisit? Which books have travelled with you through your ministry and still have more to teach you? What have we forgotten that we need to recover? Let's keep on learning as we keep on reading.

Archbishop Justin Welby: the road to Canterbury

Andrew Atherstone

DLT, 2013

Reviewer: George Neal

This is a most exciting and uplifting biography: not for the contents *per se*, but for its significance as an example of how God still prepares a man for his will in the church and world. Every chapter and almost every experience Welby underwent showed clear signs that he was 'head-hunted' by God from birth.

Nothing that happened to him seemed to be wasted! Both positive and negative experiences, to which he responded with Christian trust, were conducive to his growth in character and wisdom, qualities desperately needed as the Anglican Communion endeavours to sort out strong

differences of opinion on a number of thorny divisive challenges of the hour; but also for improving the Church of England's relationship with the other churches, especially the Roman Catholics.

Welby was born into privilege and wealth—Eton and Cambridge were all part of his background. His childhood was very unsettled. His mother was a gifted woman; she was Winston Churchill's personal secretary and typed up his five volumes on the *History of the Second World War*. Unfortunately, she succumbed to the charms of Welby's father Gavin, not knowing his background as a womaniser, or that he was already married. After three years of marriage they were divorced when Justin was three. From thereon he shuttled between his parents, other relatives, boarding school and Eton.

At 18 he went to Cambridge, at a time when there were many keen young evangelicals there. Under their influence he experienced a conversion, becoming deeply committed. He was active in the churches with which he had contact.

His meeting there with Caroline Eaton, whom he married after three years, was again arguably of divine leading, for his wife—a deeply committed evangelical Christian—has supported and encouraged him throughout their married life in a wonderful way. She was willing to allow Justin to do daring things for the gospel and sacrificed security and prosperity as well as her own personal desires, so that Justin might fulfil his vocation.

After Cambridge, Justin continued³ in a committed Christian faith, and when he

entered the oil industry and became an influential financial adviser he applied his faith to the morality of finance. He has written books on the relation of banks and business and morality. While staying in France for some years he assisted in smuggling Bibles behind the Iron Curtain.

Tragedy was part of this period. Returning home to work in England, Justin was travelling with the furniture van while Caroline and their baby daughter followed in a car. The car crashed and baby Johanna suffered severe brain damage. After four days in a French hospital she died, despite much prayer. Both testify that the experience brought them nearer to God.

God's call to ordination was a battle: Justin enjoyed his work. To move from the a huge business enterprise to caring for the spiritual needs of a small parish was to be undertaken only if he was really sure God wanted it.

When he applied to his local bishop he was initially turned down. The bishop said his fitness for the priesthood was lower than for any candidate he had ever interviewed. Others disagreed, and Justin spent four years in training before ordination. His income dropped from over £100,000 a year to £9000—but his wife made no complaint, for she believed it was all of God.

Justin served in three local parishes and two cathedrals; became the Bishop of Durham and then was selected against all the odds to be the new Archbishop of Canterbury. All his appointments and

experiences were helpful as preparation for his appointment to the highest office in the Anglican Communion.

Two experiences should be mentioned—in Coventry Cathedral he played a prominent part in the reconciling work of the fellowship, whose building was destroyed by the Luftwaffe during WWII. Such work led to calls to do reconciliation work, not only in England, but overseas—because those in authority saw his gifts. Even secular leaders in Africa (especially in Nigeria) called on his peacemaking abilities to try to reconcile deep and violent tribal divisions. On a number of occasions his life was threatened and he escaped death by a whisker.

The second experience was his encounter and deep involvement with Roman Catholic leaders. Through these involvements he developed a theology, which although evangelically rooted, was interlaced and nuanced by involvement in monastic experiences, Catholic liturgy and a deep sacramentalism. Again, what useful experiences these were to prepare a man for the role of Archbishop and for the relationship with the new Pope Francis, who also was so clearly 'head-hunted' by God to lead the Roman Church.

Please read this book: you will experience a great blessing and a deep renewal in your hope and faith in the providence of God and the body of Christ.

Editor's note: George Neal has gone to be with the Lord since writing this review. We are thankful for his interest in bmj over the years.

