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the baptist ministers'
journal

April 2010 volume 306

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From the editor

Inclusion confusion?

The *bmj* has recently published a run of articles on the slavery apology, each with a different perspective. Whatever views have been presented on the value of the apology, no-one suggests that slavery itself was anything other than abhorrent.

We are sometimes reminded that our complex modern society contains all kinds of minorities and sometimes it takes a while for us fully to register their existence. Gender issues in ministry are currently under the Baptist spotlight again; while disability is just beginning to catch popular press attention as another locus of exclusion. A recent letter to the BMF expressed great sadness that retired ministers in one area of the country were expected to meet separately from the 'workers' and questioned whether the sense of lifelong calling by God had been revoked by the exclusive actions of humans.

As dissenters, we are located on the margins: that is the very nature of dissent. It is our job to occupy this uncomfortable place and to offer a prophetic empathy with and hospitality to other 'marginals'. So far, so good—but how do we include without so restricting the majority that we alienate that group in its turn? How do we include women without alienating men; the 'disabled' (and who is that, exactly?) without limiting the 'able'?

It is Easter and we recall that the greatest dissenter of them all spoke for those with no voice and was lynched in the process. He included by creating a dialogue between people and exposing the hierarchies and categories we love so much, which can be used to make others into enemies instead of creative partners. Often we don't mean to exclude: we are just afraid of that which is different. He understood our fear: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. We still don't know what we do to each other, unless we engage in genuine dialogue with the 'others'.

Do you have a story of positive modern dissent? Get in touch with *bmj* and help to keep our inheritance alive. **SN.**

Please contact me (reusal96@aol.com) if you have a contribution for *bmj*. Concise articles will usually be published more quickly (allowing for other constraints), so please try to keep to under 2000 words for main articles and under 1500 for *Points of view*. Shorter pieces are also welcome. If you would like to discuss or submit a longer article, it may need adaptation or serialisation. Thank you.

Easter Icons

by Andy Goodliff

In Holy Week 2008, 240 primary school children visited Easter Icons, a contemporary Stations of the Cross event held at Bunyan Baptist Church in Stevenage. On Good Friday another 150 people from the church and the wider public came to visit. In this article I will offer some theological reflection on this alternative worship, and comment on the use of ritual and on consumer-led religion.

Various factors triggered the creation of Easter Icons.

1. During 2004 I had led a series of alternative services which were attempts at doing worship differently—more interactive and visual, without a sermon and with less time spent singing—inspired by the book *Alternative worship*.
2. I had become involved in conversations about emerging church and alternative worship, where I discovered others were creating contemporary Stations of the Cross based on a traditional form of Catholic devotion that can be traced back to the 13th century. The stations were designed to be a ‘domestic’ pilgrimage to the places where Christ suffered, for those who were unable to go to Jerusalem.
3. I perceived a need to enable the church to reflect on the whole passion story. Little happened during Holy Week apart from a Good Friday walk of witness, which meant that many people moved straight from Palm Sunday to Easter Day.
4. I also believe that Easter (and Christmas) services are often times when a ‘simple gospel message’ is presented in view of the increased number of non-church attenders, meaning that the church rarely reflected deeply on the passion. The intention and aim of Easter Icons was to create an ‘Easter space’ in which the church (and the public) could interact with and contemplate the story.

The first form of Easter Icons went ahead in 2005, as the more modest Windows on the Cross, a series of five stations reflecting on different aspects of the cross and open to the church from 12 noon to 3pm on Good Friday. It was attended by around 50 people.

Over the next three years, Easter Icons, as it became called, grew and developed,

which involved more advanced planning and the use of a team. It began to resemble more closely the traditional Stations of the Cross, by which I mean it had 14 stations on different moments from the passion story. Each station had something visual, a text to listen to, a written reflection and in most cases something to do—for example, writing a prayer, or having your feet washed.

The planning included practical matters but also included choosing the different readings for the stations and then deciding how the station would reflect and respond to that reading. Instead of having a set of stations which were repeated each year, we focused on different parts of the narrative, some obviously being repeated. The evening before the event, the room in which the church met for worship was emptied—this meant removing chairs, stage blocks, communion table, musical instruments, and the windows were covered and the baptistry uncovered. While the focus of the room was usually at the front, towards the pulpit and music band, during Easter Icons the stations were set up in circular shape.

Theological reflection

Many people have remarked upon the perceived gap between academic theology and the working faith of the congregation. The Protestant emphasis on the sermon has encouraged believers to become passive recipients and left a theological gulf between clergy and laity. One of the aims of Easter Icons was to offer a space for people to reflect on and explore the passion story and their faith; that is, a space to theologise. This happened in different ways in the group that gathered to create the stations, and in the visitors engaging with the stations.

Creating the stations was a theological exercise, which can be understood as following the pastoral cycle conceived as stages of situation-exploration-reflection-action. Our situation was the 14 scriptures that we wanted to use as stations that would ‘engage and involve’ visitors in the passion story and ask them to respond, all the time seeking to be all-age, multisensory, interactive, and contemporary.

We started with the notion that ‘the characters in the Holy Week narrative face choices and experience feelings very similar to our own’. Each part of the story had and has something to say. The exploring stage involved asking a set of hermeneutical questions of the text—what is this text trying to do? how might this text speak to the contemporary world?

Having asked the questions, we then reflected theologically on how the scripture

could be interpreted faithfully and also in ways that made contemporary resonances and made people feel that the Bible was ‘indeed theirs’. As a group we shared responses, which included insights from different biblical commentaries, in the form of a large mind map.

Part of the challenge each year was to generate new ways of reading the particular texts and making contemporary connections with today’s world. For example, reading the moment where Jesus is beaten and mocked in the context of prisoner abuses in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay; or reading where Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry the cross in the context of adults and children forced to work in appalling conditions. As with the classical pastoral cycle, we ended with action, in terms of an agreed way of interpreting and presenting the scriptural text in ‘station’ form. Sometimes, as the pastoral cycle encourages, the ‘station’ went through another cycle of exploring and reflecting.

This process was a rich way of engaging people with the Bible. It gave them a confidence to offer ideas, and required them to listen to the text carefully and ask what God might be saying through it—although its effectiveness was enhanced by the involvement of someone theologically educated. The theologian’s role is to bring scholarship and hermeneutical insight into the process and so assist the group in interpreting the particular scriptures faithfully and imaginatively.

The use of ritual

There are many ways of defining ritual, but here I want to focus on Catherine Bell’s understanding of ritual as ‘practice’. At many of the Easter Icons stations there was a ritual or symbolic action to use. Bell argues that ritual activity has four practical features: ‘(1) situational; (2) strategic; (3) embedded in misrecognition of what it is in fact doing; and (4) able to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world, or “redemptive hegemony”’.

1. **Situation.** Postmodernism has a number of characteristics: a decline in institutional religion but a growth in ‘spirituality’; consumerism; and a change from ‘pilgrim’ to ‘tourist’. Most people who attended Easter Icons were churchgoing Christians and so were more likely to have a ‘pilgrim’ than a ‘tourist’ mentality. Part of the attraction of Easter Icons was that people were free to come and go at any time during the afternoon. They could fit their visit around their day.

2. **Strategic.** Easter Icons responded strategically to modern culture by attempting

to inculcate the gospel—by using poetic language, ritual, and popular culture. Easter Icons used symbolic actions—engagement and involvement—in part to connect with kinaesthetic as well as visual and auditory learners, but also (by having feet washed, by throwing money into the baptistry) to facilitate a movement deeper into faith, and for some, an encounter with God. The use of popular culture was limited. The Simon of Cyrene 2007 station used ‘Nike’ trainers and their slogan ‘Just Do It’ to interpret the soldiers forcing Simon to carry the cross and to raise questions about how we consumer the likes of products made by global companies. Again, the Easter Egg Cross 2008 station was designed to juxtapose the symbol of the cross with the consumption of chocolate eggs. Both examples are perhaps akin to the role of the prophet, disturbing and challenging the human-made divides between faith and consumption. Matthew Guest comments that ‘the symbolism used in worship services is often deliberately ambiguous and provocative. Occasionally, irreverent and controversial images are juxtaposed with images traditionally associated with purity or holiness, in an expressed effort to subvert our understanding and provoke a rethinking of the Christian tradition’. Easter Icons in this regard was very mild in comparison to other alternative worship groups, due to the fact that it takes place in an evangelical church and our desire was not to deliberately offend, but it was to challenge and disturb an expression of Christianity that is increasingly at home in a consumer culture.

3. **Misrecognition.** Bell understands ritual as involving ‘misrecognition’—*ie* those taking part in the ritual are unaware of what they are doing; but some theologians disagree. At Easter Icons people were mostly aware of what they were doing, but there was also misrecognition—those who participated were probably not schooled in alternative worship; and as traditional churchgoers may have had a limited grasp of what is happening within our culture. I would suggest that for many who came to Easter Icons the combined effect of the stations was a new feeling of thankfulness for Jesus going to the cross. This response is not invalid but, without wanting to claim too much, it is a ‘misrecognition’ of the deeper intentions of the different stations.

4. **Redemptive hegemony.** Redemptive hegemony is a way of referring to the ability of ritual to subvert the order of power in the world. Bell argues that ‘the goal of ritualisation is “the creation of a ritualised agent, an actor with a form of ritual mastery, who embodies sets of cultural schemes and can deploy them effectively in multiple situations so as to restructure those situations in practical ways”’.

In the case of Easter Icons there is not enough reported evidence to support any real transformation of participants in everyday life. However, that does not mean the event had no impact after the visit. For example, one participant wrote ‘it made me reflect on my own consumer choices and challenged me to buy and eat only Fairtrade chocolate’. Another wrote ‘I have thought more about my own perspective and the “glasses” I have been looking through. They are distorted and darkened by past experiences and I can take them off’.

Creating meaningful worship

Graham Hughes has examined how the meanings of worship are organised and transmitted by those who lead, and also how those who participate appropriate these meanings. Hughes puts forward a way of reading worship as liturgical signs. Signs can be interpreted in three ways: as icons, as indices, and as symbols.

Hughes argues that the iconicity of worship ‘derives from its being seen as an event which takes place on some sort of boundary or frontier’ and so ‘iconic signs invite us to imagine how things are in the presence of God’. Iconic liturgical signs bring us to this boundary and the physical worship space is also iconic, taking us somewhere ‘special’. At Easter Icons we wanted people to see the space as different from wherever they had come from and different also from worship on a normal Sunday. We sought to create an environment and ambience to allow people to go on the journey around the stations. Our intention, to quote Hughes again, was that ‘as the worshipper move[d] into space which is perceptibly different (visually, audibly) from the space from which he has just come, it is possible to suppose that this might really be how it is with “God’s space”’. Often, claims Hughes, Protestants have ‘wish[ed] to minimize in so far as they can a sense of alterity and, conversely, strongly encourage a sense of sociability, of “at-homeness”, of familiarity, of intimacy’, which ‘silently yet powerfully corroborates the notion that “nothing special” is expected of the people who enter it, nor perhaps of what will happen within it’. With Easter Icons we wanted to create a sense of movement into a holy space in which something special might happen. From the responses to 2008 I think we were fairly successful and people did have that sense of alterity on entering.

The indexicality of worship ‘has to do with “truthfulness” or “authenticity” in the

words and actions of worship'. For Hughes, worship should not become a performance: that is, the iconicity of worship—its coming to that frontier—is not negated by the inauthentic, such as a leading of worship which is indistinguishable from entertainment, or a leading of worship which is over-politicised. The point of worship is not that people 'enjoy the show' or 'get the point', but that they come into the presence of God.

Easter Icons was not about entertainment and not intentionally (or perhaps more honestly, not wholly) about people taking home some social or political message. Each station was created to be iconic and authentic, but I am not sure we were entirely successful where we were making a political point, at least in the sense of being iconic. The emphasis of these 'political' stations was on raising awareness and suggesting that Jesus was on the side of the poor; and they were perhaps less numinous. No doubt some participants found it entertaining, especially the children who visited from schools; and equally some participants would have gone home challenged about slave labour, the unfair treatment of prisoners, or making a difference in regard to climate change or fair trade (and others would not). I believe that worship should be engaging, and sometimes that is not different from being entertaining. It should also not shy away from the politics of the gospel, but equally it should not be reduced to the political.

The symbolic dimension of worship interprets for us the 'boundary' between ourselves and God, or the movement into sacred space. Symbolic signs give content to iconic and this content is located within the liturgical and theological traditions of the church and prevents beliefs from becoming too individualised or subjective. Easter Icons was full of symbolic signs based in the church tradition. The Stations of the Cross are themselves a tradition within the church: we tried both to remain faithful to this tradition as well as to renew it. Arguably one less faithful aspect of Easter Icons was its individual focus. In different years we have used the traditions of foot washing and contemplation of icons of Christ, as well as different ways of praying and opportunities for repentance. Every station was an interpretation of scripture and taken as a whole it provided theological content for the worshipper's imagined journey with Christ to the cross.

The consequences in terms of creating meaning for those who plan and lead worship are threefold. First, leaders need an awareness that worship is about bringing the congregation to the 'boundary' and that there is a constant danger of domesticating the event. Second, the three dimensions of liturgical signs need to be present: iconic, indexical, and symbolic. Thirdly, the symbolic dimension needs to

indicate the traditional wisdom of the church. From the questionnaire responses in 2008, Easter Icons was successful in creating a meaningful worship experience.

There has been some criticism of Hughes for favouring sociology over theology in his approach to liturgy. The question might reasonably be asked: where was God in Easter Icons? Some might find the answer in understanding creation as sacramental. Paul Fiddes has claimed that ‘any object, act or word can become sacramental’; while the ‘sacraments’ focus ‘God’s presence and activity’, they are also clues ‘by which we can notice a sacramentality elsewhere’. If Fiddes is right, there is warrant in seeing the presence of God in the different stations of Easter Icons. On the other hand, John Colwell argues against seeing God as ever present in everything, where everything becomes a possible ‘sign’ and we simply need to learn to perceive it. He contends that any ‘single particular may be sacramental’, but this does not follow necessarily, suggesting that we cannot just say: God was there at Easter Icons. It might be valuable to assess the faithfulness to the gospel of each station in deciding whether it was sacramental. A different and perhaps better way is to see Easter Icons as a space for people to be ‘attentive to Christ’, through opportunities for ‘stillness’ and ‘journey’. The Stations of the Cross is a tradition of going on a ‘domestic’ pilgrimage (a journey) through the events of Christ’s passion and at each station waiting and meditating (being still) on those events. In Easter Icons people went on a journey through the passion and had space to meditate and also take part in ritual actions mostly in silence.

Consumer-led religion?

If Easter Icons is an example of alternative worship it must face the criticism that the participants were ‘consumers of worship’. Participating in Easter Icons was optional, and people visited for a variety of reasons: they had seen advertising; they were invited or recommended by friends; or they had visited in previous years. It was also individualistic—participants mostly went round by themselves, were free to decide in what order and how many stations they visited, and whether they performed the various symbolic actions. The school pupils were given free T-shirts to take home. There was the option of refreshments before or after visiting. Easter Icons was ‘subject to personal choice’, the hallmark of consumerism. However, to single out Easter Icons and alternative worship as having ‘consumerist tendencies’ is to ignore the fact that every church at some level is a consumerist church—for example, in the choice and selection of which songs or

hymns are sung. Easter Icons was, and alternative worship is, arguably more aware and attentive to faith that is consumer-shaped, and attempts both to engage with consumer culture and to resist it. Easter Icons was ‘marketed’ as a space to engage and explore the passion story—collaborating with the consumerist mindset—and at the same time, it sought to resist and critique various consumer practices—for example, the consumption of chocolate through the Easter Egg Cross. Furthermore, it was differentiated from other similar consumer activities, such as visiting an art gallery, by its explicit theological meanings. It is difficult to assess clearly whether the resistance to consumerism was entirely successful in overcoming the simultaneous accommodation of consumerism.

Easter Icons is not the normative shape and context of worship at the church where it was held, but a specific annual event, offered, as proposed above, as a space for ‘stillness’ and ‘journey’. If it was, or became, the normative shape of worship, there would be a danger that it become something other than Christian worship. Instead, it served to complement the weekly worship and to give people a rare space, at least among Baptists, to meditate on Christ.

Conclusion

One participant after his visit to Easter Icons in 2008 said that ‘this Easter space helps me to stay with the story from the inside, its building tension, its pain, its desolation and hopelessness. For me it was another meaningful and enriching Holy Week experience’. This comment helpfully illuminates what Easter Icons was trying to do. It acknowledges that the event was trying to explore the passion story, drawing out its implications and developing theological threads for reflection. Easter Icons was designed to allow the participant to take part in ritual and symbolic actions, to encourage them to pray and to discover the frontier where God’s presence, even in the pain, desolation and perceived hopelessness of those events of Jesus’ passion, might be found. I believe that events like Easter Icons are resources for those within the church and outside it to explore faith in meaningful and enriching ways, where the aim is not conversion, but an engagement of heart, mind and body with the story of Jesus.

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Grief and loss

by Sue Phillips

Every year in the UK, over 500 000 people will die. Death is a fact of life that each one of us will one day face. It is also highly likely that we will have to meet head-on the emotions that accompany the death of someone we love.

I have personally experienced a great deal of loss in some very different deaths, each accompanied by different emotions. Most of my working life has been spent in dealing with death and its consequences—first as a hospital nurse, then working in palliative care, and more recently as a minister.

For all my experience in caring for people as they die, I have nonetheless always felt inadequate when faced with the intensity and variety of emotions that people feel and express at a time of great loss. These intense emotions can also accompany other kinds of loss, when a major crisis means that we have to adjust the courses of our lives. I have seen it, I have experienced it, and yet I am often unable to find the right words, or even be confident that I have enough of a handle on my own emotions to be able to help other people deal with theirs.

The purpose of this short reflection is to look again at the process of grieving, to explore the reasons behind these feelings of inadequacy, to reflect on situations in ministry, and to explore ways of helping others through their experiences of loss.

The sense of inadequacy

Like other ministers I regularly conduct funeral services. Most of these are for people we have never met and so it is impossible to know in advance what we may walk into. No two situations are alike and no two people react to loss in the same way.

When I look at the uniqueness of each situation, and then factor in my own emotional baggage, it is perhaps not surprising that I often feel I have failed to be of any help. It is much easier to resort to platitudes and stay on safe ground than to

try to appreciate and engage with the deep desolation that many people are feeling at their loss. I am afraid of being ‘rubbish’ at what I do, but my greatest fear is that their pain will somehow reach out to my deepest experiences of loss. I do not want their pain to cause me pain, and even more terrifying is the thought that I might not be able to control those feelings in public. And so the barrier goes up, the ‘professional’ comes out, and the moment when I might actually be able to help is lost.

I begin this journey by revisiting the normal stages of the grief process, as suggested by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her book *On death and dying*, written in 1969. Kubler-Ross viewed the five classical stages—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—as coping mechanisms, allowing an individual to work through their loss (or disease, since she worked with terminal patients) over an unspecified period of time. Since then, she and David Kessler have written *On grief and grieving*, which uses these five stages to look at the way we experience the process of grief. I believe these stages are still helpful in enabling us to understand some of the emotions experienced at a time of loss. Yet they are not the only emotions that one might feel. Every griever is an individual, so every experience of grief is unique. Unfortunately the blanket way in which we sometimes tend to deal with these feelings is insufficient for most people.

Funerals: dealing with guilt?

Harold S. Kushner speaks from the experience of someone who has suffered the loss of a child. He states that ‘[m]any of the mourning rituals in all religions are designed to help the bereaved get rid of their irrational feelings of guilt’. Does this explain why so many people, who rarely set foot inside a church, still want their loved ones to have religious funerals? Many people who would not profess a faith say they find real comfort in this ritual. Perhaps release from guilt is a more powerful factor than we realise.

As a minister I believe that there is a greater comfort for families in a Christian funeral than in a non-faith funeral, and that this comfort is in part a release from guilt. However I often question the real purpose of this ritual, and whether anything I say has any real meaning for those who are listening.

For many experiencing loss, the hardest question is ‘why did this happen?’, to which there is no adequate response. The columnist Virginia Ironside explores the

futility in any attempt to answer it, and particularly what she sees as the inability of the clergy to provide a passable response. This criticism provides us with a challenge to re-think how God might be relevant in these situations.

The sum total of the argument is simply: 'It's a big mystery.' But to the God is Guilty brigade, it is no mystery at all. Who did it? God did it. He is guilty as charged...Bad God. Slam him in jail. Throw away the key...not only does he murder us in our beds, but when we turn to him for comfort he is either not around or claiming it wasn't him who did it...

I was further confirmed in my decision to re-examine my practice and particularly the wording of my funeral services, after reading Tom Wright's *Surprised by hope*. Wright examines the wording behind many of our well known hymns and traditional funeral services, and finds that often the actual words used are not based on biblical teaching on resurrection but are 'the vague and fuzzy optimism that somehow things might work out in the end'. I have become aware that many of the things I say also fall into this category, my desire to comfort and not offend has led me increasingly not to proclaim the gospel but to generalise a formless ultimate hope and happiness. Probably it is best seen in the words I always use at a cremation service.

Lord, you renew the face of the earth; gather to yourself N whom we have loved, and grant to her those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart imagined.

In using this example, Wright maintains that:

If we are not careful, we will offer merely a 'hope' that is no longer a surprise, no longer able to transform lives and communities in the present, no longer generated by the resurrection of Jesus himself and looking forward to the promised new heaven and new earth.

I have to acknowledge that my ability to give comfort to those who feel guilt falls far short of what they really need.

In my experience these feelings of guilt are never more acute than following a death by suicide. I have been involved with several families facing the trauma of this cruel loss. Guilt is usually at the forefront of emotions but often shows itself as anger, which is initially directed towards those who are seen to have been negligent in some way, and therefore may have contributed to the death. However if

there is no one else to blame many people blame themselves, even when it is apparent that it was no fault of their own. Kushner suggests that we feel guilty because we need to believe that the world makes sense—that there is cause and effect, a reason for everything—and it helps us even to believe that we are the cause of what happens; even the bad things.

Making sense of it

I believe that Kushner is often right. One of the hardest tasks after a suicide is to help people to see past their own feelings of guilt, to see that there is almost always something to regret after a death, especially a sudden death—always something left unsaid or undone, because in reality we cannot live our lives as if this might be the last opportunity to be with every person that matters to us. This truth is even harder to accept when something you could have done might have altered the course of events that led to a death.

I visited a family who felt guilt because they believed their father's suicide had been caused by the burden of caring for his chronically ill wife and they hadn't done enough to ease the pressure. In another case the dead man's wife felt enormous guilt because his suicide appeared to be a spontaneous decision after a silly argument. And in another, the parents had no idea why their son had taken his life, but somehow it had to be their fault.

Sometimes guilt is mixed with other feelings, such as relief. In one instance I visited parents who felt their son had blamed his father for passing on his mental health problems, and had staged his death for maximum impact to 'get back' at them. They had been unable for months to leave their son unattended for any length of time, the guilt they felt was immense, but so was the feeling of relief—that they at last had the opportunity of a normal family life.

These incidents appear to confirm Kushner's idea that people need to make sense of a death; that they often feel there needs to be a reason for it and blaming themselves is more helpful than no explanation at all.

We are still left with the question of how we best help others deal with their loss. Kubler-Ross suggests that belief in the afterlife affects how people grieve, and Paul Griffiths contrasts the experiences of Christian and non-Christian death:

One of the most moving funerals I have attended was that of a four year old. De-

spite the tragic nature of the boy's death, there can be no disputing that the funeral was filled with hope and faith, particularly on the part of the parents...they knew that one day, some day, they would see him again.

There is often a marked difference in the way that someone with a faith deals with the death of a loved one compared with a person with no faith. Although the pain of loss is just as great there can be a feeling of assurance that that life is not ended, and the comfort that this brings is sometimes palpable. Paul Griffiths states that:

A friend of mine, who works with the terminally ill, tells me that she often finds a real faith and hope in Christians who are about to die. There is a stark contrast with the atheist, who faces (he or she believes) non-existence.

Although I have also found this to be true when working in palliative care, as a minister I have found it to be less true. Christians can often be much less realistic about the dying process and often find it harder to accept than do non-Christians. Frequently there is the hope, or even expectation, that healing will take place, right up until the final breath. As a minister present at the bedside, I feel the pressure (the guilt) of not being able to accomplish this miracle, even though I know the expectation is unrealistic—in contrast a person who has no expectation of a God who heals usually accept the dying process for what it is.

The minister as listener

So, with such a variety of emotions to deal with, what can I do to help a bereaved person through one of the most difficult periods of his/her life? The answer appears to be of the simplest. Kubler–Ross suggests that people like to tell their stories:

The ways we now have in our society to share our loss become fewer as we discount grief and loss. But ultimately we learn that not telling the story and holding it back also takes an enormous amount of energy...Telling our story is primal, and not telling it can be unnatural.

I have also found that people really do want to talk about their experiences, this is not the same as talking about their feelings—often that is the last thing they want—but I have rarely found anyone who does not want to tell me the story of what has happened.

There are many reasons people want to talk, Virginia Ironside acknowledges another powerful reason:

One of the reasons people need to talk so much about a death is because they suffer from compulsive feelings of wanting to take control, again and again and again. Telling people is not always just born out of a desire to talk things out, or a desire for sympathy, or as a way of getting the truth to sink, slowly, in. It's a way of clawing back the power into your life. You have no power over the death but you do have power over the story.

Of course, so far I have only talked about death, and I acknowledge that loss comes in many more forms than this. For all the losses we face, great and small, each is painful and personal. Some we keep hidden and perhaps we are never released from them; but others, if we are given the time and opportunity, we can express in story, and if we do not find healing, then at least we have some sense of liberation from the powerful grip of guilt and the myriad other emotions that follow.

And so whatever the reason may be for the desire to talk about what has happened, one positive thing, and maybe the only positive thing we can do as ministers, is listen, and not underestimate the help we can be in just allowing the story to be told, without the temptation to offer advice or platitudes or explanation.

Sue Phillips is minister of Elim Baptist Church in Pontllanfraith.

Books

E. Kubler-Ross, & D. Kessler, *On grief and grieving*, Simon & Schuster, 2004.

H. S. Kushner, *When bad things happen to good people*, Pan, 1981.

P. Griffiths, *God and the troubles of life*, Terra Nova, 2003.

V. Ironside, *'You'll get over it': the rage of bereavement*. Penguin, 1997.

R. Friedman & J. W. James, *The myth of the stages of dying, death and grief*, in *Skeptical Magazine*, 2008, **14**(2).

E. Storkey, *Losing a child*, Lion Hudson, 1999.

T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, SPCK, 2007.

BUGB, *Gathering for worship*.

The apology, slavery, and the Bible reconciled

by Ed Kaneen

In a recent edition of the *bmj*,¹ Ted Hale commented on slavery and the 2007 BUGB apology to the Jamaican Baptists for the transatlantic slave trade. As ever, he writes thoughtfully and provocatively, taking the BU to task over an apology which, he suggests, was unbiblical, strategically and pastorally dangerous, and bears the ‘them and us’ hallmarks of the acts for which it sought to apologise. The antidote to the concerns of the Jamaican Christians should rather have been a greater awareness of their ‘freedom in Christ’. I suggest, however, that Hale has undervalued the effects of our history on our present, and oversimplified the means by which those suffering ‘imprisonment...in the present by their past experiences,’ may be set free.² In particular, the issue of human slavery should not be spiritualised (and thereby marginalised), but requires a concrete response in the manner seen in the Bible. I therefore want to offer a pastoral model that makes some sense of such apologies, and points out the biblical precedent for engaging with our history in this way.

Thankfully, no court of law would now convict a person of crimes committed by his/her forebears, but this is decidedly not the case in the court of public opinion. For example, many of us know of, and perhaps experience, splits in families, the origins of which go back for generations. The Bible contains many encouragements to Israel to remember the wrongs of long ago, even encoding them in the Law (eg Deut. 25:17-19). It seems that it is not so easy to ‘forget what lies behind’ (Phil 3:13). Is it any wonder that the people of Jamaica, or any of the other former slave colonies, might yet retain feelings wrought by the history of their suffering ancestors? It may not be legally admissible to seek redress from those living today for past wrongs, but it is certainly part of our nature as relational beings. We cannot escape our connection with generations past, but this experience can only be worked out through our connections with generations present.

‘Identificational repentance’³ or ‘representational confession’⁴ did become something of a bandwagon around the turn of the millennium, although less is heard of it today. The most theologically sophisticated statement of ‘purification of memory’ is offered by the Catholic International Theological Commission, although it naturally reflects Catholic doctrine and is focused specifically on the failings of the *Church* in the past.⁵ I do not find the typical attempts to find a biblical basis for this practice convincing, involving particular readings of quite disparate texts to fit them into a doubtful overall schema. In this respect, Ted Hale seems to be justified in his criticism. Yet, it cannot be denied that the Bible in general, and the Old Testament in particular, contains individuals who conceive of themselves as part of a whole that exists through time as well as space (*eg* Israel), to such an extent that they express a corporate responsibility for generations past and present (*eg* Jer 14:20). Although British people today, for example, may feel some connection with others through ‘Britishness’, conceived of in historical as well as geographic and cultural terms, our creed remains that of individual responsibility.

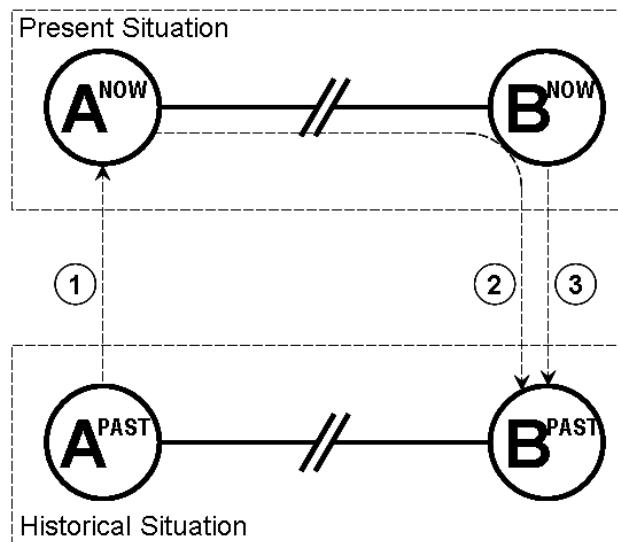
Jubilee

The Bible’s general principle is given practical expression in the celebration of Jubilee, the bi-centennial year of liberation for, among others, those in debt-bondage (Lev 25:10*ff*). The need for Jubilee demonstrates that, without intervention, even a society like Israel, bound by God’s Law, tends towards injustice. The year of Jubilee is an opportunity for a re-ordering of society, a righting of the wrongs of the previous 49 years. In the case of debt-bondage, different from but akin to slavery, Jubilee brings freedom to those who have perhaps been born into servitude (*ie* the descendants of the debtors) from those who may have inherited their service (Lev 25:41). In other words, Jubilee gives us a picture of the injustices of history being examined, and righted, as far as possible. This is the manifesto of Isa 61:1-2 that Jesus takes to himself in Luke 4:18-19.

The ultimate expression of this idea is found in the example of Christ, who bore sins that were not his own to effect reconciliation and a reshaping of relationships. In 2 Cor 5 we discover that reconciliation was God’s purpose in history, and has now become our responsibility, our ‘ministry’. This reconciliation is not simply a theological category but is to be worked out in the interconnected lives of God’s people and God’s world. Through Christ, as Ted Hale rightly points out,

we are reconciled with God, but it cannot end there. The new community into which Christ calls us, echoing the Spirit of Jubilee, invites our reconciliation to our neighbour, and perhaps thereby our reconciliation with our past. This, I suggest, is the support for apologies such as those offered by the BU, and we can therefore offer the following pragmatic, pastoral model.

Suppose that, in the past, A^{PAST} (a person or group of people), was sinned against by B^{PAST} . This created a breach in their relationship which was not adequately dealt with at the time, and there was no reconciliation. In the present day, A^{NOW} continues to identify with A^{PAST} (step 1), carrying forward some of the injustice of the historical situation into the present. Because they identify with their predecessor(s) across the historical divide, so they cast the present-day B^{NOW} as their antagonists, since they are the descendents of B^{PAST} (step 2). In this way, the unreconciled relationship of the past is carried through into the present day by A^{NOW} (this language may suggest a deliberate action on the part of A^{NOW} , and some do persist in nursing old wounds, but it may not be so, coming rather from a natural desire to understand one's own story).



In such a case, B^{NOW} may justifiably feel completely innocent of the crimes of the past, and therefore indignantly disclaim any requirement for reconciliation. But

this position is to mistake the present situation for the past situation. The events of history cannot be changed, so we can no longer effect the reconciliation of A^{PAST} with B^{PAST}. However, what matters for the sake of the gospel of reconciliation is the reconciliation of A^{NOW} with B^{NOW}. This can only be done with reference to the past, and step 3 requires an acknowledgement by B^{NOW} of the link with B^{PAST}, already recognised by A^{NOW} in step 2. Each of these steps is a necessary preliminary to reconciliation taking place.

Following the standard pattern of reconciliation ('I'm sorry I forgot our anniversary'/'It's OK, I forgive you'/'Here are some flowers to make up for it'), we know that reconciliation has three components: repentance, forgiveness, and atonement.

If there is a breach in the present relationship because of the past, A^{NOW} may have offered forgiveness (which can be freeing in itself), but reconciliation cannot take place until B^{NOW} has repented. However, B^{NOW} cannot repent of actions that were not their own. Their repentance is instead to be found in an acknowledgement of the sins of the past, and importantly, an acceptance of their relationship with that past—that B^{NOW} stands in the same relationship to the past in B^{PAST} as A^{NOW} stands to A^{PAST}. This step requires both courage and humility. We find it easier to identify with the oppressed than the oppressor, but we cannot escape our history, and helping people to acknowledge it is necessary if we are to be ministers of reconciliation today. Of course, this assumes that we agree with A^{NOW} that the actions of B^{PAST} were wrong! Reconciliation is complete when, following this acknowledgement, we make atonement in the Spirit of Jubilee by seeking to address whatever motivations led to the wrongs of the past, so they are not repeated in the present.

The sugar slaves

The BUGB apology for the transatlantic slave trade fits this model. Jamaica was 'the dominant British sugar colony of the 18th century, the standard by which others were measured'. In 1809, the slave population had risen to 300 000, 'despite the fact that slave deaths consistently outnumbered births'.⁶ This fact is unsurprising given that 'the working life of a sugar plantation slave was calculated at seven years'.⁷ It should be noted that it was not for another 27 years after the cessation of the slave trade that the Jamaican slaves actually received emanci-

pation.⁸ During this period, the so-called ‘Baptist War’ took place, when, inspired by Jesus’ teaching that none can serve two masters,⁹ and dissatisfied with the missionaries’ teaching on ‘obedience’,¹⁰ Baptist leader Samuel Sharpe led his fellow slaves in revolt. It had originally been planned as a peaceful strike, but became violent and was violently repressed. Sharpe, along with many other slaves, was hung from a gibbet in Montego Bay’s central square. The tales of the brutality meted out to the slaves, coupled with the religious persecution of Baptists and other nonconformists that followed, were one of the significant contributions to the hastening of abolition by the British Government.

The impact today

Thus it is not hard to see that the descendents of those brutalised at the hands of British slave owners, might yet feel the effects of their history 200 years later. And it is equally understandable that something of the relational pain of the past might be translated into the present with respect to Britain. For Britain prospered on the back of the slave economy, and though modern-day Baptists are not necessarily related to any of those who specifically furthered this trade, nevertheless we have all profited from its practice. Furthermore, although there is no evidence that it contributed to the troubles, it is a matter of regret that, in keeping with the attitudes of the time, the BMS, along with other societies, forbade its missionaries (including William Knibb) from getting involved in ‘civil or political affairs’, *ie* they should not rock the boat with respect to slavery and emancipation.¹¹ Our relationship with slavery in the West Indies thus comes close to home. But even if it were not so, where else could Jamaicans turn to find help in the grief of history? We are those closest to the perpetrators.

In the statement by the BU, the Council acknowledged, ‘...our share in and benefit from our nation’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade... We repent of the hurt we have caused, the divisions we have created, our reluctance to face up to the sin of the past...’ In this last phrase, the Council took step 3 in the above model, they accepted A^{NOW}’s identification of B^{NOW} with B^{PAST}. As such, they could, ‘offer our apology to God and to our brothers and sisters for all that has created and still perpetuates the hurt which originated from the horror of slavery...in a true spirit of repentance...’.¹² As far as it is possible, then, the repentance element of reconciliation has been fulfilled.

The response by the Jamaican Baptist Union similarly echoes this model. Indeed, the statement by Karl B. Johnson, JBU General Secretary, also gives a flavour of the issues that still existed for these Christian descendants of former slaves:

It's our view that it [the apology] served as a positive model to our society that one is never too 'big' to apologize and it is never too late so to do. What a wonderful opportunity Christ afforded us to show to Jamaica, the United Kingdom and the world another way of responding to deep-seated hurts and pain. Indeed in the words of Neville Callam, BWA General Secretary, 'we know the joy and the blessing of forgiveness. With this, true healing is possible and liberation becomes the common gain of everyone involved'.¹³

Thus, we see that forgiveness is offered, through which freedom is gained for the participants, fulfilling a further element of reconciliation. But what of atonement? What price is there to be paid? For many, as this statement shows, the humbling of the 'big' through the acknowledgment of their relationship with the oppressors of history is payment enough. It is hard for us to appreciate the significance of a British Baptist delegation personally delivering the apology in Jamaica. However, the BUGB statement acknowledges that, 'we are only at the start of a journey.' Reflecting on this, one Jamaican Baptist Pastor considers calling for financial reparation, but prefers long-term efforts to eradicate the kind of systemic values which supported the slave trade, and perpetuate unjust and dehumanising practices today.¹⁴ Thus, while reconciliation has been significantly furthered through the act of apology and the receipt of forgiveness, it will be fully effected when we demonstrate our commitment to live differently, in the Spirit of Jubilee.

By following the model described above and taking seriously the concerns of our neighbours, the BUGB and JBU have found a new relationship, both with the past and with each other. Reconciliation is thus transformative, just as Paul described, 'the old has gone, the new has come.' (2 Cor 5:17).

Ed Kaneen is a Baptist minister, currently researching slavery metaphors in the synoptic gospels, towards a PhD at Durham University. A longer version of this article can be obtained from Ed by email at e.n.kaneen@dur.ac.uk.

Notes to text

1. T. Hale, *Slavery, the Bible, and the apology*, *bmj*, 2009, **304**, 18-21.

2. *Ibid.* p 19.
3. This term seems to be in general use by evangelicals, coined by John Dawson in *Healing America's wounds* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1994). A helpful collection of papers from a 2001 Evangelical Alliance conference, *Repenting for Others?*, can be found at www.eauk.org/theology/key_papers/pastoral-theology.cfm
4. This term is used by Russ Parker in *Healing wounded history*. London: DLT, 2001.
5. International Theological Commission, *Memory and reconciliation: the church and the faults of the past* (1999). This paper can be found at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html
6. J. D. Rice, *Jamaica*, in *The historical encyclopedia of world slavery*, J. P. Rodriguez (ed), vol 1, pp 374-376. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997.
7. S. Landers, *Sugar cultivation and trade*, in *The historical encyclopedia of world slavery, ibid*, vol 2, pp 618-619.
8. It can be argued that it was not for another four years, until 1 August 1838, with the abolition of the apprenticeship system that, in the words of William Knibb, 'The monster is dead, the negro is free.' B. Stanley, *The history of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992, p 81.
9. D. Paton, *Jamaica rebellion (1831)*, in *The historical encyclopedia of world slavery, ibid*, vol 1, pp 376-377.
10. M. Reckord, *The Jamaica slave rebellion of 1831*, in *Past and Present*, 1968, **39**, 113.
11. J. H. Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb, missionary in Jamaica*. London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1847, pp 149 ff. This book is available as a free download from Google Books.
12. www.baptist.org.uk/news_media/latest_news/slave-trade.html
13. www.jbu.org.jm/jbu_news.php?news=94
14. www.marviaspanamajournal.com/after-the-british-baptists-apologized-for-slavery-whats-next/

A point of view

Strategic imperative?

by Colin Cartwright

Thanks to Gordon Brown, the UK's four Trident submarines resurfaced in our newspaper headlines last year. As a result, it is now less possible for us collectively to overlook the existence of our nation's nuclear arsenal. However, I cannot help wondering how many people in the UK are aware that 2010 marks a significant year of review for the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)? I only found out recently, thanks to being prompted to write to my MP. I have since learned that this vital review conference will take place in May.

Last year, the Baptist Peace Fellowship issued a challenge in the *bt*, calling ministers to write to their MPs about cancelling Trident. When this challenge reached my desk, it happened to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It also coincided with the run-up to the now infamous talks in Copenhagen, dedicated to building a new multinational consensus for saving our planet. This particular conjunction of signs in the heavens got me musing about the sanity of continuing to preserve our nuclear arsenal. I was even led to preach on this topic, albeit tangentially, on Remembrance Sunday last year.

I asked my congregation first whether they could imagine Jesus pressing the button that would condemn countless millions of people to nuclear destruction and the planet to a nuclear winter of massive proportions and unknown duration. Then I asked whether they could imagine themselves pressing that nuclear button. I then conceded that, 'The problem is, we can all too easily imagine some megalomaniac dictator pressing the button'.

The Government's Defence White Paper of 2006 plays heavily on the fear of such a scenario, and of others—such as being blackmailed by another nuclear power or by a terrorist group. While the paper does attempt briefly to address the arguments for unilateral nuclear disarmament, there is no exploration of this possible future. The document defends the need to continue with our existing Trident submarines and also to update our nuclear capability, effectively indefinitely. This 'received wisdom' is advocated both by our current Government and also by the

current main opposition, the Conservatives, who may be in government in the near future. So what opportunity is there for the British people democratically to debate this vital question in an election year ?

One of my prayers for 2010 is that there would be an opportunity for ordinary people to engage with this question. I do not imagine for a moment that there is currently a majority of people in favour of Britain taking the initiative of renouncing nuclear weapons. I *do* think that this is the time for us to begin to help shape a new vision for our nation and for the planet. To justify the UK's potential for nuclear genocide, as this Government White Paper does, simply serves to illustrate how far we have fallen from a holistic and realistic vision of our world.

I have to ask myself whether it is really clear thinking to reserve the right to use these weapons pre-emptively? On the basis of the lack of judgement our political leaders displayed in the rush towards war against Iraq, justified by much talk of the threat of weapons of mass destruction, can we or the leaders of other nations trust the decision-making process regarding the use of the UK's own WMD?

Possible scenarios

What this Government document lacks is imagination. There is no attempt to understand possible future scenarios, or to imagine the scale of awful destruction our nation could wreak, nor to imagine why it is, for example, that Iran has backed out of the NPT. Surely it does not require much imagination to gain some understanding of the Iranian government's position? Not only has Iran been called part of an 'axis of evil', but it has been faced with wars at both of its most significant borders, as well as an enemy with no apparent intention of renouncing its own pre-emptive use of the 'ultimate weapon'.

Here the Government's position of defending its possession of nuclear weapons, while trying to argue that it is actively pursuing complete nuclear disarmament, begins to unravel. Here the White Paper's unfounded assumption that the trend of increasing numbers of states with nuclear weapons, 'will not endure', does not ring true. Given the overall pessimistic tone of the document and its insistence that we cannot tell how things will work out in the future, this assertion is not only surprisingly optimistic but seems to run counter to some expert opinion. The insistence by some powers that they retain nuclear capabilities is likely to mean that other developing nations will explore the possibility of acquiring nuclear

weapons, on the very same basis argued by the White Paper: that such weapons are needed to cover all possible scenarios. These national leaders may well see the development of such weapons, within an era of anticipated increasing political instability, as providing a way of holding a trump card over other powers in potential regional conflicts.

I remain entirely unconvinced either that these bluntest of blunt instruments, nuclear weapons, cover all eventualities; or that retaining such weapons actually guarantees the security of the UK and other parts of the world. What happens, for example, in the case of a paranoid dictator who enjoys the sanctuary of a nuclear bunker, but feels that he has no other option left to him as the threats to his rule grow? What happens in the case of a threat of blackmail from an international terrorist network, where the source of the threat is not entirely clear? And there is certainly a case to be answered that, as the numbers of states with nuclear weapons has increased, so has the likelihood of some kind of terrible accident or misunderstanding between nations.

Having read the White Paper, my enduring impression is of the number of times it refers to 'our vital interests'. Surely this language represents the politics of the 20th century, not the 21st? Surely the language of 'deterrence' has already been invalidated, given that nations like India and Pakistan and Israel have gained nuclear weapons, despite (or because of) other nations already having them?

For these weapons to be effective deterrents, there has to be a justifiable determination to use them. And this is where, for me, the argument for supposedly responsible nations retaining such capacity for potential genocide completely breaks down. To use such weapons in any situation, and certainly under our Government's decidedly vague criteria of defending our 'vital national interests', is entirely unsupportable. Is this our 'abomination of desolation'—not just the weapons themselves, but a mindset that justifies their use?

Alongside my hope for a proper debate over the continuing deployment of such weapons is another hope: that if the UK were to renounce them, it would send a positive message to the nations and could mark the true beginning of a long process towards freeing the world from nuclear threat. For our Government to say that there is 'no evidence or likelihood that other nations would follow suit', again shows a singular lack of imagination. A third hope would be that any money potentially saved by not having to develop a next generation of nuclear weapons might be profitably used to devote more resources to establishing clear, interna-

tional programmes for nuclear disarmament. These released resources might also be used to enable more development of positive weapons against global warming or against the rising tide of global poverty.

This is a time for creative and deeper thinking about such a vital issue, as demonstrated by the recent, groundbreaking book, *Abolishing nuclear weapons: a debate*. One review of this book includes the statement: 'Few, if any, top-tier issues attract as much simplistic analysis, as many verbal red herrings, and as little serious work by governments as does the feasibility of nuclear weapons'.

Much more thinking about nuclear disarmament is needed. However, the issue could come down to a very simple question. For Christians this is a question shaped by our understanding of the mission of God's salvation in Christ. Does our God-given and human desire to save our planet necessarily include nuclear weapons like Trident and its successors, which are already being planned ?

Colin Cartwright is minister of Trinity Baptist Church, Chesham.

Notes to text

1. A letter from my MP, 17 November 2009, says: 'It is therefore a strategic imperative that we maintain, update and replace our independent nuclear deterrent'.
2. From The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent, Defence White Paper 2006 (Cm 6994), p18, 3-4.
3. Cm 6994, p 18, 3-7.
4. Mohamed El-Baradei, Director General of the IAEA, estimates that 'there are 35 to 40 states who could have the knowledge to develop nuclear weapons'. Quoted in Wikipedia's article on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, p 4.
5. 'More nuclear players... multiplying the risks of miscalculation, accident or unauthorised use, or through the escalation of small nuclear conflict', Wikipedia NPT, p 5.
6. Mark 13:14.
7. Cm 6994, p 20, 3-1, in section 3 of 'Responses to Counter Arguments'.
8. G. Perkovich & J. Acton (eds), *Abolishing nuclear weapons: a debate*. Carnegie Endowment Report, February 2009.
9. www.carnegieendowment.org/publications.

Reviews

edited by John Houseago

Crucifixions and resurrections of the image: Christian reflections on art and modernity

by George Pattison

SCM Press £19.99

ISBN: 978-0-334-04341-6

reviewed by: Steve Langford

Having misread the title it took me a while to tune into the fact that this book is a reflection on the way artistic images are presented and received and not images of crucifixion and resurrection in modern art. Furthermore, because of the depth and complexity of George Pattison's writing, it took me quite a while to engage with what I was reading. However, as soon as I began to understand that Pattison is reflecting on the way images are abused, destroyed and find renewal and fresh impetus in the media of art and film I found his work totally absorbing.

Crucifixions and resurrections of the image is based on a collection of lectures and talks that Pattison has previously delivered at a number of undisclosed events. As he is at pains to note, this is not an introduction to, nor a history of, modern art. This is a theological and philosophical reflection on the relationship between the moods of the human spirit and the images presented on canvas and celluloid.

Although, for the most part, I have not encountered the artists, or works, that Pattison reflects on, it did not prove to be a hindrance. I was still drawn into the inherent tensions between modern art's desire for autonomy in the way it chooses, and interprets, its subject matter and its fascination with images drawn from the Christian story.

Because of the history that lies behind its writing I presume that each chapter represents a previously delivered lecture or talk. Certainly, each appears to work as a stand-alone essay and thus presents itself well to the reader who enjoys simply dipping into a subject. Sadly the stand-alone nature of the last chapter leaves the book with a slightly unfinished feel. Personally, I would have preferred Pattison to have spent the last chapter pulling together the threads he has worked so hard to tease out.

Crucifixions and resurrections of the image offers a meeting place where modern art, on canvas or celluloid, and Christian spirituality can engage. As such it is not necessarily an easy read but is, nevertheless, fascinating, absorbing and well worth the effort.

'adventure of a lifetime'. Promising to speak to a variety of people, including different named groups who might feel excluded, in exile. or unfulfilled in the church, I approached it with an initial enthusiasm. The book essentially follows the life of Abraham, who has clearly gripped the writer and the study of whom has enriched her own spiritual life.

The magnificent obsession

by Anne Graham Lotz

Hodder 2009 pb £11.99

ISBN 978-9-340-90851-8

reviewed by Jeannie Kendall

As a person, I hope, of sensitivity, reviewing this book presented me with a real dilemma. There are moments within it when there is a clear sense of the writer's pain, and, I would argue, anger, at both the caution and the criticism she has received from fellow Christians (and indeed from her family) at her ministry. So it seems churlish to add to that. However I very much doubt she will read this review, so here goes.

This book came with a raft of front cover recommendations and the (rather over-inflated) promise from Rick Warren's Foreword of an

Sadly by about 30 pages in I was struggling to match the promises with the reality. The book essentially reads like a series of sermons with each section having the kind of headings seen on many a Sunday morning Powerpoint. There are some very over-used stories such as the crossing of Niagara as an example of faith: will someone get in the wheelbarrow? It is positively littered with vast numbers of questions which some preachers might ask: where have you built your altar...what 'obvious' decision have you made without asking the Lord, etc.

Some of my issues with the style may well be personality or cultural but I found them an irritant rather than a help. The book is neither an actual novel (like the excellent "The Red Tent" by Anita Diamant on the life of Dinah) nor a real engagement with the Biblical text. So there is a great deal of assumption about what Abraham "must

have" felt to back up what is essentially eisegesis.

The Foreword suggests using the book in groups and perhaps used as a devotional book individually or a discussion starter in some contexts it might have some merit. I genuinely hope some may find encouragement and growth in their spiritual life from this book. Sadly, I was not one of them.

planning something in the next two years' (p 152).

Based on talks given to a conference in September 2007, this book seems already in danger of being out of date. For example, new 'Bishop's Mission Orders' have been in existence since 2008 and I was curious to find out how these were progressing. Doubtless there will be research and publications on this in the future.

Evaluating fresh expressions: explorations in emerging church

by L. Nelstrop & M. Percy (eds)

Canterbury Press 2008 £16.99

ISBN 978-1-85311-816-6

reviewed by Colin Cartwright

While this book cannot be considered a full introduction to Fresh Expressions (if such a thing were possible), it did nevertheless give some valuable insights and information about the development of this movement. For example, at time of writing there were an estimated 650 Fresh Expressions of church nationally, and, 'over half of the parishes in the Church of England either have a fresh expression or are

However, where this book does succeed is in providing something of a record of the debate surrounding this rise of the Fresh Expression Initiative since it was set up in 2004, following the publication of the 'Mission-Shaped Church' report.

As the product of a conference, it never quite feels like a book, but more like a series of slightly disjointed reflections. So, it is authentically postmodern! Because the contributors come from different backgrounds with a variety of perspectives, there is no genuine dialogue, only a 'mixed economy'. Two of the chapters of the book deal with two particular case studies, which provides a helpful opportunity to glimpse some outworking of this initiative.

Overall, I had a feeling that the way the book is presented itself represents the difficulty the church has had over the

centuries of encouraging advocates of 'emerging' and 'inherited' forms of church to properly talk and listen to each other.

Perhaps I was expecting a different book. The bibliography however, was very helpful and could provide a good launching point for anyone wanting to explore Fresh Expressions in greater depth. Reading the book itself was enough to encourage me to at least experience and perhaps even initiate a fresh form of Christian community.

Theological reflection

by J. Thompson with S. Pattison and R. Thomson

SCM 2008 £16.99

ISBN 978-0-334-04055-2

reviewed by Robert Draycott

The blurb says that this 'provides an accessible guide to the key issue of relating belief and practice'. I thought it was certainly accessible because each chapter is so clearly structured with diagrams, examples, and summaries which make the book such an easy one to read.

There are four parts, first, an explanation of what PTR (progressing theological reflection) is and isn't; then its elements and resources; third, PTR as part of a wider perspective in relation to theology and ethics; and finally, a chapter entitled 'a toolkit for PTR'. The book possesses its own dynamic and progression. My attention was engaged through the various exercises which offered the opportunity to practice PTR and relate it to my own ministry and Christian life. In addition to the exercises there were also various situations and examples for thought and consideration.

I recommend this book because, although not previously familiar with the concept it rang so many bells, and it made sense. As an analogy it is a bit like a grammar book which offers a structured account of a language which a person has been speaking for years. I also felt that it was theologically neutral (if such a thing is possible) in the sense that pastoral practitioners across the Christian spectrum could profitably be encouraged to reflect further and deeper on what they are doing as pastors, ministers or priests.

If this outline has whetted your appetite, look at a copy in a bookshop and I think you will end up buying it!