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contacts for the baptist ministers' journal

Editor: Sally Nelson, 4 Station View, Church Fenton,
Tadcaster LS24 9QY; revsal96@aol.com

Book reviews: Michael Peat, The Multifaith Chaplaincy Centre, The Grange,
1 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TB; mike.peat@bristol.ac.uk

Of Interest To You: Arderne Gillies, 17 Leeks Close, Southwell,
Notts NG25 0BA; rev.arderne@btinternet.com

Paper Journal distribution: Jem Sewell, 2 Westbourne Park Villas
London W25EA; jembmj@gmail.com

Electronic Journal distribution: Ron Day, 14 Gretton Street, Oakham,
Rutland LE15 7UU; ronald.e.day@outlook.com

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From the editor

Recalibration

After the 2020 fairground ride of Brexit transition, Covid-19, Black Lives Matter, and a tempestuous US Presidential election, we now know we will be in lockdown as we start Advent, just as we were back at Easter. I had a quick look ahead to see what texts have been set for Advent Sunday (29 November) for those churches who use the Lectionary. Yes, you may have guessed it already—we will be reading about the signs of the end of the age in Mark 13!

The stop-start characteristic of life under the virus has disrupted many lives and livelihoods, quite apart from the impact of the illness itself for those who have been afflicted. This punctuated way of being reminds me of being lost in the Yorkshire Dales, in a remote area where my navigation app couldn't connect. The car was filled with the noise of my device's bleeping and a patient voice on the smartphone reiterating its intention to 'RECALIBRATE'! The only possible response was to resort to the security of a printed map and the strategy of 'let's try this road now and hope that we see a signpost to our destination'.

Much has been written about the disorienting effect of Covid-19 on our lives and our mission: it is a time both of restriction and of opportunity. But the Advent Sunday scripture above reminds us of the metanarrative in which all of this is set. There *is* a reliable 'map' to guide us through an unfamiliar landscape, and we *will* reach our destination, one way or another. Constant recalibration towards that end may perhaps help us to stop being distracted by the scenery and to focus anew on the glory of the coming Lord.

I hope the articles in this issue are of interest and encourage you on your own journey towards God. Please get in touch with the editor if you would like to offer a paper.

Meanwhile: Come, Lord Jesus. *SN*

Corrigendum: in bmj vol 347, July 2020, p7: 'John Boston' should be 'Thomas Boston' in the article by Anthony Luxton.

Baptist ecclesiology and intergenerational faith formation

by Simon Harry

What keeps me going are the young, and the very old, the remarkably old. The young are beacons that burn bright with new hope, new energy, with the beauty of fervour, the joy of discovery…Just as rejuvenating and energising to me are the examples of those who have lived long, and never aged.[1]

As the above quote from the 76-year-old author Michael Morpurgo demonstrates, intergenerational interaction can be highly beneficial. From Parliamentary groups to businesses such as McCarthy & Stone, intergenerational initiatives are being developed which seek to enrich multiple generations. As a Baptist minister I have found myself regularly straddling multiple age-groups: from parent and toddler groups to pensioners' lunches; from adult preaching to running a youth group; I have found myself living in multiple, but equally rich, worlds. Yet in our modern secular and church culture the various generations seldom actively engage with each other beyond family groupings.

In the past decade an increasing number of Christian books have been published proposing that intergenerational ministry can enable intergenerational faith formation.[2] The church appears to be lagging behind secular society in understanding the benefits of intergenerational interaction, but there are positive signs. The summer 2020 *Baptists Together* magazine focused on reaching and raising young adults.[3] Among the stories told were those of Hope Baptist Church and Holland Road Baptist Church, who both mentioned that being intergenerational was an important part of their strategy with young adults.[4] The question I want to consider is whether our Baptist ecclesiology hinders such movement into intergenerational aspects of church, especially among children and young people.

Holly Allen and Christine Ross define intergenerational ministry as taking place 'when a congregation intentionally brings the generations together in mutual serving, sharing or learning within the core activities of the church in order to live out being the Body of Christ to each other and the greater community'.[5] At the heart of Allen & Ross' argument is the assertion that current experienced levels of intergenerational interaction, primarily in family units and with the leaders of different age specific groups, is insufficient for progression through developmental stages. One key aspect of this understanding of intergenerational ministry is the acknowledgement that

benefits between generations can flow both ways, which includes the proposition that children and young people have something to offer older generations.

Although British Baptist churches have historically valued children, little of the academic study exploring intergenerational faith formation is either British or from a Baptist perspective. Indeed, much of the study emanates from a North American setting, but not from the Baptist churches there. This poses the question of whether the ecclesiologies of other church denominations are more conducive to intergenerational faith formation than that of Baptists.

This article seeks to explore how the understanding of the status of children and young people in British Baptist ecclesiology may adversely affect intergenerational faith formation. It will move from an overview of the potential benefits of intergenerational faith formation to a summary of British Baptist ecclesiology before exploring different ways of viewing children in a British Baptist context, by using Baptist authors.

Benefits of intergenerational faith formation

Proponents of increased intergenerational faith formation regularly cite biblical support for their stance—including key religious events in the Old and New Testaments, such as Moses' call to impress the commandments of God on the young (Deut 6:4-9); and events such as the feeding of the 5000 (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14); and whole family baptisms (Acts 16:15, 33). Evidence is also found in NT passages such as Jesus' call to become like children (Matt 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17) and Paul's image of the church as the body of Christ (Eph 4:15-16). Examples are also found of intergenerational relationships in a faith context, such as Samuel and Eli (1 Sam 3), Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-15), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1-4) and Timothy, Lois and Eunice (2 Tim 1:5).

Allen & Ross also encourage intergenerational faith formation by drawing on secular material, such as the development theories of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, the social learning theory in the work of Margaret Mead and Albert Bandura, and the ecological systems theory in the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner.[6] Christian faith development theories provide further evidence, specifically that of James Fowler.[7] If we are willing to accept that intergenerational faith formation can be beneficial in a Baptist context, we now need to understand that context in terms of ecclesiology.

Belonging in Baptist ecclesiology

Stephen Holmes indentifies six main elements to the Baptist vision of the church: believers' baptism, the primacy of the local church, congregational church government, the independence and interdependence of local churches, the importance of preaching, and leadership within the church.[8] Of particular relevance to the issue of intergenerational faith formation are the elements of baptism and congregational church governance. Believers' baptism is often seen as one of the key aspects of Baptist churches. Yet, as Holmes states, 'the Baptist distinctive is not in baptizing

believers, but in refusing to baptize infants, and in generally refusing to recognize the baptism of infants'.[9] Baptism is seen as a response of an individual in faith and repentance to a gospel call and the normal door into membership. As Holmes writes, 'immersion into the gathered community is the inevitable result of immersion into the water'.[10] Membership, in turn, is the means by which congregational church governance is enabled. Thus membership, and involvement in congregational church government, is open to those willing and able to be baptised, or for those who, in an open membership church, have confessed their faith publicly by another means. The implicit message of this is that only members have something of value to add to discerning the mind of Christ within the church, and that others, including children, do not.

Children in Baptist ecclesiology

In the traditional understanding of Baptist ecclesiology, therefore, the lordship of Christ is expressed through the local church and the mind of Christ is discerned by the church members in a church members' meeting. Children have no place in this process, and get grouped with those of no faith outside the church, even though they may have faith. Indeed, they do not have the option to get involved. As Paul Martin points out, 'with children, whatever their quality of faith experience, or whatever their spiritual journey, they do not have the option of being affirmed as members of the church'.[11] From early Baptist origins a distinctive ecclesiology raised questions about the understanding of the place of children in the church and society. Yet theological discussions about the place of children within British Baptist churches have not historically been a matter of importance for British Baptists and only emerged in the 1970s with authors like David Tennant, although he saw children as wholly dependent on their parents' belonging in church.[12]

Radical Believers, written by Paul Beasley-Murray, described the Baptist Union's official understanding of what it meant to be a Baptist.[13] He affirms the place of children within a Baptist Church and a church's duty of care, but also marks out limitations of their involvement, such as discouraging baptism before mid-adolescence and questioning the right of young church members to have the ability to vote in church members' meetings. After *Radical Believers* Baptist thinkers have reflected on the place of children in church mainly in three ways: church as the Body of Christ; the concept of the Kingdom of God; and the church as family.

Church as the body of Christ

A discussion document, *Believing and Being Baptised*, produced in 1996 by the Doctrine and Worship Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (which included Christopher Ellis, Paul Fiddes and Nigel Wright) sought to explore theologically the issue of belief and baptism from a Baptist perspective.[14] The authors seek to be more creative with biblical metaphors and propose a variation on the image of the church as a body by distinguishing between being in the body of Christ and being members of the body. As they state:

Children may certainly be said to be 'in the Body' in the sense that they are enfolded and embraced by it; as a baby is enfolded by its mother's arms, so a child in the church is wrapped around by all the caring and the praying of the community.[15]

By referring to Colossians 1, they propose that belonging to the church is a process, and that being in the body will help a child to move towards being a member of the body, because to be 'surrounded by Christian example and Christian teaching is to be drawn continually more deeply into the reality of being "in Christ" until the point of baptism or confirmation in faith as a believer is reached'.[16] In response to *Believing and Being Baptised*, in 2000 Paul Martin, in his article 'Towards a Baptist Ecclesiology Inclusive of Children', sought to present a different understanding of the status of children within Baptist ecclesiology.[17] He asks how Baptists would view the artwork *Je cherche ton visage,* a picture of Christ's head made up of images of individuals of all ages, not just baptised believers. He comments that in *Believing and Being Baptised*, the child still essentially remains '"other than" the body, belonging to the body because of the action and initiative of the members of the body'.[18] This denies the validity of childhood faith experiences and their ability to offer 'insight, common sense and prophetic direction'.[19]

Paul Fiddes, one of the contributors to *Believing and Being Baptised*, explores the area of Baptist identity in his own book, *Tracks and Traces*. Here Fiddes wrestles with the inclusion of believing children in the body while wanting to postpone baptism until the full implications of discipleship are understood. He affirms that 'they are more than embraced in the body; they form part of the body that embraces others'.[20] He proposes that children can be seen as members of the body but 'have not yet covenanted with other members; they are not on the roll of disciples available for service'.[21] Indeed, for Fiddes, their absence from the body would leave it incomplete, and he states, perhaps referring back to Martin's reflection on *Je cherche ton visage*, that 'the face of Christ will have empty patches if the features they supply are missing'.[22]

Nigel Wright, another of the contributors to *Believing and Being Baptised*, expands on his own thinking in Chapter 7 of his book, *Free Church, Free State*.[23] He seeks to redesignate 'believers' baptism' as 'baptism of disciples'.[24] Indeed, Wright goes so far as to say that 'the common designation of the church as the "fellowship of believers", while not untrue, is also not true enough'.[25]

These authors are attempting to mitigate against the disadvantages of not being members of the body both by softening the concept of the body of the church and by affirming that even those outside the body have something to contribute. Yet the tension between being in the body and not being in the body remains. In terms of intergenerational faith formation, if the body of Christ is the dominant image for belonging, intergenerational faith formation becomes much harder to enable as children and young people can be perceived as having limited amounts to offer.

Membership of the Kingdom of God

Another theme that emerges from Baptist writings is a move towards an emphasis on the Kingdom of God. *Believing and Being Baptised* states that the concept of the Kingdom of God is wider than just the church, suggesting that 'we ought to think of moving boundaries between the states of being "in Christ", "in the Body" and "members of the Body", and we ought not to be over-confident about drawing the lines of demarcation'.[26] Martin goes further by asserting that the child relates primarily to the Kingdom, rather than the church, and this should be the defining way by which children are understood to be included.[27] Echoing the words of Jesus (Mark 10:14-15), Martin asserts that children belong to the Kingdom because they are children, and it is adults who need to be converted to the Kingdom by becoming like children. This image removes the need to seek ways to enable the inclusion of children, and rather it is now adults who need including.

Goodliff, in *To Such as These*, noting that the account of the bringing of children to Jesus and his response (Mark 10:13-16) has been central to Baptist infant dedication liturgy, contends that children are included in 'blessing of the Kingdom and the new community of God, until they deem themselves otherwise'.[28] Thus, like Martin, Goodliff sees the inclusion of children as automatic, but adds that their exclusion is voluntary.

In terms of intergenerational faith formation, the Kingdom metaphor provides more reason to value the contributions of children to the faith life of the church. Yet in Baptist ecclesiology, the metaphor of the Kingdom is not one that is stressed beyond infant presentation liturgies, as seen by the emphasis on membership through baptism being the door into belonging, rather than through an infant dedication service.

Church as family

A further metaphor that has increasingly been used to describe church is that of family. The Doctrine and Worship Committee noted in passing this image of the church, using the King James translation of Galatians 6:10 as 'household of faith', describing it as a 'space in which people can dwell in different ways'.[29] Paul Martin also draws on the image of church as family, a household of faith, describing how a family can invite friends to share their communal life without those friends having to become family.[30] Paul Fiddes, too, comments on the idea of households of faith that welcome and embrace visitors while family members remain a distinct group.[31] Fiddes acknowledges that the boundary of baptised believers exists, but sees it as 'an open boundary, with plenty of room for hospitality and for travellers passing in and out'.[32]

In terms of intergenerational faith formation, viewing church as a family provides a way of valuing all members, while acknowledging their different standing within the family. In a good family everyone's voices are heard and, in a church context, this would provide good grounds for intergenerational faith formation.

New ways of viewing children

Two main ways forward emerge from the Baptist authors we have explored. The first is a reassessment of the nature and

validity of childhood faith, and how participation in Sunday services, in particular communion and membership, might apply to children. Fiddes' image of the church body embracing the child is helpful in that it both maintains the church body as being made up of baptised believers (1 Cor 12:13), but welcomes and embraces children into the body. Yet, in Fiddes' image, the child and the body of the church remain separate, and the initiative for the child's inclusion rests solely in the generous action of the body.

Goodliff's work has a strong link with intergenerational faith formation theory through his emphasis that welcoming children is not enough in itself, that in addition a church should be one that also 'recognises, affirms and listens to them as fellow pilgrims on the journey of faith'.[33] He develops this view in his article 'Celebrating Diversity', which encourages churches so see that children have much to offer, such as 'the joy of life, a model of trust, a desire to learn'.[34] This should see expression both in the baptism of children once they demonstrate faith, regardless of whether or not they are in their mid-teens, and their full participation in communion.[35]

A broader view of faith enables a broader view of belonging. An acceptance, therefore, that all generations have something to offer the others, and opportunities for this to occur, is needed. This requires an acknowledgement of the validity of faith development in pre-teenage children and an accompanying relaxation of the restriction on who can take communion and the timing of baptism. Here lies the challenge for Baptist churches because to change such restrictions can be seen to weaken the theology behind them, namely the importance of repentance and personal commitment. The earlier children are baptised, the less the issue of exclusion exists. However, early baptism carries with it the risk that the candidate is not ready for baptism.

Catechumenate

One resolution to this tension may be a catechumenate period, where children are seen, as Goodliff puts it, as 'those intentionally being gathered into the life of the church towards baptism'.[36] The adoption of a catechumenate stage in faith development would be to introduce a new concept to most British Baptist churches. Although it is not a new idea in Baptist writing, Goodliff notes that 'despite being fairly pervasive in the literature, it has not been widely taken up'.[37] Beasley-Murray, Wright and Martin all make mention of the idea in their writings.[38]

Many British Baptist churches may unconsciously already have a roughly formed catechetical programme involving Sunday school teaching, visits to Christian festivals like Soul Survivor, baptism and membership courses. Formalising such programmes, and introducing intergenerational elements into them, could potentially increase their effectiveness and change people's understanding of the place of children and young people within church.

Concluding comments

Reflecting six years after the publication of *To Such as These*, Goodliff acknowledges the challenges he has found in putting these theories into practice.[39]

He has not implemented his more radical suggestions, such as baptising children at the first signs of faith and allowing children to take communion. Partly this is about changes in Goodliff's thinking, but also, the reality of church life meant that his church didn't feel it was right for children to take bread and wine, and instead children take biscuits and grapes at alternate communion services. The experience of Goodliff in a local church context is indicative of the difficulties in changing the view of a church on such fundamental rites as baptism and communion. Yet such changes seem necessary for intergenerational faith formation ministry to become more widespread in Baptist churches.

Simon Harry is pastor at Bewdley Baptist Church. This article is an abridged version of part of his DTh. Contact Simon on pastor@bewdleybaptist.org.uk

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5. Allen & Ross, *Intergenerational*, 17.
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14. Christopher Ellis (ed), *Believing and Being Baptised*, BUGB, 1996, 39-46.
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17. Martin, "Towards", 47-57.
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23. Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision*, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011, 138-148.
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26. Ellis, *Believing*, 43.
27. Martin, "Towards", 56.
28. A. J. Goodliff, '*To Such as These': The Child in Baptist Thought*, Oxford: RPC, 2012, 17.
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33. Goodliff, *To Such as These*, 58.
34. A. Goodliff, "Celebrating Diversity: Towards an inclusive church", in *BQ*, 2009, 43:1, 30.
35. Goodliff, *To Such as These*,46-50.
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To be a pilgrim

by Paul Revill

For in their hearts doth Nature stir them so,
Then people long on pilgrimage to go,
And palmers to be seeking foreign strands,
To distant shrines renowned in sundry lands.[1]

It was reading an article several years ago in the *bmj*, no less, which sowed a seed in my heart and mind that eventually resulted in using some sabbatical time in the autumn of 2019 to walk the 500-mile Camino Frances route from St Jean Pied de Port to Santiago de Compostela. In this article my intention is not primarily to describe that experience, significant though it was for me, but to explore more widely the concept of pilgrimage and what it might mean for us as Baptists to embrace the call to live as pilgrims.

Why is pilgrimage important?

Pilgrimage is common to all the world's major religions and the concept of a sacred journey or the journey to a sacred site is an anthropological phenomenon which can be identified across virtually every culture and faith. However, the Christian theological basis and practice of pilgrimage has its own particular distinctives.

Theologically speaking, a Christian understanding of pilgrimage is rooted first in the nature of God as revealed to us. Charles Foster argues that in the Old Testament God has a 'bias to the wanderer', that God is always on the move and calls a people to journey with him, and it is the times when God's people settle down, build cities and become stable and static that things start going wrong.[2] We can see this in the earliest narratives in Genesis, such as the account of Cain and Abel, or the Tower of Babel. We see it in the resistance in some of the prophetic strands to the establishment of a Temple that 'ties down' the omnipresent God to one place in the hearts and minds of his people. But even when a centralised cult is established, the people of God are called to travel to worship at the place 'Yahweh has chosen for his name'.[3]

All the key players in the story of God's people are travellers, whether Abraham who lived a classical nomadic lifestyle; Moses leading the people to the Promised Land; David always on the move when serving or fleeing from Saul; prophets travelling the land to bring Yahweh's message to the person or people he chose, the exiles being taken away and then returning. These key journeys shape the story of who God's people are. Just stop and think for a moment how many times the image of walking or following a path are used in the Scriptures of a life surrendered to God.

The principle of a wandering God travelling with his people becomes more sharply focused in the New Testament,

where the Jesus of the gospel narratives is always on the road, who has nowhere to lay his head and is thrown out of the only town where he spent a significant settled period of his lifetime. He calls people to follow him along the road and declares, '*Yo soy el Camino*'—I am the way. To be a disciple of Jesus requires us to be walking the Camino, living in the Camino of Christ. Following the pilgrim Messiah is about accompanying him on a dynamic journey, learning along the way and being sent out to journey in mission. Perhaps the response of his opponents in crucifying him was an attempt to nail down a constantly moving man who appeared unstoppable, who lived a lifestyle which threatened those settled leaders of Jerusalem.

In my view, we have lost something important in shedding the original (presumably self-identified) title given to the first disciples of Jesus as followers of The Way.[4] How different might our discipleship be if we still identified ourselves primarily as the People of The Way rather than 'Little Anointed Ones'.

Turning to the practice of pilgrimage, it is clear that as certain places became associated with epiphanic experiences of God, they took on a special status, such as Bethel.[5] They developed into sites that held special status and therefore attracted pilgrims seeking to encounter God for themselves, and to express their worship of God. So, in the Torah, pilgrimage became stitched into the structure of national life. 'How blessed are those who set their hearts on pilgrimage,' says the psalmist,[6] and of course many of the later psalms were repeated by pilgrims on their journey to the Tabernacle and the Temple. As a devout Jew, Jesus was schooled in the practice of pilgrimage for the major festivals from childhood. The only incident recorded for us of his 'hidden' life before beginning his ministry is centred around the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. John's Gospel in particular gives enough clues to make clear that Jesus continued to make pilgrimage during the years of his ministry.

So pilgrimage, and the associated recognition of special 'thin places' where God is especially felt to be accessible (to use an ancient Celtic idiom), continued to be embedded in the tradition of the Christian church right up to the Reformation. But no doubt because of the accretion of other more questionable traditions, such as the veneration of relics, the requirement to make pilgrimage as an act of penance, and a culture of excess that developed around the main pilgrimage routes, by the time of the Reformation it was ripe for a healthy critique. Martin Luther pulled no punches and vehemently condemned the practice of pilgrimage in its entirety,[7] putting an end to it in the Protestant branch of the Christian faith. Babies and bathwater come to mind! Ironically, the practice of pilgrimage to sites associated with Luther's ministry is now stronger than ever, as was evidenced with the marking of the 500th anniversary of the Wittenberg declarations!

As the last comment suggests, the practice of pilgrimage has never died out even in Protestant circles. Today it is on the rise again, not merely among Protestants who are rediscovering some of the valuable spiritual disciplines which were jettisoned at the Reformation, but much more widely amongst those of no particular faith tradition who might consider themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'. The numbers of pilgrims who arrive in Santiago de Compostela, Rome and other

traditional centres of Christian pilgrimage grow year on year. People undertake pilgrimages in response to the growing sense of ill-ease at the contemporary Western materialism and consumerism. For example in valuing travel with the aim of encountering the divine or experiencing transformation of soul and spirit, instead of the traditional holiday pattern which tends to be a superficial engagement of sight-seeing which rarely enters deeply into a culture or respects the unique quality of each place.[8]

Practising the discipline of pilgrimage today

The first thing to do is lift your foot.
Breathe in.
Put your foot down in front of you,
First your heel and then your toes.
Breathe out.
Feel your feet solid on the Earth.
You have already arrived.[9]

I believe that if we get back to our roots and rediscover a more mobile faith, if we learn again to practise the art of pilgrimage, there will be innumerable benefits to our own spiritual health and wellbeing, as well as in the exercise of our ministries. Rather than to extol the virtues and benefits of undertaking a 500-mile walk across northern Spain as I had the privilege to do, I would like to consider what might happen if we start to reidentify ourselves as pilgrims travelling the Way of Jesus in our daily lives. Here I offer a few suggestions for pilgrimage disciplines which can be practised by all Christians.

Trust. Practising pilgrimage is a spiritual discipline which fosters a greater dependence upon God: it is an adventure that takes us out of our settled and comfortable home and forces us to face fresh challenges for which we might not be fully equipped. So, to identify ourselves as pilgrims means that we are serious about living a life of greater dependence upon God and putting ourselves into situations where we cannot merely be self-reliant upon our own skills, experiences and training. In my experience as a minister, I rarely step out into settings where I feel out of my own depth and have to trust more wholeheartedly in God. Most of the time it's me who is in control and me who is nicely comfortable.

Priority. Pilgrims face by necessity detachment from many of the people and possessions from which they usually derive help and support, but which can so easily become distractions from the One who matters above all else. On my pilgrimage I chose not to communicate regularly back home, to cease engaging in social media and internet surfing, to leave my 'old life' behind. On the road it's just you and God, you and your own thoughts and prayers. Pilgrimage enables the externals of life to be stripped away, so that what really matters becomes more important. Whether or not we like to walk, we can all do well to find ways and means of naming and dethroning our personal idols, so that we might love more purely and fiercely the God who is so passionately loving towards us.

Simplicity. If ever there is an idol which needs to be confronted and addressed in our Western churches it is the god of materialism. The current of materialism in our society is so strong it is virtually impossible to swim against, certainly on

one's own. Some people address this challenge through banding together into intentional communities to enable a simpler way of living. The practice of pilgrimage offers another means, by requiring the traveller to strip possessions down to the bare essentials, to carry the lightest possible load. To live as an intentional pilgrim means choosing to live more simply, to tread the earth more gently, to recognise and reject the demonic power of the god of materialism.

Spontaneity. Practising pilgrimage enables a more spontaneous and adaptable faith, for while the pilgrim may have a definite goal and end to her journey, along the way there is potential for surprises and the unexpected. The pilgrim is open to God to intervene and lead her steps in a new direction, as it's far easier to take a new turning when one is already on the road. I discovered for myself on the Camino de Santiago that by abandoning a guidebook, choosing not to book accommodation in advance but relying upon the well-established infrastructure of hostels, cafés and the community of fellow-pilgrims, I gained a fresh confidence in God to provide for my needs whenever they arose, and received a joy in the unexpected encounters and experiences along the way.

To live intentionally a pilgrim lifestyle means that I am able to be interrupted from my diary and schedule; that I always hold the commitments of the daily routine a little lighter, that I make space for the Spirit to take me off in an unexpected direction and welcome this when it happens. This is where so much of the fruitfulness in ministry happens, where we see God at work in significant and powerful ways. Yet so many of us miss these opportunities because we are too settled into our established patterns and routines.

Attentiveness. Because the pilgrim travels at walking pace, there is time to notice one's surroundings, to employ all the senses: to hear the sounds, smell the scents and feel the changing ground beneath one's feet. The pilgrim is able to live in the present moment, to appreciate the gift of now. This applies just as much to urban settings where we more readily encounter the image of the creator in the faces of our fellow townsfolk or city-dwellers. The pilgrim becomes better able to listen to others, to look for signs of God's activity and communication, to have a heightened awareness of the One in whom we live and move and have our being. To adopt a pilgrim lifestyle means focusing upon the present, of living a life of attentiveness.

Following from this, the pilgrim's attentiveness enables him to see more deeply into the lives of others, to learn to value more greatly those who are different. One of the joys for me of walking the Camino was to meet fellow-pilgrims from more than 30 different countries across the globe, to find I had a surprisingly deep connection even with those with whom I couldn't even communicate a word in their language or they in mine. Not only does the 'fellowship of the road' generate a strong bond to other pilgrims, but this connectedness overflows towards the others one meets along the way, those who offer the generous hospitality of the *albergue*, those who serve in the bars, restaurants, cafés and shops which service the pilgrim, and more widely to those one meets for a moment on the road as they

are passed. The pilgrim looks another in the eyes, sees as deeply as they can into the other, and appreciates the privilege of knowing another. How much our ministries will be enhanced if we deliberately practice this attentiveness to all those we meet, both those we know and the casual encounters of daily life.

Identity. On the road, as already identified, many of the centres where we might derive our identity and value are stripped away: close family relationships, work and ministry, the place where we are known. Some pilgrims even choose a new 'pilgrim name' when they set out to travel and leave their birth name behind. Pilgrimage forces the traveller to discover their true and deeper value and identity, as a beloved child of God. 'I am loved, therefore I am'.[10] Personally, it has been on pilgrimage where I have confronted most directly my mortality; on pilgrimage I have wrestled most deeply with the inner demons and nagging insecurities which undermine my being; and on pilgrimage that I have become most firmly assured of my worth in the sight of God. There is a profound freedom which is gained through such a process. Obviously, it doesn't require a walk for us to do this work, but it's a necessary work for all of us, a journey of self-awareness within the circle of God's all-sufficient grace, if we are to live well ourselves and enable others to do the same.

Hardships. Walking a pilgrimage is not an easy option. In mediaeval times the act of pilgrimage would be a once-in-a-lifetime occasion taking the pilgrim from the relatively limited geographical circle of home and out into an unknown 'beyond'. The trip would take weeks, it would be hard on feet, health and resources. And when the pilgrim reached the destination, he would have to make the journey in reverse to return home. So, it is no surprise that part of the pilgrim culture is an acceptance of hardships and a willingness to learn from them, to seek God in the midst of the difficulties, and not always to seek an easy option. A pilgrim lifestyle means embracing suffering when it comes and finding that God is present in these times.

Some suggestions

Living a pilgrim lifestyle does not merely or even necessarily require the practice of walking to a particular 'holy site'. It can just as much be a commitment to journey, to 'wander for the sake of the love of Christ', as the Celtic tradition as exemplified by the Northumbria Community would describe it.[11] Simply getting out of our buildings and travelling into our neighbouring communities is a good missional and spiritual practice. I wonder what might happen if we made our congregational life and service more mobile. Here are a few brief practical suggestions.

• Hold a church service out of doors, to enable a greater connection with the surrounding community.

• Change the church seating arrangement; have people deliberately sit in different places; or carry out activities during worship which require people to move from their seat, such as in using prayer stations.

•Try holding a meeting on the road,

walking a local path. One well-practised tradition is prayer-walking, but what about Bible study-walking, or pastoral care-walking?

• Invite and provide opportunities for the congregation to practice some of the disciplines mentioned above, such as attentiveness. This can be done in any setting.

• Organise a church pilgrimage day (or longer trip), for example to a local cathedral or site of spiritual interest, or a walk with meditations from the Scriptures or on the life of a local saint or 'spiritual hero'.[12]

• Simply get into the habit of walking more often into and around your local neighbourhood and open yourself to God to lead and guide you about where to go, who to engage with, what to do or say.

•Encourage your congregation not merely to take consumeristic holidays but to travel with the aim of encountering God, learning to love the culture and people of the place being visited, giving something back to the people among whom one is staying.

Research is increasingly demonstrating that exercise such as walking and running is beneficial for our mental health as well as bringing obvious benefits for physical health. I am convinced that rediscovering our heritage as a pilgrim people of God will benefit our spiritual and missional health. Pilgrimage can enable us to be more fruitful in this post-Christendom age where the settled institution of church is widely rejected and disparaged, where we can better connect with others who also feel ill at ease with our secular and materialistic culture, as well as connecting us more closely to the One who is the true and living Camino.

Paul Revill is part of the Regional Team of NBA and can be contacted at paulrevill@thenba.org.uk or via the Facebook page 'Baptist Pilgrim'.

Notes to text

1. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

2. C. Foster, *The Sacred Journey*, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2010.

3. *eg* Deuteronomy 12:5.

4. Acts 9:2.

5. Genesis 28:18-22.

6. Psalm 84:5.

7. See for example the quotations from Luther's works given at https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/9859/how-did-luther-view-pilgrimages

8. Read some of these stories of transformation by pilgrims who have walked one of the Caminos to Santiago at http://www.theroadtosantiago.com/camino-stories.html

9. Thich Nhat Hanh, *How to Walk,* Berkeley, California: Parallax, 2015.

10. See, for example, an article by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware on 23rd June 2009 for the Orthodox Peace Fellowship: https://incommunion.org/2009/06/23/i-love-therefore-i-am/

11. See https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/articles/celtic-spirituality-a-beginners-guide/

12. The British pilgrimage website, https://britishpilgrimage.org lists 112 routes in the UK alone, walks in length ranging from one day to three months. So there will be a pilgrimage route located near to you to get you started!

A fresh way of seeing

by John Billingham

Almost 50 years ago, while studying Fine Art at Goldsmith's College, London, I came to faith in Christ. As a disciple of Jesus, life took a very different path. I left artistic ambitions behind and some years later entered Baptist ministry. In retirement, I applied to York St John to study for an MA full-time in Fine Art (2018-19). My main focus was studio-practice (painting and drawing) with a desire to rediscover and develop what had lain dormant over the years. The visual arts have changed a lot in that time, with an emphasis now more visually conceptual and culturally fragmented than I'd known previously; an emphasis that might be termed 'post' or 'late-modern' where all tradition is questioned and all is uncertain. I had to find my way afresh within the diversity and practices of present-day fine art. This article is an attempt to bring theological reflection to my returning.

For me the venture back into painting and drawing *practice* has raised questions around what it means to be human (and in relation to God) as a thinking Christian 'self', while relating to contemporary culture. The physical-creative act of painting and drawing brought me afresh to an incarnational Creator God who is Christ and Trinity. I found myself engaging with imagery and imagination around memory, the dream, relationship, participation, material-body-encounter, meaning, chance and awe. I became aware of 'discourse' and 'process' in creative *praxis*; the unique *doing* and *being* of human creativity. This became not simply an attempt to express the sublime but physical-material bodily participation; a meaningful sacramental (as 'sacred mystery') encounter, with a Creator-God mediated in time and space. It opened up thinking around 'body-knowledge' and 'tacit knowledge'—*being* and *doing* in and from the human body, including reason and experience; an existential, even phenomenological, interactive harmony with human creative practice and the Creator. Art practice and process brought into focus the value of a sacramental (*musterion*) theology in a material universe, challenging ideas that try to separate *spiritual* from *physical* and represent God as if *absent* from his creation.

I found myself entering new spaces in the visual world including subject-matter, experiment, materials, colour, texture, patterns, rhythm, mood, the moment, the now—even *ekphrastic* expressions of

poetry. Old skills came alive with different ways of seeing. The act of painting and drawing brought together the 'poetic' and the 'reality', inviting viewers into a 'new world' (ironically 'unreal/myth'), expressed on two- or three-dimensional surfaces, in which to contemplate; learning anew a creative-cum-creator act involved in gathering and presenting, as well as interpreting. Here was theatre, drama and experience together while aware of divine encounter.

Responding to the world around

The discourse that emerged around 'abstract' and 'figurative', as well as word, text, image and human communication fascinated me. To speak of visual art implies 'seeing' and 'relationship' engaging 'language' and 'meaning'. The earliest art-expressions of humanity, identified as *palaeolithic*, can be traced to cave paintings, engravings and sculpture (*parietal* art) ranging between 9000 and 65000BP.[1] They look overwhelming and awe-inspiring (I would love to visit some). Paleontological debates on dating continue as do anthropological questions of meaning around the religious, the cultural and earliest ways of storytelling. These images, both abstract and figurative, from Argentina, to France, Spain, Indonesia, Borneo, Sulawesi and Australia reveal human presence, not only with images but discovered materials and colours, predating earliest written texts (around 3400-3100BCE: Sumerian archaic, pre-cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics). Indeed the earliest written alphabets were based on relations between marks, things, words, sounds and visual images.[2] This raised questions for me concerning the use of images and the tradition of God's Word, oral and textual, before and since the revealing of Christ the Living Word. Does God speak through visual art, Christian and non-Christian, and how do we listen and 'see'? Aware of iconoclasms and problems with idolatry through the centuries, I would say that all kinds of art have ways of opening up questions, and drawing us nearer to God, such that faith and meaning can be enriched.[3] To make a mark (and painting and drawing is human mark-making; sign and symbol) says: 'I am here' or 'we are here', even prayerfully—creating a sacred space to enter in awe and to listen. Maybe enabling us to 'see' God and creation, even humanity in new ways.

The whole creation, however impacted by sin and human beings, still reflects the glory of God and dwells under the Lordship of Christ through whom all of creation was made.[4] To enter into the creative act as an artist is to identify with and recognise the Creator God who is holy and who is love; and in whose image I am created however flawed. Art *praxis* in response to the world around is to enter a kind of holy ground; as it is for those who view the art-form itself. The way to God, who is triune in relationship, is through faith in Christ who died for us on the cross to take away

our sin and who is raised from the dead for our justification.[5] But this gospel truth does not prevent me experiencing his mediated presence as I respond in creative wonder to the world around, making my mark—and to 'marks' made by others. The experience is subjective and can be 'spiritual'—in the realm of the Spirit but not beyond human-body-materiality. Not all of us respond the same way but I remember being at Tate Modern London, two years' ago, viewing 'Six Prayers'—tapestries by Anni Albers (1899-1994). This became for me a moment of awe, a divine encounter, a place of prayer, stillness and reflection—in God's presence.

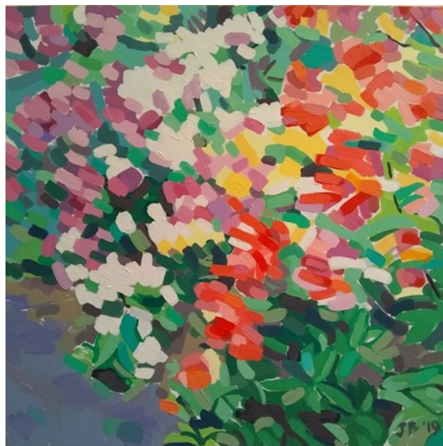
Abstract and figurative into the unknown

I am led into a mystery that comes with the working together of 'abstract' and 'figurative' images. All painting in its underlying form is abstract even if portrayed figuratively. Patrick Heron (1955) wrote of 'an irrepressible desire to comment upon that visual reality which my eyes actually encounter every day.' He continued: 'Although I am convinced that it is the underlying abstraction in a painting which give that painting its quality, its life and its truth [...] I believe in abstract-figuration'.[6] The dialogue between 'visual reality' that 'my eyes encounter' and 'abstraction' (revealing inner-vision), lies behind my own *praxis*. Currently images from nature, including landscape and seascape, have inspired my gathering of material in sketchbooks, photographs, painting and drawing. In the process I wrestle with self and subject until images find resolution, while looking for an authentic expression in response to an outer and inner world that is 'seen' and 'unseen'. My work searches for underlying 'abstraction' taking me beyond *mimesis* to another way of 'seeing' in reality and imagination—this involves following where the material leads me. Such an approach identifies me as a human-being *seeing* differently, in 'time' and 'place'.

This in turn leads me to questions of *chance* and *guided randomness*. I recognise that, as in life, unplanned things happen in painting and drawing: 'Artists often begin something without knowing how it will turn out. In practice, this translates as thinking through doing. Some methods used by artists to drive the creative process or work out problems can seem counter-intuitive or irrational: distraction or relinquishing control, embracing chance and collaboration; following a hunch rather than a rationale; privileging the senses over the intellect'.[7] Amy Sillman said of her paintings (2016): 'I cover them, ruin them, paint over them, scrape them out, and turn them upside down. I guess I need all that time and change to understand what the whole thing can be or will mean, or what it will look like. It is through material change that I think my way into the future'.[8] Here the work gains a 'hands-on' life of its own. It is this awareness of *chance,* of the unexpected, with materials and the 'going with it', as well as inspiration from other artists that inhabits

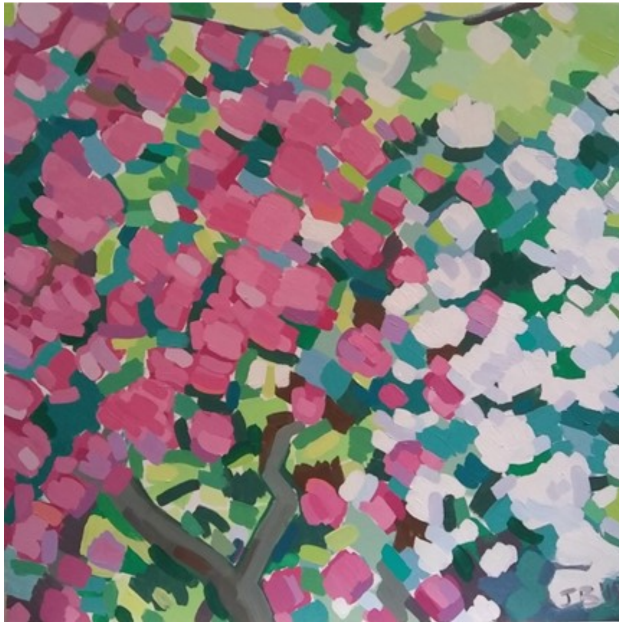
John Billingham (2019), *Moorlands Wood (Rhododendrons)*, pen and ink, graphite stick, black acrylic paint (105.5 x 116cm)

John Billingham (2019), *Sherringham Beach*, graphite stick and powder (105.5 x 125cm)



John Billingham (2019), *Moorlands Wood 1*, *Rhododendrons*, oil on canvas, (100cm^2

John Billingham (2019), *Moorlands Wood 2*, *Rhododendrons*, oil on canvas, (100cm^2)



John Billingham (2019), *Moorlands Wood 3*, *Rhododendrons*, oil on canvas, (100cm^2)

John Billingham, (2019), *Gladioli*, oil on canvas, (100cm^2)

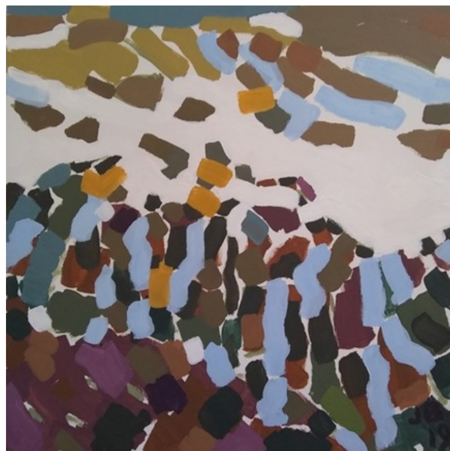
John Billingham (2019); *Reflection*; 3D Installations: wood, raffia, plastic, (left to right: chair, dining table, household recycling): 100cm x 50cm; 100cm x 100cm; 100cm x 50cm.

John Billingham (2019), *Marks by the river*, graphite on paper, 110cm (44”) x 95cm (36”)

John Billingham, (2019), *Through the window*, charcoal on paper, 110cm (44”) x 112cm (45”)

John Billingham (2019), *Sherringham Beach 1*, acrylic on canvas ($100cm^2$)

John Billingham (2019), *Sherringham Beach 2*, acrylic on canvas, ($100cm^2$)



John Billingham (2019), *Sherringham Beach 3*, acrylic on canvas ($100cm^2$)

John Billingham (2019), *Sherringham Beach 4*, acrylic on canvas ($100cm^2$)

my work—abstract and figurative. This moving into the unknown, taking the risk, is all part of the creative act—and maybe an insight into God's own act in the *risk* of creation and redemption.

Physical and relational conversation

For me to practice as an artist cannot be disengaged from the traditions and mark-making of the past. We dismiss previous mark-making of others to the demise of present-day practice. In addition the physical 'art-act' speaks to me of a sacramental world-view, revealing God's mediated presence, such that the physical-material world is spiritual and the spiritual is material. In Scripture we read that God created Adam from the soil and 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being'.[9] The first man and woman were created in the image of God from physical materials. This physical -creative-breath act is revealed to us in the work of God the Holy Spirit, at the incarnation, and in the human life-form of Jesus, his death and resurrection—and from Pentecost to the present day. The ecclesial praxis of the sacramental reminds us that God by his Spirit always engages with us in a material, physical world, in the now—and with real people in time and space. Maybe art practice helps us understand God's relationship to the world and church in a fresh way; a reminder that the triune God is still involved with us creatively and materially such that the 'virtual' is always challenged and the 'reality' engaged.

Art practice reminds me that as a 'thinking -self', I cannot be divorced from what I do physically. As philosopher and phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty reminds us concerning art practice '[...] we cannot imagine how a *mind* could paint. It is by lending his body (*sic*) to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings'.[10] This brings an emerging *relationship* between artist and creative act, with materials, colour, texture, meaning, subject matter. The practical-creative process might be seen as movement-in-relationship with artist, mark-making, contemplation, outcome, presentation and viewing public, even congregation. Theologically I am reminded of the noun 'perichoresis' whereby the Eastern church (6-8th centuries) sought a language to express its understanding of God as 'Trinity'—'equal inter-relationship in movement' (as with patterns of a 'dance').[11] Through faith in Christ we are invited into this 'dance' or 'movements of relationship'. As a practising artist, who is Christian, I become aware of movements in 'seeing' and 'creative practice' whereby all my senses, the *whole-being* of body, mind and spirit, are prayerfully involved in 'the dance'. Here is a creative act and outcome that is never finished.

Exploring in many ways

Art involvement enables us to 'see' differently. For Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979) painting '[...] was always primarily and predominantly from the eye, not the mind and it was essential for him to remain in touch with that initial inspiration, however far the demands of the picture might take

him from it. Indeed it is the tension between representation of the thing seen and the pattern on the canvas that generates the painting'.[12] This tension in representation brings me to the importance of drawing.

In 1882 Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo, 'Drawing is the root of everything [...]. It is working oneself through an invisible iron wall that seems to stand between what one feels and what one can do'.[13] In a similar way drawing came alive for me, both for its own sake and in relation to the development of painting, both abstract and figurative. I worked on a larger scale (up to seven foot square) while at the same time experimenting with materials: graphite stick/powder, charcoal, crayon, paint, pencil, pen and ink. The larger sizes came with joining together strips of wallpaper randomly gathered. Working on the floor and kneeling felt not only prayerful but child-like as I crawled over the emerging creation. The process allowed space for 'unknowns' to emerge with an awareness of the whole-self physically involved.

As well as painting and drawing the 'physicality' of art practice led me to *3D Installations* (inspired by artist Lewis Robinson (b.1960)). What was going on here? I don't know—I followed my 'gut-instinct'. These installations emerged through many changes over nine months around 'recycling' and 'deconstruction' of human-made objects: a pinewood dining-table, a chair and household rubbish. Maybe it was the primitive physicality of such work that moved me, taking me back to a *parietal* instinct. How does one end up taking one direction and not another? In art -practice context, the philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote: 'What is decision at all? Not *choice*. Choosing always involves only what is pre-given and can be taken or rejected. *Decision* here means grounding and creating, disposing in advance and beyond oneself'.[14] Heidegger believed the artist, simply imitating or representing the world around, was merely reflecting the world as an object to be dominated and controlled. He rather believed authentic art -practice to be a 'revealing' or 'unconcealment' of the hidden, a *poietic* revealing.[15] There is always more to painting and drawing than simply reproducing what you see; the result an *autograph* with 'poetry' unearthed.

My method of working, with 3D installation as well as painting and drawing, engages in the act of making in response to a visual reality that *reveals* rhythms of 'inner self' and underlying patterns of nature. For me it embraces discourse and process around theories of *chance*: not knowing, uncertainty, materiality, seeing, relationship and memory. The place of memory in art was highlighted for me in an exhibition of Pierre Bonnard's (1867-1947) work at Tate Modern, London. He '[...] did not paint in front of the motif. Instead he filtered the image, finding a way to make annotations that were a trigger for recollections that he wanted to capture on the canvas in the studio'.[16] The desire creatively to explore 'memory' as well as the 'seen' and 'unseen' of nature, is something I enter with a sense of wonder—uncertain of the outcome.

Conclusion

In the act of drawing, Tania Kovats finds, 'an intersection between drawing and landscape' while for Professor Anita Taylor, 'drawing is how I understand the world and my authenticity as a person'.17 With the act of painting Lee Krasner (1908 -84) once said, 'Painting is a revelation, an act of love [...] As a painter I can't experience it any other way'.[18] For me the working together of chance and discovery, personal authenticity and memory, personal significance and awareness of place and presence brings revelation, movement and relationship as in a 'dance'. Art practice and the creative-act, with painting and drawing, remind me of my humanity and dependence upon a Creator-God who made physical humanity from physical materials and breathed into them the breath of life—a sacramental and spiritual moment that continues; a Creator-God who physically/spiritually became one of us. With the psalmist I respond in worship: 'How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all'.[19] Yes, I am glad to be back with new ways of *seeing*.

John Billingham is now retired from Baptist ministry. Contact John on reverendjohn@hotmail.co.uk.

Notes to text

1. 'Before Present' day, as in archaeology, geology, palaeontology.

2. Julian Bell (1999/2017), *What is Painting?,* London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, p87.

3. *eg* Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal Son (c1661-69), Hermitage, St Petersburg.

4. John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2; Revelation 14:7

5. Romans 4:25

6. Patrick Heron, 'Art is Autonomous', *The Twentieth Century,* Sept 1955; cited Andrew Wilson (ed), (2018), Patrick Heron, London, Pavilion, p10.

7. Elizabeth Fisher & Rebecca Fortnum (eds), (2013), *On not knowing how artists think*, (London: Black Dog Publishing), p7.

8. Fabian Schoneich (2016), Interview with Amy Sillman in Bois, Yve-Alain, Amy Sillman The All-Over, New York, Mouse Publishing.

9. Gen 1:27; 2:7

10. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1960), 'Eye and Mind', Cazeaux (ed) (2011), *The Continental Aesthetics Reader,* p455.

11. Paul Fiddes (2000), *Participating in God*, London, DLT, pp72-82.

12. Peter Khoroche, (1990/2007), *Ivon Hitchens*, London: Lund Humphries, pp57 -58.

13. Vincent van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, the Hague, Sunday, 22 October 1882; Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum

14. Martin Heidegger (1989), *Contributions to Philosophy,* P Emad and K Maly trans, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p69

15. Barbara Bolt (2011), *Heidegger Reframed*, London/New York: IB Tauris, p149.

16. Cited Matthew Gale (ed), (2019), *Pierre Bonnard, the Colour of Memory*, London: Tate Publishing, p10.

17. Both speakers at the Drawing Symposium (Newcastle, 5 April 2019).

18. Cited, Eleanor Nairne (ed), in 'Primary Series', Lee Krasner, *Living Colour*, London: Thames & Hudson, p129.

19. Psalm 104:24a

Reviews

edited by Mike Peat

When Breath becomes Air

by Paul Kalanithi

Vintage, 2016

Late Fragments

by Kate Gross

William Collins, 2015

Reviewer John Rackley

These authors died within a few months of each other, in their mid-30s. Paul was completing his training as a neurosurgeon. Kate had worked for Tony Blair and Gordon Brown at No 10 before the discovery of her cancer, and was CEO of Africa Governance Initiative, a charity helping fragile governments develops stable processes. Both authors confess to a love of words and literature: Kate says, 'words are how I understand the world—I read, therefore I am'. Paul rediscovered some of the great works of Western fiction as he responded to his specialist's advice to ask what was of real importance in the here and now.

Kate wrote for her children—twins aged 5—so that they would know something of their mother in her own words. Paul decided with his wife Lucy to have their first child so the two of them could meet before he died.

Both attended church but do not elaborate greatly what that meant to them. Kate was more interested in the afterlife of her husband and children than in anything received from God. Paul re-established a connection with an expression of Church which did not embrace an uncomfortable conservative theology.

Approaching death is a popular literary genre in our confessional culture. No-one, not even eloquent people like Kate and Paul, can speak for everyone, but in their words we may all imagine our own responses to our vulnerability. Henri Nouwen argued that the real question before we die is not how much can we accomplish or how much influence can we still exert, but rather how can we so live that we can continue to be fruitful when we are no longer here among family and friends. Kate and Paul would agree. Paul in particular recorded the necessary struggle which moves one from asking 'how long do I have?' to 'what is of importance now?'.

I am wondering what this might all say to pastoral ministers. Certainly it would be interesting to consider how often and in what manner questions around dying and death are addressed in sermons and house groups. But, more importantly, a minister will spend a significant element of time with people who face a terminal illness. Techniques of listening and empathy will carry us so far, but beyond them there must be a readiness to encounter our own mortality and face hard questions of providence and eternity so that we may walk in the valley of the shadow of death with faith, as an offering and a prayer.

Dancers and Wayfarers

by Chris Thorpe

Canterbury Press, £14.99

Reviewer: Bob Little

This book contains ready-to-use liturgies, prayers and service outlines for part of the Christian year from Chris Thorpe, a parish priest in Shropshire and one of the Church of England's creative and poetic voices. The book's title highlights that its contents focus on movement and change—not least since

any encounter with the living God can change our perceptions and actions.

Dancers must be able to move and feel—usually in relationship with others. While some will prefer more formal dances—the dance equivalent of traditional, carefully choreographed worship—others will enjoy improvisation and experimentation. Thorpe points out that, at either end of this spectrum lies the danger of developing a performance-and-spectator culture This book is an attempt to avoid these extremes, providing some worship resources that allow all involved in worship to engage and become one body.

Thorpe adds that Christians are also called to be wayfarers, journeying with Jesus throughout life. Yet, he argues, we can become static—loaded down with doctrine, history, tradition, buildings, language and liturgy. His answer is to develop liturgies that use language that doesn't rely on religious familiarity and formulation.

Thorpe has already produced similar volumes of creative liturgies covering Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, along with Lent and Easter. So, this collection of 18 themed, complete outlines for worship deals with the period from Pentecost to the Feast of Christ the King (the Sunday before Advent). It includes readings, prayers, reflections, ideas for practical responses and music suggestions. These cover Pentecost (finding a language of love in a world of strangers and restoring community); Trinity (knowing that we belong and are loved); Ordinary Time (journeying in faith, venturing out, encountering storms, not losing heart, replenishing our resources); Transfiguration (seeing heaven in the everyday); Harvest (fruitfulness in unexpected places); All Saints and All Souls (expressing our grief, joyful remembrance, and finding light in the darkness), and Christ the King (the upside-down kingdom).

There's a wealth of worship material—not just prayers and reflections—in this book which, even if used in a slightly different context, could enhance other worship occasions and/or prompt further worship-related insights. Those who value others' insights into the content and conduct of public worship—especially when these come from a different worship tradition—should benefit from reading this slim volume.

Communion, Covenant and Creativity: An Approach to the Communion of Saints through the Arts

by Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes & Richard L. Kidd

Cascade Books, Oregon, 2020

Reviewer: Stephen Copson

The authors need little introduction. Many bmj readers will have sat in their lectures, read their books or listened to their sermons; maybe even acquired inspiration or an illustration or two.

A previous book—*The Communion of Saints*—used the same collaborative approach: the authors share insights and views as their thinking develops. This book builds on the earlier volume (although they can be read separately) which proposed an approach to the communion of saints through the lens of Baptist covenant theology, with its stress on both human and divine relationships, and suggested this was a gift that Baptists could offer to the universal church.

The communion of saints is determined not by special holiness of individuals nor divided into the church militant and the church triumphant, but as a coterminous community of past, present and future that is held in being by the grace of God, who is not constrained by time. So, prayer with the saints (and not to them) is possible because in each and every generation, followers of Jesus have

been able to pray in context, 'your Kingdom come; your will be done'.

The authors appeal to visual, literary and artistic aesthetics to demonstrate how people of deep spirituality, if not necessarily avowedly Christian motivation, can usher seekers into the presence of this greater and unbounded fellowship. Thomas Hardy, T.S.Eliot, James Joyce are enlisted by Paul Fiddes. Richard Kidd examines his profound encounter with the art of Mark Rothko, whilst Brian Haymes tells the story of Thérèse of Lisieux and the struggle of John Taverner to compose an opera accurately reflecting her life-force. A review is too short to explain the complex interplay here of presence and absence, of intimacy and alienation, of religious fervour and the limitations of musical expression. Take and read.

Further chapters reflect on the sense of journey and goal by Paul Fiddes citing Elgar and Brahms. Richard Kidd explores the hiddenness of faith in the apophatic tradition, and how less can be more, whilst Brian Haymes develops the idea of one (non-dualistic) world and the call to altruistic living in a complex and challenging environment. Paul Fiddes offers a final chapter that highlights the significance of participation.

This is a reclaiming of a high Baptist view of the church. The Baptist community is not a haphazard group of loosely connected individuals. It is a place of covenant, of commitment where God roots the communion of saints and invites to embrace the greater reality. Time and space are the theatre of the activity of God. No place here for self-justifying individualism without missing something essential about the self-communication of Godself. No functional consumer view of church where people take without creating. This is a pressing and attractive appeal to discover the gifts of God that have been given to the people of God for the people of God. And aesthetics plays its part in making this real to women and men. As an argument, it is innovative, refreshing and thought-provoking, and a counter to the near-horizoned congregations that our Baptist theology has sometimes permitted.

Regrets. I have a few. It was heart-warming to recall some fellow travellers on my journey—Eliot, Hardy, Kierkegaard, R.S. Thomas, Elgar, Taverner, Paul Nash. (Sorry Richard, Rothko still doesn't do it for me). But pause for thought to realise that the examples cited were all white, male (excepting Thérèse) and...dead.

This concept offers fresh explorations into the communion of saints as a supportive reality and hopefully the wider audience of Baptist Christians will be encouraged to find their own guides and portals—maybe contemporary aesthetics, or experience of suffering or discrimination, or appreciation of the environment, or the unique insights of other abled people, or simply the wonder of the commonplace. Whatever assists in comprehending people in this great crowd of witnesses and allows them to be rooted and grounded in their lived experience as followers of Jesus.

Also, while acknowledging the strengths of the collaborative approach, I would have appreciated an outsider, someone with a different take on the communion of saints, to engage as a conversation partner, to critique or applaud.

That said, this is a creative piece that deserves to be read carefully and savoured. It seeks to signpost Baptists to affirm that sense of enjoying the church universal to which we belong, and which may sometimes get overlooked in the narrower preoccupations of the local gathered fellowship. This collection is a timely reminder of the glory of God and the glories of humankind.

Fifty Lessons in Ministry: Reflections on Fifty Years of Ministry

Paul Beasley-Murray

DLT, 2020

Reviewer: John Rackley

Paul describes a ministry I recognise: weddings, funerals, preaching, pastoral visiting; the power games of deacons; the stresses on family; the need to adapt to cultural changes and the transitions into different stages of life. Here is the ministry of the book reading, worship planning, sermon loving, and early morning praying pastor explored in detail and with affection.

This book is at its most impressive when Paul talks of the call to ministry, the grace of God and the intrinsic woundedness of the human condition. I wished for more of this—the dust and glory of disciple-ministry. In Paul's typical fashion each of the 50 sections are under-girded by scripture references; quotations from a wide range of authors from both sides of the Atlantic and his own experience.

At times the book tips over into 'minister as God's CEO'—the minister working for God rather than with God; the book leaning towards the 'doing' of ministry rather than 'being' a minister. But could this author have written any differently? More crucially, can any ministry (however long and significant) still speak in changing times?

I wonder whether this describes a dated understanding of what ministers do/are. There will be some who will say 'I wish I'd had something like this when I started out' or 'I would give this to any minister starting out'. But there will be others who will say 'this is not ministry as I need to develop it now'. Circumstances and needs change the manner of ministry. I wonder how this book will relate to today's emphasis that ministers are to be community-centred mission-workers, for whom pastoral ministry is too often parodied as church-centred chaplaincy.

The book may be a necessary call back to the significance of the local church in the mission of God. Ministry to the local church can be dull and vexatious, and it would be good if this offering from Paul re-kindles forgotten hopes, suspended prayers and creates a fresh expectation of the company of God's people.

As in many of his books, Paul has much to say about himself and his experience. This is to be expected. This book is about the ministry of one person, and he is a man of his time. He can only speak as he has found it. He has been a pioneer. He was often at the forefront of various movements within the Baptist world - not all of which he admits now, as that the early ideas of church growth were of the gospel. And in that there is an important invitation: the invitation to let our biography create our theology—whether it is of the ministry or the faith itself.

For there is no one-size-fits-all mould for the minister. We may learn from each other but we should not try to imitate. Any ministry is through personality and Spirit. It emerges from the faith-journey of each minister. It is through our uniqueness that God serves his world.

In the final analysis we are the authors of our own pages, and it is God who signs us off.

Bread of Life in Broken Britain

by Charles Roding Pemberton

SCM press, 2020

Reviewer: Stephen Heap

The rise of foodbanks and the significant support given to them by Christians are the phenomena at the heart of this book. Interviews with foodbank users and volunteers, along with a useful brief history of the foodbank movement set the scene. A

wider context is also given as Pemberton considers 'neoliberalism', which he says has done much to create the sort of 'precariousness' (*eg* p31) which makes foodbanks necessary. He also argues that, while foodbanks are a necessary response to immediate need, from the perspective of Christianity they are not a sufficient response to the underlying issues of injustice and food insecurity.

All that provides the framework for what could be a useful book, helping Christians think through issues around this particular charitable activity, including the possible root causes of the hunger which drives people to foodbanks. Such a book is present in embryonic form in this one, and there is certainly valuable material here. To use a food analogy, the problem is that Pemberton puts rather a lot on the reader's plate, some of which could helpfully be held back for another meal.

Our author draws on quite a range of resources. The fact there are 39 pages of endnotes and 10 pages of bibliography to a substantive text of 140 pages may be indicative of that. Clearly a huge amount of research has gone in to producing this book. That means there are lots of references for the interested reader to follow up. However, this reviewer's enjoyment and understanding would have been aided with a more careful editing. A honing of the material with a clearer focus on the central arguments and a more judicious use of resources to illustrate and reinforce understanding of the issues around those arguments would hugely enhance the book.

Having said which, there are many useful insights. For example, Pemberton reflects on the place of food in Christian tradition. Within Christianity, food helps us recognise 'our embeddedness and entanglement in God, nature and each other' (p64). The growth, production and preparing of food speak of our relatedness to God, creation and each other; a relatedness which for Christians should be marked by giving and loving. From such thoughts Pemberton draws conclusions about the need to respect the land and to care for what it produces; care for, not waste. Through such reflections he looks behind foodbanks to the underlying issues which help create food poverty. Similarly there are critiques of neoliberal political and economic policies, of which Pemberton is not a fan. He, like others, has seen the harm they do to the poor.

He has three suggestions to make which might help us tackle the root causes which make food banks necessary. The first is the establishment of a universal basic income. The second is the disestablishment of the Church of England. The third is individual dietary responsibility. The link between the first and the third points and the issues being addressed may be clear enough. On the second, Pemberton's point is that the established church is too aligned with a state which pursues policies which consign people to precariousness and poverty. It is not clear Mrs Thatcher experienced the Church of England in that way when *Faith in the City* was produced, but perhaps that is ancient history now.

Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Uncertainty

By Walter Brueggemann

Cascade Books, 2020

Reviewer: Michael Bochenski

Any new book by Walter Brueggemann is eagerly awaited by many across the worlds of faith. How much more so one about a devastating virus which is breaking hearts and health, economies and social contracts across the globe. Nahum Ward-Lev (whose

own book *The Liberating Path of the Hebrew Prophets* speaks so powerfully into the 21st century world), is a one-time student and now friend and colleague of Bruegemman. In his Foreword to this short and deeply helpful volume, he writes of it as '...an invaluable source of guidance—spiritual, psychological, social, and political—for how we can bring new life out of the death and destruction we find all around us'. How we need such a guide! For what an extraordinary year this one has already become. From the early years of Roman Christianity's presence in these islands Easter Sunday worship has continued undeterred here...until 2020. It is already clear that our world will never be the same again after Covid-19. We will, or so the scientists tell us, be learning to live with it for months and perhaps years to come. 'Beyond these demanding immediacies', comments Brueggemann, 'we have a deep sense that our life is not fully contained in the cause-and-effect reasoning of the Enlightenment that seeks to explain and control. There is more than that and other than that to our life in God's world!'

What a difference too to the way government, society and business operate in the space of just a few weeks. Why can we suddenly get rough sleepers off the streets in days, when so many have lobbied for this for decades? How can the average four-year-old have a maturer attititude to bleach than a US President? And as nature and the ozone layer, the air we breathe and the songbirds remind us, the natural world has flourished in and through it all, offering us all glimpses of a new and more eco-friendly world. In church life too, all kinds of creative experiments have been taking place. From pastoral calls by Face Time to worship and services on our iPads and TV screens; from leadership meetings by Zoom to remarkable programmes of generosity and support for local communities. Into all of this book speaks powerfully. One of the most familiar sayings of recent weeks has been 'I just wish we could get back to normal'. Brueggemann would wish to disagree.

In *Virus as a Summons to Faith* he invites us to reflect on seven biblical passages and what they have to say to us as a deadly new coronavirus, like an Old Testament plague, curses millions across God's world. The relationship between sword, famine and plague in the Torah. Samuel's unshakeable confidence in God's *hesed*—a solidarity of mercy and love. The longing for wedding songs to be heard again in Jeremiah. The move from 'I, me me, mine' to the 'Thous' of Psalm 77: 'After we have said "I" for a very long time, we fall back to "Thou"; we utter the "Thou" who inhabits our memories, memories of rescue, healing, and forgiveness; we utter the "thou" who occupies our best hopes, as we hope for peace, wellbeing, and justice in the world'. The complexity of trying to pray in the midst of a virus: ' We are bold to ask, because it will be given! So we pray for the end of the virus, for the health of the neighborhood, for the recovery of the economy. We are bold to seek, because you will be found! ' Isaiah's vision of a new normal...and ours. And what Brueggemann calls 'the matrix of groan' (drawing on Romans 8) as a call to a potentially very new way of living and being. Too many of us, sheltered in first world comfort during this pandemic, are he suggests, like the somewhat obtuse new father greeting his wife and their baby after labour with the words 'well that wasn't so bad, was it?' (!). Brueggemann's perception of America in these days is deeply insightful. He captures the mood of many there thus—the paraphrase is mine. Why has God stopped our American way of life in this cruel way? We had a pact. We continue to live the

good life we enjoy and ignore its impact on the poor and the planet. In return God gets our tithes and lips praying and singing to Him. How dare God change the terms of His contract with the America's (richer) people ?! The transfer of that message to the UK should not be hard.

Interspersed between the chapters of this book are several reflective prayers. Here is one profound example: 'We sense the disruption, the loss, the deep dis-ease among us, and we want our old normals to be "great again." Except that we cannot! Except that you summon us to new futures made sober by the pandemic; You require us now to imagine, to risk, and be vulnerable as we watch the new normals emerge among us: the blind see, lepers are cleansed, the poor have good news; students have debts canceled, the poor have health care, workers have a living wage, the atmosphere breathes fresh air. We want to return to the old normals that yield (for some) safety and happiness. but you dispatch us otherwise. Your new normal for us requires some adjustment by us. And adjust we will. We will live and trust and share differently. "All things new" is a huge stretch for us. But we know it is your good gift to us; with wistfulness, we receive it we embrace it, and we give thanks to you. Amen.'

Ward-Lev gets this small book exactly right. It is indeed a '...comforting, challenging, and invaluable resource to guide us through these difficult times'.

The Kingdom of our God: A Theological Commentary on Isaiah

by Jenni Williams

SCM, 2019

Reviewer: Pieter J. Lalleman

Not long ago I reviewed a book for you not unlike this one: *The Abiding Presence. A Theological Commentary on Exodus*, by Mark Scarlata. Both books are large paperbacks with fancy covers and they offer running commentaries on the biblical text. It looks as if SCM has started a new series, but their website won't tell me. Is it accidental that both authors are tutors in Anglican theological colleges?

Anyway, I liked Scarlata's book a lot, but I am less enthusiastic about Williams' and I wonder why. Whereas Scarlata had over 200 pages to expound Exodus (and rightly made light of chapters 35-40), if you deduct the pages given to introductory and concluding materials, Williams has fewer than 200 pages for the 66 chapters of Isaiah. Additionally, Scarlata's text is printed in a small font with 44 lines per page, but William's font is larger and only allows 38 lines.

The result is that her discussions are shorter than I find helpful. I want to hear more! Furthermore, she does not have the gift to state things in a way that strikes me as beautiful or powerful. And whereas Scarlata had scope to interact with the authors in his 14-page bibliography, Williams hardly spars with the authors on her 2-page book list. (I am aware that not all users of commentaries value interaction with previous voices.)

The short introduction is largely dedicated to the authorship of the book called Isaiah. Williams carefully argues for the common view that two or three authors worked on it and in the actual commentary she does point to links between the various parts of the book. Her discussions are balanced and helpful, with little to disagree with. The conclusion—an unusual element in a commentary and easily overlooked—is largely about the political relevance of Isaiah today.

Some readers may disagree with me and think that two or three pages per chapter of Isaiah give them enough material to prepare their

sermons and Bible studies. If you are among them, then do buy this book.

Holy Habits in Messy Church: Discipleship Sessions for Churches

by Lucy Moore & Andrew Roberts

BRF, 2020

Reviewer: Bob Allaway

This book does what it says on the cover!

I think most of us are familiar with Messy Church, which teaches through creative, practical, hands-on activities. It is what we might associate with all age services or children's activities, though I am pleased to see this book also has some 'Messy Vintage' sessions to use with, for example, older people in care homes. Lucy Moore handles this.

Holy Habits are about developing discipleship practices. I thought it sounded like the character ethics approach of writers like Stanley Hauerwas, of which I am an advocate, but, as we shall see, there are differences. Andrew Roberts handles this.

The object of this book is to use the former to teach the latter. It is laid out very simply and clearly, with titles in different colours for different sections, colourful little pictures and references to downloadable pdfs of illustrations. All this makes it a pleasure to use. So: the presentation is excellent; what of the content?

A major question the book raised in me was why Roberts uses Acts 2:42-47 to define the 10 practices that the book teaches. Admittedly, he uses a passage from the gospels to illustrate each of these practices, but I would have thought it would make more sense to start with the values that Jesus teaches in, for example, the Beatitudes, rather than with one stage in the early evolution of the church, under particular historical conditions.

Perhaps the most notorious practice here is what Roberts terms 'sharing resources', and illustrates with Matthew 25:31-46. All this is commendable, but could be seen as just being charitable, whereas Acts 2:44,45 and 4:32-35 are actually about Christian communism ('no one claimed that any of their possessions was their own')—and were they led to this by a particular eschatological worldview? If Barnabas, from Cyprus, could sell a field he owned on the spot, was this because it was a burial plot, which many wealthy Jews owned around Jerusalem? He would not be needing it if Jesus was coming again at any moment!

My interpretation of this passage may be wrong, but most commentators see a degree of radicalism here that was not and could not be replicated elsewhere. So why make a watered-down interpretation of it normative for church life today?

Whatever we may make of the Holy Habits, how well does Messy Church teach them? This really needs to be tested in practice. A minister I know was just starting afternoon meetings for families, along Messy Church lines, and was keen to roadtest this book for me. Unfortunately, the government brought in the Covid-19 lockdown before he could do so. What I would say is that I have viewed some simple Messy Church type activities taught on-line, but I am not sure if these could be. It is one thing to say, 'You will need a small sheet of paper, later on', it is quite another to say, for example, 'You will need: cling film; small cardboard bowls; PVA glue; paint brushes; thick string' (p15).

My impression is that, with plenty of time to prepare and buy in resources, and by using the Messy Church stuff to teach the Holy Habit in the gospel reading in each chapter, in its own right (without necessarily referencing Acts), this could be useful.

Faithful Living: Discipleship, Creed and Ethics

By Michael Leyden

SCM, 2019

Reviewer: Andy Goodliff

Michael Leyden has written a good book which seeks to bring doctrine to bear on ethics. His argument is that the Nicene Creed is not just a confession of Christian belief, but by implication it has ethical meaning. Where, too often, it is seen that doctrine and belief are one thing, and ethics and Christian living are another, Leyden seeks to show that they are joined together. And by treating the Creed—that which is most often used in worship (although more occasionally by Baptists)—Leyden argues that worship is formative. The ground he is treading is not altogether new: others have been treading similar paths. For example, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* and for Baptists, the former Spurgeon's tutor John Colwell's little book *The Rhythm of Doctrine*, which does a similar work to Leyden in connecting doctrine, ethics and liturgy together. Leyden's is more consciously shaped by the Creed, where Colwell's follows the pattern of the Christian year.

Each chapter of *Faithful Living* explores the doctrine in the Creed, before exploring its ethical implications. Chapter 2 on 'We believe in God' tells the story of how the Nicene Creed emerged and how this shapes a communal ethic of discernment. This challenges individualism, but, at the same time, Leyden is aware that conciliar decision-making can also be problematic, and so argues for a posture of listening, humility and forbearance. This speaks helpfully into the Baptist practice of church meeting.

The next four chapters are more particularly linked to an ethical 'issue': 'Maker of heaven and earth' challenges us to think about our relationship to fellow creatures and eating meat; 'in Lord Jesus Christ' makes clear the link between faith and politics—if Jesus is Lord, we cannot help but be politically engaged; 'conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary' engages with Jesus' humanity and how we understand disability; and 'suffered death and was buried' confronts the question of suffering and assisted suicide. Each chapter demonstrates helpfully that what we believe about who God is cannot be separated from what faithful living looks like. Even if we draw different conclusions to those ones Leyden makes, the point is that doctrine matters for ethics.

The final three chapters are more general in terms of the character of ethical reasoning: a chapter on the resurrection and hope, which teases out hope as imaginative, self-critical and socially-engaged and a chapter on the Holy Spirit and prayer. The final chapter is an argument for how this might go on to shape catechesis. I was a bit disappointed that Leyden puts the doctrinal reflection to one side here. The chapter is headed the *Communion of Saints and the Forgiveness of Sins*, but there are only tangential links in the argument he makes for how the church should do catechesis—liturgically, pedagogically and responsively. This is all good, but I felt that could have been a separate chapter, and one more focused on forgiveness or the communion of saints and how it might shape, for example, crime and punishment or education, would have been more in keeping with the rest of the book.

As I said above, this is a good book. I recommend it (along with John Colwell's) for doing the kind of work that I believe is helpful to ministers seeking to offer a vision of the Christian life where theology shapes living. Each chapter ends with some questions, so the book could be used by a small group. As Leyden acknowledges, this is not the last

word and other connections between doctrine and ethics could be made, but this is a helpful addition to a body of work that is thinking about the formation of Christians as disciples with mind, heart and body in relation.

Scattering Church, Effective Mission in the Post-Institutional World

By Matthew C. Clarke

Newcastle, Australia, 2019

Reviewer: Bob Allaway

I read a good review of this book in *Anabaptism Today* **2.1**, which encouraged me to purchase a copy for myself (although published in Australia, it can be found here). The concept binding this book together is metaphor. Although he demonstrates at the start that he knows the difference between a metaphor, a simile, and other comparisons, Clarke uses metaphor as shorthand for all of them. (He repeatedly talks about 'metaphoric calculus', which really grates on me.)

We Baptists often speak of the 'gathered church'. *Ekklesia,* the word we translate 'church', is itself a metaphor drawn from civic life, and certainly contains a sense of gathering. However, only twice are Jesus' words translated with that word. Jesus tells parables to illustrate the Kingdom of God, and these more often convey a sense of scattering. What do these metaphors tell us about God's Kingdom? How can church work through the implications of these metaphors?

There is solid New Testament exegesis underpinning Clarke's writing, but he is very readable and takes fresh approaches. On the parable of the leaven, for example (Matthew 13:33/Luke 13:20-21), he describes how he and his wife baked two loaves, one with the yeast well kneaded through the dough, the other with yeast added at the last minute, to illustrate how yeast only works properly when scattered! He also points out how subversive it must have seemed in a patriarchal society to use a woman doing a domestic chore as a metaphor for God's Kingdom.

Clarke is explicitly writing within the Anabaptist tradition, as am I, and quotes theologians I regard highly: Bonhoeffer, Volf, C. F. Blumhardt. He has many stories drawn from real pastoral experience and suggests many practical ideas. Although published in 2019, he anticipated the digital communications churches have now been forced to adopt under 'lockdown'.

All this should give you a good idea why I recommend this book. But, here are a couple of caveats.

First, Clarke admits, 'There have been times when I have deliberately lived in multi-racial areas and areas of low socio-economic power, but most of my life has been in comfortable Australian suburbs' (p202). It shows, as when he says, 'We baptize in the backyard pool' (p201, also p158)! Presumably, this was the backyard garden to which they invited 20 people to share an outdoor meal (p1). I could not help wondering what the members of my church would make of all this, when most of them live in crowded flats in tower blocks.

It irritates me when bourgeois, 'radical' Christians deprecate having church buildings as 'institutional' (p139). For us, having a permanent building in the midst of the estate, where our youth and children's clubs can meet, is a life-saver for the youngsters. It also means we can all meet equally as guests on a Sunday, instead of being beholden to householders, like us, as hosts. To be fair to Clarke, though, he is

aware of such things.

Secondly, his 'scattering church' ecclesiology is underpinned by a theology in which God acts by 'letting go'. As a metaphor for this he uses improvisatory drama, 'improv' (p245f), an unfortunate choice. Apart from comedy, and role-play in training, my experiences of this have been unimpressive, so I did not find this helpful. And is it really true that God has no script, when his saving acts are 'according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3,4)?

There are extensive endnotes and a comprehensive bibliography, but no index.

Alive in God: A Christian Imagination

by Timothy Radcliffe

Bloomsbury, 2019

Reviewer John Rackley

The difference between a Roman Catholic and a Baptist is that the Roman Catholic knows he or she belongs to a world church. Timothy Radcliffe demonstrates this in a book that ranges widely over his experience as a former Master of the Dominican Order as he travelled extensively and reports his encounters with writers, people in the poorest of communities, fellow-friars and cultural commentators.

He begins with a circumstance familiar in Christian families both Protestant and Catholic. 'We brought them all up to go to church and become Christian, now only one does—why?'

The purpose of this pastoral book is to investigate how Christian belief and practice may touch the imagination of people shaped by the secular mindset of contemporary Western culture.

He explores imagination in three ways—the way we see the world; a vision of how the world could be; the creation of fantasies. He addresses these by taking us through the journeys and teaching of Jesus but the text really takes off as he inhabits the resurrection and its consequences.

There is a deceptive simplicity in what Radcliffe writes. He is very aware that his church will have a long stint in the wilderness of indifference after the various scandals of recent years. He seems haunted by the deaths of monks in Algeria at the close of the last century so powerfully portrayed in the film *Of Gods and Men*.

He is at his most potent when writing about forgiveness and sin, the holiness of the flesh, care of the Earth, liturgy and a prayer lifestyle. For the latter he acknowledges the impact of both Pope Francis and Baptist Ian Stackhouse. These chapters come closest to fulfilling his intention. I place him alongside Rowan Williams, Richard Harries and Jonathan Sacks as astute commentators on current culture—both ecclesial and a-religious.

In the end, he recognises that only when the church acquires a desire and ability to become a community of fresh air (a metaphor for the experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which he explores throughout the book) will its own imagination flourish and the millennial generation wonder whether we are worth a look.

Meanwhile, God has not left himself without witness in the lives of martyrs and the imaginations of composers, artists and authors, be they Christian or not.

bmj Essay Prize 2021

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

Baptist History and Principles
Biblical Studies
Theology or Practical Theology

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

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

Closing date: 30 March 2021

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

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

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