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

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

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the baptist ministers' journal

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From the editor

Prophets or profits?

I have recently revisited Wendell Berry's *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front* as a basis for prayers around Easter. Berry, an activist with a range of passions, wrote this poem in the 1970s but it is a timely prophetic word today, addressing environmental issues, all-engulfing consumerism, oppressive power, and the subversive calling by God to love those who do 'not deserve it'. The final line enjoins us to 'Practice [*sic*] resurrection', reminding us that the cross and resurrection are a godly judgement on destructive human economics and politics. Berry's original concerns emerge with a particular resonance in the light of the many impacts of the global pandemic, for which our lifestyle choices have been in part responsible. I love this:

Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.

We can't force governments to make long-term altruistic decisions on such matters as global vaccination, green policies and foreign aid, although we can lobby, campaign and persuade. But in our churches, we *can* plant crops that we will not live to harvest, and in anticipating the life that is yet to come we can take our places humbly within creation, confronting the drive towards individual legacy that is endemic to so much of our western culture and so destructive to the soul.

In this issue of *bmj* there are some super articles, all exploring matters of relevance to ministry today. The action of reflecting on life from the accrued resources of our tradition, in conversation with others, is that of exercising godly wisdom: asking questions and seeking common ground. In this way, opening ourselves to critique, we can learn the art of the prophet and not of the profit.

Many thanks to all our thoughtful contributors, as always, and our gratitude to Sarah Halliwell for sending out the past two issues. Adrian Ward now joins your *bmj* team as distributor from July 2021. Thank you, Adrian. *SN*

Rebel hearts and radical traditions:

learning from the experience of women in ministry in BUGB

by Leigh Greenwood

Author: Leigh Greenwood is the minister of Stoneygate Baptist Church, Leicester, and this material was part of her MA research.

The past few years have been significant for women in ministry in our Union, because 2018 marked a century since Edith Gates was recognised as the first woman to hold pastoral charge of a Baptist church in England and Wales, and 2019 was the centenary of Violet Hedger's being accepted as the first woman formally to train for Baptist ministry.[1] These milestones were celebrated in a number of ways, from purple ribbons at Assembly 2019, a special edition of *Baptists Together,* to the appointment of Jane Day as Centenary Enabler, working across the Union to 'encourage and equip women in exercising their God-given gifting and leadership'.[2]

It is right that there were celebrations, but they ought not to mask the fact that the past 100 years have not been entirely happy for the women who serve our churches in pastoral ministry. In 1926, *Baptist Times* reported the view of a special committee founded to discuss the matter of women and ministry, which declared that 'in Baptist belief and practice, sex is not a bar to any kind of Christian service'.[3] So far so good, and yet that same committee also cautioned that 'in view of the reluctance of our churches to invite women to the pastorate' it should be made 'as clear as possible to all women candidates for the ministry... that the prospect of finding such spheres of service as they desire...is exceedingly small'.[4] In short, women ministers were given the approval but not the full support of the Union, and while official support has since been more forthcoming, a degree of ambivalence at grassroots level has continued ever since.

In 2018, I completed and shared a piece of research for my MA, looking at how the history and principles of the BU have shaped the experience of women in ministry in its churches, and as part of that study, I invited women currently or formerly serving as Baptist ministers in Great Britain to reflect on their experiences. I wrote the questionnaire early in the project, and so it was not until I had already shared it that I realised I was asking an almost identical set of questions to that posed by Dianne Tidball three decades

earlier.[5] As I watched the responses come in, my heart sank to see that the answers were almost identical too, reporting the same instances of exclusion and discrimination. It may well be that some of the respondents (and therefore some of the answers) were in fact the same across the two studies, but as one of the questions concerned length of ministry, it was clear that many of the negative experiences reported were recent.

There was much that was encouraging in the survey, but it was impossible not to conclude that even after 100 years, women ministers were still facing both conscious and unconscious bias. If little had changed in the 30 years prior to my study, it seems unlikely that much has changed in the three years since,[6] but my intention here is not to present again the evidence I gathered or reflect in any detail on it. Instead, I want to explain why I felt such research was necessary, why any of this matters to anyone outside of the 300 or so women in ministry in BUGB.

It matters first because the current and historical situations have hurt women deeply, and this has maimed the body of Christ. Ruth Goldbourne has observed that women who are told 'the gifts and willingness that they have can be used only in certain ways' are forced into the 'impossible and painful situation' of having to deny either their calling or their fellowship,[7] and when Carol McCarthy reflected on her experience of ministry she found she was 'tired of being patronised… tired of surprising people…tired of being treated as a peculiarity…angry and disappointed'.[8] These women are far from being alone, and while I have found myself in supportive environments where the slights against me personally have been few and mild, I have felt the pain of seeing other female ministers abused and rejected, knowing that I would have faced exactly the same thing in their place. If the BU is truly committed to the women it calls into ministry, it must recognise this hurt to repent and reform, and to allow the body to heal.

It matters because it is a nonsense to say that dissent must not mask prejudice, as the BU has done,[9] if there is no attempt to delineate between the two and challenge any prejudice thus found. The BU has always been characterised by a respect for freedom of conscience, and so it does not enforce beliefs or practices on its members or expect them of its counterparts, but if it wholeheartedly affirms the ministry of women as it has claimed, it must at least engage with those who disagree, and yet Keith Jones has spoken of his regret that Baptists 'have not had the deep debate some other traditions have had about the place of leadership of women'.[10] Pat Took goes even further when she questions why 'the matter of freeing and celebrating women' is still seen as 'a diaphora, marginal, a matter of social custom' in which 'churches should be free to follow their conscience'.[11] Insisting on the equality of women as a foundational element of Baptist ecclesiology would be a

significant move, but that does not necessarily mean it would be an inappropriate limit on the liberty of the churches. In fact, extending the Declaration of Principle to affirm the equality of all before God would seem in keeping with our belief in every-member ministry, and could defend against the kind of prejudice disguised as theology against which the BU has specifically cautioned, while encouraging the deep debate of which Jones has lamented the absence.

It matters because the soft complementarity that underpins so much of the conversation, by which I mean the argument that women should minister because they complement men or bring their own 'soft' skills to ministry,[12] restricts all ministers. Adding a box labelled 'female ministers' to the box now reactively labelled 'male ministers' still keeps everyone in boxes. Goldbourne claims that the 'different but equal' argument has been used to limit women without doing the same for men,[13] and it is clear that women have been limited in ways that men have not, but I believe that the marginalisation and oppression of women does affect men too, not least because it expects men to conform to stereotypes they may not be comfortable with either.

It matters because it affects our witness to the world. Mission has always been at the heart of Baptist life, but a publication from the BU claims that 'when gender inequality takes root amongst the people of God, all of God's people are diminished and the good news of Jesus Christ…is distorted',[14] although the impact that has on mission will depend on the context in which it takes place. Simon Woodman argues that 'in Western culture it is no longer harmful to the proclamation of the gospel for women to minister…the converse is probably true',[15] the consequence being that in areas of the world where the equality of women is valued, the church's real or perceived lack of commitment to it may render mission less effective. And in cultures where conservative attitudes towards women remain the norm, the church's reluctance to push the conversation may appear to endorse already oppressive views, so that mission may become potentially destructive.

And finally, it matters because it has implications for other conversations, not least those around sexuality. For example, Beth Allison-Glenny contends that the 'binary theology of embodiment' that lies behind complementarian views of gender has 'shaped the interpretive landscape for our conversations around human sexuality' by insisting that partnership must be male and female.[16] Focusing on the distinctive contributions of men and women in ministry has strengthened this position and indirectly served to harden the BU's rejection of same-sex marriage. And yet where the debate around the former may have had a more positive impact on the debate around the latter, this has not materialised. With respect to women in ministry, the BU

has found a way to 'live with a measure of disagreement' without seeking to discipline churches,[17] and yet with respect to same-sex marriages, the Baptist Council has sought to 'humbly urge' churches not to register their buildings lest they cause division.[18] While the same freedom is technically allowed, it is done so begrudgingly, but the acceptance of women into Baptist ministry surely ought to serve as a model for the allowance of same-sex marriages in Baptist churches, in spirit as well as in practice. And to make a broader point, affirming the equality of all before God as suggested above would not just protect and empower women, but all those belonging to groups which have traditionally been excluded from the full welcome of the church.

Took has declared that 'if the church is to be true to Jesus in the way it lives there must space in it for women who are evangelists, who are priests, who are prophets and teachers and apostles'.[19] That space does exist within the BU, but many women find it an uncomfortable one to occupy, and this matters in short because it hurts the whole people of God. I do want to end with a note of hope though, because while I take seriously the importance of this conversation and the damage that will be done by ignoring it, I do have hope. In part because there has been progress, and it has accelerated within my lifetime, but mostly because my sisters in ministry give me hope. Baptists are the heirs of a radical tradition, and there is a rebel heart in the women of our union. As it beats in time with the heart of Christ, it will do glorious things.

Notes to text

1. For a concise history of women in ministry in BUGB, see *The Story of Women in Ministry in the Baptist Union of Great Britain* (Didcot: BUGB, 2011). This text will hereafter by referred to as *SWMBUGB*.
2. See https://baptisttimes.co.uk/Articles/554164/Jane_Day_appointed.aspx
3. *Baptist Times*, quoted in *SWMBUGB*, p6
4. Minutes from Special Committee (1926), quoted in *SWMBUGB*, p11-12
5. Dianne Tidball, 'Walking a Tightrope' in *Baptist Quarterly,* 1990, **33**.8, pp388-95. Coincidentally, but meaningfully for me, the survey was conducted in the year I was born.
6. Indeed, with concerns about ministerial posts being lost as churches struggle financially in the pandemic, and women's work disproportionately affected across a variety of sectors, it may well be that any progress made has already been set back.
7. Ruth Goldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel*. Oxford: Whitley Publications, 1997, pp16-17.
8. Carol McCarthy, 'Ordained and Female' in *Baptist Quarterly,* 1986, **31**.7, pp334-36 (p336).
9. *SWMBUGB*, p72.
10. Keith Jones, quoted in Goldbourne, p19.
11. Pat Took, 'In His image' in *Baptist Ministers' Journal,* 2008, *v*ol 300, pp2-10, p5.
12. Beth Allison-Glenny treats this line of thought in 'Performing Baptism, Embodying Christ' in *Reconciling Rites,* Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2020.
13. Goldbourne, p24.
14. *SWMBUGB,* p7.

15. Simon Woodman, 'A Biblical basis for affirming women in ministry (Pt 2)' in *Baptist Ministers' Journal,* 2007, vol 296, pp10-15 (p13).
16. Beth Allison-Glenny, 'Baptist Interpretations of Scripture on the Complementarity of Male and Female' in *Gathering Disciples.* Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017, pp90-111 (p90).
17. Beth Allison-Glenny *et al, The Courage to be Baptist* at http://www.somethingtodeclare.org.uk/uploads/7/7/9/3/77938394/the_courage_to_be_baptist.pdf, p13.
18. Baptist Council, 'Council Statement on the Registration of Buildings for Same-Sex Marriage' accessed at http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/273782/Same_Sex_Marriage.aspx.
19. Took, p10.

Nominations for the Whitley Lecturer 2024

The Whitley Trust Committee is receiving nominations for the 2024 Lectureship. This Lecture, endowed in memory of Baptist scholar W.T. Whitley, is open to Baptists from the UK and Ireland. If you have research that might be of interest to the wider Baptist public, and you would like to know more, please contact the Secretary to the Trust at revsal96@aol.com for more information about the nomination and selection process, and the appropriate forms. You can encourage someone else to think about the Lectureship, but they must submit the nomination themselves.

Closing date for nominations: 15 July 2021

Watch your language:

talking to God; talking of God

by Michael Humphreys

Author: Michael Humphreys is a retired Baptist minister, and a Fellow Emeritus of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, Regent's Park College. A version of this paper was given at the Knighton Theology Circle, January 2019.

Getting the language right is difficult even when we speak to one another about everyday matters, and still more difficult when we speak about God. What does it mean for God to speak, and for us to speak to God and in God's name?

Genres and theology

If I pick up a book on theology, or read an article in a theological journal, the genre in which it is commonly written could be described as reasoned discourse and debate. Ideas are proposed and explained, discussed, compared and criticised. This process leads, one hopes, to a conclusion, sometimes firm and sometimes tentative, about the matter in hand—is this or that doctrine correct? Is this exegesis of the text secure? How sure of it should we be? Is this take on church history reasonable in the light of the relevant documents?

A glance through the scriptures reveals a profusion of genres: narrative, biography, genealogy, myth (in the technical sense), historiography, song, poetry, lament, letter, proverb, prophecy, parable, healing story, exorcism story, dialogue, apocalyptic…all alongside, or perhaps including, careful rational discourse. This profusion of genres shows that theology (the knowledge of God) may be conveyed in varied ways.

The preacher is wise not to use only rational explanation to proclaim Christian belief and teaching—though reasoned discourse has an important place—but to convey the message using a variety of ways that mirror to some extent the variety seen in our scriptures. Not of course that every sermon or talk should use the entire repertoire—the choice depends on the audience and the occasion, as well as the purpose of the talk.

Preachers develop a personal style, and that style is likely to change over the years. I have found myself making more use of story-telling and illustrations in recent decades. There is a risk, if spur-of-the-moment illustrations are used, of using the

same illustration repeatedly without realising it. Sometimes I have thought while preaching: *Have I used this before when speaking to this congregation?* Even more alarmingly: *Did I use it last time I was here?* (A minister I knew kept a record of when and where he used each illustration, organising them all by theme. I am not so organised!)

I encourage those of us who engage in preaching and teaching to review from time to time, in the presence of God, the range of genres we use. What is our dominant style? How can we best convey the richness of the faith, drawing upon the variety of genres found in our scriptures and in today's culture? The aim of our preaching and teaching is that our people will sense the touch of God through the spoken word—encounter his holy presence—'touch the hem of his garment'. Such discourse can be life-changing, even if largely private to the person so touching and touched. 'Who is sufficient for these things?' So we pray: 'Guide my studying, my thinking, my writing, my speaking, and the people's listening. May it all be infused with your Spirit'. There is something sacramental about preaching—Christ is somehow present in these everyday words, both in the speaking and in the hearing.

A quote from Augustine of Hippo:

O Thou Supreme! most secret and most present, most beautiful and strong! What shall I say, my God, my Life, my Holy Joy? What shall say any man when he speaks of Thee?

The overall genre used by Augustine in his *Confessions* is dialogue with God (prayer), and through this dialogue he conveys his life-story, his conversion to faith, and much of his contemplation and thought about God and humanity. 'What shall say any man when he speaks of Thee?' The difficulty of using words to speak of God has long been recognised by thoughtful people. We recognise that all we say about God is in some sense false, because human language falls far short of the divine reality. Yet human words we must use despite their inadequacy.

Using metaphor

In an analogy we say 'He is like a strong tower'. In a metaphor we say 'He is a tower of strength'. God is not like anything at all, so we often use metaphor. Moses at the burning bush hears 'I am that I am'...Say: 'I am has sent me'. The psalmist sings (in our English translations): 'The Lord is my light and my salvation'. Jesus says: 'I am the light of the world'. The author of 1 John says 'God is love'. Metaphors can be misleading when taken singly, and of course should not be taken literally. (When Jesus says 'I am the door', we don't ask: oak, pine, or PVC? Panelled or plain?) We hope that by using several metaphors, something true about the nature of God is conveyed. In the Augustine quote, God is: 'most secret', 'most present', 'my life', 'my holy joy'. Together the metaphors convey something of the nature of God, and of his relationship with Augustine.

It is healthy sometimes to consider what metaphors we normally use for God, both in our speaking and in our praying. Are we over-using one preferred metaphor to address God or to speak of God? As we need variety in our diet for the health of the body, I suspect that we need variety of metaphor for the health of soul and spirit. The riches of language are there for our benefit. So not always 'Lord' or 'Father', but sometimes 'my Shepherd', 'my Rock', 'my Light', 'my Reward', 'my King', 'my Way', 'our Peace'. Variety fills out our concept of God: rock, fortress, shepherd, father, mother, husband, teacher, saviour, light, shade. Variety frees us from the tyranny of the single address, and keeps us aware of the limitation of each way of speaking. It helps us avoid idolatry, worshipping a single verbal image. We remember: 'God is spirit; those worshipping must do so in spirit and truth'. (This too is metaphor.)

Occasionally it helps to be deliberately negative (the *via negativa*). Whatever we say about God is untrue. We can only say what God is not. An occasional dose of the 'negative way' can be good for us.

Lord, you are not a king,
For you are beyond all kingship.
Lord, you don't 'exist',
For you are the source of all existence.

Then the soul goes quiet before him, for there are no further words. This can make God remote and inaccessible, and we see afresh that Christians come to him through Jesus, his Son, our Lord, in whom we glimpse the human in the divine, and the divine in the human.

Realising the limitation of our language encourages modesty and humility in what we assert. In view of the insufficiency of all human language, can it make sense to quarrel over fine points of doctrine? Much anguish and bloodshed could have been avoided if our forefathers had refrained from trying to 'nail God down' in precise, mandatory creeds and doctrinal statements. When faced with obscurity (for we see through a glass darkly), discussion and reflection are the appropriate modes of discourse, and not forceful assertion.

Language is evocative

A child grows and develops in the context of language. It is hard to envisage growing up without language. We are immersed in it, nurtured in it, and learn to use it to express ourselves, and to exert control over our world. Similarly the Christian is formed and grows to mature faith through the medium of language. The scriptures, through long reading and hearing, become part of who we are, and mould our thinking and our imagining. (Much the same is true of the words of hymns and songs, and in Anglican and Catholic churches of the liturgy of the services.)

A difficulty can arise in our churches because of this immersion in familiar language. We live so long these days (the Old Testament blessing: 'May you

see your children's children' could be modified: 'May you see your children's children's children'), and the culture and language in which people have been nurtured changes from generation to generation. This is especially true in periods of rapid cultural change. What is evocative for me may differ from what is evocative for my children and this differs from what is evocative for their children. A hymn that for me is full of life and full of my experience of Christ may leave a younger person quite untouched, or even hostile. (But, Grandad, that is from the 1962 green hymnbook! I remind them that when I was a teenager we sang from the 1931 edition.) Their life in Christ has been formed and nurtured through different hymns and songs, and by newer translations of the Bible.

My wife Mary once was thanked because she had read from 'the real Bible' (the AV). It is easy to dismiss such comments, but for that person her nurture in Christ and her manifold experience of him had taken place in the language of that version of the scriptures. This was the version she had internalised and in which she lived. Most young people in our churches are at home with various versions, but not with the AV.

What is to be done? First, we need to understand the nature of the problem. Second, I believe we should cultivate a 'positive tolerance'. While I may dislike a particular hymn or song, or a particular rendering of the scripture, I must be glad (really happy) that my brother or sister in Christ finds that it stirs their spirit and encourages them forward in their discipleship. This positive tolerance is hard to practise, and requires both sacrifice and the grace of God. We cannot expect the young to understand the old (they have never been old) but we can expect the old to some extend to understand the young (we were young once!).

Our emotional responses to stimuli are deeply affected by their social and cultural context, rather than being physiologically determined, as current brain-scan researchers sometimes seem to presume.[1] A young grandson of mine was scared of dogs, and went with his mum to visit a friend who owned a miniature French Bulldog. To our surprise, Matthew showed no fear, but settled down beside it. Eventually the dog barked. Matthew looked puzzled: 'Mummy, why did the piggy bark?' The visual, tactile, and auditory stimuli did not determine the child's response—his classification of the French Bulldog as 'piggy' rather than 'doggy' was decisive. Language matters. How we speak of one another matters. How we speak to each other matters.

Much of my pastoral ministry (1975-89) was in a church that over the years became remarkably diverse. We had elderly people and babies, and everything between; the highly educated and those who left school at 14; we had some blessed with high intelligence and others not so blessed;

professionals and labourers. We had those from a theologically liberal tradition, and near-fundamentalists; charismatics and those untouched by that ethos, even hostile to it. Beside Baptists we had some whose origins lay in Pentecostalism, Anglicanism, Methodism; there was an Armenian Orthodox, a Quaker couple, and a Lutheran married to a convert from Islam. What we had in common was a devotion to Christ and a desire to follow him. In this situation I asked of the people a 'positive tolerance', while recognising how difficult it was, and on my part tried to incorporate in the services material drawn from different ages and streams of Christianity. I remembered the saying 'The scribe trained for the kingdom of God brings from his treasure things old and things new'. We decided, after careful discussion at a Church Meeting, to use the Good News Bible (not my favourite) in our services and in the children's classes, for that was the version used in all the local schools, while encouraging a variety of versions in study-groups and private use.

Language has power

Creation is portrayed as coming about by language, a series of commands. 'And God said: Let there be light; and there was light'. This is of course figurative, perhaps even metaphorical, as we can see by asking questions such as: What language did God use? How can there be speech when there is nothing to carry sound-waves? Evidently the scripture means that with God there is something somehow akin to speech; something that has power to create. And some of the prophets of old are portrayed as having some degree of power over creation, by the action of the Spirit of God upon them. The prophet's words were to be feared. They did things! 'My word shall not return to me void, but it will accomplish that for which I sent it'.

Jesus is portrayed as stilling the storm on Galilee with a word of command. 'He rebuked the wind and the sea, and there became a great calm' (Matthew 8:26). Or more vividly 'Be quiet! Shut up!' as Mark's version could be translated. This is easier than the Genesis passage to take literally: Jesus was speaking Aramaic, or perhaps Greek; there were real waves and real wind to speak to. At his command the course of nature is changed, and calm restored. The command is effective, powerful. Here is something God-like becoming apparent in Christ.

The power of a command depends on the hierarchy in which it is spoken and recognised. The centurion who came to Jesus asking for his servant to be healed was under the authority of his superior officer, whose bidding he must do, and under him were soldiers who must do the centurion's bidding. He saw that Christ was acting under a higher authority, and would have those under him who would do his bidding (to convey healing to the centurion's servant), so Jesus need not himself come to the centurion's house. Jesus's authority (power of command)

was valid within this hierarchy.

Sceva's sons (Acts 19:13ff) tried to cast out a spirit in the name of Jesus, but the spirit replied: 'I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but you—who are you?' and chased them all naked away. Sceva's sons were not part of a legitimate hierarchy of power, and their command had no validity—it was not recognised. The recognition of a command's validity is important. I was once watching over a young grandson, aged about three. He was bouncing on the new sofa, which was forbidden. After a while I said 'Peter, stop that'. Peter continued bouncing. 'Peter, stop it!' Peter said 'You are not the boss in this house'. 'Peter, Mummy says you mustn't bounce on the sofa'. Peter: 'Mummy's not here!' My authority was invalid in Peter's eyes, and so my command was ineffective.

Where am I going with this? Preachers are sometimes exhorted to 'teach with authority', like Jesus did (and not like the scribes). Especially in times of revival there has been such preaching; strong, forceful rhetoric at work on the congregation. Perhaps sometimes it is valid, but 'preaching with authority' can easily become verbal abuse of the congregation—bullying from the pulpit—unless Christ's authority genuinely is at work through the preaching. And Christ's authority is more likely to be evident through humility and gentleness rather than through forceful rhetoric. 'When I am weak, then I am strong', St Paul wrote. We need to beware of becoming false prophets, or of heeding them. Hence the need for careful assessment of what is said. Neither emotional intensity, nor its absence, is a reliable indicator of genuine Christian authority. (I once visited a Mennonite church, and after the sermon the congregation retired into several groups to discuss, evaluate and develop what had been said, afterwards reconvening to say how their thought had developed. Mennonites think it strange that other churches have no such custom.)

Summary

Speech about God is necessarily indirect and approximate. The gospel, the good news of God speaking to us, can be conveyed through manifold genres. Language is evocative. Language is powerful. Words are wonderful. So let us be considerate of one another when we speak and when we listen.

Notes to text

1. D.M. Gross, *The secret history of emotion. From Aristotle's rhetoric to modern brain science.* University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Archive of *bmj* issues

If you are doing Baptist-focused research, you can find the free archive of past issues of the *bmj* and its predecessor, *The Fraternal*, at Theology on the Web:
The Fraternal / Baptist Ministers' Journal No's. 200 - 239 (1982-1992) (biblicalstudies.org.uk)

Wrath and cross

by John Matthews

Author: John Matthews is retired from ministry. This article was first read to the Northamptonshire Theological Society on 17 March 2020.

According to the Christian licensing group CCLI, *In Christ Alone* has been the most used hymn in the UK for the past seven years, and among the top 10 in the US, Canada, and Australia for almost as long.

In summer 2013 a committee of the Presbyterian Church in the US wanted to add it to their new hymnal, *Glory to God*. The committee requested permission from the song's writers, Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, to print an altered version of the words, changing 'Till on that cross as Jesus died/the wrath of God was satisfied' to 'Till on that cross as Jesus died/the love of God was magnified'. The writers rejected the proposed change and the hymn was not included in the book. The committee chair, Mary Louise Bringle, told *The Christian Century*, the 'view that the cross is primarily about God's need to assuage God's anger' would have a negative effect on the hymnal's ability to form the faith of coming generations.

I have twice emailed Stuart Townend, who wrote the words, using the address on his website, but have received no reply. But in an interview with The Gospel Coalition, Keith Getty says:

We wanted to explore the scope of the gospel message in one song. As people in the pew sing In Christ Alone, *we pray they understand the many attributes of God. His sovereign power, grace, love, justice and wrath all are intertwined. And we shouldn't turn away from exploring his wrath, because through understanding God's righteous anger toward sin, we understand his desire for justice and peace…While we may think it severe, we desperately need God's wrath—a holy and just response to evil—to restore the broken world in which we live.*

I understand some people take issue with the theological perspective that God's wrath was satisfied through Christ's death on the cross. Part of this debate centers on whether the cross became the object of God's wrath. When couched in those terms, God's anger can sound harsh and perhaps confusing. Yet I believe this view stems from an inadequate understanding of how God's wrath differs from our own…God's wrath is not like our wrath and his ways are not like ours. Thro'out Scripture the need for atonement to be

made is likened to a cup of wrath the sinner must consume. As we know, Jesus drank this cup for us. The cross was a remedy, providing for each of us a way to be saved…Stuart Townend and I believe the doctrine of propitiation plays a vital role in how we understand Christ's saving work as explained in Scripture…the language used throughout In Christ Alone *is a natural expression of our theological view on this subject.*[1]

There is no space for a full discussion of propitiation, but as this doctrine is given as the reason for the words of the song I am discussing, some brief consideration of it may be helpful. Tom Smail argues that:
Whatever propitiation may mean, it does not mean that the result of Jesus' work on the cross was to change his Father's attitude towards the sinful world from wrath to love, from rejection to acceptance. The biblical witness is clear that God's prior love for the world is the source and not the consequence of Christ's atoning death.[2]

John Stott puts it this way:
It is God himself who in holy wrath needs to be propitiated. God himself who in holy love undertook to do the propitiating, and God himself who in the person of his Son died for the propitiation of our sins. Thus God took his own loving initiative to appease his own righteous anger by bearing it in his own self in his own Son when he took our place and died for us.

To my mind, there is a confusion of language here leading to nonsense; an issue to which we will return.

Tom Smail acknowledges that 'propitiation language has at its heart a very right concern to take the wrath of God seriously', but he suggests, rightly in my view, that it 'can be expressed more appropriately in ways that do not suggest that God has to be changed in order to relate to and accept us'.[4]

G.B. Caird helps to clarify things:
'Propitiate' is a transitive verb which requires a personal object, and which entails a change of attitude in the person propitiated. But in the New Testament atonement in all its forms has its origin in the unchanging purpose and love of God.[5]

Caird concludes that 'The continued use of "propitiation" in theological debate is more the waving of a partisan flag than an aid to understanding'.

Wrath of God, cross of Christ

Is it justifiable, biblically or theologically, to speak of the wrath of God being satisfied by the death of Christ, or indeed to speak of the wrath of God in relation to the cross of Christ at all? Some have no doubt that it is. John Piper's book, *The Passion of Jesus Christ,* is subtitled *Fifty Reasons Why He Came to Die*; each reason being prefaced by scriptural quotations. The very first of the 50 reasons given is that of absorbing the wrath of God[6] and the supporting scriptural quotations are Galatians 3.13, which refers to Christ

becoming a curse for us; and Romans 3.25 and 1 John 4.10 which both refer to Christ in terms of 'propitiation', defined by Piper as *wrath-absorbing*. He argues that God sends his own Son to absorb his wrath and that the word 'propitiation' in Romans 3.25 refers to the removal of God's wrath by providing a substitute. 'The substitute, Jesus Christ, does not just cancel the wrath; he absorbs it and diverts it from us to himself. God's wrath is just, and it was spent not withdrawn'.[7]

Alex Buchanan expresses the connection between the wrath of God and the cross of Christ very starkly when he writes that:
…it was on the cross that God showed His anger to the greatest degree…God's anger was poured out…without any restraint, the whole burden of God's wrath fell on Jesus. It was at Calvary's cross that God showed His fierce anger to the ultimate degree…Jesus… bore, on our behalf, the fierce anger of an offended deity. He did this so that we could be delivered from it.[8]

Buchanan, a conservative evangelical, may be surprised to find himself in agreement with a Roman Catholic theologian, for Hans Von Balthasar writes, 'Can we seriously say that God unloaded his wrath upon the Man who wrestled with his destiny on the Mount of Olives and was subsequently crucified? Indeed we must'.[9]

Wayne Grudem writes 'God…poured out on Jesus the fury of his wrath: Jesus became the object of intense hatred of sin and vengeance against sin which God had patiently stored up since the beginning of the world.[10] This understanding of the cross in terms of Christ bearing the wrath of God is also to be found in the *Africa Bible Commentary*, written by Africans for Africans. Its comment on Mark 15:33f includes the words, 'Jesus was taking our place, enduring the wrath of God that each of us deserves…'. However, in an article on *orge* (anger) by Stahlin '…the passion is never directly related to God's wrath. We are never told expressly that Jesus stood under wrath'.[11]

In *The wrath of God satisfied?* Tim Stuckey states unequivocally that '…nowhere in the New Testament is the crucified Christ said to suffer God's wrath, although such an interpretation can be imposed on some texts'.[12] Paul Fiddes suggests that it is possible to speak of the crucified Christ experiencing the wrath of God, without saying that God punishes Jesus:
To say that Jesus dies under the judgement of God does not mean…that God directly ***inflicts*** *some kind of penalty upon him. It is to speak of his complete identification with humankind, and so his experience of the consequences of human sinfulness….He hangs on the cross at the end-point of human sin…It is a thoroughly biblical perspective to call this exposure to the disaster which humankind brings upon itself an enduring of the 'wrath' of God.*[13]

Hammerton-Kelly, drawing on the work of Girard, has a different slant, saying:
…the wrath revealed in the gospel is not the divine vengeance that should have fallen on us instead of falling on Jesus, but rather the divine nonresistance to human evil (cf Matt 5:39), God's willingness to suffer violence rather than defend himself or retaliate…The cross reveals this paradoxical wrath as God's acceptance of our free choice to destroy ourselves and each other.[14]

Wrath and satisfaction of God

The lines of *In Christ Alone* speak not only of the wrath of God, but also of the wrath of God being satisfied by the death of Christ: One problem with this way of putting things is that we seem to be expected to behave 'better' than God does. Steve Chalke makes the point well when he asks, 'Wouldn't it be inconsistent for God to warn us not to be angry with each other and yet burn with wrath himself, or tell us to 'love our enemies' when he obviously couldn't bring himself to do the same without demanding massive appeasement?'[15]

Karl Barth stresses that there is no question of Christ's offering satisfaction to the wrath of God the Father, and judges that such presentations of the doctrine of the atonement are quite foreign to the New Testament,[16] but John Stott argues that before the holy God can forgive us, some kind of 'satisfaction' is necessary:[17]

We strongly reject…every explanation of the death of Christ which does not have ***at its centre*** *the principle of 'divine satisfaction through substitution', indeed divine self-satisfaction through divine self-substitution…The words 'satisfaction' and 'substitution' need to be carefully defined and safeguarded, but they cannot in any circumstances be given up.*[18]

But is some kind of satisfaction necessary, as Stott suggests? With good reason Margaret Silf asks, 'What kind of 'God' is this, who will not be satisfied until he has his pound of flesh and dispenses justice by means of the ultimate death penalty (a form of punishment that most civilised people today have rejected as unworthy of humanity?'[19]

Wrath and love of God

How are we to square the wrath of God in the cross of Christ with the early Christian belief that in and through the death of Jesus we see the **love** of God? Smail suggests that:
In the New Testament the wrath of God is not in any kind of contradiction to the love of God…His wrath is his passionate protest against the lovelessness and in justice of human society…Those who burn with righteous indignation on behalf of just causes and oppressed people should have no difficulty in understanding the wrath of God and the judgement of God as the shadow side of his justice and love.[20]

Stahlin suggests that 'the wrath of God against Israel is the reverse side of his love... (and) even prior to the New Testament it was realised that wrath and love are mutually inclusive, not exclusive, in God', but adds that only he who knows the greatness of wrath will be mastered by the greatness of mercy.[21] Tasker feels that the wrath of God 'is a personal quality, without which God would cease to be fully righteous and his love would degenerate into sentimentality'.[22]

In advocating his 'narrative Christus Victor' theory of the atonement, particularly against Anselm's 'satisfaction' theory, Denny Weaver argues that:

The wrath of God and the love of God represent the two stances from which we view the act of God in Christ—as an act of judgment as long as we continue in bondage to the powers of evil that enslave us, and as an act of love that frees us from the powers of evil. These are not two consecutive stages in God's attitude towards humankind, but differing stages in humankind's perception of God.[23]

If God is angry with us, why is this? The usual answer is 'because we have sinned'. Another answer is 'because he loves us'. Moltmann argues that:

What the Old Testament terms 'the wrath of God'...(belongs) in the category of the divine 'pathos'. His wrath is injured love and therefore a mode of his reaction to men. Love is the source and the basis of the possibility of the wrath of God...As injured love, the wrath of God is not something that is inflicted, but a divine suffering of evil. It is a sorrow which goes through his opened heart. He suffers in his passion for his people.[24]

Likewise, Fiddes, in the context of a discussion of the Old Testament prophetic understanding of God, writes, 'The sorrow of God because his people reject his loving care leads to a unique kind of pain which is ascribed to God, a state of feeling which is characterized by the prophets as **a blend of love and wrath**'.[25] Another way of approaching the relationship of love and wrath in God according to the Old Testament prophets is to see the supposed conflict as 'nothing other than the torment of God's desire for his people, a longing which is suffused by a sense of failure and disappointment'.[26]

But Fiddes feels we can go further than this and draws attention to the fact that the prophets speak of God's wrath not only in terms of God's inflicting penalties on people for their sinfulness but also in terms of God's 'giving up' people to the natural consequences of their own actions. 'God's wrath here is his active con-sent to the working out of human sin into its inevitable consequences'.[27] It is this understanding of wrath that, he argues, the apostle Paul works with in Romans 1 when he speaks of God's wrath in terms of his 'giving them up' to the futility of their own desires. This echoes the exposition of C.H. Dodd. But Fiddes criticises Dodd's labelling

this wrath as 'impersonal', saying that 'it is a personal, but not an imposed judgement'.[28]

In summing up, Fiddes argues that:
Within this biblical perspective, God's 'wrath' is not a part of an internal conflict within the being of God, but an aspect of the autonomy which he gives to mankind. It is the darker side of human freedom. Yet it is not a divine indifference... according to the prophets, just because God is passionately concerned with the life of the world he cannot 'give up' people without feeling the pain of the consequences himself....As God has given them up, so he continually woos them back to himself, and if they will only return then there can be no more 'wrath' since they will no longer be on their own headlong rush towards calamity.[29]

So, he concludes: 'Neither wrath nor restoration are a mechanical process of causation, and both mean pain for God. We may then make the theological judgement that there is no conflict of love and wrath within God.[30]

That there are numerous references to the wrath of God in the Bible is indisputable. It is equally clear that there are numerous references to the love of God, and while it may be argued that these are not incompatible, let alone mutually exclusive, how God's wrath and God's love are related depends on what we feel to be the essential character of God. As Keith Ward puts it, '...there are specific sentences in the Bible that speak of vindictive divine justice. But also in the Bible is the teaching that God is love, and that love cares for the good of all, however wicked. One of these teachings must be sublated by the other. The only question is: which?'[31] For Ward, vindictiveness in the Bible is caused by a limited understanding of the punitive justice of God, which has not fully appreciated Jesus' teaching of the unlimited love and mercy of God. This is decisively overcome by the cross, which shows God going to the uttermost limits to reconcile the world to himself.

Wrath of God and the Trinity

Marshall believes that 'the contemporary understanding of the Trinity is of decisive significance in helping us to formulate an acceptable understanding of the doctrine (of penal substitution)'.[32] He may be correct but, unfortunately, he does not elaborate either on what the contemporary doctrine of the Trinity is or on the ways in which it is of decisive significance in this regard. This is a pity, especially in the light of some imprecision in regard to aspects of trinitarian language. Marshall writes of Forsyth and those like him embracing
The understanding of the work of Christ which sees it as the active obedience and expression of holiness in which God himself bears the painful consequences of human sin...In other words, to uphold holiness and righteousness, God had to be seen to be both just and the justifier, and this he did by bearing the judgement or penalty of sin.[33]

The problem with this way of putting it is that it is actually **Christ**, the Son of God, who bears the judgement or penalty of sin by dying on the cross. Marshall himself perpetuates this linguistic confusion when he goes on to say that 'the death (of Christ) is the death of God himself, since the Son is one with the Father, and we are correct to see God dying on the cross…God takes upon himself our sin and bears its consequences so that we do not have to bear them'.[34]

Further on, Marshall asserts that while it is God who bears our sin, it is his Son who dies on the cross, 'God himself bears the sin and gives his Son in his sacrificial death as the way or means that sinners can come to him'.[35] He argues that 'it was God himself who suffered on the cross and bore the sin of the world. A parent who puts herself into the breach and dies to save her child from a burning house is considered praiseworthy. The God who suffers and dies in the person of Jesus for human sin belongs in the same category'.[36]

I find this illustration unconvincing and, indeed, unbiblical. If **God** suffers and dies on the cross then the cry of dereliction 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' makes no sense (Mark 15:34). And who raises God from the dead? This seems to me to be theological none-sense because of an imprecise use of language.

But Marshall is not the only culprit. Cranfield writes that 'God….purposed *to* **direct against his own self in the person of his Son** the full weight of that righteous wrath which they (sinners) deserved'.[37] What does 'against his own self in the person of his Son' mean? In human terms, can I direct the full weight of my wrath against myself in the person of my son?

This discussion reminds me of someone in my first church asking, 'Why did God send his son? Why didn't he come himself?' One traditional answer would be to say 'he did'. But can we talk of God coming himself and, at the same time, speak of God sending his son, or giving his son? The fact that the question was asked at all shows that to do so leads to perplexity and confusion. Are these two ways of saying the same thing? Even if they are, do they not need to be kept separate, and not confused, because they are saying the same thing in different ways?

The following quotation from Barth, cited by von Balthasar, expresses things in a more nuanced way, even if it does not provide a totally satisfactory solution to the two ways of speaking of God as 'coming' himself and 'sending' his son.

The reason why the No spoken on Good Friday is so terrible, but why there is already concealed within it the Eastertide Yes of God's righteousness, is that he who on the Cross took upon himself and suffered the wrath of God was none other than God's own Son, and therefore the eternal God himself in

the unity of the human nature that he freely accepted in his transcendent mercy.[38]

Weaver points out that 'the orthodox formulation of the Trinity emphasises that each person of the Trinity participates in all the attributes of God and that it would be heretical to develop attributes in one person of the Trinity that were different from the other persons…'[39] So, he argues, it is contradictory for Jesus to be non-violent and for God to bring about salvation through divinely orchestrated violence.

What of the Holy Spirit in all this? In discussions of the death of Christ mention of the Holy Spirit is rare, although there are exceptions. One is Buchanan, who speaks of the Spirit having to 'depart from the life of the One who had never grieved him. His view is that God the Holy Spirit took Jesus as far as He could before leaving Him. Then at the Cross the Spirit could no longer walk with Jesus because they were no longer "agreed"'.[40] So at the Cross 'both the Father and the Spirit left Him'. While this may be an unusual way of putting things, it does emphasise what we might call the complete and utter aloneness of Jesus on the cross.

Conclusions

The words of the song that triggered this exploration, *on the cross as Jesus died/the wrath of God was satisfied* presuppose at least two things. One is that is legitimate to speak of the wrath of God at all. The other is that it is legitimate to speak of the wrath of God in terms of the cross of Christ.

In relation to the first assumption, the fact that there are numerous references to the wrath of God in the Bible cannot be ignored by anyone who takes the Bible seriously — which is not the same as taking it literally. It might be argued that to see God as getting angry is simply to make God in our own image; because we get angry, we assume that God does so. This might explain some of the references to God's anger in the OT. But in the gospels we see examples of Jesus getting angry. If Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1.14), the visible image of the invisible God (Col 1.15), may we assume that he is expressing God's anger?

Even if it is legitimate to speak of the wrath of God, is it also legitimate to speak of the wrath of God being satisfied by the death of Christ? I can find no NT texts that make this connection directly or unequivocally. This does not necessarily mean that the connection is not present in the thought of any NT writer, nor that it is not theologically legitimate to make it, but I do not see how a God of love can pour out his wrath on the crucified Christ, the Son of God, in the sense of punishing Christ rather than us.

The argument that someone has to bear the punishment for our sins meets a serious objection in the fact that we are commanded to forgive those who sin against us without

anyone bearing such punishment. If it makes any sense to speak of the bearing of punishment in such a context, it is the offended party who bears it. Those who support penal substitution will probably respond that this precisely what happens on the cross; that in Christ God himself bears the punishment for our sin. But, to me, it seems difficult to express things in this way without the theological confusion of language that I have criticised above.

It might be said the words of the song do not speak of God's wrath being poured out on Christ, or even of his bearing the punishment for our sin, they say that *on that cross as Jesus died/the wrath of God was satisfied.*

I remain *dis*satisfied with this way of putting it, and unconvinced that it is consistent with the God revealed most clearly and completely in Jesus Christ as love. It seems to me that if we want to speak of God being satisfied, we are better to do so, as Fiddes does, in terms of God being satisfied by our responding to his love.

Notes to text

1.https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/keith-getty-on-what-makes-in-christ-alone-beloved-and-contested/ accessed 12/02/2020.
2. T. Smail, *Once for All*, p85.
3. J. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p175, in Smail, pp86f.
4. Smail, pp88-89.
5. G.B.Caird *New Testament Theology, p*137n3.
6. J. Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, pp20ff
7. *Ibid*, p21.
8. A. Buchanan, *Anger, Mercy and the Heart of God*, pp9,55.
9. H. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol IV, p345.
10. W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* p575, in Marshall, p16n69.
11. Kittel's *Theological Word Book of the New Testament*, vol V, p446.
12. T. Stuckey, *The Wrath of God Satisfied?* p104.
13. P. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, p91.
14. Hammerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence—Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross, p*101.
15. S. Chalke, "Redeeming the dream" in S. Barrow & J. Bartley (eds), *Consuming Passion,* DLT, 2005, p23.
16. K. Barth, *CD* IV/1, p253, in Fiddes, The *Creative Suffering of God,* p217.
17. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p109.
18. *Ibid*, p159 (emphasis mine).
19. M. Silf, *Roots and Wings*, p 88.
20. T. Smail, *Once for All*, p82.
21. Stahlin in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of NT*, vol V, pp408, 425.
22. Tasker (*Wrath*, in *New Bible Dictionary,* in J. Packer, *Knowing God*, p205).
23. D. Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, p78.
24. J. Moltmann,, *The Crucified God,* p272, in A. Campbell, *The Gospel of Anger*, p 9.
25. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, p20 (emphasis original).
26. *Ibid*, p23..
27. *Ibid,* p23.
28. *Ibid*, p24n22.
29. *Ibid,* 24ff.
30. *Ibid*, 25.
31. K. Ward, *What the Bible Really Teaches,* p149.
32. Marshall, *The Theology of the Atonement*, p1n5.
33. *Ibid*, p10.
34. *Ibid*, p11.

35. *Ibid*, p13.
36. *Ibid*, p15.
37. Cranfield, *Romans I*, pp210, 217 (emphasis mine).
38. K. Barth, *CD* II/I, p396, in *Theo-Drama*, vol IV, p346.
39. D. Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, p203.
40. Buchanan, *Anger, Mercy and the Heart of God*, p57.

Baptist Ministers' Fellowship

Notice of Annual General Meeting

11am on Wednesday 26 May

To all members of BMF: the Fellowship's AGM takes place on 26 May and you are cordially invited. The meeting will be held on Zoom and if you would like to attend, please email Mike Peat, BMF Secretary, for a link:

mike.peat@bristol.ac.uk

We are a fellowship of ministers and Baptist leaders working for one another's wellbeing, and we'd love to hear from you.

Engaging with the world of sport

by J. Stuart Weir

Author: J. Stuart Weir, is director of Verite Sport. He supports Christians in elite sport and has written extensively on sport and Christianity. See www.veritesport.org.

Rev Samuel Ashe, an 18th century English clergyman, clearly saw the need for interaction between church and sport. He used to spend Sunday afternoons hiding in the trees by the local sports field. He would bide his time till the football came near him, when he would catch the ball and pierce it with a pin.[1] He could then go home pleased to have stopped his parishioners from sinning! Hopefully, in this article we can identify more constructive ways of engaging with the world of sport.

No reasonable person can deny the importance of sport in the modern world. The FIFA Football World Cup, which takes place every four years, is shown on TV in every single country and territory on earth, with 3.2 billion people around the world—or 46.4% of the global population—watching at least part of it the last time.[2] The Olympics in Tokyo this year—if they happen—will have similar worldwide appeal. Visiting a remote village in rural Togo, West Africa, without electricity or running water and seeing a child wearing a Manchester United replica shirt with Rooney on the back was a reminder to me of the global reach of the English Premier League. Something in the region of 15 million people in England participate in sport at some level according to a Sport England survey.[3]

Theology of Sport

Christians, from the Puritans onwards, have had issues with sport. The traditional arguments against sport were that:

- sport was not the best use of time;
- sport often took place on Sunday;
- sport was often associated with drinking, gambling and bad company.

While we no longer see it in such black and white terms, a tension still exists in the perceived lack of compatibility between the performance-based values of the world of sport and Christian belief based on grace and undeserved favour. The values of sport teach a person self-reliance and meritocracy; Christianity teaches that our only hope is to be found in God's love and mercy.

Christian ministry to sport largely

began in the 1950s but has grown exponentially to the point where there are currently over 50 ministries with a specific engagement with sport in the UK alone. Some form of Christian ministry to sport exists in 180 countries of the world. However, the growth has been spontaneous and often uncoordinated. This process has had certain consequences—for example, in terms of theology.

Jim Mathisen, from Wheaton College, has written, 'The fact that the current [sports ministry] movement still operates in the absence of any clearly articulated theology of sport is troubling…no theology or hermeneutics is broadly shared within the movement'.[4] While Mathisen's comment remains true in the sense that sports ministry still operates from no generally accepted common theological foundation, more and more material on sport and Christianity is being published at an academically respectable level.[5]

The best book is *The Games People Play,* by Rob Ellis,[6] Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford. Writing as an academic theologian with a love of sport who has conducted empirical research among sports players and fans, he is well placed to develop a theology of sport, rooted in the actuality of sport. The way he takes concepts based on play, salvation and sin and applies them to sport, arguing that participation in sport can be seen as a participation in God's playful creativity, is ground breaking. Ellis' stated aim is 'to explore the relationship between Christianity and the all-pervasive cultural phenomenon of modern sport. In so doing we will be examining theories which suggest, among other things, that sport has become a kind of surrogate religion in the twenty-first century. We will also be attempting to outline a theology of sport—that is, suggesting how sport might fit into our understanding of God's way with the world and our attempt to live godly lives in the world'.

Elsewhere I have suggested that a Christian view of sport might see it as:

- a gift from God
- part of God's creation
- an opportunity for worship
- an opportunity to love one's neighbour
- a testing ground for our faith
- an opportunity for witness
- Important, but not all-important
- not the source of our significance as people

Grasping the truth about God as creator and redeemer must affect our attitude to him. If he is the creator of all things, we have an inescapable obligation to worship him in all things and at all times. This thought is well expressed in the words attributed to Eric Liddell, the 1924 Olympic gold medallist in the film *Chariots of Fire*, 'God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast and when I run, I feel his pleasure'.[7] There seems no reason why a piece of sporting skill

should not bring pleasure to God, pleasure in something that he has created. Sporting ability is as much a gift from God as other creative abilities like singing, painting and writing and can, by his Spirit, be redeemed, to be used in worshipping Him. Equally all God's gifts are capable of being used selfishly and for our own glory.

Competition

Sport lives by comparison. If I want to find out how good I am at a sport, I need to compete. I may think myself invincible as a tennis player on the basis of my school or village experience; entering my county or national championship may bring me quickly down to earth.

Imagine being marooned alone on a desert island—an island with a state-of-the-art sports centre. What would be the point of a tennis court, balls and a racquet if there is no one against whom to compete? In sport we need an opponent!

In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the novel which had so much influence on the development of Muscular Christianity in the 19th century, Tom says of the school match: 'This is worth living for; the whole sum of schoolboy existence gathered into one straining, struggling half-hour, a half-hour worth a year of common life'.[8] Anyone who has played competitive sport at any level will identify with these sentiments.

At the same time it seems that most Christians who play sport seriously have struggled to reconcile their competitiveness with their faith. Sport has been accused of bringing out the worst in us. The dichotomy is well expressed by Shirl Hoffman: 'Belting another person around on a football field may seem an odd way to express your love to him or to the Almighty'.[9]

But if we see our opponent not as our enemy but as our neighbour, and moreover a neighbour whom Jesus tells us to love as ourselves, it certainly affects our attitude to that opponent. We will treat our opponent in the way we want to be treated: with respect. We want a fair game. We want a good contest. We want our opponent to push us to perform at our best. People often think that being loving and being competitive is an 'either or' but in this setting, love is to be competitive! The challenge, as John White puts it, is 'to keep winning important, while raising the bar for character and godliness for those who desire to bring glory to God in competitive sports'.[10] That's why I not only can, but must, love my neighbour as myself in sport, since I understand God's desire that we please Him with our abilities and that we help each other to do so.

Worship

A recent article[11] noted how elite sports participants often perform religious gestures and many speak of their sporting performance in terms of their religious faith, including the assertion that it constitutes an act of worship. After examining the parallels between sporting activity and worship

the authors concluded that 'while the correspondence may not be complete or exact, there is good reason to take seriously the claims of elite athletes of faith that their sporting performance should be regarded as an act of worship'.

Three elite sportspeople quoted in the article make the case well for how sport can be an experience of Christian worship. Cat Reddick Whitehill, retired US football international, says 'Many people think church is the only place to worship God. But you can worship God no matter what you're doing. A soccer field is one of my favorite places to worship. Before the national anthem, I pray my performance will bring glory to God. Then the field becomes my church and playing to the best of my ability, a form of praise'. Similarly, South African swimming Olympic gold medallist Penny Heyns says 'I sensed God was saying to me, "As you swim up and down this black line, this is your opportunity to worship me. Every single breaststroke kick and pull that you do is the same as raising your hands in church and praising me. I'll teach you to worship me through your talent"'. Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, twice Olympic champion at 100m, expresses a similar sentiment: 'When I run, the first thing I say is: "I hope you are pleased with my worship" for running is my worship—my way of worshipping him because he has given me the talents'.

Practical engagement with sport

Sports ministry broadly falls into two categories—ministry to sport and ministry through sport:

Ministry to sport means serving sport in the name of Jesus; sports chaplaincy is a good example of this. The term 'Serving the people of sport' is also used. This is helping the (often) elite sportsperson to practise their sport Christianly as well bringing church to them when competition stops them getting to a local Sunday service.

Ministry through sport is seeing sport as an evangelistic opportunity. This might involve running sports events with an evangelistic purpose, starting a church sports team to draw in outsiders, operating a fitness centre for the community as part of the church's programme, or distributing leaflets or video material with a gospel message in the language of sport, often using the testimony of high-profile Christian athletes.

Sports ministry works at all levels and age-groups. The following vision statement of one UK ministry summarises well the task that most Christian sports ministry organisations are engaged in:

> **Christians** *everywhere* living out their faith in sports clubs and teams.
> **Churches** *everywhere* engaging with their local sports communities.
> **Sportspeople** *everywhere* having the opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.[12]

Sports chaplaincy[13]

The chaplaincy programme at the London Olympics was arguably the most comprehensive ever conducted at an Olympic Games, with 162 chaplains accredited in three separate categories to serve the athletes and others in the Olympic Village, the workforce and volunteers and the media. This was an excellent example of servant-hearted Christians working with the Olympic Organizing Committee to add value to the event. The chaplaincy opportunity was possible through the foresight of the Bishop of Barking who had created the post of 'Church of England Olympics Executive Co-ordinator' five years previously. The person appointed, Duncan Green, described his journey of service to the Organizing Committee in a book.[14]

Many professional football, rugby and cricket clubs in the UK have appointed a chaplain. Sports Chaplaincy UK estimates that there are 150000 sports chaplaincy opportunities in the UK alone.[15]

Sports outreach

Local church sports ministry is well-developed in North America and is growing in the UK. Finchampstead Baptist Church built its main hall as a multipurpose sports hall, to Sport England requirements so that it could be used for the service of the community during the week alongside its traditional Sunday purpose.[16] Churches have run football teams, badminton sessions, keep fit classes *etc* to reach out to the community.

At the grassroots level, some Christian-based sports outreach projects are being recognised by secular sporting networks as valid forms of engagement through sport to tackle problems in society. A good example is the Ambassadors Fathers' Football project which won the Beyond London Innovation award for reaching out to support poor marginalised immigrant fathers in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.[17]

When the Africa Cup of Nations was held in Egypt in 2006, the organising committee was short of volunteers. The Christian community rallied round and recruited the required help. A Christian leader was given the role of head of volunteers and a place on the organising committee. He said afterwards, 'It was an incredible opportunity that God gave to the sports ministry in Egypt, to be at the heart of such a big sports event. Ninety percent of the people I was working with—volunteers, organizing committee, government—were not Christians. But all of them knew I was from a Christian church. I believe this is real sports ministry—not just working in the church but taking the church outside'.

The London 2012 and Egypt 2006 experiences show how an attitude of servant-hearted support for the organising committee of a major sports event is often appreciated and can

build bridges between the Christian community and the sports administrators.

Disability sport

At the 1992 Paralympics, admission was free because the organising committee did not think that anyone would pay to watch disability sport. In 2012 in London the Paralympics were virtually sold out for every event. The quality and the profile of disability sport have increased dramatically over the past few years. However, the Christian community has largely ignored disability sport. In the UK perhaps two of the 50 sports ministries explicitly include disability sport within their programme of activities.

If the theological reflection on sport has been sparse, the Christian thinking about disability sport has been almost non-existent. There have been some recent publications which make represent a welcome contribution to the field.[18]

Prophetic engagement

Christians have been criticised for failing to have any prophetic engagement with sport. Tom Krattenmaker,[19] for example, has lamented the lack of interest in issues like racism, exploitation of women, financial corruption or excessive violence in sport. It seems a fair criticism.

Over 40 years ago, Frank Deford[20] wrote a series of articles in *Sports Illustrated* in which he coined the phrase 'sportianity'. In a damning indictment of Christians involved in sport, he suggested that sport had had more impact on religion than *vice versa*.[21] He bemoaned the lack of Christian voice against dirty play, cheating, racism or any other moral issue in sport.[22] To quote John White's cry from the heart, 'Sport is too good to allow it to fade away without a serious attempt to bring positive change'.[23] While we do not have time to do justice to this point, the issue must not be neglected.

Taking it further

The increased application of theological reflection to sport is to be welcomed. However, it must be recognised that the process has only just begun.

- Ministry underpinned by a sound theological base will be stronger and hopefully more effective.
- Greater theological understanding will help Christians to interact positively with sports' governing bodies and to serve them rather than appearing simply to want to use the sports event for their own purposes.
- It will also help Christians address and give leadership in relation to the ethical issues which pervade sport.
- Ministry which respects the integrity of sport without compromising the integrity of the gospel is likely to reap long-term fruit.

Conclusion

As we work to see the sports fields of the world become cathedrals to the glory of God[24] there are perhaps four principles, to which we need to hold fast. We need to see our sporting talents and our relationships with our sports friends as gifts from God, to be developed and given back to him for his glory. Our identity is to be seen as who we are as part of God's creation, not dependent on our sports performance. We need too to challenge the traditional view of winning and losing and see the aim of the competition as applying our talents to the best of our ability, to the glory of God, regardless of the outcome. Finally, we need to see our responsibility to transform sport to the glory of God.

Notes to text

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5. For a list of the main books see http://www.veritesport.org/index.php?page=topten.
6. R. Ellis, The Games People Play. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014.
7. By script writer, Colin Welland, the line was not spoken by Liddell but is nonetheless often regarded as an authentic expression of his sentiment. Letter from Welland to J.S. Weir, December 2002.
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12. www.christiansinsport.org.uk.
13. For more details of sports chaplaincy see A. Parker, N. Watson & J. White, Sports Chaplaincy: Trends, Issues and Debates. Farnham: Ashgate, 2016.
14. D. Green, "Sports chaplaincy at the Olympics and Paralympics: Reflections on London 2012" in A. Parker, N. Watson & J. White, ibid.
15. https://sportschaplaincy.org.uk/
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17. http://www.beyondsport.org/the-awards/entries/view.php?Id=2226
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19. T. Krattenmaker, Onward Christian Athletes. Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield. 2009.
20. F. Deford, "Religion in Sport", Sports Illustrated, 44(16-18), (19, 26 April 1976, and 3 May 1976).
21. F. Deford, Sports Illustrated, 44(18), May 3, 1976, p60.
22. F. Deford, Sports Illustrated, 44(18), May 3, 1976, p60.
23. J. White, ibid, p12.
24. This expression was, to my knowledge, first used by Cassie Carstens, former Chairman of the International Sports Coalition.

Reviews

Edited by Michael Peat

A Charge to Keep: Reflective Supervision and the Renewal of Christian Leadership

Jane Leach

Wesley's Foundery Books, 2020

Reviewer: Tim Fergusson

Pastoral supervision is an increasingly popular means of providing accountability for church ministers. It is defined on the APSE website (pastoralsupervision.org.uk) as a 'regular, planned, intentional and boundaried space in which a practitioner skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with one or more other practitioners (the supervisees) to look together at the supervisees' practice'.

Jane Leach, principal of Wesley House in Cambridge, is among the foremost proponents of pastoral supervision for clergy and she has already co-authored a handbook on pastoral supervision published six years ago. In *A Charge to Keep,* Jane advocates again for the benefits of supervision, but goes further in suggesting how it may strengthen a whole body of ministers if provided in a structured manner to every one of them. She draws on her experience of introducing exactly this structure to the British Methodist Church. Through the training programme she led, all Methodist District Chairs and Circuit Superintendents have been prepared to provide supervision across the denomination.

Part 1 of her book is entitled *The case for reflective supervision* and Leach's case is, in short, persuasive. She says that a network of supervisory relationships across her denomination 'can become a means by which the whole body can be restored to life as we open the open ourselves to God's Spirit and allow ourselves to be knit into deeper relationship and be drawn into the future from which God beckons'. Any suspicion that this sounds rather grand is addressed by qualitative and quantitative assessment of the impact such supervision has had on Methodist clergy. Commenting in turn on the 'restorative, formative and normative' benefits of pastoral supervision, those surveyed spoke of reduced isolation, improved mental health and resilience, increased sense of being valued, a lowered danger of issues festering, better use of time, greater insight among those who oversee fellow ministers, increased pastoral skill and wisdom, regained sense of control, better handling of risks, and greater safety for a minister's congregation. One resonant quote states, 'It's a positive accountability that I think has the capacity to engender positive feelings of confidence'.

So far, so good. I cannot help but wonder how, had I received pastoral supervision, I might have handled a number of incidents in my own ministry much better. Maybe they would have

had a less draining effect on me personally and on the fruitfulness of my work. By extension, how much angst would be avoided if we all had supervision? But of course, there are nowhere near enough trained supervisors out there to go round.

Part 2 of the book therefore goes onto explore what it looks like when a denomination determines that, as a matter of policy, every minister shall receive supervision. Leach spends considerable time exploring how supervision can remain a safe space for ministers when their supervisors are internal to the organisation. How can ministers disclose what is important without feeling they might be subject to pressure to conform or to discipline? She distinguishes here between management supervision that focuses on how the supervisee meets the goals and norms of the organisation, and pastoral supervision that includes a concern for the wellbeing of the supervisee.

However, because accountability to the denomination and its norms still remains an important facet, Leach replaces the term pastoral supervision with reflective supervision. We might say it is pastoral, but not that pastoral. Ministers are not provided only with a space to offload, but are asked to reflect on, among other things, how their practice relates to denominational expectations. Part 2 also explores some of the tools used by supervisors and some of the necessary qualities possessed by supervisors.

The book, though somewhat specialised in application in its later chapters, raises some difficult questions for us as Baptists. The benefits of supervision are apparent. The means by which it might be made widely available among us is not. We do not have the structure of District Chairs and Circuit Superintendents who may be trained. Neither do we have a culture in which the imposition of supervision as a requirement of accreditation is likely to be well received. Sadly too, the finance necessary to train a few hundred ministers in supervision cannot easily be found. I am left slightly envious of what has been achieved in the Methodist Church. I think as Baptists we need a dialogue about whether we should aspire to similar levels of supportive accountability and if so, how.

Reconceptualising Disability for the Contemporary Church

Frances Mackenney-Jeffs
London, SCM 2021
Reviewer: Sally Nelson

I have a personal interest in the theology of disability, since my daughter has complex and severe disabilities. I am always looking out for new books, since this is a growing area of theological reflection, and I find that many students are interested in it. What might this book, with its fascinating title, offer?

Mackenney-Jeffs has experience of suffering within her own family (I was

not quite clear whether this was illness or disability) and writes with real commitment, clearly hoping to help churches to review their assumptions around disability. Indeed, she is correct that there are deeply embedded religious, anthropological and theological perspectives on disability among Christians and unless these are revealed and explored, things are unlikely to change for affected families. Mackenney-Jeffs brings a multitude of theoretical and practical insights together in this book. It will not be a surprise that I particularly enjoyed the chapter on conversations with parents of children with disabilities, and there were some great challenges for churches to consider in this undervalued mission field.

Having said that, the book says a little about a lot rather than a lot about a little, which personally I found frustrating, since so many really important areas were outlined in just a few short paragraphs but without enough depth to be life-changing. The stated aim of the author is 'to equip clergy and the many lay people who engage in ministry with disabled people to think more deeply about the relationship between the church and disabled people and to be mindful of the dangers that lie in that direction'. A lot of disability theology is indicated (maybe too much for some of the 'lay people' indicated above) but the arguments are disappointingly curtailed because of the book's breadth (and it is short, at under 200 pages). The chapters each contained suggestions for reflection and discussion—all interesting in their own right, yet oddly pitched alongside some of the sophisticated ideas in the text (albeit briefly indicated). It was rather like reading a literature review with a comprehension test to follow. John Swinton, probably the UK's most prolific disability theologian, suggests in the blurb that the book functions as a primer, but I am not quite sure that it hits that target either: I'd prefer students to read more deeply about a smaller number of key issues—and the book is not aimed at students anyway. Clearly Mackenney-Jeffs knows her stuff: it's the structure of the book that doesn't work for me.

I did like the set of practical suggestions at the book's end (though they could be more forcefully expressed); and I did discover some writers/resources new to me in the extensive coverage, for which I am really grateful. One important missing element was a comprehensive bibliography for the whole book – it is fiddly to have to search through footnotes in chapters. But to whom would I recommend it? I'm just not sure. Maybe a good library choice, as a locus of ideas and sources.

The Essential Guide to Family Ministry

Gail Adcock
Bible Reading Fellowship
Reviewer: Bob Little

By examining the changing shape of 'family', outlining a family ministry

theology, and offering thoughts on family ministry today, the Methodist Church's Families Ministries Development Officer, Gail Adcock, concludes by explaining the seven habits of effective family ministry. Be strategic; be supportive; be collaborative; be intergenerational; be missional; be holy at home, and be reflective. Her book concludes with some 'final thoughts' and suggestions for further reading and other resources.

Adcock explains that our understanding of 'family' evolves over time—and even Jesus' family ancestry contains families with 'skeletons in their closets' but who try to relate, make helpful choices and seek the best for each other.

Having set the scene, she offers 15 questions on understanding family ministry, the spectrum of family ministry, issues in family ministry and support, and equipping for family ministry.

Those seeking superficial, institutional solutions may want to focus on questions in the latter two of these four sections, whereas a more comprehensive and sustainable approach needs to address all 15 questions—before embracing Adcock's seven habits of effective family ministry. Adcock argues that these principles and practices provide the means to establish a solid foundation on which churches can build a sustainable family care and support framework.

Adcock's book deals with more than how children's, family and youth leaders can help parents—and makes the point that 'families' comprise more than children and teenagers. It addresses how we think about 'church', as well as setting out visions of what can be achieved when embarking on family ministry with purpose and passion.

'Essential guides' are, by definition, essential. So, if you're concerned or involved with family ministry, this is probably a book to buy. If you're looking for tips and techniques to use in family ministry, it's probably equally important at least to read it.

This Hallelujah Banquet: How the End of What We Were Reveals Who We Can Be

Eugene Peterson
WaterBrook, 2021
Reviewer: Michael I. Bochenski

This book glows. We all have books that seem to glow as we turn their pages: a Tolkien, a C.S. Lewis classic, a St John of the Cross poem or a Marilynne Robinson novel, for example. This posthumous publication reminds us vividly of the treasury that flowed from the pen of the much-missed Eugene H. Peterson (EHP). It has been compiled from a sermon series Peterson gave in 1984—at the church he pastored for some three decades, Christ our King Presbyterian, Bel Air. In these sermons Peterson reflects on the ongoing message of the

seven letters to the churches in Revelation. An aspect of Christ's character is described, followed by an examination of Christians in which they are usually both encouraged and challenged, before receiving a promise. Peterson has written previously, and brilliantly, on Revelation (*Reversed Thunder*, 1988). It clearly fascinates him: 'We are confused by an author who talks of angels and dragons, men eating books and giant insects eating men, bottomless pits and mysterious numbers , fantastic beasts and golden cities. The language confuses us'.

Ephesus is a test of love: 'We have to return to what Christ first meant to us'. Smyrna's test is one of our responses to suffering, and Pergamum's of our commitment to truth. Consider here these words which, alas, capture so many social media abuses: 'The skill of our times is not using words as words but using them as weapons, as tools.' Or this observation: 'Opposition didn't work. Cursing didn't work. But clever lies did'. Thyatira concerns our holiness, and Sardis our grasp of reality, one that should embrace 'sacred' and 'secular': '...the earth is the Lord's...If we treat any of it—its air, its land, its work, its money—as if it were anything other than holy, we pollute it. We leech the life out of it, and the life we take from it is God's life'. As a long-time lover of sci-fi and fantasy writing, I especially valued too this observation (in the Philadelphia sermon) examining our witness: 'We hear a lot about UFOs and aliens these days. Behind the fascination with them and all the speculation, there reappears from time to time an eerie feeling that perhaps someone, some other creature capable of ruling over us, is about to impose a new authority over us, about to take over. And we are fearful of that. Maybe some of the same avoidance is in our thinking about Christ. He came to rule. Christ lived for the open door—to enter Jerusalem and our lives, to assert the rule of God over all creation'. In Laodicea it is our commitment that comes under scrutiny, and the dangers that result from too much material comfort. 'The Lord knocked at their lives, they opened and He entered. Let us do the same', Peterson pleads. The book ends with a sermon examining the words hallelujah and amen. 'Come to this hallelujah banquet of our Lord and be blessed. This is the end where we make our beginning. The end from which we start'.

The qualities that have made Peterson's pastoral theology some of the finest (and certainly most popular), for a generation can already be glimpsed in these sermons. His historical empathy—the ability to get into the world of Scripture—alongside apposite applications which build bridges back to the contemporary world. His mining of a lifetime's wide-reading for its own pleasures and in order to serve the development of the spiritual life. His outstanding skills as a Bible translator and biblical languages etymologist are also in evidence.

Some anticipatory glimpses of *The Message*, the only other Bible to draw

me (occasionally) away from the NIV now, can be found here too. The book's editor (Paul J. Pastor) has then done a fine job. He is at times a little too over-protective, as when he insists that EHP's use of the term 'Jezebel' should not be considered misogynist, nor a 'cowboys and Indians' illustration disrespectful to Native Americans! The tracing of quotes and sources of information is thorough. Also effective is the way that key quotes and sentences are highlighted in italics throughout the book—the helpful equivalent of a preacher's repetition. Finally, the inclusion of a spiritual examination appendix completes the book well: 'this guide is for prayerful introspection rather than being a quick fix for easy growth'.

Would that more books glowed as brightly as this one does!

Jesus: Dead or Alive?
John Dyer
John Barry Dyer
Reviewer: Bob Little

Not to be confused with other titles of the same name—notably books by John Blanchard, and Josh & Sean McDowell—this book is by John Dyer, a Baptist minister, former BMS missionary in Brazil and now Coordinator of the online training resource, the Timothy Project. Examining biblical—and some non-biblical—evidence for Jesus' resurrection, the book explores the personalities and temperaments of the event's first-hand witnesses. It also considers whether the traditions that have grown up around the resurrection stand up to scrutiny. 'Plot-spoiler': the book supports the view that the resurrection took place.

Like a good sermon, the book is in three parts with alliterative headings: Approaching the evidence, Assimilating the evidence and Appealing to the evidence. 'Approaching the evidence' looks at the gospels' accounts; the first-hand witnesses about whom we know; biblical and secular evidence (including that of Josephus, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger), and takes what it calls a closer look at the events surrounding the resurrection. The second part focuses on the book of Acts—notably the apostles' teaching about the resurrection—and Paul's views, while the final part outlines the church's subsequent testimony.

The book's epilogue considers the key question, 'does it make any difference whether we believe Jesus rose from the dead?' Dyer concludes that, while proof of the resurrection is impossible to produce—and even the disciples didn't expect Jesus to rise from the dead—the existence of the church is a key sign of, and continuing testament to, Jesus' resurrection.

He adds that, regardless of whether we believe in the resurrection or not, the claim that it happened has changed—and continues to change—the world. This book could play its part in reinforcing this claim in ways including as a Bible study resource—for adults and young people.

Lifelines
Carla A. Grosch-Miller
Canterbury Press
Reviewer: Bob Little

Subtitled *Wrestling the Word, Gathering up Grace*, this book of scripture-inspired, hope-filled, prose-style poems was prompted by the deaths of Carla Grosch-Miller's brother, father and mother, combined with, in Grosch-Miller's words, 'an increasingly confusing and assumption -shattering few years in my work' (as a Christian minster and theologian).

Lifelines examines, in poetry, the mystery at the heart of Christian faith—that a seed dies so that new life can emerge. The first section of the book, *Wrestling the Word*, bases the reality of this mystery—sometimes thought of as a journey or pilgrimage—in the sacred stories that have traditionally shaped Christian life. The second part of the book, titled *Gathering up Grace*, attempts to 'name and claim' God's presence amid life's ruins and, ultimately, celebrate the triumph of resilient love.

A helpful *To the Reader* section at the front of the book explains the rationale for the poems, providing some context for what follows. In the way of the psalms, many of these poems are laments. They are modern—and soul-searchingly genuine—attempts to 'sing the songs of the Lord in a foreign land' (Psalm 137: 4), where the foreign land is the devastation and disorientation left by the removal of old, familiar certainties. The poems explore losing but, encouragingly, also finding both life and faith.

This book of over 100 poems offers some resources for those seeking contemporary inspiration for poems related to, and suitable for use during, Christian festivals—and many of the poems conclude with helpful Bible references. As such, they provide interesting insights not only into a contemporary writer's spiritual struggles but also commentaries on scripture passages. There's much, too, in this slim book that will resonate with readers who have experienced the loss of loved ones and the loss of cherished hopes and ambitions.

Can you review?

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Writing book reviews is a good CMD discipline too!