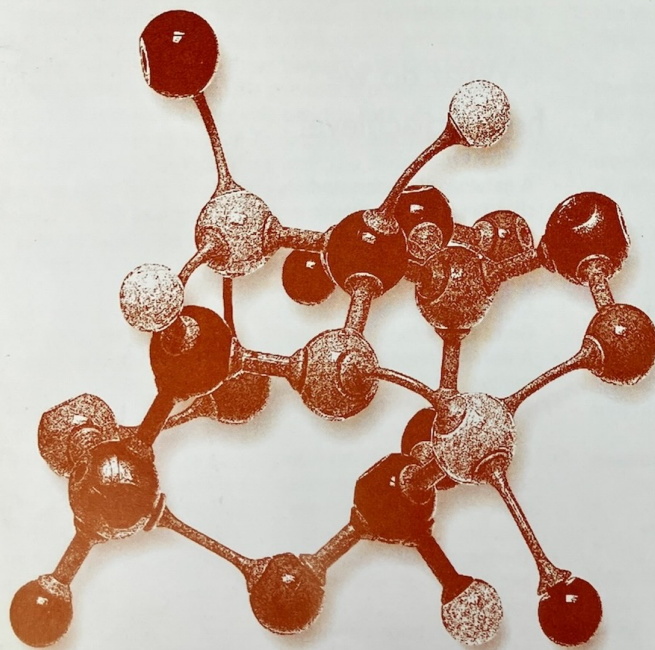


Autumn 2001

TALK

The Mainstream Magazine



Connecting leaders

INSIDE

Pursuing God

Roy Searle
Geraldine Latty
James Catford
Jim Graham
and many others on
Spirituality
Worship
Spiritual direction
Spiritual disciplines
and other subjects
plus regular columns
news and reviews
and much more...

Pursuing God



Our number one commitment – 'to get passionate about knowing God.' Our first, middle and last aim, whether personally, as church leaders, churches, or as Mainstream, is the pursuit of God. Nothing more important – nothing so easily neglected. Number one because all else flows from this. Get this right and the river flows. Foul up here and we become either stagnant water or destructive torrent.

So it's healthy to discover so many with a renewed interest in spirituality – taking responsibility for our own walk with God. It has a radical feel this renewed interest – radical because it gets to the root, the *radix* of what we are about. It cuts through our anxieties that drive us evangelicals to unhealthy activism, a busyness leading to barrenness and burn out. It cautions us about relentless waves of latest trends that pound the Church remorselessly these days. It re-orientates us charismatics from the highly individualised faith celebrated in an endless diet of 'me' and 'I' songs, to God, there beyond us all, yet closer than our breath. We are called to a daily Copernican revolution as we re-orientate life around him.

Pursuing God has a playfulness about it. Who's pursuing whom? Is it us who pursue God or God us? Both? But it's not just a playful title, it evokes for me the way Israel reflected upon its experience of God. I find my imagination provoked by that strange narrative where Moses bargains with God for his presence and to see his glory. The presence is promised, but the face of God denied. Moses only sees the back of God – this *elusive presence* as Samuel Terrien aptly describes our experience of God. I like that! If we would be disciples of Jesus we must come to terms with God's elusive presence – for Jesus bids us follow him through our Gethsemane.

So we introduce our 2002 conference theme. It will be a time to pursue the elusive presence. Don't miss out! Come yourself – bring your teams. They won't be disappointed! The last two have been terrific as we sensed God moving us together along the journey of discipleship and mission. And a bigger edition of *Talk* – two new columns this time. Simon Hall becomes our third regular columnist as he surveys youth culture and ministry. Neil Hepworth starts our gadfly column – *baptist speak* – where a different columnist each edition provides a personal take on Baptist church life. We welcome Geraldine Latty as our regular *worship file* columnist. I want future editions to include a children's ministry column. Other ideas? Please get back with your comments. And thanks for all the positive feedback. Contact me on Theibbos.Altrincham@btinternet.com

Stephen Ibbotson is the Editor of *Talk*.

He is also a member of the pastoral staff of Altrincham Baptist Church, Altrincham, Cheshire.

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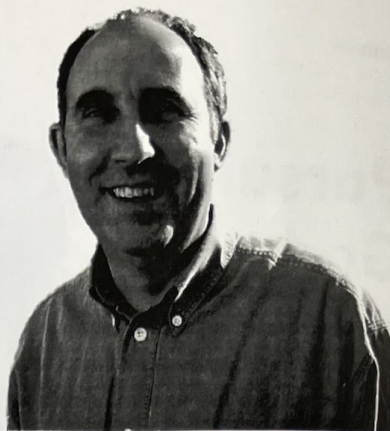
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I just want to be with you – Seeking God

by Roy Searle



Roy Searle is one of the leaders of the Northumbria Community, a geographically dispersed community of people who share a common way of living – a Rule of Life: Availability and Vulnerability. Roy travels extensively. He has a particular interest in spirituality, gospel and cultural issues and is committed to helping people to realise the love and grace of God. Roy is married with four children.

It was evening and I was in the study, preparing for next week's sermon. Into the room appeared my younger son who came and sat down on the seat near my desk. It was good to see him and after several minutes of father and son chat I followed a line of inquiry as to why and what he was doing. Had he come in for a story? paper and pencils? to play? was he on the run from some mischief? hiding from the inevitable call for bedtime? None of these. His quiet manner in the chair beside me was both welcoming and disturbing. 'So why are you here?' I eventually asked. 'I just want to be with you Dad'.

His innocent yet beautifully profound response was to change the course of my life and

'I just want to be with you', when had I last said that to God? With renewed awareness of both my need and desire I began to realise that ministry had distanced rather than drawn me closer to God and that I had allowed things to lead me away from the heart of God into a far country of activity, drivenness and falsehoods. 'I just want to be with you' was an invitation to a homecoming, a call in my own heart, a call to return to that first love for God who calls us to be with him as well as to be sent by him.

It is a call that continues to draw and to challenge and its aim to seek God has to mean more than aspiration and good intent – it requires discipline and a reorientation of life.

accompany and help us on our journey of seeking God and deepening our relationship with him. They are given not as rules and sticks with which we are made to feel guilty or be beaten with, rather as those gifts that are for our well-being in our seeking after God.

Solitude

Solitude is an indispensable companion without which it is very difficult to deepen our relationship with God. The frenetic culture of noise and busyness must not rob us from setting aside time and space to give God our undivided attention. Withdrawing from the immediate demands, routines, responsibilities and relationships in order to be alone with God are prerequisites to seeking him and being men and women who are led by the Spirit, not driven by the demands, opportunities, obligations and tyrannies of the urgent, (see Mark 1:35–39). Solitude provided for Jesus those precious times of seeking and deepening of relationship with the Father, out of which came direction for life and ministry; relationship out of which came activity and mission. Here was the discipline of taking time out to seek God in the solitary place that provided a template for our seeking of God and a foundation upon which our ministries should be built. As Henri Nouwen put it, 'a life without a solitary place, that is a life without a quiet centre, can so easily destroy and destruct'.

Knowing and seeking God calls for an awakening to his presence in all things, not just in the religious and spiritual realms of life

ministry for in his simple answer, 'I just want to be with you', sounded the Spirit of God speaking to my own heart. It was a crucible moment that awoke me from my preoccupied sailing through life and ministry, which engaged me in many activities but had robbed me of that desire and call in my own heart to seek God. Perceived knowledge of God was no substitute for knowing God. Words about God were no authentic alternative for relationship with him.

Pursuing or seeking God is both an invitation and a challenge to reorder our lives. To set our hearts on seeking God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength requires an embracing of those gifts and graces, disciplines and commitments that would accompany and help us on what is a journey of discovery.

Companions on the journey

Think of the following spiritual disciplines and graces as companions and friends to

Silence

Silence completes and intensifies solitude and its value in a world inundated by words, sounds and much noise cannot be underestimated in our quest to seek and listen to God. As Mother Teresa said, 'We need to find God and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how in nature; trees, flowers, grass, grow in silence; see the stars, the moon, the sun, how they move in silence... the more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in our active life. We need silence to be able to touch

Pursuing or seeking God is both an invitation and a challenge to reorder our lives

people's souls. The essential thing is not what we say, but what God says to us and through us. All our words will be useless unless they come from within – words which do not give the light of Christ only increase the darkness.'

Solitude and silence don't come easy to many of us. They are often equated with laziness, inactivity and regarded as unproductive but when seen as companions on the road to seeking God they open our hearts and minds to his presence, found in learning to be alone before him. As leaders committed to engaging with mission in a changing world with all its attendant challenges and opportunities and plethora of strategies, programmes, ideas and visions, the need to withdraw and seek becomes even greater as we seek to listen to God's heartbeat for our lives and ministries.

Awareness

Thomas Merton described contemplation as, 'a gift of awareness, an awakening to the Real within all that is real.' Brother Lawrence spoke about,

'alertness towards God'.

One of the things that has dulled our awareness of God is that false divide between the sacred and the secular. Knowing and seeking God calls for an awakening to his presence in all things, not just in the religious and spiritual realms of life. In him we live and move and have our being. Awareness and responsiveness to God in the ordinariness of everyday life is a key to seeking him and discerning his presence: in holy and helpless places, in joy and pain; in the events, experiences, and encounters of life. Garrison Keillor speaks about the presence of God permeating through ordinary life – 'cooking, small talk, storytelling, making love, fishing, tending animals, arranging flowers, through sports, music, books, spending time with friends, raising children, why it's been known in a church service, every once in a while!'

Awareness of the presence of God in ordinary life enlarges our vision of him and helps us to know him more intimately in the everyday happenings of our lives

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and those whom we are called to share and serve. We can however, through being overly obsessed with seeking to see God at work in extraordinary, miraculous ways, consign him in our thinking, to the 'remarkable' and lock our understanding of God into the so-called sacred realms of church and the worship or ministry meeting, thus blinding us to the reality of seeing and encountering him in the ordinariness of life.

Desire

Desire is sometimes talked about as though it is something we should avoid as believers. But

desire is a fundamental human attribute and given by God can be used to lead us in our quest for him. Our desire for him should govern and determine all other desires. The journey of seeking God is paradoxical for it is one of pursuing that which has already been found. We seek the Lord because we have been found by him. The desire to know more of God and to seek him is the fruit or consequence of having been touched by his love and grace. It is God's initiative to put desire in us that causes us to seek after him. It is he who creates us with the ability to desire that enables us to pursue him. As Augustine said, 'You have made us for yourself Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.' Our desire and restlessness may seek fulfilment in many areas of life and relationships; friendships, marriage, work, football – not if you're a Middlesborough supporter! – pleasure, success, accumulation etc. but they will not be truly realised until our hearts find their rest in God. Desire is God given, without which our lives lose their passion,

vitality and motivation – lives that will not rest until they have found the embrace of the God who is the creator of desire. The Lord who created us in his own image as persons in relationship, the triune God who longs that we might know him is the God who has given us the desire to seek, to look and discover him. In the words of Brother Lawrence we are urged to 'Consider God as the goal of all our thoughts and desires'.

With all the challenges and opportunities facing us as leaders may the cry of our hearts be, *Lord I just want to be with you.*



Jim Graham is presently Director of External Ministries at Gold Hill Baptist Church where he was previously the Pastor for 28 years. A Speaker and author, he has been a key leader amongst churches in the whole area of renewal over many years.

I was born into the backwash of Nineteenth Century evangelical individualism. It was confidently assumed that we were committed to Christianity not Churchianity. It sounded good and plausible, but it was seriously wrong. There is no such thing as solitary religion in the Bible and there are no unattached Christians in the New Testament. Biblical holiness is corporate as well as personal. What then are the features that will determine and develop the spiritual life of a church community?

An acknowledgement of the centrality of Christ

It is not difficult to pay lip-service to this clear priority; but much more difficult to live with it. It involves corporately giving up our right to a life of our own. We often are tenacious defenders of our history, our tradition, our distinctive ethos. We need to learn how to die to that – although not all of it is necessarily wrong – so that Christ can have his Church back. We need to put structures in place and give prime time to knowing what is in Christ's mind, seeing what is on Christ's agenda and feeling what is on Christ's heart. In a frenetic culture being still and listening does not come easily personally far less corporately. Token-praying can often be a smokescreen obscuring dynamic dialogue between heaven and earth.

A confidence in the authority of scripture

After many years I have found this easy to preach but unbelievably painful to pastor. Where truth is in conflict with tradition not only practically but theologically,

there is a potent recipe for violent reaction. Often we have accepted our traditional ways and beliefs without examination in the light of Scripture and truth unexamined is truth that lacks integrity. After all the source of all Scripture according to Dr. Jim Packer is 'The divine outbreathing of God into man by His controlling Spirit, with the result that he speaks, or writes, with a quality insight, accuracy and authority which is possible in no other form of human speaking or writing. Scripture has a double authorship and man is only the secondary author; the primary author through whose initiative, prompting and enlightenment and under whose superintendence each human writer did his work is God the Holy Spirit.'

A recognition of the person and work of the Holy Spirit

Long ago in London John Wimber had a prophetic word for the UK. 'For such a long time I have stood aside and watched you fulfilling your ministry, now I want you to stand aside and watch me fulfilling my ministry through you.' The Holy Spirit has come for that purpose. We have often relegated him to some kind of spiritual jamboree or charismatic knees-up whereas he has come to credit us with the risen life of Jesus Christ corporately as well as personally. What Jesus made possible on the Cross the Holy Spirit wants to make actual in our lives. How little we know of the One who out of nothing brought something and out of chaos created cosmos.

A submissiveness to godly leadership

Submission is not a spineless, incoherent abandonment of

responsibility but rather a

voluntary selflessness that responds in faith to the wisdom of God for his people. In this lies our freedom and effectiveness. Biblically some shall be responsible for the leadership of others and both shall be responsible to Jesus Christ. In practice all need to be involved in decision-making, but clearly not all can be involved in decision-taking. Surely the time has come to restore the priesthood of all believers to its devotional wonder and richness rather than relegate it to a non-biblical, impractical, fleshly democratic principle.

A demand for reality in fellowship

Three questions constantly need to be asked: *What does it mean to love one another as Jesus loves us? What does it mean to have everything in common? What does it mean to lay down your life for your brother?* Fellowship is intrusive and radical and lifestyle-changing. It will only happen as a result of the flow of the life of God by the Holy Spirit.

A commitment to mission and evangelism

An axiomatic spiritual principle is that we receive all that God wants to give unconditionally so that we have something to share unreservedly. The world has maliciously and effectively invaded the Church with its values and procedures whereas the yearning of the heart of God is that the Church would confidently and courageously invade the world with his Kingdom life. It is an equally axiomatic spiritual principle that it is in giving that we receive. God enriches in order that we may enrich!

worship file

by Geraldine Latty



Photo: Kelvin Reeves Design, Bristol

I write at the end of six intensive weeks, involved in leading worship at conferences, conducting 'Music in Worship' workshops et al, which have been among other things, busy, so enjoyable, deeply challenging, stimulating - oh yes - and at times, fun! What a privilege working with and seeking to encourage musicians who serve their local churches, people who have full-time jobs, full-time families, full-time lives! - who trek out faithfully to the music group/musician rehearsal each week serving their local church in this way.

During this time I have heard comments, observations and questions ranging from song choice and style to the hymn versus chorus debate - from people feeling without affirmation and lonely in their 'serving', to those who have encouragement coming out of their ears! From those who feel it is all such a struggle, to those who have great vision for church in the community AND see that vision in reality! Not to mention the 'how to' questions of encouraging younger people to be involved or, making the older people feel valued in our corporate worship times - how to leave space for the Holy Spirit to work or how to lead corporate worship after 'Terrible Tuesday' at the World Trade Centre.

These are important questions, and I find that as I have listened and been challenged there are other questions that stir in me. Two in particular: What is worship? What does that look like in us as individuals and in family/corporate gatherings?

In my search for a definition of worship, I have returned often

to the account of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 and the first use of the word 'worship' in the Bible in verse 5. There is no mention of drums, guitars, organs and robed choirs or even a tambourine - but we see a father and a son walking up a hill and the father is about to sacrifice the dream he has waited 100 years for! What we don't see are the questions, agonizing questions - for Sarah too - and the pain of that obedience. But we do see the faith that simply said 'God himself will provide a lamb...'

We see that reflected in Jesus too, don't we, as years later, another son, the Son of God, walks up a hill and in the middle of the pain of surrendering says 'not my will, but yours' (Luke 22:42).

I find this so helpful as a base line for worship - for it means that the starting point is

this is worship that makes sense to God. It means too that in the pain of obedience and the pain of the hard questions - I have permission to say in faltering faith 'God will provide...' It is the place of risk, but it is also the place where God-given dreams come true (Genesis 22:15-18). It's that which Paul speaks of when he says 'in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices... this is your reasonable act of worship,' or as I have heard it put another way 'this is worship that makes sense' (Romans 12:1).

What will that look like when we come together? There are so many expressions - readings, stories-testimony, high, abandoned praise, dance, space for repentance, adoration-wonder, prayer for my

worship is the place of risk
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sacrifice and surrender - 'loving God with all my heart, my soul, my mind, my strength' (Deut. 6:5 /Mark 12:30). It means that worship is more than music - or art, spoken word, dance, multimedia presentations, drama et al - but that as these elements reflect our surrender to God, it becomes worship that makes sense to him.

It means that as I work, study, collect my unemployment benefit, care for my family or allow myself to be cared for, if therein lies a heart that chooses to say 'not my will but yours...'

neighbour, art response, weeping, resolute faith, broken intercession and so much more. For sure it is a place where our most generous God is present, where we his people look to him without apology, and seek to be people that love him with heart, mind, soul and strength.

For sure it is a place where those who don't know Jesus will see that you don't have to be perfect to belong, but that it is a journey to surrendering to God, maybe a journey up a hill.

Geraldine Latty, a graduate musician, conducts workshops in leading worship. She also leads worship at national and international conferences such as Spring Harvest, Baptist Assembly and Worship Together. Previous to this she taught as head of music in a secondary school for 12 years. For further details please contact Geraldine on geraldinelatty@hotmail.com.



Resourcing your spiritual life

by Lisa Holmes

Lisa Holmes has been in ministry at Skipton Baptist Church since 1994. Our thanks to Lisa and members of Skipton Baptist Church for this chat room article. Lisa broke into maternity leave to give birth to this, before returning to her and her husband Mike's pride and joy, Caitlin.

I have recently joined the ranks of those who dread periods of silence, prayer or in fact anything other than singing during church services; I also wonder why I ever thought I was too busy to have a personal devotional time. Sermons have been replaced by 'crèche talk', quiet times by crying times – I am a mother (4 weeks old!) and spirituality may never be the same again!

I have taken the opportunity to interview 6 members of my church about how they resource their own spiritual lives: Elzet, Peter, Mike, Andy, Rob and Lis. Here's the low-down.

years spiritual drifting in 20s renewed commitment through influence of Celtic Spirituality

Rob Browning is 32 and married. Secondary School Teacher. Anglican background, Christian commitment formalized during University

Lis Golding is 44 and mother of two. School Secretary. Married to nonbeliever. Non-church background. Period of intense searching culminated with significant experience while at University. Involved with the Quakers for many years before feeling the need for a more biblically based spiritual home

about faith but living it – not just talking about the importance of humility but behaving in a humble way towards someone I don't necessarily like.

Peter: Church also provides me with the fellowship necessary for spiritual growth. It is especially important that I can meet with Christians my own age and we can encourage each other since it's often lonely at school.

Rob: I also appreciate the support and love from friends in church – good teaching can flag up parts of my spiritual life, challenge me or clearly show me God's will, but this is only a starting point. I then need to share the issues with my wife and friends to test them. I value the opportunity to serve in the church as well.

Mike: Church plays a significant part in my spiritual growth through worship – the majority of the time I play in the band – and sermons, although I often find that my state of mind plays a big part in how effective these things are to me. Cell groups foster mutual accountability and encourage commitment and spiritual growth, while prayer partnerships are a tremendous source of spiritual encouragement and discipline.

Andy: I also find that God communicates with me in a number of ways and often these get brought together in church, usually during the worship time.

As our lives get busier and more materialistic, isolating ourselves from things like the pervasive influence of the TV becomes more and more vital

Elzet de Vries is 26, married. South African accountant. Christian home and upbringing.

Peter Mackley is 15, taking GCSEs at the end of the year. Christian home, baptized last year

Mike Holmes is 29, married with new baby. Computer Programmer. Converted from non church upbringing through influence of grandparents

Andy Ryland aged 39 is married, with new baby imminent. Transport and Visitor Manager at Yorkshire Dales National Park. Converted age 17 at SU Camp; after period of 10

What part does church play in your spiritual life?

Elzet: I find that going to church is a necessary spiritual discipline. The church as Christ's body plays two roles in my life. I find role models from whom I can seek guidance and who inspire me in my spiritual growth. Also conversely there are some challenging relationships where God teaches me to exercise love.

Lis: Yes church provides the most challenging part of the Christian life. It means not just reading

My mind tends to work in a visual manner and therefore I respond better to illustrations than necessarily a logical sermon.

What aspects of spirituality do you find most inspiring?

Elzet: The Bible and books about real people in real situations inspire me because they are true to life. Sermons can be so inspiring when they are from God and visible in the preacher's own life. It makes me think if God can do it for them he can do it for me.

Rob: Yes, other peoples' testimonies give me great inspiration – they help to show me that God is real.

Peter: I find those things inspiring too since I can listen to a variety of pastors and teachers across the globe every day on Christian television – 'The God Channel'. I think TV is particularly important for the present

We often say we do not find time to spend with God and his word. As this is the best resource, the only answer is to cut down the resources we so generously supply to other areas of our lives

generation of Christians who benefit from having instant access to the television.

Mike: In contrast to that I think there is a lot to be said for the 'Desert Fathers' Mentality' – wilderness experiences where we choose to withdraw for a period of time to reflect and focus on God and possibly hear from him. I have found this very helpful in the past when I have visited the Northumbria Community. This discipline of retreating is probably much more important today than it has ever been. As our lives get busier and more materialistic, isolating ourselves from things like the pervasive influence of the TV becomes more and more vital.

Andy: I agree because often when I need to reach a conclusion on something I find it helpful to spend time alone in the countryside, not difficult in the Yorkshire Dales.

I also find books very inspiring to my spiritual growth.

Lis: Yes, I also find books and poetry a major inspiration and resource. I particularly valued Gerard Hughes *God of Surprises* (DLT) when considering changing my spiritual home. My children, too, lead me to explore my own – and their – spirituality further. However I sometimes feel daunted by the size of the task in nurturing their explorations by myself.

Is there one thing you would recommend to other people as a resource for their spiritual lives?

Peter: I would say that for me going to Christian camps e.g. Crusaders has helped me to better resource my spiritual life. Again this goes back to fellowship and sharing

experiences and problems with other Christians while generally recharging your spiritual batteries.

Mike: I would agree on the importance of getting away from outside world influences and normal pulls on life – for me that means going on retreat. From day to day we need to try to meet with God alone; I find it's better to aim for 5 or 10 minutes than setting yourself unrealistic goals and being discouraged because you always fall short. I, personally, find it helpful to vary the Bible reading programme that I follow – for instance *Celtic Daily Prayer* (Harper Collins), *Search the Scriptures* (IVP).

Lis: I also think that a daily quiet time where we make space in our minds and clear away the clutter of every day is important but if I could recommend just one thing it would be books which help me to explore my spiritual experience more fully by reflecting on other peoples' thinking.

Rob: I would recommend open, honest and mutually accountable relationships. When I am able to talk through difficult issues and problems it helps me gain perspective and prevents the devil from undermining my faith.

Elzet: People, including myself, often say they do not find time to spend with God and his word. As this is the best resource, the only answer is to cut down the resources we so generously supply to other areas of our lives.

Companions on the way – spiritual direction

by Trevor Miller



Trevor Miller is a former baptist minister now developing a unique ministry within the Northumbria Community as its 'abbot'.

On a recent visit to Ireland I read in the vestibule of the Franciscan Church in Killarney a simple definition of spiritual direction. It was, the notice said, 'not about giving answers. It was about helping each other to hear the voice of God in life's experience and to discover God's plan as it unfolds.' This latter expression about the 'ongoingness' of the journey, about discoveries yet to unfold is what differentiates spiritual direction from pastoral counselling. Although pastoral counselling can in some cases develop into an ongoing need, it is generally a one off compassionate attempt to bring healing and consolation to a 'now' situation. Spiritual direction is a conscious and deliberate attempt to accompany another on the ongoing journey of faith as a fellow traveller. It follows that spiritual direction needs an ongoing commitment to the development of a spiritual friendship, so as to help another to interpret life's experiences in the context of prayer and seeking God.

We are all blind to our own failings and often build defences around our fragile egos, so that it sometimes helps to have another person whose walk with God we respect sharing our inner journey. Someone who accepts us as we are, and who, through their own vulnerability, is honest enough yet gentle enough to help us discern our motives and actions.

This is why anyone who is committed to spiritual growth and the deepening of their own relationship with God can be a

spiritual director. In one sense spiritual directors cannot be trained as the ability is a gift of God's grace but the gift can be fine tuned by training, study and the trial and error of actual experience. This alone brings the wisdom and discernment needed to be a true guide.

To find a director needs time, an openness to God in prayer, asking that the Lord will reveal someone to you whose spiritual walk you respect. You then ask them if they would explore the possibility of walking with you on your journey.

Thomas Green in his book *The Friend of the Bridegroom* (Ave Maria Press 2000) lists six criteria for choosing a spiritual director. They are *Compatibility* – someone you feel comfortable with and who is on the same wavelength. *Shared Vision* – someone who believes in the value of prayer and discernment. *Objectivity* – someone who can maintain a healthy detachment without being emotionally distant. *A Good Listener* – someone who can listen to heart and the movement of God beneath the externals. *Confidentiality* – someone who can respect the trust placed in them. The sixth criterion Green states is an ideal but not essential – that the *Person be someone who is ahead of you on the journey*.

This is not to encourage an elite guru mentality from either side. Nor must they assume an authority they do not have or insist on another following their tradition as the only way. This is why the term 'director' can be misleading. It has overtones of a

spiritual traffic policeman popping up at the crossroads of our lives and directing us left then right. This is simply wrong. God is the Real Director and the spiritual director assists the seeker in uncovering and discovering the direction of God in the person's life. The best spiritual companions are those prepared to listen to our personal story, who encourage and affirm us in our faltering steps towards Jesus and who, when we are unsure or indecisive, help us to discern what God wants of us in the ordinary circumstances of our lives. Roland Walls, a much loved and busy spiritual director for over fifty years, insists that he has never given anyone a direction in his life. It is an exploration, with suggestions and minimal advice, of the person's prayer life, their self-awareness, and their sense of vocation and whether they have a pattern to their days that encourages spiritual formation.

It is not the name but the function that matters. While it is true that there is some confusion over the difference in emphases of spiritual direction, soul friends, mentoring, discipling, these are surely of minor importance when compared with the task they all have at their heart which is to encourage growth in the spiritual life, increased longing for God and the imitation of Christ.

Those who wish to investigate further can visit www.shalem.org or www.sdiworld.org or read Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (Fount 1996) or Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Friend* (Paulist Press 2001).



In the training of Baptist ministers do the colleges have too much influence?

by Neil Hepworth

I am a newly accredited minister. I have just finished training at Northern Baptist College in Manchester. What is the place of formal theological education and the role of colleges in the ministerial training process? (I hope to stimulate some ongoing discussion and the issues I speak of are relevant to all of our 'approved' colleges.) First I want to make clear that I have thrived at NBC, enjoyed theological education, and had a positive experience of the training process in general. I have begun my ministry in a church-planting situation with an emphasis on mission and evangelism, with a sense of gratitude to God and all at Northern, for their input into my life. Indeed I am returning to do an MA in Contextual Missiology. So what follows is not the griping of someone who dislikes theology, fails to perceive the value of training, and feels hurt or disillusioned!

However, what concerns me is the disproportionate influence a college has in a student's training and appraisal of their suitability and development. I have felt fairly treated and encouraged, but can see the potential for abuse. We recognise the place of the local church at the onset of training and by confirming a call at the end of the process, but the whole responsibility and influence for two to four years in-between, is located in the hands of the college. Even the Association Ministerial Recognition committees appear to have no part during the training itself. This of course ties

in with the main emphasis in training being on theological learning. I do think that our colleges have much to offer and that theological study should remain an essential part of ministerial formation, but it should not be the only focus. The very nature of our colleges as academic institutions keeps the major focus on theological study. I would propose a model of training that is more integrated and involves a mutual partnership between local churches, colleges, regional associations, Baptist Union Ministry Department, together with centres and organisations that model effective Christian ministry and mission.

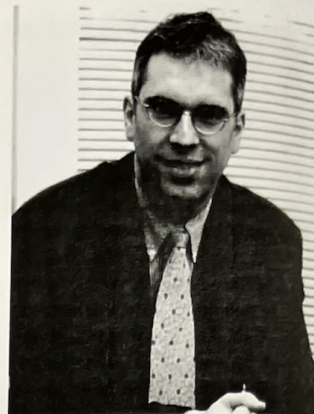
We could do worse than model our training on my experience as an apprentice gas engineer. This was a three-year intensive period, which ran consecutively in three six-week blocks, of college, training centre, and district. The college was about the theory. The training centre was where we learnt the practical skills under trained supervision. In the district we did the actual work largely assisting an experienced engineer. However towards the end we worked on our own. The three different 'partners' in the process carried out assessment and appraisal in the three respective areas. This ensured that the academic, specialist skills, and practical ability to do the job in a real situation were given equal weight. Surely students ought to be disciplined by spending time with 'minister-mentors', churches, and agencies

doing significant practical ministry and these should have more of a place in the continuing training and appraising of a student's call and suitability for ministry. This calls for more of a real partnership between all concerned right the way through the whole process.

With the present system, whether a student is training 'in-pastorate' or in placements in the community, feedback and reports are made, but it remains the college's sole right to evaluate and interpret such information. I am concerned that we give so much influence and power over the training of students for the ministry to our colleges and yet there is no direct accountability to the churches of the Union they serve. I believe our churches through the structures of our association life should be able to influence the style and content of training. They are the recipients of the ministers. They are being served under God by the colleges. I do not accept the argument that a college is autonomous like a local church. If I do not like a particular local church I can choose to go to a multitude of others, but as a Baptist ministerial student I am not free to choose any college I like. We must attend an approved college and this often means that once geographical limitations are considered there is no real choice. The privilege of being an approved college, with currently such a large influence over the training process, should also require genuine accountability to the churches, associations and the Union.

Neil Hepworth recently completed ministerial training at Northern College. He has begun pastoral ministry at Weir Baptist Church in Rossendale, Lancs – a church plant featured in the BU *Re-Imagine* video and in *Talk*. He is 37, married to Debbie, and father to four children.

Dusting off the family silver – the interview with James Catford



James Catford is a former publishing director with Hodder Headline and HarperCollins and is currently on sabbatical before taking up a new role in publishing at the end of the year. He is a member of the board of Renovaré in the US. James also serves on the board of the London Institute and Premier Radio and is chairman of the International Bible Society and Sojourn Publications. He is interviewed here by Stephen Ibbotson.

James, I understand you've just started a new job for RENOVARÉ. What is RENOVARÉ and what is your own role within it?

I've been asked to help set up Renovaré here in the UK in a voluntary position arising. Richard Foster - founder of Renovaré in the United States - explains: 'Renovaré is committed to working for the renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ, enhanced by a practical strategy for spiritual growth.' We have consulted widely with the Church in the UK, including several national leaders, as well as trying to read the times as best we can. We are currently setting up the Board and a small office in London. Those involved include Roy Searle - Northumbria Community, Rob Warner who is well known to *Talk* readers, and celebrated author Joyce Huggett, who has been something of a pioneer in this area.

How have you become involved in this?

There was a time in my life, a few years ago, when I was going through the motions - mouthing the words of our faith but no longer singing the song. I was struggling to make sense of the sort of life that the Bible talks about, such as 'knowing Christ'. I got to a point where I didn't want to read the Bible very much because it all seemed to be out of reach for me. I was either going to have to downgrade my reading of Scripture and say that this kind of life is little more than a romantic ideal, or I was going to have to embark on a journey to find out how Christ really

changes lives - even mine. This brought me into contact with Richard Foster and people he works with, including Dallas Willard and James Bryan Smith. Eventually we have come to a place where we feel we can share what we have discovered with a wider Christian community. Next year I hope we will see the first little shoots of a seed that was planted several years ago.

Richard Foster's writings will be well known to some of our readers. Is there a 'way-in' to the matters he highlights for those not yet familiar with his approach?

Streams of Living Water explores six classic traditions of the Christian faith. These are the Contemplative tradition - the prayer filled life; the Holiness tradition - the virtuous life; the Evangelical tradition - the word

Taken together they reflect the different aspects of Jesus' own life and the way he lived. By stepping into these streams and learning from the rich heritage of the people who have gone before us, we can start to become more like Jesus. It is not about reading books, acquiring teaching or collecting sermons - not that they are bad in themselves - but about placing ourselves in a place where God can begin to change us from the inside. That's an invitation to all of us. With his Spirit working within, we start doing the things he did. As a result, an inner-transformation quietly starts to take place in us. Of course we will need the support of others along the way, but this is essentially how we are renovated and renewed - 'Renovaré' if you are into the Latin!

We might do well to get out the family silver and take another look at it. Hidden there may be practical ways of encountering God that today we may have missed

centred life; the Social justice tradition - the compassionate life; the Charismatic tradition - the Spirit empowered life; and the Incarnational tradition - the sacramental life. Sounds daunting, but the basic point is to ask why do we have to choose between them? As long as they are consistent with Scripture, why not have them all?

One of the features of our society is the speed with which trends come and go. This features Christian circles. I can think of power evangelism through sign & wonders, Toronto, Pensacola, church planting, seeker targeted mission, city prayer movements, cell church etc. Is this an

observation of a middle-aged crony or is RENOVARÉ just another such movement?

It would be rather presumptuous to call Renovaré a movement as we have hardly started yet! We simply want to introduce the people of God to what others have experienced in discipleship and spiritual growth. We certainly don't intend to do a 'new-new thing'. Why don't we try something even more original in our day and start doing an OLD thing? Let's learn from the way God has worked down the centuries in building his Church and ask the best and most valuable movements to show us their greatest treasures. We might do well to get out the family silver and take another look at it. Hidden there may be practical ways of encountering God today we may have missed.

Perhaps it's easy to become cynical about movements – church history is a history of movements. Perhaps it's not so much the existence of movements but the speed with which they come and go. It encourages flirtation rather than genuine engagement with God. So no formation of Christian character or community takes place.

Let's not be condescending about this. I'm just as susceptible to the instant society as anyone else. But as we go on through life we realise that Christian people cannot live off spiritual

Spiritual disciplines are doors through which we encounter the living God

handouts from the minister alone. We are invited by God to take responsibility for our own spiritual formation. He won't wipe our noses for us and, very largely, the way we form our spiritual lives will result in the

lives we get. Character is formed slowly and the construction work almost always takes place below ground. Of course at this point we need to introduce the concept of discipline, or discipleship. When we start any

Character is formed slowly and the construction work almost always takes place below ground

kind of training we look ahead and think the challenge ahead of us is totally impossible. This applies as much to training in righteousness as it does to music, athletics, or a foreign language. We start by doing what we can, so that eventually we are able to do what was previously impossible. Through spiritual disciplines we deliberately place ourselves where God can transform our very core. This governs how we live and relate to people. Put briefly, disciplines are doors through which we encounter the living God.

The marketing of latest trends by speedy communication surely also erodes our confidence to find our own personal, or our own community's calling and style. We are tempted to think someone else is doing it right or has the answer – especially if they get 'results' i.e. bigger churches. Then after we've tried it and find it doesn't fit comfortably our community or me, we quietly abandon it? How can we encourage people to live true to Christ and themselves?

You are right that we quietly abandon a certain method when it doesn't deliver – we can even abandon the entire faith. Like an office block shutting down for the night, slowly the lights go out one by one and there is no one there except for the caretaker. People just drift away. Many churches see encouraging

numbers join as a result of Alpha and the like, only to find that as fast as people enter through the front door, they quietly leave via the back door. Why is this, and has it got anything to do with what we teach and live out in front of our congregations week by week? The answer to all this is to have a vital, real and ever deepening relationship with Christ ourselves. If we are being transformed, or 'renovated' from within, then people will surely notice. From wherever they are sitting in the pews, people can always spot insincerity. They know instinctively if our lives are running on empty. The temptation then is to fall back on substitutes for a genuine encounter with God. In other words, we start faking it. Only when we engage in some of the many Christian disciplines or streams that are available to us within the Church can we speak with conviction about the life that others can enter. When we

What people are longing for most is a life that is real

humbly live it ourselves, we can say with sincerity 'there is a life that the Bible describes and you can experience it too!' What people are longing for most is a life that is real. With so many false starts and easy answers they will quite rightly be wary of anything else. Our job is to build their confidence. And there is a way to get there. Everyone is invited to wade into the great streams that God has given us. We don't even have to be educated, especially gifted or 'that way inclined' to experience God's transforming work in the depth of our beings.

Readers of Talk come in the main from the evangelical and charismatic streams that Richard Foster identifies in Stream of Living Water. I don't know your own background at all, but as you observe or participate within

continued over page

these traditions what are some of the things we need to learn most from other traditions of Christianity at this particular time?

There is much we can learn from each other in the context of a biblical framework. Not that we all have to be identical. As C.S. Lewis said, we may be one body but we don't have to be one pool. Evangelicals and charismatics will, I'm sure, readily embrace and benefit from a richer prayer-filled life through the disciplines of the Contemplative tradition. Taking time to be with God is an enormously valuable 'holy habit' that will pay back the investment a hundred fold. There is also the social justice movement within which Evangelicals have often been the prime movers, but are more wary about these days. Steve Chalke's *FaithWorks* project, for example, is seeking to extend this discipline. Each of us will

own traditions. Whilst Evangelicals take for granted the clear exposition of Scripture, true believers everywhere have so much to gain from this glorious and essential stream. Then there is the priority of evangelism and being able to engage in apologetics in order to win people for Christ. As someone who does not usually call himself a charismatic, I have been profoundly influenced by new and freer forms of worship. The quality of both words and music seems to get better year after year. The contribution to the wider church has been enormous, reaching well beyond the confines of its own historic tradition. We can rejoice in this.

If readers are interested in following up the matters you mention how can they do they do so?

We are gathering a mailing list for people wanting to be kept in

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Taking time to be with God is an enormously valuable 'holy habit' that will pay back the investment a hundredfold

experience inner transformation of our hearts and minds as we personally engage in simple works of compassion and grace, and not just by writing cheques! Then there is the Holiness movement which would serve as a much needed corrective to any who seek to manipulate, abuse or hold power over others, both inside and outside the Church. This virtuous life helps us to trust God more fully to provide for all that we need exactly when we need it. Imagine how living like this could impact our church fellowships and local communities.

What do evangelicals and charismatics need to hold on to most dearly and offer freely to the rest of Christ's Church?

What they need to hold onto most is the very essence of their

touch with news, resources and events. Contact **RenovaréUK@dial.pipex.com** The following books will help in exploring this subject further: *Streams of Living Water* by Richard Foster; *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* by Lynda Greybeal and James Bryan Smith, (this helps people to not only hear the words of Jesus but put them into practice); *The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard. All are published by HarperCollins.

Thanks James for sharing these provoking ideas. What's your job by the way?

Editor for HarperCollins!

Well that's quite enough then! Truly thanks and we hope for RENOVARÉ to be influential in the best possible way.

When God hides his face

by Rob Warner



We live in a society that emphasizes immediacy, experience and intimacy. And so prayer is expected to be immediately fulfilling, even ecstatic – if it doesn't deliver what I want, it's time to move on. But that's hardly the richest way to understand prayer. John of the Cross wrote eloquently of the dark night of the soul, more aware of God's absence than his presence. Faced with recent terrorist atrocities, many will recently have confronted the hiddenness of God. There is a single cry of the heart from the passengers on the hijacked planes, the victims in the World Trade Centre, the children of Iraq, the Palestinians in their camps, the Jews in Auschwitz, and all who have struggled with the bitterness of depression: *Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?* (Psalm 44:24)

So what does the Bible say about hiddenness and God? First, there is hiddenness as a result of sin. We may hide from God with a guilty conscience, and the 'day of the Lord' will provoke many to attempt the impossible evasion of trying to hide from God's judgment. However nothing is hidden from God, fooled neither by our evasions nor by a thin veneer of religious conformity. Just as we hide from God, he sometimes hides from us as a result of our sin. Second there is hiddenness as God's provision. The psalmists speak of hiding in God where we discover the deepest source of

whether personal, national or original. Rather, they faced with honesty the painful experience of the absence of God.

We rush to explain God's hiddenness. Some concentrate on the tension between divine sovereignty and human free will – you cannot expect God to intervene every time we are about to suffer. Some concentrate on the fall – you cannot blame God for man's every inhumanity to man. Some concentrate on the cross – in the crucified Jesus we see the suffering God, who enters into our pain. Maybe the psalmists suggest a different approach, inviting us to give expression to the experience of desolation rather than rush to a theoretical explanation. There can be benefit and wisdom in complaining to God of his absence, even echoing Jesus' cry of abandonment – 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

The medieval world knew much suffering, violence and distress. Life was indeed nasty, brutish and short. Poems and prayers from that period speak of searching for God in the face of life's hardship. Perhaps in the last quarter century our diet of worship has become one sided. Celebrating

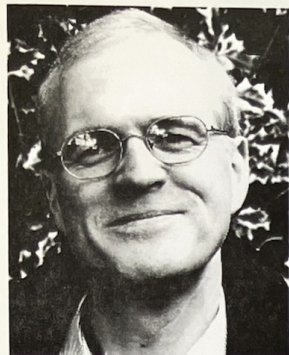
Rob Warner is one of our regular columnists. A pastor and author, he has served in London churches at Herne Hill and Wimbledon where he presently leads Kairos, a church that's been started from scratch. He has a wider speaking ministry and is involved in Alpha for believer baptising churches.

The cross with its corpse bears silent witness to the experience of the hiddenness and apparent absence of God

peace, protection and security. Third, there is God's hidden wisdom, more enduring than any human empires and achievements, that finds its consummation in Christ, in whom hidden wisdom is made manifest. Fourth, the Christian believer is hidden in Christ. Our security, identity, purpose and hope are grounded in the invisible realities of the saving grace of God.

These facets of hiddenness are familiar and clear. But there is a further dimension we can easily miss. Many psalms express the experience of God's hiddenness in times of misery, oppression and distress. Faced with personal trauma or national conflict, the ancient Hebrews discovered experiences and events marked more obviously by God's absence than his presence. Job's friends would have no problem with such experiences: 'It must be down to your sin' was their instant diagnosis. Like Job, the psalmists declined to explain every downside or disaster in terms of sin,

the joys of faith and anticipating the advance of the church, could we have become spiritually malnourished without realizing it? Maybe there are aspects of prayer to find in God's hiddenness that we couldn't discover easily in times of relative ease and prosperity. Maybe we need a new vocabulary of prayer and worship for seasons of distress, when God's ways are hidden and evil is manifest. Where are the songs of bereavement, sorrow or imminent death for Christians of the 21st century? When our world's experience seems closer to Golgotha than the Garden of resurrection, we dare not lose sight of Christus Victor and the empty cross. But we must also cherish the harsher truths of Christ's desolation. The cross with its corpse bears silent witness to the experience, not ultimate but nonetheless painful and shockingly real, of the hiddenness and apparent absence of God. The God who reveals himself is even yet the hidden God.



Peter Nodding brings us news from the Mainstream network and other connections. Peter chairs Mainstream Leadership team and is a pastor in Guildford.

Northern Retreat Recipe

Take 17 men and 1 woman who are becoming friends and also happen to be Baptist ministers; Add in the sublime surroundings of the Yorkshire Dales; Mix with excellent nourishment and suitable lubrication; Bake for 24 hours under the watchful eye of an experienced cook: What do you get? A highly rewarding, upbuilding retreat!

Midsummer saw the annual Mainstream North Team's retreat, to which a number of hangers on like myself were invited, at Parcevall Hall, the Bradford Diocesan Retreat Centre near Grassington. The retreat took place this year amidst Dales' sheep farms ravaged by foot and mouth adding a sobering reality and restricted the afternoon ramble to tarmac. Led by Roy Searle we were invited to join in the rhythm of the Northumbria Community Daily Prayer. Most of our time was spent in groups of 6 where we reflected together how we were doing as human beings.

Networking – Gold Hill's Story

From 1968 to 1978 Jim Graham led the church at Gold Hill through principles and practices of renewal. It eventually led to a network loosely based around the church. This is Jim's story:

I began to get calls from church leaders from different parts of the country asking to come and talk to me about 'bringing renewal into the local church'. It seemed sensible to bring church leaders together to address these issues. So over twenty years ago we established Leaders' Conferences. A network of churches from the north of Scotland to the south of England and from East Anglia to West Wales was established. We estimate that over that period around thirteen hundred church leaders joined us. Any continuing relationship was by request and through the initiative of the local church leaders themselves.

Frequently Faith Sharing teams from Gold Hill would be invited to go to these churches to share with the local people our 'journey' in renewal. These teams built a customised programme for each local church in consultation with the local leadership. They offered teaching and testimony on the themes of renewal. Many close relationships developed which remain and are mutually beneficial today.

We began to feel there was a need – particularly for

pastors – to come together on a more regular basis. We drew on an area of about a one-hour car journey from Gold Hill and invited these church leaders to Beyond Survival days for mutual support, spiritual refreshing, envisioning, and addressing key issues of the day. These along with Leaders' Conferences continue.

Increasingly we felt that while renewal is basic and fundamental it constantly faces the twin dangers of becoming in-turned and self-indulgent. Clearly renewal is insufficient in itself to make an adequate response to a post-modern culture. The Church in the nation continues to decline both numerically and in effectiveness. So we recognised the need to change the nature of our Faith Sharing Teams and Beyond Survival Days so that they focussed on renewal for mission.

It also became obvious to us that there was a need to make radical inroads into how to 'do church'. Our focus has been not so much on church growth as on church health for the purpose of evangelism in our geographical area. That is making deep inroads into our own church family life. At the same time about twenty churches have indicated their desire to be in some kind of partnership with us on this renewal for mission journey.

We want to provide support and encouragement in ways that are requested by

the leaders of our partners and agreed by Gold Hill. We will review church structures of partner churches to consider whether changes should be made in order to achieve mission objectives. We anticipate that pastors of partner churches would become members of Gold Hill's Staff Team, although they would be directly employed and financed by respective partner churches, and give 90% of their time to their church. Where there is no pastor, Gold Hill would want to be associated with the partner church in the process of finding one, ensuring that partner churches have the final say in such an appointment. Mutual training, envisioning, mentoring and praying would be part of our ongoing life together as partners.

Reviewing the partnership would take place regularly – say annually. Both Gold Hill and the partner church would wholeheartedly enter into this partnership believing that it provides the best way for both churches to fulfil their vision for extending God's Kingdom in an increasingly secular society. We are in the very early stages of this procedure and feel the thrill and apprehension of the incredible potential that it could unlock.

If you would like further information do not hesitate to contact Jim Graham or Grant Masom at Gold Hill Baptist Church Office, 01753 887173 or office@goldhill.org

We then turned to current hopes and aspirations for ministry, before finally praying for one another. The retreat culminated in prayer for our 'patch' in the North of

England. Out on the terrace looking up to Simon's Seat we stood around a map with a night light placed on each of our locations, conscious as much of the huge gaps as of

the spread, and fervent for the fires of the gospel to cover more ground. Then we parted, by car and cycle – ride it Ash! – to serve again.

Andrew Hardcastle

Word & Spirit Network

Contacts:

North: Glen Marshall 01924 387225 glen@wakefieldbaptist.org.uk

Central: Chris Densham 01992 462838

North London: Graham Watkins 020 7376 7802

South London: Peter Nodding 020 86680422 peter.nodding@purleybaptist.org

Surrey, Hants, Sussex: Graham Jefferson 01903 262313 106615.1520@compuserve.com

Anglia: Craig Millward 01493 731009 craig.millward@virgin.net

Acting Up

A new theatre company hits the road this autumn, *Rhema*, with a ground-breaking new play *Dancing Without Music*. It presents an exciting new piece of theatre, which confronts issues of depression and low self-esteem – issues that effect an increasingly large percentage of the population. It brings a unique mix of music, physical theatre and clowning, *Dancing Without Music* takes

Northern Light 2001

An event worthy of thousands attending, but which had a few hundred! That was Northern Light, 11th – 17th August, held on Hollybush Farm, near Thirsk, in Yorkshire.

The event is five years old and Marion and I, having been invited as speakers the first year, were then asked to join the leadership team. The last two years' events, particularly, have been outstanding in terms of the ministry from Scripture, the worship leading, the children's and youth work... in fact every part.

We want to keep the event to a few hundred because the general feedback from the guests is that they want something more personal and informal. The atmosphere enables each person to feel a part of the week and seems to encourage the many (and there are many) who want to

find help through personal ministry.

Hollybush is an excellent venue. In Herriot country surroundings, it has a large purpose-built meeting place as well as a café and decent loos & showers! The options are for caravanning or camping or staying off-site in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

This year's Northern Light (as in other years) attracted a good mix of people from different denominational backgrounds including Baptist. Baptists were well represented on the speaking and leading team as well, with Roy Searle, Glen Marshall, Andrew Kane, Marion and I participating as well as Geraldine Latty leading worship (the most creative times of worship I've ever been part of). Ken McGreavy (next year's Mainstream Conference speaker) opened up the

Scriptures, morning by morning, looking at God's character and ways. There were also seminars and evening celebrations, all within the theme of 'God unwrapped'.

Two age groups functioned in the children's work, and in the youth work, with very experienced and creative leaders putting together up-to-date, challenging programmes. The After-hours programme was varied and well attended and an extra this year (hopefully to be repeated) was an optional afternoon programme of games and sports activities, led by Bryan and Judith Mason of Christians in Sport.

I've been involved in many Christian events, festivals etc., including twenty years of Spring Harvest, but have to say that these last two years' Northern Light weeks have been the best I can remember.

Rob White (Poynton Baptist Church)

people on a journey towards hope.

Rhema is a brand-new theatre company, with experienced professional actors, established to

promote the Christian faith. It's touring schools, churches and prisons. They have a vision to go anywhere they are sent, with the aim of using theatre and music as

tools for teaching and evangelism. They have a world vision as well with work already from as far apart as Italy and Argentina, Hong-King and Uganda, Bosnia and Belgium.

Ideal for a professional, entertaining and stimulating mission event, as a prelude to an Alpha course or a stand-alone evangelistic outreach. Founded by Michael and Rebecca Peacock, who trained at the Arden School of Theatre and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. National credits include appearances with Royal Exchange and Haymarket theatre companies, Palace Opera, Riding Lights, Flying Gorillas and Manchester Actors Company.

You can contact *Rhema* on 0161 969 1851 or e-mail rhema.theatre@bigfoot.com.



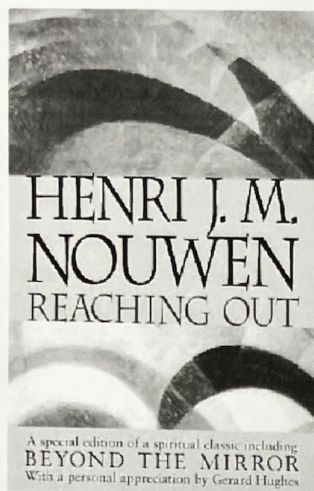


Daniel Pritchard is a member of the pastoral staff at Battle in Sussex. He has an interest in theological studies and will be arranging reviews in each edition.

off the shelf

compiled by Daniel Pritchard

Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (Fount Paperbacks 1998, £6.99 ISBN 0 00 628086 2 -This special edition includes 'Beyond the mirror').



Having only come across the late Henri Nouwen through some of his devotional writing, the theme of this edition of Talk gave me the ideal opportunity to take a closer look at his work.

In *Reaching Out*, a work originally published in the 70's, Nouwen attempts to answer the question, 'What does it mean to live a life in the Spirit of Jesus Christ?' His response is in three movements. First *from loneliness to solitude*, focuses on the spiritual life as it relates to our experience of ourselves. Nouwen honestly addresses our need to belong, to be busy and involved, but also the often felt longing for solitude of heart. Then *from hostility to hospitality*, addresses the spiritual life lived in relation to others and in the last section, *from illusion to prayer*, he explores our most important relationship of all, our relationship with God. The other

two movements find their foundation here argues Nouwen. Reaching out to God, in the movement from illusion to prayer 'undergirds and makes possible' the other two movements.

It is the 'first and final' movement - even though he addresses it last of all. The big illusion, according to Nouwen, is our sense of immortality.

The more we understand our inner struggles, the more we will be able to live an authentic spiritual life, open and responsive to the needs of others and rooted in a living relationship with God

However we may protest, we do not live in the humility of awareness of ourselves as mortal beings. This is evident in the value we give to the things we own, the people we know, our hopes and dreams, successes and achievements. The unfolding of this last movement reveals something of Nouwen's pilgrim spirit, and his monastic influences and heart for community. Discovering the true place of prayer is a pilgrim experience and is enhanced by the fellowship of the community of faith.

We are not encouraged by Nouwen to view these movements as goals to achieve, but rather, through his own honest self-appraisal, as a constant exercise of seeking balance and health, in our attitude to ourselves, others and, above all God. 'Reaching Out' describes a quest, rather than giving answers and solutions. Throughout the book Nouwen demonstrates that the more we understand our inner struggles, the more we will be able to live an authentic spiritual life, open and responsive to the needs of others and rooted in a living relationship with God.

This is a rich and beautiful book, written from the perspective of one who constantly sought to be a true follower of Jesus. Deservedly a classic of spiritual writing, I cannot hope to do it justice here, and will have to read it again and again, to fully appreciate its wisdom and depth.

Craig Millward, *Renewing Harvest - Celebrating God's Creation* (Pentland Press 2001, £9.95 ISBN 1 85821 925 6).



How to celebrate harvest in an urban society. Today's rural economy is as mechanized as a modern factory, economized by a landowning pensions industry, and bureaucratized by Brussels. The agricultural process is off our radar scheme most of the time – BSE/CJD and foot and mouth excluded. The book tackles a much-neglected theme.

The substance of the book is its subtitle not its title. The first four chapters outline a Christian theology of creation, starting with the nature of creation and then in turn fallen creation, God's covenant with creation and finally its redemption. The position developed is that of positive thoughtful evangelical-

with the local authority about Local Agenda 21, fair trade initiatives. The book ends with contact suggestions. Give this chapter to a project group to re-imagine celebrating harvest.

But it fails to touch an area of current concern: the idolatry expressed in current farming methods. Something has gone profoundly wrong with our food production industry. Such exploration would expose our wilful blindness to how we treat animals by which we tear up our covenant relationship with the community of God's creation. We need explorations of the case for vegetarianism on theological as well as health and justice grounds, the manic quest for

It is hard to imagine any image other than crucifixion that could adequately do justice to the extent of man's hatred towards nature

ism. However it draws from a wide range of sources beyond evangelicalism. For instance, this from Will Hoyt: 'It is hard to imagine any image other than crucifixion that could adequately do justice to the extent of man's hatred towards nature, and, as well, to the extent of the agony other creatures have suffered on account of that hate. In other words, the death of nature – should it occur – would be a profoundly revelatory event.' Strong stuff!

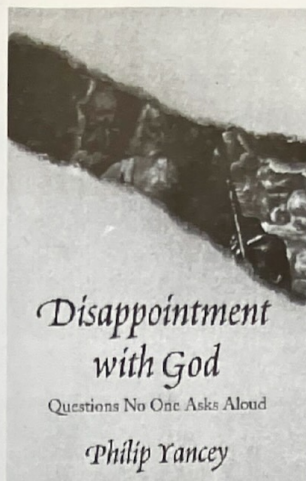
The last chapter on harvest festival is packed with creative suggestions for its renewal. It should be a 'new creation care festival.' It draws on familiar ground of Jubilee as well as the OT festivals. Harvest is grounded in a theology of 'enough', living by the lyric of abundance and not the myth of scarcity. Amongst the suggestions included are a celebration week of creativity, making connections with environmental groups, display of skills and professional services put at disposal of those in need in the wider community, church organized cleanups, living churchyard projects, connecting

profitability in farming that leads to disasters like BSE, and the case for organic farming. The church needs to expose a cultural blind spot that arises from our worship at the altar of the market. The church needs to be in the vanguard rather than the guard's van. How about another book on these Craig!

Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God* (Marshall Pickering, £4.99 (PB) ISBN 055102 9722)

Many of you will be familiar with Yancey's writings through his book about grace. The subtitle to *Disappointment with God* is *Questions No One Asks Aloud*. The book starts with the story of a young man whose disappointment with God set Yancey thinking. Three questions were raised in Yancey's mind: Is God unfair? Is God silent? Is God hidden?

In order to address these questions Yancey went away and reread the Bible from cover to cover. The middle section of the book is an exploration of what he discovered and it makes fascinating reading. It charts the



progression of God's attempts to win the love of human beings. I believe the book is worth reading for this section alone as it reveals something of the fullness of the nature of God revealed in the Bible, but gets even better.

In the third section Yancey realizes that his reading of the Bible, though helpful, had not addressed those three questions. So in final section he looks at the book of Job and examines the questions in the light of Job's experience. It is both helpful and thought provoking.

Yancey's book does not contain all the answers, because God does not give them! But it

If our expectations of God are more accurate then we are less likely to be disappointed!

enriches our understanding of God and his purpose in our lives. Above all it helps us understand God more clearly and refine our expectations of him. If our expectations are more accurate then we are less likely to be disappointed!

Chris Densham

reviews continue on page 23



Journeying and journalling

by Brian & Chris Howden

Brian and Chris Howden live and work in Manchester, Chris as Minister of Levenshulme Baptist and Brian as tutor at Northern Baptist College. Before moving to Manchester in 1994 both Brian and Chris were involved in ministry at Lymm Baptist, Cheshire. Chris trained at Northern Baptist College (1996-99) and Brian at London Bible College (1982-85).

Why keep a journal? – Chris

I have had various spells of writing a journal. For my college course I had to keep a week by week account of my areas of learning and insights made, making connections between the course and my practical experience. For my counselling training, the focus was to discover about myself – my reactions – my feelings. As a retreatant I was encouraged to note the content of my prayers and reflections on scripture, recording what God was saying to me and the things I wanted to say to him.

My journal has incorporated all of the different aspects mentioned above. They are all part of my personal journey, helping me to recall interesting or significant events in my life; reflect on my feelings and attitudes, my response to others; name things without self-judgement, so they can be reflected on further. In this way I seek to discern and hear more clearly the voice of God.

I am someone who thinks better out there than in here and I often make discoveries as I write. As I get things off my chest I can sometimes see things in a new way. While it is often not deep or meaningful, looking back I can trace threads running through and see movement in my thinking-feeling. There are also moments of God's apparent silence named among moments of great insight and hope. These are the ups and downs of a journey, focusing not on the destination but the day by day process. Henri Nouwen says 'I have little to say about events good or bad, creative or

destructive, but much to say about the way I remember them, that is the way I start giving them form in the story of my life.'

Pressing the pause button – Brian

The journal enables me to pause and reflect on how I am experiencing life to note what I discern to be important. It is different to writing an essay, where something is argued or researched. It has more to do with focusing on what is happening internally and creating the space to reflect on it. I was profoundly struck by some words in the Foreword to Henri Nouwen's *Sabbatical Journey*. He records watching some close friends who were trapeze artists and reflects on how the daredevil flyer swinging high above the crowds lets go of the trapeze to simply stretch out his arms and wait to feel the strong hands of the catcher pluck him out of the air. The flyer must never catch the catcher he must wait in absolute trust. Reflecting on this picture Henri notes in his journal how he finds himself drawn to an image of God who is the eternal catcher.

I do not keep a daily journal, but have been drawn to write at special times sometimes when I'm wanting to give voice to my inner story or through a time of sabbatical when there is space to journey reflectively with God in new ways.

It enables me to name and stay with the painful moments. Tempted to move on I stay with the struggle seeking to integrate the parts that I would rather deny. This is not to wallow in the mud but to face the reality of my

own vulnerability and brokenness. I have accompanied Chris through her diagnosis of cancer this year. I have not only tried to engage in her struggle, but faced my own struggle – the impact Chris' illness has on my own journey. The journal enables me to name this, possibly letting go of something that I might otherwise bury. It is in such a process that I open myself to a deeper healing taking place.

Guidelines for journal starters

- There is no right or wrong way!
- It helps to write regularly but not necessarily every day, or for the same length. Let the situation decide.
- Choose a book, folder or loose-leaf file which you can keep to hand, bearing in mind that you may wish to add doodles, pictures, poems etc. as well as writing.
- Remember you are writing for yourself there is no need to sensor what you write. Nobody is going to read it!
- Include your reflections on what has struck you things that either feel good and draw you to God, or disturb you. You can then come back and revisit what you have written.
- You may wish to record verses of scripture that are significant, or questions that you want to pose to God.

Reasons for Hope – 2001 Evangelical Assembly

Reasons for Hope, hosted by the Evangelical Alliance, is a call to Christians to come together for three days of teaching, interaction, networking, seminars, talkback, debate and worship – a key opportunity to mobilise the evangelical community to become agents for significant change in the 21st century. Joel Edwards, General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, has stressed that 'it is essential Christians work collectively within God's agenda to bring about positive transformation to our society'. Joel says, 'credible Christian witness in

the new millennium recognises that it is a challenge no less profound than that faced by first century believers' urging that 'like them, we must seize the moment.'

Reasons for Hope will focus on four keynote subjects – society, truth, discipleship and church. Bookings for the Assembly have already reached 1150, and the Evangelical Alliance is optimistic that the target of 3500 delegates will be met.

The Assembly is at Cardiff International Arena, from 5th to 7th November 2001.

Transformations II - The Glory Spreads

If you were inspired by the stories on the first Transformations video will need little encouragement to see the sequel which contains two major stories, one from the Arctic and the other from Uganda.

Both videos are impressive because of their historical links and their up-to-date coverage of community transformation, and the new video intersperses these more recent accounts with reports of the Hebridean and Welsh revivals from the last century.

Transformations II is available from 1 September orders@uksentinel.com or from Sentinel Ministries, PO Box 11905, London, NW10 4ZQ, tel 020 8453 1111.

Is your Vision reflected in your Values?

Think of focused leadership and who comes to mind? Chances are it is Bill Hybels from Willow Creek. Willow Creek Association UK have launched a new website www.theleadersedge.org aimed at providing a raft of resources for leaders. The website contains a number of articles and resources, together with a Vision and Values Assessment Tool to use in your church.

Mark Greene writes: 'SSD Syndrome pervades the whole church. And pretty much everyone I know has had it and is a carrier. I've had it. And I struggle against it all the time.' SSD is the sacred-secular divide: the pervasive belief that some parts of our life are not really important to God – work, school, leisure – but anything to do with prayer, church services, church-based activities is.

Ascension Update

Steve Cockram gives the latest on establishing an Ascension Bar-Club 'brand' nationally and in the heart of Manchester.

In the last edition I outlined the four stages of the Ascension vision. We have now completed stage 1 – establishing the reputation of Ascension, and stage 2 – the development of Ascension clubs nights and larger events. We are well advanced in our planning for stages 3 – an Ascension Bar in Manchester city centre, and 4 – developing a discipleship process for enquirers wanting to explore Christianity further. So far we have:

I. Tested the marketability of the brand, receiving hugely encouraging reviews in the secular press and music industry.

II. Negotiated a lease with the landlords and secured the services of the professional bodies required for launching a new business.

III. Developed a business prospectus for potential backers.

IV. Written the staff training manuals relating to



Craig Millward brings us information from the Christian world. Pastor at Ormsby in Norfolk, Craig is a member of the Mainstream leadership team. His new book *Renewing Harvest* is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

the values and ethos of the Ascension Bar-Club.

It has been busy and stressful for us. It feels like we are about to cross the River Jordan and possess the land God has promised to us. However the giants are looming larger than ever. £600K is some giant!

At times of uncertainty we remind ourselves how far God has brought us and of the impact an Ascension Bar-Club with a capacity of 1400 and 30 motivated Gen X missionary staff will have in Manchester and other cities around UK. Please pray for us. More updates on the website www.ascension-info.com

Faith that is relevant to the real world

Because of the sacred-secular divide over 50% of evangelicals have never heard a sermon on work and the vast majority of Christians in every denomination feel they get no significant support for their work from the ministry of their local church. No support for how they spend 60–70% of their lives. Work is part of the secular world – not really part of what God intended for every human on the

planet. The real 'work' gets done at church or in the neighbourhood.

To help leaders think through these issues, the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity has produced a free new resource available for every minister in UK. Supporting Christians at Work is available at www.licc.org.uk.

Going liquid

by Simon Hall



Simon Hall has been involved in youth ministry since his theological studies at Oxford. He is presently the Pastor of revive, a congregation linked with Sharing Life, reaching out to the extensive night club and pub culture of Leeds. He has become known as a writer, speaker and thinker about Church, mission and youth culture.

Some of you might have heard of my friend Pete Ward. He's starting to annoy some of you. Or perhaps you've heard of his new idea – Liquid Church. Maybe you haven't heard it yet but believe me, if you have young adults in your congregation you will do very soon. Like the term Post-Evangelical it appears to be spreading like wildfire among Christian young adults and malcontents of every age. Even though at present Pete has merely presented his ideas at no more than a handful of conferences, he is assured a busy trade when the resulting book is completed. And there is the beauty of this mini-phenomenon – the idea and the Liquid Church 'logo' are themselves exactly the kind of 'viral evangelism' that Pete is trying to promote.

The idea comes from sociologist Zygmunt Baumann's analysis of postmodernity – what he calls liquid modernity. Baumann is concerned with the loss of community and identity that our present liquid state creates, and the – often negative – consequences of the resulting search for these in superficial activities such as shopping. Baumann even criticises our present notions of freedom as misguided – we are all like bees, believing ourselves to be individuals but in reality just swarming, at the mercy of the advertisers and their enticing pots of honey.

The interesting thing that Pete Ward does is completely side-step the issues of the evaluation of culture and takes it as it is – so people are rootless, shallow, hungry for cheap thrills, now what do we do? Especially the church, which is traditional, deep and boring? He suggests that fighting against such a rapid

and strong tide of culture is worse than fruitless – we must get wise and go with the flow. That means that what used to be called church will be one of the first things to go out of the window. At the centre of Pete's argument is his assertion that our idea of church as congregation – and let's face it, it's a very Baptist idea – is soon to become outmoded. Congregation can celebrate community – in a local village, for example – but it cannot create it. When communities are divided along age, class, race and other lines everyone sitting in pews being bored by the same sermon does not a church make.

So what does Mr Ward suggest? Firstly, he suggests that we build Christian community around already existing networks of relationships and modes of relating. This is the liquid part – suddenly discipleship is no longer about attendance at meetings but about real relationships. I think it's probably Pete's hope that removing the congregation as a kind of 'identity prop' for Christians will leave them wondering what it really does mean to be a Christian, resulting in the second prong of his argument – what he calls 'extreme spirituality'. He believes that our passive commitment to the institution of the congregation needs to be replaced by a much more challenging commitment to radical lifestyle and openness to charismatic experience. Pete envisages like-minded people eventually gathering around 'logos' such as Soul Survivor or Greenbelt – maybe even Mainstream? – which represent the values that they hold dear but do not prescribe set ways of belonging. He is experimenting with these

ideas within a church context in Reading.

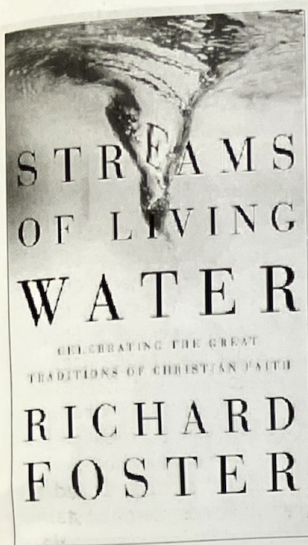
Young adults in our churches can feel the sense of dislocation more than any other group because in most of our churches they are just expected to 'fit in' with what the middle-aged leadership like doing. John Drane has recently written of what we could call the 'modernisation' of church – homogenised, standardised products served lukewarm by disinterested staff – he calls it *MacDonaldisation*. He suggests that the renewal of the church will come from something not unlike Liquid Church – an outpouring of creativity, an investment in real relationships, a radical commitment to an uncomfortable gospel.

Of course there are a million and one objections to the chaos that will ensue from liquidising our churches – Baumann himself criticises western multiculturalism because he sees it not as a celebration of difference, but indifference – each group goes their own way and to hell with the rest. However, the success of such websites as www.24-7prayer.com and www.ship-of-fools.com is a sign that these viral networks are developing fast. Watch this space, or a young Christian near you.

The MacDonaldisation of the Church by John Drane is out now from DLT (2000). Pete's original seminar paper is available at www.revive.org.uk/LiquidChurch.txt (case sensitive). A subsequent discussion between Pete, Anna Robbins from LBC and myself can be found at www.youthwork.co.uk/liquid/.

continued from page 19

Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water – Celebrating the great traditions of the Christian Faith* (Harper Collins, PB £6.99; HB £8.99, ISBN 0006 281 303).



Here Foster sets himself the enormous task of giving an overview of Church history arguing that six major streams – or flavours – of Christianity can be discerned. From studying different aspects of the life of Christ he goes on to say how each of the six streams can be identified throughout the subsequent spread of Christianity over the last two thousand years.

The 'streams' identified by Foster are: the contemplative, holiness, charismatic, social justice, evangelical and incarnational traditions. Each has its respective life emphasis: the prayerful life, virtuous, Spirit empowered, compassionate, word centered and sacramental life. It is interesting and challenging, that Foster sees the life-emphasis of the evangelical tradition as word centered, rather than mission, or Gospel centered. Most Christians probably comfortably identify with one or two of Foster's categories. Their knowledge of other expressions of the church is likely to be hazier. This book begins to fill the gaps in a readable way. The use of

biographical sketches helps maintain the interest of the reader and to illustrate each of the cases he is trying to build.

The usefulness of Foster's book as a tool for study is limited by the complete lack of a bibliography. To have known the sources used would have made it possible to explore further lines of enquiry found to be of interest. For British readers the reference charts draw too heavily on American personalities to give a complete overview of how things have developed in these islands. For example George Jeffreys had an arguably greater effect on the development of Foster's 'charismatic stream' during the 20th century than Evan Roberts, having been one of the few people to have been responsible for starting two denominational groups! The omission of early Pentecostal writers such as Donald Gee and Howard Carter is another weakness. Through their books these men had influence far beyond their church grouping, especially in the 1950's and 1960's when many denominational churches were becoming interested in charismatic renewal.

Despite these small reservations, I enjoyed this book. It provided a good read and helped me appreciate other parts of the church I knew little about. The added advantage for pastors is that it could be a useful starting point for some interesting talks.

Dennis W. Nolan - Battle, East Sussex.

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Spirituality on the web



Stephen Ibbotson is the Editor of *Talk*. He is also a member of the pastoral staff of Altrincham Baptist Church, Altrincham, Cheshire.

Our interview introduced the ministry of RENOVARÉ. Their site is www.renovare.org Richard Foster has been key in developing thinking and drawing together resources from different spiritual traditions. This is the site of his RENOVARÉ movement. A first-stop page if interested in developing spiritual disciplines in your own life or the life of the church. Basic values, explanation and materials available.

If you want access to spiritual classics, www.ccel.org is the most accessible site. It spans from the Early Church Fathers with Clement of Rome, through to relatively modern classics such as Evelyn Underhill.

Talking of whom, here is a British writer of the early part of the 20th century, who combines insight and sensitivity together with theological depth and breadth. Well worth getting to know her writings. Try www.evelynunderhill.org Maybe a bit wordy and too conceptual for some, with long sentences dense with ideas, but richly rewarding if read thoughtfully and slowly.

The website of The Northumbria Community is still in the process of being formed. Like RENOVARÉ this community provides helpful access to many spiritual streams that might be overlooked by those from evangelical and charismatic traditions. Beyond this there is also information about their programme of teaching, retreats and many other creative projects. A site to keep your eyes on www.northumbriacommunity.org.

For those wanting an evangelical approach to spirituality try <http://crosswork.com> and click on 'Spiritual Life' This site has well known Christian leaders – e.g. Luis Palau – offering inspirational thoughts and articles. This site has all kinds of resources much broader than developing spirituality with material for worship leaders,

bible study etc. Because of its reliable reputation.

www.christianitytoday.com/spiritual is probably worth looking at. I've not explored it much but it gives material on prayer and living the Christian life.

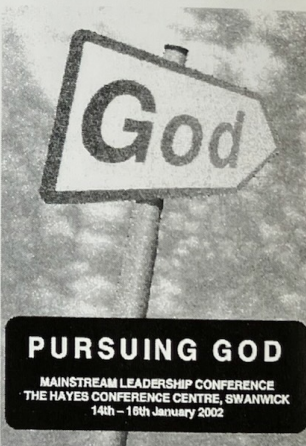
A starting point for anyone searching for resources in Christian spirituality is www.gtu.edu/library and click on 'Christian Spirituality' under 'Research Areas'. This is the web site of the Graduate Theological Union and has archive library material and listing on a broad range of religious traditions. Probably worth exploring the links in some detail.

There are some wonderful sites that help with developing our prayer life. Drawing from the ancient catholic traditions of the Church, and particularly focused on contemplative prayer try www.centeringprayer.com Many of these sites and the traditions highlighted are Catholic in origin, but we should not dismiss them for that. There's much to be learnt from these traditions and this site is a good introduction.

Two sites give more information on Alexander Whyte. Try www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/4199 There is a short biography by Maureen Bradley and links to other Puritan sites. The text of his book *Lord Teach Us To Pray: Sermons on Prayer* is available on www.ccel.org/w/whyte

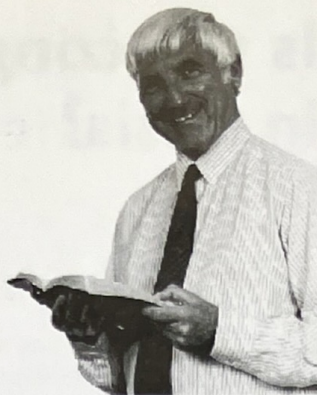
Entering a word search on any of the main spiritual traditions or saints brings up a wealth of possible sites to follow. Searches worth making include Augustine, Carmelite, John Cassian, Celtic, English mystics, Gregory of Nyssa, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Merton, John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Brother Lawrence, Ignatius Loyola, monasticism – and this is only a beginning!

Mainstream Conference 2002 with Roy Searle & Ken McGreavy



see insert for further details

A classic of class Alexander Whyte



by Donald Bridge

For me, a spiritual classic is identified by its lifelong ability to inflame my heart, inform my mind, enlarge my vision and strengthen my walk with God. If, in addition, it quickens and equips me in my calling to preach the word, with Christ as its glowing focus then my cup is full. In that test Alexander Whyte comes top. To quote some of his own evocative phrases, his works are at my elbow, beside my bed, and framed on my study wall in letters of gold a finger deep!

Born in Angus in 1836, he dominated Victorian Scottish Christianity and lived to eighty-five, when his silent sphinx-like figure with massive features and flowing white locks calmed heated ecclesiastical debates with the serenity of another world. His Edinburgh pulpit was his throne. His writings were prints of his sermons or lectures, for he had the rare gift of preaching in balanced sentences with perfect syntax. His spiritual classics were *Lord Teach Us To Pray*, *With Mercy And With Judgement* and supremely *Jesus Christ Our Lord – his walk, conversation and character*. These are still available second-hand.

One sentence encapsulates his spirituality. 'The whole of the Four Gospels were written and have been put into our hands, in order that we may have continually before our eyes the character of Jesus Christ, both for our justifying faith in him, and for our sanctifying imitation of him.' This was ever his theme – Christ likeness sought through constant private meditation on

the Scriptures. He spent four to six hours each morning on his knees or at his desk, with Bible, spiritual biographies, theological classics and spiritual handbooks. It became my own pattern, though not invariably followed. His one great exercise was the practice of the presence of God, and he walked with Christ every day. He advised young ministers, 'Neglect any part of your work rather than personal preparation for the pulpit.'

Whyte advocated Scripture-prompted imagination. This animates his numerous bible characters – it is still in print. It ranges from the creative to the

Theophrastus, Dante, Keble, Calvin and Newman. His favourites were all Puritans – John Bunyan, Thomas Goodwin, Stephen Marshall and Thomas Shepard. Yet with no sense of incongruity he also launched me into the writings of Christina Rossetti, Julian of Norwich, Athanasius, Augustine, Charles Wesley and John Keble.

His themes were repeated, but never repetitive: the holiness of God, the human heart's infinite capacity for self-deception, the transforming power of Christ-centred reflection, the finality of the atonement, the combined

Don Bridge began his ministry in his native north-east and returned to it in 'retirement'. This was interrupted by spells at Frinton, as chaplain at The Garden Tomb, Jerusalem, and in translocal ministry. He has also written a number of books, including *Spiritual Gifts & the Church* and *Why Four Gospels?*

Neglect any part of your work rather than personal preparation for the pulpit

bizarre. Abel never noticed that his dog snarled whenever Cain passed the door. Jacob's staff is carved by Esau with their initials entwined – and the handle burns Jacob's hand whenever he cheats. The craftsmen who help Noah build the ark scabble despairingly on its closed door when the rain begins – and a similar fate awaits unconverted church musicians, ecclesiastical architects and Bible publishers!

He taught imaginative reflection on the passion, almost in the style of Ignatius Loyola – but also prominent in my Brethren childhood. His numerous quotations were astonishing in their catholicity. One page echoed William Law, Bishop Joseph Butler, Cicero,

effectiveness of scriptural 'story' and 'exposition', preaching truth through personality, prayer as the most personal, secret and blissful of arts. Read and follow, but be warned – this is explosive stuff!

For further information on Alexander Whyte see Surfer's Guide in this edition. The following of his books are still in print and available from Amazon *Bible Character From the Old and New Testament*, (Kregel Publications, 1990 £22.06). You can get separate hardcover edition of Old and New Testament books for about the same price. Also available is *Lord, Teach Us To Pray: Sermons on Prayer*, (Regent College Publishing, 1998 £15.73).

Is the congregation in crisis?

by Nigel Wright



Dr Nigel G Wright is the principal of Spurgeon's College, London and vice-president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. He is well known for his many books including *The Radical Evangelical and Challenge to Change*.

Is it just me or are there larger quantities of confessing Christians who just can't get along with church at the moment? The typical scenario, which I am encountering in different parts of the world, suggests numbers of established Christians, often in their 30s and 40s, dropping out of church but not out of faith. Church is not scratching where they itch. They have become bored with it. They want something different but are not sure what.

As a pastor I do not find this easy. All my instincts are *congregational*. The congregation, as I have understood things, is primary. Belonging to it and caring about it is vital. Bearing the burden of making it happen is heroic. Safeguarding and protecting it is crucial. So when I meet people who, for no reasons of ill will, are simply indifferent to it, it vexes me.

On the one hand it tempts me to be judgmental. Is not this simply a rejection of responsibility, dilettantism on the part of people who are unwilling to bear the heat and burden of the day or a luxury indulged in by the over-churched and over-privileged while the rest of us get on with the real job? On the other hand, it

In place of competition we need collaboration, and space to hear each other's hopes and disappointments as we strive for a better way

provokes me to be self-critical: is this another sign that church, led by people like me, just isn't working, a wake-up call to start getting it right? Frankly, at this point I just do not know.

What is probably unhelpful is to become confrontational. There are certainly questions to be asked. For all the calls for new ways of being church, I have yet to find any that are working any better than what they profess to reject. They might be working, but are they working any better? And

The future of the Church, as with every other part of life, is going to be more diverse and complex than ever we have known

do they have the capacity to win converts, sustain effort through time and history, and endure? Yet to approach the matter in this way roots it in a contest to prove a point and lacks the degree of vulnerability that is appropriate. To claim that older ways of being church have failed is to claim too much – they have often been highly effective and successful. They will be found to have surprising resilience. Those who make the claim have almost invariably been won to Christ through those forms in the first place! In place of competition we need collaboration, and space to hear each other's hopes and disappointments as we strive for a better way.

The fact is that the future, as with every other part of life, is going to be more diverse and complex than ever we have known. Within this future it is crucial to maintain the tension of stability and adventurousness. One without the other would amount either to tedious stodginess or ephemeral volatility. The congregation and the experimental way of being church must both thrive together, and challenge and impact each other, if the work of the Kingdom is to thrive at all.

The congregation and the experimental way of being church must both thrive together, and challenge and impact each other