

Editorial

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Chair of Ministry Today

The Challenge of Christian Grandparenting

(This editorial had its origins in an invitation to contribute to a Lenten series on 'Evangelism and the Third Age', in which the emphasis was not on evangelising older people, but on older people evangelising younger people!)

Grandchildren are special! As one wit put it, "The idea that no one is perfect is a view most commonly held by people with no grandchildren!" On the other hand, there is truth in the observation that while "an hour with your grandchildren can make you feel young again, anything longer than that, and you start to age quickly!"

Let me set the scene as far as Caroline and I are concerned. We are the proud grand-parents of five, if not seven, grand-children. That may sound strange, so let me explain.

- Our eldest son, Jonathan, lives in Vancouver with his wife Fiona and they have a four year old son, David Aneurin. In addition, living with them are two children from Fiona's previous marriage, Sophie aged 14 and Theo aged 12. Sophie and Theo have two other sets of grandparents, but they like to be included along with our other grandchildren.
- Our second son, Timothy, lives in Stepney Green, East London, with his wife Charlotte, and they have two children, Felix (aged nine) and Clara (aged six).
- Our daughter, Susannah, lives in Forest Gate, East London, with her husband Rob, and they have two children, Jemima (aged eleven) and Raphael (aged eight).
- We also have a third son, Benjamin, who lives in Islington, East London: he is not married and has no children, but is a super uncle to all the grandchildren.

As a family we are very close. We see a lot of our children and grandchildren who live in East London. We 'face-time' the family

in Vancouver. For a week in the summer of 2014, we took over a large manor house just outside Southwold and all the family came, including the Vancouver family, and also Benjamin's girlfriend, Kathryn. This summer, at the request of the family, we shall do the same again.

So we get together, but none of our children live locally. So, unlike some, we are not able to look after our grandchildren on any regular basis. Caroline is still at work and, although I am retired, I am still heavily involved in ministry. We are there for emergencies and for holidays, but not on a daily or weekly basis.

There is a further fact you need to know. Without exception all our children have had a bad experience of church and, as a result, our grandchildren do not normally go to church. As one of my sons put it following a disastrous experience of church: "If this is institutional Christianity, then you can stuff it". This fills us with great sadness, because at one stage our children were keen Christians. It also underlines the important challenge we have in seeking to share our faith with our grandchildren.

So how do we rise to the challenge before us? Let me give you some very ordinary examples of how we try to bless our grandchildren:

- It goes without saying that we pray for them. Indeed, it has been said that the greatest gift we can give to our grandchildren is our time and our prayers.
- When they come to visit us, we always say grace at meals, and we try to begin the day with a prayer and a reading. We also pray with them before they go to sleep.
- In the spirit of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6.4-7), we make opportunities to talk to them about God and his love.
- If they are with us over a Sunday, we try to take them to church, but changing churches has made things a little difficult in that respect.
- With our encouragement they all come to church on Christmas Day
- We buy them Christian books: for instance, recently I gave Jemima a copy of Corrie ten Boom's *No Hiding Place*, which she thoroughly enjoyed.
- We give them Christian Advent calendars and Fairtrade Christian Easter eggs which tell the story of Easter.

- Before the grandchildren open their Christmas presents around the tree, we have developed a tradition that first I read Luke's account of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2.1-7) and then we have a prayer together.
- We try to be creative in how we share our faith. One year (2102), in the run-up to Easter, I emailed my grandchildren every day for 28 days. Each email contained a picture, a few verses of Scripture, and a prayer, featuring the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Another year (2014) when, for a period of seven weeks, I was engaged in ministry in Australia and New Zealand, I sent them a weekly instalment of 'Grandpa's Adventures' – each instalment always included a reflection on some aspect of God at work in his world.
- This year the family all came together to celebrate Caroline's birthday. Instead of going to church, we held a family service at home. With the help of a printed order of service, we sang 'All things bright and beautiful', 'Jesus loves me this I know', and 'The wise man built his house upon the rock'. I read to the children the tale of two sons as contained in the Scripture Union book, *The Ten Must Know Stories*, a copy of which I then gave to each family – it was amazing to see how intently the children listened. And of course we prayed together.
- With my grandchildren specifically in mind I have written an autobiography. Entitled *This is my story*, it tells not just the story of my life, but also the story of my faith-journey. Indeed, some of you will recognise the source of inspiration for the title – 'This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long'. In due course I intend to give each of them a hard copy, but will wait until they are old enough to appreciate it.

It is a real challenge to be a Christian grand-parent. I once read of an American Presbyterian minister working in one of the more deprived areas of New York who said: "We never tell the kids to say 'Our Father' in the Lord's Prayer, because most of their fathers are alcoholic or absent. The person who represents God to them most of all was their grandmother". Gosh, that is a sobering thought, but the truth is that grandmothers, and grandfathers for that matter, can have a real influence on their grandchildren's understanding of God. As the Apostle Paul once reminded his young friend Timothy: his faith had in the first

place been shaped by not just by his mother Eunice, but also by his grandmother, Lois (2 Timothy 1.5. See also 3.14).

When Jemima, our first grandchild was born, I read a book entitled *Grand-parenting – the Agony and the Ecstasy*, by an American author called Jay Kessler. I later wrote an article in which I reflected on five nuggets of wisdom I discovered there.

"We cannot stop the passage of time.... We can merely learn to accept our new roles graciously". Yes, I said, there is wisdom in that. In one sense, few of us want to become a grandparent – it's a sign we are getting old, yet none of us can turn the clock back. Far better to accept graciously the challenge of our new calling.

"We've had our shot at parenting. Now, as grandparents, we become a support to our children as they attempt the confusing and demanding task of parenting". That's so true. I guess I'll find that there are times when I am tempted to interfere in upbringing, but my new role is to affirm and cheer on parents.

"We need to restore the values, loyalties and security of family life to provide an environment in which children can grow up safe and healthy to become what God intended them to be". Yes, indeed. Sadly, we live in a world where many families break-down, where many grandchildren are confused and hurt and often filled with anger, resentment, and perhaps even guilt as a result of their parents' divorce. In such situations grandparents have a special stabilizing role to play.

"We can't change society, but what we can do, as grandparents, is to provide for them a solid moral framework, based on biblical principles, to help them establish their own moral standards". True again. We can't control what our grandchildren see and hear and experience. We can, however, listen. We can empathize with their struggles, we can offer them guidelines.

"We cannot spare them most of the struggles and failures of life. We can, however, demonstrate that, after a long life filled with battles and victories, we can come out on the other side and do so with grace". Even more true. Grandchildren aren't impressed with grandparents who are forever moralising! What really counts is to see and hear how they have coped in the tough

times, how their faith in God has enabled them to come through with a thankful and loving spirit."

More recently I read a collection of essays entitled *Ageing, Death and the Quest for Immortality*, one of which was by a man called Vernon Grounds. He noted that, whereas in early retirement people can be incredibly active, there comes a point when energy is gone and physical limitations appear. Old age for those who are becoming frail can sometimes seem to be nothing more than a waiting-room for death. The reality, however, is that we can still be useful for God. Older people have time to pray - perhaps one of the tasks of a pastoral carer is to share names of people who need particular prayer. Older people can continue to bear witness to those who look after them, as well as to family members. Vernon Grounds went on to say: "Without becoming a loquacious bore, an older person can testify of God's faithfulness through the years of life. That is the message of Psalm 71. The older generation can pass on to the next generation....Perhaps a grandparent's congregation is one small grandchild, but how important it is that the upcoming generations hear about the spiritual experience of the older generations. The good news is that older people, if they look, can find opportunities for ongoing usefulness." ¹

Often when preachers talk about evangelism, they urge their hearers to share their faith with their neighbours and colleagues. Evangelism begins, however, with the family. Indeed, we might argue that the family is our 'Jerusalem' in the call of Jesus for us to be witnesses found in Acts 1.8. Vernon Grounds referred to Psalm 71.18: "Even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come" - but he could also have referred to Psalms 48.13,14; 73.5,6; and 145.4. Yes, those of us who are grandparents have special responsibilities - and opportunities - to share our faith.

¹ Vernon Grounds, 'A Personal Perspective', 23-13 in *Ageing, Death and the Quest for Immortality* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2004) edited by C. Ben Mitchell, Robert D. Orr & Susan A. Salladay.

What Makes Churches Grow?

Bob Jackson

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What does make churches grow? I've been studying that question for the last thirty years. I should by now be able to give you the boiled down, one paragraph answer. However, I'm afraid I haven't found it yet. It's not for want of trying. Perhaps the one paragraph answer doesn't actually exist.

Alternatively, I could simply tell you that God grows the Church, but that doesn't explain why, when we sit back and expect God to do everything, churches usually wither away. Nor does it explain why all churches everywhere aren't growing. So it must have something to do with us as well as with God! Paul said that we are all like living stones being built into a holy temple. The Church is us, warts and all.

I'm still working on my one paragraph, dripping-with-wisdom answer. It starts by observing that numerical growth happens when fewer people leave the churches than join them. We stop people leaving by loving them so well that they have no desire to leave. Churches grow when we love God better, love each other better and love our neighbours better. It all boils down to loving God and humans, just like Jesus said. That's why I can't understand Christians who affect to despise the idea of intentional church growth. What exactly is wrong with a corporate attempt to obey the two great commandments better? Perhaps when I am ancient, I'll simply boil down the church growth textbook to the length of one of the mature St John's little letters: "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well" (1 John 4.11 and 5.1). I'm not sure the Beatles had church growth in mind when coining their song, but 'All you need is love' seems to boil it down nicely.

However, the trouble is that, true though the love answer may be, it doesn't tell us practically what to do. Nor does it spell out the content of love – which of course in the New Testament is a set of obedient actions more than a warm inner feeling. When it

comes to helping to grow the churches, we need more than the repetition of basic theological truisms. We need hard evidence from struggling churches, learning by studying what makes growing churches different from shrinking ones. When we do that, we find that church growth is not an exact science. There are simple answers and few universal generalities. Every situation and every group of Christians is unique, and God is infinitely creative and mysterious, so every church at every point in time will have its own unique way of growing and thriving.

The bad news is that, to grow our churches, as well as using our ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us, we also have to use our God-given minds to crack what Sherlock Holmes would call 'a three pipe problem'.

However, that doesn't mean I give up – I can still help you grow your church through pointing out some general correlations, some hard-won experience, some pieces of wisdom born of much pipe puffing. Off the peg solutions they are not, but they are the material out of which you can manufacture your own tailor-made solutions to your own growth conundrum.

Even the question, 'What is growth?' is tricky. Traditionally, we have measured the size of churches by average attendance at Sunday services, but people come less often these days, so does God consider the average Christian who attends half the time half a person? And what about those who go to small groups, but have a job on Sundays? And what about all those Fresh Expressions and other congregations which meet on weekdays?

Probably the size of your church is best measured by the number of people who try to participate in its worshipping life at least once a month. That includes those stuck at home or in care homes to whom you bring prayers and communion. Make a list and you may be amazed at how long it is. Don't make a list and I have no idea how you can offer pastoral care and a sense of belonging to the most vulnerable of your church members, those you have difficulty calling to mind off the top of your head.

Growth, however, is not measured only by the involvement of more people. It is also about the depth of their involvement, spirituality and faith. Growth is about a church's active ministry, the way it serves its neighbourhood and brings in the kingdom

of God into the kingdom of this world. Healthy churches grow in all those three dimensions at once – numbers of people, depth of faith and vitality of ministry. In the UK over the last century, attendance figures have been falling as fewer in each succeeding generation get involved. If there is nobody left, then there is no depth of faith to cultivate and no chance of doing good in the world. There is today a real urgency about numerical growth.

Here is a summary list of features the evidence says tend to be present in numerically growing churches and absent in shrinking ones. I'm afraid in this short article you'll have to take the evidence on trust – if you want more detail, you'll have to fork out for my book, *'What Makes Churches Grow?'* (Church House Publishing, 2015). In the meantime, here is an executive summary list of 20 factors governing the growth of churches. Maybe it'll whet your appetite for the big book!

1. **Churches grow when they intend to grow.**

Churches which unthinkingly go round their version of the church's year repeating what they did last time are not long for this world. Churches which develop a deliberate, written vision and a strategy for getting there (sometimes called a 'Mission Action Plan'), often find they succeed. Growth does not come from good luck, but from good intent.

2. **Churches grow when they change.**

The world around us is changing fast. We need to keep making intentional changes to church life and services in a constant search to improve what we do and who we are. Examples of effective changes include making church services less stiff and awkward; more relaxed and joyful, allowing and encouraging laughter; better small groups and pastoral care; using evangelism courses more regularly; involving more people in genuine church leadership; and improving the buildings. Most churches want to grow, but only those prepared to change will succeed.

3. **Churches grow when they improve.**

Gone are the days when people went to church out of habit, duty, loyalty and social convention, or because there was nothing else to do on a Sunday. We may not like it, but people

tend to behave as consumers. If a church is helpful to them and offers good quality provision they may come. If it lets them down or falls short of their standards they will stop coming. This forces church leaders to focus on the quality of what is offered.

4. Churches grow when they train to grow.

The Church of England's '*Leading Your Church into Growth*' team, of which I'm a member, do conferences and courses for church leaders and members, and we know that churches are more likely to grow once their leaders have done a course. They are even more likely to grow once the whole congregation has gone through our *LyCiG-Local* course – see the website.

5. Churches grow when they pray to grow.

Most church people say they would like their church to grow, but it seems that very few of us seriously and regularly ask God to bring this about. Write a church prayer for growth, ask everyone to pray it regularly at home and use it in the church services.

6. Churches grow when they focus on families.

Children, young people and families are the most responsive demographic to our church worship-offers. We need to move beyond the Sunday-school model these days. The fastest growth is in all-age forms of worship such as Messy Church. Churches tend to shrink older and grow younger. We are in a post-Christian missionary situation. Which people group is your primary mission field? Very often our answer is 'younger generations' and we grow when our culture becomes more relevant to them.

7. Churches grow when they provide for teens as well as children.

It's all too easy to give the impression that we expect young people to leave when they move to secondary school. Many churches are too small to cater properly for teenagers, but if we work together to make joint provision, teenagers can be on the programme of every church in the country. Most adult Christians today came to faith as children or teenagers – we need to give today's young people the same opportunity.

8. **Churches grow when they plant new congregations.**

We sometimes imagine that growth is about attracting more people to our existing events. More usually, the Christian Church throughout the world in the last 2000 years has grown through the planting of new churches. It is usually best to identify a people-group we are trying to reach with a new service in a different style from the existing. The Fresh Expressions movement shows that it is often best not to devise a new service we think we might like and then advertise it. Rather, work with the folk we are trying to reach to incarnate a new style of worship in their culture.

9. **Churches grow when they sort out their leadership structure.**

In denominations like Anglicanism and Methodism, the declining numbers of paid clergy has meant asking them to lead more and more churches each. I met someone the other day who was vicar of 13 churches all at once! The end result is not that all the churches still have a leader, but that none of them do! If it is to thrive, every church community needs someone at its heart to focus around, someone who is reliably there at the main worship events and in the daily life of the church community. We are finding that smaller churches are beginning to turn around again if they can be led from within by someone unpaid who is focussing just on them.

10. **Churches grow when they have a leader in place.**

In the Church of England, churches are no longer shrinking when there is a vicar in place, but they are shrinking in their vacancies between vicars – which on average are now lasting nearly a year. There is nothing wrong with a model of church without a paid leader or minister, but it doesn't work to set up a model of church which needs a paid minister and then not providing one for an extended period. Churches grow long term when the transitions between leaders are well managed.

11. **Churches grow when they involve more people in leadership.**

Most of our churches only have one 'Minister' – the rest are the recipients of the minister's ministry, so their size is restricted by

the capacity of the minister and the inertness of the congregation. However, when lay leaders begin to have serious responsibilities the capacity of the church to grow is enlarged.

12. **Churches grow when their members invite others to come along.**

Many non-churchgoers view churches as someone else's private club. It is far too scary just to gate-crash uninvited one Sunday. People need to be invited to 'come with me' and some will respond. They may need to keep on being invited before having the confidence to be self-starters.

13. **Churches grow when they improve their welcome and integration of newcomers.**

Only about 10-15% of people who try out a church with any seriousness succeed in joining its community. It's very hard to join most churches and many people fall at one hurdle or another, but churches which become good at welcome and integration can increase the proportion who stick by up to two thirds. Check out the website '*everybodywelcome*'.

14. **Churches grow when they offer friendship not just friendliness.**

Initially, most people are looking for friendship, community and belonging. Superficial friendliness is not enough. If someone new finds a couple of friends in the first few weeks, they will stay. If not, they probably won't.

15. **Churches grow when they offer evangelism courses at least annually.**

Courses such as Alpha, Christianity Explored or START are the main way in which adults and young people make a decisive move in their journey into faith today. To the church that is praying for new Christians, I think I hear God saying, 'Meet me half way – put on a course'!

16. **Churches grow when their worship is about encounter.**

If people feel they can encounter the Living God in a church service, they will keep coming, and perhaps bring their friends, but they also need to encounter each other and share the realities of their own lives, so testimony is important. Where the

worship is a new and living event each week, the people will keep coming.

17. **Churches grow when they are well connected.**

Isolated clergy and churches tend to run dry and run out of ideas, but when they are plugged into good networks they can be refreshed, renewed and reenergised.

18. **Churches grow when they recover their confidence.**

Living in a sometimes militantly secular society, suffering from media derision and hostility, and experiencing long term decline, many churches and church leaders have lost their confidence in both Church and Gospel. Most of us keep needing experiences of God and Church that renew our confidence.

19. **Churches grow when they hear and obey the Spirit's guidance.**

Even this little list may look pretty daunting. No church can tackle all twenty of these agendas at once, so what is God saying to my church at this time? What is the priority for action? Churches with lots of priorities have none, so have no more than three priorities at any one time, preferably just one!

20. **Churches grow when it is time to grow.**

Not every church will, can or should grow numerically all the time. There are deep mysteries of place – in one place a church will thrive and in another a similar church will wither. Churches tend to grow best with a minister who has been in place between five and twelve years. It takes time to get trusted and to understand what makes somewhere tick. Sometimes the priority is to grow spiritually or in ministry vitality. Lack of numerical growth does not equate to personal failure. There is a time and a season for everything, but, after a century of decline, if this is not a time and season for new growth in the Christian church in this country, exactly when will that time be?

If I were to think about it a bit longer, I've no doubt I could extend my list of 20 factors to 30 or 40. Probably so could you. There is no single, simple, knock down answer to the question of how our churches grow. Each one is its own unique mix and muddle of Christians trying to relate well with God, each other

and their community. However, God is gracious, so it looks as though we don't have to get all 20 of those factors looking good before there is a chance of growth. Just some movement on one or two can make a big difference. What will make the big difference where you are?

15 Books for All Age Worship

Richard Dormandy
Vicar of Tulse Hill, London

All Age Worship is not easy to do well. Frequently it is not really inclusive, not very satisfying, not deeply meaningful, too long, too light, too bizarre, too unimaginative. I have been creating and leading monthly All Age Worship for nearly thirty years and I have been guilty of all the above at one time or another.

Some people don't come to church on an All Age Sunday. It's too stressful with the kids. There's no 'real' sermon. There's no big block of 'worship'. There's no Holy Communion. Sometimes I wonder whether it's worth it - apart from the benefit of giving the Sunday School Team a monthly break. However, then I think about the majority who *do* come, and I think about the theological, social, educational, even political statement we're making: the church *is* a unique All-Age body - growing, learning, and following Jesus together. All Age worship helps us to live that and celebrate it. It's not a 'children's service'. It's interactive, intergenerational worship and growing together.

There are lots of resources in print, and on the Internet, to help with the planning of All Age worship. Some may need adapting because they were originally written for other contexts - for example, you will find plenty of team games and ice-breakers in the context of motivational training for adults, but they probably won't have links to Bible passages! You can also find a few attempts to give a rationale for All Age worship like my own YouTube video *All Age Worship - The Family Meal*. Then there are websites such as familyworship.org.uk, barnabasinchurches.org.uk, and scriptureunion.org.uk.

This article, however, reviews fifteen All Age worship books. The great thing about books is that you can write on the pages - annotate with your adaptations, leave them for others in a church library, turn down the corners for quick access, add ticks and crosses for ideas you think would work easily or wouldn't work at all, etc. Most, but not all, of these books are published by brf (including barnabas/Messy Church) which is easily now the leading light in this field. One or two are out of print, but available second hand online. I have also given each book points out of five.

All Age Worship (Lucy Moore, BRF, £7.99, 2010)

This is the number one book for giving you a vision and philosophy for All Age Worship. Written with depth, passion, respect, practicality, and simplicity, I have given one of these to each member of our All Age Teams so that we all know what we're aiming for. This is not an 'ideas' book, although there are plenty of examples which you can pick up and use.

The first three chapters prepare the ground: "Should Church Be All Age?"; "How Does Worship Happen?"; "What Matters Most?" You may think you know the answers to these questions, but these 66 pages provide an excellent refresher. The last three chapters are more practical: "Rules of Thumb for All Age Services"; "Coping With Change"; "Planning An All Age Service." Having worked out your All Age Philosophy, you need to monitor what you are doing so that you remain constant to the vision, so these chapters provide checklists and sample planning grids (How many of our five senses are we engaging throughout this service? What different modes of learning are we employing? Do we want many little items (magazine style) or do we want to focus on one, core, shared experience? Are we connecting with vehicles for worship which have evolved through the centuries? How do we make sure that 'wonder' isn't lost amid chaos?

Each chapter is clearly laid out, easy to read and content rich. This is the go-to book if you want to introduce All Age Worship, but it also an outstanding refresher course. **5/5.**

Help! It's the All Age Slot (Rebecca Parkinson, Barnabas for Children, £9.99, 2010)

I was deeply put off by the title because, for me, All Age is *not* about a slot! Once I'd got over that, I found this to be another

outstanding book. It comprises 52 instant talk outlines, most of which use objects or visual activities of one kind or another.

Out of 52 outlines, there will always be some which are weaker than others. I went through and marked all the ones I thought would work, would be easy, were just 'ok', etc. Some of them I have road-tested in primary school assemblies. Each chapter follows the same format: Aim, Bible Links, 'You will need' list, Talk Outline, and Challenge. The Challenge is great, and is something we have included in each of our All Age services for over a year now. Here, it is the other bookend to the Aim. It concludes the talk and offers a challenge you can leave your congregation to follow up.

The book is more or less structured around the church's year and there is an appendix with lectionary links for each of the chapter-weeks. Some of the chapters need sharpening up or adapting. For example, Chapter 48 ("Waiting is Good") on Advent, might be better presented as "Preparation is Good." This is a reminder to me that 'off the peg' quick help guides require a little bit of thinking and adapting to your own local language or culture.

This is an excellent book of its type and worth the money as a source of ideas. A Bible references index would have been helpful. **4/5.**

Few Children Great Opportunities (Sue Price and Ruth Alliston, Barnabas for Children, 2012, £8.99)

This book is simply outstanding. It looks thin for the price, but it is packed full. Strictly speaking, this is a Sunday School book, but there is much that can be very easily adapted for the All Age context.

The premise of this book is a situation all too familiar in many churches: a single Sunday School class with few members across a wide age-range, several of whom are not present every week. It's difficult to maintain continuity and dispiriting. This book contains 12 stand-alone sessions, which are designed so they can effectively be split into two or four sessions each, depending on the length of time available on the Sunday. In theory, you could have a year's worth of sessions.

What's great about this book is that the authors create an age-appropriate 'liturgical' routine which includes opening and adding to special group scrapbook each week, so there's a skilfully developed combination of the familiar and the new. This gives continuity, even if children have missed a week. In the All Age context, this could be adapted to a monthly service.

Also brilliant is that they offer explicit instructions, telling you what to say and teaching you how to listen. Of course, this can be adapted. You don't have to follow it precisely, but the effect is like a very good recipe book. You can tell these recipes will work, but they can also mined for ideas.

Each chapter is headed with the theme, passage, Bible verse, linked stories from news and culture and theme. The sessions are clearly and helpfully divided into 'Way in', 'Learn from Jesus', 'Tell... Consider... Explore... ... the Story', 'Praise', 'Explore other people's stories', 'Respond', 'Review', 'Way out', 'Follow up'. In fact, if you only took a few of these headings and regularly framed All Age Worship according to them, the book would have been money very well spent. **5/5.**

Creative Worship (John Guest, Barnabas for Children, 2014, £7.99)

This book contains 20 Bible-based service outlines for All Age church, which John Guest divides into five different types: 'Signs and Symbols'; 'Storytelling'; 'Slapstick'; 'Surrogacy' (mainly using puppets); and 'Slant' (i.e. an unexpected angle). John Guest is clearly an experienced practitioner, but the book is somewhat idiosyncratic. There is a useful index of themes, a limited index of Bible links, and a very good listing of further resources.

Each chapter offers a theme, Bible link, possible songs, a suggested prayer, a fairly vague suggestion as to how the service might go, the main item, and some follow-up to end the service. I'm really not convinced of the value of suggesting songs. Every church has a different canon of well-known songs, and in my experience, most songs will have something to offer most occasions. I think this space could have been better used to offer more detail.

There are some excellent stories, such as 'Gas Station Christmas', but, for example, he says he does this particular one "in a Morgan Freeman narrative voice." Well, not all of us can do that very convincingly! It would have been more useful if the story had been re-written for the English context.

There's an old combination of specificity regarding some of the ideas presented, and the vagueness of how to present them – I imagine John Guest thinks this vagueness will make it easier to adapt his ideas because he is not being prescriptive. Ironically, however, it is easier to adapt a recipe style book like the previous one reviewed, than it is a vague one, because you know exactly what it is you're adapting.

My impression is that this author is a good creator and performer of scripts and other ideas, but the book would have been better value if the nuts and bolts had also been presented in more detail. **3.5/5.**

Instant Talks for All Ages (Sue Relf, David C Cook, 2009, available secondhand)

Here are 100 ideas for short talks divided into sections. Each has a Bible passage, teaching point, and involves some simple equipment. Sue Relf has written several other similar books, and together they provide a good storehouse of object lessons.

No ideas for context or follow-on are offered, so they won't deliver you an All Age Service, but that's not the purpose. The objects are simple to find, or you can easily think of alternatives that would do just as well. I have used or adapted a number of these talks for school assemblies, so they definitely work, but it is a resource for only a segment of your worship. **4/5.**

Multi-Sensory Ideas for Worship (Irene Smale, David C Cook, 2009, available secondhand)

On Amazon this is available for £55!! Hopefully you might pick it up secondhand elsewhere for a more sensible price!

Here are 100 ideas aim to engage all the senses. They involve a good deal more preparation, but they could easily form the core activity of All Age Worship. However, not all the activities would work so well with a whole congregation, so if you wanted to include everyone, you would need to adapt the activity.

Scripture Union has also produced some ideas for Multi-Sensory worship. It is often easier with a small group as you can encourage feedback and reflection more easily.

This is a book to buy and read through so that the wealth of ideas seeps into your mind. Then, when you're planning your All Age yearly calendar, look through it again and choose some specific ideas which you can adapt for your context. **4/5.**

Messy Church Theology (Ed. George Lings, Messy Church (BRF), 2013, £9.99)

This is a fairly substantial assessment of where Messy Church is up to and how it might sit within the wider church, and because Messy Church is inter-generational, there is much in these 13 chapters that could apply to All Age Worship of any kind.

Key recurring issues are: "Is Messy Church really church, or is it just a part of church?"; "Does Messy Church really disciple people adequately?"; "How adaptable is Messy Church?"; "What is the future of Messy Church?" Obviously, the book is a forthright apologia for Messy Church. Most, but not all, contributors insist that Messy Church is (or should be viewed as) a full expression of church in its own right. Certainly, it's pointed out, if the Vicar thinks it is merely a strategy to get people into 'real' church and the Messy Church Leaders feel it's a full expression of church in its own right, there is trouble ahead!

There is much here for All Age practitioners to reflect upon, especially in the area of discipleship. However, stronger answers still need to be developed. What's really good is that the Messy Church movement has asked searching questions of itself, and offered some answers with case-studies. **3.5/5.**

Making Disciples in Messy Church (Paul Moore, Messy Church (BRF), 2013, £6.99)

This interesting book delves further into the thorny issue of whether Messy Church really makes disciples. In order to do this, Paul Moore asks what disciples are and how they are really made, as well as showing how Messy Church moves people onto the discipleship journey. He then carries out a survey of discipleship in the Bible, applying the models he finds there to the practice of Messy Church. It's a good attempt to drill down

into a difficult area in order to make sure that Messy Church is not only fun but fruitful. Once again, the connections for All Age Worship of every kind are obvious.

Sometimes the balance between describing discipleship patterns in the Bible and actually applying them to Messy Church is too heavily weighted in favour of the former. As a book simply on biblical patterns of discipleship, it is not really sufficient. The real value lies in the application to Messy Church, and I feel more space and depth of analysis could have been given to that application. Each chapter ends with questions for further reflection. **3.5/5.**

Blended: A Call to Reimagine our Church Family (Eleanor Bird, BRF, 2015, £8.99)

Eleanor Bird would obviously make a great, upbeat, speaker, and the book is written in a chatty style. However, there seems to be a claim that she is saying something new, whereas she is only using a new word ('blended') to describe what All-Age practitioners have been doing for decades. This book has one or two interesting perspectives, but I didn't find it 'inspiring' as is promised on the cover. I found it repetitive and lacking depth. Sorry - it's nothing more than OK. **1/5.**

Edible Bible Crafts (Sally Welch, Barnabas (BRF), 2014, £11.99)

Here are 64 story-based craft ideas. It is a mixed bag, and a fair amount of preparation is needed. Some of them could be used or adapted for a whole All-Age congregation (say 100 people), but most would be more suited to Holiday Club activities or Sunday School. Some of the ideas are rather gruesome - such as making gingerbread people without limbs to illustrate the story of the 10 lepers!! Others could be improved, such as the making of a starry sky by sticking cut processed cheese onto a rice cake smothered with Marmite. Not only would the marmite be quite expensive when multiplied, but the thickness required would also make the result inedible. Dark chocolate spread, or melted dark cooking chocolate, would have been much nicer!

So... a niche book with some good ideas for occasional use. There are black and white photos throughout. **3.5/5.**

All Age Service Annual - Volumes 3 and 4 (Scripture Union, 2009 and 2010, £11.99 and £14.99)

Scripture Union have always been at the forefront of All Age Worship, so I eagerly bought these a few years back. However, I have found them very difficult to use. What you have is 52 'starter' activities for use at the start or end of a service, plus 15 complete service outlines. Sadly, it's simply not well thought out for the user.

To begin with, as the BRF material proves, there is a lot of difference between the start of a service and the end. Each page in this section contains a 'Theme Introduction', a 'Prayer Idea' and an 'Extra Idea'. However, those precise words are the repeated headings. There is no indication as to the activity without reading through two or three paragraphs, nor is it very clear how the first part of small ideas connects into the service outlines in the second part. Confusingly, both sections begin in October (I think this connects with SU's Light curriculum) with the Last Supper and Spectators at the Cross - hardly intuitive for anyone using either a standard or church calendar!

The Service Outlines are prey to the same problems: the repeated generic headings (as opposed to descriptive individual ones) make this book virtually impossible to flick through. The format is spiral-bound A4, but there is absolutely no need for this. Standard sized books would have been much more convenient. The pages are cluttered with irrelevant cartoon pictures and adverts for other (relevant) SU products.

There are lots of ideas somewhere in here, but they are hard to access. Maybe this would make more sense for users of the Light curriculum, but as a stand-alone product, I find them sadly hard to recommend. **2.5/5.**

Extreme Crafts for Messy Churches (Pete Maidment and Barry Brand, Messy Church (BRF), 2015, £7.99)

This is a great book of "50 activity ideas for the adventurous." The crafts are very simple and do-able. Each has a 'mess' rating, a 'danger' rating and a 'difficulty' rating. Where appropriate, they specify what the 'danger' is so that you can do your own risk assessment. There is 'big stuff' like the collapsing house or the giant whale. There are 'Construction Crafts' like clothes peg

catapults and squawking cans. There are 'science crafts' like CD hovercrafts and lava lamps. There are some great arty crafts and some edible crafts, such as 'Edible Dirt Garden'.

These activities are guaranteed to cause excitement, but each one is topped and tailed with Bible application and a way to talk about it. Inevitably, the applications are not precisely spelled out and sometimes the connections are a little elusive. However, that's not the point. This small book is packed with tons of fun and an indication of how it might be used. There is a useful appendix on "planning a male-friendly messy church." **5/5.**

Creative Ideas For All Age Church (Karen Morrison, Barnabas (BRF), 2010, £7.99)

There are quite a lot of ideas here, arranged in "12 Through-the-Year Programmes for Informal Church Services and One-off events". One of the best features is the inclusion of a special meal or food item for each occasion. The activities are fairly sedate and many are centred around conversations. Sometimes, they involve reading fairly lengthy passages too.

It's a gentle book – probably for a gentle church. There's nothing too challenging, but it's all nourishing. If this were your *only* resource book, then the All Age Services could become a little 'samey'. On the other hand, for a more reflective congregation, there is a lot here. Used in conjunction with something like "Extreme Crafts" (above), you would have a rich repository of ideas. **3.5/5.**

Messy Prayer (Jane Leadbetter, Messy (BRF) £6.99)

This book is excellent, packed with simple, practical ideas that can be used or adapted for many an All Age service. Aimed specifically at Messy Church, the book is structured around the particular elements of that format (the celebration time, the meal time, the home), but these are easily adaptable. Of particular interest for some is a very substantial chapter by Lucy Moore on 'Liturgical Prayers'.

There is also a useful chapter on 'Creating a Prayer Space', which doesn't have to be a permanent installation. It could be created and themed for a particular service. Of course, this might be limited by the size of the user-group or congregation.

In some contexts, it might be necessary to adapt the ideas here into multiple stations. At our last holiday club, we made a huge igloo from milk bottles, which could take up to fifteen children with adults, but it would be tricky to use on a Sunday morning when the congregation can be up to 150.

The book ends with three chapters on a Messy Church session on prayer, a Quiet Day for your team, and a Messy Retreat. Even if you never hold these precise events, they might be adapted for your next church weekend. This book is handy, practical, and great value. **5/5.**

Building Visions

Martyn Johnson

Retired hospice CEO and Thalidomide Trust Director

I have been interested in how to build successful organisations practically all my life, which has included a 21-year career in the RAF, and latterly 20 years as a charity CEO. I have had lots of opportunities to see how people interact in a wide variety of situations, working with a common purpose. I long felt that it must be possible to identify the key factors which set apart organisations which achieve above and beyond what they set out to do, so that they can be applied in other situations.

I read the stories of a number of Christian leaders who had built spectacular organisations, including Oral Roberts and Paul Yonggi-Cho, but was left wondering about the attribution they made to divine intervention. After all, if such successes were attributed to the miraculous intervention of God, then the converse would mean that failures were not the fault of people - it must be the devil!

In April 1994, I took up the job of running a hospice charity and quickly realised that here was an opportunity to explore how vision operated. I was able to develop this as formal research into the foundation of independent charitable hospices in Britain and establish whether corporate vision was a valid and relevant concept in this context, and whether it had any relation to the

achievements of the hospice founders. The usefulness of the hospice movement was that it offered a large number of organisations of a similar type which had been founded in a relatively short period of time between 1967 and 1997, and for which a large number of original founders were still available. An early discovery was that the entire worldwide modern hospice movement, incorporating the combination of medical, nursing and spiritual support for the terminally ill stemmed from the vision of one woman, Cicely Saunders, who said she had been given the 'go-ahead' in a vision from God in 1959. By 1997, over 4,000 hospice services were operating worldwide, over 200 in the UK alone.

I was able to carry out detailed research into the foundation of a total of 77 hospices, more than one third of the UK total. Some hospice projects were founded by groups of Christians, who indeed attributed their success to divine support. Others included a group of 'multi-faith', including Jews and Sikhs. Still others made no faith claims and said they were driven by the desire to alleviate the suffering of terminal cancer patients. There was no discernible difference between the end results achieved by these different groups. Each group raised sums (adjusted to 2016 values) in the order of millions, for establishments that again (at present costs) cost a few millions a year to operate - major achievements by any standards! However, while exploring their methodologies, my mind was conditioned by my general management and leadership training, and assumptions about what ought to happen in such situations.

I expected to find:

- Strong charismatic leaders driving projects forward
- Financial targets acting as feasibility limits, meaning people would be set back if project costs increased and budgets overran.
- Government pledges as instrumental, meaning that the project teams would require firm guarantees of government funding before they started.

What I found instead included:

- The projects tended to attract the leaders, rather than the other way around.

- Groups did not rely on expected measures of success or progress, such as financial targets or time deadlines.
- Financial targets were secondary to the main aim of completing the project. If more money (and often a lot more money) was needed, they mostly just pressed on and raised it.
- Prospective central government funding had no measurable effect on their implementation.

In addition to these findings, I was able to identify seven important characteristics of successful shared vision, listed in the order (more or less) in which I recognised them¹:

1. Future goals which can be visualised.
2. Contributions from a variety of sources.
3. Attracts individuals with the skills needed.
4. Can be communicated easily.
5. Powerfully motivational.
6. Serves an important need for others.
7. Matches values of supporters.

I later discovered that it was number 6 (meeting the needs of others) that was the 'magic ingredient'!

At Warwick Business School, Nigel Sykes had developed a theory of organisational growth titled *Egg to Butterfly*, which used an organic model of organisations coupled with concepts of role-person fit. This model proposes that there are just three key roles, the Envisioner, the Enabler, and the Enactor (the 3E's), a concept derived from the biblical anointings of Prophet Priest and King. They are all centred on the shared vision (**I**, for 'Idea') and they function in three main task areas²:

Envisioning (creative, inventive, concerned with identifying business opportunities);

Enabling (interpreting vision, organizing, managing, concerned with establishing sound process);

¹ Johnson M.W (1999) a Feasibility Test for Corporate Vision in *Strategic Change* 8 (6), 335-348

² Sykes, N. (2002) *Envisioning, Enabling and Enacting: Metamorphosing the Enterprise*, CSME Working Papers No 71 ISSN 0964-9328 Warwick Business School.

Enacting (focussed, leading, driving projects to completion, concerned with progress).

We have come across many successful organisations where this pattern can be seen. What I did next was to see if the concept of Envisioner, Enabler and Enactor could be validated. I recruited over 70 candidates for this study, ranging from Warwick Business School Executive MBA students to Thalidomide Survivors, and subjected them to a battery of tests. Before doing this I had to establish some basic issues, including roles, motivation, and how individuals differ.

I carried out this project with the support of London University (Birkbeck College), in order to ensure that it was robustly grounded in Organizational Psychology. A review of role theory supported Nigel Sykes' assumptions about the segregation of the three roles he had identified (the 3E's), so the test was whether these roles actually reflected measurable differences between people. We used a combination of a full description of the differences between the 3E's, together with an 'Ideal Job' test to segregate people between the 3E's. I then used tests for Motivational Needs, Personality Factor, and Decision theory. Between them, these gave measures of peoples' inner drives (intrinsic motivation), how others describe their behaviour (Personality Factors), and what they actually do in determining their personal course of action (Decision-making).

This pretty much covers the ways in which people vary outside the things over which we have little or no control, such as our specific abilities, gender, age, class, education and intelligence.

The 3E's concept works by assuming that the intrinsic (inner) needs of the individual require an appropriate extrinsic (external) setting before motivated behaviour is evident. This view is strongly supported by extensive work on Goal-setting, which shows that individuals will perform as an effective team when an appropriate goal-setting methodology is implemented¹.

¹ Locke, E. A. and Latham, G. P. (1990). "Work motivation: The high performance cycle", in Kleinbeck, U., Quast, H., Thierry, H. and Hacker, H. (eds). *Work Motivation*. Hillsdale, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

The next implication is that alignment around a shared vision produces responses from individuals based on their intrinsic motivation – a field much studied from the 1930s to the 1980s. The most comprehensive work is by David McClelland, who identified just three major intrinsic motivational needs governing around 70% of normal daily behaviour¹. These are: Need for Achievement; Need for Affiliation; Need for Power.

Characteristic behaviour of people with strong Need for Achievement was found to match Enactors, and includes:

- Taking moderate calculated risks.
- Being persistent pursuing goals.
- Trying to 'do things better'.
- Being restless in work, wanting to move on to new tasks.
- Seeking higher status.

People with strong Need for Affiliation proved a very close match for Enablers, as they tend to:

- Have extensive interpersonal networks.
- Be more concerned with how the group is getting along than with completion of the task.
- Act to avoid conflict.
- Be less likely to get promoted to high-level management.

Strong Need for Power was found to indicate both the Envisioner and the Enactor, but in different ways. It relates to:

- Persuading and influencing skills.
- Seeking management jobs.
- Attempting to establish control over their environment.

Personality Factor analysis began with studies of words used to describe individual behaviour. These ended up getting reduced to five main factors, commonly known as the 'Big 5' Personality Factors: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.

Each of these five factors covers a wide range of behaviours²:

¹ McClelland, D. C. (1987) *Human Motivation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

² McCrae, R. R. and Costa, P. T. (2006) *Personality in Adulthood*. New York: Guildford.

1. Neuroticism includes: Anxiety, Angry Hostility, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, Vulnerability;
Envisioners tended to score higher on this scale than either Enablers or Enactors.
2. Extraversion includes activity, and excitement-seeking which tended to identify the Envisioner, although assertiveness, another aspect of extraversion, is an attribute of people who are natural leaders and tended to match Enactors. It tended to contra-indicate Enablers.
3. Openness to Experience includes the areas of fantasy, ideas, and aesthetics. All are linked to creativity and inventiveness, and indicate the Envisioner, while openness to actions is indicative of the Enactor.
4. Agreeableness is strongly indicative of the Enabler, particularly with aspects such as trust, compliance, and tender-mindedness. Both Enactors and Envisioners tended to score low on this scale.
5. Conscientiousness facets include: order, dutifulness, self-discipline, and deliberation. These describe both Enablers and Enactors, but strongly contra-indicated Envisioners.

This meant we had a set of measures which could be used to identify Envisioners Enablers and Enactors with a fair degree of accuracy, showing also that these role-types do indeed reflect different motivation patterns and behaviours between people. This led us on to see how the 3E's might work out in practice.

Decision-making

Effectiveness of people in an organisational environment is linked to the need to take effective decisions by individuals. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) discovered factors which cause people to decide against their economic interest. They identified a number of systematic biases in judgement, similar in cognitive terms to optical illusions, which they titled 'heuristics'. These include Representativeness, Availability, Anchoring and Adjustment heuristics which all mark significant errors in

decision making¹. Alternatively, people can learn to trust non-rational decisions, often described as 'intuition', when accurate decisions are made extremely quickly, showing that we can be trained to develop positive heuristics, helping us make correct decisions².

When a person has brain damage affecting the areas that processes emotions, they often struggle with making even routine decisions, even though they are able to comprehend all the factors relevant to the decision. Decision-making therefore clearly involves a 'hard wired' linkage between the emotional and rational aspects of individual behaviour, rather the opposite of the idea that the best decisions being made by unemotional super-rational people (e.g. Mr Spock in Star Trek!).

How does individual decision making relate to organisations? The 3E's is about the combination of people with different behaviours occupying different roles delivering a shared Idea – so group behaviour must be considered.

Group decisions

A number of management experts have shown how the best organisations have quite diverse management teams, and that in these teams members are treated respectfully by their colleagues (as opposed to the popular idea of the dynamic leader figure issuing a stream of orders to subservient colleagues). In one major study of organisational decision-making, Surowiecki defines three principal types of group decision-making problems³:

Cognition; understanding the problem and identifying solutions (matching Envisioners);

¹ Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D. (1974) "Judgements under uncertainty: heuristics and biases". *Science*, 185, p. 1124-1131; also Piattelli-Palmarini (1994) *Inevitable Illusions: how mistakes of reason rule our minds*. New York: Wiley.

² Buchanan, L. and O'Connell, A. (2006) A Brief History of Decision making, in *Harvard Business Review*, January 2006, p. 32-41; also Gladwell, M. (2005) *Blink; the power of thinking without thinking*. London: Allen Lane.

³ Surowiecki, J. (2006) *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter Than the Few*, London: Abacus

Cooperation; ensuring team members are properly supported and equipped, and understand the shared vision (matching Enablers) and,

Coordination; ensuring team members work effectively together to deliver the shared vision (matching Enactors).

The 3E's thus identifies the minimum diversity of behaviours in an ideal small group needed for effective group decision-making, but was this reflected in the decision-making patterns of people in those three groupings? We used a test then under development, the Dewberry-Narendran decision psychometric (DNA), which revealed differences generally supportive of the expectations¹.

Envisioners showed greatest post-decision flexibility, were most likely to procrastinate, and least likely to make complex decisions slowly.

Enablers were most likely to use conscious thought rather than intuition, to be self-disciplined and to actively seek information in making their decisions. They were least likely to sequence their actions.

Enactors showed least post-decision flexibility, and were least likely to postpone decisions or to procrastinate. They were most likely to be intuitive rather than conscious and yet to make complex decisions slowly.

A Winning Formula

At this point, we can see that the 3E's concept reflects not only a biblical reality (the anointings of prophet/Envisioner, priest/Enabler) and king/Enactor), but also reflects measurable differences between people and the way they operate. This is not just evident in charities such as hospices and other welfare organisations, but also in the foundation of a wide variety of the world's most successful businesses (including General Electric and Microsoft).

¹ Johnson M.W. (2010) Designing Visionary Teams in: *The International Journal of Sociotechnology and Knowledge Development* Vol 2 No 1 (Jan-Mar 2010) pp 12-35

The magic ingredient in all these cases, from hospice charities to Microsoft, is that, in every case, they centre on an aim to make life better for other people. Bill Gates saw how liberating it would be for people both at home and in the work place if digital computing could be put within the reach of everyone.

Astonishingly, this vision is only just over forty years old, and lies behind smart phones, tablets, the internet and a huge range of other things. A century before Bill Gates, Thomas Edison (founder of General Electric) had a vision of a future where electric lighting could not only transform the home and workplace, but also make life so much safer.¹

The core component of the successful vision is about aiming to do good things for other people. We can describe this as 'love'. The Hebrew word *Hesed*, usually translated 'lovingkindness' in the Bible, captures this idea both more broadly and more accurately than English does. The research discussed above merely serves to demonstrate how this acts to build the motivation of people of all kinds and propel them into high achieving teams. It acts to harmonise the different motivational needs and personality types of the different people needed to build the vision.

The fly in the ointment is the unfortunate human tendency to associate with people who are 'like them', so any organisation left to its own devices will gradually lose basic diversity. The result of this is to make it more difficult to achieve new visions, and perhaps worse, they become less able to overcome challenges and difficulties which may arise. You can see the effects of this in a number of older charitable organisations which struggle even to maintain the buildings and activities which their founders created from nothing.

Summary

If you find yourself involved in a visionary project, there are two simple things you can do. First, check the vision being built against the seven criteria above, and also ensure that the

¹ Wallace, James, and Erickson, Jim, (1992) *Hard Drive: Bill Gates and the making of the Microsoft Empire*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. Wachhorst, Wyn (1981) *Thomas Alva Edison: an American Myth*.

management group has the personality diversity indicated by the 3E's concept. Above all, focus on the delivery of 'lovingkindness'. I have seen several astonishing results from this – and I am sure you will too!

Adolescence, Popular Culture and the Church

Michael Hopkins

Minister of Trinity URC, Farnham, Surrey

Dorothy Day was an influential journalist and social activist in America in the 20th Century. She converted to Catholicism later in life, but her sense of social justice manifested itself early. It is of interest to me, as a youth minister, to explore the question of what drove Day to both her passion for equality and ultimately to her religious conversion. In her essay, *Dorothy Day: A Love of Fiction and Her Love of The Poor*, Judith Ann Brady (2010) explores the ways in which Day's social conscience was formed by her love of classic literature. Brady suggests that authors such as Dickens and Dostoyevsky, who wrote about the experience of poverty, shaped the young Day's vocation and sense of identity: personally, politically and religiously.

René Girard calls this process *mimesis*, and believes that it is a universal experience. Identity is formed by observing another person or group (which Girard calls the 'model'), and imitating their desire. As an example, imagine a nursery full of toddlers. One child has pushed another over and stolen the toy fire engine he was playing with. You, the responsible adult, scold the child, and encourage him to play with a different toy instead. "Why don't you play with this police car instead?" you suggest. "Look, it has flashing lights and everything!" But the child will not be convinced. He wants the fire engine. He has seen that the fire engine is desirable, because his friend desires it. He is in *mimesis* with his friend. This is how we learn, Girard tells us. We unconsciously 'catch' the desires of others. In fact, he goes so

far as to suggest that everything about us has its source in mimesis:

"There is nothing, or nearly nothing, in human behaviour which isn't learned, and all apprenticeship comes back to imitation. If men (sic) suddenly stopped imitating, all cultural forms would disappear. Neurologists remind us that the human brain is an enormous imitation machine" (Girard, Oughourlian, and Lefort, 1978, pp.16–17, translation mine).

What makes Brady's essay about Dorothy Day particularly interesting in this context is that she focuses not on Day's mimetic relationships with parents and peers, but on rather on the influence of literature. Brady uses a few specific examples to illustrate this, one of which is Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Day read the novel at a young age, and identified with the protagonist. Brady contends that Day was shaped by the book and its characters:

"Like Dickens, Dorothy Day portrayed the insecurities of life that the poor face daily. Just as Dickens captured the attention of Dorothy Day by showing the living situations of believable characters, so too Dorothy Day would share the lives of the people who were her community and as close as family, remembering that as she lived and worked among the poor, she knew their strength and foibles first hand" (Brady, 2010, p.485).

This is of interest to me as a youth minister because of the relationship which modern young people have with popular culture. Dorothy Day's works of classical fiction may have been replaced with television shows, popular music, and internet vloggers, but the mimetic relationship still exists. If Dickens and Dostoevsky can teach us about what drove Day, what might Steven Moffatt, Taylor Swift, Cristiano Ronaldo, and PewDiePie reveal to us about today's young people? And how might we respond?

To understand the ways in which young people interact with popular culture, we need to understand the structure of society.

"Structure is the order in culture, in society, which developed through a very long process in order to keep

peace in society. Peace is only possible when people are different, each having their own place, which is respected by everybody" (Kaptein and Morrow, 1993, p.139).

In a stable, structured society, identity is given to us by forces greater than us. The king is the king, the servant is the servant, and, though there is no guarantee of comfort or even happiness, at the very least, each knows his place in society. Where clear structures exist, the individual has a sense of his or her identity.

The clearly defined structure of society, writes Kaptein, is collapsing. Distinctive societal roles are increasingly incapable of separating us, or keeping us 'in our right place'. Twitter is an acute example of this. As a social network, Twitter is a great leveller. Rich and poor can start a Twitter account, for free, and share their thoughts with the world. The British monarchy and the president of the United States of America are both represented on the website, but at the time of writing, Justin Bieber, a 21-year-old pop singer, has more followers than either of them. Bieber was unheard of until 2008, when, at the age of thirteen, the songs he had recorded himself singing were discovered by a music producer.

Similar stories to Bieber's are part of a young person's cultural narrative. One Direction, a record-breakingly successful 'boy band', were discovered on a television talent show. PewDiePie (real name Felix Kjellberg) is "a college dropout who had been working in a hot dog stand", started a YouTube channel in 2010, which earned him \$7.4 million in 2014 (Thomsen, 2015). Television shows like *The X Factor* tell young people that anybody can 'make it'.

The result of this is that identity is insecure. Though there are areas in which relationships have a structure, our society as a whole could be described as post-structural, or at least on its way to it. We no longer have clearly defined roles imposed on us, so our sense of identity is more fluid, and harder to define.

Clearly-defined roles in society are collapsing into each other, but the desire for a sense of identity is still there. As a result, young people are faced with almost unanswerable questions: "Who am I? What should I do with my life? What kind of person do I want to be?" Girard writes that the search for identity which

young people experience is actually a metaphysical desire: a search for *being*.

Theologian Paul Tillich suggests that our search for a sense of identity is the result of unhappiness. For him, this unhappiness comes from feeling threatened by what he calls non-being, which is to say meaninglessness and death (Tillich, 1953, p.210). This might go some way towards explaining young people's increasing dependence on fast-paced, readily-available entertainment. The stories we hear every day about refugees fleeing war-torn countries, global climate change, widening wealth gaps, racism, homophobia, religious extremism, and so on, could well make young people overwhelmed:

"This is a country of two laws. There's laws for rich people and there's laws for poor people. But if you get me, there's sub-laws. And they exist if you're black. You get caught doing a crime and you are poor and white, you are f---d. If you get caught doing a crime and you're poor and black, you are double f---d. It's hard sometimes to be in a system that is counting against you from the moment you are born in your skin" (Kieran, 19, in 'Combi', 2015, pp.147–148).

In some ways, popular cultural narratives provide a kind of escapism from a world which appears frightening, even nihilistic. It has even been suggested that they have taken on religious significance for some young people. In *Gods Behaving Badly*, Pete Ward (Ward, 2011) suggests that the 'real-life' celebrity stories presented in places like *Hello* magazine fulfil the same need in the 21st Century as the Hellenic gods of old. In *Making Sense of Generation Y*, Savage and his colleagues find that the stories told in *Eastenders* helped young people to make sense of their own lives. Today, young people idolise pop singers, and identify with a whole subculture who feel the same way. Justin Bieber fans call themselves Beliebers. Lady Gaga's call themselves Little Monsters. Jessie J's fans are Sparks. These labels represent an almost religious level of belonging.

However, Tillich and Kaptein would both recognise this as an incomplete kind of devotion, one which doesn't fulfil existential desire in the same way which the God of Jesus Christ does. Because we are unaware of the presence of God, says David

Kelsey, "we alternate between relying on something outside of us ... and relying on ourselves. Neither is adequate" (Kelsey, 1997, p.92). Religion, Tillich suggests, provides answers to the questions posed by culture. The fear of non-being is resolved in the discovery of God, who is being itself, so the singers, vloggers, actors and writers which today's young people love provide a short-term sense of identity, but they are not enough. We see this in Dorothy Day's life too: Dickens and Dostoevsky were good, but not enough. It was her Christian faith which gave her the space to search for something deeper.

It is important here to recognise that faith and religion are not necessarily the same thing. Religion is caught up in rivalry – there is still an anxious need to be 'right' at the expense of those who are not:

"Religion is the result of the scapegoat mechanism. ... To religion belong myths, stories about driving out the scapegoat, rites, repetitions of the driving out, and prohibitions" (Kaptein and Morrow, 1993, p.138).

The young people I work with are aware of religion's violent tendencies. They have seen homophobia, racism, and sexism justified with religious language. The youth minister's job is not to introduce religion, as defined by Kaptein, to the young person. Religion, and the dualism that it imposes (in or out, saved or unsaved, good or evil), are a part of the world of rivalry. Religion is not freedom.

Faith, writes James Alison, is something different. Faith allows the subject to discover the God who likes them, and who is on their side. In discovering herself to be loved, the subject's need to be right, or to be good, diminishes:

"[Imagine] an encounter with a benign elderly relative who has known you since childhood. ... You know that Aunt Mildred likes you and wants what is good for you. So when you are with her you don't need to impress her, or convince her of your worth. In fact, you can let your masks down and allow yourself to be teased and your little foibles giggled at when you are with her. You know her enough to know that she is trustworthy, not out to

'get' you and won't hold things she learns about you against you" (Alison, 2013, pp.188–189).

This faith is made visible in the life of Christ, who went to the place which frightens us most – the place of non-being, the place of shame, the place of death – and demonstrated that it is not final: "It is to your advantage that I go to my death ... because I will then have opened up for you the possibility of no longer being run by this bugbear" (Alison, 2013, p.209). Discovering faith, as opposed to religion, is a process of relaxation. Receiving the gift of faith would mean that the young people I work with feel less anxious about their sense of identity.

The concluding question is this: if religion (being caught in the language of fear and rivalry) is not the answer in itself, how do we bring young people to this faith (which liberates us)?

Kaptein responds by pointing out the flaw in the question:

"...in our culture, helping is, however well-intentioned, a power-game in which the helper always stands above his or her victim, one-up in the power game ... in which the needs of others are used. The more professional our helping becomes, the more this fact becomes true!"
(Kaptein and Morrow, 1993, pp.119–121).

My desire to help young people out of the world of rivalry is actually a part of that world. I am assigning a hierarchy: I am the helper, they are the helped. My desire to help is a manifestation of my metaphysical desire: I want to feel worthwhile, to be seen as productive. I want people to speak highly of me. I want to experience *being*. My rivalrous desires cannot save these young people from their rivalrous desires.

The youth minister's task?

The youth minister's task is not to help young people. It is to follow Jesus on the way to freedom. The task is to become aware of one's own rivalry, fear, and desires, and to enter into mimesis with the God of the gospels, who is free from those things. In doing so, we will begin to exhibit what James Alison calls a 'concavity'. Like a crater in the surface of the earth, this concavity is evidence that something has happened. The crater

evidences that a meteorite landed here, and scientists make deductions about the meteorite by studying the crater. Equally, the life which has opened itself to faith begins to show evidence of an occurrence: what James Alison calls “undergoing God” (Alison, 2007). In this scenario, by becoming open to faith, I will become more relaxed and less fearful, and this will have a much more significant impact on the lives of the young people I work with than a religious education class could. The youth minister, in other words, is justified by faith.

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings”
(Romans 5.1-3a).

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Book Reviews

The Naked God: Wrestling for a Grace-ful Humanity

Vincent Strudwick (with Jane Shaw)

Darton, Longman and Todd, London 2017; £12.99; 192pp;
ISBN 978 0 53256 2

The Naked God is a charming and honest review of why the Christian faith in the UK finds itself in such a pickle, with falling attendances, too many expensive buildings, too few clergy, very little respect among adults and almost complete ignorance among young people. Does the Church (not just Anglicans, but in general) have a future? If so how can it happen? That's the question Strudwick and Shaw attempt to answer.

The title of the book is a reference to the thesis that "every generation puts 'clothes' onto God to help their understanding". Therefore, we need to 'clothe' God in such a way as to make him accessible to the people of the 21st century.

Vincent Strudwick is an historical theologian, now in his eighties, so brings a very long view of the decline. Jane Shaw is also an

historian. Together, they chart the decline with grace and sympathy, giving praise where it's due and careful, thoughtful critique when appropriate. As it's always impossible to chart the future without understanding the past, this critique needs to be read by all in Christian leadership.

There is also an excellent description of the way in which the Christian faith was changed by the so-called 'conversion' of the Emperor Constantine, which transformed a lively, organic early Christendom into an institution with a canon of Scripture, rules, laws and other methods of imperial control and manipulation. The thesis of the authors is that all these systems are now breaking down and in many cases have already done so, leaving a lot of uncertainty about what the future might hold.

Where the authors are on less firm ground is in trying to imagine a way forward into that future. They helpfully describe and take heart from a number of creative initiatives in alternative ways of using existing buildings, which is fine for congregations and buildings in cities and among the affluent areas of our land, but they have little to offer to areas of rural poverty or de-population, where something much more radical (such as abandoning the church buildings altogether in favour of homes or community centres!) is needed.

Nevertheless, I strongly recommend that you buy this book. You won't agree with everything in it, but it will encourage and provoke creative thinking, which is something our Christian faith surely and sorely needs more than anything else at this moment in time!

Alun Brookfield

Body: Biblical Spirituality for the Whole Person

Paula Gooder

SPCK, London 2016; 162pp; £9.98; ISBN 978 0 281 07100 5

"Body"! Don't worry. This isn't a new Christian 'Workout' book! However, this book definitely involves exercise - it will get your brain working - because this book is dangerous to read. It's one of those books which are so comfortable to read that you are lulled into thinking, 'This is easy. Was there really a need to write a book on it all?' Then someone asks you to explain to them what the book says, and all that easy logic and common sense evaporates from your mind.

Paula Gooder is aware of the context into which she writes. Most of us have conflicting feelings about our bodies. Advertisers are aware

of this too, which is why so much time and expense is put into getting us to hand over hard-earned cash for all kinds of body-care products. Christian thinking is often not sure how to respond to this - we have a confused view of the body. The body is understood to be contrary to the spiritual, which can lead some Christians to go to extremes to distance themselves from their bodies, far beyond the usual discipline of self-control. Gooder is very clear that spirituality and physicality, in particular the body, are not opposites: spirituality includes the body. Once this realization is grasped, a whole range of new thinking becomes apparent.

Gooder's thinking is very much in sympathy with that of Tom Wright, but travels a different path from a shared beginning. Her tone is very helpful; she writes with humility. Gooder is very clear about her understanding of the body in New Testament theology, but rather than offer her thoughts as the definitive statement on the matter, she lays out her thinking for all to inspect. It's as if she's saying, "This is what I believe the New Testament to be saying. This is how I understand it. What do you think?"

Gooder examines what the New Testament as a whole thinks about the body, but her primary focus is the thinking of Paul. She believes firmly that the body is a key aspect of Paul's theology, a motif used in many ways. Consequently, his thinking about the body touches many elements of his theology. As a result, Gooder touches many questions we may wish to ask about what God is doing in Christ: questions about the nature of the resurrection, about identity, about the Church as the body of Christ, about the nature of body, and of spirit and the relation between the two.

Gooder writes, "Paul has a carefully nuanced and largely positive view of the body and... he views a mature and proper response to our bodies as an essential part of Christian life and faith." (p.7). This book is a real help for us as we attempt to make this response ourselves.

Kim Hitch

119 - My Life as a Bisexual Christian

Jaime Sommers

Darton, Longman and Todd, 2016; 189pp; £9.99;

ISBN 978 0 232 53257 9

The 119 of the title is a reference to the number of words dedicated to the subject of bisexuality in the Church of England's statement, *Issues in Human Sexuality* - far too few! The author is an openly

bisexual person, meaning that she finds both males and females attractive. A convert to the Christian faith in her twenties, she is married to a loving and supportive man, but feels the need for female physical (although non-sexual) contact. This led to a momentary unexpected physicality with a close female friend, who then betrayed Sommers by accusing her of having initiated and manipulated the relationship. So far, so interesting.

However, if you're looking to find some clarity of thought about bisexuality, I think this book will disappoint you. Although Sommers writes attractively, with great energy and openness, I finished reading with a clear impression that this book is primarily about 1) the incompetence, rigidity and confusion of the Church of England in dealing with female sexuality and 2) the author's journey from a Charismatic-Evangelical environment where she met precious little Christ-like love and compassion, to a rediscovered faith which her previous 'friends' would have called 'liberal'.

The key players are Sommers and her relationships; the rigidity and ignorance of the Church of England hierarchy; some wonderfully caring friends and colleagues; and Sommers' husband, Ed, who emerges as something of a hero for the way he stood by his wife throughout a time of great torment.

Having myself endured an Anglican investigation (in my case for false allegations of financial misconduct), I felt for Jaime Sommers, because she found (as did I) that those who were supposed to be supporting her were also the ones investigating the charges against her, leaving her isolated, alone, frightened, unsupported and unable to know whom to trust.

Do read this book and resolve to be slow to judge and quick to love and support. It deserves to be very influential, not least because it shows us how poor we are at dealing with those whose sexuality is different from our own.

Alun Brookfield

Faith Generation

Nick Shepherd

SPCK London 2016; 194pp; £12.99; ISBN 978 028 10738 87

Faith Generation, in the context of this book, refers to the practice of generating faith. Starting with the phenomenon of church decline, it is about how to restore, or renew, the relationship between young people and the church. The driving force behind the

book is a piece of empirical research undertaken in two real-life youth ministry settings: a church-based youth group, and an inner-city outreach project, both with a strong focus on faith. Shepherd writes about Christian identity, the plausibility of faith, choice, charismatic experiences, the applicability of faith to life outside of the church, and more, culminating in some practical suggestions to help the (youth) minister generate faith in young people, and reverse the trend of decline.

Shepherd is clearly very knowledgeable of his context, and the wider field of youth ministry. One gets the impression that he knows intimately the settings in which he is undertaking his fieldwork, and the bibliography of *Faith Generation* in itself would be enough to see a youth work student through a degree. The engagement with contemporary youth ministry theory feels effortless. Having until recently been in charge of the Institute for Children, Youth and Mission, this might come as no surprise.

It was also gratifying to read an academic piece of writing that is so grounded in real practice. Each chapter ends with questions to reflect on, and the practical suggestions at the end of the book are helpful and challenging.

My only reservation is that I feel the parameters of youth ministry are a bit too tightly defined. The contexts in which Shepherd undertook his research are, in reality, very similar. Both operate within a classically Evangelical framework, with a dualistic focus on conversion underscored by testimony, Alpha courses, and charismatic experiences of God. Although this book isn't directly about putting more bums on seats, there are times in which that kind of language feels very near.

Ultimately, this book is about reversing decline by trying harder. it operates within a conceptual framework in which salvation is dependent on human agency. Of course, this is a prevalent theological model, and one which has some merit, but it is an incomplete image. At times, Shepherd shows signs of critical engagement with his framework, but never really goes quite far enough for me.

Faith Generation is a well-written and thorough evaluation of an area of youth ministry. It will not fit every youth work context, but it is an important contribution to those areas in which it does fit. I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in the study of youth ministry, and particularly to those who are running the kind

of Evangelical youth groups that Shepherd writes about. An interesting companion piece to *Faith Generation* would be Jason Lief's *Poetic Youth Ministry*, in which Lief suggests that we might demonstrate God's love to young people by letting them go. Reading both books together would give the reader an interesting critical dialogue about the issue of decline, and how best to respond.

Tim Leeson

Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in the Light of Pentecost

Craig Keener

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2016; 521pp; £34.99 hardback;
ISBN 978 080 2874 399

My daughter loves her Pentecostal Church. Attending its services, however, for me is difficult, mostly because so much of its preaching does not ring true - at least not biblically true. Reading *Spirit Hermeneutics* unfortunately does not help in this regard, but it does help me understand my reservations. It is certainly not for lack of academic excellence in style or content (half of the text is in footnotes). Keener has a compellingly gentle and plain academic style of writing with which to dismiss his critics. He is an accomplished exegete, such that he may seem irrefutable. Furthermore, the book is brilliantly organised so as to present his point of view to best effect.

My problem is that I was a seminarian at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (just 'up the road' from Asbury) in the late seventies. Frank Tupper's course on *Bible and Revelation* offered a wide range of understandings and not a false dichotomy of historical criticism versus the spiritual. Eric Rust in *Philosophy of Religion* taught me a commitment to truth and an understanding of Kant and Kierkegaard which deepened my understanding of faith beyond that which is offered in this text. Joe Callaway's *Biblical Archaeology* forever changed me as he brought transparency to the Old Testament, in particular to its humanity that is so more profound than that given by piety. Hugo Culpepper's Mission Courses introduced me to the art of listening without condemnation to Marxists, Witches, Hindus and Buddhists that clearly Keener needs to learn. My father's unforgettable courses on the *Kingdom of God* and *Revelation* left me awestruck as he demonstrated the power of multifaceted biblical exegesis.

The more I read of *Spirit Hermeneutics*, the more I came upon a deeper problem that is theological and trinitarian. It is a truism that we have a notion of divinity given us by our culture. My answer to this is that recommended by 'red letter' Baptists, the dictum that when we take care to understand the words of Jesus first (and live by them), then the rest of the Bible takes care of itself. We must do the same with our doctrine of the Trinity, since then our understanding of God and the Holy Spirit become inseparable from the meaning we give to the title, 'Lord Jesus Christ'. Only then may we break out of the constraints of our cultural understandings of God and Spirit. If we could do this, the church might be revolutionised by the Spirit of Pentecost.

To me, Keener's hermeneutic seems to support a doctrine of the 'Lordship of the Bible' which, far from renewing the church, though not fundamentalist, runs the risk of killing the spirit - a contradiction of Pentecost.

Stephen Beasley-Murray

Vainglory: The Forgotten Vice

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung

Wm B Eerdmans, 2014; 167pp; £8.99; ISBN 978 0 8028 7129 9

The vices of pride and vainglory, and the virtue of humility are tricky, as DeYoung acknowledges. To write a book that seeks to enhance one's reputation seems not so bad a thing to accomplish, not least when the whole academic enterprise is grounded in one's publishing record, but in so doing might not vainglory be an unwelcome outcome — and to write about it, doubly ironic. Nonetheless, this is one of the prevailing sins of our age, and we are indebted to DeYoung for this accomplished exploration of its character and dangers.

The opportunities for vainglory are legion, from the entry in Facebook to the obsession with the selfie and the attendant high-maintenance appearance; from the red carpet to those questions asked at professional academic conferences which are designed to demonstrate just what a smart guy the questioner is, compared to the jerk who just delivered the results of their last 5 years' research in the form of an hour's lecture.

Even in church — no, especially in church — we are not immune. Perhaps it is why the church is the last place you might want to acknowledge actual sins, rather than the comforting 'general

confession' behind which we hide. This vice is a big deal, and ministers are most prone to it.

This exploration by DeYoung is clear, easily read (which is not a vice!) and to the point. She places vainglory in the context of the proper demonstration of glory, what Aquinas describes as "goodness that is displayed." When rooted in human dignity derived from God's gracious approval of us, it becomes easier to shrug off the need for approval from others. She continues with a description of the varieties of vainglory, (chapter 2); its origins in pride and fear (chapter 3); and its counter in honesty and the avoidance of hypocrisy. The monastic tradition and Aquinas preside behind this analysis, and the resources of the desert tradition are brought fully to the fore.

This book stands within the growing movement that emphasises practices as the way of forming Christian character and virtue, both spiritual practices and community ones, so that we might not live under the sign of vainglory's disordered love, but live with the ability to appreciate and value the goodness and success of others, while avoiding the hunger for approval of others that rots the soul.

This is a beautiful book, necessary with relevance of an urgency in our contemporary culture that leads me to say 'buy it, read it, and learn from it.' It might just save a ministry, and it might be yours.

Paul Goodliff

Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life

Rowan Williams

SPCK, 2016; £8.99; 86pp; ISBN 978 0 281 07662 8

It takes huge ability to write both the monograph on *Arius* (SCM 1987), or the papers in *On Christian Theology* (Blackwell 2000), and this wonderfully simple (yet profound) book on discipleship. I guess, when you have all the academic plaudits you need, and after the challenges of his Archbishopric, then Williams can do just about anything he wants. And the variety is mind-blowing — literary criticism on Dostoevsky, his own poetry, continuing theological work of the highest quality and broadest range — but most recently, books aimed at the ordinary reader. *Being Disciples* is just such a book (he has recently written similarly on St Paul, Mark's Gospel and *What is Christianity?*)

Discipleship as contemplation and action; enacted faith, hope and love; forgiveness, holiness and faith in a modern democratic society, and life in the Spirit are the areas explored.

So, three things. First, this is simply one of the best short books on what it means to follow Christ available today. It draws from a wide set of resources, from Scripture to St John of the Cross, and avoids that Christian confessional sectarianism that so disfigures some treatments of discipleship. I would use it for the new Christian and happily trust the Spirit to use it to deepen their discipleship.

Second, the questions posed at the end of each chapter lend this book to use as a small group resource. I'd much rather use this than that genre of small group material that consists in asking a series of questions to which the answer are pretty obvious.

Third, while it is beautifully written, and profound in its brevity, why its 86 (small) pages warrant a price tag of almost nine pounds is beyond me. Maybe that is what it costs these days to publish what are short runs compared with the blockbuster novel, but I am dismayed that it costs as much as the latest paperback novel. However, even at this price, I warmly recommend it.

Paul Goodliff

Encountering the Bible

Andrew Village

SCM, London 2016; 130pp; £14.99; ISBN 978 0 334 05397 2

The author is an Anglican minister, now Professor of Practical and Empirical Theology at York St John University. Among his interests are the influence of the psychology-type models of personality on the ways academics, clergy and laity read and understand the Bible. We all recognise that how people understand the Bible will be influenced by the reader's culture, education, upbringing, race and gender. For me, the most helpful part of the book was the explanation of how the approaches we take to Scripture will often also be influenced by our Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) of personality.

Using the MBTI categories, readers who psychologically prefer sensing over intuition will give more attention to the details of the text and may prefer literal interpretations, whereas those who prefer intuition will be more comfortable with imagery and metaphors and also care more about the big picture. In the same way, readers who prefer feeling over thinking will relate to the

human dimensions of a text, whereas those who prefer thinking will be more interested in principles and arguments. This theory offers one explanation for why people with very similar backgrounds and beliefs might come to understand the same Bible passage very differently. It also reinforces the great value of studying the Bible in groups, where people of different personality types can share their different insights.

The author discusses how different approaches to biblical interpretation can lead readers to a variety of understandings of a particular text, and separately to different understandings of the authority of Scripture, although he does appear to have an unstated bias towards reader-response approaches. He helpfully explains reasons why different interpretations of a text might arise, but then leaves the possibilities rather more wide open than jobbing preachers and pastors might wish. For example, in a section entitled 'Squidgy Bible', he writes, "The answer to the question, 'Can the Bible mean whatever we want it to mean?' is a qualified yes" (p.59). Regrettably, he does not offer meaningful parameters for distinguishing between which understandings might be preferable, which might be defensible and which others might be impossible.

I enjoyed this book and would happily recommend it, but I am unsure to whom. The first chapter begins, "This book is intended for people who wonder if we need the Bible at all, rather than those who already read and use it." (p.1), yet there are many sections, such as those on inspiration, inerrancy, literalism, sufficiency and exclusivity, and on the personality types, which would be hard going for anybody not already familiar with the material. His discussion of (the) five ways people can interpret 'commands of God' for moral and ethical theory would be both inaccessible and irrelevant to his declared readership. That said, even though we would probably all disagree with different parts for different reasons, this book is a very readable way for ministers to brush up on our hermeneutics.

Peter Thomas

Human Being - insights from Psychology and the Christian Faith

Jocelyn Bryan

SCM Press, London 2016; 270pp; £25.00; ISBN 978 0334 04924 1

Enter the church in darkness, except for spot-lights on a stand-up comedian/preacher. Night club music deafens, except one can hear words like God and Jesus. Everyone is 20-30 years of age - Bible

readings from one's smartphone app. As my eyes adjust I find a seat. Eventually the preacher reads the story of an encounter between Jesus, a tax collector and a blind man. He puts us - 'everyman' - into the story and at its conclusion asks us to raise our hands - *'teneo et teneor'* - that we may be raised up from our quiet despair and know the love of Jesus enveloping us. Our stories were brought into the story of scripture, theology and psychology all fused together. We were invited to go to a 'connect' corner afterwards - baptisms, next Sunday, would be conducted in wetsuits in a temporary pool to be erected on the pavement outside. The church I visited in Harlem last week has gone from 0 to 100 members in five weeks.

In the first 99 pages of her book, Jocelyn Bryan provides a psychological understanding of narrative and human personality that would support such preaching. 150 pages of application then follows to assist the pastoral counsellor or visitor. My reservations on this plausibly argued book arises from my own story. I became an atheist precisely because of such preaching and use of scripture at a student mission in the East End of London in the late 1960's. The language of mission was the language of Zion - but it seemed hollow to me. It dawned on me that plain psychology of the human condition was all that was needed - the rest was myth. What brought me back to faith was also a darkened church with restricted light, but its worship was that of coming upon holy ground. Existence was experienced as holy and sacred. Liturgy and preaching proclaimed Jesus mediating that mystery, the mystery of the human heart, holiness, justice, love and the fullness of life. Joy and personal transformation followed, but it was philosophy and theology working together that brought me understanding. Though I value and respect the psychology of personality and narrative so ably presented here, I have been more helped by depth psychology because it speaks for me to the irreducible mystery of the epiphany of 'love-in-flesh', the mystery both 'tremendum' and 'fascinans'. It gives religious language its provenance that can never be reduced to telling stories or theories of psychology.

Stephen Beasley-Murray

Short notes

In **The Parish Handbook** (SCM Press, 2016; 175pp; £19.99; ISBN 978 0 334 05359 0), Bob Mayo, with Cameron Collington and Bishop David Gillett, covers a huge amount of ground about parish ministry. In the author's own words, it is "a book of narrative theology". It is not intended to be a workshop manual about how to maintain and mend the local church! It's easy to read, gently provocative, and should be on every minister's bookshelf. Only the price might put you off buying it.

Fresh Expressions has become part of the UK church scene, so it's good at last to have the story of one particular Fresh Expression, *Sorted*, in Bradford. Written by Andy Milne and Michael Moynagh, **The DNA of Pioneer Ministry** (SCM Press, 2016; 246pp; £19.99; ISBN 978 0 334 05409 2) is a valuable reflective resource for anyone who, like me, is trying hard to imagine the shape of the post-Christendom church in the UK.

Afterlife: A History of Life after Death (I B Tauris, London 2016; 236pp; £25 hardback; ISBN 978 1 78453 496 7), by Philip C Almond, Emeritus Professor of Religion at the University of Queensland, is an erudite and readable study of the afterlife in the imagination of the Christian West. In seven chapters, it deals with the destiny of the dead; the geography of the underworld; souls and bodies; purgatory and beyond; the sleep of death; the saved and the damned; and heavens, sacred and secular.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **Light When It Comes: Trusting Joy, Facing Darkness and Seeing God in Everything** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2016; 165pp; £11.99; ISBN 978 0 8028 7399 6), by Chris Anderson, an English professor and poet, retreat leader and Catholic deacon, encourages Christians to remember and reflect upon moments of light, struggle, and of joy – in effect to engage in the Ignatian *examen* of conscience.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **The Invisible Among Us: Hidden, Forgotten, Stateless** (World Council of Churches, Geneva 2016; 136pp; £5; ISBN 978 2 82541 684 6), by Semegnish Asfaw, is a sobering reflection on the plight of the more than ten million stateless people around the world.

Surprised by the Commandments: Discovering New Depth and Richness (IVP, London 2016; 160pp; £8.99; ISBN 978 1 783 59440 5), by Graham Benyon, minister of Cambridge's Grace Church, first saw the light of day as a series of sermons. Many

preachers will find this a helpful resource when preaching on the Ten Commandments.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **An Anomalous Jew: Paul Among Jews, Greeks and Romans** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2016; 310pp; £18.99; ISBN 978 0 8028 6769 8), by Australian scholar Michael F Bird, explores how Paul could be thoroughly Jewish, and yet become a figure of notoriety and controversy among his Jewish compatriots. This is more a book for students and academics, rather than for working pastors.

First published in the USA in 2015, **The Pilgrim** (Marylebone House, London 2016; 165pp; £8.99; ISBN 978 1 910 67440 6), by Davis Bunn, is a highly imaginative novel in which the author tells the story of Empress Helena, and features the discovery of the True Cross. More for light reading, this is good story-telling.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **Theology of Power: International Perspectives** (Paulist Press, New York 2016; 230pp; £19.99; ISBN 978 0 8091 4945 2), edited by Stephen Bullivant, Eric Marcelo Genilo, Daniel Franklin Pilarios and Agnes Brazal, contains 13 wide-ranging essays written within a Roman Catholic context. The context of these essays is the bullying by senior clergy as also child abuse within the church. From a Protestant perspective, the usefulness of this book is limited.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **The Lausanne Legacy: Landmarks in Global Mission** (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts 2016; 200pp; £9.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 830 3), edited by J E M Cameron, contains the agreed texts of the first, second and third Lausanne congresses on World Evangelization, as well as the closing addresses and other material. This book is probably more for a theological college library than for a pastor's study.

Companion to the Old Testament: Introduction, Interpretation, Application (SCM Press, London 2016; 271pp; £25; ISBN 978 0 334 05393 4), edited by Hywel Clifford with Douglas Earl, Ryan O'Dowd and Lena Sofia-Tiemeyer, is primarily a text-book for theological students. It is divided into five main sections: Pentateuch; Historical Books; Poetry and Wisdom; Prophetic Books; and Apocrypha/Deutero-Canon. The emphasis on interpretation and application is particularly welcome.

The Things He Did: The Story of Holy Week (SPCK, London 2016; 79pp; £7.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07623 9), by Stephen Cotterell, Bishop of Chelmsford, looks at six key things Jesus did:

he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey; overturned the money changers' tables; ate with tax collectors and sinners; washed his disciples' feet; broke bread and shared wine; and prayed that there might be another way. Simple, but thoughtful, this has been produced as a Lent Book, but also offers a way into Holy Week for the preacher.

The Gift of Leadership According to the Scriptures (Canterbury Press, Norwich 2016; 92pp; £9.99; ISBN 978 1 84825 865 5), by Steven Croft, the new Bishop of Oxford, is made up of ten Old Testament Bible studies in which, using the lens of leadership, the focus is on beginning (1 Kings 12.1-19); tending (Psalm 23); hope (Ezekiel 47.1-12); pain (1 Kings 19); team (Exodus 18.13-27); gentleness (Proverbs 15.1-7); chaos (Genesis 1.1-2.4); covenant (Ruth); change (1 Samuel 7.15-8.22); and vision (Numbers 13-14). An imaginative approach to leadership, this simple book could be particularly useful to men and women preparing for ministry.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **Preaching the Luminous Word: Biblical Sermons and Homiletical Essays** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2016; 332pp; £22.99; ISBN 978 0 8028 7423 8), by Ellen F Davis, Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School, consists of 50 sermons selected by Austin McIver Dennis. Ellen Davis is clearly a gifted preacher, blessed with a wonderful mastery of the English language, whose sermons are stimulating and insightful. Here is a great resource for preachers looking of new ways of expounding familiar Scriptures.

Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled: the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission 1983-2005 (ARCIC II) (SPCK, London 2016; 350pp; £14.99; ISBN 978 0 281077 793), edited by Adelbert Denaux, Nicholas Sagovsky and Charles Sherlock, is divided into three sections: Part A deals with the agreed statements of ARCIC II; Part B with the scope and method of Arcic II's work; and Part C with the Arcic II story. This undoubtedly will become a standard text for ecumenists and denominational leaders.

First published in the USA in 2012, **In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy and Survival** (SPCK, London 2016; 234pp; £9.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07552 2), by John Dougill, Professor of British Studies in a Japanese university, raises question such as: "What is it about Japanese culture that makes it so resistant to Western Christianity?" This is essential reading for Western Christians visiting or doing business with Japan.

It will also be of interest to film-goers, as it is the background to the 'major motion picture', *Silence*, by Shusaku Endo.

First published in 1996 by the Epworth Press, **The Acts of the Apostles** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2nd edition 2016; 393pp; £21.99; ISBN 978 0 8028 7402 3), by J D G Dunn, is almost the same as the first edition, save that it has a foreword by Scot McKnight, and an extra page of bibliography dealing with the period 1996-2016. It is a useful commentary on what Dunn calls "the most exciting book in the New Testament".

Published in *The Bible Speaks Today* series, **The Message of Spiritual Warfare** (IVP, London 2016; 283pp; £12.99; ISBN 978 1 783 59435 1), by Keith Ferdinando, who has taught both in Congo and here in the UK, and is now associate pastor at Woodford Evangelical Church, is yet another excellent resource for preachers. Significantly, this is not a book which engages in undue triumphalism for, as the author is at pains to point out, spiritual warfare "takes the shape of a cross".

Exploring Old Testament Wisdom: Literature and Themes (Apollos, London 2016; 252pp; £17.99; ISBN 978 1 783 59430 6), edited by David Firth and Lindsay Wilson, surveys recent developments in the study of Old Testament wisdom. Although written by academics, the issues addressed - such as justice, faith, suffering, meaning and sexuality - are very relevant today.

Destiny: Learning to Live by Preparing to Die (IVP, London 2016; 166pp; £9.99; ISBN 978 1 783 59285 2), by David Gibson, minister of Trinity Church, Aberdeen, is a most unusual and thought-provoking exposition of Ecclesiastes. Each chapter has questions for discussion and personal reflection. For small groups willing to read, it could be a useful resource, as well as for ministers wanting to have a go at preaching a sermon series on Ecclesiastes!

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **Preaching Christ from Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2016; 595pp; £26.99; ISBN 978 0 8028 7366 8), by Sidney Greidanus, professor emeritus of preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary in the USA, is a real treasure-trove. The bulk of the book is devoted to the study of 22 psalms, in which the author provides verse-by-verse exposition, bridges to Christ in the New Testament, and ideas for placing the psalmist's words into contemporary context. A superb resource, this is a book for every preacher to buy!

The Beauty and the Horror (SPCK, London 2016; 240pp; £19.99 hardback; ISBN 978 0 281 07693 2), by Richard Harries, the former Bishop of Oxford, is a truly remarkable book, combining wide-ranging learning with orthodox Christian faith, as the author searches for God in a suffering world. Toward the end of the book, Harries writes: "The case against the possibility of a wise and loving power behind creation does often seem overwhelming as we listen to or read the news about the daily hells people find themselves in... From a Christian point of view, however, there is a clue that is all too easily overlooked... That is.. Jesus crucified and risen, in whom is seen the self-emptying of God in creation, and his identification with the whole of humanity in their travail". Harries acknowledges that that "the contradiction between the beauty and horror of life cannot be fully resolved", and that ultimately there is mystery. He quotes the Oxford New Testament scholar, G B Caird, who, commenting on Ephesians 3.19, wrote: "Man must know God or perish, but unless he knows him as ultimate mystery, he does not know him at all". This is a book which needs much pondering!

Re-Enchanting the Activist: Spirituality and Social Change (Jessica Kingsley, London 2016; 176pp; £8.99; ISBN 978 1 78592 041 7), by Keith Hebden, Director of the Urban Theology Social Unit based in Sheffield, is a book "for activists of all faiths and of good faith". Through a series of reflections, stories and 'spiritual' exercises, it seeks to address the problem of people who have become tired of 'the cause'. In the words of the author, the book's purpose is to invite readers "to create spiritual habits that lead to mystical experiences that re-enchant our activism".

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **Great Awakenings: Historical Perspectives Today** (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts, 2016; 189pp; £28.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 767 2), edited by David Horn and Gordon L Isaac, is a collection of 11 essays by American academics with a focus on North America, and therefore of less interest to a British readership.

The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary seeks to bridge the gap between biblical studies and systematic theology. The latest offering in this series is **1 and 2 Thessalonians** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2016; 349pp; £17.99; ISBN 978 0 8028 2552 0), by Andy Johnson of the Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City. This excellent commentary will be of great help to preachers.

Prepare your Heart for the Midnight Cry (SPCK, London 2016; 192pp; £9.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07772 4), by R T Kendall, a former pastor of London's Westminster Chapel, is a lengthy popular

exposition of the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25.1-13). Some of the illustrations could be of use to preachers.

Published in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series, **Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth** (Apollos, London 2016; 210pp; £14.99; ISBN 978 1 783 59448 1), by Peter H W Lau and Gregory Goswell, looks at the Book of Ruth through a variety of interpretative lenses, and at the same time seeks to enter into dialogue with other books in the Bible. Ministers preaching through Ruth would benefit from reading this study.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader** (Kregel Academic, Grand Rapids 2016; 351pp; £30.99 hardback; ISBN 978 0 8254 4342 8), edited by Karen H Jobes and others, is a beautifully produced student textbook, more for the budding scholar than the pastor!

Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth behind the Birth of Christ (Hodder and Stoughton, London 2016; 148pp; £12.99 hardback; ISBN 978 1 473 64258 4), by Tim Keller, pastor of New York's Redeemed Presbyterian Church, takes a fresh look at the Christmas story. Although popular in style, preachers may well find this a helpful resource.

Catching the Wave: Preaching the New Testament as Rhetoric (IVP, London 2016; 199pp; £11.99; ISBN 978 1 78359 436 8), by Tim MacBride, who teaches New Testament and Preaching at Morling College, the Baptist college in Sydney, Australia, has a particular focus on the Epistles and aims to help preachers to say and do what the text says – so that in this way they might 'catch the wave' and not swim against the current.

Finding God in the Waves: How I Lost My Faith and Found It Again Through Science (Hodder & Stoughton, London 2016; 274pp; £13.99; ISBN 978 1 473 65368 9), by Mike McHargue, is a popular account of how the author discovered that science was a means to Christian believing. It would appeal to lay people interested in apologetics.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **Retiring Retirement** (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts; 285pp; £17.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 808 2), by Rodney Macready, an Australian Baptist minister, argues that retirement is not a biblical concept, and should be therefore rejected by Christians. "If you're already retired and in the middle of a self-indulgent binge, I want you to repent. You may think you're entitled to this – that it's your

God-given right after years of hard work. I don't think you'll find that in the Bible". Much of the book consists of detailed biblical exegesis seeking to prove that we have been created to work, and that the biblical ideal for the aged was "much more active, engaged and responsible for the community than the modern practice of retirement encourages us to be". I am not sure that most ministers would find the examples particularly helpful or creative.

The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion Is Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian (Hodder and Stoughton, London 2016; 305pp; £13.99; ISBN 978 1 473 62671 3), by Brian McLaren, challenges readers to leave their "cages and ruts" and become "hopeful pilgrims moving forward in the journey of faith". McLaren is concerned for Christians to "rediscover their faith not as a problematic system of beliefs, but as a just and generous way of life, rooted in contemplation and expressed in compassion". This is an attractive, but controversial presentation, which is not concerned for organised religion, but rather for a spiritual radicalism dedicated to healing the planet, building peace, overcoming poverty and injustice, and collaborating with other faiths to ensure a better future for all. Every chapter ends with a page of things to contemplate, talk about, and to act upon.

First published in 1994, **A Scenic Route Through the Old Testament** (IVP, London, 2nd edition 2016; 214pp; £8.99; ISBN 978 1 783 59419 1), by the late Alec Motyer, is a popular introduction to some of the key themes of the Old Testament, written with ordinary church members in view. This second edition offers weekly guided readings at the end of each chapter, and a month of daily readings in the Appendix.

Be A Better Leader: Personality Type and Difference in Ministry (SPCK, London 2016; 252pp; £14.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07583 6), by Graham Osborne, an Anglican rector and a qualified Myers-Briggs practitioner "who has a passion for helping those in ministry enjoy life in all its fullness", is an interesting exploration of how leadership might be improved using the Myers-Briggs psychological type theory. There are 16 types. Mine is ENTJ (Dominant Extraverted Thinking with Introverted iNtuition), a 'decision strategist' – "ENTJs are quick-witted, innovative problem-solvers with a natural flair for leadership. Intelligent and perceptive, they are quick, assertive and positive, making decisions with clarity and logic, and seldom troubled by second thoughts"!

First published in the USA, **Knowing God Through the Year** (Hodder and Stoughton, London 2016; 313pp; £14.99; ISBN 978 1

473 63979 9) consists of daily brief selections from *Knowing God* by J I Packer, headed with an appropriate Scripture verse and followed by a 'thought' for reflection compiled and edited by Carol Nystrom. Personally, I would prefer more Scripture and less Packer!

First published in 1976 by Hendrickson of Peabody, Massachusetts, as part of the *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* series, **Martin Buber** (reprinted 2016; 106pp; £10.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 859 4), by Stephen M Panko; and **Soren Kirkegaard** (reprinted 2016; 121pp; £10.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 814 3), by Elmer H Duncan, are helpful introductions for students to key Christian thinkers. A similar helpful introduction, which was first published by Hendrickson in 2007, is **Dietrich Bonhoeffer: An Introduction to his Thought** (reprinted 2016; 258pp; £14.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 850 1), by the German theologian Sabine Damm. All these books are available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh.

Songs for a Saviour's Birth: Journey through Advent with Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah, the Angels, Simeon and Anna (IVP, London 2016; 74pp; £6.99; ISBN 978 1 783 59447 4), by William Philip, minister of The Troon Church in Glasgow, is a helpful down-to-earth resource for ministers wanting to find fresh ways of preaching the Christmas story.

Thankfulness: a colouring book (SPCK, London 2016; £7.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07736 6), designed by Lizzie Preston, is designed to help users to focus on thanksgiving (there are 30 helpful quotes to that effect) and thereby relax and unwind.

Reason and Wonder: Why Science and Faith Need Each Other (SPCK, London 2016; 211pp; £12.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07524 9), edited by the distinguished mathematician Eric Priest, is a veritable cornucopia of good things. The book contains 13 essays by various scholars and scientists, including 'God, science and the New Atheism' by Kevin Ward; 'The origin and end of the universe: a challenge for Christianity' by David Wilkinson; 'Evolution, faith and science' by Kenneth Miller; 'Evolution and evil' by Michael Murray and Jeff Schloss; 'Psychological science meets Christian faith' by David Myers; 'Being a person: towards an integration of neuroscientific and Christian perspectives' by John Wyatt; 'Do the miracles of Jesus contradict science?' by Mark Harris; and 'Can a scientist trust the New Testament?' by N T Wright. The final chapter is devoted to questions for private thought or group discussion. There is also a ten page bibliography.

Julian of Norwich: A Very Brief History (SPCK, London 2016; 97pp; £12.99 hardback; ISBN 978 0 281 07737 3), by Janina Ramirez, course director on the certificate and diploma in History at the University of Oxford, explores the history and the significance of the first known woman to write in English – sometimes termed a female Chaucer.

First published in 2009 and reprinted seven times since, **The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation** (IVP, London 2016; 192pp; £9.99; ISBN 978 1 78359 529 7), by Michael Reeves, President of Oxford's Union School of Theology, has been re-issued to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. Popular in style, I appreciated the four-page appendix with recommended further reading.

I enjoy the offerings of Marylebone House, part of the SPCK group, which specialises in ecclesiastical mysteries. One of their latest offerings is **The Sinister Student** (London 2016; 267pp; £5.99; ISBN 978 1 910674 32 1), by Kel Richards, an Australian journalist, who sets his murder mystery in 1936, where C S Lewis and his friends are the sleuths! A great light-hearted read.

The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation (SPCK, London 2016; 220pp; £17.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07815 8), by Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest based in New Mexico, consists of material presented by him at two conferences and then edited by Mike Morrell, a gifted communicator and organiser. The underlying theme is the ancient idea that the Trinity is a ceaseless circle dance of life into which the whole creation is invited. This imaginative book needs to be read slowly on retreat.

Christianity: The Biography – Two Thousand Years of the Global Church (IVP, London 2016; 279pp; £12.99; ISBN 978 1 783 59466 5), by Ian J Shaw, Associate International Director of the Langham Scholars Programme, is a delightful overview of the development of the Christian Church world-wide. The author quotes Cicero, who argued that the person without any knowledge of events from before he or she was born would forever remain an infant, and adds: "For Christians the biography of Christianity is the history of their family and an exploration of their heritage. It should be an exciting adventure of self-discovery".

The Evolution of the West: How Christianity Has Shaped our Values (SPCK, London 2016; 190pp; £9.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07520 1), by Nick Spencer, the Research Director of the Theos think-tank, explores the Christian faith's contribution to dignity, rule of law,

welfare, humanism, capitalism, science, human rights, atheism, secularism, nationhood, ethics and democracy. This is a great apologetic tool and essential reading for Christians wanting to engage with the so-called 'new atheists'.

Paul on Baptism: Theology, Mission and Ministry in Context (SCM Press, London 2016; 180pp; £19.99; ISBN 978 0 334 05476 4), by Nicholas Taylor, a minister of the Scottish Episcopal Church, gives a helpful over-view of Paul's teaching on baptism, but somewhat strangely ends up as more concerned with the justification on of the practice of infant baptism, rather than focussing on increasing number of adult converts wishing to be baptised. Nonetheless, this will be a useful textbook for ministerial students, whether they be pedo- or credo-baptists!

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh,

Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook (Kregel Academic, Grand Rapids 2016; 205pp; £16.99; ISBN 978 0 8254 2761 9), by Richard A Taylor of Dallas Theological Seminary, is a textbook for students at home with Hebrew, but wanting to preach in particular from Daniel and Joel. I wonder: to what extent have we in our British theological colleges lowered the bar in terms of what we expect of ministerial students?

First published in English in 1962, **A Little Exercise for Young Theologians** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, reprinted 2016; 74pp; £7.99; ISBN 978 0 8028 7415 3), by Helmut Thielicke, the great post-war German Lutheran preacher, is a wonderful book, worth every penny, and an absolute 'must' for all ministerial students.

Available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh, **The Truth We Owe One Another: Mutual Accountability in the Ecumenical Movement** (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 2016; 353pp; £20; ISBN 978 0 625 44342 8), by Olav Fykse Tveit, the Norwegian General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, is a scholarly work, in which the author argues that mutual accountability is a matter of how we seek the truth together by sharing insights into the truth we carry.

Out of the Silence: Memories, Poems, Reflections (SPCK, London 2016; 139pp; £9.99; ISBN 978 0 281 07761 8), by Terry Waite, the former special envoy for the Archbishop of Canterbury, recalls the highs and lows of his time in captivity in Beirut. A highly readable and compelling book!

Exploring Doubt: Landscapes of Loss and Longing (Darton, Longman and Todd, London 2016; 142pp; £12.99; ISBN 978 0 232

53060 5), by Alex Wright, Executive Editor for Religion and Classical Studies at I B Tauris Publishers, is a wide-ranging exploration of the place of doubt set against the backdrop of his coming to terms with the end of his marriage. The author writes: "Conviction undeniably has its place in life, and many hard decisions require an attitude of positive or single-minded determination to see them through satisfactorily; but as a rule of thumb, doubt is surely a more honest and truthful response to the instabilities and unknowns that life inevitably throws in our direction". Reading this book gives much food for thought.

Vital Truth: Convictions of the Christian Community

(Lutterworth, Cambridge 2016; 262pp; £16.50; ISBN 978 0 7188 9434 4), by Nigel Wright, a former Principal of Spurgeon's College, is an excellent guide to the Christian faith, perhaps aimed more at thoughtful lay people rather than at ministers, although ministers would find this a useful book on which to develop a series of sermons on Christian convictions. I very much liked what the author has to say about the importance of Christians knowing and understanding their faith: "When church members lose a familiarity with the biblical sources of their faith, or have never gained it in the first place, congregational life becomes detached from the very wellsprings that will give it life in times good and bad. And when they are unsure about their convictions, about what it is they believe and why it is they believe it, then the very reasons for being in the church in the first place are undermined."

The Day the Revolution Began: Rethinking the Meaning of

Jesus' Crucifixion (SPCK, London 2016; 440pp; £16.99 hardback; ISBN 978 0 281 06145 7), by N T Wright, is 'vintage Tom Wright', and in that respect has no surprises. Wright argues that the crucifixion of Jesus was "the one moment in history on behalf of all others through which sins would be forgiven, the powers robbed of their power, and humans redeemed to take their place as worshippers and stewards, celebrating the powerful victory of God in his Messiah and so gaining the Spirit's power to make his kingdom effective in the world". Wright emphasises the 'this worldly' aspect of redemption: the revolution brought about by the death of Jesus is not about saving us from our sin so that we can go to heaven, but rather about Jesus restoring human beings with a vocation to play a vital part in God's purposes for the world. I confess to not being totally convinced by Wright's arguments. I also have reservations about Wright's emphasis on the Cross over against the resurrection.

Published by Hendrickson in Peabody, Massachusetts and available in the UK through Alban Books of Edinburgh are the commentaries and study booklets in the *Theology of Work* series. The latest contributions include the study booklets **Genesis** (2016; 75pp; £7.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 809 9); **Acts** (2016; 71pp; £6.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 724 5); and **Economics and Society** (2016; 79pp; £7.99; ISBN 978 1 61970 806 8).

Hodder and Stoughton of London have just re-issued **The NIV Manga Bible** (2016; £16.99 hardback; ISBN 978 1 473 63737 5) with 64 revised full-colour Manga illustrations (i.e. in 'comic' style) featuring some of the key Bible stories. Hodder and Stoughton have also published a 'new' **NIV Pink Polka Dot Journaling Bible with Margins** (2016; £21.99 hardback; ISBN 978 1 473 64014 6) – although the margins are wide, they are more suitable for the odd 'note' rather than actual journaling.

Grove Booklets of Cambridge, all of which are short and to the point, are a great resource. All 28pp in length and priced at £3.95, they represent excellent value for money. Recent booklets include:

Sharing Faith, Using Social Media (Evangelism 115, 2016; ISBN 978 185174 983 6) by Bryony Taylor, an excellent practical guide to reaching the wider online community.

Growing Upwards: The Faith Journey of Christian Young People (Youth 44, 2016; ISBN 978 1 85174 986 7), by Colin Bennett of Moorlands College, is a fairly pedestrian exploration of what church leaders and parents can do to help their young people to deeper maturity in faith.

Nursing and the Mission of the Church (Pastoral 147, 2016; ISBN 978 1 85174 985 0), by Helen Wordsworth, Baptist minister and a Queen's Nurse, argues the case for a parish nursing service as a form of Christian mission – currently in England, Scotland and Wales there are some 80 churches offering such a service.

Managing Change: Practical Change in Churches (Leadership 26, 2016; ISBN 978 1 85174 989 8), by Alison Myers, an Anglican team vicar, who provides some most helpful tools for planning 'transition'.