

metconnexion

WINTER 2022 | COVER PRICE £2.50

FEATURING

DAVID HULL, PETER HATTON, FIONA BRUCE MP, JO FROST, BART WOODHOUSE



Rediscovering our Foundations

'Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age old foundations'

ISAIAH 58:12



EDITORIAL

Marian Izzard

We have entitled the theme of this spring edition of MET Connexion 'Rediscovering our Foundations' as we wanted to give space to remind ourselves of what and in whom we build our faith upon at foundational level and how God continues to use us to build his kingdom as we place our hope and trust in him.

David Hull, Chair of MET, in his article on 'Rediscovering our Foundations' considers what has been lost and how it might be found again. The images used to illustrate this article have been used with kind permission from Chris Parker, a keen photographer based in Devon.

Peter Hatton, former biblical tutor at Wesley College, Bristol and Bristol Baptist College explores Biblical Covenant Theology and how this helps us in our relationship with Jesus and with each other.

Fiona Bruce, MP outlines her campaign for 2022 to 'End the Persecution' encouraging churches to support those who are persecuted for their faith around the world.

Jo Frost, Director of Communications and Engagement at the Evangelical Alliance, explores what it is to be human as we invest in the sure foundation of God whilst facing the pressures of life today.

Bart Woodhouse, Pioneer Mission Enabler explores some insights on the nature of the gospel in the shifting landscape of a post pandemic culture.

Our song selections of 'Every Promise' (From the Breaking of the Dawn) and 'In Christ Alone' have been chosen to reflect the importance of standing on every promise of God's word and to remind ourselves that our ultimate hope can only be found in Christ alone.

Our Covenant hymn (Come let us use the Grace Divine) and The Covenant Prayer are salutary reminders - particularly at the start of a new year - to yield ourselves totally to God in everything and to trust him for all that is to come.

The Bible Study is part three, the final part of our study on Paul's letter to Titus, compiled by Gareth Higgs. This final section looks at 'Spiritual Living'.

Praying Always is compiled by our Prayer Coordinator, Roz Addington who shares what God has laid on her heart and provides us with prayer pointers for a four week cycle.

Please do send in any of your own 'Good News' stories to me at admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

The next edition of MET Connexion will be the spring edition available in May.

Marian

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 5. REDISCOVERING OUR FOUNDATIONS
By David Hull
- 13. CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SCRIPTURE - COVENANT AS TREATY
By Peter Hatton
- 17. 2022: THE YEAR TO CAMPAIGN TO END THE PERSECUTION
By Fiona Bruce MP
- 19. BEING HUMAN
By Jo Frost
- 25. A NEW NORMAL
By Bart Woodhouse

REGULARS

- 3. FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER
By Derek Balsdon
- 10. BIBLE STUDY
By Gareth Higgs
- 22. GOOD NEWS STORIES
- 28. RESOURCE REVIEWS
- 31. PRAYING ALWAYS
- 35. FROM THE CHAIR

CREDITS

Editor: Marian Izzard
Designed by: danielwatsondesign.co.uk
Printed by: cliffe-enterprise.com

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: © Patryk Kosmider, Page 3: © Nicolas Messifet, Page 4: © Vino Li, Page 5-9: Chris Parker, Page 10: © Larm Rmah, Page 11: © Ryan Stone, Page 12: © Annie Spratt, Page 13: © Adalia Botha, Page 15: © Eberhard Grossgasteiger, Page 16: © Guido Da Sacco, Page 17: © Denny Muller, Page 18: © Robert Bye, Page 19: © Milan Popovic, Page 20-21: © Kelly Sikkema, Page 24: © Zhi Xuan, Page 25: © Ali Syaaban, Page 26: © Tyler Pruitt, Page 27: © jajam_e, Page 28: © Tetiana Padurets, Page 31: © pluie_r, Page 34: © Paul Green, Back Cover: © Boguslaw Nowak



FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER

The Revd Derek Balsdon

During the autumn of 2021, I have been pleased to be out and about more in my role as the MET Development Worker. I would be glad to receive invitations for preaching and teaching, either in person or online, for 2022. After having come to know some people through online events, it was great to meet in person at REVIVE. I hope to meet more of you at events during this year, such as ECG, Cliff Festival and Methodist Conference. REVIVE: The MET Prayer Weekend at The Hayes was a highlight during the autumn. We are again grateful to Kevin and Anne-Marie Jones for all their work in organising it, and very thankful for Roz Addington's leading of the morning and evening prayers and for Hilary Balsdon's leading of worship. Around 40 people attended and greatly appreciated the opportunity to share together in worship, fellowship, prayer for revival and biblical teaching, and enjoy hospitality at The Hayes.

Living Through Forgiving was the theme of the weekend, with a focus on how forgiveness helps us to experience life in all its fullness. We considered accepting God's total forgiveness, forgiving others, forgiving ourselves (letting ourselves off the hook for the things we regret) and even forgiving God. I do not believe that God has done anything wrong, so he does not need our forgiveness; yet sometimes we treat God as if he has wronged us, or blame him for not having done more to help us. These negative attitudes towards God damage our relationship with him, so we need to let God off the hook so that our life in Christ can flourish. I have found R T Kendal's forgiveness trilogy very helpful, especially *Totally Forgiving God**. The subtitle *How to trust God when you feel he has let you down*, brings us to the heart of the matter.

Living Through Lamenting was the title of one session. Although I have taught about forgiveness many times, this was my first time teaching about lamenting. The Wikipedia definition begins: *A lament or lamentation is a passionate expression of grief, often in music, poetry, or song form. The grief is most often born of regret, or mourning.*

Over the past couple of years there has been a lot of lamenting going on across the world and within the church. The Covid pandemic has caused many people to lament, not just over the loss of loved ones (owing to other reasons as well as Covid), but also over the loss of freedoms, such as going out to work, education, finance, mental health, etc. Within the Methodist Church in Britain, whilst many people have welcomed the approval of same-sex marriage and cohabitation, many others have lamented because they believe that the church is moving away from its biblical roots. There are also many other more personal reasons for lamenting. Lamenting enables us to express the deep feelings within our hearts, to bring them to God, and to receive his help and healing. Wikipedia also indicates that laments are some of the oldest forms of writing, and there are plenty of examples within our ancient scriptures; Job, Psalms, Lamentations and more. Many of the Psalms include the pouring out of deep laments, as well as expressions of deep trust in God. Even though Lamentations is almost full of laments, it still contains some deep expressions of trust in God, especially 3:22-23, which speaks of the Lord's great love, never failing compassion and great faithfulness. The songs: Great is thy faithfulness and Lord I come before

your throne of grace echo those great and glorious truths. If these words have struck a chord for you, then I encourage you to bring your laments to the Lord, knowing that he loves you, cares for you and will help you through.

Along with the Voice of Methodism Association we have hosted some Zoom meetings for ministers and Local Preachers who are concerned about how best to respond to the annual reaffirmations. Each week I continue to receive communications from those who are struggling to stay within the Methodist Church in Britain, and from those who have resigned. Some are already establishing new churches. I lament with them, and encourage them to keep trusting in the Good Shepherd for strength for the present and guidance for the future.

Even though I am travelling a bit more, the following continue on Zoom: Prayer Meetings, Bible Studies, Bible Teaching Days and Equipping for Ministry (EfM). EfM is the event we put on for presbyters and deacons within the first 5 years of ministry and student ministers. We are grateful that Revd's Nicola and Chris Briggs are organising EfM 2022, and on Saturday 5 February the Revd Andrew Roberts will be speaking on 'Habits for Growth'. If there is anyone within your church or circuit who is eligible to attend EfM, please let them know about it. There will also be a Bible Teaching day on Saturday 5 March entitled Shining for Christ: Learning from Philipians, which will be led by myself and John Hogarth, a Local Preacher and former Chair of MET South West.

In the previous edition of MET Connexion, I mentioned being at my dad's home while he was in hospital; he has made a remarkable recovery, and is living independently again. I am very grateful for all the encouragement that you give to me and to MET, especially your financial and prayer support. It is a wonderful privilege to share together as the Body of Christ.

Yours in Christ Jesus,
Derek

*Totally Forgiving God, R. T. Kendal ISBN 9780340964187, Publisher: John Murray Press

EVERY PROMISE

(FROM THE BREAKING OF THE DAWN)

Keith Getty (b.1974)
& *Stuart Townend (b.1963)*

From the Breaking of the dawn
To the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
That will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.

When I stumble and I sin,
Condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
That in freedom I might live,
So I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
You remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
And I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
You will guide me with you hand
As I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
Every work begun in me,
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair;
Love that casts out every fear
As I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
For the Comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.

REDISCOVERING OUR FOUNDATIONS

David Hull

DAVID HULL, CHAIR OF MET, CONSIDERS WHAT HAS BEEN LOST AND HOW IT MIGHT BE FOUND AGAIN.

A Fellow of the state-sponsored Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is quoted as saying, 'We were asked to look into what accounted for the ... pre-eminence of the West over the world. ... At first, we thought it was because you had more powerful guns than we had. Then we thought it was because you had the best political system. Next, we focused on your economic system. But in the past twenty years, we have realised that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West has been so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don't have any doubt about this' (quoted by Niall Ferguson in 'Civilisation: The West and the Rest').

This Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life in the West has, more recently, been the subject of the agnostic author Tom Holland's masterly, 'Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World'. In it, he demonstrates how, despite the claims (and often ignorance) of those who aggressively pursue a secularising agenda, our whole culture has been

built almost entirely upon Christian assumptions - centred on the humility and power of the Cross of Jesus - which do not make sense when abstracted from the context of the Bible.

“
... we now seem to be in the process of ripping out the heart of our cultural life with the naïve expectation that, when we have extracted it, the blood will continue to pump around the body and sustain its life ...
”

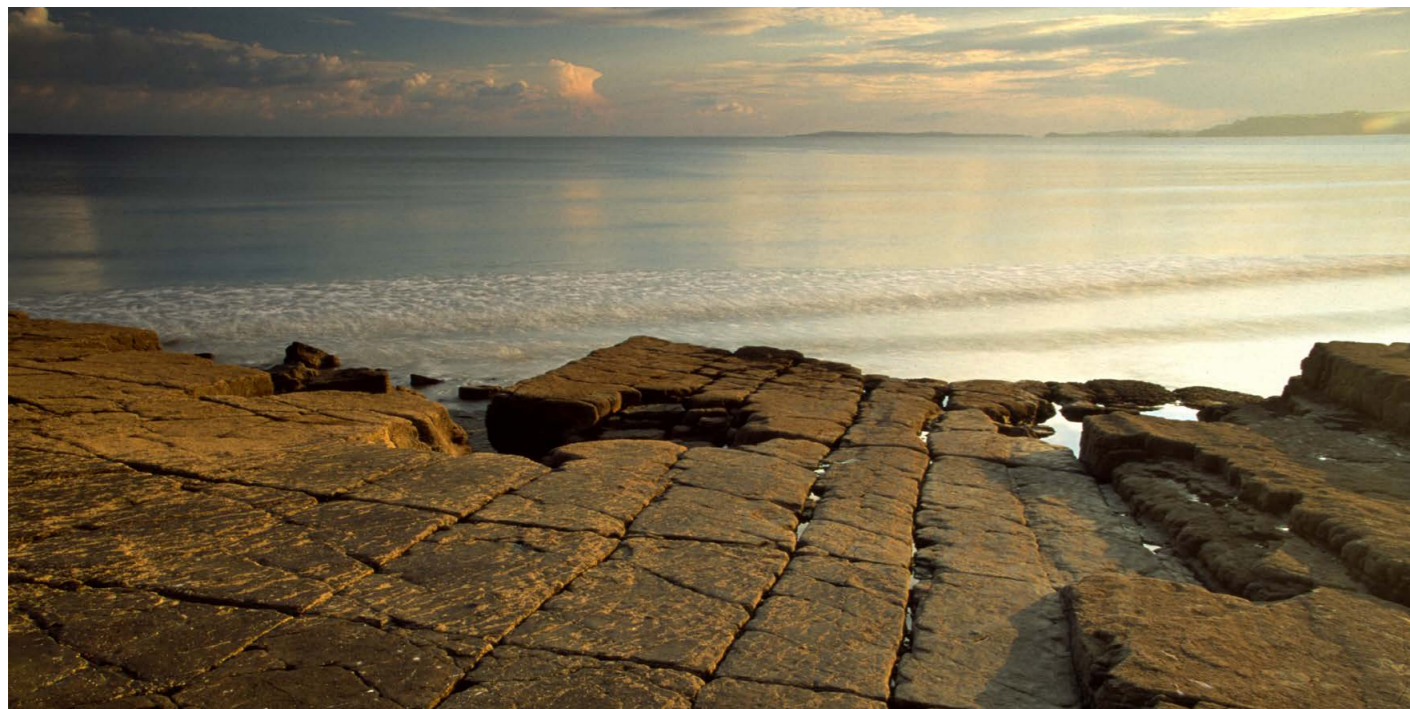
However, here in the West, we now seem to be in the process of ripping out the heart of our cultural life with the naïve expectation that, when we have extracted it, the blood will continue to pump around the body and sustain its life. We have forgotten where we have come from, what has shaped us, and what has given us everything we have. We are losing sight of the Judeo-Christian worldview, the way of

understanding the world that is shaped by the Bible and which offers answers to the ultimate questions of life: Who are we? Where did we come from? Why are we here? How ought we to live? Where are we going? We have lost the sense of living our lives within the Great Story the Bible tells from beginning to end.

We now live within a clash of competing worldviews that offer a confusing cacophony of answers to such questions, leading to a dreadful sense of 'lostness' in the world. We see it especially amongst teenagers and young adults. We tell them they can be anything they want to be, but they don't know who they are.

It is not, of course, the first time the world has experienced such turmoil and change. Competing political visions of the twentieth century had catastrophic effects which led to world war and the threat of impending nuclear annihilation. The revival in which Methodism has its roots, looking further back, occurred amidst a clash of worldviews which, on the continent, resulted in violent revolution.

On Thursday 17 August 1758, John Wesley went to Bristol Cathedral to attend a performance of George Frideric Handel's oratorio 'Messiah'. It was an historic occasion, for this was the first performance of 'Messiah' to be given in an English Church. Until then, for sixteen



years, the work had been performed to popular acclaim exclusively in secular venues, such as music halls and theatres.

What seemed to impress Wesley most was the way in which the congregation listened. Perhaps it was a striking contrast to the riots which, not infrequently, accompanied his own preaching! This is what he wrote in his journal about the performance: 'I doubt if that congregation was ever so serious at a sermon, as they were during this performance. In many parts, especially several of the choruses, it exceeded my expectation'.

He was moved not only by the attentiveness of the congregation, but also by the beauty of the music. It has known unprecedented popularity throughout its 280-year history. Why was it so popular?

The answer appears to be, not least, because it was launched upon the world at just the right time: in the midst of a clash of worldviews. The so-called Enlightenment, with its emphasis on human rational thought and progress had sought to undermine and attack Christian faith at its foundations. The religious beliefs of Deism were spreading, encouraging human beings to see that the solutions to all their problems lay within themselves and not in a distant deity. There was no need, the Deists argued, for a Messiah to save humanity; they must save themselves.

The vast mass of the population was left not knowing what to believe, filled with doubt and disorientation. It was into a world such as this that Handel's 'Messiah' was born. The very first words of the oratorio are striking: "Comfort ye! Comfort ye my people" saith your God'. Handel, spurred on by his devout librettist Charles Jennens, held out the comfort for which people longed, comfort that could be found only in the retelling of the Great Story. In the words of the bidding prayer from the famous service of nine lessons and carols, it is none other than the 'tale of the loving purposes of God' presented throughout the pages of Scripture.

Like then, this Great Story has today again been lost from within much of the very culture it birthed. However, the greatest danger of all, I believe, is that we are in danger of losing this Judeo-Christian worldview also from within the Church, which is increasingly shaped by other worldviews. We no longer know what the Judeo-Christian worldview is. How, then, can we live our lives faithfully within it? We, too, desperately need to hear again of the comfort that can only be found in retelling the Great Story with joyful confidence and beauty.

It is a situation that has been a long time in coming. Tom Wright outlines this Great Story as a play of five acts: Creation; Fall; the People of Israel; the life, death and resurrection of Jesus;

and the Church (see, for example, his 'Scripture and the Authority of God'). He suggests, however, that Christians have often been tempted to tell only part of our story, jumping from the problem of the Fall to the solution in Jesus, missing out entirely the whole story of the People of Israel. This we have done despite the fact that it is only against the backdrop of the whole of the Old Testament that the rest of the story makes any real sense and finds its meaning.

As time has gone by, we have dropped the beginning of the story, which reminds us that we are creatures, created by God, declared by him to be 'very good', living within a good world. Instead, we have simply focussed on the message that human beings have fallen short of the glory of God and that Jesus can restore us. We have also tended to end the story with individuals being put right, fully and finally, in heaven, stopping short of the renewal of all creation - bodily resurrection within a new earth. The story has been abbreviated and Christian preachers have often presented only the edited highlights.

More recently, there has been even more of an abridgement. People do not like to hear that they have fallen short, or that there is anything wrong with them. So now, the focus of much Christian communication is on the part of the Great Story which tells everyone that God loves them. Wider culture

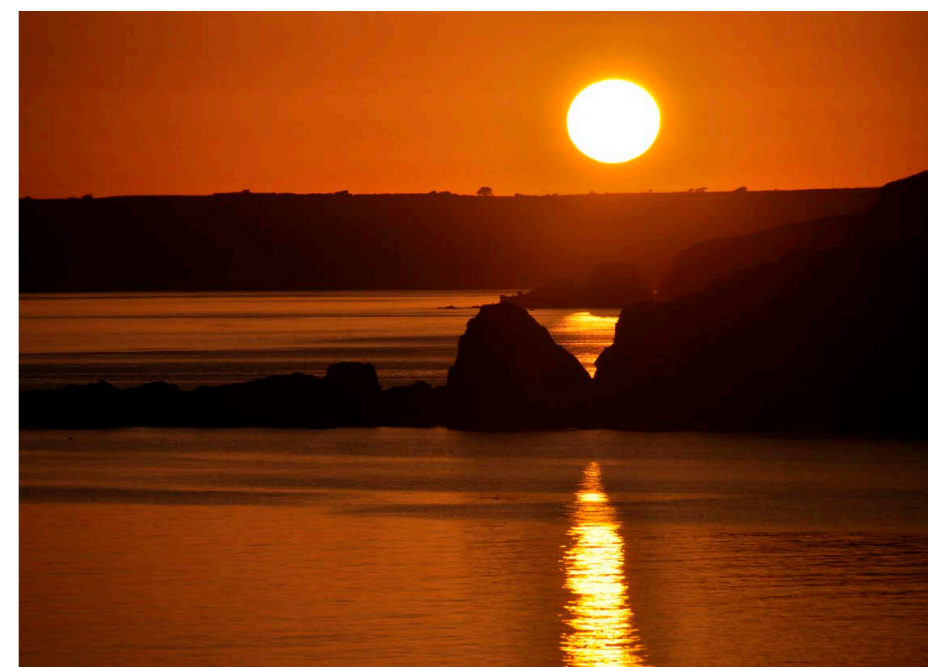
asserts that all we need to hear is affirmation of who we really are, so that is all the Church has said. The clash of worldviews has seeped into the Church and has shaped us more than we might like to admit.

I wrote in the conclusion of 'The Runaway Train' (available from the MET website) about gherkins and cucumbers. Although I have always liked gherkins, I had never realised that they were simply pickled cucumbers, which I do not like at all. That's what the pickling process does: if you submerge something in another culture for long enough, it can change beyond all recognition. We live in a world of 'pickled people': we have all been pickled by the culture of the world, a culture no longer shaped by the Great Story of the Bible, the Judeo-Christian worldview.

It follows, of course, that the Church is not only filled with pickled people on the inside, but is itself also marinated on the outside in the culture of the world. We seem to have come to the point at which it is difficult to tell where the one ends and the other begins. It was, of course, never intended to be that way. The Church is 'sent into the world' but it is never to be 'of the world' (John 17:14-19). It is supposed to provide the context in which pickled people become unpickled through being submerged in a radically different culture. Thus Paul, having described in Romans 1 how human culture all too easily drifts away from the Lord and his ways, issues his great challenge to the Church in Romans 12:1-2:

'Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.'

The world tells all sorts of stories in an attempt to shape our lives and our understanding of our identity. The Bible tells the greatest story the world has ever known, the only true story. It is not surprising and it is nothing new that this



Great Story is continually challenged. It has been so almost from the beginning of time itself: 'Did God really say?' is a question that was first whispered in the Garden of Eden.



Our task within the Church is to retell the Great Story in every generation, to live our lives within it, to invite others to step into it, and to pass it on to future generations.



Our task within the Church is to retell the Great Story in every generation, to live our lives within it, to invite others to step into it, and to pass it on to future generations. Indeed, we are to retell it on the first day of each week as we gather in worship, whenever we break bread and share wine, and as we pass through the seasons and festivals of each year. The Church, in the providence of God, is supposed to provide the context in which pickled people become unpickled, in which we learn not to conform to the pattern of the world, shaped by all those competing stories, but to be transformed.

Notice where the transformation begins: with the renewal of the mind: the way we think, the way we understand, the way our minds are shaped by the Great Story in which we are called to live our lives. All human beings live their lives within a story, a 'metanarrative', with which they make sense of the world and answer the ultimate questions of life. The crucial question is: which story is shaping your life? Which story are you inhabiting in this age of a clash of worldviews?

The challenge for every Christian is to be transformed by the renewing of the mind according to this Great Story. The evangelistic invitation for people who

are not yet Christians is to step into this Great Story through the door of repentance and faith, opened through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Surely, the great need for the Church is to make sure that it is itself properly shaped by the Great Story and that it faithfully, clearly and compellingly retells the Great Story - and with such joyful confidence and beauty - that the Judeo-Christian worldview is rediscovered, not only within the Church it formed, but also within the wider culture for which it was foundational.

John Wesley seems never to have written about unpickling pickled people! He did, however, write about scriptural holiness: the 'grand depositum' - the family treasure - entrusted by God to the Methodist movement as its central purpose. Wesley saw every Christian as being on a journey towards Christian perfection, the likeness of Jesus, the image of God restored. Surely that is what it means to live our lives within the Great Story. He knew that we need the means of grace to grow in such holiness: not least the reading and proclamation of Scripture and the support of one another in Christian fellowship, through it all continually being re-evangelised by the retelling and re-hearing of the Great Story (see Jack Jackson's 'Offering Christ: John Wesley's Evangelistic Vision').



Today, the competing stories within the world are very compelling and very confusing, often driven by an aggressive secular agenda which seeks to force Christian faith out of the picture altogether. They compete for the minds of Christians just as much as for the minds of everyone else. How do we tell again the Great Story of the Bible within our Church and culture? How do we rearticulate the Judeo-Christian worldview within this clash of worldviews, so that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that people are invited to step into this story, and so that we all seek to live our lives within it? How do we enable people to make sense of the great issues of our day within the context of the Great Story - issues of a global pandemic; of the continued rise of radical Islam on the one hand and aggressive secularisation on the other; of political polarisation and of the erosion of freedom of speech; of attacks on religious freedom; of climate change, and race, and sexuality, and gender, and identity; of the sanctity of life, particularly at its beginning and end? All these questions, and more, seem to be used today to drive a very different agenda in the world. It's even more dangerous when that agenda finds its way into the Church. Within this clash of worldviews, there is a great need for a joyful, confident and beautiful retelling of the whole story of the whole Bible.



This article seeks to raise the questions and provoke reflection rather than to offer answers! There is, however, an increasing number of people who are working in this area. Two authors who have sought to explore these questions and set out challenges for the Church are Glynn Harrison and Carl Trueman. Glynn Harrison is a retired professor of psychiatry at the University of Bristol. He has written two books about contemporary culture that are both well worth reading: 'The Big Ego Trip' explores the significant characteristics of contemporary culture, and 'A Better Story' considers questions of identity and sexuality. He issues a significant challenge to the Church: in a world of competing stories, the Church must tell a better story - the greatest story the world has ever known - the one true story. It is a challenge that is capturing the imaginations of increasing numbers of Christians in our day and age.

Carl Trueman is Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies at Grove City College, Pennsylvania, though he still speaks with his native English accent! He kindly agreed to take part in an interview for MET's online event for the Methodist Conference last year (the video of which, entitled 'A Vision for Life: Where Christianity Meets Culture', is available on the MET website). He traces the development of contemporary culture through the eyes of a historian in his book, 'The Rise and Triumph of the

Modern Self'. Towards the end of the book, he considers the challenges of his survey of contemporary culture for the Church of today.

In our interview, I asked him to say more about his comment in the book that today's Church could learn much from the Church of the second century. In response, he first pointed out the differences between our culture and that of the second century, not least that Christianity had then never been the dominant cultural narrative, whereas those days have now come and gone for us. He then talked about the similarities: Christians are increasingly viewed now, as they were then, as an immoral minority cult.

How did the Church respond to those challenges of the surrounding culture in the second century? Carl Trueman said: they took Jesus at his word when he promised, 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:35). They took him at his word; they loved one another; they developed true Christian communities in the Church.

In other words, we could say, they kept the Great Story alive in their hearts and minds and they truly inhabited it. In obedience to Jesus' command, they lived lives of love towards one another and towards a world in need. Consequently, others were attracted

to enter into the story themselves, to become followers of Jesus. Within two hundred years, the Judeo-Christian worldview had become the prevailing narrative which shaped developing cultures, including our own.

It seems to me that there is at least as great a need today as there ever was in the days of George Frideric Handel and John Wesley - a need for a rediscovery of our foundations, the Judeo-Christian worldview. There is a desperation, a longing for a retelling, in word and deed, of the Great Story - the whole message of the whole Bible. May the Lord raise up in our own day people to retell, with joyful confidence and beauty, the Great Story of the loving purposes of God that we might be transformed by the renewing of our minds and that many more might enter into the Story themselves, through Jesus and to his glory!

The Revd Dr David A. Hull is Chair of Methodist Evangelicals Together and of Share Jesus International, and is a member of the Evangelical Alliance's Council. He is a minister in full connexion with the Methodist Church, currently serving with the Free Methodist Church as Lead Pastor of Freedom Church in Kingswood, Bristol. His analysis of the developments which led to last year's controversial decisions of the British Methodist Church, 'The Runaway Train', can be obtained freely from methodistevangelicals.org.uk/runaway-train. The video referred to above, along with others, can be found at methodistevangelicals.org.uk/videos.



SPIRITUAL LIVING

Gareth Higgs

LIVING IN GOD'S GENEROUS LOVE

Sadly, we know all too well the horror of brutal regimes across the globe, who through fear of losing power end up turning on their people. If we live in such a situation, how do we make sense of the opening verse of this chapter? Well, Paul writes before the idea of democracy has largely taken hold. He has a strong view (which we can see echoes of elsewhere in his writing - see Romans 13) of the sovereignty of God and Paul understands that governments are raised up by God for the safety and security of people and to bring order. It is important to remember the context in which Paul writes.

The Christian community on Crete, pastored by Titus, is a small and fledgling one, and Paul wants the church to be winsome, not snuffed out before they've even got going - they are to be good citizens and recognised as such by the surrounding culture. Balance is important. As I write, the COP26 Climate Summit is underway, and I see from my social media feed some Christian activists championing civil disobedience as a means of making the point about the urgent climate emergency. The right to protest, to challenge and to critique those in power is a cherished right, grounded in the Christian tradition, but our protest should be within the confines of the law, done respectfully, not with aggression or slander.

My twitter feed is too often filled with fellow Christians (and often clergy) making the most rude and aggressive statements about politicians with whom they disagree. For Paul, such interaction crosses the line - he cautions Titus to be gentle and humble in his interactions with people (v.2) - following the example of Jesus. Jesus rebuked and challenged, he didn't cave into the prevailing culture of the time, but, most obviously in his passion, he chooses the path of obedience and submission.

Now before we get too self-righteous and judgmental, Paul reminds his hearers that we all have a past (v.3), so humility is the appropriate response, remembering that God has graciously made us into what we are now. What we were (v.3) should be a stark contrast from what we are now (v.2). We were foolish, disobedient (literally a word that speaks of being rebellious, causing disorder and disarray), yet even when we were far away, 'dead in our transgressions and sins' (Ephesians 2:1ff) God has reached out to us in Jesus (v.4).

Out of sheer kindness, God has reached out to us. He acts with benevolence, with great generosity and incredible mercy. Mercy is love that is undeserved, the basis by which we are saved. Our salvation is not because of anything we have done, but because of God's extravagant and wonderful mercy (v.5). As Archbishop Temple famously once

said: 'we contribute nothing to our salvation except the sin from which we need to be redeemed.'

By God's incredible mercy we receive salvation by God's grace, poured into our lives by the Holy Spirit (v.6). As the Spirit applies God's mercy and grace we are washed clean and renewed in hope. Through such salvation we inherit all the riches of God's grace and promises. And so, in view of God's great and generous mercy, we are to respond with a life that honours and pleases him - a life that is gentle, humble and courteous towards others.

FOR REFLECTION...

- **Reflect on the magnitude of the Gospel. What does it mean for you today to be saved?**

DOING GOOD

The gospel that has transformed the world through the ages must transform you and me. If the gospel has no effect on our conduct, or we fail to live like those who belong to a new master, we are in danger of being like those who do not produce '...fruit in keeping with repentance' (Matthew 3:8). For Paul, the effects of the gospel should be the outworking of God's grace in our lives, seen by 'doing good' (v.8) This theme of 'doing good' is a repeated theme for Paul in this letter, so it is worth paying attention to it.

Doing good means not getting into petty arguments with people that will only lead to quarrels and disagreements. During the course of my ministry, I have had church members who seem to enjoy the drama of stirring up conflict and argument with a well-placed word or calculated comment; designed to inflame someone they know who will react. Such behaviour is unbecoming those who claim the name of Jesus Christ. Arguments only lead to quarrelling, then to someone taking offence, harbouring resentment and leading to unforgiveness and before too long there is division among God's people.

Paul takes such divisive behaviour seriously - such people should be put out of the fellowship (v.10). We may balk at such treatment but action must be taken to preserve the well-being of the whole Body of Christ, especially in a context where a fledgling community wants to remain attractive to its neighbours. Paul suggests two warnings for such behaviour, giving opportunity for repentance, grace and a response, but if the people will not listen, they have to take responsibility for the consequences (v.11). Purity of God's house trumps inclusiveness in Paul's mind.

As I write this, I have recently completed reading the first volume of John Wesley's journal featuring his time in Georgia. Wesley frequently chose not to admit to Holy Communion those who were unrepentant of their sins. To simply lift this approach into our context would be clumsy, but the discipline of the church bears some reflection alongside the grace and mercy of the church.

For Paul, 'doing good' means to be productive and hospitable. Work hard, fulfil your duties, watch your life and conduct closely. Again, John Wesley's 'works of mercy' - serving others, caring for the unlovely, being generous with our time and resources provides a good pattern of application for 'doing good'. The early Church were famed (or notorious) for such radical kindness to others. The first hospitals and orphanages were founded by early Christians who refused to desert people who were sick or destitute and instead, fled towards such folk in kindness and care. The early Methodists were known for such acts of kindness to the poor and dispossessed, their 'doing good' was a clear example of the grace of God that had been received into their lives.

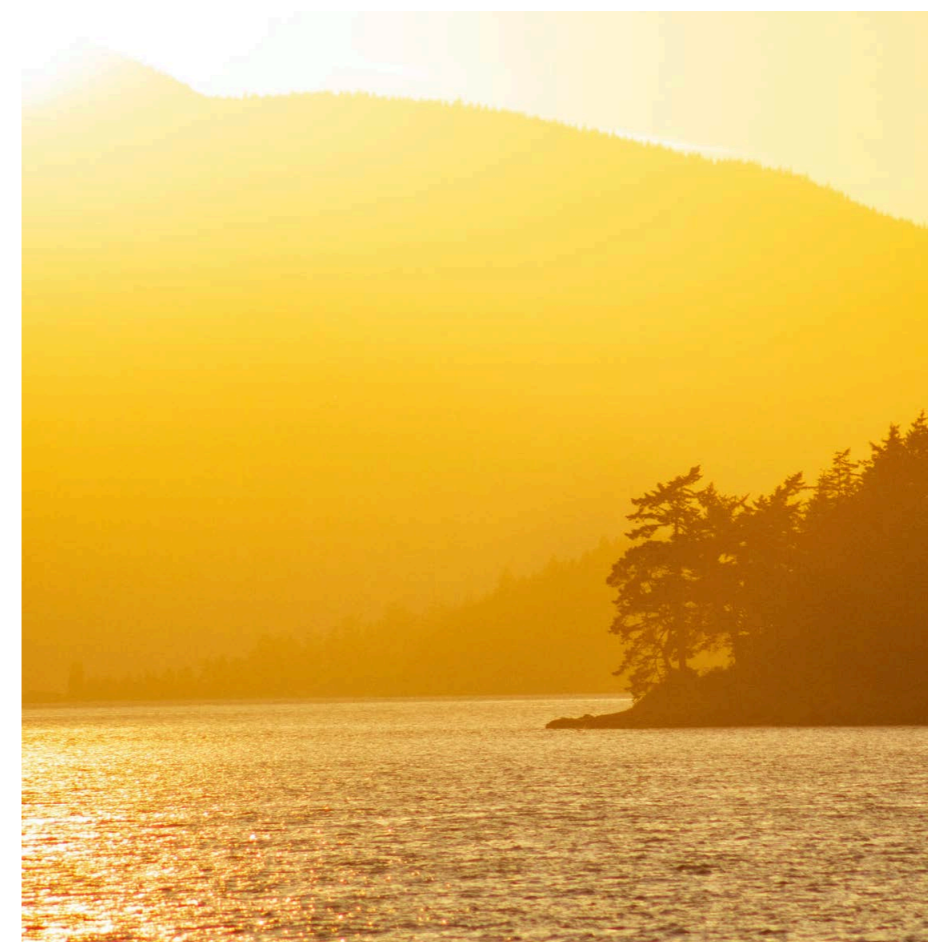
In fact, John Wesley believed that by carrying out works of service and kindness, this might be a 'means of grace' - a channel by which we discover and receive more of God's renewing grace in our lives. For Paul, grace leads to 'doing good', with such good works being a sign of gratitude to God for such a salvation. The church and its members are in peril when we get this the other way around. No matter how many good works we may be employed in, they will never atone for the weight of our sin and will never contribute one iota towards our salvation.

Many years ago, a friend of mine was crossing a road in our home city. She had headphones in her ears and was more focussed on her phone than the road in front of her and so didn't notice the car careering towards the zebra crossing she was using, with no hope of stopping. An awful carnage seemed inevitable. Mercifully, a fellow pedestrian from a slightly different vantage-point spotted the danger in the nick of time and rugby-tackled my friend to safety as the passing car sailed past. Her life had been mercifully saved. When she collected herself and realised what had and hadn't happened, she couldn't express her gratitude enough to the one who had come to her rescue. What will you and I do today, then, to express our gratitude and deep appreciation for the one who has come to our eternal rescue?

FOR REFLECTION...

- **What will you do today to reflect the generous kindness of our God? How/where can you 'do good'?**

The Revd Gareth Higgs is the Superintendent Minister at Plymouth Methodist Central Hall and Vice-Chair of MET. He is married to Laura with three young children.



COME LET US USE THE GRACE DIVINE

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Come let us use the grace divine,
And all, with one accord,
In a perpetual cov'nant join
Ourselves to Christ the Lord:

Give up ourselves, through Jesu's power,
His name to glorify;
And promise, in this sacred hour,
For God to live and die.

The cov'nant we this moment make
Be ever kept in mind:
We will no more or God forsake,
Or cast his words behind.

We never will throw off his fear
Who hears our solemn vow;
And if thou art well pleased to hear,
Come down, and meet us now.

To each the cov'nant blood apply,
Which takes our sins away;
And register our names on high,
And keep us to that day.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SCRIPTURE - COVENANT AS TREATY

Peter Hatton

MINISTER AND BIBLICAL SCHOLAR, PETER HATTON, LOOKS AT BIBLICAL COVENANTS AFRESH IN THE LIGHT OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATIES.

Biblical covenant theology marries a stark realism about our relationships with an astonishing vision of what, by God's grace, they can become. John Wesley's promotion of the Covenant Service sought as it were, to 'popularise' covenant theology; to help 'the people called Methodist' to pray that which was believed. Now, scholarship has shed new light on what covenants involved in biblical times. We'll look at some of these findings under three headings: Conflict Resolution, Unequal Partners and Power Subverted, before reflecting on how they might help us in our relationships with Jesus and one another.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Early in the last century scholars deciphered the text of several treaties that aimed to end conflicts between the High King of the Hittite people (who inhabited present-day Turkey in the second millennium BC) and minor rulers. They discovered these followed a set form that included: a sketch of what had happened to make the treaty necessary; lists of rules about how the parties would relate from now on, and solemn vows to observe them; the names of witnesses to the agreement, often gods; descriptions of blessings if the parties kept faith with one another and of the curses that would fall on anyone breaking the treaty.

Sounds familiar? It did to Catholic scholar Denis McCarthy who, in 1963, showed that the basic structure of such a treaty, although not the precise content, closely resembled that of the book of Deuteronomy! Was the biblical book patterned on these precise Hittite examples? Not necessarily; similar treaties were used throughout the ancient Near East - versions have been found from Egypt and from the neo-Assyrian

Empire (1000-600 BC). Of course, Deuteronomy's concern with covenant is no surprise; the book looks back repeatedly to God's great covenant with Israel at Sinai; it ends with its renewal. However, this discovery about the overall form of the book confirmed what many scholars had long suspected; namely, that the Hebrew word *berith*, generally rendered 'covenant', is best understood as meaning 'treaty'; as an agreement between two parties that aims to transform toxic relationships; to turn conflict into a flourishing life together, albeit in what we might call a very 'top down' way.

This understanding is confirmed if we look at biblical examples of covenants between humans. When Abraham and Abimelech make a *berith* at Beersheba in Genesis 21:25-26, they settle a potentially violent dispute about a water supply - still a frequent cause of conflict in the present day. When Jacob and Laban finally resolve the many arguments between them in Genesis 31:43-55 - like so many of the bitterest of disputes - one within a family - they do so by means of a *berith*. Jonathan's covenant with David (1 Samuel 18:1-4) is particularly moving; it transforms what might have been a deadly enmity between the heir to Israel's throne and a potential rival into a relationship of deep faithfulness and affection.

But surely, no matter whatever may be the case between humans, covenants between God and his people don't presuppose a conflict between them? Aren't they all about unconditional love and positive regard? Really? We can only hold on to such a view if we read Scripture, as many do, with blinkers that blind us to its portrayal of a persistent conflict between a faithful God and a faithless people, between a loving Lord and his rebellious servants.

Moreover, as our knowledge of how ancient treaties were made has increased, we have come to realise that the underlying conflicts were represented in powerful symbols. For instance, very often a ruler imposing a treaty on defeated rebels is pictured as holding out a bow in the ceremony to



remind his former enemies of his overwhelming military might - the power that had brought them to submit and could be unleashed upon them again if they dared to revolt. So, in the 'Black Obelisk', a column celebrating his victories, Shalmaneser III of Assyria (859-824 BC) holds out a bow to the defeated king of Gilzanu who grovels as he accepts the terms of a (we may suppose) rather harsh treaty.

So ancient readers would, initially, have seen the bow in the sky in Genesis 9 - when God gives the first covenant in Scripture - as a threat, not a sign of hope. Again, when, in Genesis 5:7-21, the Lord seals his covenant with Abram, the gruesome spectacle of five sacrificed animals, each cut into two pieces, is mandated for the ceremony. Such carcasses formed part of ancient treaty rituals in which both parties walked through the dismembered animals and asked the gods to deal similarly with them should they fail to honour the treaty's terms! Indeed, we may now be thinking that covenants were unpleasant instruments of power politics. We would be right; although as we shall see, when God adopts them he subverts, indeed reverses, their power dynamics.

UNEQUAL PARTNERS

We've probably already realised that ancient covenants were rarely concluded between equal partners. In the human examples already mentioned, there were big discrepancies between the social standing of the parties involved. Abimelech is a powerful king while Abraham is a landless nomad; Laban is a prosperous patriarch while Jacob is a hired man, almost a slave; Jonathan is the heir to the kingdom while David is the youngest son of a minor clan and a common soldier.

Yet, surely, in the most primal ancient covenant of all, that of marriage (Genesis 2:24 and Malachi 2:14), an essential equality between husband and wife is presupposed? Well, given that the Hebrew word for 'husband' is ba'al which means, literally, 'lord' (also, of course, the name of a 'pagan' god!), this can't be taken for granted. While biblical justification for the teaching that men and women are essentially equal may be found in the creation story - where they are together created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) - it cannot easily be read off the institution of covenant.

However, it is striking that, in the covenants between humans, at which we've already looked, God's blessings don't flow

through the more powerful parties but through Abraham, Jacob and David, the weaker parties. This already hints that, in the parallel covenants between God and humanity, something more may be going on than God acting like a powerful imperial ruler to keep his rebellious subjects in their place. Nevertheless, while we may, accordingly, begin to suspect that in scripture the power dynamics of covenant treaties are going to be radically subverted, we should also note that differences in social status, function here as a marker for other profound differences.

Conflicts arise when people differ; differing approaches, even, perhaps, differing identities, cannot easily be reconciled. However, what if the most profound differences can be honestly faced and worked through in the sort of secure framework that a covenant provides?

Might not these very differences then make possible an even more profound unity than any that very similar, like-minded people could achieve?

POWER SUBVERTED

When the parties in a covenant are the God who created the heavens and the earth and his creatures, then it might seem that the differences between them are so vast as to be irreconcilable. At the very least, a totally 'top down' approach in which God's power and authority are central seems mandated. Given the role of the institution of covenant in the imperial power structures of the ancient Near East, it would appear to lend itself well to such a demonstration of divine power. All the more remarkable then, that the biblical witness repeatedly undermines such an understanding of covenant.



The first hint of this might be seen in the way the rainbow in Genesis 9 is transformed from a grim threat of punishment into a sign of hope; of God promising to limit his power to permit the life of the cosmos to continue. The enigmatic story of the Lord's covenant with Abram in Genesis 15, shows even more clearly God's commitment to transform covenant relationships. You'll recall that the ritual involved both the parties walking through dismembered animals as an enacted curse on themselves if they should break their pact. However, in Genesis 15, Abram is not required to take this perilous walk; instead, a torch and a firepot, representing the presence of the LORD, float eerily between the animals. The inference is clear, any curses for breaches of this covenant will fall on God alone!

Arguably, even taking into account the tragic history of disobedient Israel, which the subsequent biblical books will reveal all too clearly, it is indeed God who will suffer most from Israel's covenantal violations, as his plans for the redemption of the cosmos are thwarted again and again and his holy name is blasphemed among the nations.

Be that as it may, Christians may see in Genesis 15 an astonishing prophecy of how God would - in the person of his Son, Jesus - take upon himself alone the penalty for our failure to keep covenant with him. God's new and gracious covenant, sealed as the curses for breaches of the old treaty, fell upon Jesus at Calvary and has become a means of empowerment in which humanity's angry disobedience can be transformed into peace and harmony.

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE!

Paul sees in the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman a great mystery which speaks of the relationship between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:31-32). This insight shows us how deeply Paul understood the dynamics

“
Paradoxically, mysteriously, the very differences between a man and a woman make possible a transcendent unity in covenant.
”

of biblical covenant theology. He sees that, in the church's covenant relationship with Jesus, a sinless Lord and a sinful people, creator and created, heaven and earth are united by God's grace. On the cross that which divided such apparent irreconcilables was transcended and conflict was transformed into peace and unity.

The covenant of marriage between husband and wife can bear the weight of referring to the incomprehensible but glorious unity of Christ and his people, precisely because men and women are so different. Paradoxically, mysteriously, these very differences make possible a transcendent unity in covenant, one richer and deeper than if they were more similar.

Moreover, that covenants involve bringing peace to deeply conflicted parties, reminds us that relationships, even those between people who love each other, are fraught with conflict. However, when such conflicts are acknowledged and worked through - and this always involves profound intentionality and no little pain and effort - then even toxic relationships can be transformed. In the course of circuit ministry I prepared over 120 couples for marriage and worked with many others who were experiencing big problems in their marriages. So often we discovered that the place of renewal in relationship, paradoxical as it may seem, was hidden in the things couples argued about most fiercely; for, indeed, there were the places of reality where true feelings were being expressed. The grace lay in finding the framework in which such conflicts - as well as yearnings for renewal of relationship and growth in love - could be contained. There is a name for such a framework - covenant.

I cannot conclude this brief exploration of an endlessly rich subject without expressing my sadness, indeed my incomprehension, that, given the significance of covenants in scripture's understanding of relationships, the topic received such scant attention in *God In Love Unites Us*. That the discussion of such a biblically significant, indeed normative, means of relating should have been so limited - (one brief subsection and some passing references) - is deeply regrettable, although I guess, such neglect did make it much easier to sustain the report's conclusions.

The Revd Dr Peter Hatton served for twenty five years in Circuit Ministry, for the last two years combined with the role of biblical tutor at Wesley College, Bristol. Following Wesley's closure he was appointed to a similar role at Bristol Baptist College where he served for eight years until September 2020. He continues to write, teach and preach on a regular basis while helping to look after four lively grandchildren.



THE COVENANT PRAYER

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen



2022: THE YEAR TO CAMPAIGN TO END THE PERSECUTION

Fiona Bruce MP

FIONA BRUCE, MP AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPECIAL ENVOY FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF, HOPES THAT, FOR THOSE PERSECUTED SIMPLY FOR WHAT THEY BELIEVE, THIS YEAR MAY BE DIFFERENT.

For most of us there is a positive sense of new beginnings at the start of a year. But for too many around the world there is little which is positive to look forward to.

There will be no New Year celebrations for Maira Shahbaz, a 14-year-old Christian schoolgirl in Pakistan. Maira was kidnapped last year from just outside her home: raped, 'forcibly married', forced to convert to Islam and even when she managed to escape, found no justice through the legal system there, and is now living in hiding with her family - all of them in fear for their lives.

Neither will Chang Weiping be able to look forward to this New Year. He is a lawyer in prison in China, forced to sit on a tortuous 'tiger chair' for up to six days at a time, and facing round the clock interrogations, subjected to prolonged sleep deprivation, with a lack of adequate food and hygiene facilities. All of this because he represented clients in support of their freedom of religion or belief.

Nor will Valentina Baranovskaya, a 70-year-old Jehovah's Witness woman, be looking forward to 2022 with her family. She is in prison in Siberia for breaching the Russian criminal code - as is her son. Simply for being a member of her faith - the Jehovah's Witnesses are a banned extremist organisation there.

And teenage Christian Leah Sharibu, kidnapped along with 113 other schoolgirls by Boko Haram in Nigeria, will spend her fourth year apart from her mother Rebecca. Brave Leah is the only one of those schoolgirls not to have been released - because she has refused to renounce her faith.

Neither will Pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo, leader of the Monte de Sion Independent Church in Cuba be with his wife Maridilegnis and their children. He has been detained in prison, charged with crimes including 'disrespect' and 'public disorder,' at risk of a ten year prison sentence and subject to brutal beatings. Maridilegnis says 'I have been married to Pastor Lorenzo Rosales for more than 20 years and we have served God since then. He is not a criminal; he is a man of God. I am very afraid for his life, my children and I plead for help - cries for help which we lift up to God.'

All of this has happened to these people, and is happening to countless millions of people of different faiths and beliefs



Cuban Pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo and his wife Maridilegni Carballo (Photo courtesy of CSW)

around the world today - simply because of what they believe. Yet, the right to believe is a fundamental one - as Article 18 of the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights states: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.' But today, that is far from a reality for many around the world - believers are losing their jobs, their education, their homes, their livelihoods, their families, their freedom, their access to justice, and even life itself. They cannot meet with others to worship, they are being discriminated against, marginalised, beaten, threatened, tortured and killed.

And the extent of this in the 21st century is not only simply staggering but largely unrecognised - it is estimated that over 83% of the world's population live in a country where their right to practice their faith or belief is restricted, for many severely, and often by their own government. It is also estimated that 80% of the persecution globally is against Christians. And this gravely disturbing phenomenon is growing. Even during the Covid pandemic, members of religious groups around the world have been scapegoated - blamed and ostracised - as responsible for the pandemic in their countries and excluded from health treatments to alleviate it.

Do you remember the campaign started by the churches in this country called: 'Stop the Traffik?' This campaign ultimately led to the government passing the Modern Day Slavery Act to tackle the scourge of human trafficking - particularly of young girls into prostitution - in this country. So people of conscience, by engaging and campaigning, can make a difference!

As the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, I am therefore initiating a new campaign - 'End The Persecution', encouraging people from churches across the country to come together to champion freedom of religion or belief and to support those in other countries who are persecuted, in the hope that many of them will be able to approach this year with hope, rather than fear or dread. To find out how you and your local church can support this campaign please see www.endthepersecution.uk



Fiona Bruce MP in the House of Commons with Mervyn Thomas, Founder President of CSW meeting Rebecca Sharibu, mother of abducted Nigerian schoolgirl, Leah. (Photo courtesy of Fiona Bruce MP).

For more information about freedom of religion or belief and the worldwide persecution of so many, visit Christian Solidarity Worldwide's website - www.csw.org.uk

Fiona Bruce has been Member of Parliament for Congleton since 2010. She is Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Pro-Life Group in the House of Commons and is the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.



So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

PHILLIPIANS 2.15

BEING HUMAN

Jo Frost



INVESTING IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF WHO GOD IS AND WHO WE ARE WILL ENABLE US TO FACE THE PRESSURES OF LIFE AND ADDRESS THE BIG QUESTIONS OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN TODAY, SAYS JO FROST, EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT, AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE BEING HUMAN PROJECT.

Psalm 8 starts with this glorious refrain, 'O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.' But by verse 4 the psalmist ponders this profound question, 'what are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them?' (Common English Bible (CEB)). What does it mean to be human? And why does God care so much about us? These questions strike at the heart of so many conversations, stories, ideas and actions swirling around in our world at the moment and it is crucial for Christians to have good, true and beautiful answers for people that point them towards Jesus and his Kingdom.

Towards the end of last summer, after a longed-for heatwave in September, cracks started to appear in my house. The types of cracks that you really don't want to appear in your house. We started to worry and then we started to panic. So, we invited a friend over, a helpful friend - a civil engineer. As he walked around our house, examining each of the cracks, he muttered to himself 'Oh no... yeah definitely.' And then he turned to us with resignation and said, 'You have subsidence.'

'Look,' he said, 'you can see how your building is twisting. One section of your foundation has slipped, and the rest of the building is now twisting and straining to stay upright whilst one area is weakened by a crisis.'

“
It is crucial for Christians to have good, true and beautiful answers for people that point them towards Jesus and his Kingdom
”

The crisis is a nearby oak tree which is draining the soil of water and causing the foundations to fail. As the oak tree sucks out the moisture of the ground soil, and causes a crisis, that one bit of foundation isn't strong enough and the whole building drops. The cracks therefore appear as the rest of the building takes on the burden to hold the building upright while one bit is weak. You see it most clearly on one of the supporting walls where there's a crack almost like the guy rope of a tent streaking diagonally down the wall as it pulls taut to hold my home intact. What the engineers are going to have to do is come in and reinforce the foundations right at the bottom so that the one bit that is currently weak is able to withstand the pressure and the crisis that may come from the environment around it.

Just like my home, our society is cracking under the pressure of crisis and trauma everywhere we look. From Covid death tolls to climate emergencies, from political turmoil to economic crashes, our culture is fragmenting and fracturing because our culture's foundation is not strong enough to handle the pressure. At our foundation we don't have robust answers to life's fundamental questions. And we are all feeling the strain as a result.

But as Christians we do have that necessary foundation. Right at the

beginning of our story, in the creation story of Genesis, we see who God is and who he made us to be and how that understanding forms and shapes our lives. The more attention we give to our foundations, to strengthening and reinforcing the fundamentals, the better prepared we are for life's questions and crises.

I have never met the Queen. But I'm pretty confident I would instantly recognise the Queen if she walked in through my front door and said hello. Why am I so confident that I would immediately know someone I have never met? Well because I have seen countless objects that bear her image. Coins, notes, stamps, tea towels and even her image on the TV. Image bearing objects means that when you encounter the Queen, you recognise her for who she is. None of those objects are actually her and yet because they bear her image, she is forever recognised.

Being human means bearing God's image. Like a child resembles their parent, how they look, how they act, the type of character they have, we resemble God. God made humans to be like him - to reflect and project his character into creation, so that when creation encounters God, they will recognise him because they have seen his likeness before.

But what does it mean to be made in the image of God? Let's remind ourselves of Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

We are made in the image of a good and true God - God who is worthy - who gives every human being dignity and value. Every human being matters. We each have significance.

We are made in the image of a loving and relational God - a God who cares - who wants us to know him as friend. Every human being matters to each other. We are all connected.

We are made in the image of a personal and present God - a God who shows up - who promises us we will never be alone. It matters that every human being is here, now. We are present in this time and in this place.

We are made in the image of a generous and active God - a God who gets involved. The difference every human being makes in the world matters. We are all invited to join with God to bring peace and wholeness to all of creation.

These are our foundations; they are who we are and how we are made. And yet we live in a broken and messed up world. Our foundations went wonky, almost straight off the bat. In Genesis 3, the first human beings decided that being made in the image of God was not enough - they wanted to be God. The core human temptation is to redefine good and evil on your own terms - rather than trust God's vision and definition of human flourishing. God has a vision for what it means to be human; instead, we fall into the trap of trying to be God for ourselves.

We see the cracks in our humanity everywhere. In this broken world, we use a broken ruler to decide how much other people matter. We measure them by their usefulness or their record. We build our identities on our own fabrications instead of receiving our lives as a gift. We live in a messed-up world where we suffer the grief caused by absence, where we long for a world which is whole and flourishing while we find ourselves part of a culture that all too often deforms and dehumanizes, where purpose is distorted, power is abused, and freedom is twisted.

We value relationships, but we also know how badly relationships can go.

“

Like a child resembles their parent, how they look, how they act, the type of character they have, we resemble God.

”



Our relationships can give us joy, a sense of self, or purpose. But they also can cause us pain or harm, or we can cause that pain in others. Our sin brings injury, breaks connection, and fractures the peace that once ordered God's world. We crave acceptance and inclusion but rather than share the honest, vulnerable truth with others, we hide ourselves and chase distraction. Our broken lives lead us to injustice, as we exploit our fellow human beings and the natural world.

We are made in the image of God, but we are forever falling short of his glory.

But the God who is good, present and active, does not leave us bereft of his likeness.

Jesus is the true image of God. In Jesus we see both the mystery of God and the secret of being human revealed. He is the perfect human, the one who shows us how to do it right. Jesus' identity and his actions, flowed directly from his confidence in who he was in relation to the Father. Jesus communicates to us who God is, who we are meant to be and shows what a human life lived in loving obedience with God looks like. Jesus is the human being we were all made to be and through all that he says and does, Jesus teaches, demonstrates and creates a new way of being human.

The life of Jesus shows us how to love our neighbours as we long to be so loved. He loved us, not for anything we did, but simply that we are his beloved. He died for those who injured and rejected him, to mend our broken, love-sick hearts. He patched the holes in our broken bonds and gathers us together as his church - a people forged in his grace and mercy. Therefore, because of him and what he has done, we are invited to share with him the joy of knowing and being known by God, joining his family as his adopted children.

As we look to Jesus to show us fully who God is and who we are, I am struck by how profound the image of humanity is for our hurting and damaged world, and how beautiful and compelling the truth of the gospel is, of the life well lived in relationship with Jesus. It is summed up for me by this paraphrase of Matthew 28:19-20:

As you go and live your lives, help everyone you encounter to become imitators of Jesus. Immerse them into a community built upon the characteristics of, and the relationship between God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Enable them to put into practice Jesus' instructions for life; to love God with all you do, say, think, feel and will. And to love all others as you are loved.

This is being human.

Jo Frost is director of communications and engagement at the Evangelical Alliance, and co-founder of the Being Human project which aims to inspire and equip everyday Christians to understand, articulate and participate in the biblical vision of humanity. Jo teaches and preaches regularly on communications, conflict, whole-life discipleship, mission and leadership. For more information on Being Human go to beinghumanproject.co.uk





GOOD NEWS THROUGH ZOOM

Andy Jarvis & Anne Jarvis

Through Zoom we have been blessed to be able to join in fellowship with Christians from different countries who are part of the East African Revival Fellowship. These meetings came about because we weren't able to meet together in person. It has meant we've been able to see people we haven't seen for years.

The Revival had its beginnings in 1929 in Uganda, from where it spread out, touching individuals, mission stations and Churches across Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi. Small fellowship groups sprang up, then larger conferences were held, where many came together for preaching of the Word, to pray and to give testimony how Jesus was satisfying their formally cold, empty hearts.

In post-war Europe, teams of Africans and missionaries responded to calls from those who had heard of the movings of God's Spirit in East Africa. In Britain, the evangelist Roy Hession invited them to speak at a conference, where he heard for the first time the revival message. Roy and a number of others found that what was being shared by the team was something quite different from what they expected. The emphasis was not on some



exciting experience, nor did they speak so much about revival, rather they testified about how the Holy Spirit had met with them anew, convicting them of sin and pointing to Calvary, that place of deep repentance. As Joe Church, a missionary Doctor, expressed: revival is not the roof blowing off, but the bottom falling out.

A group of British evangelists and clergy desired to share with others how God had met with them. They organised fellowship weekends and regional conferences, sometimes joining international conventions, which have continued right up to pre-lockdown. The need of fellowship continues and this has inspired groups in each country to meet via Zoom, for times of Bible Study, prayer and sharing. An international group from five time zones have been meeting monthly. They are a time of blessing and encouragement as we seek to keep Jesus central in our lives and our fellowships, knowing that Jesus truly satisfies.

Andy Jarvis is part of the Congleton Bible Week team, which partners with Keswick Ministries. He attends Wellspring Methodist Church. Anne Jarvis is wife of the late Revd Keith Jarvis and also attends Wellspring Methodist Church in Congleton.

met | Methodist Evangelicals Together

REVIVE: THE MET PRAYER WEEKEND

4 - 6 November 2022

The King's Park Conference Centre, Northampton

- Bible Teaching
- Inspiring Worship
- Praying for Revival
- Christian Fellowship

Further details will be available at methodistevangelicals.org.uk/revive

STIR THE FIRE

An invitation to pray at historic Methodist sites

4 - 15 March 2022

The Revd Bill Phares, a Methodist minister from Alabama, is responding to God's call to come and pray for God to stir the fire again in the UK

If you would be interested in joining in with a prayer gathering near you, willing to help organize one or want further details, visit:

methodistevangelicals.org.uk/stir-the-fire

or contact Derek Balsdon

01260 297609 | 07958 549146

development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

Methodist Evangelicals Together
met

IMPORTANT UPDATES ON MET

MET becomes a Charitable Incorporated Organization (CIO) from 1 January 2022

This was agreed at the 2021 AGM and offers a better structure for MET as a charity. This means two things that you need to note:

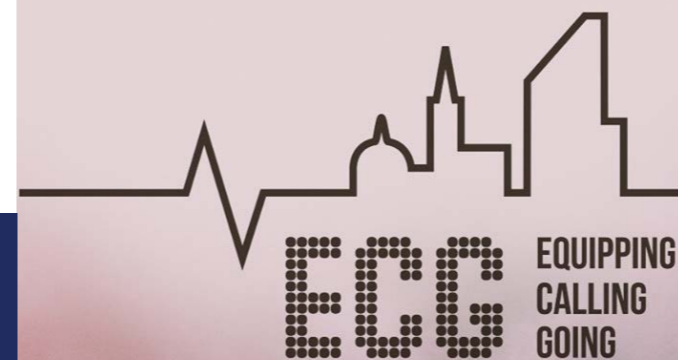
1. **MET has a new charity number** which is **1196407**
2. **MET will have new bank details** and we will update you with these when they are available. For those who have a Standing Order with us you will be able to update this with the new account details in your own time. (But don't worry, the existing bank account will continue to work alongside the new one indefinitely, so we will still be able to access donations made to the old account).

If you donate online via the website, then you do not need to do anything as this will be done automatically.



A SUSTAINABLE MET MAILING!

Just to let you know that we use sustainable paper for the production of the MET magazine which is FSC Certified. The outer polywrap of the mailing is recyclable - so please put it in your recycling!



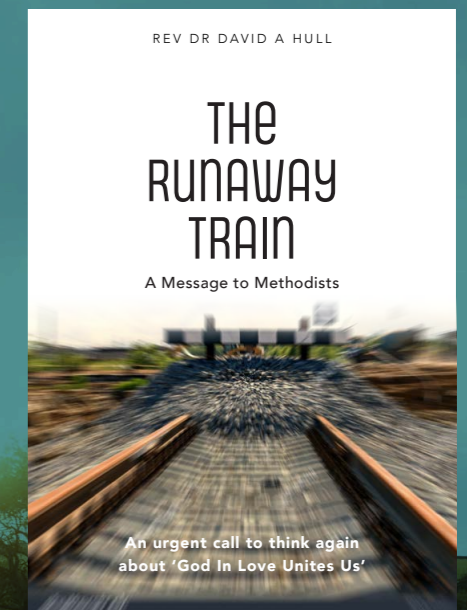
YESTERDAY : TODAY : FOREVER CELEBRATING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

19 - 24 April 2022

At the Scarborough Spa

Join the MET Gathering in the Ocean Room
Friday 22 April 2:00pm - 3:30pm

Visit the MET stand in the Market Place



Suitable for Church Council debates on same-sex marriage

For free copies contact Derek Balsdon

07958 549146 | 01260 297609

development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

IN CHRIST ALONE

*Keith Getty (b.1974)
& Stuart Townend (b.1963)*

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!

My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.



Copyright © 2001 Thankyou Music (Adm. by
CapitolCMGPublishing.com excl. UK & Europe,
adm. at IntegrityRights.com)

A NEW NORMAL?

Bart Woodhouse



DR. BART WOODHOUSE SHARES SOME THOUGHTS ON THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL IN THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF OUR POST PANDEMIC CULTURE.

As I watch the news each night and read through the social media feed of my own echo chamber, the Holy Spirit causes me to wonder whether we are at a critical moment of renewal within the church, despite evidence to the contrary. The news is typically depressing, pandemic fatigue has certainly set in, and its efforts, along with others, at sharing good news are often well meaning, but unsatisfying and ring hollow in the face of life's present raw experience. I then wonder whether the pandemic has helped to uncover an ancient wound; a wound that 'Emmerdale'; repeats of 'Love Actually'; government reforms; sex; eating a whole bag of 'Percy Pigs'; a holiday to Disney Land, and even (dare I say it) Captain Tom, cannot heal or even acknowledge. As the author of Ecclesiastes reminds us 'He has also set eternity in the human heart' (Ecclesiastes 3:11), and only the eternal love and person of God can ever satisfy that need in the human heart.

Our culture has become extremely advanced, primarily in the art of distraction and consumption, which appears to be fuelling an insecure clamour for meaning in ever more polarised ideological and political enclaves. I sense that the pandemic may have opened a wider gap in the western cultural curtain revealing the frail 'postmodern wizard', frantically maintaining his smoke and mirrors.

I know the wound that was in my life was fundamentally a question of sin, shame, and identity, which worked themselves out as a polluting brokenness inside. Along with the inability to look up with true confidence, and my shifting sense of 'self' being continually obscured by competing internal and external voices, none of which ever provided the solid ground that I craved. I believe this same ancient wound persists in a litany of different expressions within the lives of those around us. It is to

these that the Christ-centred gospel needs to be shared: to be free of sin and shame, and most wonderfully to begin the eternal adventure of being God's cherished, adopted, chosen child. I am not convinced, post pandemic, that we need to spend too much effort on trying to widen the gap in the cultural curtain to expose the frailty of the wizard. Society seems perfectly able to expose its own myths, proclaiming our 'mortality' on the billboard of Covid, perpetuating warring ideologues, and fuelling the fast-fashion nature of 'identities', to mention just a few. However, as I explore a bit more below, we do need to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), living and demonstrating the truth of Christ, his cross, and the surrendered way to victory and security. Indeed, being a people of a positive message that is confident, engaging, and self-giving first and foremost. Thus, avoiding being distracted by the noise of our culture to the degree we forget to be the light, indeed a light that reveals the darkness. Put another way, there is a need to resist pointing out the ills of society for its own sake, and instead reveal the light of Christ and allow the shadows to speak for themselves. Indeed, the ancient wound won't heal without the sting of the salty cleansing gospel, the truth that defies a 'post-truth' pharmakon, that in Christ there is freedom, a truth that reveals both harsh realities about ourselves and the world and yet affirms us as loved and rooted on solid ground (Galatians 5:1). We need to rediscover a confidence and capacity to speak to the issues of sin, shame, and identity that emanates from a harmony with the Holy Spirit, already at work before us, and the grace of Christ available by the means of two crosses, his victory on calvary and mine on my knees in surrendered repentance.

I learnt to swim properly a little later in life as a teenager, having spent many years growing up having fun in the pool but never feeling confident when out in the deep end. After many hours of practice, I finally mastered the art of swimming, which allowed me access to the deep water where I no longer needed the comforting presence of the badly tiled pool floor or the hair littered side rail. I was free from the restrictive need to hold on to something, I no longer needed a fixed presence



with all its offensive accretions. But, as I discovered, swimming in the deep end gets tiring, and at that point I would look for the place of rest, and the side of the pool with all of its 'public facility' charm, became my place of rescue as I caught my breath.

I often use this rather flimsy analogy to describe something of the 'postmodern' shift that has been underway for the best part of sixty years. There is a continuing shift away from the hard and defining 'truths' into the more free and limitless water of personal, validating, and contextualizing narratives, or, 'my truths'. This has given prominence to such moral ideals as authenticity and the demand for a reciprocated accommodation of my self-made claims. In short it plays a significant role in generating a sense of identity, where the question of 'who am I?' is allowed to echo in its own chamber. It is the postmodern framing of identity that I want to spend a moment looking into, as I feel it may be a crucial evangelistic point of engagement as we reveal the light of Christ.

Let me explain a little about authenticity, at least as I understand it. It expresses an increasingly cherished cultural moral value that has a slightly different take on reality from what it might have meant several years ago. Authenticity in this context simply encapsulates the idea of being, of becoming, truly one's self, unmediated and unhindered by controlling influences, norms, or historic orthodox beliefs. Hence, to be 'authentically myself', is to be free, is to be true to my own story, my own, meaningful narrative, empowered to become the ground of my own being - or put another way - I am as I imagine myself to be; I create and sustain my own sense of identity. Interestingly, the use of imagination is always employed in this endeavour as authenticity, which, ironically, never escapes the need to be an ongoing creative act (Genesis 11:4). Returning to my analogy, here the postmodern 'self' pushes away from the side of the pool, confident and free, but continually caught-up in the work of maintaining the 'self'. This demanding work is unnoticed at first, but as each simulacrum of the 'self' is realised as just that, the work becomes noticeable and opens the door to a growing

“
There is a continuing shift away from the hard and defining 'truths' into the more free and limitless water of personal, validating, and contextualizing narratives, or 'my truths'.
”



anxiety. Indeed, this moral value of authenticity is collectively maintained and fostered, so helping keep the growing anxiety at bay, by the further moral demand that every authentic 'self' be accommodated reciprocally within the given community. Again, more simply put, 'I'll value your truth and you value mine'.

The authentic 'self' is self-generated, in a not too dissimilar fashion, like one engaging with a puppet on one's own hand as if it is truly one's self. This is the strange moment that requires a certain madness, which in turn grows to become a nagging anxiety, producing a glance to see where the proverbial pool edge is. But, to avoid surrendering to a higher imagination of ourselves and resisting giving ourselves over to be re-created and informed by an untiringly creative God of love, is to insist on our prideful 'self-creation' (Proverbs 21:2). However, this self-made entity ultimately, has few resources to draw from in our secular, 'cheap truth', and consumerist milieu. As Charles Taylor explores in thorough detail in 'A Secular Age'; the secular self (or as Taylor would describe it, the 'buffered self') may become increasingly aware of the limited resources available in a purely material sense, for constructing a meaningful, satisfying, and deep understanding of the self and the world. I think Jesus said something on this involving sand, rock, and a storm (Matthew 7:24-27)? Augustine of Hippo writes, in his Confessions: 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you'.

The question raises its head: do we possess the highest imagination of our own identity? Is the temptation to believe this, the very thing that disconnects us from the divine, and prevents repentance as metanoia; transformation of heart and mind? Is authenticity in this context simply a form of pride, not dissimilar to that expressed in the third chapter of Genesis? I believe that questions of identity and authenticity are of paramount importance, as it is increasingly the battle ground of the soul, one with which we need to learn how to engage.

There is little space in this postmodern and politically correct utopian dream for criticism or challenge: that would be to risk offence, and so the 'self' generating game continues. I'm reminded here of Søren Kierkegaard's words that 'The possibility of offence is the dialectical element in all that is Christian. Take it away, and Christianity becomes mere paganism' ('Sickness unto Death', London: Penguin, 1989, p.159). Here we have the sting of salt on the wound, and without it we descend into an

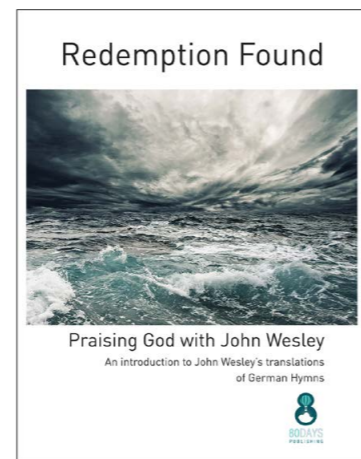
accommodating gospel that merely affirms the 'self-making' work, medicates the anxiety, and plays the game, becoming nothing more than a form of paganism. 'They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace' (Jeremiah 6:14). The saltiness of the gospel, that speaks boldly of our fallen nature, our sin, our shame, and our hope in Christ alone, as the only means to forgiveness, rest, and peace with God and ourselves, will sting - it goes against the grain - but it is true (in the true sense of the word!). Only the truth will set us free, and that truth is most salty when it's expressed on the cross of Christ, and again when we pick up ours. As Jesus said, 'Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life' (John 12:25). Jesus doesn't accommodate our lives, he transforms them.

There is a certain 'ripeness' in the harvest field, but we must resist accommodating strategies and seek prayerfully the creative movement of the Holy Spirit. Let's seek the Holy Spirit to become a missional church that confidently leads people to where the rock can be found; ancient and unchanging and yet ever new to our hearts and imagination; where the lost, anxious, despairing, self-hating, exhausted, and confused can find who they really are: forgiven - surrendered into the embrace of God - and called a chosen people, sons and daughters of God. A repentant discovery, a change of direction, a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of resources, that lead to an identity in Christ that is always already a gift and not a work.

Dr. Bart Woodhouse is a Pioneer Mission Enabler in North Kent who studied at Cliff College and went on to complete a PhD in Postmodern Biblical Studies at Sheffield University. Married to Rachel with three teenage children he is a lover of coffee and most at home in the middle of the Scottish mountains!



RESOURCE REVIEWS



REDEMPTION FOUND: PRAISING GOD WITH JOHN WESLEY

John M Haley

Edinburgh: 80 Days Publishing, 2021
ISBN 978-1-908500-52-6 | pp. 144, £16.50

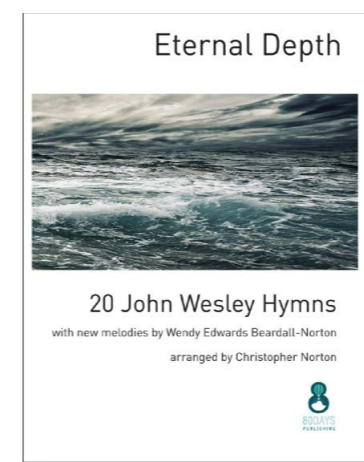
This is the first of three resources offered in a new project initiated by MET member the Revd Dr John Haley. It is an unusual look at John Wesley's thirty-three translations of German hymns, of which sadly a diminishing number are to be found in successive Methodist hymn books. The project has taken nine years to complete and comprises a detailed and scholarly examination of the sources and the way in which Wesley treated them. Many books have been written on the hymn texts of John's brother Charles, but comparatively few on John's translations, so this is a welcome treatment of the topic.

Methodists have traditionally sung great hymns like 'O God, what offering shall I give', 'Now I have found the ground wherein', and 'What shall we offer our good Lord' with little thought given to their origins, and the author's exploration of their background in Germany's Lutheran, Moravian and Reformed traditions is helpful and enlightening. Opening chapters provide a brief useful overview of John Wesley's own spiritual development, particularly the influence of the Moravians he encountered on his voyage to America and the surprising assertion that he probably produced all thirty-three of his translations while still in Georgia. Surprising, that is, on two counts: first, that he only began learning German not long before embarking for America; and, second, that all this was before his life-changing Aldersgate experience. Indeed, the German emphasis on a faith that was not formal but a heart-felt and inward experience no doubt helped to prepare Wesley for what happened back home in Aldersgate.

There follows an interesting chapter on the German hymn writers themselves, some familiar names like Gerhardt, Count Zinzendorf and Spangenberg, and others less well-known but

equally important. The longest chapter in the book examines twenty-two of Wesley's translations, giving useful biblical references for each line of their texts, analysing the way Wesley treated them and offering observations on the different tunes to which each hymn has been sung over the years.

It is this last topic which gives rise to the second component of Dr Haley's project: how to encourage modern congregations to revisit these classic texts and indeed to sing them in their worship. His book suggests familiar traditional tunes which might give them a new lease of life and, more importantly, he has published a companion volume to his book with twenty completely new tunes written specifically for these texts.

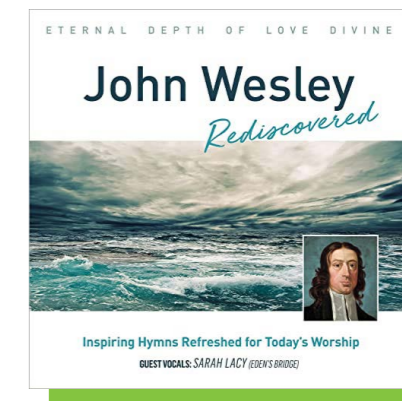


ETERNAL DEPTH: 20 JOHN WESLEY HYMNS WITH NEW MELODIES

*Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton,
arr. Christopher Norton*

Edinburgh, 80 Days Publishing 2021
ISBN 978-1-908500-51-9 | pp. 101, £20

John Haley's email enquiry to Christopher Norton (a musician whose work appears in many contemporary hymn books) about possibly using one of his tunes in this project led eventually to an invitation to his wife, Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton, to write the twenty new tunes found in this novel and interesting publication. She faced a challenging task, not least because many of the texts are, by nature, fairly solid in both theology and metre (thirteen of the twenty have six- or eight-line verses). To an extent, the text and metre dictate the type of melody set to it, and Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton has produced some attractive melodies, though rather more traditional than contemporary in style. The tunes are enhanced and have been given a more contemporary feel by her husband's characteristically imaginative arrangements of her melodies.



JOHN WESLEY REDISCOVERED

(Digital music album by the London Fox Singers)

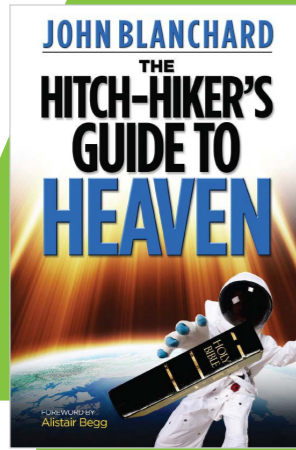
This online recording of Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton's new settings of John Wesley's translations provides a third resource offered by John Haley's project and is freely available at <https://music.apple.com/us/album/john-wesley-rediscovered-hymns/1569056214> and other online music stores. Particularly for non-music readers, this is a good way to access these tunes, some of which are slightly reminiscent of the sort of 19th century gallery music made popular by Maddy Prior and her Carnival Band.

All in all, this is a project to be welcomed. It may not be of interest to those who do not share the author's interest in traditional Methodist hymnody in general, and John Wesley's translations in particular; but for those who do, this is a valuable resource and a useful addition to the existing limited corpus of work on the contribution to hymnody by John (rather than Charles) Wesley. His research provides a valuable contribution to the topic quite apart from the new music provided in the companion ring-bound volume and the online recording.

It remains to be seen how far Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton's music will achieve Dr Haley's aim of encouraging modern Methodist (and other) congregations to read, and better still, to sing John Wesley's translations. As the author freely acknowledges, many of them have been dormant and unused for a long time now, but his effort to revive them is to be commended and deserves to succeed.

Reviewed by the Revd Brian Hoare who is a retired Methodist minister, former Cliff College New Testament Tutor and former Connexional Secretary for Evangelism in the Methodist Church Home Mission Division. He was President of the Methodist Conference from 1995-96 and was Chair of Headway (the predecessor to MET). He is also a prolific author and composer of over sixty hymns and songs.





THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO HEAVEN

John Blanchard

Darlington, England: EP Books, 2013
ISBN 978-0-85234-938-0 | pp. 297, £10.99

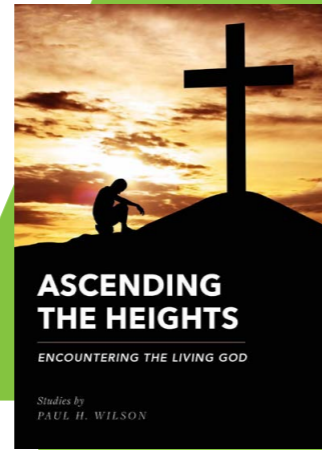
I hadn't really gone in to buy a book but to chat with our Christian bookshop manager. It was the title of this book that caught my eye, plus I've read books by John Blanchard before. I haven't been disappointed!

Solidly based in scripture and illustrated with real life stories, humour and John's insight into the Bible, I found this book to be both inspiring and challenging.

As more people are considering their eternal destiny, owing in part to the current pandemic, it is also a book for our time - maybe not for unbelievers but for all of us who are looking for the bigger picture. There is so much misunderstanding about heaven, where it is, what it is and what to expect. Grounded in Scripture, this book takes us on a journey helping us to long for that time when the invisible becomes visible, the unknowable knowable, and the unimaginable a reality. John unwraps Revelation, taking in the bride and the city, considers conquest and crowns, unimaginable certainties, time and motion, onwards and upwards.

It truly is an exciting read and one that brings clarity to the whole subject of our eternal destiny. It is a book full of hope that looks constantly to Jesus and his work of salvation. A recommended read.

Reviewed by Linda (aka Lou) Ashford, who is a former Prayer Secretary and Vice-Chair of MET. She is married to Mike and they have two grown up sons. They moved from south-west London to north Wiltshire in 2015 - a stunning location which affords easy access to dog walking in the Cotswolds. Lou helps with her local branch of CAP and enjoys leading Bible studies.



ASCENDING THE HEIGHTS

Paul Wilson

Moorleys on behalf of MET, 2021
ISBN 978-0-86071-866-6 | pp. 36, £6

September 25, 2021 saw the return, after a year's absence, of WORD, the annual teaching day held in collaboration between MET and The King's Cross Church, Doncaster. Having attended, I was thrilled when I realised that the Revd Paul Wilson had published a book based on the teaching.

In his introduction, Paul sets out his direction: 'The study follows Peter on his roller-coaster experience of being Jesus' disciple', echoed in the book's subtitle, 'Encountering the Living God'. Each of the chapters concludes with a series of questions for further consideration, either in individual study or as a group.

Paul bases his chapters on Mark's Gospel. In the first, he challenges us to embed the Sabbath principle into our own busy lives: to find time to rest and to spend time with God, both on a weekly and a daily basis. Paul then opens up the Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase.

The overriding theme of the second chapter is the holiness of God as revealed at the Transfiguration, and the exposure of our sin through the law and the prophets. Paul concludes the chapter with an extended discourse on the need for holiness. He reminds us that a commitment to prayer and to scriptural holiness is fundamental to MET.

In the third chapter, Paul focuses even more on the experience of Peter, from the nadir of his denial to the peak of his restoration. He writes of the necessity of allowing the Holy Spirit to apply God's Word to ourselves, and of the need for repentance, for holiness and for insistence on the uniqueness of the way of salvation.

The book is very firmly rooted in 2021, with its references to a world emerging from the pandemic and the summer of sporting activity we have enjoyed. However its lessons, like the gospel message itself, are timeless and universally relevant.

Reviewed by Lynn Petersen who is Vice-Chair for MET and a lay worker at The King's Cross Church in the Doncaster Circuit, where she has been managing the church's community project, The Junction, for the last seven years. Her heart is to see people coming to faith and growing and maturing in their discipleship.



PRAYING ALWAYS

*Roz Addington,
MET's Prayer Secretary*

We continue to live in turbulent times and the need to pray is more urgent than ever. I believe, God has said that he is shaking the nation to bring us back to a realisation of our need for him. The pandemic continues, our climate is unpredictable, more and more people are living on the bread line and are struggling to make ends meet. Homelessness remains a huge problem. There is more and more despair, causing mental health problems, putting even greater pressure on our NHS.

Only God has the answer. We must keep praying for people to turn to God and repent of their sin, enabling them to find the peace and security they so long for. Pray for the Holy Spirit to sweep through our church, taking us back to the roots of John Wesley, and our nation to our Christian heritage.

If you wish to contact Roz with any prayer requests then please email her at: roz.addington1@btinternet.com



WEEK 1 | THE CHURCH

- 1. Repentance:** Moving away from biblical holiness; not truly seeking God's will; doing things in our own strength, rather than God's; denying the power of the Holy Spirit. (Proverbs 28:13; Acts 3:19).
- 2. Church Leaders:** the President and Vice President of Conference, Sonia Hicks and Barbara Easton; Chairs of District, Superintendents, Presbyters, Deacons and lay workers; Local Preachers and leaders of worship. (Proverbs 3: 5-6; Micah 6:8).
- 3. Scriptural Holiness:** A return to Scriptural Holiness; a renewed passion for preaching the gospel; for the centrality of prayer at all levels within the church; for the Holy Spirit to fall, burning up all false teaching and ideologies. (2 Corinthians 7:1; Psalm 139:23-24).
- 4. The work of MET:** For the 3R's: re-kindling of the Wesleyan vision, renewing the Wesleyan mission and raising up of a new generation of Wesleys; moving forward into the future; for David Hull as Chair; Derek Balsdon as Development Worker; the trustees; the executive committee. (1 Chronicles 16:11; Colossians 1:9-11).
- 5. Mission and vision:** renewed vision; a seeking of God's will for the Church connexionally; empowerment of the Holy Spirit; boldness to evangelise our communities in creative ways. (Isaiah 61:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:1-5).
- 6. Cliff College:** Ashley Cooper as Principal, and all the staff; a continuation of the authority of scripture to be upheld; students to grow in biblical faith; good opportunities to put their learning into practice. (Hebrews 4:12; John 8:31-32).
- 7. Young people:** Nathan Veall, seeking to reach out to the Rising Generation; The WHOTWAY initiative; all who work with children and young people; clear biblical teaching; inspiration and guidance through the Holy Spirit. (Psalm 119:9-16; 1 Timothy 4:11).



WEEK 2 | GREAT BRITAIN

- 1. Covid Pandemic:** Give thanks for vaccines; for continuing protection, especially from the Omicron variant; for those suffering from Long Covid; mental health issues, particularly amongst young people; a stop to all misinformation. (Romans 15:13; Psalm 62:5-6).
- 2. NHS and Social Care:** Doctors and nurses battling with Covid on top of trying to reduce the backlog of those waiting for other treatments; adequate funding for Care Home staff; adequate staffing levels in hospital and Care Homes; care packages and help for vulnerable people to allow them to return home. (Isaiah 40:28-31; Matthew 11:28-30)
- 3. The Government:** Wisdom for the Prime Minister and all members of the Cabinet; justice in all policies put forward; an encounter with God and a returning to our Christian heritage. (1 Timothy 2:1-4; Psalm 2:10-12)
- 4. Revival:** A realisation across the country of the need for God, that only he has the answers to the complex issues facing our country; for the Holy Spirit to convict people of corporate selfishness, pride, greed, arrogance, self-righteousness, and egotism. (Matthew 6:33; Jeremiah 29:11-13).
- 5. Charities and foodbanks:** Necessary funding; support in reaching those who are struggling with many and varied needs; those reaching out to the marginalised and vulnerable; the homeless. (Matthew 25:34-40; Deuteronomy 15:11).
- 6. Gangs, Knife Crime and County Lines:** Youngsters caught up in gang culture and the related problems of knife crime and drug abuse; those trapped in County Lines; the police dealing with these issues. (Psalm 140:6-8 & 12; Psalm 9:9).
- 7. Relations with the EU:** Particularly France and the issue of migrants; migrants on the Polish border; fishing rights; the Irish protocol; unity after Brexit. (Proverbs 15:1-2; James 1:19-20).



WEEK 3 | THE NATURAL WORLD AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- 1. Repentance:** Forgiveness for: our abuse of our planet; our ravaging of its resources; destruction of its eco-systems; pollution of the land and sea, causing reduction in biodiversity. (Isaiah 24:4-6; Revelation 4:11)
- 2. COP 26 Agreements:** For nations to commit to the pledges made; reduction in carbon emissions; protection of communities and natural habitats; commitment to release finance to poorer nations; collaboration and the working together to bring meaningful change. (1 Corinthians 1:10; 1 Peter 3:8-9).
- 3. Carbon emissions:** An urgency among Governments to act collaboratively; new technologies to reduce these emissions; financial guarantees from wealthier nations to enable poorer nations to make greener and more sustainable choices. (Jeremiah 2:7).
- 4. Rising sea levels:** Those living in low lying coastal regions; sufficient aid for those affected; climate refugees. (Proverbs 31:8-9).
- 5. Illegal logging:** financial help to tackle the problem; perpetrators to be brought to justice; prevention of loss of habitats and the extinction of wildlife, adding to the problem of increased carbon emissions and rising sea levels. (Nehemiah 9:5b-6).
- 6. Plastics:** Commitment worldwide to reduce and even eliminate all plastics; for environmentally friendly materials to be found; political will around the world to bring in legislation and funding enabling this to happen; the clearing up of polluted habitats. (Galatians 6:2).
- 7. Changing weather patterns:** Areas where there is hardship owing to natural disasters; new strains of crops to stand extremes of weather; farmers coping with these extremes of weather. Cry out to the Lord for mercy. (2 Chronicles 7:14).



WEEK 4 | WORLD ISSUES

- 1. The Persecuted Church:** Afghanistan and other Islamic controlled countries; basic human rights to be upheld; justice and fair treatment; other countries around the world where Christianity is suppressed; release of those in detention; strength and resilience for those suffering. (Isaiah 41:9-11; Romans 8:35-39).
- 2. World poverty:** People living in abject poverty; finance from governmental bodies to tackle these issues; provision for those facing starvation; adequate sanitation and housing; health care; refugees. (Psalm 9:18; 1 John 3:17-18).
- 3. War torn areas of the world:** Those who have lost everything; refugee camps, especially in Yemen; compassion amongst the richer nations to offer sanctuary; adequate aid where there is famine and disease; justice and relief for the helpless. (Psalm 55:22; James 1:14-17).
- 4. Relief and aid agencies:** Rich nations to support poorer nations; charities supporting the oppressed; access to those who need aid the most; adequate funding to made available. (Isaiah 58:9b-10; Proverbs 19:7).
- 5. Those living under repressive regimes:** Nations where there is little or no democracy, particularly Hong Kong where it is under threat, Russia, Myanmar, Belarus and North Korea; those detained for speaking out; exposure of injustices; governments to take action. (Luke 12:11-12; Romans 1:18).
- 6. Natural disasters:** Those across the world who have experienced earthquakes, fires, floods, storms, and drought; financial and mental health support; aid agencies working to alleviate the suffering; finance to re-build infrastructure, particularly in poorer nations. (Nahum 1:7; Psalm 46:1-3).
- 7. Terrorism:** For perpetrators of terror to encounter God; for victims to find peace; regimes across the world which encourage acts of terror; cyber-attacks. (Isaiah 55: 6-7; Romans 12:17 -19 & 21).



*Let us hold
unswervingly to the
hope that we profess,
for he who promised
is faithful.*

HEBREWS 10.23



FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd Dr David A. Hull

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! I have the privilege of writing twice with new year greetings, both here and also in the renewal letter included in this mailing. Do please read that letter alongside this - not least for the very kind and encouraging comments from our members about a range of our work throughout the past year.

At our October meeting, I shared with the executive committee that I don't remember ever enjoying the changing of the seasons as much as I did as summer changed to autumn last year. There could be all sorts of reasons for that: perhaps the pace of life at that time of year is slightly less intense in my current role; perhaps we are now feeling more settled as a family after a number of house moves. It did, however, seem strangely prophetic. With the decisions of last year's Methodist Conference, we have now, I believe, arrived in a new season within the British Methodist Church. The implications of those decisions are still being outworked for many people. There is no doubt, though, that the old season has passed and a new season has come. Though I believe the outcome is highly regrettable, I for one am somewhat relieved that we no longer have to engage in the debates around the Conference report, God In Love Unites Us.

As we have begun a new year, I have noticed that a variety of people in a number of different contexts have spoken and written about the 'one another's of the New Testament: 'love one another ... serve one another ... encourage one another' etc. They serve as wonderful reminders of the actions and attitudes that should characterise both the body of Christ and the lives of individual Christians that form the body. They remind me also of the commitment that Methodist presbyters make at their ordination, to 'watch over one another in love' - a concept, in the Methodist understanding of discipleship, that is at the heart of Christian fellowship for all believers.

It remains to be seen whether this will be the hallmark of the new season within the Methodist Church. Concerning signs have already begun to appear with reports of Circuits being obstructive towards local churches who feel they can no longer continue in connexion with the Methodist Church and who seek to buy their buildings: withholding information; seeking to drive up costs through obtaining outline planning permission; refusing to sell to local church members, even when the due process of bidding on the open market has been completed; preferring, it seems, to sell church buildings for housing or business use, or even for use by other religions, than to continue to be used for Christian mission and ministry.

What is even more concerning, perhaps, is the standard of debate and engagement within the Methodist Church. When 'The Runaway Train' was published last year, as could be expected, I received a significant amount of feedback. I was deeply grateful that so many wrote warmly to express their appreciation. The nature of disagreement was, however, disturbingly insightful, with a noticeable generational divide. I received some responses from ministers who have been retired for, say, more than a decade or so. Though some disagreed with my conclusions, their correspondence was civil, thoughtful and engaged seriously with the points I had raised; it made stimulating reading. By way of contrast, much of the correspondence I received from disagreeing ministers who are a decade and more younger was emotive, shallow and even silly, making no attempt to engage with the points I had made. It does not bode well for the future.

Perhaps the opposite of the 'one another's of the New Testament is the contemporary concept of 'othering' - objectifying those with whom you disagree, denying their innate dignity and treating them as unworthy of respect. It is the modern form of what the philosopher John Stuart Mill described two hundred years or so ago as 'the worst offence': 'to stigmatise those who hold the contrary opinion as bad and immoral' (see his essay, 'On Liberty', chapter 2). Let us hope that this is not becoming a characteristic of the new season within the Methodist Church. When I hear of a desire to depict those who now struggle to affirm the doctrine and discipline of the Methodist Church, though they have held significant positions of responsibility within the denomination, as a 'lunatic fringe', I have my concerns.

There is still much to be outworked within this new season. It is clear that many of our members feel that MET is needed now more than ever. I am so grateful that we stand together, and I look forward to loving, serving and encouraging one another as we each seek to serve the Lord and 'do whatever he tells us' throughout the year ahead.

Rejoicing in our partnership in the gospel,

David



met | Methodist
Evangelicals
Together

MET Connexion is the magazine of
Methodist Evangelicals Together
Registered charity 1196407
methodistevangelicals.org.uk

Chair: The Revd Dr David A. Hull
chair@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

Development Worker: The Revd Derek Balsdon
01260 297609
development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

Administrator & General Secretary:
Marian Izzard
01983 642024
admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk
50a Castle Road, Newport, PO30 1DP

MET Connexion is printed on sustainable
paper which is FSC® Certified. The outer
polywrap of the mailing is recyclable.

