

Spring 2009

# **CHRISTIAN LIBRARIAN**



The Journal of the  
Librarians' Christian Fellowship

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## EVENTS AT A GLANCE

### ●SATURDAY 25 APRIL 2009: CONFERENCE: NOTTINGHAM 2009

**St. Nicholas' Church, Maid Marian Way, Nottingham**, from 10.30.a.m. Speakers: Rev. **Rhona Floate**, and Rev. **Andii Bowsher** John's College, Nottingham. Details: pp. 7-10.

### ●TUESDAY 19 MAY 2009: VISIT TO WESTMINSTER CENTRAL HALL, from 2.00.p.m.

An opportunity to tour the Central Hall and see the Methodist archives stored there. Details: pp. 10-11.

### ●TUESDAY 14 JULY 2009: SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING

**De Havilland Campus, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield**, from 5.30.p.m. Guest speaker: Rev. **David Ronco**. Details: p. 11.

### ●TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2009: VISIT TO ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL LIBRARY, from 2.30.p.m.

Details: p. 11.

### SATURDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2009: ANNUAL PUBLIC LECTURE

**Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Milton Keynes**, from 2.30.p.m. Speaker: **Alan Howell**, *Kitab Bookshop*. Details p. 11.

## PRAYER NOTES FOR SPRING 2009

### PLEASE PRAY FOR

●The work of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship and its forthcoming programme of activities including the *Nottingham 2009* Conference and the *Service of Thanksgiving*. Pray that the latter event will be well supported by *Umbrella* delegates.

●Suitable volunteers who are willing to respond to requests for assistance that we receive from Christian libraries in Britain and overseas.

●The staff of the soon-to-be disbanded *MLA West Midlands* and others who are facing the prospect of upheaval in the workplace. Pray, also, for librarians who are facing pressure due to the Sunday opening of libraries.

●The work of the *William Booth College* and the *Wales Evangelical School of Theology* and their libraries (both featured in the Winter 2008 issue of *Christian Librarian*).

●Christian librarians and others who are trying to resolve the issues of 'work/life balance'

●Give thanks for the life and ministry of our member **John Burne** whose recent passing is reported elsewhere in this issue.



# **LIBRARIANS' CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**

**CHRISTIANS IN LIBRARY, INFORMATION AND ARCHIVE WORK**

*An organisation 'in liaison' with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.  
Affiliated to: Christian Research Association; Christians at Work; Evangelical Alliance; Transform Work  
UK; Universities' & Colleges' Christian Fellowship.  
Web Site: [www.librarianscf.org.uk](http://www.librarianscf.org.uk)*

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## THE FIRST WORD

**GORDON HARRIS** shares some brief jottings on the shortest gospel and raises one or two important questions for contemporary Christians

# ***MIRACLE STORIES***



When I went on silent retreat recently my spiritual director suggested I read the whole of Mark's Gospel. I welcomed the opportunity to get stuck into the Word, to read the entire account of Christ's life, all in one go, in a comfortable and non-rushed environment, away from work and home ..... I recommend retreats!

So, I thought I would share the brief jottings I made on this the shortest of the Gospels. Mark divides neatly into two parts of eight chapters each. The first concerns Galilee, the second concerns the inexorable progress to Jerusalem. In this issue of ***Christian Librarian*** I shall share my jottings on the Galilee narrative, and in the next issue I will deal with the second half of the Gospel. These jottings are very much a summary of the total impression gained by a reader who reads right through several chapters. They are not intended to be a commentary on specific verses.

## Mark, chapters 1-8

These chapters are characterised by tension and misapprehension between Jesus and the twelve disciples. The account starts with Jesus experiencing a rapid rise to fame. His was an unrelenting journey, with people pressing in on Him wherever he went around the northern towns and villages. He always wanted to be on the move, not to be the centre of attention, always damping down the fever generated by his miracles. He didn't even want the demons to recognise him.

These first eight chapters also emphasise his brushes with the teachers of the Law, and the Pharisees. Mark depicts them as the bad guys. Why is this such a black and white judgement? Surely they were defending the Law handed down by Moses?

Is there a parallel between these events and the rise of independent healers and preachers outside the established (and fossilised) church?

Jesus often expresses impatience and frustration with his listeners' lack of understanding, and he makes remarks such as "*Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod*". At the same time his mood is tempered by compassion.

The spectacular miracles only took place when Jesus saw that people had immediate or long-term problems: the disciples in the sinking boat, the woman with the illness of many years.

The chapters are in fact so full of little stories of miracles that they seem to crowd out any record of the details of what Jesus said. But it is clear that while He saw supernatural intervention as a sign of the Kingdom, as part of the Good News, it was His call to live new lives which was more important. For that reason, he refused to give the Pharisees a sign when challenged, and he walked off.

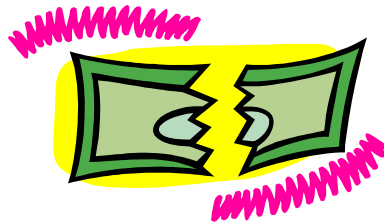
**Question:** *Is the Jesus of Mark 1-8 championed by the Church?*

**Gordon A. Harris**, *BSocSc, MPhil, FCLIP, DipKM*, is President of the *Librarians' Christian Fellowship* and works as Senior Corporate Information Officer for *Tearfund*.

## THE SECOND WORD

**LOUISE MANNERS** reflects on abuses of the tax system and identifies sectors of library and information work which are especially at risk during our present economic downturn

# ***GETTING THE ECONOMY MOVING***



Keen to follow the Chancellor's advice to spend money to get the economy moving, I hired a man to move furniture and take some furniture to the municipal rubbish disposal area. I informed the man I would pay by cheque. On the day the man refused to accept a cheque and insisted on taking me to a cashpoint so that I could pay in cash. He was unable to give me a receipt but would put one in the post. I am still waiting for the receipt. One wonders how much tax actually gets paid! With the European elections coming up in May 2009 and a General Election due in or before May 2010 the economy will be a major election issue.

My church is currently recruiting a new vicar. The first advertisement did not bring enough candidates to conduct interviews so the post was re-advertised. The appointment, when it is made, will mean that all the projects waiting in limbo for a decision to be made by the incoming vicar, will be able to move forward, and new projects can be started.

The Christmas post brought news from Down Under from a former colleague working as a librarian to a construction industry firm in Australia that she has been made redundant along with many other staff. Her firm's construction projects are in Australia and Dubai and the projects have ground to a halt. In the global downturn library and information posts in construction, financial services and law firms are very vulnerable.

**Louise Manners**, *DipLib, MA, MCLIP*, was elected as Chair of the Executive committee of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship at the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 19 April 2008.

**NEWS**

# **NOTTINGHAM 2009**

***BACK TO ROBIN HOOD COUNTRY***



*Please join us for LCF's Annual Conference*

**SATURDAY 25 APRIL 2009**

***at ST. NICHOLAS' CHURCH,  
MAID MARIAN WAY, NOTTINGHAM,***

*from 10.30.am – 4.45.p.m.*

## **SPEAKERS**

***Rev. ANDII BOWSHER***

*“Adam and Dewey”*

***Rev. RHONA FLOATE***

*“Desert Island Texts:  
Resources for Integrating Occupation and Vocation”*

## CONFERENCE DETAILS

**Nottingham 2009**, this year's annual conference of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship, is to be held on **Saturday 25 April 2009**, at **St. Nicholas' Church, Maid Marian Way, Nottingham**, from 10.30 am – 4.45.p.m. The speakers are to be the **Rev. Andii Bowsher**, a member of the teaching staff at *St. John's College, Nottingham*, and the **Rev. Rhona Floate**, a former librarian who is now a parish priest in the Church of England.

The booking fee for the conference is £24.00 (cheaper than 2008!), payable to Librarians' Christian Fellowship. This includes lunch and refreshments. There is a reduced rate of £18.00 for unwaged delegates.

## SPEAKERS AND THEMES

- The **Rev. Andii Bowsher, BA, PGCert, PGDip, MA**, is a tutor in practical theology and pathway leader for Mixed Mode training at *St. John's College, Nottingham*. Before moving into full time education he was in church-based ordained ministry, in mostly urban contexts, and then in chaplaincy in higher and further education institutions in West Yorkshire.

Andii likes looking at 'gospel and culture' issues and says "*you can get me interested in almost anything involving culture, linguistics, the arts, mission, post-*

*modern spiritualities, spiritual direction, science, environment and justice issues and Islam – and just about anything that combines two or more of that list!*"

Andii has chosen the interesting theme *Adam and Dewey*. He will remind us that in Genesis we read of Adam giving names to the animals. This seems an insignificant moment amongst weighty theological themes and dramas, but it may have important things to say to us in a knowledge economy and amid technological and cultural change.

- Before ordination in the Church of England, the **Rev. Rhona Floate, BA, DipThSt, DipLib, MCLIP**, managed libraries in the water industry and plant science research. She is now the Priest-in-Charge of Wool and East Stoke in the Diocese of Salisbury.

Rhona's session is to be entitled *Desert Island Texts: Resources for Integrating Occupation and Vocation*. This will be a workshop style presentation to help deepen our understanding of our chosen occupation and our Christian faith as an integrated whole.

## BACK TO ROBIN HOOD COUNTRY

We trust our delegates will find that Nottingham is a convenient and accessible conference venue. It can be reached in approximately two



hours by train from London St. Pancras, and can also be easily reached by rail services from Birmingham, Derby, Gloucester, Leicester, Lincoln, Manchester and other regional centres. St. Nicholas' Church is a short walk from the railway and bus stations in central Nottingham. Although there are no parking facilities at the church, there is usually ample space available in the nearby multi-storey car parks. Full travel details will be sent to all registered delegates nearer the time.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

- LCF's Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 25 April 2009, from 11.20. am, as part of the annual conference at St. Nicholas' Church, Nottingham. Nominations for office and details of any motions to be put to the meeting should be sent to The Secretary not later than *Saturday 21 March 2009*. Nominations are invited for the following executive committee positions: *Chair, Secretary, Irish Regional Rep, Eastern Regional Rep, Midlands Regional Rep, London Regional Rep, Southern Regional Rep, and Member Without Portfolio*.

- Although we already have candidates willing to serve in *some* of these positions, we are always interested in recruiting new members to our executive body. If you are

interested in a particular post, and would like to know more about what would be involved, please contact The Secretary.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**

We will be asking the annual general meeting to approve a number of amendments to the Fellowship's Constitution. These will be mainly to allow for the appointment of additional officers not currently included in the Constitution – for example, a Web Site Manager and a Library Assistance Manager.

We will need to remove references to the now defunct *Professional Groups Co-ordinating Committee*, of the *Universities' and Colleges' Christian Fellowship*. We would also like to simplify the arrangements concerning the election and re-election of members to the executive committee.

We will be circulating the wording of the amendments with our AGM agenda, sometime in March. Recipients of our ***E-Newsletter*** will receive the agenda as part of the next e-mailing. Members without e-mail facilities will receive their agendas in the post. If you do not receive an agenda by either of these means by mid-April, please contact The Secretary (address below).

Most members will have received copies of the present constitution when they joined the

Fellowship. We are also placing the document on the LCF web site at [www.librarianscf.org.uk](http://www.librarianscf.org.uk) However, If you would like to receive a printed copy of the current constitution, please contact Janice Paine, 22 Queensgate Gardens, 396 Upper Richmond Road, Putney, London, SW15 6JN. Tel. 020 8785 2174.

### **SEE YOU IN NOTTINGHAM?**

Attendance at the Conference is not restricted to members of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship. Please plan to attend the Conference yourself, if at all possible, and help us to publicise the event by making the arrangements known to colleagues and friends likely to be interested.

It is possible that our speakers will wish to use Powerpoint equipment as part of their presentations. Hire of such equipment is expensive – would anyone be able to bring along a data projector that we can use during the conference?

Conference bookings and correspondence, and enquiries about the wider activities of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship, should be addressed to The Secretary, Graham Hedges, 34 Thurlestone Avenue, Ilford, Essex, IG3 9DU. Home tel. 020 8599 1310, Work tel. 020 8871 7467. E mail [secretary@librarianscf.org.uk](mailto:secretary@librarianscf.org.uk) Web site [www.librarianscf.org.uk](http://www.librarianscf.org.uk)

## **OTHER EVENTS FOR 2009**

### **TUESDAY 19 MAY 2009: VISIT TO WESTMINSTER CENTRAL HALL**

If you attended our annual conference in April 2008, you may recall that our speaker Richard Ratcliffe invited a group of LCF members to visit the Westminster Central Hall and see the Methodist archives stored there.

We have now been able to arrange a visit for the date mentioned above. The formal visit will begin at 2.00 pm but our plan is that those who can arrive in time will have lunch together in the Central Hall's basement cafe from 12.30. pm.

Richard Ratcliffe will probably have retired from his role as the Central Hall Archivist before May, but he is planning to come back and help show the LCF group round. The tour will include the Wesleyan Methodist Historic Roll and the Great Hall (provided there is no event on that day in the Great Hall) and the Grand staircase which featured in the film *Calendar Girls*. There are also paintings by Bernard Sleigh and A.T. Nowell. It is hoped that the new display in the Visitor Centre will be in place by then as will the *Methodist Publishing House* book collection.

Please make a note to join us

in seeing behind the scenes in this major centre of Non-Conformist worship at the heart of Westminster. If you would like to join us for the tour, please let The Secretary know, indicating whether or not you will be able to join the LCF group for lunch.

**TUESDAY 14 JULY 2009:  
SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING**

CILIP (*Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals*) will be returning to the **de Havilland Campus** of the **University of Hertfordshire**, at Hatfield, Hertfordshire for their next *Umbrella* Conference. The dates are **Tuesday 14 and Wednesday 15 July 2009**. As our contribution to this major professional gathering, we are organising another *Service of Thanksgiving*, to take place from 5.30. pm on the Tuesday evening. The Rev. **David Ronco**, a locally based Baptist minister, will be our guest speaker.

Please support the Service with your prayers, and if possible your presence, whether or not you are able to attend the *Umbrella* event as a whole. The Service of Thanksgiving is one of the “public faces” of the Fellowship and usually attracts a good number of delegates who are not members of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship. However, the conference schedule is always tight and this year our short time of worship will overlap with an exhibitors' reception. We would like

to ensure a good attendance, and will be grateful to members who make a special effort to come to Hatfield to attend the Service. The actual location on the campus is not yet known but visitors will be able to obtain details from the conference desk.

We will need the services of two or three stewards to hand out service sheets, etc. If you can help, please contact The Secretary,

**TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER  
2009: VISIT TO ST. PAUL'S  
CATHEDRAL LIBRARY**

We have arranged a visit to the Library of *St. Paul's Cathedral*, London, from 2.30. pm on this date. Places will be limited to fifteen, so if you would like to reserve a place, please contact The Secretary now.

**SATURDAY 17 OCTOBER  
2009: ANNUAL LECTURE**

*The Church of Christ the Cornerstone* in Milton Keynes will be the venue for this year's Annual Lecture. Our guest speaker will be **Alan Howell**, Manager of the *Kitab* bookshop which provides Christian resources for the Asian and Muslim communities. Details will follow later but please book the date and plan to attend.

# **LIBRARIANS' CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTER**



**From The Secretary: Graham Hedges, Hon. FCLIP, MCLIP, 34 Thurlestone Avenue, Ilford, Essex, IG3 9DU. Home tel. 020 8599 1310; Work tel. 020 8871 7467. E mail secretary@librarianscf.org.uk; Web site www.librarianscf.org.uk**

## **ANYONE ELSE FOR INDIA?**

Mrs. Sheila Ponraj, the very committed and enthusiastic director of *Bharatiya Christi Seva Dal* (Indian Christian Service Society) in Madhupur in the state of Jharkhand, is eagerly looking for a librarian to organise more professionally the library of 30 – 40,000 volumes that have been gathered to serve their school and missionaries working in that area of eastern India. This could obviously be work for a small team or a commitment over a period by an individual. It would be a great encouragement to Mrs. Ponraj if someone would get in touch with her to discuss possibilities. If you are interested, please e-mail

[Sheilaponraj@gmail.com](mailto:Sheilaponraj@gmail.com) telephone 00 91 09431 1328 39, or write to Mrs. Sheila Ponraj, Bharatiya Christi Sava Dal, Lalgah, Madhupur, Jharkhand 815353, India.

## **CHRISTIAN BOOKSELLERS' CONVENTION**

The *Bible Society* is taking over the organisation of the annual **Christian Booksellers' Convention** in time for the 2009 CBC trade event. Following recent negotiations, it has been agreed that the day to day operations will be carried out by the trading arm of the Bible Society and that the next CBC will take place alongside the Bible Society-run **Christian Resources Exhibition** at the **Sandown Park Exhibition Centre, Esher, Surrey, during 12-15 May 2009**. CBC has a long and distinguished record of service to the Christian trade in books, Bibles, music and other products. It has been suggested that the move to locate CBC within Bible Society "offers the exciting possibility of greater investment into the exhibition and a larger team of event organisers to run it, positioning CBC as the central event of the year for retailers, distributors and publishers." You can obtain more information about both the Christian Booksellers' Convention and the Christian Resources Exhibition from the Exhibition Director, Steve Briars at [steve@creonline.co.uk](mailto:steve@creonline.co.uk)

## **BEN HUR AT GREENWICH**

The O2 Centre in Greenwich, London, is to host a mammoth stage production of **Ben Hur** on **15, 18 and 19 September 2009**. The venue will welcome four hundred performers, one hundred animals, and five chariots for the live adaptation of Lew Wallace's celebrated novel in which a young Jewish nobleman finally learns to forgive his Roman enemies after witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus. The theatrical translation of the 1880 best-selling novel is predicted to cost £5 million and will receive its premiere performances at the O2 before going on tour. You can find more information, including ticket prices, on the O2's web site. These performances of **Ben Hur** will coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the 1959 epic film version starring Charlton Heston in the title role. **Ben Hur** last appeared on the London stage in a ten-man pantomime style presentation at the *Battersea Arts Centre* in 2002.

## **OPENING VIRTUAL DOORS**

The outstanding collections of *Lambeth Palace Library*, the historic library and record office of the Archbishops of Canterbury and the principal repository of the history of the Church of England, have been made more accessible with the launch of the Library's newly re-

designed web site at [www.lambethpalacelibrary.org](http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org). As well as practical details on accessing the Library's collections and other services, the web site allows potential users to view the full scope of its research resources via its electronic catalogues and outlines of its holdings. Improved features on the new-look site include downloadable research guides covering a range of topics, from helping people trace their family history where their ancestors included Anglican clergy, through to trends in church architecture and clerical costume through the ages. The new site has been designed and developed by *Tape London Limited*, whose previous work has included developing the web sites of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Museum of London.

## **VERDICT ON THE SHACK**

- Our Isle of Wight member **Lois Cooper** has sent us her thoughts on William P. Young's successful - yet controversial - novel **The Shack** (Hodder and Stoughton, £7.99, ISBN 978-0340979495). Lois writes:

*"During my last holiday the most popular read was **The Shack** by William Young. It was quoted from at our Bible talks in the evening, cried over during train journeys and the rest of us were all queuing to read it!*

*When I got back The Christian*

*Viewpoint Reading Group took it on as their book to read. I was so glad but also nervous because of some of the different ideas which the book portrayed.*

*We all found it a very moving story and one we just couldn't put down. The story is about Mack's youngest daughter who was abducted during a family weekend. He finds a note from God to meet him in the shack. There were some things in it which we weren't comfortable with, but on the other hand it was good to look differently at "The Trinity" and to re-think one's beliefs and be challenged about some prejudices too. We thought it brought out the theme of suffering and forgiveness very well. The descriptions in it were good. It was a book that needs to be discussed and remembered . It is not inspired but on the other hand we all found different things that spoke to us as Christians."*

- Our Somerset member, Anne Nicklen, has also read ***The Shack*** and recommends Paul Grimmond's review article *We Need More Shack Time* which appears at <http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/briefing/library/5395/> Anne says that this is the best review that she has read of William P. Young's book.

Grimmond concludes, "***The Shack*** is a beguiling mix of truth and error. The combination of ideas and language sweep the reader along so that it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two. In fact, the book works in such a way that

*you don't want to. The theological discussion comes wrapped in an incredibly powerful emotional journey".*

He continues, "Is it too much to suggest that Christians are meeting God in ***The Shack*** because they haven't met him face-to-face in the Bible? Would it be unfair to think that we have spent more time drinking at the 'shack' of individualism and comfort than from the well of scriptural truth? "

- Have you read ***The Shack*** - and what is your verdict on the novel? We will be pleased to receive other comments from members and friends of LCF. You can read a more formal review by Barbara Gilman in our *Bookworm* feature elsewhere in this issue.

## **DAWN TREADER HITS THE ROCKS**

According to recent reports on the ***Internet Movie Database*** and elsewhere, there is some doubt about whether the third film in the series based on C.S. Lewis's ***The Chronicles of Narnia*** will be made. According to these reports, *Walt Disney Studios* have announced that they will *not* be co-producing, financing or distributing ***The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*** as originally planned. The Disney organisation appear to be worried that the public appetite for large budget fantasy epics may have declined and that a

third Narnian film would bring in less money at the box office than its predecessors, Other possible reasons for Disney jumping ship are considered in *The Secret history of why Disney dumped 'Narnia'*, an article that was posted on the blog of Patrick Goldstein of the **Los Angeles Times** on 19 January 2009. This article mentions that *Walden Media*, who hold the film rights to the Narnian series, have been negotiating with other major film companies and that a formal announcement may be imminent. Let's hope that, by the time these words appear in print, a new backer will have been found and the **Dawn Treader** will be sailing again.

## **COMMITTED LIBRARIAN**

We were sorry to hear of the death of our Biggin Hill member **John Burne** (1932 – 2008) on 23 December 2008 after a long battle with cancer.

John served for many years as a government librarian and held senior positions in the library of the *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*. His work for the Ministry took him to Aberdeen and during this period he was a speaker at LCF's Scottish Conference in May 1990.

After John's retirement from government libraries he was head-hunted and took a library post with the *World Maritime University*, in Malmo, Sweden.

After retiring from this job,

John spent ten years working for the mission organisation *Operation Mobilisation*. As OM's Operations Manager he was responsible for the organisation's properties, but he also showed a tireless passion for recruiting young people for mission work.

George Verwer, the founder of OM, has said that John "*was one of the most committed men ... and his wife Gwenda at his side ... that we have ever had*".

John attended several LCF meetings and also joined small groups of LCF members who attended the annual lectures of the *Christian Research Association*.

Members will want to give thanks for John's life and witness and pray for his wife Gwenda and their children Jeremy, Rachel and Andrew.

## **EBSCO PUBLISHING**

The Librarians' Christian Fellowship has recently entered into an electronic licensing relationship with *EBSCO Publishing*, a company which describes itself as "*the world's most prolific aggregator of full text journals, magazines and other sources*". The full text of **Christian Librarian** will in future be available on EBSCO Publishing's databases. Subscribers will be able to retrieve articles from our publications and the Fellowship will receive a small commission for each article retrieved.

# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

**News from the Membership Secretary:  
Janice Paine, MCLIP, 22 Queensgate Gardens, 396 Upper Richmond  
Road, Putney, London, SW15 6JN.  
Tel. 020 8785 2174**

We would like to remind current members that subscription renewals are now due for 2009. It would be greatly appreciated if payment could be sent **before the end of April**. Minimum subscription rates for 2009 are: £22 (full rate), £14 (retired, unemployed and students), £14 each for married couples both in membership; overseas (outside Europe) please add £4 for postage. If you have **changed address, job, etc.**, please let us know as soon as possible.

## **LATE RENEWAL FOR 2008**

HARRIS, Miss Norma Lynne, 11 Constant Road, , Port Talbot, SA13 1UB - Home Tel: 01639-890076 - Email: nlharris72@hotmail.com

## **CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP DETAILS**

ARTHUR, Mrs Elaine, 6 Sevenoaks Drive, Castledean Park, Bournemouth, Dorset BH7 7JG - Freelance Library and Information Professional. Home Tel: 07515370270 - Email: elainearthur1@yahoo.co.uk

DIXON, Miss Brenda A., 17 Berkeley Precinct, Ecclesall Road, Sheffield, S11 8PN - Home Tel: - Email: b.a.dixon@sheffield.ac.uk

JOHNSON, Mr Richard I., Hirilonde, 185 Longford Lane, Longlevens Gloucester, GL2 9HD - Head of Biblical Studies/Library Supervisor, Redcliffe College, Gloucester. Home Tel: 01452 506974 - Email: rjohnson@redcliffe.org

PLAISTER, Miss Jean M., 3 St.Regis Close, Alexandra Park Road, Muswell Hill London, N10 2DE - Home Tel: 0208-444-8860 - Email: jean.plaister@tiscali.co.uk

SAVIN, Mr James, 63 Briarfield Avenue, Finchley, London, N3 2LG - Tax Know How Officer, Slaughter and May. Home Tel: 0208 346 5932 - Email: james.savin@btopenworld.com

SHIRE, Mrs Shirley A., 35 Sea Mills Lane, Stoke Bishop, Bristol, BS9 1DP - Libn., Bristol Baptist College. Home Tel: 0117 9682474 - Email: shirley.shire@googlemail.com

SNUGGS, Mrs Elaine R., 37 Norcott Close, Dunstable, Beds LU5 4AH - Home Tel: 01582 665188 - Email: john.snuggs@btinternet.com

WARREN, Mr Geoffrey R., 15 Stagborough Way, Stourport-on-Severn, Worcs DY13 8SS - Home Tel: 01299871218 - Email: geoff.warren@stagborough15.freeserve.co.uk



## MAIN ARTICLES

**Will Christians be unable to work in public libraries if Sunday opening becomes more widespread? Do we really need libraries now that the Internet is widely available? In the first of a new series, RICHARD WALLER surveys recent librarianship periodicals and highlights some areas of concern to Christians**

# ***EYE ON THE PROFESSION***

I can't help but empathise with Katherine Williams' complaint in the *Library and Information Gazette* <sup>(1)</sup> that jobs for the newly qualified are hard to find and that there is a general incomprehension out there about what we librarians do. My brother-in-law is just the same, unable to understand why anyone needs to go to college to learn to stamp out books, this despite two MCLIPs in the family, one his own son!

More seriously, Katherine speaks about the way in which voluntary work in the field has helped her understand the profession and added to her CV as she continues to search for a job. But it did leave me wondering whether as individual Christian librarians we shouldn't seek to positively encourage such people by making volunteer opportunities more widely available. If we care about people, we should try to help. I can think of several long-term unemployed people helped over the years by volunteer work. It can have a dramatic effect on individual morale. Perhaps those of us whose work means that we can make such opportunities available should do so to folk like Katherine. Going to be a lot more of them, judging by the gloomy economic news.

Of vastly more serious import, the main item in the recent professional news that concerns us as Christians in library and information work is to be found in the *Public Library Journal* <sup>(2)</sup>. 'Seven days a week?' is published under the 'research' banner and takes the top place on the cover credits. This article is a very good summary of exactly what is really going on about Sunday opening as opposed to what people think is going on. It isn't actually that widespread in public libraries, and the writers ask some sensible questions about whether those doing it are actually following a rational

methodology for success. This isn't the place to summarise a serious piece of work, I suggest you read it for yourself. If you don't get the PLJ yourself, it should soon be available on-line via the CILIP website although it hadn't appeared as of 29 December, although it should have done to judge by the policy statement on the site.

'*Seven days a week?*' certainly attracted my attention as a recent victim of Sunday opening proposals. I read it with interest and some amusement, although those who wish to promote Sunday opening probably wouldn't have liked the reasons! I think it tells us two things. Firstly that Sunday opening is unlikely to be a really major issue in the near future (Can you seriously see it becoming widespread in the current worsening economic situation?); and secondly (and more importantly) that the tone of the article tells you that the eventual outcome of all this will be exactly what we see with the shops, libraries will start to open on a Sunday. There is no longer a real debate.

There are implications in all this. Already some Christians who work in retailing can't work for certain employers if they wish to continue to follow Biblical principles of not working on Sundays. Are public libraries going to go the same way, that Christians can't work for them? Time to stand up and stake out a position. To a degree those of us already in post are unlikely to be effected at one level; our rights will be formally respected and there will be legal redress if they aren't, but there is also peer pressure, '*Because you won't work we have to do it for you...*' Seen some of this already, Christian library assistants subtly put under pressure. Well, this sort of thing is hardly unexpected, we were warned, '*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*' (2 Timothy 3:12) and there are more subtle forms of persecution than being thrown to the lions.

The Archbishop of Canterbury gets a mention for saying that Sunday opening of libraries would be a good thing, and the authors also very fairly mention his caveat that no one must be forced to work. This concludes the article and gives an impression that Christians approve the idea. They didn't consult the LCF, or at least, they didn't quote us if they did, and the opinions of those of us who work in libraries do have relevance, probably more relevance than those of the Archbishop. We even have a position paper on the subject produced by Ken Bakewell a few years ago when this topic first came to the fore. Rowan Williams speaks only for his party within the Church of England, others have very different views.

We clearly have more work to do in this area to see that Sunday observance is still possible for the next generation of Christian public

library staff. Time to make sure that this does not pass unchallenged.

Finally on this topic, have a look at the picture on the last page of the article. Someone, presumably working in a library on a Sunday, wearing what looks very like a tee-shirt from one of the satanic pop groups. No comment!

To take off on a totally different tack, we don't always know when we are well off. ***Focus on international library and information work***<sup>(3)</sup> has a wonderful account of a visit to the UK by Raj Kumar Gandharba, winner of the Anthony Thomson award in 2008, which provides an opportunity for third world librarians to visit the UK. Raj comes from Nepal and all his comments are interesting, but, having worked for the last thirty-four years in public libraries, I found his sheer astonishment at the concept of mobile libraries and the way they reach out into areas with no libraries quite moving.

Nowhere in Britain is remote from a library service in the way parts of Nepal are, but we take this access for granted and often debate if mobiles now have a useful role in a society with a highly mobile population. Reading his article, you realise just how fortunate we are to have such amenities, and we should value them more lest we wake up one day and find the accountants have closed all the libraries because they aren't needed now the Internet is available. I exaggerate, but having recently heard a senior librarian in a London authority wondering why we '*waste money*' on an inter-library loans service for only a few old items, it does make you think, as does the news item on page 7 of the December ***Update***<sup>(4)</sup> about what's happening with some school libraries.

It appears that libraries are not being provided in certain new schools and others are closing them as irrelevant. The idea of having a contribution from librarians at a conference on '*Building schools for the future*' was rejected as irrelevant. It appears that one school threw out all non-fiction items and moved the remaining fiction titles to an '*impossibly small room*'. The *School Libraries Group* is understandably concerned, and so should we all be. In Wigan where I work the staff have recently been sponsoring the building of a new school in rural Uganda, I would like to see the reaction of the Ugandans to the idea that you don't need a library! You see priorities clearer from further away, places like Nepal and Uganda, for instance.

Another question was sparked off in my mind by the sight of the news article on the CILIP policy forum meeting in the October ***Update***<sup>(5)</sup>. The MLA is apparently about to issue '*Guidance on controversial stock*' in the wake of concerns about allegedly inflammatory and terrorist material available in some libraries. I think this is a very useful move in

these troubled times. But I do recall Philip Sewell, LCF's first President, telling me how, in the face of the unrest leading up to World War 2 with Mosley's Blackshirts on the one hand and militant Marxists on the other, he put on two displays of fascist and communist materials so as to make the point that balanced access to information was possible via the library although he personally loathed both points of view. I wonder what would happen if something similar was tried now? Our tolerant society can be very intolerant and I suspect that displays of BNP material in the local library might not be seen as a contribution to free debate, nor might anything that attacked any other shibboleths of modern society. Rather than rising to the top of his profession and collecting an OBE, would Philip have been shown the door in today's service?

And finally, do you ever surf the library blogs and discussion sites? Try it sometime, there is a lot of good stuff out there. I was most entertained by a reference in a Talis e-newsletter that sent me off on the trail of an article by 'technology evangelist' Richard Wallis <sup>(6)</sup>. Yes, they really have adopted the language and methods previously the domain of Gospel evangelists, even the picture advertising the meeting was of a leaflet that was exactly in the style of a poster or leaflet for a evangelistic campaign. Billy Graham might have used it! They do say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

## References

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5. *Controversial stock guidance wins endorsement* **Library and information update**. October 2008 pp. 18-19
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**GEOFF WARREN** describes his own reaction to the prospect of compulsory redundancy and early retirement and suggests ways in which Christians can respond to unwelcome work situations

# ***FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS***

***SOME THOUGHTS ON WORKPLACE UPHEAVAL***



There was a time, when I first started to work in libraries in the early 1970s, when a job for life meant just that. Re-structuring, re-applying for your job and compulsory redundancy were things that happened to people in the private sector - not in the comfortable worlds of local government or education or health (where most library and information services are located). Recent times have told a very different story. I imagine that nearly every LCF member will have been affected in some way or other by major upheaval in the workplace in the last few years. The difficult economic situation guarantees that such uncertainties will characterise the coming few years as managers seek to deliver services to their users in flexible and more efficient ways with less money available to spend on

employees. Christians are not personally shielded from the stress of job loss or job change – so we need to cope ourselves. But God has called us to go through such times with our colleagues. Many of them do not have a faith in Christ as “*an anchor to keep the soul*”, so we need to be equipped to help others as well. This double challenge will require us to have a clear Christian perspective on the changing landscape of libraries.

In early 2008 all seventeen staff working for *MLA West Midlands* (along with those employed by the other Museums, Libraries and Archives Councils across the English Regions – well over a hundred people in total) received news that our regional agencies were to be wound up and that all of us would therefore be out of a job by March 2009. Although I believe this is the right time for me to accept compulsory redundancy and early retirement, this last year has still been a stressful time for me at work. My responsibilities as Deputy CEO at *MLA West Midlands* have included managing the redundancy process, helping others with their career development, trying to ensure that no one ends up with serious stress problems and preparing for the solvent wind-up of the charitable company. None of this is very satisfying. It is more about “*a time to tear down*” than “*a time to build*” [1]. So what difference can being a Christian make in undertaking such tasks as these? If Martin Luther was right when he asserted that it is possible to sweep the floor to the glory of God, how can we go through upheaval in the workplace in a God-glorifying way?

To begin with I think it helps to remain as positive as we can. That may not sound particularly spiritual or even very helpful. It will not come easy in difficult circumstances. However even secular personal and career development programmes put it very high up their list. They will tell you to have a strong reason why, to define your goals and then to develop a range of possibilities with which to prioritise and plan so you can really make a difference (see for example GOMAD) [2]. So surely if they can do this without Christ, we should be able to do it “*in Christ*”. Don’t we believe that in everything God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose [3]? One of the practical ways we can express hope and confidence is to recognise the value of our past achievements even when things come to their end. When jobs,

organisations and structures are being removed it is easy to feel that all our work has been pointless. At MLA West Midlands we have tried to counter these negative feelings by defining our legacy and “bequeathing” it to MLA Council whose new teams will be taking over some of our roles. In our farewell newsletter, we set out twenty achievements that we felt the succeeding structure needs to build on [4]. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verses 10 to 15 about the quality of our work being tested. I think this is as applicable to what Christians do in their secular employment (where God has placed them) as it is to service in the Church or LCF or the community. The day of Jesus will test the value of everything we have done. Genuine achievement will shine like refined and polished gold or silver. If we aim for this now then we can look forward to eternal satisfaction and God’s reward for faithfulness. And even now in the secular working environment our confidence in the enduring value of all that is truly good and worthwhile may help others to see things in their right perspective.

The next thing I’ve been challenged about is honesty. These days, truth is at a premium and spin is not just something politicians do. Many of the organisations MLA West Midlands deals with have been really confused about what is happening to MLA. From national press-releases and Ministerial announcements they hear glowing talk about new opportunities, re-focusing and the bright future that a “new” MLA will have once it is made fit for purpose. Then they are quite amazed when we explain that all the regional agencies are being shut down and many people will be losing their jobs! We are told that there are no problems only challenges. Well, I believe there are both. A problem is not made any easier by down grading it to a mere challenge. We must be allowed to say truthfully how things are if we are to make progress to where we want them to be. Indeed as lovers of the truth we must insist that the truth is told however inconvenient. If organisations are being wound up for good reasons, then let’s say so. But there must be in any process of major change, a place for anger, disappointment and regret. Like the loss of a loved one through physical death, loss of a job or liquidation of a company requires a grieving process. While the Bible certainly teaches “*do not be anxious about anything*” [5] it doesn’t say “*do not be angry about anything*”. In fact it says “*in your*

*anger do not sin - do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*" [6]. No restructuring or other kind of workplace upheaval will ever be carried out perfectly. Where things are managed badly we need to say so and challenge unjust, unfair and unhelpful decisions. While I hesitate to recommend yet more money being diverted into the pockets of employment lawyers (they seem to be the one part of the economy that is booming at the moment), there are times when employers must face legal challenge if they have not acted rightly. I have been conscious of the need to treat all our staff with fairness and according to their contractual rights. The Old Testament has a lot to say about such matters and we should be strong supporters of just and (where possible) generous treatment of employees in redundancy situations.

Then there is the matter of calmness. When things are volatile and unpredictable it can be very hard to keep a sense of perspective or to wait for hard information to be announced rather than listening to gossip and rumour. We may be anxious to know as soon as possible what it is going to happen to us but some of us tend to endlessly discuss things and thereby create an unhelpful climate of speculation and intrigue. Others cope with the prospect of unwelcome changes or uncertainty by blindfolding themselves and just working away in the dark. For them it isn't going to happen. Activity is a drug that appears at first to be effective in pacifying our unsettledness. But being too busy being busy is dangerous – look what it did to Martha [7]. It robbed her of the greater blessing of being in the Lord's presence because she had become so distracted – we might even say obsessed – with duties and needs. The yoke that Jesus invites us to take on is easy and light [8] and in service he leads us into there will be rest for our souls as well as energising and satisfying labour. Yes, we do need to get on with the job in tough times but not in a mindless, head-down kind of way. In the end we will be most at peace by facing up to unpleasant realities, informing ourselves about what is happening and working through the implications.

The final thing I have been learning is that character counts. We have in the Bible three powerful pictures of what Christ wants us to be - salt, light and fragrance [9] [10]. These are what he is re-making us to be, changing us from the inside out. As we live



through difficult times at work or in any other context it is what we are, as much as what we say or do, that counts. And if in everything God is at work, then he will have a good reason why he is putting us through such things. As Mordecai said to Queen Esther “*who knows but that you have come to (your) position for such a time as this*”? [11]

## References

- [1] Ecclesiastes 3:3b
- [2 ] [www.gomadthinking.com](http://www.gomadthinking.com)
- [3] Romans 8:28
- [4] [www.mla.gov.uk/about/region/~media/Files/pdf/2008/INSIGHT20](http://www.mla.gov.uk/about/region/~media/Files/pdf/2008/INSIGHT20)
- [5] Philippians 4:6-7
- [6] Ephesians 4:26r
- [7] Luke 10:38-42
- [8] Matthew 11:28-30
- [9] Matthew 5:13-16
- [10] 2 Corinthians 2:15
- [11] Esther 4:14b

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Long working hours, travel and ever-evolving gadgets connecting us to an always-on world leave many people sapped of energy and far too tired. PAUL VALLER digs deep to uncover the root cause of our work/life balance problems

# **GET A LIFE**



## **WINNING CHOICES FOR WORKING PEOPLE**

The Librarians' Christian Fellowship Annual Public Lecture held on Saturday 18 October 2008 at the United Church, Jewry Street, Winchester.

*“Jack ran down the stairs and out the front door. With a passing twinge of guilt over his failure to repair the sticking latch, he slammed the door shut and jumped in the car. Then he remembered his laptop. Muttering an apology to God for what he had just said he charged back inside, grabbed the bag and slammed the door again. ‘What are you doing?’ called Liz, but there was no reply.*

*Jack was late. He was often late. Driving away he punched his mobile for voicemail and heard the words. ‘You have nine messages.’ ‘What? Unbelievable! It’s only a quarter to eight.’ He blew out a long sigh as he joined the inevitable queue.*

*‘Hey Jack, hope you’re well. Can we have ten minutes today to finalise the position before our customer meeting tomorrow? Best time for me would be end of play – I’m pretty full with back-to-back meetings otherwise. Let me know. Cheers.’ ‘Yeah, of course I’d like to be late*

*back from work as well', said Jack sarcastically. The queue started moving.*

*'Next message'. The voice was older and slower. 'Oh, hello Jack, sorry I missed you after the service. I was wondering if you would like to have lunch together sometime this week and chat through the agenda for Thursday night. Are you free today? I'm at home so just call to let me know. God bless.'* Jack gave a little snort. *'Lunch! What planet are you on?'*

*He finished listening to all nine messages only to have the system announce, 'You have one new message'. 'Leave me alone', he shouted. It was Liz. 'Hi, it's me. The front door won't shut. Can you tell me what to do?'*

*Shaking his head, he dialled home. He felt trapped by his responsibilities, burdened with all his obligations and intimidated by other people's expectations. After calling Liz, he stared ahead, cruising in the outside lane, trying to relax. Pressure at work, pressure at home and pressure at church , a seemingly eternal triangle. I just need a break, he thought.*

*The rush hour traffic slowed again under the flyover. As his queue crawled past three giant pillars, the graffiti on them revealed itself one word at a time, and Jack gripped the wheel as the message struck home. Good ... Morning ... Lemmings. 'God help me,' he said."<sup>1</sup>*

Our lives are often lived at such a pace that it's only in these momentary pauses that we really start to think. Then our problem is that we're back into the race before we've had a chance to work out what to do. Even when the same thought occurs to us more than once, it can so easily get lost again in the busy atmosphere around us. For change to take place, insight has to be captured and then turned into action. Without that there can be no progress. If we allow our insights to slip away into the back of our mind, we fail to learn and grow.

*"After a heavy day Jack was once again late leaving work, silently grateful for the fact that the graffiti artists had only written on one side of the pillars. He felt drained and tried to psych himself up for 're-entry' at home. He knew Liz would be at her low point after three hours of post-school activities, feeding the kids and keeping them in order. Then he*

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations are from Paul Valler, *Get A Life: Winnng Choices for Working People*, IVP, 2008, £8.99, ISBN 978-1844742172.

*groaned as he remembered that he'd agreed to cover for Matt at the youth group.*

*As the traffic stopped again he shut his eyes, only to open them a few moments later to find he had a thirty-yard gap in front of him. Embarrassed, he jabbed the accelerator ... stalled ... then tried to ignore the shaking heads overtaking his car. 'I'm living in survival mode', he thought, 'What can I stop doing? Everything I do is important. I'm on the proverbial treadmill and I want to get off'.*

*Jack saw the people in his work and life like spinning plates on poles. If he didn't keep up the spinning, one of them would fall and smash; his boss, his clients, his wife, his kids, his health, his role at church ... How could he ignore any of them? He didn't want to ignore any of them."*

Well what can Jack do? Rushing between things, he is trying to be all things to everyone and burning out in the process. The same feelings apply whether we are a male thirty-something professional or a mum trying to juggle a job and childcare. Whatever our age or lifestyle, everyone experiences competing pressures and feels like a plate spinner sometimes. We can even enjoy this kind of busyness and feel good about our multitasking capacity and our productivity – I certainly did for a while. Then we start to realise that our pattern of behaviour is becoming damaging - more damaging than we want to admit. Relationships start to become strained and we begin to feel an uneasy sense of being pulled apart as we try to cope with all the different roles and expectations. Psychologists call it 'fragmentation'.

Fourteen years ago, 1994 stands out in my memory. I had just begun a very demanding job that required a lot of attention. I was usually working ten hours a day and that didn't include overseas business trips that frequently took me away from home. That same year my brother was diagnosed with a fatal brain tumour and both he and my parents needed support. Our teenage sons were in that phase of their launch into adult life that I think NASA refers to as '*maximum aerodynamic stress*', and at the same time our church was struggling without a Pastor and I was church secretary in pole position for sorting it out. My wife told me I was distant. Even when I was physically present at home I was emotionally absent. And on top of all that I had a French boss who spoke exactly like Inspector Clouseau. Work-life balance problems? I've been there.

Most material about work-life balance focuses on time pressure and time management, but nine tenths of the iceberg of work-life

pressure is a hidden reality we rarely want to face or talk about.

## **Tired, trapped and troubled**

We're tired - not just because of working hours and travel. We are tired from being electronically connected to an always-on world. We're tired of other people's expectations, and tired from the slavery of meeting targets. Many of us toil in sleep-deprived, energy-sapping workplaces of continuous intensity. We may not want to admit it, but we are far too tired - and our families and friends often get the dregs of lives worn out by work.

And expectations in our jobs are often getting more difficult. I guess the historical role of a librarian was changed forever by Google. Everyone's expectations are that information is now instant, sifted, relevant and free. That's a tough turf to play on. Some technical advances make people folk feel their job is running away from them. Information systems managers are in vogue but perhaps not everyone wants to be a 'Librarian 2.0' to use internet parlance.

Sometimes people can feel trapped. Stuck in jobs that may not suit us anymore, doing time in organisations where our development may seem ignored or blocked and angry inside at the long hours culture. Financial anxiety is so often the padlock keeping us there. In some workplaces people can feel ethically compromised in work relationships and situations where there seems no right way out. So instead of being at peace, many are troubled. Perhaps unsettled by the different faces they feel they have to present to different people, and heavy hearted in some relationships that may not be working out well.

I am fed up with all the superficial coping mechanisms on offer for this deep malaise. I don't want another '*Little Book of Calm*'. Restful sounds of nature being piped over the intercom in the airline departure lounge and screensavers with pictures of south-sea islands don't do it for me. I need more than encouragement from a personal fitness trainer. I need help to understand and deal with the deep causes of work-life problems.

My personal journey has included decisions like refusing to relocate for a promotion, working part-time as finance director of a large company and changing career - choices that attracted interest and have led to mentoring others. Major work-life decisions like these forced me to get to grips with the tension between three key dimensions of my life: who I am, why I'm here, and what I should do. These three dimensions

are my identity, my purposes and my choices. I can't solve all my problems, but I can try to make choices that are consistent with my personal values and sense of vocation.

I want to structure this talk around these three key dimensions. First, the issue of our identity, secondly the question of our purposes and finally some of the choices we have available.

## Identity

Let me first start to unpack the topic of identity and illustrate why this is such a key issue for work-life integration. I want to paint you a picture of a typical character I call Fred, a man who lives in the same village that I do, the village of Finchampstead in Berkshire. At our Church we call this man 'Finchampstead Fred'. He is our stereotype resident.

Fred is in his late thirties and married to Freda. They have three children and live in a fairly upmarket house. If you asked him he would call himself a Christian. Fred works for the 'Global Organisation for New Electronics' or G.O.N.E. for short, which Freda says describes Fred very well – he's 'gone' most of the time. In fact if you want to find Fred, your best chance is at the airport or in the car. Fred is the Director for Unlimited Mega Business Opportunities, or D.U.M.B.O. for short, and he is a busy man. Busy because he's facing increasing expectations from just about everyone.

He has statistical targets to meet and they get bigger every year. He feels a lot of pressure, partly because whatever time of the day or night it is, there's always somebody somewhere in this 24/7 global world who is trying to get hold of him. A pressure that is made worse by his internet-enabled mobile. It's a business world that demands nothing less than his full and undivided attention

Meanwhile Freda, his wife, lives the life of a single parent. She draws small comfort from the fact that the other depressed 'Fredas' in Finchampstead are also lonely and ignored. In a way, Freda almost dreads Fred coming home. He's so unaware of the emotional reality. His idea of a day with the family is to spend money on them. His motto is *Veni Vidi Visa!....I came, I saw, I bought it on credit.* Fred is desperate to show he is providing for the family and he buys things to fill the relational void with his wife and kids.

Freda feels rejected and finds it difficult to show approval or respect for Fred. She naturally complains – pushing Fred further into the only part of his life where he feels praised and respected, the

workplace. When Fred performs well at work he feels good - nothing wrong with that. But that cycle of performance and feeling good has become for Fred the 'be-all and end-all'. He has started to believe that his whole self-worth is based on his ability to perform. If he performs well he *is* somebody. If he performs badly he will probably join the bottom 10% programme. Feeling rejected as a person, not just as a worker.

That's why everything Fred does has to be measured and rewarded. He has been trained to think like that. As a child the education system rewarded his grades and now achievement at work is rewarded with promotion. That's why Fred is always seeking to compete and excel – even in his shopping sprees. It's an internal driving pedal that's got jammed down and can't be released.

Governments can put limits on Fred's working hours – as the **European Working Time Directive** has sought to do. The Organisation can make family friendly policies, which they should do. Boundaries can be defined which should stop this sell-out of Fred's life to his work, but nobody can put a boundary on the internal psychological driver that is pushing Fred to achieve because his self-worth depends on it. As someone has said ... *'All my life I've been looking for the person who has caused me so much stress and I finally found them in the bathroom mirror.'*

What work is doing to Fred is repositioning his identity to be entirely job based. Fred is who his business card says he is. That's how he introduces himself. That's how he sees the world – through the lens of his job. Fred's job is what he's thinking about when he goes to sleep and when he wakes up. His to-do list, his objectives, his success criteria, his next evaluation. Work is not just consuming his time and energy, it is consuming his whole personality. This is a modern day form of identity theft. Identity stolen by the job.

Fred's employer is providing him with a context to live out, that lie that his self-worth is based on his ability to perform. The more he believes it, the more driven he is. And the paradox and the trap is that the more he focuses on work achievement, the more his other relationships deteriorate and the more he believes that work is his only meaning in life. The fact that he doesn't have enough time to keep healthy or see his wife and children – or even to be as productive as he would like, doesn't alter the fact that Fred loves his work, because it now meets his needs for acceptance, for success and for significance.

Work even meets Fred's need for community – he gets far more face-to-face time with people at work than he does with his family. But

in fact Fred has perfected the art of remote management – conducting all his relationships at a distance. He remote manages everyone and everything. Without realising it, Fred even remote manages his family as well as his employees. Oh, he comes home now and then, but even when he's physically present, he is emotionally absent, because the pervasive use of telecoms and IT keep his attention elsewhere.

Of course, Fred is something of an extreme – after all he is a stereotype character. But in my experience quite a few people recognise a bit of Fred in themselves. There are even a lot of Christian 'Fred's' about. I was a bit of a Fred myself for a while, and whilst I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work at a senior level in a global company, I am acutely aware that these workplaces can create a context for human drivenness instead of human flourishing.

Organisations and jobs offer an identity, because they offer roles and responsibilities with a sense of belonging and purpose – reinforced by job titles, name badges with logos and business cards. People feel more secure with these things, transient though they are. But if we let our identity be defined by them, a deep deception enters our thinking like a geological fault line. Then a change in job title can be like a psychological earthquake as everything we built on the previous identity collapses.

There are now only two ways out for a Fred. The first is the usual way of being eventually forced out of the organisation, probably resulting in considerable personal disorientation and trauma. Sometimes even an early death. The other way is a better way, but most 'Fred's' don't find it. The other way is to confront the lie that his self-worth is based on his ability to perform. To confront a faulty belief system, and that takes a lot of faith.

It's not just business people in a fast paced lifestyle who fall into this trap of believing self-worth is based on performance. Many unemployed people believe the same lie, because they feel they are nobody without a role. Women who leave work to have a baby sometimes feel that they lose their identity, because it is such a major change of role. Single people, who may feel lonely, can find themselves sucked into working long hours because, in the absence of a meaningful relationship, work provides definition in life.

And of course, teenagers who are searching for identity are also trying to define themselves by what they do, whether their behaviours are constructive like academic achievement or sport or voluntary service, or whether they are destructive, like crime or drugs or self-harm. So it seems we are all tempted by this prevailing world-view that '*we are*



*what we do*'.

It's about our belief system you see, because our beliefs – whether they are right or wrong - drive our behaviours. The idea of a performance-based life is the pattern of this world, a world that gives conditional acceptance based on performance. In fact, even most of the world major religions require you to do something to be accepted. Whether it is spinning Tibetan prayer wheels or praying five times a day or doing good works; it's all about your performance.

Only the Christian faith is different, because the Bible says that we are already accepted by God, not because we've done something, but because Jesus has done what was needed for us to be accepted. This good news of God's unconditional acceptance (not on the basis of our performance or our merit) collides head-on with the world-view of performance-based living. It unmasks the lie that we are what we do. No, says the Bible, you are who you are because God loves you and has accepted you and wants you in his family.

Pablo Picasso said "*When a man knows how to do something, he ceases being a man when he stops doing it.*" We are not to be like that, because if, like Fred, our work performance becomes our identity we are in trouble. We become driven.

Christians are called first to Christ rather than to any specific role. It is in Christ that our core identity is truly found, not in the secondary call to work or vocation. A man on a station platform was asked '*Who are you?*' and he replied '*I'm a Christian – thinly disguised as an accountant*' Now the fact that we find that reply mildly amusing shows how much we have become used to thinking of ourselves as having a role first and being Christian second.

A few years ago I came across a prayer written by Neil Anderson of *Freedom in Christ Ministries* that says this:- "*Lord, I renounce the lie that my self worth is dependent upon my ability to perform. I announce the truth that my identity and sense of worth is found in who I am as Your child. I renounce seeking the approval and acceptance of other people, and I choose to believe that I am already approved and accepted in Christ because of His death and resurrection for me*".

Having a resilient Christian identity makes us more stable and able to handle change at work and to initiate change in our lives. Choosing to believe that my identity is first and foremost in Christ is like the moment when the conductor of an orchestra asks the oboist to sound an A. At first there is just noise as all the musicians try to align themselves with that note. Then as everyone converges towards it, the noise diminishes. When they all finally sound together, there is a moment of homecoming

and rest. Somewhere deep inside me there is a resonance that is Christ alone. I want to know that sound and daily tune my life to it.

## Purposes

Now let me move on from identity to the second core issue of purpose. Most people want to know the answer to the question: *'How can I be the best person I can possibly be?'* It's one of the most popular topics in self-help books today, but the big mistake many of these books make is failing to distinguish between dreaming and discovery. The idea of choosing our own dream and living it sounds great, but the Bible is clear that it is God who has chosen our dream. *'For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.'* (Ephesians 2:10) He has hardwired into our capabilities and motivations both the skills and the passion to fulfil these good works. So our task is to *discover His* dream, not invent our own ideas.

This process is done through a combination of reflection on our life experience, asking other people about what they have observed in us, and gradually developing a sense of conviction about the way we're wired up. It's often a process of trial and error to develop a simple sentence or phrase that brings a sense of focus. Let me illustrate with my opening character, Jack.

*"It was just a passing comment that got Jack thinking. Stan had been chatting with him at a barbeque and as they parted, Stan said 'I don't know what it is about you Jack, but I always find you easy to talk to'. Jack had mentioned the comment to Liz on the way home and she agreed it just about summed him up. 'That's why you have so many people trying to get hold of you', she said, 'You're a great listener and people trust you'.*

*As Jack reflected about how he might be made to be a listener, he thought about the job he did and began to realise why he might have such a problem with time management and being late. Jack just loved people talking to him and he found it difficult to cut the conversation. Also, administrative stuff was really not his thing and seemed to take him longer than most people.*

*At work, Jack's best moments were when he was listening to others and drawing them out, and his colleagues knew it. Jack could form a trusted relationship faster than most people and the result was*

*that he could understand people's needs better. That was a valuable asset in a business fighting for customer loyalty. Jack began to think about whether his job responsibilities could somehow be shifted towards his areas of strength.*

*And as he thought about church, Jack realised his involvement with the Friday night youth group had been a mistake, because much of what was needed there was people to run activities like group games. The group was so noisy and boisterous that time to talk was very limited. He was better suited to a different environment, like playing pool with the young people and getting alongside them to chat. He had been asked to consider working with the pastoral team a while ago. Now he realised that it would probably be a good idea to drop the Friday evening and maybe do some pastoral work instead. It was a better fit”.*

Developing a clear sense of calling and vocation is another part of our journey of becoming more integrated. Now you might get a bolt from the blue or God speaking to you in a very direct way, but generally it usually takes a lot of reflection and prayer, with inputs from other people, before we begin to get a sense of clarity about our calling and vocation. One helpful tool to clarify our thinking is a personal mission statement. Something that is general enough to cover our work *and* life, but is specific enough to use as a way of testing whether certain things fit or not.

The benefit of discovering a personal mission is that it infuses work and life with greater focus, enabling us to develop in areas that match our strengths, and reduce or eliminate activities that don't match. If we have no idea of our personal mission statement, that doesn't make us second-class Christians, but having one can be a catalyst for greater fruitfulness and fulfilment. It is an aspiration worth pursuing. Although the aim is a simple summary, it may take a lot of searching before we can arrive at a statement that others confirm accurately reflects how God has made us.

*“Jack looked at his scrappy piece of paper with its crossings out. He had finally arrived at a single sentence. 'My personal mission is to enable others to feel accepted and valued by listening to them.' Hmmm. Liz thought it was quite good and others agreed. 'Yeah, sounds like you to me.' Mike said.*

*Jack had no idea how much that sentence would impact his work*

and life. When he mentioned it to his boss as part of a discussion on his development plan, it led to him being assigned to handle angry customers, a role in which he excelled. Listening to people who felt they had been ignored was his forte – he had finally found a niche in the organisation. After dealing with Jack, disgruntled customers often continued with repeat business.

At church he discussed his profile with the leadership and was glad to join the welcoming team. Liz and Jack were good hosts, and offering hospitality gave him the opportunity to listen to new people and help them feel accepted and valued in the church, something that positively helped church growth. He also found he had a knack for interviewing people in the morning service, putting them at ease and enabling them to share what God was doing in their lives.

Jack was looking at things through a new insight that had given him greater meaning and mission. His focus enabled him to reduce or drop some things that had overloaded his life, creating a better sense of harmony and integration. He felt more fulfilled and more fruitful. Jack's personal mission statement didn't make him perfect though. He still had a tendency to allow people to talk too much, which meant he was still inclined to be late, and it still took him too long to fix things like the front door at home.”

Developing your personal mission is one of the most powerful ways to bring work and life into alignment, into an integrated whole in the context of God's mission on earth. Finding ourselves and our role within the greatest story ever told is a continuation of Jesus' mission, a wonderful privilege that gives our lives meaning. At the end of his earthly life Jesus said: “*I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.*” (John 17:4) What work has God given and called you to do?

## **Choices consistent with Identity and Purposes**

Finally we come to the topic of making choices that are consistent with our identity and purposes. Many of these choices are about *freedom within limits*. *The Bible* says ‘It is for freedom that Christ *has set us free.*’ Free to be who we really are in Christ, free to pursue his purposes and free to make the right choices. There are certain disciplines that we can choose that result in more personal freedom. And I want to call your attention to three disciplines in particular.

The first is the discipline of living in friendship and community with others. For a Christian that means being involved in a Christian community of some kind. If I choose to do that, it not only keeps me from being isolated, but also reduces the risk of fragmentation in my life. When I allow certain people to know me well enough, and share my life with them – giving them permission to speak into my life, then I have a relationship foundation that is both a sanity check and a support network for who I am and what I do.

This is a very significant and difficult topic for many people. Loneliness can be as acute for the young single person living on their own as it is for the fast paced executive traveling away from his family, as it is for the older person stuck indoors. It is often difficult to connect with people in their busyness of work and life, to get to know them. One of the reasons for the popularity of the TV programme *Friends* is that viewers felt the experience of friendship and community that is so often lacking in real life. But TV and the internet are not the real thing. *Facebook* is not always friendship, and electronic connectedness is not always authentic community.

The morning I was due to drive to the *Christian Booksellers' Convention* in Telford to launch the book *Get a Life*, our fridge/freezer packed up. So there I was, due to leave with radio interviews scheduled and all our frozen food warming up. My wife suffers from M.E. and so has limited capability, and she wasn't able to deal with the task of unpacking everything and lugging it round to someone else's place.

So there I am in a classic work/life crisis. Either default on my commitments or lose all our frozen food. If we did not have a community of friends it would have been a significant problem. As it is, after one phone call, friends from the Church came to the rescue, and when I got home there was even a replacement fridge in place. Now this is just a simple example, but the fact is that living in Community makes all the difference to the ups and downs of life.

It isn't easy to make real friends, and it isn't easy to find and integrate into a community – even a Christian community. Ironically, the barriers are often in our own hearts, our own high hopes or worst fears of what an experience of friendship and community might mean. We can find ourselves yearning for deeper relationships but paralysed by the risk of being emotionally vulnerable. The fact is that community *is* sometimes messy and we can't be totally insulated from taking some hits.

But all these hindrances don't alter the fact that loneliness and isolation are a modern day disease that fragments lives. Do everything

you can to guard against them, by working at developing friendships and living in as authentic a Christian community as you can find. Jesus modelled this pattern and he was a busy man.

The second important personal discipline is taking time out with God and His Word. It's clear from the Gospels that Jesus did this frequently, and if the perfect man, needed time with his heavenly Father, so do I. Interspersing our lives with little solitudes of communion with God enables us to get better perspective and resist the urgent clamour of the world to conform to its agenda. A classic example of this discipline is illustrated in the first chapter of Mark's gospel. After an intense period of ministry, Jesus goes out on his own, early in the morning to pray. When the disciples find him and tell him that all the people are looking for him, He says, very clearly, "*Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.*" In that period of personal quietness with God, he refreshed his conviction about who he was and what he was called to do. We all need those times, and the faster paced our work and life, the more we need them.

And the third discipline is the discipline of living a low-debt lifestyle. When I wrote the book and included three chapters on money, I had no idea that the global financial system was going to go into such a meltdown, or that debt was going to become such a hugely relevant topic at the time of this lecture. Living a low-debt lifestyle is not always easy and here may be people reading this who are in financial difficulty, for whom borrowing money is a matter of survival. If that is your situation, then in the UK, I recommend that you seek advice from organisations like *Christians Against Poverty* who will be able to help you.

Most of us, though, are not on the breadline. The risk we face is the risk of developing a materially driven lifestyle that over-stretches us and locks us in to financial commitments, maybe including high mortgage payments or consumer and credit card debt. If we allow this kind of pattern to develop, then our freedoms are greatly reduced. Our ability to change job or even to change career to move closer to our vocation, may be choked by financial commitments and anxieties that padlock us into the current job. Fred's lifestyle was driven and deceived when it came to money. A low-debt lifestyle is a better basis for freedom to integrate our lives.

Try asking yourself some questions about your financial affairs. What choices am I making? For example, what choices am I making about my house, my car, my household possessions, my children's

education, my healthcare and my hobbies and interests. Are these choices putting me under financial pressure? Have I developed an attitude to debt that now sees it as inevitable? Am I spending money to try to compensate for something else – perhaps something missing in my self image or something missing in a relationship? These are tough questions, but we now live in a society where debt is driving people. Financial discipline is key to our freedom.

Well there are many other disciplines and choices available to us, and they are described in the book. What I want to do now is give an example of a specific problem and apply some of this thinking to it. My boss is demanding something on Monday morning. It's Friday afternoon, and if I choose to do it, both my Friday evening and my family's whole weekend will be wrecked. If I don't do it, my relationship with my boss, and so ultimately perhaps my whole career will be wrecked. What do I do about that? And another thing is that my children are sick and need extra time. I don't have that extra time. Something's got to give. What do I do?

Well, sudden crises often flow from underlying causes. Obviously a complex situation cannot be completely unpacked in two minutes, but I can start the process. We can try to get underneath the presenting issues to understand if there is anything that is a structural cause of this crisis.

Let's first assume that this demand for something by Monday morning is not the result of an earlier failure to deliver. It has just come out of the blue as far as you're concerned. Because we live in a culture that rewards performance - a merit culture, we can very easily, like Fred, believe that our self-worth and our survival depend on our ability to perform. If I feel insecure or uncertain about who I am, and so have become a people pleaser, a boss-pleaser incapable of saying no, I might not have enough personal assurance about my identity to be assertive with my boss. I may not have the confidence to set boundaries.

But do I even know my boss well enough to have that kind of conversation? Relational excellence depends on knowing someone in more than one dimension of life. If I have had an attitude of keeping my work and the rest of my life compartmentalised, so my boss knows virtually nothing of my family commitments or my outside work life, he might not consider it unreasonable to ask for something on Monday morning. It may be me that has unwittingly created a work/life divide that has helped set the scene for a demand like this.

Then there's the issue of the sick children. If my family have

chosen to live independently, instead of in friendship and community, then we may lack the practical help we need when a crisis occurs with our children like sickness. Then there's the issue of whether I have been honest with my partner about the kind of expectations that exist in my workplace? If my family or wider church family know nothing of my work or my boss, is it surprising they can't understand when demands are made that conflict with their needs? The more each of our stakeholders in work and life knows about the *other* stakeholders, the more likely it is that they will recognise the reality that other people also have legitimate expectations.

Is anyone in my family and church praying for my boss? He may be cast as the villain of the piece, but somebody may be pressurising the boss even harder than the boss is leaning on me. Does anybody care about him? Now these kind of questions are only scratching the surface of an analysis about why this demand for weekend working might have arisen, or be a problem. Of course it is a complex issue, but my point is, that unless we have the courage to explore and tackle the deeper, underlying issues, crises like this may, and probably will continue to occur.

Sometimes, though, as Christians, you can have prayed, said and done all the right things and still find yourself in the lions' den. Stress is not always an indicator of failure. It isn't always possible to '*choose your way out*' of every difficulty. We live in a world of injustice, flawed authority structures, systems that don't work properly, imperfect people, chronic illness and music you don't like. As someone has said, '*life is tough and then you die*'. The cross was a position of extreme tension and pain and conflict. Jesus did not make a single wrong choice and he still ended up there. So if you are in a situation of tension, and maybe even pain, that doesn't automatically mean you got it wrong. There are no perfect scores in this game. Work/life integration is not about uninterrupted happiness and perfection, it is a wholeness we aspire to. Still despite all the imperfections we live with, I hope I have shown that there is an opportunity for real progress if we're willing to tackle the deep issues.

## **Summary**

The problem is so often that we want a '*soundbite solution*' to life. We want a quick fix for over-tiredness, priority conflicts, irritability, strained relationships, dissatisfaction and so on. But there is no quick fix, because of what lies at the root of these things. If we look into our own



hearts, we start to realise that some of our motives are out of line. When we delve deeper we find we are being driven by desires like approval, status, ambition, a relationship, financial security, autonomy ... the list is endless. And behind all of these motives lurks the idol of self. The problem is us, and we cannot fix ourselves.

God's solution is to take our attention away from ourselves to love Him. The great commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind has that keyword repeated three times; the Word **all**. The principle is '*all-ness*', wholeness, entirety. When our identity and our purposes and our choices are all oriented towards God, when our heart, mind and will seek Him, valuing Him above all else and enjoying Him, then we experience the deep inner peace and wholeness that in the Bible, in the Hebrew language, is called Shalom. That peace and presence, the Shalom of God is the by-product of giving Him our whole attention. Loving God involves all our work and life with no compartments. There is no sacred/secular divide.

We may, like Martha, be distracted and '*worried and upset about many things*' (Luke 10:41). Our life may feel fragmented, because we have allowed something other than God to get too important. Work-life integration is ultimately not about trying to finesse the pressures and conflicts or measure how 'balanced' we are; it is about loving the source from which our life springs.

In some vehicles you see floating compasses on the dashboard. Whatever angle or direction the road takes, they swing back to point to the magnetic pole. This is a picture of the whole-life Christian, our inner centre reorienting towards the magnetic personality of God in the bumps and diversions of everyday experience. Whatever our situation in work and life we look to Him, the source of our life in Christ. '*And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*' (2 Corinthians 3:18)

That same dependency on God, which first enabled us to be saved, now enables our work and life. Every time we choose, even in a small way, to alter our choices in line with God's patterns, Shalom advances. As we force ourselves to disengage from an unhealthy work intensity to take just five minutes out with God, Shalom advances. When by faith we make choices that dethrone the deceptive and subtle control of money, Shalom advances. As we make ourselves open in community, Shalom advances. As we momentarily pause after someone has said something that really hurt, and with the forgiveness and grace of God say something kind, Shalom advances. If those

strong emotions surge within us and we take time out with God to understand why, and take captive those thoughts to Christ, Shalom advances.

In school races, most people cheer from the sidelines, but I've noticed that the parents of very young children often go and stand behind the finishing line to encourage them. They look back down the track into the faces of their children. God our father is looking into our faces with his arms outstretched as we move towards him in the race of life, sometimes running, sometimes stumbling, but advancing in his grace and Shalom.

We are like Peter gazing at Christ, walking towards him on the restless sea. We are navigating this life in the tension of conflicting expectations, on the restless sea of changing circumstances, focused on Jesus. When Peter famously takes his eyes off Jesus for a moment, he sinks, but the great thing is the story doesn't end there. Jesus, who has dominion over the forces of chaos, reaches out and pulls him back up. Such is the grace of our God.

*'The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King for ever. The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with Shalom.'* (Psalm 29:10-11)

May it be so for you.

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Paul is a regular conference and seminar speaker on topics such as Leadership Integrity and Work/Life Integration – inspiring people to make the right choices. He has lectured at *Cambridge University* and *Cranfield Management Centre*. He spoke at the *House of Lords* colloquium on the spiritual and ethical implications of the Internet.

A Teaching Elder at *Finchampstead Baptist Church* with an itinerant preaching ministry, Paul has spoken at the Christian conference *Spring Harvest* on the topic of Faith in the Workplace. In addition to serving as an Associate Speaker for the *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity*, he is an after-dinner speaker on subjects with a wide appeal such as “*Balancing All Life's Pressures*” and “*Job Security in a Global Economy*”. His book – also called ***Get A Life – Winning Choices for Working People*** – was published by IVP (Inter-Varsity Press) in March 2008.

## REVIEWS

# **THE BOOKWORM'S SPRING SELECTION**



***THE SHACK: WHERE TRAGEDY CONFRONTS ETERNITY***  
*Hodder and Stoughton, 2008, £7.99, Pbk., 254 p.,*  
*ISBN 978 0 340 979495*

“Where is God in a world so filled with unspeakable pain?” The books written on this subject are legion, many giving religiously “correct”, textbook answers that bring no comfort and shed very little light. ***The Shack*** is an attempt to grapple with this question using the literary genre of the novel. (Yes – the novel: the genre that John Bunyan used to such stunning effect in ***Pilgrim’s Progress***, perhaps the greatest Christian novel of all time.) It is difficult to write too much about ***The Shack*** without giving away the plot. Suffice to say that it is the story of how a Christian father comes to terms with the kidnap and brutal murder of his six-year-old daughter, and in so doing, how he experiences the Trinity - Father (“Papa”, who for some of the story, at least, is female), Son and Holy Spirit – in a totally new and mind-blowing way.

This is a work of the imagination. If you believe the imagination to be suspect when it comes to dealing with Christian truth – particularly with a topic as sacred as the Trinity – or if you believe that God never uses human imagination to reveal more of himself to humankind, then this book is not for you. It will probably shock, even outrage you (in much the same way that Jesus outraged *his* listeners, come to think

about it.) As with Jesus, you need to be prepared to think “outside the box” – or at the very least, to *consider* thinking outside the box. This does not mean abandoning all critical faculties. Although the book is superbly written, and the colour and flow and depth of the narrative will amaze you as it carries you on its mind-blowing journey, the effect is occasionally marred by the explanatory “theologising” indulged in by the Trinity. (Ironically, some readers might find this to be the only worthwhile feature of the book. Whether they *agree* with all of it is another matter.) But the fact remains that, if the blogs are to be believed, many Christian parents who have been bereaved of a child have found restoration and healing through reading ***The Shack***. They have come to understand and experience their loss in a totally new way.

The author of the book was born a Canadian but now lives in the United States, where the book is set. Patrick Roddy, Producer of ABC News, writes: “*With every page, the complicated do’s and don’ts that distort a relationship into a religion were washed away as I understood Father, Son and Holy Ghost for the first time in my life.*”

A great many Christians are more at ease with a religion than with a relationship.

(To read the views of others on ***The Shack***, including those with reservations about it, go to [www.theshackbook.com](http://www.theshackbook.com) The book itself can be readily found on the fiction shelves of W.H Smith – which must tell us something!)

**Barbara Gilman, MA**, is a retired librarian who has previously worked for the *University of Hull* and the *Torch Trust for the Blind*.

***DOSTOEVSKY: LANGUAGE, FAITH AND FICTION***  
***Rowan Williams***  
***Continuum, 2008, £16.99, Hardback, 268 p.,***  
***ISBN 978-1847064257***

Rowan Williams' study of Dostoevsky's fiction paints 'a picture of what faith or the lack of it would look like in the political and social world of his [Dostoevsky's] day' (p.4). So although it is a close literary study of character, structure and language, it is also a powerful commentary on the big issues – evil, suffering, and the failure of social relations – totally

relevant to our society.

Williams writes as an academic, admittedly a non-specialist, and for the serious student, so this is not an easy read but one with many hidden gems. He approaches Dostoevsky's fiction through the work of a Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who wrote during the Russian revolution, yet hung on to his Russian Orthodox faith. Bakhtin<sup>2</sup> sees fiction as the dialogue between many interacting and conflicting voices. The novel is then a richly textured mix of styles, voices, language with different levels of meaning.

Williams explores the many contradictory elements in Dostoevsky's novels – particularly if viewed simply as 'Christian' novels (noting Dostoevsky describes himself as a '*child of unbelief*'). Williams' great strength (as well as perhaps the source of misunderstanding) is his deep integrity which prompts him to weigh all possible points of view<sup>3</sup>. By doing so he identifies the way Dostoevsky wrote '*for the cause of faith*' by showing us its opposites, exploring the tension between good and evil, the 'devils' and the 'saints'. He looks at how key actions in the novels (for example, two instances of the exchange of crucifixes in ***Brothers Karamazov*** and ***The Idiot***) symbolise '*moral and spiritual change*', of '*Taking up the cross with and for another*' (p. 153).

He indicates that fiction may, by its very ambiguity and complexity, be more 'true' than straight apologetics. In recent LCF conferences we have looked at the power and possibilities of story. In this book Williams defines and explores those '*stories which create a spiritual and moral landscape*' and which make '*the holy visible in narratives*' (p. 161)

**Margaret Keeling, MA, MCLIP, PhD**, is a Vice-President of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship and worked until her retirement as Head of Services for Libraries, Culture and Adult Community Learning for Essex County Council.

*Readers are reminded that many of the books mentioned or reviewed in **Christian Librarian** can be ordered on-line from St. Andrew's Bookshops. Any books ordered via the LCF web site at <http://www.librarianscf.org.uk/bookshelf/index.html> will earn a small commission for the Librarians' Christian Fellowship.*

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, David Lodge's book of essays *Afyer Bakhtin: essays on fiction and criticism*. London, Routledge, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> 'If we speak what we believe to be the truth we must not be surprised at risk'. p. 112.

## THE LAST WORD

What do our contemporaries really think about the Christian faith? What stages do present day unbelievers go through before they embrace the gospel message? Professor DONALD G. DAVIS, Jr., looks at some recent books that can help Christians to understand the current generation

# **LOST IN AN UN-CHRISTIAN WORLD**

*Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why it Matters*  
David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons.  
Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Books, 2007.  
Available in the UK from St. Andrew's Bookshops,  
price £8.99

*I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us about Their Path to Jesus,*  
Don Everts and Doug Schaupp.  
Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008.  
Available in the UK from Amazon.co.uk, price £8.06

Within the past year or so two books have appeared that deal squarely with the issues involved in the proclamation and reception of the Christian gospel to the young generation reaching maturity in the twenty-first century. They have different objectives, utilise different data, and perhaps aim at different audiences. Yet their essential conclusions fit together very conveniently, providing some solid information on which new strategies might be developed to implement the Great Commandments and the Great Commission. They both agree that many in the current generation, those in their late teens and early twenties, are sceptical and wary of evangelical Christians.

Kinnaman and Lyons condense the findings of a number of surveys conducted over several years by *The Barna Group* and the *Fermi Project*. These sought to isolate the issues that Outsiders, defined as those who do not identify themselves with a church or the Christian faith, consistently raise

as unpleasant and unattractive perceptions of Christians. The book devotes one chapter to each of six such themes — describing the data for the finding, suggesting reasons and giving examples of the trait, and pointing to some ways in which the situation might turn around. In all, the book synthesises some fourteen studies, conducted between 1995 and 2007 with a combined sample size of more than 60,000 persons.

Everts and Schaupp in recent years interviewed some two thousand college-age people, asking them about the particulars of their journey in Christian faith to become followers of Jesus. They found that most persons had passed through five milestones, or crossed five thresholds, along that pathway. Knowing and recognising where any person is on this continuum or spectrum enables one to see how to relate meaningfully at a given state in initial faith development and to perceive the next steps to take or thresholds to cross.

This short essay does not allow for elaboration of the themes of these books, which must be read in their entirety, fully digested, and deliberately implemented to have their full value. But the major points are worth underscoring — and provide a summary that may stimulate further reading.

The Barna Group volume reveals that Outsiders have a negative impression of Christians as a whole. This appears in six broad themes:

**Hypocritical.** *“Outsiders consider us hypocritical—saying one thing and doing another—and they are sceptical of our morally superior attitudes.”*

**Too Focused on Getting Converts.** *“Outsiders wonder if we genuinely care about them.”*

**Anti-homosexual.** *“Outsiders say that Christians are bigoted and show disdain for gays and lesbians.”*

**Sheltered.** *“Christians are thought of as old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality.”*

**Too Political** Outsiders perceive Christians as being *“overly motivated by a political agenda, that we promote and represent conservative interests and issues.”*

**Judgmental.** *“Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others.”*

The study of college students who became Christians reveals that a process is normally involved—a process that proceeds progressively through five thresholds:

**Move from distrust to trust.** *“Somewhere along the line, they learned to trust a Christian.”*

**Move from complacent to curious.** *“The fact that our friends actually came to trust a Christian didn’t necessarily mean that they were at all curious about Jesus. . . . “then something wonderful and mysterious happened.”*

**Move from being closed to change to being open to change in their life.** *“This always seemed to be the hardest threshold to cross.”*

**Move from meandering to seeking.** *“Even when our friends became curious about Jesus and open to change in their life, it didn't necessarily follow that they began actively, purposefully seeking God. It was more natural for them to meander”.*

**Move to cross the threshold of the Kingdom itself.** *“They needed to repent and believe and give their life to Jesus”.*

The issues that the Barna folks identified as barriers the Outsiders consider in dismissing Christians, along with the gospel they embrace, seems to mesh with what the student staff workers portray as steps to overcome that reluctance. Learning to know and to trust a Christian seems to be the primary antidote to countering their negative caricatures. This can lead to curiosity about Jesus and the Christian faith, openness to life change, purposeful seeking, and, finally real belief. Of course, the positive benefits of knowing well a single Christian, or several of them, assumes that the believer is real – genuine, authentic, transparent – in his or her life, including relationships. The fact that self-identified Christians as a group communicate such negative stereotypes to those they would like to affect is just cause for considerable concern.

For evangelical, intentional Christians to dismiss the findings of the Barna authors as simply excuses or defensive manoeuvres by Outsiders would be a serious mis-reading of the culture they claim to care about. Getting seriously involved with Outsiders and allowing them to know us and vice-versa could well be the key to changing their perceptions. Though this will not be easy for many, it would be worth a try. In fact it may be the only way, the Jesus way, even if it takes a long time.

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