

EDITORIAL – DAVID SPRIGGS

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THIS EDITION IS DIFFERENT TO MOST IN THAT IT EXPLORES A SUBJECT THAT APPEARS TO BE MORE ABOUT INTERNAL CHURCH THAN CULTURAL FACING ISSUES; IT ALSO SEEMS TO BE A MORE PERENNIAL ONE THAN SOME.

However, appearances can be deceptive! Although the topic is the use of the Bible in pastoral practice, it is important to understand the breadth that 'pastoral practice' encompasses. This can be discerned through the definition provided by Stephen Pattison: 'That activity ... directed towards the elimination and relief of sin and sorrow and the presentation of all people perfect in Christ to God.'¹

What is important here is to remind ourselves that 'sin' is not limited to individual or personal sin, but that within Christian understandings there is a social, institutional and cultural dimension to sin – indeed some would add a cosmic one as well. Hence, this project includes the issue of how the Bible can properly be applied to and used to illuminate issues in our social and cultural context. In one sense, therefore, the total business of *The Bible in TransMission* is a subset of this project. That this is not a hypothetical stance can be seen from *The Bible in Christian Ministry: The Workbook*² units 13–15, for example.

But what this topic does is to move centre stage the core issue which *TransMission* always seeks to address, namely, how we can benefit from the Bible in our mission challenges. It also moves forward the internal challenges within the Church of using the Bible today. This can be considered as dealing with the cultural impact within the churches, which thereby challenge and modulate the ways the Bible features in the churches' life.

What then of the view that this topic is more perennial than most? While it is true that 'slavery' has been a focus for the churches this year because of the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Act, the issue of slavery is 'always with us'. Happiness, or well-being, may have become a preoccupation, but it is actually a consistent focus for all human living. So perhaps the differences in this respect are not that great either!

Yet, this topic does have a more immediate resonance for every priest, clergyperson and minister. The Bible is their core text and sometimes their main problem! For those who are weary from seeking to apply the Bible intelligently and imaginatively as well as for those who suspect they have become slack or lazy in their engagement with the Bible, this project is a valuable resource and so this issue of *TransMission* is an enticing introduction.

The project has been running for seven years. It formally commenced with a Consultation held at Cardiff University in 2000. Several of the contributors to *TransMission* gave papers at a similar consultation called, 'The Bible as Pastor' in 2005. By then field research and a report had been undertaken by Dr Ian Dickson and the academic papers from the first consultation plus other commissioned pieces had been published,³ and a second stimulating book by Gordon Oliver⁴ would soon be available. Since then other articles have been published and now the more practical workbook is available too.⁵

This edition both celebrates the progress of this project and serves as an introduction to some of the issues. It carries a number of short papers from those who contributed to the 2005 Consultation as well as an explanatory article with

respect to the workbook from Margaret Cooling. Margaret has many years experience producing workbooks for the educational market and she has brought her expertise to this topic with exceptionally helpful results. We are delighted about this, for the concern of the project and this issue is to assist pastoral practice by informing, challenging and stimulating mind, imagination and heart. If the Church is to be authentic as well as effective in its mission then enabling the Bible to play a full and proper place at every level is paramount.

The other articles cover a range of issues. Frances Young's *Paradise Now* is an insightful reminder both of the pressures in our culture to satisfy the desire for utopia but also the proper limits and responses which our Christian understanding of the framework for human living between 'The Fall and the eschaton' provides. She draws on both early Christian writings and her own reflections to help us profoundly.

Chris Sunderland is a frequent contributor to *TransMission*. He is someone who has developed ways to introduce the Bible into public square debate. Here he intriguingly introduces us to his ecological retelling of 'The Prodigal Son' but also engages us with his creative and theological processes. There is much to challenge and stimulate us here! For those who want to follow up on the ecological issues there is a short review of a new Labyrinth resource which Chris has helped to design.

Gordon Oliver is the author of the second publication, *Holy Bible, Human Bible*. His article focuses on different understandings of the relationship between the text of the Bible and the Word of God, together with reflections on the implications these have for the way we read the Bible.

Two new authors for *TransMission* are Trevor Reynolds and Andrew Rogers. They offer us insights from their doctoral research. Trevor's 'Spirit, Community and Biblical Interpretation' while it immerses us first in the academic and biblical insights, soon moves on to challenge us practically. He explores how we can incorporate the recognition that the Holy Spirit is there to help us with the interpretative process, but primarily in a communal context, by applying this in educational, ethical, homiletic and pastoral contexts.

Andrew Rogers stimulates us by highlighting seven different hermeneutical strategies which operate in one evangelical charismatic church he observed for six months. This is followed by reflection on the affirmative and transformatory readings of the Bible, together with considerations of the contribution which academic scholarship can helpfully make to a community's engagement with the Bible.

In reading these articles please expect to be stimulated to reconsider your own use of the Bible as well as to discover more of the resources which the overall project represents. For groups of ministers, clergy and lay- persons who wish to explore further the resources which this project offers, please contact me – david.spriggs@biblesociety.org.uk

NOTES

1. S Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral Care* (London: SCM, 2000), p. 13.
2. S Pattison, M Cooling, T Cooling, *Using The Bible in Christian Ministry: The Workbook* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007).
3. P Ballard and S Holmes (eds.), *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church*

(Using the Bible in Pastoral Practice) (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005). In fact, this 2005 Consultation was the launch for this book.

4. G Oliver, *Holy Bible, Human Bible: Questions Pastoral Practice Must Ask* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005).

5. Pattison et al., *Using The Bible in Christian Ministry*.

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