

Editorial



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One of my favourite passages in the New Testament is Hebrews chapter 11. It begins, 'Now *faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen. This is what the ancients were commended for.*' The whole chapter narrates what God has done for and through various characters, sometimes described as the heroes of faith, the ancients of verse one. Their hope was in the God of the universe whom they had not seen but in whom they trusted.

That same hope continues to inspire faithful believers today and in 2008 the first year of Hope saw thousands of Christians take that hope to their local communities in words and actions. Such was the impact on the churches and their surrounding communities various senior church leaders asked for a repeat year which is now planned for 2014. Even more denominations and organisations are getting on board to make 2014 a year of hope throughout the UK in villages, towns and cities up and down the land.

We, at Bible Society, are pleased to be supporting this initiative and we have dedicated this edition of *The Bible in Transmission* to the theme of hope in order to help church leaders to reflect theologically as they seek to equip their congregations particularly with the word aspect of HOPE 2014. We not only need to demonstrate the fruits of the hope which fires us but to be able to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

HOPE 2014 later aims to help churches rediscover a rhythm of mission based on the seasons and the churches' liturgical year. But also next year will see in August the beginning of the commemorations of the First World War which will present its own opportunities

for churches to assist their communities to reflect and remember.

There is no doubt that the two major world wars of the twentieth century ushered in a new era of cynicism and secularisation. Marcus Bockmuehl, in his article, looks at hope and optimism in straitened times including the current collapse of the economic utopian dream. Both the Old and New Testaments recognise the realities of troubled times and that the God of Israel is the only ground of genuine hope. He is, indeed, the substance of things hoped for. The promises of God are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and most specifically in his resurrection which is the harbinger of his return in the future to renew the earth. Current signs of hope include the unity of Christ's body of which our united actions in 2014 are a significant demonstration.

Stephen Kuhrt argues that a version of hope rooted in personal comfort about what happens when you and your loved ones die is not enough to fuel robust enough engagement with the world. Many churches are providing 'very practical things within this world' but without a theology to make full sense of this. Stephen's own personal discovery has been 'to see the huge difference that can occur within a local church when a clear exposition of biblical eschatology replaces the inadequate and sub-biblical hope of going to heaven when you die'. This article gives a glimpse of church life transformed by a church 'surprised by hope'.

One of the most provocative articles is that by Ruth Valerio on 'Hope and the Environment'. Following a short exposition of a passage from Isaiah linking the state of the earth and human sin, Ruth looks at the

ecological consequences of human sin but in the face of seeming impending disaster, there is hope. It is the hope of a radically renewed and transformed earth and what we do now to ameliorate matters is an anticipation of this future inheritance. Will your church respond to her invitation to 'integrate this whole area into your church life?'

The environmental context is not the only area of fragility confronting the next generation as Miriam Swaffield graphically points out in her contribution. With family breakdown rife and relationships in tatters, the very meaning of life is up for grabs but such a cultural crisis calls for more than cultural Christianity and those 18–30 year olds who are opting in are doing so in a way that really counts. 'I wonder if there isn't a gift in it being hard and costly to be a Christian in my generation.' Miriam writes passionately about her work with Fusion among students as she urges us to 'stay awake to the student world' and invite some round for tea if you want to be filled with hope.

One of the most shaping forces in all of our lives is the internet. We are part of a 'network society' and, argues Tim Hutchings, this is having a profound effect on our experiences of death and mourning. Christians have a distinctive hope for the future beyond death and we need to find ways to share that hope in a changing world. News and sometimes rumours about deaths circulate rapidly and social networks are used to express reactions and 'connect to temporary networks of emotional support'. The internet also has the power to overcome the isolation of dying. Webcasts are becoming part of funeral packages. The internet is also rich in conversations about life after death. Hutchings makes the powerful case for Christians to pay attention and to think hard about how to connect, literally, into these conversations.

So the internet is a space of opportunity for 2014. But there are many others and Catherine Butcher outlines some of the many opportunities nationally and locally that we can join in on from passion plays to the Big Lunch, carol services in football stadia to World War One remembrance events. The HOPE 2014 resource book, *HOPE – The heartbeat of mission*, is full of ideas and articles to get your creative juices flowing so log on to www.hopetogether.org.uk/ to order one and to see many more ideas that did not make it to us in time for the book.



We, at Bible Society, have produced a fresh retelling of the story of Jesus as found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. This has been extracted from *Who?* A paraphrase of the New Testament written by Paul Langham. When a 11-year-old boy was given the extract to read, he rang his aunt to say how great it was and how he now 'got it'. So if your friends and family still need to get it then contact us to get a **special price for bulk buys** or log on to the shop on our website www.biblesociety.org.uk. We are also publishing a

special commemorative booklet of words for when there are no words including some of the Psalms for use in the World War One commemorations. Also look out for the edition of *The Bible in Trans**mission*** on Memory in 2014.

Hope is like a light shining in the darkness. Jesus is that light and it cannot be put out. The great cloud of witnesses of Hebrews 11 did not receive what had been promised to them because the God in whom they trusted had planned something better for them ... and US! They are urging us to throw away everything that would hinder our witness to the hope of which faith in Jesus is the confidence that enables us not grow weary or lose heart in 2014 and beyond.



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