

the Journal



Baptist Union Retreat Group

Autumn 2013

E/I E/I Oh!

As an extrovert, Dr Simon Woodman, co-minister of Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church finds retreats and silence exhausting and hard-going.

In the Spring 2013 issue of *The Journal*, Ian Green pondered whether we 'tailor-make our retreats for introverts', and wondered what a 'retreat for extroverts' might look like? Well, I've done the Myers-Briggs test a few times over the years, and I consistently report as a strong 'E' - that is, I am an Extrovert, rather than an Introvert. This means I am energised by being with people, and drained when I spend time alone.

I've been on many 'retreats' and 'quiet days' over the years, and have variously found them either draining or challenging, but never refreshing. And so I think Ian might be on to something. The question I have frequently found myself asking is whether my 'Extroverted' nature means that I am inherently any less 'spiritual' than those who report as strong 'Introverted' types?

In their book *Knowing Me, Knowing You* (SPCK, 2003), Malcolm Goldsmith and Martin Wharton comment that: 'Extroverts... often feel that they are unable to pray, and they feel uneasy when prayer is being discussed... and they probably need help in realising that their thinking and action might well be a form of prayer... Retreats and Quiet Days can leave them feeling 'outsiders', and somehow 'second-class' when it comes to spirituality.' (p.158)

I've done a fair bit of reading on 'spirituality' and have frequently been left feeling rather inadequate. Those whom the church looks to as 'spiritual' people, the great 'spiritual' writers of past and present, seem to advocate pathways to God which are predominantly 'I' rather than 'E'. Ignatian Spirituality is predicated on the idea of retreat, with silent meditation and contemplation featuring high up the agenda. The practice of *Lectio Divina* is based on silent reflection upon the text and the world. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross are similarly focused on the inner journey undertaken in solitude. When I was growing up, I was told that I should prioritise my daily Quiet Time, finding a silent place and meeting God in my solitude.

All of this is fine, up to a point. And the point is this: For me, this is all a lot of *hard work*. I'm not denying its value: I do indeed take quiet days, engage in silent reflection and meditation, and spend time alone in prayer. But, and it's a big but, this is not my naturally

'Extroverts probably need help in realising that thinking and action might well be a form of prayer.'

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A TRIBUTE TO RON AYRES

NEWS & NOTICES

www.burg.org.uk

The Baptist Union Retreat Group is a Founder Member of the Retreat Association.

All views and opinions expressed in this Journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of BURG or of the members of the Committee.

What if it is *just as spiritual* to meet God in others as it is to meet him alone?

What if it is *just as spiritual* to hang around at the end of the service talking to people, as it is to go home and contemplate the sermon?

What if it is *just as spiritual* to spend the afternoon visiting, as it is to spend it in prayer?

preferred place to be. It is tiring, draining, *hard work*. It's not that I'm afraid of a bit of hard work from time to time: we all have to work hard at things. But I'm not sure I want to locate my primary place of divine encounter in that place which also drains and exhausts me. Because if I do, when I am tired and stressed from the rest of my life, the last thing I'll want to do is go and meet God.

Spending time with God, when understood as an Introverted exercise, can become one more tiring task to put on the extrovert's 'to do' list, which they then never get round to completing.

But, nonetheless, 'spirituality' = Introverted, has become almost *de rigeur* in Christian culture

Forgive the rant, I'm getting less and less happy with this status quo. I was talking this through (as you might expect) with my Spiritual Director, and I was complaining about my perception of 'bias' in the spiritual literature towards Introverted Spirituality. She made what is, I think, a good point: most people who write books are Introverts, because writing is an essentially introverted discipline. This means that most of those who have put words to their spirituality have done so from an introverted perspective.

The extroverts are too busy 'out there' getting on with life. ■

FROM THE BURG COMMITTEE

held at Abingdon Baptist Church, 11 September.

We were pleased to welcome a new member of the Committee, Pauline West.

ARCHIVE MATERIAL

The Angus Library at Regents Park Baptist College, Oxford, is happy to accept BURG archives. We are in the process of removing duplicates and categorising all our documents. We are also collecting in material which individual members of BURG may be holding. The Committee will be looking at this material during its meeting and retreat in February. There is a need for lists of retreats, programmes and photographs.

FUTURE RETREATS

We have been looking at the shape of future retreats and are exploring the possibility of taster retreats. There is also a suggestion of a pilgrimage, possibly to Iona, in 2016. Watch this space.

THE RETREAT ASSOCIATION

The office has now moved to High Wycombe. The next Retreat Conference will 22-25 June 2015 at Swanwick.

WEBSITE

The number of people visiting the website, www.burg.org.uk, is encouraging. Members can check there for the latest news and information on retreats. 1000 people had looked at the page on membership. Another 1800 had looked at the information on our retreat programme. Visitors to the website had also downloaded conference information, the Annual Report, Journal articles, and Occasional papers

AGM 2014

This will take place at Amersham Free Church on 28 June. Graham Sparkes has agreed to be our speaker.

The Sound of Silence

From Ian Green's Blog. Ian, who is Chair of Burg, wonders whether we know what to do with silence.

It may be one of my favourite Simon and Garfunkel tracts but as I reflect on the phrase 'The Sound of Silence' I'm not thinking of this 1964 classic, written in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, but of a comment made at the serving hatch of our church hall. A number of welcome visitors from the Tuesday group at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church had joined us for lunch as part of their final summer outing des for 2013. One of them said how much he was enjoying the lack of background noise in Amersham compared to central London. It was refreshing to hear the sound of silence!

That experience became even more intense as we gathered in The Sanctuary for a talk by Alison MacTier, Director of The Retreat Association, who led a short, and silent, meditation.

We often long for silence when our lives are crowded and noisy. Whether we know what to do with it is another matter.

Like many people I have tinnitus, which means silent retreats are never totally so because of a high pitched ringing in my ears. When I was diagnosed the rather down to earth consultant, said, 'Looks like you've got tinnitus, I've got it, my wife's got it and now you've got it. None of us can do anything about it so you've just got to live with it.' I actually found that rather helpful!

The point of meditation in the Christian tradition isn't just to find the silence. That very process often brings lots of other thoughts and worries into our minds and maybe these are the current issues that we need to be addressing prayerfully. So retreat leaders when settling a group down for a time of quiet or

Encouraged to listen to sounds coming from outside

silent prayer, encourage them to listen to the noises coming from outside the building or the thoughts filling the empty space we're trying to clear in our minds.. The idea is that slowly, and with a consciousness of God that can be all too absent from our usual rushed routine, we linger with these thoughts and tease out what they may be saying to us about our journey through faith and life.

Over the years retreats, quiet days and silent prayer have given me tools to hone down what I believe to be the important things in life. They are tools I use to separate the dross from the gold and begin to see with greater clarity what matters. They are effective tools in our pilgrimage with Christ, giving him the space to speak into the silence.

Phyllis used to come along to Thursday Morning Prayers every week without fail. She was a quiet lady whose main 'ministry' was of praying for our church. One morning after the prayer group we got on to the subject of favourite hymns. I was touched when Phyllis started to sing her favourite hymn.

*Ev'ry day, ev'ry hour, ev'ry moment
have been blessed by the strength of God's love.
At the turn of each tide he is there by my side,
and his touch is as gentle as silence.*

That, I reckon, is as good as any Simon and Garfunkel number!



FOR YOUR DIARY 2013

Advent Individually Guided Retreat

2-5 December

Ivy House
Warminster

2014

Lent Retreat

4-6 April
at

Buckfast Abbey
theme

*"Yearning, looking,
forgetting and soaring"*

Speakers:

Rev Dr Ivor and Mrs
Anthea Hughes

An
Individually Guided Retreat
is being arranged for early
autumn.

Updates on these retreats can
be found on our
website:
www.burg.org.uk

Enquiries and bookings to:
Gill Roberts
01494 677281
gill-roberts@live.co.uk

Spiritual Direction

Christine Hutt has recently been on a course on Spiritual Direction where she discovered much about her own faith journey.

I have recently completed an excellent introductory course on spiritual direction run by Berks Bucks and Oxon Spiritual Direction Network. (One of the three tutors, Sue Sheppy, is a BURG member.) It took place at Douai Abbey near Reading; 24 people were on the course, but only two were men. The course ran for 24 days over an academic year.

At the end of the course we were each asked to take an object to place on the table to represent what the course had meant to us. I chose to take a fossilised sea urchin because it had a regular pattern and was a perfect shape, also because it was something beautiful and very old.

Early on in the course we had to ponder 'who am I?' and 'who is God for me?' which was very revealing showing how our image of God had changed over the years from childhood.

At the beginning of the second term we each had to give a presentation about our own faith journey in our tutor groups. It was interesting to see the different ways people undertook their presentations. There was a real depth of sharing and it was a humbling experience to just listen.

We looked at monastic spirituality – the Benedictines with their *lectio divina*, a way of praying with scripture; the Ignatians with their *examen*, the use of prayerful reflection on the events of the day; the Franciscans with their stress on creation, poverty and obedience; and the Carmelites, looking at St Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, who wrote about the 'dark night of the soul' (which we had to compare with 'depression').

We looked at discernment and went into it in depth on a further occasion. We considered brokenness and resistance, and looked at the difference between spiritual direction and other types of therapy. We learned about the Enneagram, a way of looking at personality types using behaviour and attitudes and had feedback on where we were on the spectrum.

Each afternoon we would do listening in small groups of three people and take turns to be the director, directee and to give feedback. This was not role play but using real situations from our own experience.

There was a rhythm to each day and to the course which contained much prayerful reflection based not just on passages of scripture but also on poetry.

It was a very holistic course – I have learned much about myself, my faith journey and about how to listen to other people and help them to discover a deeper awareness of God's presence in their own journey through life.

*It is my dream you dream...
my house you build...
my caring you witness to...
my love you share,
and this is the heart of the matter.'*

Charles Peguy, from his poem 'God's Dream'



FOR YOUR DIARY 2014

BURG AGM
and
Conference
28 June 2014
at
Amersham Free
Church
speaker
Rev Graham Sparkes

Advent Retreat
at
Holland House
5th - 7th December
2014
Led by
Rev Dr Chris Ellis
and
Rev Dr Ruth Gouldbourne

2015

Lent Retreat
27 February - 1 March
2015
Led by
John Rackley
theme
Praying our Goodbyes.

Ron Ayres -

a founder member of BURG,
who died on 14 May

The small entry about Ron Ayres in the Baptist Union Directory, informing us that he studied at Spurgeon's College, that he was minister at Merstham, Surrey from 1958 to 1964 and that he was minister at Normanton Baptist Church, Yorkshire for the next 33 years, doesn't even begin to describe the Ron we all knew and loved.

I first met Ron when I moved to a church in Yorkshire in 1967. We were both members of the Yorkshire Baptist Association's Commission of Christian Witness and in particular the social-responsibility sub-committee. Ron's way with words, sense of humour and lateral thinking made our meetings both fruitful enjoyable.

Once, when we were asked to go in a particular but unpopular direction, a deadly hush descended and I wrote on my notepad, 'the sound of silence.' This set Ron off on a bout of uncontrollable

He was frustrated by policies, timetables and denominational tinkering.

giggles. He wasn't one to be pushed around. Earlier this year, John Rackley said of him: 'He did not like systems. He was angered by cant and injustice. He was frustrated by policies, timetables and denominational tinkering.'

During a ministers' conference at Cober Hill, two of us walked along the coastal footpath into Scarborough with Ron. It was shortly after his wife died. They had been married, I believe, for about four years. The two of us listened as he talked lovingly about her, how he missed her and how much she meant to him.

Ron was part of BURG from the beginning and a long-serving member of the BURG Committee. From 1997 until 2003 he served us as Chairman. So many of us have benefited from the way he led retreats or was just there alongside them. His very presence seemed to add to the quality of the occasion

The way he conducted worship, prayed and presided at

Ron taught me:

- To appreciate and to trust.**
- To appreciate dogs and their huge devotion.**
- To appreciate people and their singularity.**
- To appreciate the special in the ordinary.**
- To appreciate poetry.**
- To appreciate the human story of Jesus.**
- To trust the grace and the power of each moment.**
- To trust the spoken word.**
- To trust the unseen work of God.**
- To appreciate and trust the power of kindness.**

John Rackley



SOME WORDS ABOUT RON

by John Rackley

I have been able to visit Ron in these recent struggling years and was last with him at Attlee Court in March.

After a conversation in which we struggled to make sense to each other but both understood he surprised and delighted me by praying for me.

He was cogent, kind and told the Lord all about me and why He should bother about me.

It was a blessed moment and I am so glad to have received it.

It was ended abruptly by a cleaner bustling in with Yorkshire brightness.

Ron responded with sigh and a wave of his hand.

Communion was refreshing and stimulating. He always had something to offer even if it was only a single word. He didn't necessarily keep to the subject but often went off at a tangent and we let him do so because he helped us to perceive something new, to grasp fresh thoughts and to sense the caring presence of God in surprising places.

At our urban retreat at St Catherine's, London, in 2007 I started to quote something from T S Eliot's *Cocktail Party*. I never finished it because Ron pulled me from my seat, sat me down on a chair in the centre of the room and proceeded to direct me and others in a completely different part of the play. But it was relevant and creative.

I took over from Ron in editing this *Journal* in 2003 and I wondered how he had managed to do the job. The cutting edge of

The article you thought I'd written was better than the one I thought I'd written

technology for him was pen and paper. He wrote down everything by hand. That wouldn't have mattered if his handwriting could have been deciphered. Sometimes he himself couldn't understand what he'd written. Once he sent me an article which I thought I'd managed to translate. He later told me, 'The article you thought I'd written was better than the one I thought I'd written.'

This tribute to Ron is woefully inadequate. There is so much more that ought to be said. But we all have our different memories of Ron so let's join together in giving thanks to God for the privilege of knowing him and for sharing so much with him.

Drama and Ron went together. He was a member of Radius, an ecumenical charity 'promoting the performance and study of religious drama.' In their magazine, John Ablett wrote a moving tribute to Ron. He told of the last Radius weekend Ron curated in Thirsk when Ron was aware of becoming ill.

In a tableau of almost silent biblical stories, Ron played the tree at the centre of the garden of Eden, rigid but for the expression of growing horror in his eyes as the fruit was plucked from him. His open hand retained the shape of the apple and slowly turned upside down, suddenly clawlike and shaking with indignation.

In that image, Ron fully embodied the final stage of the hero's journey – the surrendering of his gift to the world in preparation for the journey home.'

DEP

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The Editor welcomes contributions, related to the retreat movement, in the form of articles, reports, prayers and poems but cannot always guarantee to include them.

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Two More Memories of Ron by John Rackley

The first is leading a retreat together at Scargill House and simply reading through the Gospel of Mark. This brought out the performer, student and faith in him.

And a final moment in the garden, in the rain remembering Easter amongst the vegetables.

The second is going to see the last theatre performance of Eric Sykes in London.

It was my suggestion which I think he tolerated. But he roared with laughter and afterwards revelled in going over the actor's craft we had enjoyed.

"It has been a delight to be on the receiving end of Ron's ready wit. To be drawn into some of the depths and breadth of his knowledge of literature and poetry. And to be embraced by his creative silences and prayers which are so much part of his spirituality and faith. Above all we have valued his honesty, his ability to express his feeling and his non-judgemental acceptance of others, with all their gifts and weaknesses."

Joan Whyman, writing in The Journal in 2003 as Ron relinquished the responsibilities of Journal Editor and BURG Chairman.