

# JOURNAL **BURG**

Autumn 2015

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GOING ON RETREAT?

Travel broadens the mind, so they say, to which I want to reply, "It depends what kind of travel you're talking about." If it is moving from one hotel to another with all of the comforts of western living, then the traveller becomes no more than an observer, a spectator, a looker on, who, when faced with something disturbing, can easily withdraw to the safety of an air-conditioned coach or cruise liner.

The real joy of travel is in meeting people where they are and discovering how they are coping with life. It is surprising how open people can be when you show an interest in them. The casual observer often makes snap judgements about the quality of life experienced by people existing in 'poor' and humble situations. But when we are received into their homes and offered generous hospitality we quickly sense the warmth of friendship and love that holds families together.

In these situations, we begin to discover something about ourselves and about all those assumptions we've made about what it means to be poor or rich. Perhaps poverty is nothing to do with the lack of possessions at all but more about the lack of compassion for fellow human beings. Perhaps having many possessions, as Jesus put it, shows where our heart really lies. Where is our treasure to be found? Is it in heaven or where moth and rust corrupts?

So when we travel to new places and are out of our comfort zone where do we put our trust? Where do we look for security and help?

Look at Abraham, Moses and the children of Israel, even Paul on his journeys. How much would they have discovered if they'd stayed at home? Leaving their familiar securities behind they learned to put all their trust in God and began slowly to understand His true nature.

Gerard Hughes, who walked as a pilgrim both to Rome and to Jerusalem writes that the Church is sometimes described as the 'Pilgrim People'. "We are on a journey but have not yet reached our destination. Because we are on a journey, we do not know what is coming next: we do not have final answers. Pilgrims are constantly subject to surprises and have to take risks... The ultimate destination and security of pilgrims lies only in the trust that enables them to proceed confidently in their insecurity." (Gerard Hughes: *God in all things*)

When I look at photographs of those attending BURG retreats I note that we have a core of regular retreatants. This is not a criticism but I want to understand why they are so regular. Is there something they are searching for but have not yet found? Are they spiritually dependent on these occasions, perhaps finding there something which is missing from our local Baptist churches?

Because our retreats are residential and last over two or three days are we providing something which local churches find difficult to offer? If so should BURG be looking for ways to help churches or groups of churches to arrange, say, quiet days, weekends away or weeks of guided prayer?



Leaving the familiar securities behind we learn to put all our trust in God



*The Baptist Union Retreat Group is a Founder member of the Retreat Association*

The purpose of retreat	1
Poems and quotes	2
Reflections of Retreat Association Conference	3
Notices & Tribute	4
Ian Green's RA Blog	5
Bookshelf	6

## I dream of a church...

by Kate Compston

I dream of a church that joins in with God's laughing as she rocks in her rapture, enjoying her art: she's glad of her world, in its risking and growing; tis the child she has borne and holds close to her heart.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's weeping as she crouches, weighed down by the sorrow she sees; she cries for the hostile, the cold and no-hoping, for she bears in herself our despair and dis-ease.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's dancing as she moves like the wind and the wave and the fire; a church that can pick up its skirts, pirouetting, with the steps that can signal God's deepest desire.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's loving as she bends to embrace the unlovely and lost; a church that can free, by its sharing and daring, the imprisoned and poor and then shoulder the cost.

God make us a church that joins in with your living as you cherish and challenge, rein in and release; a church that is winsome, impassioned, inspiring; lioness of your justice and lamb of your peace.

After all what is the purpose of a retreat? Is it to grow spiritually? Of course. Is it to discover more and more about the loving nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ? Naturally. Is it to develop a more Christ-like personality? Certainly. However none of this can be taught?

The German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann writes: "As far as doctrinal content is concerned, the theology of the mystics has never seemed particularly impressive, even down to the present day." He says that it is more appropriate to ask, "What experiences were they trying to express with the help of particular images and ideas?"

He goes on to suggest that if we want to share their experiences we have to accompany them on their pilgrimage "whether it is with Bernard of Clairvaux on the ladder of love, or with Bonaventure on the pilgrimage of the soul, or with Thomas à Kempis on the way he called 'the imitation of Christ'." (Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, SCM Press 1980)

So retreats are not about saying that a particular mystical path is the correct way to go. It is about journeying together on a spiritual pilgrimage.

As we accompany each other, we are able to share experiences and insights about an object, a plant, an animal, an author, an encounter, a

person, a poem, a piece of music or a passage of Scripture.

God speaks to each one of us differently so we have much to share. We can grow spiritually as we journey together and begin to see through another's eyes, or hear through their ears, or understand through their mind.

But to what end? I suppose the years I spent working for the BMS have coloured my thinking. I tend to see that Christian discipleship is about working for the Kingdom of God and that my personal spiritual pilgrimage, whilst bringing me closer and closer to God, is aimed at making me a better advocate for Jesus.

At the end of Jürgen Moltmann's book, *Experiences of God*, he imagines our seeing, like Jacob, a ladder up to heaven and being able to climb it and to see God face to face.

"Whom should we find there? We should find the babe lying in the manger. We should find ourselves standing before the Man on the cross... Whoever wants to find him must look for him in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. He will find God at the foot of the cross on Golgotha."

And this Jesus Christ is the one who calls us to take up a cross, to follow him and to accompany him on a very special journey. Who knows what we shall discover on the way?  
*DEP*

We grow spiritually as we journey together and begin to see through another's eyes.

### ON A CLEAR NIGHT

On a clear night  
Away from the jaundiced  
Sodium lamps  
And staccato security probes  
I look: look up  
At the distant stars  
Winking dead stars  
That gift us with light.  
I too am made of stardust.  
I ponder the wonder of life  
Both micro and mega;  
The awesome connection of things  
In the wider than worldwide  
Web of creation.

Anne Mansfield

### GO WITH THEM

Do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before'.

Vincent Donovan on the subject of our missionary task of accompanying others in their search for God. Quoted in BUGN Presidential address in Cardiff.

# Reflections on the Retreat Association Conference

**G**reen grass, sunshine, people lazing around, talking, refreshing tired bodies and spirits. Stimulating main sessions packed with ideas to ponder and challenges to consider: small groups supportive and sharing in love and friendship.

This conference was a stopping place in the busy schedule of living.

It provided space and time to pause, assess, reconsider and restart.

It invited us to explore further the complexity of God; the presence that is within us and all around us in the obvious and in the unexpected. A presence that is hidden until we stop and look or listen or both and wait for the connection. Wait on the green grass, in the small groups, around the table with food.

*Pauline West*

**I** thought the recent R.A. Conference was stimulating and inspirational. I've been to all but the first and this, I thought, was one of the best, though with all the 'goodies' available there just wasn't time to participate in everything that appealed.

As I seem to have been lurching through life for some years seeking balance, it was helpful to be told that balance is not a goal in itself, but that it is normal to be constantly adjusting and life is often chaotic.

There was the lovely video at the end of the Conference showing a Japanese dancer erecting and balancing an enormous bamboo scaffolding on her head then collapsing the whole thing when she withdrew a feather!

That was only one of many insights gained but that personal struggle for balance prompted me to write a couple of prayer-poems. (See below)

*Anne Mansfield*

## EQUILIBRIUM

Equilibrium.

I savour the word

On my tongue –

Smooth round pebbles of sound

The flavour of harmony,

The mind's frenzy stilled.

In the instance of

Resting

When mind's motion ceases

The balance shifts.

I am up-ended again

as chaos

overwhelms.

Life:

perpetual motion

Between and between

A complexity of choices.

Life:

risk-stability

Clarity-perplexity

Joy-despair

Fear-faith.

Life:

Constantly shifting

Adjusting, changing ...

I take

The leap of faith

And trust

I'll land on Rock

And not on

Shifting sands.

For there I find my

Equilibrium.



*Retreat Association Patrons: Revd Graham Sparkes, Fr. Christopher Jamison, Margaret Rizza, and Dr Rowan Williams*

## BALANCING ACT

There's a yearning in me

For harmony

That I find

Only in brief

Snippets of time;

'Aha' moments, nuggets

Of calm exposed

In hard-quarried stone.

I am learning

Balance

Is achieved through

A constant shifting of gears

And adjustments.

Chaos and order shift in

Perpetual motion:

Mess - marvel;

Muddle - mystery.

This side of heaven

I am unique.

Eccentric.

Vulnerable yet strong,

Made in the image

Of the Creator:

Renewer and Sustainer

Of life.

# FOR YOUR DIARY

Lent Retreat 2016

At

The Brierly, Ilkley

Yorkshire

11-13 March

‘A Way in the desert –  
Journeying with Christ  
through Lent’

Led by

Graham Sparkes  
&  
Pauline West

# A Tribute to Paul Henstock



Paul Henstock, who has died, was a familiar figure at our BURG retreats. Those who met him there describe him as always gentle, friendly, supportive, pastoral and strong.

Paul was born in Leicester and throughout his life continued to be a Leicester City fan.

He prepared for ministry at Spurgeon's College. When he arrived there in 1975 he met Lynda who had already been studying for a year. They married in 1976. From 1979-1988 they shared a pastorate between two churches: Shoreditch Tabernacle and Dalton and Salters Hall. Between 1988 and 1991 they served on a short-term appointment with the BMS at Cinnamon Gardens Baptist Church in Sri Lanka while student minister Kingsley Perera was studying at Spurgeon's. Later they worked alongside him to help the church make the transition from missionary to Sri Lankan ministers.

When they returned to the UK, after a time searching for another appointment, Paul became Manager of the Retired Baptist Ministers' Housing Society, which he continued to do until 2003.

Paul and Lynda joined Matson Baptist Church in Gloucester and proved to be a great asset to the church. Not only did they take services when required but people turned to them both for help and advice.

Paul has been described as a loving, caring brother. 'He was always there to pray for me and gave me good spiritual advice.'

Along with countless numbers of people at home and overseas, members of BURG give thanks to God for the Christian life and witness of Paul Henstock.

## UNLESS

*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone. But if it dies it bears much fruit. John 12:24*

I kicked at the leaves,  
the leaves around my feet,  
Small, medium, large,  
pale, golden, multi-coloured –  
vibrant in their dying.

They had given of their best all year.  
They had caused us to marvel  
first at their fresh green,  
then at their turning colour,  
and now they lay at my feet – life finished;  
their dying the final act of service.  
For the tree must give up its  
precious leaves if there is to be  
new growth next year.

But in these dying leaves  
there lies the germ of life.  
For bite by bite they will be broken down,  
and one by one the elements of growth will be  
released into the earth  
to feed new trees, new leaves, new fruit.

I picked up the leaves,  
the dying leaves in all their fallen glory,  
and thought of another discarding,  
another dying.

That death too was a last act of service.  
That death too was a sight to  
be marvelled at.  
That death too brought new life.  
That death was a gift,  
an everlasting gift, a gift of love,  
an offer of life spread out for us  
by God our creator.

I sat with the leaves around my feet  
vivid in their blood red colours,  
and dared to pray  
that I  
could have this life.

*Pauline West*

# 'Holding a Balance' at the Retreat Association's three yearly Conference

by Ian Green

Last week I was up in Derbyshire attending The Retreat Association's three yearly conference entitled 'Holding a Balance'. We had great weather, inspiring speakers, good fellowship and creative worship - 'who could ask for anything more!'

As I chair the board of trustees I had something of an 'insiders' view of the goings-on behind the scenes! I attended some of the planning meetings and took part in the discussions which focused on how to keep 270 participants happy

Our main speaker was Iain McGilchrist, who is a psychiatrist, doctor, writer and former Oxford literary scholar. He is



*Dr Iain McGilchrist*

particularly famous for his work on 'The Divided Brain'. His talk was fascinating and the way he floated around the conference ever ready to engage in conversation during the breaks was so appreciated.

All our patrons attended: Rowan Williams, Christopher Jamison, Margaret Rizza and

Graham Sparkes. To catch a glimpse of a former Archbishop of Canterbury serving up the fruit salad on the table opposite one lunchtime was a slightly surreal moment

The Retreat Association brings together various denominational retreat bodies under one umbrella and also provides a home for those exploring quiet prayer spirituality who don't have any denominational allegiance.

One of the best things we do is publish an annual handbook listing pretty much every retreat house in the country and the various activities on offers. I lent a copy to a minister colleague once and by the end of the evening he told me he'd planned his whole three month sabbatical using the info he'd found in the handbook.

I'm glad we held last week's conference. It was super to sit at a different table every meal time and chat with Christian folk from right across the spectrum and hear about the way their church or group prays, explores faith and simply tries to 'hold a balance' between faith and life.

I'm deeply grateful to be travelling alongside such people and will look back at those four days in Derbyshire last week as one of the highlights of 2015.



*Ian Green is Chair of BURG*

## 'VIRTUAL' COMMUNION?

At the Retreat Association Conference I was asked, at short notice, to lead an early morning communion service in the Free Church tradition. Having been told everything necessary would be provided by the centre I greeted the prospect of leading this service in a relaxed manner.

Come the day I arrived at the designated room early to set up only to find that, through a misunderstanding, no bread and wine had been delivered. I went on a search but, at 7am in the morning, could rouse no one and obtain nothing.

By now around twenty people had gathered expectantly for communion! What could we do? We might still read the scriptures, even sing a hymn and certainly pray. Being a Retreat Association event it seemed natural to suggest a period of extended silence.

Then something beautiful happened. Someone, from both a Quaker and Baptist background, led us in a wonderful prayer of thanks for bread and wine and all that communion can still mean to us, even with the elements missing. It was an affirming and positive moment when this disappointing situation was 'redeemed' by a super Eucharistic Prayer.

It was as if we had shared in a moment of 'virtual' communion and, for me, it became one of the most precious and memorable parts of the conference.

# BOOKSHELF

*Heather Andrews is captivated by a book review*

I was captivated by an extract in the *Church Times* (04/09/2015) of 'The Wilderness Within' by Nicholas Buxton (Canterbury Press £12.90).

Under the heading 'Balancing work and spiritual sustenance' this extract struck a chord with me as I experience the dilemma of pressing work (voluntary) for the church during a difficult time, ongoing family responsibilities, my engagement with several people in regular spiritual direction and my need to keep my balance spiritually.

I contemplated phrases from this review like the following: '...caught between... conflicting calls: withdrawal from the world and engagement with the world'.

'This dichotomy played into the story of Mary and Martha'.

'By affirming the contemplative vocation we are not necessarily devaluing the care of the world, but making the point that there is more to life than work'.

## *Balancing Being and Doing*

'Our responsibilities still need our attention but... we should keep things in proportion and perspective. There is an appropriate time for everything (Ecc. 3: 1-8)'

'Indeed, the task of the spiritual life is not to make an either/or choice between the active and contemplative vocations, but to create a both/and synthesis. It is all about balance. Mary and Martha personify two facets of the one calling to pursue what really matters.'

'Finding this balance is what meditation, the cultivation of self-awareness through the discipline of stillness, is really all about'.

'The spiritual life is not about being rather than doing, but the harmonious integration of being and doing as a seamless whole so that we are what we do and we do what we are'.

This has so whetted my appetite for this book – it is on my 'to get' list. Trying to live out the calling as an active-contemplative or a contemplative-in-action will continue to be a challenge!



## Advent Retreat 2016

25-27 Nov

at  
Holland House

This is to be  
Led by

Members of the  
BURG Committee.

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BURG AGM  
11<sup>th</sup> June 2016

At  
Amersham Free Church

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*Book the dates. More details  
will be available later*

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

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