

# JOURNAL **BURG**

Spring 2015

## TO DE-CLUTTER OR READ AGAIN? THAT IS THE QUESTION

It's time to de-clutter. I shall be 80 next year and my family tell me that I need to sort out my books – no easy matter. Going through my library is like trawling through my life over the past 60 years.

Here are books given to me by a well-meaning church member who thought they would be useful to a young ministerial student setting off to a Baptist College in 1955. Well throughout my ministry I have used the copy of *Cruden's Concordance* he donated, even though it is the 1804 edition and every 's' is a confusing *f*. It has been superseded now by the Bible on my iPad with its quick electronic search facility.

Then there are those text books needed for college and university courses, some still with notes on bits of paper marking chapters studied closely for essay writing or swotting for exams.

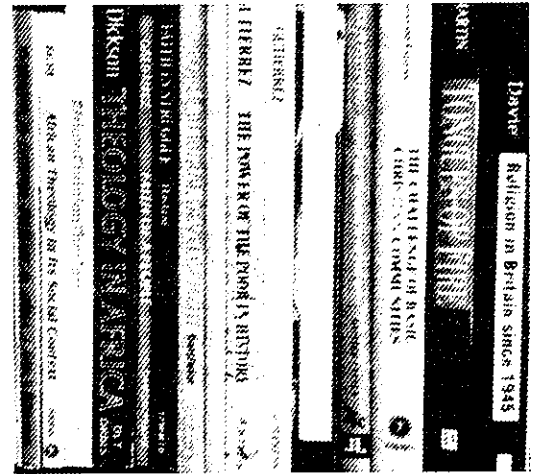
There are a number of service manuals. One in particular is well-thumbed around calls to worship, orders for communion and weddings. The funeral section is stained, smudged and wrinkled by rain drops and even snow-flakes falling on its pages at many a grave-side committal.

There is a shelf of books concerning Latin American liberation theology and African and Asian theology. They go back to a sabbatical spent at the Selly Oak Colleges studying third world theology. Another shelf has volumes about the Church and post-modernism and post-Christendom linked to another sabbatical about change in society and how churches are meeting the challenges such change presents.

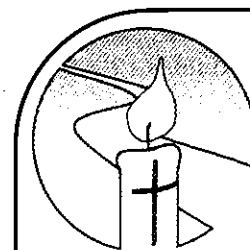
Of course many books are about the Bible. There is an eclectic mix of biblical commentaries and several translations of the Bible itself. Collections of sermons have their place too.

I'm surprised to discover how many volumes I have on the art of preaching and leading worship. Amongst them is a fairly recent acquisition bought in 2006. I wish it had been available earlier in my ministry. It is by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He didn't write it as a book for publication. In fact it has been put together from notes taken by his students between 1935 and 1939. The background to Bonhoeffer's course of lectures in homiletics at Finkenwalde was the opposition of the Confessing Church to what was taking place in Nazi Germany.

It was a difficult and dangerous time and he was preparing men for a ministry which could cost them their liberty and even their lives. Bonhoeffer does it by stressing the importance of the Bible in all that a pastor has to do. He bemoans the fact that 'the Bible is largely misunderstood, even by ministers.' And he includes himself in that. He says no one should preach from the Bible in the pulpit if he hasn't spent time labouring over it in his study and praying over it.



No one should preach from the Bible if he hasn't spent time labouring over it in his study



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

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He reminds his students that the Bible is the book in which the Word of God is conserved until the end of time. As such it is different from other books. For two thousand years the Church has drawn from it knowledge of the truth. It has consoled millions of people and led them to God. 'In fact,' he says, 'each word in it has made and possesses its own place in the history of Christianity.'

He warns against using a knowledge of Scripture to glorify oneself or to puff oneself up with pride. 'We study it as spoke-persons of the Christian community.' However 'a profound and complete knowledge of Scripture is necessary.'

He points out that Luther Read the Bible as though you are reading a love-letter through the whole of the Old Testament at least twice every year and the New Testament more often than that. I suppose that puts everything into perspective. It certainly makes me feel inadequate.

So often my reading of the Bible has been linked to the necessity of preaching two sermons each Sunday. There was always the danger of its becoming a chore rather than a way of meeting with God and listening to his voice.

Bonhoeffer suggests that we should try to read Scripture as if we were reading it for the very first time. I remember the account of the leader of a group of people somewhere in Asia who listened to a reading of the Bible in his own tribal tongue. Previously he had access to the Gospel only via another language. The passage he read was Luke's account of our Lord's birth. As it was being read he jumped up and cried, 'That's God speaking to me.'

Wouldn't it be great to read Scripture so that it comes to us with the freshness of a first-time hearing? Perhaps the nearest we can get is to have different translations available to us.

Three of the volumes in my library date back to 1933. They came from the library of a minister who died in the late 1950s. The penciled annotations show that he made good use of them for preaching.

The author attempts to look freshly at Scripture through the then fairly new translation of the Bible by James Moffatt. 'The purpose of these volumes is to suggest the great values for preaching, as well as private reading to be found in modern translations of the Bible.'

Many more translations are available to us today and by moving from one to another we should gain fresh insights and interpretations.

Bonhoeffer quotes Kierkegaard who suggests that we read the Bible as we would read a love letter. Now that's an idea: the Bible is a love letter to us from God which we treasure and read over and over again, where each word and line has a special significance.

Bonhoeffer says that prayer and the reading of Scripture are inseparable. He mourns the disappearance of the prayer-stool in ministerial studies because a preacher must be rooted in Scripture and this can only happen when he takes time to pray and to meditate over Bible passages.

'To meditate and to pray over Scripture puts solid ground under his feet... Each day should begin with the meditation of Scripture.' It is truly hard-work and not a time for day-dreaming. It is not a question of formulating new and great thoughts but a time to listen to ancient thoughts and to hear God speaking through them to us today.

He tells his students that they should choose the text from which they are going to preach no later than Tuesday and to complete the sermon by Friday. Having chosen the text early in the week they can keep returning to it and meditate on it allowing God to speak through it as they go about their daily tasks.

At the present rate it's going to take a long time to de-clutter my library. There are so many treasures there which demand to be unearthed and read over and over again.

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## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN STUDYING THE BIBLE

Bonhoeffer suggested to his students that they should analyse a biblical text by asking themselves certain concrete questions:

- a. What does the text tell me about God?
- b. What does it say about human beings?
- c. What does it say to me?
- d. Where could I be in danger of making an in-authentic interpretation? This could be perhaps because I find the text too difficult to understand or its demands too hard to take; or even because I just don't want to believe it.
- e. What does the text say in general to the Church of Christ?
- f. What does it say in particular to my own situation?
- g. What does it say to me about someone I know who is some kind of distress or need?

# praying our goodbyes

Reflections from the Lent Retreat, held at Holland House and led by John Rackley

**J**ohn started by asking us to think why we had come on this retreat. No answers were required, but it helped me to clarify my reasons for being there.

Before I came somebody asked me if I planned my retreats. The answer is yes. I become aware that my relationship with God is losing its sharpness.

We always see through a mirror dimly, but there comes a time when the mirror needs cleaning and, for me, that is what a retreat does. In some ways the content of the retreat is immaterial, what matters is the time with God uninterrupted by the routine of living.

The content is important, however, in that it provides a springboard for interaction with God: it is the starting point of the conversations that deepen and refresh the relationship. It opens a door that,

*"What matters is the time with  
God uninterrupted by the  
routine of living."*

perhaps unwittingly, has been kept shut; it enables the dust to be blown off the inner book that has been kept closed.

John led us through the use of Philippians 4:6-7; John 11:1-26 and John 12:1-8 to consider what it is to pray a goodbye, as opposed to saying a goodbye. Then in our personal time we could explore the scriptures to find what they were saying to us particularly about goodbyes.

In the final session we were led to consider the "Quiet arrival of Hope" like the silent coming of the dawn.

That is a good description of a retreat for me. It is a time when some things are put to bed; others are cleaned and polished and there appears, often so gently sometimes dramatically, the soft pink light of dawn; the glow of resurrection.

*Pauline West*



On looking out of the chapel  
window  
at Holland House on the Lent Retreat

It was stark; bedraggled;  
calling for tidiness that was not to be.  
Drab; dull;  
waiting for blessing,  
the blessing of warmth and light and life.

It had said goodbye  
to the glories of spring and summer and autumn  
and now lifeless it lay waiting.  
As, you Lord, lay after your goodbyes.  
As we immersed in ours  
wait  
for the veil that smothers and distorts  
to be pulled aside.

Not much  
just a little.

Enough to let a spear of light,  
with a gentleness that will not dazzle,  
herald the glory that is to come.

So to the eyes that can see,  
the buds are swelling,  
new leaves are sprouting  
brave flowers shout with colour.

All is not lost.  
Praying our goodbyes  
awakens hope.

*Pauline West*

## FOR YOUR DIARY

### Lent Retreat 2016

This will be held  
at  
The Brierly, Ilkley

Yorkshire

11-13 March

### Speakers

Graham Sparkes  
&  
Pauline West

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### Advent Retreat 2016

25-27 Nov

at  
Holland House

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### BURG AGM

This will be held  
on  
Wednesday  
24 June  
during the

Retreat Association  
Conference

at

Swanwick

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# A Pilgrimage to Iona Abbey?

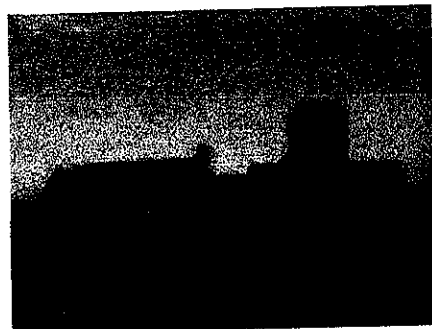
We are considering the possibility of organising a pilgrimage to Iona Abbey in the Autumn of 2016 if enough of our members are interested.

It is sometimes since we arranged a pilgrimage, way back in 2005 to be exact. Then it was to Lindisfarne. At the time Heather Andrews said that she 'found the Pilgrimage a deeply fulfilling experience, seeing places and learning aspects of our faith that I hadn't known before.'

Pilgrimages are more than a geographical journey. Tackled in the right way they become a spiritual journey. Traveling with fellow pilgrims gives one an opportunity to share faith stories and to learn from each other. Sometimes pilgrims discover that they are also walking with Christ himself. Something of an Emmaeus road experience.

A pilgrimage to Iona will enable the participants to learn something of the ecumenical Iona Community. A leaflet in the pack you have received with this *Journal* tells you more about the community and what you might expect from participating in a pilgrimage to the Abbey.

At the moment we are just exploring the idea. Any decision we make will depend on how many of our members would like to take part. So if you are interested please contact our treasurer, Bill Carpenter by email [treasurer@burg.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@burg.org.uk) or phone 07721 303548 or see him at the AGM at Swanwick in June when we will make the decision whether to pursue this.



*This is my beloved Son, in whom I take delight; listen to him.*  
(Matt 17:5)

Heavenly Father,  
we all need times like this,  
moments of vision  
when we glimpse the eternal  
beyond the temporal  
moments when we catch  
the sight of something  
which has lasting worth  
beyond the humdrum concerns of our world  
moments with our Lord  
on the mountain top  
listening to him  
preparing us to be your people  
in the world  
in the place  
in the space  
where we live.

Father  
help us to listen to your Son

# What are the ingredients necessary to make a good retreat?

by Ian Green

During the last days of February, and then tipping over into March, I joined the Lent Retreat at Holland House in Worcestershire hosted by The Baptist Union Retreat Group and it's got me thinking: What are the ingredients necessary for a good retreat?

People come to retreats with vastly different expectations and from very different contexts, so perhaps no single retreat could possibly offer all the essential ingredients. In fact the truth is it's not only what's on 'offer' that's important but what bring ourselves.

That said, the weekend offered us some very precious ingredients. So I have a little list and here it is:

**A Snappy Title:** Always a winner - it gets you interested (well interested enough to book a place!) and sets the theme to be explored. This retreat was called 'Praying Our Goodbyes'.

**A warm welcome:** That was offered by Holland House. It's a charming old building full of character but more than that the staff are constantly gracious and helpful. In addition there is the physical context of a comfortable sitting room, well stocked library, quiet chapel and a walk down to the river. Add the provision of three delicious meals a day and who wouldn't want to go on retreat!

**An engaging leader:** We were fortunate to have a former President of The Baptist Union The Revd John Rackley to guide us. John provided just the right amount of engaging and stimulating introduction. He then left us to do the work of thinking it through

*You need to let the silence settle and then it does its own work*

and applying it to our lives. There's a great art in that. Say too much and it becomes an indulgent lecture, offer too little and folks are left adrift. John made himself available for any private conversation if folks had an issue they would like to discuss. As one who took him up on that, I can say how much I appreciated both his time and counsel.

**The gift of silence:** We offered that to each other at various points over the weekend. Sharing a meal in silence is actually a very companionable thing to do because you discover there are so many ways to communicate without using words! To be honest I was very hesitant about the weekend's silence for some reason. I entered it with a grudging resentment! Yet by the end I was reluctant to come out of it! You somehow need to let the silence settle and then it seems to do its own work. In that space God can speak more clearly to us.

**A Journey:** Every retreat is a sort of journey and I regularly come away from them astonished at the paths taken. It's also true that in a collective way we gather on the Friday evening as 'strangers' yet by Sunday lunchtime we are saying our goodbyes as 'friends' - and it's that sense of 'sharing' a retreat which makes it both a personal and group experience.

As I look back on Lent 2015 this last weekend at Holland House will have been a very important stage on the road to Easter.



*Ian Green is Chair of BURG*

Lord  
it is easy  
to grow weary  
to want to give up  
when faced  
with  
difficulty and opposition  
when nothing  
runs smoothly  
and all the world  
seems to be  
against us;  
then we remember  
that you have called us  
to take up  
our cross  
to follow you  
the one  
who endured suffering  
mockery  
and death  
for the sake of the world.  
Can we expect  
your work of love  
to which  
you have called us  
to cost nothing?

# BOOKSHELF

Some phrases irritate more than others. One that really gets my goat is, "I hear what you are saying but..." And I then want to finish with the words, "You are not really listening to me."

This is a noisy world where politicians lecture us about what they think is good for us but have no time to listen to what we really want to say about our situation. So many words and images are aimed at us to make us believe this or to purchase that. Focus groups, surveys and questionnaires seem to be designed to answer questions someone else is asking. There are few people prepared to listen to others.

So here are two books which I've found helpful. The first is *A Heart to Listen* by Michael Mitton. It's not new being published 2004 by the Bible Reading Fellowship. It is subtitled *Becoming a listening person in a noisy world*. It is not just about listening to others, it's also about listening to God and listening to our own hearts.

Russ Parker, in his foreword to the book, tells us that Michael Mitton 'invites you to take a journey of discovery about what lies at the heart of listening, and in doing so you will, with me, realise how difficult and how rewarding becoming an accurate listener really is.'

Another book, *The Sacred Art of Listening* by Kay Lindahl, founder of the Listening Center in Laguna Niguel, California, was published in the UK in 2002 by Wild Goose Publications the publishing division of the Iona Community.

This is not just a text book about the benefits of listening. It contains 40 exercises or reflections to help us practise the *Sacred Art of Listening*.

The book was first published in the United States and comes highly recommended by those in the US who have read and used it. One reviewer says: "This elegantly profound book will help lead us to a more enlightened time when the listening ear, not the penetrating eye, will be our primary symbol of understanding."

Kay Lindahl writes: "Learning how to listen to and speak with each other are essential skills for creating relationship that lead to mutual respect, dialogue, understanding and peace."

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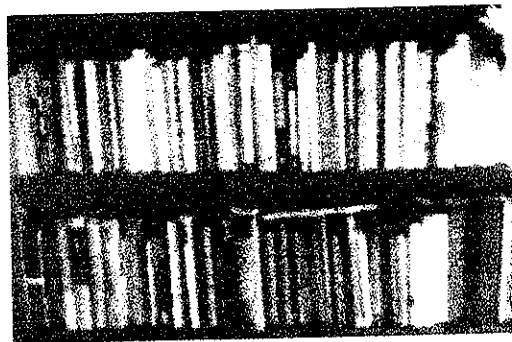
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The Editor welcomes contributions related to the retreat movement in the form of articles, reports, prayers and poems. However he cannot always guarantee to include them.

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## Weekend Individually Guided Retreat

15-17 May 2015,  
Southgate Retreat Centre,  
Buckfast Abbey,

Led by  
Revd Jane Eastell  
(Spirituality Advisor for Bath &  
Wells)

and  
Mrs Chris Redman  
(BURG member)

contact Chris  
chris@redman.org.uk

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## IGR

We are planning  
an Individually Guided Retreat  
for a small group this coming  
October.

If you are interested please get in  
touch with Gill Roberts.  
See contact details below.