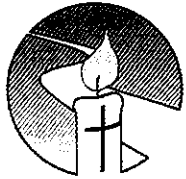


the JOURNAL



Baptist Union Retreat Group

Winter 2012/13

DEEP TIME

Exploring the concept of deep time which encompasses all time past, future and present.

The older one gets the swifter time seems to flow. When we were children Christmas took ages to arrive and as for birthdays it took an eternity before we could add another year to our age.

I am told that it is something to do with relativity. When you are five, a year is one fifth of your life. But when you reach my age a year is a mere 77th of life and it goes by in a flash.

I don't fully understand the theory of relativity in all its complexities although I have read Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. But I do know that time flows faster the closer you are to a source of gravity. This means that an astronaut who travels out into space and then returns to earth will find that those he left behind will have aged more quickly than he has.

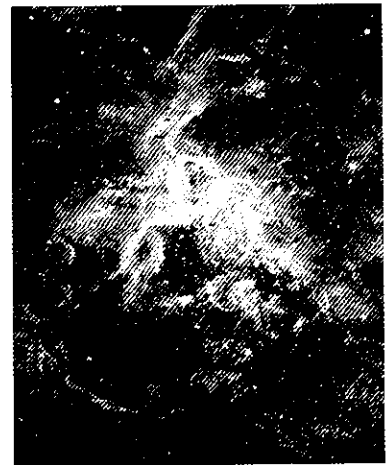
It appears then that time is relative. The pace of time varies according to where we are in the universe. Astronomers are now using ultra powerful telescopes which enable them to see images, billions of light-years away.

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

They now estimate that they are able to see events two-thirds of the way towards the beginning of the universe. It's mind boggling. Yesterday, today and tomorrow are somehow pulled together.

Psalm 93 says about God, "You existed before time began." So relativity and time should come as no surprise to Christians. God is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is God of yesterday, today and for ever. He is the beginning and the end, as well as the middle, all at the same time.

Mind you, that is for God, not for us human beings. As Einstein once said, "We need time for otherwise everything would happen all at once and we couldn't cope with that."



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God's time, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

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MY FIRST IGR

Gill Roberts appreciates the IGR held at Holland House and led by Heather Andrews

POEMS & PRAYERS

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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.

MYSTERY

To read an interview with Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan priest in New Mexico, try to get hold of a copy of *Mission Catalyst* issue 4 2012, published by BMS World Mission.

All Baptist ministers should have a copy that BURG members might be able to borrow. Otherwise visit: bmsworldmission.org/catalyst

This issue is entitled *Mystery: the art of unknowing* and should be of interest to all BURG members

Myra Blyth writes about the Lord's Supper as a faithful mystery and looks at the symbolism of Communion

Jonathan Langley focuses on Music, Modern Art and Mystery and asks whether art can have a spiritual value if it chooses mystery over conveying an obvious message

Dr Frances McCormack examines the works of Catholic Novelist Graham Greene and notes how literature can bring us face to face with the mystery of God's mercy

Dr Richard Kidd leads us into Mystery, Scripture and God's Freedom

Katherine Mannion writes about three paths to mystery by looking at Julian of Norwich, Thomas Merton and John of the Cross.

And Alison Goodlad introduces us to the poet R S Thomas suggesting how poetry can illuminate the wordless mystery of God.

I thoroughly enjoyed this particular edition. DEP

But for God the writer of Psalm 90 says, "In your sight a thousand years are as the passing of one day or as a watch in the night."

This is "deep time". In his latest book, *Falling Upward*, Richard Rohr writes, "Deep time encompasses all time, past and future, geological and cosmological, and not just our little time and culture."

If you find this difficult to comprehend so do I. It is a mystery. But we are surely not afraid of mystery. It is there at the heart of our Christian faith.

We belong to a mystery far grander than our little selves and our little time. We Christians live in deep time: in the past, present and future all at once. God's Kingdom is part of deep time.

You remember, when Jesus was crucified one of the criminals hanging alongside him sneered and asked, "What kind of King is this?" But the second criminal accepts him as King and says, "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus does, telling him that today he will be with him in Paradise.

This same crucified Jesus invites each one of us to accept him as king. He invites us to align ourselves with his work of salvation. We are invited to take up our cross and to follow him. We are invited join him in helping others to recognise his kingly rule and join him in his work of turning this world around.

He is inviting to link ourselves with all those saints who have been part of his kingdom over the centuries and years. When we talk about saints we are talking about ordinary faithful Christian men and women as well the notables like Paul, Augustine and so on.

We often describe them as the communion of saints. Somehow, in deep time we are connected with them.

"Living in deep time, connected to the past and the future, prepares us for necessary suffering, keeps us from despair about our own failure and loss and offers us a way through it all," writes Richard Rohr.

"We are merely joining the great parade of humanity that has walked ahead of us and will follow after us. When we move into deep time we are utterly at one with the whole communion of saints and sinners, past and future. In deep time everybody matters and has an influence and is even somehow present and not just past."

A GEOLOGICAL TERM

John McPhee coined the phrase 'Deep Time' in his 1981 book *Basin and Range*. The term is used to compare the vastness of the earth's history with human history. It is being used more frequently as scientists look at the effects of human activity on the earth's ecosystem. Deep Time has now been taken up by other disciplines, not to mention as a name for an American indie-pop group, and is now being used as a theological term. Franciscan, Richard Rohr introduces it in his latest book, *Falling Upward*.

Communion and Deep Time

At Communion we move into this deep time. The bread reminds us of the Passover meal that Jesus broke and shared with his disciples. So first of all we are linked, in deep time with the Hebrew people, who, at the time of the Exodus, experienced the saving power of God. At that time they were to prepare only unleavened bread because there may not be time wait for yeast to raise the dough. They must always be ready to leave.

In that bread there is the memory of the Exodus and the subsequent history of Israel – the exile into the Babylon, the return and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the words of the prophets.

Most of all, in the bread and wine there is for us the memory of Jesus – his birth, his baptism, his ministry and teaching, his suffering and death and resurrection.

In the bread there is the history of the Church – the apostles, the saints and the martyrs, all those who have lived the life of Christ and who have celebrated this feast over the centuries, even those we have loved and known: the communion of saints.

In deep time, in God's deep time, they are present with us as we celebrate communion. One day we shall be, for others who follow after us, part of that unseen communion of saints and in God's deep time they are with us as we celebrate this feast.

Pause and Remember

I have introduced the Deep Time concept into a Communion Service inviting the participants to pause before eating the bread (unleavened) and drinking the wine using the following words

Hold the bread in your hands. Look at it. Here is symbolised the whole history of God's saving work, in the Exodus, in the life of the Hebrew people, in the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Look, remember, and hear Jesus calling you to join him in the work of his kingdom.

So let us eat this bread, Christ's body broken for us.

Hold the wine, the cup of salvation, in your hand. Here is symbolised the suffering, the agony of Jesus on the cross, the mocking, the pain, his bleeding wounds and his words to those there and to us, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

So let us drink this wine, Christ's blood shed for our salvation.

FALLING UPWARD:

A spirituality for the two halves of life.

By Richard Rohr
published by SPCK,
priced £10.99

THIS is the latest book by Fr. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest who is founder and director of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In *Falling Upward*, Rohr sees our spiritual life as a journey of two halves. In the first half of life we tend to visualise everything in black and white. It is the time when we 'build the container or our identity'.

The second half of life is about finding the contents which the container is meant to hold.

Maybe it is because I am firmly situated in the second half of life that I appreciate Rohr's invitation to value the gift of aging.

He says, 'As we grow older, we are being awakened to deep, simple and mysterious things we simply could not see when we were younger.'

Elsewhere in this *Journal* we quote what Rohr has to say about the mystery of Deep Time.

Although I read through the book at a moderate pace for the first time, I am now going through it again pausing at the end of each chapter - sometimes at the bottom of a page - to meditate over what he has written.

It is that kind of book and I recommend it to all - especially if you have fallen upward into the second half of life.

AUTUMN RETREAT

Our retreat in October was arranged in Wharfedale, Yorkshire, by Ron Ayres and Tasker Lewis. It was taken over by Brian and Chris Howden and finally organised and directed by Gill Roberts and Janet Boyle, ably supported by Clive Roberts even though he was unwell. All these changes happened through ill health.

For me, travelling up to Scargill House was a journey of faith as it was my first long train journey after suffering a stroke. It was also my first visit to Scargill following its closure and consequent resurrection. To return to a much loved special place following change is always difficult - and Scargill was a special place to people like Ron and me as we had known and loved it for decades.

I should not have had doubts, the welcome from the community was warm and the journey was filled with golden moments of help (thank you Pauline and Peter). Even the familiar Dales rain was a blessing - it meant I spent more time in the lovely chapel and library.

We followed the splendid programme planned by Brian - each section had its golden moment as we explored the subject through biblical readings. The one that spoke to me most vividly was just one verse: Isaiah 45 v 3. You will find riches if you give yourself time to study it in silence.

The ultimate golden moment for me was during the final communion service taken so sensitively by Paul Henstock in the Lounge. This room has huge panoramic windows looking on to the dale. The weather had caused the magnificent view to be obliterated for most of the retreat but during the intercession the clouds suddenly drifted off the top of the fell and for two or three minutes the golden morning light fell on the tops of the hills in a glorious glow. A moment of joy and hope for us and for the Scargill community. The Old Testament reading, Haggai Chapter 11: 1-9 was appropriate.

Crystal Pearce

The Scargill House group



REFLECTIONS ON THE SCARGILL RETREAT

PARTICIPANTS in the retreat at Scargill House, in Yorkshire, found the verse from Isaiah, one of the biblical readings they explored, particularly poignant.

"I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel who summons you by name."

Together we delved into the passage to uncover its implications.

Mention was made of mining for treasures - it's hard, dirty work. There is nothing easy about it and yet from it we get:

- coal for warmth...
- diamonds for beauty and strength...
- tin for usefulness...
- gold for beauty and wealth...

Darkness, we thought, is associated with sin, ugliness and hardness.

When we go through dark days and we can discover God!

- "so that we may know that You are God and You call us by name".

To know You in Your suffering

When I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:10)

My grace is sufficient for you.

My strength is made perfect in weakness.

Such promises that had been experienced became some of the treasures too!

Gill Roberts

MY FIRST IGR

Gill Roberts tells how she enjoyed her first Individually Guided Retreat

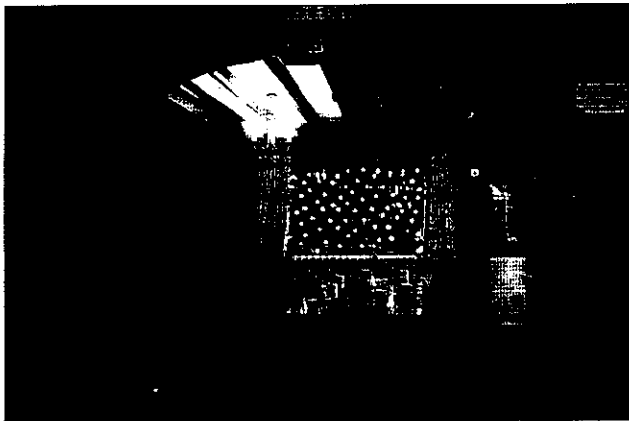
How lovely to be welcomed into the warm security of Holland House - a place we already knew and loved! Holland House in Advent is something special. They were putting up the decorations! The log fire was alight in the dining room and the shop had Christmas gifts. The food and hospitality were as warm as ever.

It was just the place to go to be looked after; to relax; to spend time in silence with God.

We read, walked, slept, took photographs, wrote and Listened. Heather Andrews journeyed with each of us and gave help and guidance and encouragement and led our morning and evening prayers.

It was spacious and free. Each of us came away with a sense that God had given us a gift. For some it was specific; for others simply time to *be*. For all it was worthwhile.

They were putting up Christmas Decorations



It was just the place to go to be looked after.

BURG AGM and Conference

**Saturday 11 May
at**

**Manvers Street Baptist Church Bath
Speaker: Revd John Rackley**

WORDS

Words, words, words,
too many words
Lord
in
prayers and sermons
and
hymns and songs.

Don't you ever get tired
of all the religious chatter
chucked at you
day and night?

Don't you ever get tired of
our incessant pleadings
and
moans?

After all
you decided to speak
but one Word,
the Logos,
the Word made flesh
full of grace
and
truth.

And that Word,
that incarnate
Word
that Word of truth
about you
is
'Love'

And
listening to
that
Word
we are awed
into silence
mesmerised
by
the creative,
saving,
suffering power
of
divine love.

Teach us how to listen
and
to learn how to live
in love

Ode to a Rose Tree

YOU stood alone in the midst of the garden
Your blooms profuse and fragrant
Your stem fragile;
but you were cared for supported and loved.

The gales and the winds came;
You were battered, bruised and bent
Your flowers blown to the earth,
many cut off in their prime.

Loving hands pruned you and put in extra support
You grew and blossomed once more
Although you were never able to stand straight,
you were always leaning in the wind.

Then came a wind so ferocious
That you were buffeted, blown over, bent double;
your stem jagged and broken,
your beautiful blooms hanging down.

Other hands came and raised you up again,
Shrouding your broken stem in black.

Loving eyes gazed on your brokenness
Distraught by your apparent death;
Loving hands pruned you, cutting off your pretty pink blooms,
Not knowing if you would ever flower again.
Your roses pervaded the house
with their fragrance and beauty.

But you kept growing, kept sending out runners,
like distress signals.
All through the rainy summer and wet autumn
you continued to flower,
So that even in dark December
your blooms were still admired
and cherished.

*Christine Hutt
December 2012*

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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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LENT RETREAT

at
Holland House

**8-10 March
2013**

Leaders

**Geoff Colmer
&
Alison MacTier**

Theme

**SONGS IN THE
KEY OF LIFE**

*How music can
express different ex-
periences in our
journey of faith.*

**There are very few
places left for this
retreat so please
telephone
Gill Roberts before
sending in booking
forms.**

Tel: 01494 677281