

# Partners in Ministry



## Passing The Baton

### Also in this issue...

The Legacy of Principals

Introducing the New Principal

Walking Where Jesus Walked

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## And It's Goodnight From Him Principal's Letter

Over the last year, I have often found myself conscious that I'm doing certain things for the last time. They've all been part of the process of trying to end well. This article will almost certainly be my final contribution to the college newsletter. The best way I can think of to end well is to offer some personal highlights of my years as College Principal. These are not necessarily the most important things or the truly decisive moments, but they are the ones that have stuck in my memory. Of course, if I were writing this last week or next week, it is very likely that the list would have been different. But today, these are the things that come to mind.

### Overseas Trips

We started the overseas trips early on in my time at college. They were part of a developing partnership with BMS World Mission. We thought that the trips would make a significant and memorable contribution to the

formation of our ministerial students, and I think that has proven to be the case. Over the years groups went, facilitated by BMS, twice to India, Nepal and Peru and once each to Thailand, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lebanon, Jamaica, and Brazil. Sadly, the trips stopped during the pandemic and changes at the BMS mean that they are no longer able to help us to organize them. We were keen that the trips continue, and we made use of our existing contacts with the Bethlehem Bible College to organize a trip to Israel/Palestine around Eastertime. You can read about it elsewhere in this publication.

I had the joy of leading the trips to Brazil and to Peru. Inevitably, I loved the things that tourists love;



the statue of Christ the Redeemer and the visit to the Copacabana beach; the trip to Cusco and then to Machu Picchu. But more significantly, I appreciated the visits to favelas and to church plants, the opportunity to see evangelism and social service in urban and rural communities, the chance to visit seminaries very different from our own college. Most of all, I was grateful for the way we saw God at work in different contexts.

### Scholar Visiting from Overseas

Prior to the pandemic we were reaping some of the gains from the visit to Jamaica and wondering if it would be possible to build a relationship with the Baptist Union there. One of the fruits of this was a visit from Revd Johnathan Hemmings who was part of the college for an autumn term. He led prayers, preached, taught, and participated in the life of the college. His contributions to discussions of spirituality and Baptist history were especially memorable. The impact he made was helped by the fact that when he spoke, he sounded like what many of the students thought God might sound like! Things didn't develop as we had hoped – finance and pandemics got in the



way – but Johnathan’s contribution had a profound effect on the college and its development.

### Books

When I was interviewed for this role, I was asked if I intended to undertake any research. I foolishly answered yes but quickly found that I had to have other priorities. A few things did get done. A redrafted version of my thesis *God, Order and Chaos; René Girard and the Apocalypse* was published; I co-edited with John Weaver the collection for Ernest Lucas referred to later; and BRF published *Romans Unwrapped* online. I also wrote ten or eleven articles. Frankly, it’s not a lot and so it was a real surprise last September when my colleagues Helen Paynter and Peter Hatton

presented me with the festschrift, *Attending to the Margins*, that they had edited for me. I think this is my favourite book of all.

### Engagement with Other Faiths

As the UK becomes more and more diverse, our commitment to helping our students learn how to engage with other faith communities had grown. We always felt that this was best done contextually and so we have arranged our programme so that every cohort of students has a chance to spend a week in Birmingham and visit other places of worship and hear about them from those involved. Last October we enjoyed going to a Buddhist temple, a Hindu temple, a Sikh Gurdwara, a synagogue, and an Islamic centre. The last of these is

a place of education we’d visited before and it has been very interesting to see a relationship develop between our institutions. We also enjoyed input from specialists involved in cross-cultural mission and interfaith dialogue. The whole week offers a major formational opportunity that needs no further justification. However, it’s worth mentioning the spin-off benefits for community building that come from spending a week away together. I’ve always enjoyed the togetherness of our community weeks but the ones where we’re away are particularly special.

### Research and Study Centres

The college has engaged with specialist fields of research for many years. While I was in a local pastorate, I remember visiting the college to be present for the launch of the Thomas Helwys Centre for Religious Freedom. I think that project moved on with the staff member who led it, but other centres were established. Some, like the Centre for Childhood and Family Studies did some significant work before closing, while others never quite got off the ground.

In my time, three have been particularly significant. Urban Life

was founded with the support of a significant grant from the Baptist Union. It was based at the college and did lots of innovative work in grassroots theological reflection for those involved in urban mission. When the founding director, Mike Pears, moved to IBTS in Amsterdam, the centre appointed its own trustees, set itself up as a charity, and moved the base of its operations further north to where most of the active participants are based. We were able to nurture and support the project until it was ready and then it left with our blessing.

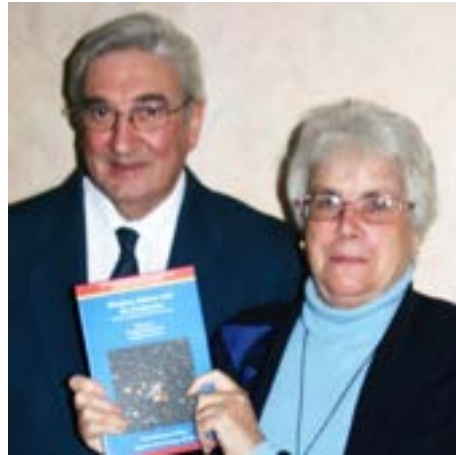
The Centre for Anabaptist Studies was formed to take advantage of the gift of the London Mennonite Library – a collection unrivalled in the UK. Stuart Murray Williams has directed the work since its beginnings. The annual lecture has been a constant presence but the emphasis of the rest of the work has shifted. When it started, the main activity involved a pathway through our MA programme but in the last couple of years this has faded as the number of research students has grown.

The project that has flourished most is my colleague Helen Paynter’s Centre for the Study of

Bible and Violence. This has become a worldwide community producing resources for the scholarly community and for local churches. The flow of books, essay collections, articles, journals, podcasts, videos, webinars, blogs, symposiums, conferences, and the like, has been remarkable. It has proved really beneficial for the college to be associated with this work. There are already several research students linked to the centre and registered with the college.

### **The Growth of the Research Programme**

When I started at the college there were, I think, perhaps three or four research students registered with us. Today there are about 15. They come from all over the world. There are a number of Baptist ministers including a few regional ministers. Some of the students are linked to one of the research centres. Lots come to us because of the positive experiences they hear that others have had within our programme. There are lots of reasons it works as well as it does. Perhaps the most obvious are that we're accredited by the University of Aberdeen with its world class standards and reputation in



divinity, and that our partnership with Trinity pays huge dividends here as elsewhere; the key staff run an excellent programme with a terrific annual conference. We are keen to build on the momentum we have gained in this area and so our next promotional video – the material has been shot and is now being edited – focusses on this area of work.

### **Community Days**

One of the highlights of every year is the gathering of the college community here in Bristol. It's always wonderful to catch up with former students and to watch the current students capture the idea that they are part of a larger body that extends beyond those presently in college.

Two occasions stand out. The first was when we presented Ernest Lucas with the festschrift *Wisdom, Science and the Scriptures* (pictured to the left), we had prepared to acknowledge his astonishing scholarship and his wonderful contribution to the college as tutor and vice-principal. As Ruth Gouldbourne said in her speech at her final college annual dinner in 2006, 'Ernest knows'.

The second occasion came last year when we launched the new history of the college written by Ruth and the late Anthony Cross. It was great to hear Ruth talk about the new book, David Bebbington lecture on the contribution of the college over the centuries, Nigel Wright offer a talk on ministerial formation, as well as enjoy contributions from former principals; Brian Haymes preached a great sermon and Chris Ellis led us – via Zoom – in a communion liturgy he had prepared for the occasion.

### **Teams**

Over the years it's been my privilege to work with some amazing teams of colleagues. I have reason to be grateful to all of them. I've worked with three principals and an acting principal at Trinity as well as with all their

colleagues. They have been understanding and sympathetic partners and this has enabled our small college to punch above its weight. We have offered and accomplished far more than would have been possible without them. However, I worked even more closely with the staff here at the Baptist College and I am very grateful to them all for their kindness, support, and friendship. One of the nicer things the leadership team has done in recent years is to go away together before the start of the college year to build relationships, discuss difficult issues, do some planning, and enjoy one another's company.





**Students**

Having said all of that, the greatest joy has been working with all the different cohorts of students and then seeing our investment bearing fruit in the ministries they exercise. There are chaplains, evangelists, church planters, pioneers, regional ministers, college tutors – here and elsewhere, and pastors – two were successors in my Bristol pastorate. As I keep telling everyone, the college is here for the students and not the other way round. The test of our work is the ministry that they exercise. There have, of course, been sadnesses, but it has been great to see so many flourish. It has been lovely to hear students speaking positively at leavers’ dinners over the years.

**And Finally...**

I seem to have had almost a whole year of farewells. Nearly

everyone – from the trustees to the students, via my colleagues – has been saying kind things about me. I am greatly honoured by the kind words, occasional songs, people dressing up to look like me, the meals, the cards, and the lovely gifts. The truth is that I should be thanking them – and you – for allowing me the enormous privilege of working for the college in this role for so long.

**Steve Finamore**  
College Principal



# College News

**Moving On**

Our former College Manager, Revd Fran Brealey, has been installed as Associate Minister for the benefices of Stiperstones and Pontesbury in Shropshire. Here she is with the Bishop at her installation service.

We wish Fran all the best in her new role, and we miss her very much!



**Save The Date!**

We are delighted to invite you to attend the next College Community Day, which will take place on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024, venue to be confirmed.

Our keynote speaker will be the new College Principal, Revd Dr Peter Morden. Join us for communion, worship, fellowship, and good food!

Invitations with further details will be sent nearer the time, and it is essential to book your place so that we know how many people to cater for.

# The Legacy of Principals

Reflections on the life of the college

By Revd Dr Ernest Lucas, **Former College Vice Principal**



Looking back over my time at Bristol Baptist College, it is striking how the three principals I have worked with contributed to the College's development and growth. When Brian Haymes became Principal in 1994, the College was at a very low ebb. Supported by the College Council, he led the 'relaunch' of the College. Providentially, the College was able to join with Trinity College in seeking validation from Bristol University for a new, modular, theology degree designed for preparing people for Christian ministry. The

colleges formed a partnership and the students benefited from this new course and being taught by the combined faculty. Another change was the move from the Woodland Road site, which no longer suited the College's needs, to the building on Clifton Down. Again, one could see God's hand in the fact that previous owners had strengthened the floor of one level to carry the weight of a library, and put IT cabling throughout. Having pioneered congregation-based training when Principal of Northern Baptist College, Brian laid the basis for it in Bristol before returning to pastoral ministry.

Chris Ellis became Principal in 2000, having many years of experience in the pastorate, including pastoring an ecumenical congregation, and having taken part in Baptist-Anglican conversations. The partnership with Trinity was deepened and renewed. The College became one of the teaching centres for the placement-based Christian Youth

Ministry course. Congregation-based training became the main mode of ministerial formation. All this changed how the College existed as a community. Chris brought to the practicalities of this his vision of what it meant to be a Christ-centred community of learning, discipleship and service. The depth of community life that was achieved in a non-residential college was a pleasant surprise to some. He enhanced the life and teaching of the College by his knowledge and experience of the theology and practice of worship.

Steve Finamore became Principal in 2006 when Chris Ellis returned to the pastorate. He had been Minister of Westbury-on-Trym Baptist Church but had a varied background much like that of many recent students of the College. After qualifying as a solicitor, he worked in a community development project in London before he and Becca went to Peru to work on a Tearfund project. Sensing a call to pastoral ministry, he studied at Regent's Park College, Oxford. When interviewed for the principalship he said his vision for Bristol's future focused on the themes of discipleship, mission, and spirituality. His passion for mission added an extra dimension to the

College's ministry. He established an arrangement with the Baptist Missionary Society giving students the opportunity of a short immersive experience in a mission situation overseas. Many described these experiences as 'life changing'. Concern for mission at home led to the development of some congregation-based placements in pioneering, church-planting, situations. Steve's vision of discipleship and spirituality seeks to integrate faith into all areas of life. In all this he would not let students undervalue the importance and of good, rigorous, scholarship in the study of the Bible and theological thinking, which he exemplified in his teaching and writing. Working with Steve was a good experience because of his collegiate and consultative leadership style, open to different ways of seeing and doing things. He showed appreciation of people's work and the effort put into it. Staff and students appreciated his pastoral insight and sensitivity. He has played an important part, under God, in the development of the college and leaves a positive legacy as he hands on the baton of 'the Bristol tradition' to his successor.

# Tell Us About Yourself

An introduction to the new College Principal

By Revd Dr Peter Morden, [Incoming College Principal](#)

*Peter tell us a bit about yourself. When did Christian things begin for you and what about your call to Baptist Ministry?*

I became a Christian when I was a teenager. I was especially struck by the quality of life of the Christians I knew and remember thinking, 'whatever it is these people have got, I want some of it!' I was baptised as a believer at University and from that point onwards the pull towards some form of accredited Ministry was strong. Later that call was discerned by others and I became a student at Spurgeon's College. I was an Associate Pastor in Eastbourne, and Team Leader in Shirley, Solihull. Then I joined the staff at Spurgeon's, where I was for ten years. The call to Baptist Ministry is as strong for me today as it's ever been. I'm thankful for all of those who saw something in me, encouraged, nurtured, and supported me. My hope and prayer now is to play a part in identifying, supporting, and releasing new generations of

pioneers, planters, pastors and chaplains for twenty-first century ministry and mission.

*What about your church in Leeds?*

I moved to Leeds in 2017 to be pastor of a multi-site church. It's been an extraordinary six years. On a personal level my wife Anne died from cancer less than a year after we arrived here, I've seen my children get married and make their way in the world and in Christian discipleship, and I've remarried (the wonderful Cheryl). In all of this – deep sorrow and great joy – the church here has been so supportive. In church life there have been challenges of course but many opportunities. We've recast our essential vision and values, changed our name, started a community café, started a new gathering for 'street people' (those who are homeless or on the edge of homelessness), navigated the challenges of pandemic, and seen conversions and baptisms. Within one church we run the range from pioneering initiatives like the homeless work to more

'classical' ways of gathering and reaching out. I've also delighted to be in partnership with other churches in mission: there's often more we can do together than on our own. I hope these various experiences of missional leadership will shape the ways that I teach and engage with students at the College. At the same time I've continued to teach and write, for example about mission, discipleship and Baptist identity. I hope I can bring that experience to College life too.

*Peter, how are you feeling as you prepare to take up your new appointment?*

I'm humbled and excited! It's a wonderful opportunity to be part of a great team. I love the Bristol tradition, Steve has led the College brilliantly over seventeen years, and there's so much good work going on. One of the ways I hope I can add value is to get the word out to people concerning the quality of what Bristol offers. It's a truly special place and I look forward to being a part of it and welcoming others into our vibrant community, as well as working through ways we can offer various training opportunities flexibly. There's no other job in the Baptist Union I'd rather do than this one.

I'm very grateful and will do my best to serve the College well.

*Is there anything else you'd like to say?*

We live in challenging times but also times of great opportunity. I look forward to working with the wonderful staff team to equip and release new generations of 'able and evangelical' students who will work with all ages to help transform this nation for Jesus. Finally, will you pray for the College, for wisdom, strength and for God to provide all we need to serve and develop? I'm keen to prioritise prayer and so this is a message I'll be repeating often in the days ahead. Please pray!



# A Poor Wise Man

A tribute to Steve Finamore

By Revd Dr Peter Hatton, **Former College Tutor**



Ecclesiastes, in its relentless dismantling of our belief 'that it's all about me', gives the example of *a poor wise man* who by his wisdom delivered a besieged city, yet, *no one remembered that poor man* (Ecclesiastes 9.15). This scripture aims a blow against our own self-conceit; against the vanity that acts chiefly so that our 'legacy' will be felt and remembered long after we are gone. Does it also rebuke the human inclination to see history as

shaped not by impersonal forces (e.g. economics, class struggles, epidemics) but by 'great men' — by an Alexander, a Caesar, a Napoleon, a Churchill? Well, perhaps; it's true that *no one remembered that poor wise man*. Yet, on the other hand, he did make a huge positive difference to the life of his community, even if they forgot him. Given that he was a wise man, we may reasonably assume that he followed the book's often repeated advice to

value the simple God-given pleasures of life and to take satisfaction in having done our best in the tasks to which we are called — *whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might* (Ecclesiastes 9.10).

During Steve's tenure as its Principal, Bristol Baptist College has certainly been subjected to plenty of 'impersonal forces'. We could instance the ever-swelling flood of regulations, both from government and denominational 'stakeholders', against which small institutions in particular have had to swim with such tenacity; again, the college's small size (though student numbers have grown consistently under his watch) and its commitment to excellence make economies of scale hard to achieve; and then of course there was the pandemic! To describe the college as 'besieged' during this period would not be quite right; for one thing, it has not been cut off from friends and supporters. Rather it has been fully part of a network of relationships with churches, Baptist institutions and ecumenical partnerships, one which Steve has done so much to strengthen and enlarge. Yet, who can deny it has been a challenging period? And that Steve has played a crucial role by encouraging and

equipping the teams he has led to rise to those challenges?

As someone who was part of those teams, I would witness to Steve's wisdom in helping us identify where our resources would do most good; in ensuring that everyone's voice was heard and that, above all, we sought to listen to that Word which alone makes us its fruitful servants. It is, of course, a cliché in Christian circles to speak of 'servant leadership'; but in Steve's case it has been true. It has never been, for one moment, 'all about him'; he has enabled others, students and colleagues, to flourish.

Our flourishing was encouraged by the fact that (most of the time!) it was clear that Steve was enjoying his own calling; that he delighted in the role and in the relationships that grew out of it; that he saw it as a God-given privilege and pleasure. He has certainly done it with all his might. Yes, and, perhaps, for good rhetorical reasons, Ecclesiastes was being too bleak about the 'instant forgettability' of those who serve and preserve human community. Caleb Evans and John Ryland, and so many others, live still in the College's memory; so will Steve Finamore.



# Passing The Baton

Reflections on Retirement

By Mike Brealey, Former College Librarian

*What do you do?* or, more cautiously if the person thinks you might be old enough or rich enough to have retired, *What did you do?* These are the questions one gets asked on moving to a new place.

Retirement evokes the notion of a race run or journey completed, but as I reflect on my years at the college the sense I have is rather of a relay, in which each participant receives the baton and passes it to the next runner. I think this is inevitable in an institution which has endured over the centuries, generation after generation playing their part in succession. Each will have had their own opportunities and their own challenges.

For me, it has been a good place to work. On arrival in 2014 I already knew something of the college and several of the staff. Therefore it wasn't wholly strange, but I needed quickly to learn some Baptist history, especially as it related to the rarer material held in the library. It was necessary to

master also the language of 'settlement', 'preaching with a view', 'ministerial recognition', and so on to make sense of some of the general conversation. I'm not sure I have it all quite straight yet, but I think not so many are Strict these days, but most are Peculiar in some way.

Naturally books and users were my main focus – working libraries are not so much about books in themselves as about getting appropriate ones into the hands of those who need them. It's been a privilege to serve staff and students, and to be the point of contact for scholars from across the UK and beyond who have wanted to access our rarer books and manuscripts.

My inheritance was not a difficult one, so it has been a time of consolidation and growth. It involved a degree of reorganisation, and especially in the case of the historic collections there was work to do to complete their listing, and upgrade their storage conditions. However few

tasks are ever really finished in an academic library, which is a living organism - one which is constantly threatened with chaos by its bothersome users.

The biggest challenge was posed by Covid, which disrupted everything and meant a sudden need to provide books in digital form when most travel was impossible and even those near at hand essentially became distance learners. In the longer term our subscription to an extensive digital collection will I am sure turn out to have been a very important move, which is already changing the way students access resources. What is available to them online now compares very favourably with even that of major university libraries.

I have become increasingly conscious too that life within the building is only a part of the college's significance, and that it has been in the past and is now faithfully supported by many individuals and churches. Their practical and prayerful commitment made me aware of the need to keep faith with those who value this work.

I'm glad to have handed over responsibility to a very competent new librarian – doubtless she too will find challenges, but also grateful users and mutual support within the community of staff and students, as I have done.

May the library and college continue to flourish!



# I Think We've Missed The Exit

A tribute to Steve Finamore

By Revd Sian Murray Williams, **Former College Tutor**



*'I think we've missed the exit.'* A repeated refrain in shared car journeys with Steve over the eight years of my tenure at Bristol Baptist College. Often deeply in conversation about church life, mission, the Union, people, the world, journeys often took longer than they should have done because motorway junctions didn't register as effectively as they might.

As I reflect now, this says something far more about Steve than the general lack of attention to the route. It speaks of a mind that loves debate, creative thinking, faithful imagining while being deeply rooted in the search for truth. It speaks of a heart that cares deeply about the church, the

world, and those entrusted to him as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This found expression in being Principal of a College committed to the formation of able, passionate, Spirit-filled and evangelical women and men preparing to serve Christ in the world.

Steve and I began at Bristol Baptist College at the same time and were inducted together on September 27th, 2006, at Westbury on Trym Baptist Church. Me, still reeling from the shock of having been appointed, and Steve, eminently equipped and called to lead the College into the next season of its life. On a personal level, I am so grateful for Steve's friendship and care as I learned the ropes of College life. He was able to create a space where I could find my feet and, once feeling a little more on firmer ground, one in which we could explore and develop new things.

One of these was the instigation of the second year mission visits, in partnership with BMS World

Mission, where most of the ministerial students could experience the realities of church life in different parts of the world. This initiative not only affected those in the teams, but came to influence in no small measure the culture of the College and expanded all our understanding of the kingdom of God in the world. I remember one occasion when all the students were gathered in the Chapel. I can't remember why we were all there, but the question 'How far does our 'yes' to God go?' was asked. In a Baptist culture which can sing '*All to Jesus, I surrender, all to him I freely give*' with gusto, the question was met with differing responses. It's a tough question. The experience of the overseas visits, helped us to explore it honestly. Steve, in his patient, pastoral way, through his robust Biblical teaching, his passionate advocacy for holistic mission, his deep commitment to being Baptist, and his yearning that the whole College deepen its life in Christ, led the way in creating a community where the answer to that question could tilt ever further into wholehearted surrender.

Steve led, with humility, grace and the occasional venting, a staff team that remains the most

undefended team I have ever known. His partnership with Becca, his pride in both daughters, his support of AFC Wimbledon, his love of live music, and commitment to playing football long after when others would have hung up their boots, were constant themes for him.

The ubiquitous car satnavs may be altering the experience of travelling with Steve. But I hope not, and somehow doubt it. Thankfully.



## Walking Where Jesus Walked

Reflections on the college trip to the Holy Land

By Rose Millard, Ministerial Student

What a privilege to walk where Jesus walked. Doing it in the company of academic giants like Helen Paynter and Tim Welch, and a bunch of BBC colleagues that I am happy to call friends, was an added pleasure.

Starting in Nazareth, I was initially struck by just how great the food was. Breakfast was a wealth of fruit and za'atar laden breads and oh joy! Halva! The genius who first considered a bar of sugar and nuts, accompanied by a small, strong coffee, the breakfast of champions should be lauded more than they currently are. Actually, the food wherever we went was fresh and tasty and served with smiles and friendliness. That was true even of the Domino's pizza we had to resort to when in Jerusalem on Shabat and especially of the fish served next

to the Sea of Galilee

But, of course, this was no mere culinary trip and we took in many "tourist" sights, some at breakneck speed. Particular memories include Tim sitting next to our guide Albert in the communal latrine at Caesarea with a nonchalance that suggested he might have done it before. Somewhat unexpectedly, we danced on the Sea of Galilee when some of us might have expected quiet contemplation but there was a joy in being there. There was an unexpected poignancy to seeing Mary's house in Nazareth, covered now in buildings and chapels but it was not impossible to imagine a young girl sweeping that same floor. I think we all loved the peace and the opportunity for a moment in the empty tomb in the Garden

Tomb in Jerusalem. Experts will tell you that it is almost definitely not the actual tomb, but I, for one, encountered the risen Jesus in that quiet, beautiful and restorative place and was grateful for it.

But, in fact, this was not just a Holy Land tour either and we had the opportunity to make this a mission trip by spending time with Palestinian Christians in their homes, various charities and speakers from Bethlehem Bible College and learning more about the devastating reality of their lives under occupation. I have used phrases like "devastating reality" since coming back and some have expressed their sadness that my trip was not the overwhelming spiritual experience that they wished for me. That was missing the point a little; I certainly was overwhelmed, but with a raging sense of injustice and sadness. There were moments when I was almost embarrassed that we were from Bristol Baptist College, because "Baptist" is synonymous with dispensationalist or Zionist for

many Palestinians. I felt just a shadow of the powerlessness felt by Palestinians daily when an armed, flying border patrol boarded the minibus, or when a sniper in a watchtower was trained on us in Hebron.

Following in Jesus' footsteps is a powerful metaphor and it was indeed a humbling moment to stand on the Mount of Olives and contemplate, as Jesus did, Jerusalem and to stand in the Garden of Gethsemane and imagine his solitude and pain. But Jesus did far less paddling in the Sea of Galilee and far more talking to the outcast, holding the hand of the shunned, speaking up for the oppressed, engaging with the injustice. He too lived under occupation and suffered indignity. And that is what I am taking away with me from this trip; a greater sense of Jesus' presence and what he calls us to do right now in his name to bring about his kingdom of hope and justice. As Munther Isaac puts it, 'Hope is what we do today.'



# Did You Have A Nice Trip?

Reflections on the college trip to the Holy Land

By Jade Zerk, Ministerial Student

In April we had the absolute privilege of going to the Holy Land, and in particular to Palestine. Ten days exploring biblical landscapes, seeing the old stones and meeting living stones. What an intense ten days it was, as we crammed in several of the Holy sites, some lectures at Bethlehem Bible College and some experiences that enabled us to see first hand the reality of life for many Palestinians.

We started in Nazareth, in a beautiful little guest house, from there we covered Capernaum, Galilee and some of the

surrounding regions, Mt. Carmel, Mt. of the Beatitudes, The Church of Loaves and Fishes, The Church of St Peter and more. All places were quite a distance from one another, not often understood when we read of a journey taking place between a few verses in our Bibles. In Nazareth we visited the Church of the Basilica. A place where residents proudly told us they were Palestinian, and we felt the presence of the different religious festivals - we visited just after Easter, the end of Passover and during Ramadan.



We then travelled down to Bethlehem, aware of the change in landscape, the difficulty of the journey, and the presence of military personnel and checkpoints. We said goodbye to our first tour guide, having two more after, each guide and driver unable to travel everywhere we were able to visit. Our journey to Bethlehem required us to go through Checkpoints, a sad experience when aware of the impact on daily life this has for many, including people we got to know. We had a further three tour guides on our trip, each emotional that we cared about hearing their

story and not just about the old stones. The welcome in Bethlehem was such a beautiful thing, so many people happy that we stayed and appreciated this place, its people and culture.

We stayed at the newly built Bethlehem Bible College Guest House (well worth a visit). While there we enjoyed their generous hospitality, some lectures, prayer and worship. We had the opportunity to spend an evening with a family linked to the college and visit a few of the projects the college is linked with. From here we also visited Jericho, the River Jordan, the dead sea, & Qumran.



Then we visited Hebron, here we felt our privilege and the plight of Palestinians being forced to sell their homes. Despite the media speaking of the West Bank as Palestinian, the Israeli settlements are large and domineering, we became a human shield for our guide who made the most of being able to speak so freely while snipers watched. We visited the Mosque and Synagogue at Hebron, a strange place on top of the tombs of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. Each side giving a different story of origin. We were initially turned back at the checkpoint because of our association with our Palestinian guide and his friends. Still after some conversations and being accompanied by our American friend Terry who wasn't afraid to go ask anyone, we made through the checkpoint into the synagogue. It was the day before

Israel day and the whole of the area knew it.

Finally on our way back to the airport we visited Aviv Ministries in Tel Aviv working with those who have immigrated but not assimilated to the culture, who instead got caught up in poverty, addiction and all that surrounds it.

When people ask "did you have a nice trip?" – the answer is no, but it's one I am grateful for and would do again. It's one where the lingering image of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem felt true today. It's a place where Hope keeps people alive and holding onto Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done. People from all around the world visit the Holy Land to find, encounter, and experience Peace. Those living in the land are crying out for peace, let's join them in prayer for it and all the peacemakers.



# Let Justice Roll

An update from the Centre for the Study of Bible & Violence

By Helen Paynter, Director of the Centre for the Study of Bible & Violence

At the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence we have had a busy and exciting few months. Our online Lent lectures this year focussed on an eclectic selection of 'must-read' books, ranging from Palestinian theologian Munther Isaac's *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* to Sarah Travis's book on trauma-informed preaching, *Unspeakable*. Each week we engaged with the book through conversation with the author and a respondent. All the recordings are available on our YouTube channel.

Recent months have also seen the launch of a new podcast series. In *Was It Something I*

*Read?*, our research associate Ashley Hibbard teams up with two non-theologian friends to discuss the issues raised by a book on biblical violence. This first season they have been discussing William Webb and Gordon Oeste's book *Blood, Brutal, Barbaric?* If you're interested in thoughtful, gracious conversations where the rubber hits the road, this might interest you. You can find it wherever you access your podcasts.

We now have not one or two but *three* blogs! In addition to our eclectic general blog on all things Bible and violence related, Peter King curates our well-established preachers' blog *Sunday Sermon, Monday*

*Mourning*. This aims to help resource preachers who wish to deal with tricky texts or current events without traumatising their congregations or providing validation for violent actions. New this year is *Hostility, Healing, Hymnody*, curated by Will Moore, which brings together a range of voices looking at violence in church music. All our blogs can be accessed via our website - [www.csbvbristol.org.uk](http://www.csbvbristol.org.uk)

At the very end of 2022 we had a particularly exciting new development: the publication of the first issue of our open-access, peer-reviewed journal, *The Journal for the Study of Bible and Violence*. We have several other issues in the pipeline, so do keep an eye on this if you're interested.

Recent months have seen the publication of several books by members of the Centre. Trevor Laurence's book *Cursing with God* offers a helpful and challenging new perspective on the imprecatory (curse) psalms. Also, Trevor and I have co-edited a book (*Violent Biblical Texts: New Approaches*) offering a range of creative hermeneutical approaches to difficult biblical



texts. *Map or Compass: The Bible on Violence*, edited by myself and Michael Spalione, offers a more diverse range of chapters on the intersection of Bible and violence. Maria Power and I have a book offering perspectives on violence from all the major faith traditions: *Violence and Peace in Sacred Texts*. And finally, Valerie Hobbs has just published an auto-ethnographic account of life growing up in a Dominionist Christian cult, *No Love in War*.

In May we were pleased to use a British Academy grant to



convene a group of a dozen scholars and practitioners from a range of specialisms, contexts, and faiths, to consider the question of the UK church's response to the rising threat posed by the Radical Right. We were dialoguing with Hannah Strømmen and Ulrich Schmiedel about their provocative book *The Claim to Christianity*. The conversation was generous and generative, and will be reflected in a forthcoming book with SCM Press. We also hope that this project will bear fruit in a range of resources for local churches and Associations, so keep an eye on our website (or sign up to our newsletter) if you're interested.

But the highlight of the year has to be our research conference, this year held in partnership with our friends at Christ at the Checkpoint (from Bethlehem

Bible College). I'll let Ashley tell you about that.

**Ashley Hibbard writes:**

When the CSBV launched in 2018, no one could have foreseen that this new venture would begin to flourish and grow in a time of pandemic. While the seeds were already present in 2019 for the Centre to be a non-centralized, global organization, the reality of the pandemic meant that for most of three years, we were only a non-centralized and online organization. Our yearly research conference, which has served as our flagship event, has had only one in-person conference: our first, in 2019—until June this year.

On 28-29 June, we were delighted to welcome in person more than 60 scholars, students, and pastors representing five continents to our fifth annual

CSBV Research Conference, with more than half again that number joining us online. Of special delight was the presence of our friends and partners from Bethlehem Bible College/ Christ at the Checkpoint, most of whom were able to join us in person. This conference *Let Justice Roll: scripture and power in Palestine* was designed as a joint project between Christ at the Checkpoint and the CSBV, as a response to the theological underpinnings of Christian Zionism and the Israeli settler-colonial project. Wednesday night saw two opening addresses from Jack Sara and Helen Paynter, the respective leaders of our organizations. Jack gave a helpful introduction to the complex reality that is life in Palestine, what led to the nakba (catastrophe), and – with more grace than I might have thought possible – called the Western church and the UK to consider our complicity in the creation of one of the great human rights crises of our time. Helen then followed with an introduction to the issue of hermeneutics and power: who gets to interpret? Whose interpretations become prioritized? What are the barriers to hearing the voices of people in oppression?





This second address led in well to one of the more unique aspects of the conference: Counterstories. These are testimonies from oppressed and marginalized peoples intended to provide a response to the dominant, accepted narrative. As a planning team, we felt that Counterstories would provide a “real world” demonstration of the realities to which an otherwise academic conference speaks. Four very different but very moving Counterstories at the beginning and end of each session on Thursday were a helpful reminder that there are real human lives, valuable and worthy of honour, at the sharp end of these issues, and that our research is always more than an academic exercise. This is a

truth to which we return frequently as a research centre, and it is both a burden and an honour to be part of work that has immediate and weighty real-world application.

On Thursday morning, Munther Isaac and John Barclay spoke about reading Romans 9-11 well, with Jamie Davies responding. The afternoon saw Mitri Raheb and Alison Walker presenting very different papers on the use of theology or Christian practice by oppressors, and the threads of control and community in these two papers were skilfully brought together by Sara Amestegui Deik.

Having led last year's online conference as well as this year's in-person conference, I am well-

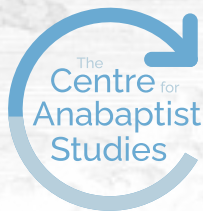
positioned to say that the opportunities of an in-person conference are unmatched. A good conference is about more than hearing papers. In person, we also have the ability to shake hands, chat over coffee, make connections, and dream and discuss over lunch. In addition to this, there is an energy in the room, the silent dialogue between speaker and audience that is so easily lost in the absence of embodied presence. A Zoom option was present for those who could not travel, and we anticipate maintaining this hybrid model of conference presentations in the future.

The videos of the conference are available behind a paywall; if you are interested in viewing them, do get in touch. And because the conference was somewhat more modest than we had initially hoped, we plan to present a third session responding to Zionist readings of Old Testament texts later this year, held on Zoom. Please plan to join us as we continue these important conversations, as we seek justice for and in Palestine, and do our part to *Let Justice Roll*.

*Please visit the CSBV website at [www.csbvbristol.org.uk](http://www.csbvbristol.org.uk) to find out more, and to sign up to the CSBV email newsletter.*







# Encountering the Anabaptists

2025 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Anabaptist movement. There will be events to celebrate this in Britain and elsewhere in Europe.

## Who were the Anabaptists?

Radical reformers – Church planters – Peace activists – Pioneers of liberty

## Want to know more?

Wondering why so many Christians today are inspired by the Anabaptist vision?

**Encountering the Anabaptists** is a short online module offered by the Centre for Anabaptist Studies at Bristol Baptist College in partnership with the Anabaptist Mennonite Network. It introduces their history, beliefs, practices and contemporary relevance.

Four Wednesdays  
7 – 9 pm  
1, 8, 15, 22 Nov

£20 (£10 unwaged)  
Free copy of The Naked  
Anabaptist included

**Book at Eventbrite** <https://encountering-anabaptists.eventbrite.co.uk/>

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