

- Welcome

Welcome to my Romans 15:8 monthly blog for November/December. I am with the busyness of advent/Christmas combining two monthly blogs into one.

This month three new people have joined the Romans 15:8 network and their names will soon be placed on the contact list. Can I encourage you if you are reading this blog and have not yet signed up to the network, please to consider doing so? We are trying to get the membership up to 100 prior to the end of the year - we are getting close but we are not there yet!

Also please do use the question option on the site - as always it's good to get questions and feedback and to enter into discussion with network members and others.

Shalom and Happy Christmas

Alex

- Teaching reflection of the month (November/December)

I had the privilege of preaching at Christ Church, Jerusalem on Sunday 24th November. This Sunday in the liturgical year is the final Sunday of the year and is known as "Christ the King". It also happened (not planned by me) that my previous Sunday preaching at Christ Church was Advent Sunday (2018) which marked the first Sunday of the same liturgical year - so it happened I felt like a pair of bookends with the privilege of preaching on the first and final Sunday.

The texts for Christ the King are Jeremiah 23:1-6, Luke 23:33-43 and Colossians 1:11-20. I focused mainly on the Colossians text and spoke about how the Kingdom is here yet not fully consummated. We live in the Kingdom via the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus (with the associated outpouring of the Holy Spirit) yet we also wait for His return. We know in part the LORD's healing, power and presence, yet we still are aware of the decay of sin and the struggle of evil. As the great Jewish writer Saul Bellow said "There's no denying that evil is as real as sunshine".

How we 'navigate' this Kingdom reality (here yet not fully here) is at the very heart of discipleship and mission. It also has huge implications within Jewish-Christian relations especially as we seek to minister in a post-Holocaust (Shoah) context.

You can listen to the full sermon via the CMJ Israel (Christ Church page) website ([soundcloud.com/christchurchjerusalem/colossians1\\_messiah-our-king](https://soundcloud.com/christchurchjerusalem/colossians1_messiah-our-king)).

- Ministry news update

In addition to my time in Israel (22-27 Nov) the main ministry event in some ways was the book launch of the new Church of England (Faith and Order Commission) publication "God's Unfailing Word". This major document will shape for many the theological perspectives and practical outworking within the field of Jewish-Christian Relations for generations to come.

I am sure this document will be required reading for most students preparing for theological exams and ordination. The working party which produced the document began its work back in early 2016. The launch was chaired by the Bishop of Coventry, the Rt Revd Dr Christopher Cocksworth and it took place at the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham on 21st November.

The ministry of CMJ is mentioned in some detail in this document (see insert on page 60) yet sadly (shamefully?) no representative of CMJ was part of the working party. Yet I was invited to make comments and suggest revisions of a draft text earlier this year. I welcomed this invitation and

submitted a detailed response. I am pleased to say that 3 of my major 4 points were accepted and parts of the text was revised accordingly.

I attended this launch event along with about 60 others including 2 senior Rabbi's, 8 Anglican Bishops and a Roman Catholic Archbishop (sounds like an opening to a great joke!). I was able to ask a question in the Q and A session and to network with those attending, which included a good number of students from the Queen's Foundation. (It is interesting that as part of the Queens undergraduate degree there is a compulsory module in Jewish-Christian Relations.)

The document is excellent in its clear rejection of anti-Semitism and the section which describes the 'parting of the ways' between emerging Christianity and Rabbinical Judaism(s) is very clear, balanced and insightful (see pages 3-9). There is also a helpful foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury and a challenging afterword by the Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis.

The point of greatest and as yet unresolved tension in the document is the discussion around the legitimacy of Christian evangelism 'targeted' towards Jewish People. This makes the ministry of CMJ 'beyond the pale' for some who contributed to the document, yet Archbishop Justin makes it clear that; "to share the hope of salvation within us, a hope coming from Jesus Christ, is core to what Christians do, but we are told to do so with gentleness and grace". I am sure all within CMJ will say a heartfelt "Amen" to this.

This document can be found on line

at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/3j5wv1o.../godsunfailingwordweb.pdf...> I strongly encourage you to read, study and discuss this document. I have given complimentary copies of this booklet to all CMJ UK staff and trustees and I can also offer this to all members of the Romans 15:8 network! If you want your complimentary copy please send me via email your postal address and the CMJ office will post you a copy ASAP.

- Book News

I have enjoyed reading this month a rather different type of book. This was part of the MACAT library of books and it provides an excellent analysis of the study of a segment of the holocaust based on Christopher Browning's book – Ordinary Men.

Ordinary Men was published in 1992 – and was probably one of the first holocaust books which did not primarily focus on Nazi ideology, war history or the experience of survivors; but rather his book focused on one unexceptional German reserve regiment - Police Battalion 101. The books allow the reader to see a segment of the holocaust through the eyes of its perpetrators. It also raises huge questions about our capacity as humans to commit evil acts. In some regard this book changed the way the holocaust is studied today and reignites the debate between those who hold to a functionalist or an intentionalist reading of holocaust history.

- Monthly Memory Verse

So Miriam said "Behold, the servant of ADONAI. Let it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) (Verse taken from the MJFB)