

# **The Torch**

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# **People of the Future**

**[Torch Trust's CEO Dr Gordon Temple introduces this issue.]**

**Welcome to the first edition of The Torch for 2018. I hope and pray you are inspired as you read it.**

**Let me start with Scripture – John 1:9–13 [NIrV]:**

**The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. The Word was in the world. And the world was made through him. But the world did not recognise him. He came to what was his own. But his own people did not accept him. Some people did accept him and did believe in his name. He gave them the right to become children of**

**God. To be a child of God has nothing to do with human parents. Children of God are not born because of human choice or because a husband wants them to be born. They are born because of what God does.**

**Often Christians are thought to be backward-looking; trying to hold onto something that has passed. After all, the most common symbol of Christian faith is a cross, reminding us of the unjust death of Jesus Christ, something that happened almost two thousand years ago.**

**When the apostle John wrote his account of the life of Jesus he began not with the circumstances of his birth, as Luke had done, but instead he reflected on the significance of the Son of God coming into the world. Here was light,**

**light shining in a dark place, a light that could not be put out.**

**Yes, we look back to his coming at the first Christmastime. We look back to his death on the cross which secured our salvation. We look back to his resurrection through which he promises eternal life to those who choose to follow him. We look back to the ascension when Jesus promised he would come back again for his people.**

**But we are not people of the past. We are people of the future, people with a future, people living with a deep and secure hope!**

**I have been privileged to visit Malawi twice in the past year. Visiting some of the country's poorest districts, it struck me that hope seemed to be in short supply. Few there really believe that the problems that make life difficult will get sorted any time soon. But when**

**I had the joy of meeting over 200 blind people gathered for a time of worship in the far south of Malawi, I saw blind people leading the event who were alive with hope. Their hope was not in national or world leaders but in Jesus.**

**Wherever we live, whatever our circumstances, we can enter 2018 with hope. As Christian people, our hope is solidly rooted in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It's a permanent relationship; we are born again as God's children!**

## **Christmas Reflection**

**Susan Richards has been involved with Torch Trust in the UK for nearly 40 years. In 2017 she combined her love of writing poetry and photography by producing a book, **ARE YOU READY FOR CHRISTMAS?** and is donating proceeds**

from sales to Torch. This reflective poem, **LOOKING IN FROM THE OUTSIDE** takes us from the Bethlehem stable to the Calvary cross.

I'm peering through the window of  
a stable, dark and cold,  
My eyes fixed on a mother and her  
Babe – a few hours old,  
Her husband watches anxiously as  
shepherds crowd around  
Full of their excitement at the  
angels' joyful sound;  
The angel said 'TO YOU' –  
I overheard one say  
'Yes, lowly shepherd though I am,  
my Saviour's born today!'  
The smell and dirt repulse me, and  
yet I long to be  
Part of that simple, joyful scene; to  
know this Child's for me.

**There's only one way, I hear them  
say,  
Lord, take me in; forgive my sin.**

**The sky is black; I shiver; there's  
a sense of dereliction,  
I'm standing by a city gate watching  
a crucifixion,  
It happens frequently these days,  
it's such a common scene,  
My eyes fixed on the One they call  
Jesus the Nazarene.  
In pain he dies, His anguish is clear  
for all to see  
Yet I feel He has a purpose beyond  
the agony.  
His mother and some women  
embrace with broken heart,  
I long to run and join them, I want to  
be a part.**

**There's only one way, I hear them  
say,  
Lord, take me in; forgive my sin.**

**Again I'm by a window, this time it's  
Christmas Eve,  
The Church is packed with  
worshippers who know what  
they believe,  
Singing praise to Jesus, their Saviour  
and their Lord,  
Praying and rejoicing, reading from  
God's Word.  
Their joy is so infectious, it comes  
from deep inside,  
I long to be a part of it – but feel  
I want to hide.  
I know my life is messy, my thoughts  
and deeds are wrong,  
I need someone to clean me up  
before I can belong  
To Jesus and His people, Oh show me  
what to do!**

**Listen to those shepherds, the  
weeping women too.**

**There's only one way, I hear them  
say,  
Lord, take me in; forgive my sin.**

## **Success in Mission**

**[Formerly a missionary in Africa with Wycliffe Bible Translators, Eddie Arthur is now studying mission and supporting mission agencies in the UK. You can find his blog at [kouya.net](http://kouya.net). Here he offers some thoughts on 1 Corinthians 3:6: 'planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.']**

**Paul and Apollos were two very different people who seem to have approached the issue of mission and evangelism in different ways; so much so, that people took sides and compared them unfavourably. Paul's response is pretty simple; he says that he and**

**Apollos are not really significant; it is God who brings success in mission work, not people.**

**. . . Our job is to plant and water, not make things grow. This means that we need to concentrate on the way that we do our planting and watering and not fret about the success of our actions. This means that rather than worrying about the outcome of our mission, we need to concentrate much more on the way we are doing things.**

**We need to ensure that the way we carry out our mission work is loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good and faithful. . . We have to get the basics right and, in Christian mission, the basics are all about character and morals. No amount of strategic planning and no wonderful techniques can substitute for Christlikeness in mission.**

**We can't guarantee success; only God can do that. But we can plant and water in a way which is pleasing and honouring to him.**

**Mission publicity is full of big promises: fulfilling the Great Commission, changing the world, ending Bible poverty and so on. The problem is that these all fall into the 'God made it grow' category, not the planting and watering one.**

**We can't actually promise any of these things. We can promise to witness to Jesus, to serve the poor and needy and to translate the Bible . . . but we can't promise what will happen as a result of these activities.**

**All that mission agencies can promise is that they will do their best, empowered by the Spirit and aided by the prayers and financial support of God's people, to faithfully and honestly serve their Lord**

**by witnessing to Christ in whatever way they are called to do. Anything beyond this is in God's domain, not theirs.**

**. . . Of course, I do recognise that one day, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Glory of God as the waters cover the sea and every knee will bow to Jesus. World mission will be ultimately successful. However, what neither I nor anyone else knows is when this will happen, nor who will be the actors in the penultimate act of the divine drama. It may be modern mission agencies or it may be some other movement which hasn't even emerged yet.**

**. . . It is easy to say and do things that might bring numerical success or raise more support, but which are not scrupulously honest or theologically valid. That's a problem.**

**A bigger problem, however, is that by promising big things, we are usurping God's role in mission. He is the one who brings growth, not us, and we need to avoid making any claims that suggest otherwise.**

## **The Importance of the Reformation**

**[At the end of 2017 the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation was marked around the world. It has been said that Martin Luther changed not only the Church but the world. Here, in edited highlights of an article by the Rev Mark Woods, managing editor of Christian Today, are some of the reasons for that claim. Read the article in full at [www.baptist.org.uk](http://www.baptist.org.uk).]**

# **1. The Reformation gave us the Bible**

**The Reformers believed in going back to the scriptures . . . back to the source. So, their scholars and pastors read the Bible intensively, and as printing and literacy spread they encouraged their people to do so too.**

**They preached from the Bible and wanted everyone to understand it, so they translated it . . . Evangelicals' love of scripture comes straight from the Reformation, because the Reformers taught that scripture alone was authoritative.**

## **2. The Reformation gave us spiritual freedom**

Luther's key insight was that salvation was by faith alone. He wasn't the first or the only one to realise that, but because he was a brilliant writer, speaker and publicist, his books and pamphlets spread very quickly. It's not up to the Pope or his minister to forgive sins, he said – we trust God and we are saved.

## **3. The Reformation gave us religious freedom**

Before the Reformation, the Church was in charge of spirituality. The Catholic Church, which controlled religion in the West, defined right and wrong theology. It exercised political power through

**Catholic rulers who all acknowledged – grudgingly in quite a few cases – that the Pope had some kind of authority over them. After the Reformation that changed, though it took a while – many Protestant countries were just as intolerant as Catholic ones.**

## **4. The Reformation gave us democracy**

**The Reformation began as a protest against authority. Luther was deeply opposed to violent rebellion . . . But others were perfectly prepared to resist unjust authority. They read in the Bible about God’s judgement on wicked kings and were willing to take up arms against them.**

**Recognising the importance of the individual’s conscience was a step on**

the way to recognising the importance of the individual's rights.

## **5. The Reformation gave us fresh temptations**

The Reformation was a wonderful gift from God in which precious truths that had been hidden for generations were discovered and shared with the world. But it also meant the destruction of the old systems of authority. Everyone could read the Bible and interpret it for themselves, so Protestantism was – and is – vulnerable to new heresies growing up.

## **A Good Investment in life?**

[Steve Bell, National Director of mission agency Interserve, has 40 years'

**experience in 100 countries. He is one of a team of writers who blog on the Global Connections website, at [WWW.GC-CONNECT.ORG.UK](http://WWW.GC-CONNECT.ORG.UK) and here is one of his contributions. He writes:**

**It may seem obvious to say it but we only have one life to live and one chance to invest it.**

**I have been spectacularly bad at discerning how to do this wisely. For instance, as a son of an economic migrant, my first attempt was to invest myself in my identity as a member of an ethnic minority; my second attempt was into becoming a counter-tenor in an Oxbridge college choir followed by a choral career; when that idea flopped, my third attempt was into education and to become one of Britain's earliest black head teachers; my fourth and final attempt was in the direction of Anglican ordination as one of the earlier non-Caucasian intake.**

**Needless to say, not only did all of the above come to nothing but they proved sterile – at that point God stepped in and did a ‘citizen’s arrest’. He showed me that, on conversion, I had received a sort of DNA transfer from Jesus.**

**I began to pay more attention to the ‘Christ within’ and began to realise God has a bespoke purpose for my life – of his choosing.**

**I was to invest my life in God’s purposes for the nations. I became smitten with divine love for the nations; who knew that within our lifetime the following would become a reality?**

**1. Nearly a quarter of a billion people worldwide are on the move in the purposes of God and residing outside their birth country.**

**2. The biggest shift in the history of Christian mission in centuries would change mission-sending patterns to**

**become multi-directional (ie ‘from everywhere to everywhere’).**

**3. Just like the so-called ‘full-time’ mission workers, many Christians are now rubbing shoulders daily with Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Muslims.**

**4. All Christians need equipping and resourcing for cross-cultural witness and it would behove mission agencies to provide it.**

**5. When mission workers get kicked out of one country (as I was) they simply carry on working elsewhere with people of the same ethnic groups and religious heritage.**

**Of course, God who is steering human history (Ephesians 1:11) knew this would happen. Our life preparation for involvement in God’s purpose is always best fit for us. It enables us to take part in the critical shifts which periodically change the direction of world mission.**

**Someone said: ‘If you waste time pursuing your own goals, your only legacy is fulfilling your own dreams; if you try to please others, your legacy is fulfilling the plans of others. But if you set out to fulfil the divine purpose for your life, your legacy becomes a tribute to God, who plans to use your life to make an eternal (rather than a professional) difference. Let God set your agenda and follow him in it. Have you found that yet? To achieve this, we need to slow down and reflect where to invest ourselves; and stop long enough to grasp God’s plan for you. The enemy is pleased when we get so busy doing good things, we miss the eternal purpose for our lives. Our good can be the enemy of his best.’**

## **Victory over the Spirits**

**[This next story comes from the remote**

**jungles of Myanmar. Tam Ki was born in Machung, a village never visited by foreign missionaries and where the people worshipped spirits. But, with no access to the Bible, Tam Ki was given supernatural visions, dreams and healings from God which brought him to faith. He is now a leader who has led thousands to believe in Jesus. He tells his amazing story in FROM DARKNESS TO GLORIOUS LIGHT, published by Armour (Singapore). This extract gives an idea of the spiritual battles he faced.]**

**Our first church building for the Machung believers to worship in was made of bamboo. So this came to be known as the Bamboo Church. Of course, its very existence in the pigaw [village] was not without a great deal of opposition.**

**Early one Sunday morning in 1977, my wife and I went to the newly built church to pray before others arrived . . .**

The moment we entered the church, we were hit by a vile stench coming from the tables and benches. We found out that a spirit worshipper, Boi Gei Ghung, had smeared his own excrement on the furniture in our Bamboo Church. The same man had tried to sabotage the building of the church. One night he pulled out the wooden poles which we had planted into the ground on the site. He would often falsely accuse us of stealing wood from him.

Three months after the incident, the young man went to India to look for work. But before he could start a job, he went down with severe dysentery. News came back to the pigaw that he had died. His body was found covered in his own vomit and excrement.

Opposition on a personal level continued, too. Once, a distant relative tried to test my faith. He persuaded his nephew Mana Düih to let me farm his

land. But this plot, with its western edge ending in a cliff, was widely believed to be cursed by the spirits. Whenever others worked on it, the head of the family always died. So the plot had been left desolate for over 20 years. Passers-by often heard sounds of tree-cutting, livestock, and people talking – although the entire area was completely deserted. Since this was the only land that I could get at that time, my wife and I had no choice but to brave it out, trusting that the Lord would protect us from the spirits. ‘The Almighty God has given us this land as our inheritance. Those who don’t belong here must depart!’ With this declaration, we initiated the ground breaking for cultivating this haunted land. It was October 1982.

That very night, my wife Thang Shwe had a dream. She saw an evil man

reprimanding her for driving him out of this land. Then, he walked over the cliff.

A few months later, in another dream, she saw herself digging the ground. Suddenly, a gaping hole the size of a hut appeared in the ground. A woman emerged from the hole and tried to grab Thang Shwe's hand. My wife boldly called out, 'I am now redeemed by the blood of Jesus. No evil spirits can touch me!' Every time the woman tried to grab her, Thang Shwe insisted she now belonged to God and was no longer under the bondage to the spirits. Eventually the woman left.

The soil in this land was fertile since it had been left uncultivated for so long. The Lord was good to us. The ground gave abundant harvest of siipsen (Chin rice), millet, sesame, yams, sweet potatoes, beans, corn, pumpkins, peas, vegetables and herbs for the two years that we worked it.

**[Later, Tam Ki used a stream on the edge of the land to create 10 flooded acres of paddy rice, an experiment which was commended by the local authorities. He was asked to expand the project, which proved a great success.]**

**Tam Ki concludes, ‘As I reflect on those years of persecution, the verses of Psalm 23:1,2 sum up his wonderful provision: ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.’**

## **New Testament Characters: John the Baptist**

**[Next, here’s a character study on John the Baptist from regular contributor Michael Stafford, a missionary in Africa**

**before spending many years serving with Torch Trust. Michael is quoting from the NIV translation.]**

**Readers in Africa will be familiar with the custom which is seen when a chief goes to visit a village in his area. Before he and his retinue arrive, a ‘herald’ goes before him to announce his coming. This was John the Baptist’s primary ministry, predicted in Malachi 3:1: ‘I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come . . .’**

**When John was born, his father Zechariah was filled with praise, expressed in a wonderful song found in Luke 1:67–79. There he said concerning his newly-born son: ‘And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation**

**through the forgiveness of their sins . . . ’**

**In preparing for the coming of the Messiah, John drew large crowds to hear him preach. He baptised them as a sign of their repentance. His stern message sought to make the people of Israel aware of how they had gone astray from God’s Law, and to expose the hypocrisy of the religious leaders such as the Pharisees and Sadducees.**

**Many began to think that John was in fact the Messiah, but he informed them that ‘He [Christ] must become greater; I must become less’ (John 3:30). Jesus would conduct a very different kind of baptism – not with water but with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:15,16).**

**I believe that ‘fire’ spoke of judgment and that John was really saying there would be two sides to Christ’s ministry – the good news of a new life lived in the power of God’s Holy Spirit following**

**repentance and faith, or the warning that unrepentant people faced God's judgement.**

**John was never one who promoted himself. He always pointed to the coming Messiah, introducing him to his own disciples saying, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29). He took the humble position, saying that he was not worthy even to carry the sandals of the Lord Jesus.**

**John was shocked when Jesus asked to be baptised by him in the Jordan River, but Jesus insisted (Matthew 3:11–15). John's faith in Jesus as the Messiah was confirmed when: ' . . . heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and landing on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"' (Matthew 3:17).**

**If we met John today we would see him as a rough character, dressed in rough clothing, living in the desert and existing on what he could forage from the countryside. His words to the crowds were strong: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance . . .’ (Luke 3:7,8). He was unafraid of those in authority, and told King Herod plainly that he was wrong to marry his brother’s wife, Herodias. As a result, she hated him and eventually found a way to persuade Herod to have him executed. John remained faithful and died a martyr, having completed his task of preparing for the Messiah.**

## **Hearts Aflame**

**[Stella Heath, who co-founded Torch Trust and edited this magazine for many**

**years, wrote many articles and books. A manuscript left unfinished at her death in 2009 has now been completed by her companion of many years, Eileen Cole. The theme – opening up the Old Testament to today’s readers – is a vital one. HEARTS AFLAME has been published by Torch and is available in standard print, braille, large print and audio. In this extract, Stella Heath looks at Creation and at our God the Creator.]**

**Right at the very beginning of the Scriptures, God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – worked together to create the world.**

**In the first chapter of Genesis each act of creation began with ‘God said’. God is one, yet three: God the Father, the Creator; God the Son (Jesus), the Word; God the Holy Spirit, who breathed upon the chaos – God in three persons, blessed Trinity!**

# **1. God is the Father**

**The Creator of all things, God planned the establishing of order out of chaos, and all that followed. ‘You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything (Nehemiah 9:6 TNIV).**

# **2. God is the Son**

**Right at the very beginning, Jesus was there as ‘the Word’. John 1:1–3 (CEV) says ‘In the beginning was the one who is called the Word. The Word was with God and was truly God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. And with this Word, God created all things. Nothing was made without the Word.’**

**But what does that mean? How can a person be a Word? The problem is that there is nothing in English which fully translates the Greek word ‘logos’ which John uses.**

**Perhaps we could understand it better as ‘personal expression’ or ‘living image’. Jesus told his disciple, Philip, ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9 TNIV). When Jesus was living in Israel and talking to the people, he was showing what God is like. The Almighty God is too great for us to understand, too majestic for us to approach, but when we see Jesus, we see God who has made himself our size. When we read in the Bible what Jesus said and did, we see God working and speaking to us.**

**It reminds us of what is said in Hebrews 1:1–3 (CEV): ‘Long ago in many ways and at many times God’s prophets spoke his message to our ancestors. But**

now at last, God sent his Son to bring his message to us. God created the universe by his Son, and everything will someday belong to the Son. God's Son has all the brightness of God's own glory and is like him in every way. By his own mighty word, he holds the universe together.'

### **3. God is the Spirit**

. . . Who hovered over the chaos before creation (Genesis 1:2 TNIV). The picture here is of a magnificent eagle circling gently in the air, looking down at the sea below it.

How awesome, too great to understand, is the power and majesty of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, three in one.

**Can we grasp the immensity of all this? One day when I was on holiday, I visited the large Newton telescope at the observatory, Herstmonceux [Herstmonceux Castle, in Sussex in the south of the UK]. A group of tourists stood listening to the guide as he was trying to give us an idea of the vastness of space. ‘Even the fastest plane would take billions of years to visit the nearest star’ said the lecturer, ‘and look at all the others which are in our galaxy – and our galaxy is only one of many!’ A little boy standing beside me could contain himself no longer. ‘Wow,’ he said, ‘God must be very big to make all that and keep it going!’**

**From the first chapter of Genesis we learn a little about how very big is our God. Three large words sum up his greatness.**

# **1. God is omnipotent**

**All-powerful. Nothing is too hard for him. He planned each development in the process of Creation. Mountains, seas, animals, people, all came into being at his command. His power is shown also in the miraculous events in the life of Jesus: raising the dead, healing blind people and, supremely, when God raised Jesus from the dead.**

# **2. God is omniscient**

**Knowing everything. He knows the future! Nothing takes him by surprise. His original plan A will stand for ever; he needs no plan B! The whole of redemption was known and planned before time began. God knows the end from the beginning.**

### **3. God is omnipresent**

**Everywhere at once. Nothing escapes his notice. He fills the whole world by his Spirit. No wonder the Psalmist asked, ‘Where could I go to escape from you?’ (Psalm 139:7 GNB). Jesus reminded us that God notices even the fall of a sparrow (Matthew 10:29). We can be comforted by the fact that Jesus said, ‘I will be with you always’ (Matthew 28:20 CEV).**