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**News:**

**'Improve rights for stateless people'**

**A new initiative calling for improved rights and better support for 'stateless' people has been backed by numerous Baptist ministers alongside the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and Rabbi Hershel Gluck OBE, chairman of the Arab-Jewish Forum**

In total 110 religious and faith leaders have signed a statement urging the UK Government to do more to welcome those who no longer have a country to call their home. They include Baptist Union General Secretary Lynn Green and several Baptist regional ministers, local ministers and college principals.

The move comes during Inter Faith Week (12-19 November) which seeks to build on the good relationships and partnerships between people of very diverse faiths and beliefs.

All have a shared commitment to protecting human rights and promoting human dignity. The statement is calling for action on the part of the UK Government to review its policies towards stateless people as many end up in prolonged and pointless detention while the Home Office tries to remove them from the UK.

'Stateless' people without legal status cannot leave the UK because no country will accept them. But without status, they don't have permission to work in the UK and remain vulnerable to destitution, exploitation and detention. Worldwide there are around 10 million 'stateless' people. Signatories are calling for alternatives to detention and better support for access to rights and advice and help with integration.

The move is part of the #LockedInLimbo campaign which is led by the European Network on Statelessness and seeks to end the detention of people who end up locked in limbo simply because they have no country that they can return to.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, said,

'This is a significant statement, showing inter faith support for global efforts to contribute to ending statelessness and the arbitrary detention associated with it. Faith groups have an important role in calling for policy-makers to prioritise the welfare of people who face marginalisation and exclusion. It is good to see so many faith and religious leaders addressing this deeply concerning issue that affects millions of people worldwide.'

Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim representatives have supported the statement.

Other Baptist signatories include David Archer, Pastor of Alnwick Baptist Church; Sarah Bingham, Minister, Green Lane Baptist Church Walsall; Nick Bradshaw, Regional Minister Team Leader, South Wales Baptist Association; John Claydon, Regional Minister (Pastoral), Northern Baptist Association; Robert Ellis, Principal, Regent's Park College, University of Oxford; Mike Fegredo, Regional Minister, East Midland Baptist Association; Simon Goddard, Regional Minister, Eastern Baptist Association; Phil Jump, Regional Minister, North Western Baptist Association; Stephen Keyworth, Faith and Society Team Leader; Mike Lowe, Communications Enabler; David Mayne, Moderator, Baptist Union Council, Lead Pastor, Shoeburyness & Thorpe Bay Baptist Church; Clare McBeath, Co-Principal of Northern Baptist College; Tim Presswood, Transitional Regional Minister, North Western Baptist Association; Ellen Price, Regional Minister, East Midlands Baptist Association; Roy Searle, Northumbria; Mary Taylor, Regional Minister, Yorkshire Baptist Association; and Andrew Waugh, Senior Pastor, Stockton Baptist Church.

The statement will be open for other faith or religious leaders who wish to add their support via the website <http://lockedinlimbo.eu>. A full list of signatories can be found at: <http://lockedinlimbo.eu/uk-faith-leaders-statement-against-detention-of-stateless-people>.

### **Honours recognition for Hilary**

**A Baptist who has had a transformative effect on the lives of thousands of children has received a British Empire Medal (BEM)**

Hilary Terry, a member of Sutcliff Baptist Church, has co-ordinated a holiday Bible club for more than 20 years in Olney, Buckinghamshire.

The club is an ecumenical event, held over five mornings and one evening barbecue one week in August.

It was originally a venture between four churches, attended then by 50 children. Hilary saw the potential to benefit the wider community by expanding and growing it to help others too.

As the club grew so did the number of leaders and helpers. Holiday Bible Club is now a significant community project with a task force of well over 100 adults, and over the years thousands of children, young people and their families have benefitted.

Hilary was awarded the BEM in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June for services to the community, and was presented with it on Thursday, 26 October, by Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher (pictured).

The citation, read by on the night Debbie Brock, herself a Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, at the Awards Ceremony, described Hilary as 'a dynamic person driven to succeed in all she does, deserving of the respect and admiration her recognition tonight confers.'

It stated that the club is 'a well-run, safe, fun, learning experience for the many children who attend it.'

One young person gave an insight into the care Hilary gives: 'Holiday Bible Club was full of children singing and laughing but on my first day I felt nervous, it was scary for me, partially deaf and aged five, but of all the hundreds of children there, Hilary came up to me and other new children and introduced herself. She understood how I was feeling and she made me feel safe.'

The citation included details of the input Hilary, a child minder, puts in: each year she sets a theme and writes daily scripts for the leaders of each age group - not to mention the associated age appropriate crafts to keep everybody busy. There's also large scale set designs for the team to create and a daily faith based drama for the young leaders to learn and act out.

The culmination of every Holiday Bible Club week is a family barbeque free to all, in the spirit of the club itself; 'a fun way for the community to come together through the shared experiences of the children's week.'

'Hilary has had a positive impact on the life path of many, many people,' the citation continued, adding that Hilary is well supported supported by husband Ralph (the Sutcliff Baptist Church secretary), her family, her church family, the close team around her and is 'held in the highest esteem by all'.

### **Connections during Children in Need**

**A Baptist church invited the local community to a buffet and film night last Friday - and it resulted in some thought provoking conversation**

Laird Street Baptist Church, Birkenhead invited the local community to a buffet and film night last Friday.

The church did not charge for the buffet or film, and donations were instead received for Children In Need, taking place that night. Laird Street even had its own Pudsey.

The church showed God's Not Dead 2, which encouraged 'good discussions and conversations,' said minister Cathy Buntin.

'This was a great opportunity to invite our local community to come and meet the people in their local church,' she said.

'We were greatly encouraged by the response welcoming eight of our neighbours and two other people who had been invited by a member of the church.

'We received a good response to the film. We thank God for answered prayer in bringing in our neighbours, and for being able to share our faith through the film and affirming that God is not Dead.'

**New website 'will make a huge difference' to the Church  
R2C2, described as the most comprehensive resource for churches yet produced on  
refugee and asylum issues, has launched**

R2C2, the Refugee Resource Centre for Churches, is a partnership between Jubilee+ and the Boaz Trust.

Its initial expression is an interactive website that aims to resource Christian churches and individuals to reach out to and support asylum seekers and refugees in their churches and communities with the love and compassion of Christ.

The website 'aims to plug the yawning gap in provision that has existed for many years', by raising awareness, providing information through a library of resources, linking Christians to existing projects and encouraging new projects across the UK, said Dave Smith, Boaz Trust founder.

It is divided into eight content blocks, each containing a one or two page 'Quick Guide', and copious links to other resources and organisations. The key blocks are 'How You Can Help', 'Resources' and 'Find Your Local Project'.

Dave, who also works for the NACCOM network of providers of accommodation for destitute asylum seekers and is the author of The Book of Boaz and Refugee Stories, described it as 'the most comprehensive resource for churches yet produced on refugee and asylum issues'.

He said, 'This has been a labour of love for the past 12 months, but, thanks to the help of Jubilee+ and Boaz, we have a website that is going to make a huge difference to the ability of the Church to step up and become what Christ has called it to be – a voice for the voiceless, a source of hope for the hopeless and a beacon on a hill for all to see.

'Asylum seekers and refugees are amongst the most marginalised people in the UK, and the Church has a huge role to play in welcoming them and helping them to flourish in our society.'

The Boaz Trust, Manchester, provides accommodation and support for over 70 refugees and asylum seekers. Jubilee+ is a Christian Social Action and Justice charity with a vision to see the Church in the UK be a champion of the poor and a means to healthy communities across the nation.

Visit the R2C2 website: <http://www.refugeeresourcecentreforchurches.org.uk/>

## **Opinion/reflection**

### **Martin Luther King: radical Christian peacemaker, not secular hero**

**It's the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's visit to Newcastle University. Current university chaplain and lecturer Nick Megoran argues that all King stood for was rooted in his radical Christian faith that built on a Baptist tradition of non-violence. If we really want to honour King's legacy, Christians in general and Baptists in particular ought to recommit to this tradition in the 21st.**

### **A King in the North East**

On this day 50 years ago Baptist minister the Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr visited Newcastle University to receive an honorary degree. The story behind this remarkable occasion is being recalled in a series of events today. But for Baptists in particular it is worth remembering because of the challenge it leaves us: to be the type of radical peacemaker our fellow-Baptist, Dr King, wanted the church to be.

In November 1967 King made his gruelling 48-hour trip to the UK to the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. During the degree ceremony, King was presented to the University's Chancellor as "Christian pastor and social revolutionary." Following this, he made a moving, off-the-cuff acceptance speech in which he identified racism,

poverty and war as the three “great and grave problems that pervade our world.” Poignantly, this was to prove his last trip outside the Americas: five months later, the world was shocked at his murder. This historic visit was almost forgotten until lost video footage of the ceremony and his impromptu acceptance speech was found in the university archives decades later.

### **The all-American secular hero?**

In the popular imagination, King is portrayed as a great ‘civil rights leader,’ a harmless dreamer and respectable national hero who helped the USA fulfil its historical destiny of equal rights. He has been reduced to being the deliverer of inspirational soundbites about a colour-blind America from his ‘I have a dream’ speech, forever standing in front of an adoring crowd on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. Yet this popular portrayal is misleading, for two reasons.

Firstly, King was never universally loved – especially not by the powerful segments of white US society who benefitted from the privileges racism, poverty and war afforded them. A few months before his Newcastle visit, King had publicly spoken out strongly against the Vietnam War, describing his own government as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.” Already harassed by the FBI and excoriated by many whites as unpatriotic, now some of his closest black allies publicly accused him of a tactical mistake in following his conscience rather than focussing on voter rights. After returning from Newcastle, he wrote a thank-you letter to the Chancellor saying that the honorary degree was an encouragement in the face of the “constant criticism and malignment” he faced. As his murder soon afterwards was to show, he was not exaggerating.

Secondly, the popular view of King as an all-American, secular hero delivering bland truisms about dreams of a united humanity is misleading because all King stood for and did was rooted in his radical Christian faith. Some observers have missed this, because King was a master public theologian, adept at conveying particular Christian truths in a universal language. But his core concepts about human suffering and abuse (evil) and the correct response to them were thoroughly Christian.

For King, nonviolent resistance to evil was not a strategy, but a way of life “based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice,” as he wrote elsewhere. This was grounded in the knowledge that we have “cosmic companionship,” a belief rooted in the reality of the Resurrection which shows that “God is on the side of truth and justice.” For King, racism, poverty and war were wrong because they deformed or destroyed human beings made in God’s image. He believed that it was more important to do and say what was right before God, than what was politically expedient.

### **King’s Baptist predecessors**

King opposed the violence of poverty, racism and war, then, not because he was a good liberal, but because he was a good theologian. In our present-day war-wracked world, Baptists (and other Christians) can best honour King's legacy by following his rejection of war and by emulating his commitment to peacemaking.

This shouldn't come as anything new. If Martin Luther King was the towering Baptist figure of the 20th century, then Charles Haddon Spurgeon – 'The Prince of Preachers' – was arguably that of the 19th. Although the two pastors differed on various doctrinal issues, Spurgeon anticipated King in regard to violence. Spurgeon abhorred war, decrying it as "the sum of all villainies." Just as King opposed US foreign policy, Spurgeon was an implacable and vocal opponent of British imperialism and militarism all his life. Albert Meredith observes that his theological principles ensured that "he never failed to be appalled at the shocking spectacle of nations resorting to arms and seeking to destroy one another" and that he "never failed to condemn the outbreak of hostilities. There was not a single instance in which he supported violence or warfare." [1] He also disapproved of Christians following the military profession.

But Spurgeon was no mere critic of war: he passionately believed that "Only let the gospel be preached and there shall be an end of war," and thus dedicated his life to preaching the gospel and building the church as an alternative. Whereas the world wages war, Spurgeon argued, the authentic task of the church is rather to "evangelise the masses, carry the truth of the loving God to their homes, preach Jesus and his dying love in their streets, and gather men to his fold," because soul-saving aims a blow at the root of the war-spirit. [2] Like King, he believed the good news of the gospel inevitably spelt the ultimate end to war: "Earth wants a peacemaker," he cried, "and it is he, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, and the friend of Gentiles, the Prince of Peace, who will make war to cease unto the ends of the earth."

### **Honouring King today**

In the 17th century John Smyth, founder of the first Baptist church in Britain, formulated a winsome confession of faith that called on Christians to follow Jesus' "unarmed and unweaponed life." [3] In the 19th century, C.H. Spurgeon reiterated this position in evangelical terms, and in the 20th Martin Luther King Jr built it into a powerful theory and practice of political change. Yet, too often, Baptist churches have encouraged their young to join the military and have even supported wars of their host states. If we really want to honour King's legacy, Christians in general and Baptists in particular ought to recommit to it in the 21st.

**Nick Megoran is a Lecturer and honorary chaplain at Newcastle University, co-convenor of the Martin Luther King Peace Committee, and a member of the Baptist World Alliance's Commission on Peace and Reconciliation.**

- [1]. Meredith, "The Social and Political Views of Charles Haddon Spurgeon," 92.
- [2]. Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 500-01.
- [3]. Dekar, *For the Healing of the Nations: Baptist Peacemakers*, 21.