



I think I need to begin by coming clean. My thoughts in this reflection have been prompted and strongly influenced by John Bown's sermon at Stephen Taylor's Induction Service at the Kirk of St Nicholas Uniting, Aberdeen. (I probably would not have confessed had I been sure that he wouldn't be reading this.) However, I don't feel that guilty because he himself admitted that he had first heard his text used in a sermon elsewhere and that he had been waiting for an opportunity to preach on the same text – Genesis 49:22-26 – ever since. Verse 22 reads, 'Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring, his branches run over the wall.' I want to link this with an address made by the Moderator of General Assembly of the United Reformed Church - the Revd Dr David Peel – to the Southern Synod of the URC in October on 'Catch the Vision'.

'Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring...' In his address, the Moderator made a convincing case that if the church was to survive, let alone flourish in the post-modern world it had to embrace two apparently contradictory positions. Firstly it had to present people with a counter-culture, which could reclaim the moral high ground and offer hope to a despairing world.

I fear the counter-culture some might offer would be rigid and exclusive and so far from the real lives of most people it would at best be utterly irrelevant to them, and at worst exclude them. A counter culture which could offer real hope and reclaim the high moral ground would be one which would suggest that people should not return evil for evil; where enemies are loved; where responsibilities to others override individual rights; where the community is at least as important as the individual; where me, me, me becomes we, we, we. A counter-culture which could offer real hope would be one where the meek, the peacemakers, the poor in spirit, the merciful, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are the heroes. A counter-culture which could offer real hope would be one

where the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the prisoner were seen to have real prior claims on our time and resources. A counter-culture which could offer real hope would be one where love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control were seen as the only signs of success, the only signs of fruitfulness, rather than by the standards of the world – numbers, buildings, money, influence. If we could do this we too could be a fruitful bough by a spring.

'...his branches run over the wall.' At the same time the Moderator argued that the church has genuinely to be part of the multi-cultural world in which we find ourselves, it has to be with all people in their lives, in their dreams, in their fears so that it can have a real dialogue – without this it would be a conversation between the deaf.

How genuinely to be a part of the many cultures in which we find ourselves? Again I think the words of Paul could be of help. (Not really surprising as Paul was himself very much a part of a multi-cultural world and was writing to churches who were having to find ways to survive and function in that world.) If, when we live and work and move in this amazing world we can actually recognise, acknowledge and celebrate whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is pure, whatever is commendable, excellent and worthy of praise - wherever it is to be found, amongst people of any and all cultures; any, all or no faith; then I think we can really connect with our world, just as Jesus did with his. If we could include rather than exclude, then surely our branches would run over the wall fed by the spring of living water that gushes up to eternal life... and make a difference, perhaps not with the pious and self-righteous, but certainly with the humble in spirit who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

**Shalom**  
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In this edition Stephen Fellingham writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC