**MY TEACHER: PAUL KING**

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**Holy Trinity Church, Baswich Lane, Stafford**

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It was September 1962 when my path and Paul’s first crossed – the beginning of a new academic year at Bath’s then boys’ grammar school, where I was a pupil, aged 15, about to start his O Levels, and where he was a young teacher of religious education.

One of my O Level courses was Bible Knowledge. Paul was its sole teacher.

First impressions matter, don’t they? I recall being immediately and very positively taken by Paul’s handsome, dashing even, appearance – tall, athletically slim, almost regimental – as he introduced himself to us at the start of our studies together.

Paul taught with authority, without being domineering, knowing fully the content of the syllabus, which he put over with commitment and enthusiasm, leavened often with good humour.

However, irrespective of Paul’s skills as a teacher, I thought doing his O Level course would be a doddle. I was well used to Bible Reading Groups at my local church. Considering scripture with him would be like that, I imagined. A relatively easy option. A cakewalk, even.

How quickly I was disabused of that.

My church’s Bible Reading Groups were devotional. Paul’s classes weren’t. They required me to *study* scripture; praying and meditating over it wouldn’t be enough. *Lectio Divina*, which I was then well practised in, was not going to get me an O Level. It might help; but it was not a sufficient condition for success.

Paul’s teaching of Mark’s Gospel taught me a wholly new way of engaging with the books of the Bible, using commentaries and the like. I’d never done that before. It was therefore revelatory, which is why I have never looked back since.

And Paul consolidated this direction of travel when I joined his A Level Bible Knowledge class two years later, at which point he also became my Sixth Form Tutor, which meant I met him every day, first thing, at registration.

Paul’s excellent A Level teaching of John’s Gospel fully opened my eyes for the first time to the deep spiritual and theological significance of the story it told. It also introduced me to a Johannine scholar – the great C K Barrett, no less, who had taught Paul as an undergraduate at Durham. I never looked back after that either.

But there was more.

I was at that time a reasonably accomplished athlete, specialising in x-country and long-distance track events. Paul took a keen interest in this aspect of my teenage life, giving me lots of advice about how to be a better runner. He was also a regular cheerleader at fixtures I took part in.

In class and out of it, Paul gifted me greater self-confidence, particularly at times when I didn’t have a surfeit of it, which undoubtedly fuelled the career success in education I went on subsequently to enjoy. Behind the scenes, Paul also stood up for me more generally. He was often more ambitious for my success than I was.

Paul also modelled a moral and Christian way of being that I sought to emulate in my own life, including the kind of teacher I wanted to be and later became. When he wasn’t tutoring my judgement, Paul, then, was educating my soul.

In my post-school life and right up until very recently, I liked the fact that Paul was ‘out there’ – making it possible for me to solicit his views on my writings on faith; consult him about a confusing lection; share knowledge of books we were each reading; and catch up on church affairs.

It is surely astonishing that Paul remained such a considerable pastoral and pedagogical influence on my life for most of the extent of it – over fifty years and counting.

Now I can’t do any of that. On the other hand, I stand before you as someone who holds Paul’s memory very dear; who has many firmly embedded recollections of a life well lived; and who is enormously grateful that his touched mine for the better, both at school and outside of it, from near the very start, extending until only a few months ago.

For two years, between 1964 and 1966, during term time, at morning registration, Paul literally called out my name.

Today, proudly, with love in my heart, I invoke and salute his.