

Mary Kathleen Batchelor (née Price)
1927-2009

Mary had Christian parents and came to faith herself in her early teens. Her ecclesiastical background went back to her maternal grandfather, Thomas Holmes, of Beer in Devon, a staunch member of the Brethren fellowship there. In her early years she lived in his home in Bournemouth and so received much to influence her early thinking. Her father, George Price, a chiropodist in Sutton, Surrey, was a well-known preacher and teacher in Brethren churches, particularly in the Home Counties. He was a convener of young people's conferences at Grittleton and Glossop and was a close associate of such well-known Brethren as F.F. Bruce, K.G. Hyland and Arnold Pickering. It was from men of this calibre that Mary's knowledge of scripture developed and matured and her theological understanding expanded. Mary was baptised at West Street Chapel, Carshalton, and later moved to Chilton Church, Sutton. She was closely involved with Crusaders in Sutton and was always grateful for the teaching she received from them.

She entered Queen Mary College, London University, and graduated in English Literature followed by a Diploma in Education. Through the Christian Union she met Alan Batchelor to whom she was married in 1951. She taught both English and Religious Studies with a break for a number of years, during which time she had a daughter, Pauline, and two sons, Graham and Oliver. After her marriage she was one of the Founder Members of Brook Chapel in Runcorn, Cheshire, and was particularly involved with teaching children and young people. On moving to Stockton-on-Tees she became leader of the Girls Crusader group there and ran children's classes in her home. Later she also ran a housewives' Bible study group from home.

Over many years she was a conference speaker, preacher and Bible teacher. But it was through her writing that Mary's ministry touched the lives of the greatest number of people, and she was perhaps the most widely-published writer among British Brethren of her generation. She wrote a wide variety of books. The British

Library catalogue lists twenty-seven separate publications by Mary in a variety of genres: practical help, anthology, biography. Her first venture into writing was a children's story for a new writers competition sponsored by Scripture Union, in which she gained joint first prize, and subsequently she compiled a special women's section in *The Witness*. This led to a long association with Lion Publishing which lasted until her death. Her writing for Lion was always commissioned and included a biography and a number of Lion anthologies on prayer, poetry and English literature. Best and most influential of all were those books in which her deep love and knowledge of the Scriptures shone through: Bible stories for children, and books which opened up the Bible, especially to newcomers. Her best-selling book was *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* (1985) which ranged through the whole of the Old and New Testaments and is still in print. She used a simple Anglo-Saxon vocabulary while eschewing the folksy, and had a fine sense for the rhythm of the English sentence, without ever patronising her readers or leaving them feeling in later life that there were aspects of the narratives which had been veiled. As a result her re-telling of the biblical stories are a delight to any adult reading them aloud as a bedtime story and are easily grasped by the children listeners. The catholicity of selection in her anthologies and the lack of sectarian bias in her children's books make her work acceptable to Christians of all traditions. Her books continue to travel the globe in many languages.

She patiently and courageously suffered increasing ravages of cancer for her last five years until she was called to meet her Lord in March 2009. As a person Mary had a natural gift of empathising with others. She readily identified with all types, regardless of age, gender, social status, or educational background. She had a great capacity for listening to and identifying with others' problems, giving wise and loving support. In her family life her own children gave the testimony, "We shared everything with Mum!"

Various contributors