

# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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**The Journal is read in:** Albania, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Equador, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Latvia, Liberia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sri-Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland. Ukraine, United Kingdom & Northern Ireland, USA, Zimbabwe.

'The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily  
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# EDITORIAL

## Listening to the drums

On the 5th of December this year a hand carved cross, four metres high, will be carried through the streets of Harare by members of local churches. It will be erected on a base constructed from wood gathered from the four corners of the earth and placed under a traditionally thatched roof enclosure on the green of the University of Zimbabwe. This will become the focus for the daily prayer and worship of those attending the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

Many of these will be delegates from various Baptist Unions, including BUGB. There will also be Baptists among those representing Councils of Churches and the like. At a recent meeting of General Secretaries of national Ecumenical Councils in Europe I was fascinated to discover that a disproportionate number of them were from our own denomination!. Baptists are, therefore, well represented in the international councils of Churches Together, and this is a cause for thanksgiving, because it shows we have not lost our historic commitment to 'associating', and have come to see that this includes other Christians as well as other Baptists, world-wide.

Each Assembly has a theme. This time it is *Turn to God - rejoice in hope*. 'The church of God is called to be a herald of the message of repentance,' writes the African theologian, Sebastian Bakare, in his pre-Assembly booklet, *The Drumbeat of Life*\*. 'Turn to God is not possible without repentance,' he reminds us. 'The church is called to lead the world to God. ... At the same time there is also reason to rejoice in hope...'

The articles in this issue are also about repentance and hope - in the local church, in its worship, in the training of its ministers, and in baptism: the ultimate sign of our unity in Christ. If they seem a far cry from the drumbeat of the WCC's forthcoming Assembly in Africa it will be because we have failed to make the connection between the local and the universal. Because when representatives of the world's Christians gather under that four metre high cross in Zimbabwe in December they will all be from local churches somewhere on earth. The experience they will take with them to the Assembly will be of the drumbeat of life in their local church. The experience they will come back to tell us about, will be of the drumbeat of life in the Church universal. I suspect they both throb to the same rhythm.

\* *Risk Book Series, WCC Publications, Geneva*

**G.A-W.**

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**CORRECTION** The idea of a 'Missions and New Testament Tutor' at Spurgeon's College, London, may be a gleam in someone's eye, but the reality is more mundane, and Dr Alastair Campbell, who contributed to our last issue, is (merely?!) a New Testament Tutor at the College. Apologies for the misnomer.

# GOING, GOING - BUT NOT GONE!

**As Bristol Baptist College - the oldest continuing Baptist College in the World - relocates within the city, MORRIS WEST, its President from 1971-1987, shares some personal thoughts on the move.**

It was a very odd experience. Indeed, it had the sense of an unreal, almost dreamlike, quality about it. I was sitting for the last time in the dining room of what we must now call the 'old' Baptist College in Woodland Road. The occasion was not a meal though many gastronomic memories flitted through my mind as I looked around at the familiar room. Memories of extraordinary dishes concocted out of rabbit and tripe in the immediate strictly rationed post-war student days; memories of my own Principalship days with dumpling stews, dishes of potatoes and vegetables followed by treacle pudding in the unhealthy times (so called) before the invasion of the healthier 'delights' imported largely from Italy and consisting mainly of pasta, rightly (in my opinion) described by Frank Muir as tasting of blotting paper!

In fact the dining room on the occasion of which I write was not prepared for a meal but for an auction sale! The strong wooden tables were put together to form a platform upon which were set a small table and two chairs occupied by the auctioneers who gabbled away skilfully in an unusual version of English. The walls were bare of all the familiar pictures; the ornaments and copper vessels had gone. It was now for me just a room of memories. The College itself had moved on. The auction was of various artefacts, which were the accumulated baggage of previous centuries no longer required on the College's journey. The auctioneers were selling what intentionally could be left behind. The various lots had reached their sell-by date. But there was nothing unreal about the auction itself. It was some of the prices paid that were unbelievable. The old long table which had stood forlornly in the corner of the games room for as long as anyone could remember sold for nearly £2,000. Three vast framed portraits, which had adorned the dining room for so long - and saved us redecorating the walls underneath - went for several thousand pounds. These were the very same portraits of a gentleman and his two wives - consecutive not concurrent - which used to be adorned on many a March 1st with daffodils and an occasional leek. A small framed tapestry for which I thought of offering £50 started with a bid of £200 and went for more than thirty times my unarticulated bid.

## **The Promenade**

Fascinating though this all is (at least to me!) the Editor has not invited me to use up all my space with what the College has left behind - but rather with what has moved on. Yet this auction sale, which tailed off startlingly in the size of bids towards the end when the bargains really did arrive, illustrates the paradox that even what is left behind, in a sense, is also moving on. In any move things have to be left behind, so all credit to those who thought up the idea of the auction sale so as to make sure that even what had become unneeded baggage made a useful financial contribution to the future beyond the move.

But, of course, what is essential to the College for the future has moved on to the College's new home in the delightful context of the Downs and with the imposing address of 'The Promenade' Clifton Down. That it is, in fact, also adjacent to the

Bristol Zoo is of no particular significance apart from the Zoo being a useful landmark in locating the College. In any case, the Lord Mayor's Mansion House stands between the College and the animals (and vice versa).

What has moved on? The Chapel furniture and other chapel contents were amongst the first things to go. The library with its thousands of volumes was miraculously moved intact within a week. The Bible Collection is safely in its new position and the important BMS souvenirs are being unpacked. The memorials of College students who died on various kinds of Christian active services including the Boxer Rising in China are awaiting their positioning in the new building. The portraits of the benefactors and significant figures within the life of the College have been 'moved on' including (of course!) the portraits of previous Principals.

Incidentally, students of Dr Dakin's era will be interested to know that an additional huge framed photograph of the 'Old Man' found in the strong room together with his framed Doctoral Diploma from Heidelberg have been gladly and affectionately received by his only grandchild Jill.

But to say that all these areas of the College's life have moved on is to speak not only of the physical. They represent key aspects of the Bristol tradition in terms which transcend the physical and which will continue into the future. Chapel, Library, Bible Collection, Missionary souvenirs, martyrs memorials, portraits of people, reflect in turn the importance of the tradition of biblical conviction, theological awareness, evangelical zeal and College community.

### **Theological Development**

The Deed of Gift from Edward Terrill in 1679 which helped to found the College requested that there should be appointed a minister who was competent in the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek and who would receive certain chosen young men and educate them in those languages in preparation for their service in Baptist churches. Our Baptist inheritance lies in the sixteenth Century Reformation where there was a re-emphasis upon the authority of the Word of God.

The Bible is the record of God in action. The heart of our biblical conviction has been to recognise that truth, to study it, as far as possible in the original languages, to discover what it meant for the people whose actual experience it recounts and through the activity of the Holy Spirit to interpret what the Word says to us in the late twentieth Century. The Bible is central to the worship in the Chapel and to work in the classroom. The centre therefore of our College community is the Chapel and the worship of the triune God - a God continuously acting towards and through his people. A chapel in which we maintain a proper balance between the acknowledgement of God objectively as wholly Other, who is truly God, and subjectively in his gracious activity towards us in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit.

Linked with the Chapel and its worship is the Library as a treasury of theological awareness. Its thousands of volumes are available not simply for reading but particularly for awakening the awareness of who God is and what he has done, is doing and will do in history.

The Bristol tradition which moves on from building to building has no policy of indoctrination of one particular theological line as against another, though we have in mind that the theological thought and practice developed is to be used in the service of the church to which we minister. To prospective students who asked about the life of Bristol I used to say that to come and to share in its life means bringing gifts of mind and spirit and opening all these to theological development. It is rather like setting up one's theological stall in a market place, recognising that

in trading one does not only offer one's ware to others, but more importantly accepting that there will be wares needed to be received from others.

### **Context of Community**

It is recorded of Hugh Evans (Principal 1756-81) that he sought always not merely to form substantial scholars, but that, as far as in him lay, "he was desirous of being made an instrument in God's hand of forming them into able, evangelical, lively, zealous ministers of the Gospel".

Evangelical zeal is a true mark of the tradition that moves on with the College. This zeal is based upon Biblical conviction and the theological awareness of putting into practice the Christ given commission to make disciples. The significant missionary souvenirs which we prize honour the missionary tradition of the College both within the British Isles and throughout the whole world. This tradition has manifested itself both in conversion to Christ and also in social consciousness from, for example, the involvement of Bristol missionaries in the emancipation of Jamaican slaves in the nineteenth century, to the current Kaleidoscope project at Kingston upon Thames. It is no coincidence either that those nurtured in the Bristol tradition were present at the founding meetings of both the Baptist Missionary Society and the Baptist Union. In the twentieth century, too, the Bristol tradition has played its part in the significant development of church relations the world over.

As the chronologically arranged portraits around the walls remind us, so the various buildings which have housed the College have reflected in one way or another, the concept of preparing for ministry in the context of community. In the eighteenth century North Street building, students lived almost as members of the Principals' family in the Principals' house. In the nineteenth century Stokes Croft building, the students became more and more responsible for developing their own community under the watchful (!) eye of the Principal. The recently vacated Woodland Road building saw the twentieth century College continue and develop this sort of tradition with the increasing involvement of student spouses and children in the community. Some College photographs of the past thirty years clearly illustrate this trend. Now the college has moved into a building which is non-residential. 'Residential' students will be accommodated in two good-sized houses belonging to the College. But the community concept will be maintained in Chapel, classroom and dining room.

### **Since 1679**

Most particularly, however, the College Community is widening. Here we begin to turn to what lies ahead as moving on becomes an ever hastening stream flowing into the future. Of this others must write in detail. I stand, as it were, as an observer by the riverside and wish the College well. Suffice it to say that I, who increasingly represent the past, can only rejoice with what I discern as the community grows and develops. So far as ministerial preparation is concerned, the college is a partner in the Bristol Federation for Theological Education. The members together with the Baptist College are Trinity College, Wesley College and the West of England Ministerial Training Course. Within this the College's primary relationship is with Trinity with whom it shares a full course of study for the Bristol RA in Theology. The college works also with Wesley College, whose work is validated by the West of England, to produce modules in common.

The demise of the Christian Training Programme means that the College has taken on a growing number of students' - some 40 at a recent count. Congregational

based training has been part of Bristol's life for much of the century with the College being responsible for the ministry of a number of churches in and around the Bristol area. The college does not use the 'distance' learning, which relies only on published or electronic material. It insists each student must be part of the learning community of the College in some way or another. Similarly churches are not left without resources and crucial work is being done in churches cared for by students and ministers linked to the college in different ways. A new staff appointment has been made to enhance and co-ordinate what may be called 'extra mural' work.

As all this policy develops and the College moves on towards the next century, so the image of the dining room auction of the past fades. Yet, just as the proceeds of that auction will remain to help create the future so the unbroken Bristol tradition from 1679 moves on into the future. As Leonard Champion once wrote, 'Tradition is continuity of life and experience. We do not look back to a static entity; we share in a living creative movement. We live within the activity of the Spirit.' It is in this sense that Bristol Baptist College moves on. Thanks be to God.

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**BOOKSEARCH** (*for readers wishing to borrow an out of print title from another reader*):

Title: 'A Rabbi reads the Psalms' (SCM 1994). Searcher: The Editor 01222 515884.

# **FOR THE BRIGHTEST NEWS OF THE YEAR**

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# A TAPESTRY OF CONNECTIONS

**HAZEL SHERMAN, Tutor, Bristol Baptist College, 1990-93, takes us on an anecdotal exploration of people with learning difficulties in the Church.**

In recent years there has been a move amongst churches to make better response to the gifts and needs of people with learning difficulties. We have been challenged to look again at the nature of community and congregation. Baptist churches have been helped in their thinking and acting by the efforts of those involved with the Baptist Union Initiative with people with Learning Difficulties (BUILD). But there are still many questions neither answered nor asked. This article is written from the point of view of one with little expertise in this controversial area. I am as confused as most people over the use of various terms ranging around learning-difficulty, learning-disability, mental-handicap. I am aware that phraseology may be improper and offensive to some whilst being a reasonable description to others: and that this includes those most closely involved as carers and family. However, the only way to further understanding is to ask questions, and my questions stem from experience of the diversity of issues facing a small congregation which includes a number of people of different ages with learning difficulties.

The church from which I write is Kensington Baptist Church in Brecon, Powys. Brecon is a town with a fairly high number of small units for semi-independent living for those with learning difficulties and their (professional) carers. This is largely due to the closure of two long-term residential hospital wards in the area. Dotted around the neighbourhood, in areas of newly constructed housing and older properties, are houses under the auspices of various statutory and voluntary bodies.

1: Living in the community: George and Billy take their place regularly in church Sunday by Sunday. But there will be different carers with them each week. They are there because they have to be - the diary tells them that this is the activity for the morning. George and Billy make their choice. But they may be influenced by the willingness of the carer on duty to 'go to chapel'. Some are more keen than others to make an effort on a rainy day, and there are different interpretations of the demands of the job. From the minister's point of view, I am not sure whether it is better to spend half the service wondering if one of our 'regulars' is unwell, and if it will be interpreted as sneaky and critical if I enquire after them (that has happened), or to have the attendant carer sit with her nose in a science fiction novel to make it clear that she would not normally attend a place of Christian worship!

## **Boring**

Special invitations are given to social activities and special events. If baking is needed, a request is always made for scones/cakes etc which may then become a creative activity for home. But again, the opportunity for these particular people to take part is affected by how their carers encourage them. One positive aspect of this is that it has given us opportunity for contact with a range of people who live locally and to be involved in unexpected ways with networks of friends and families in this rural market town. It is not uncommon for members of the same family to be employed in different areas of what has effectively become a small-scale employment industry. George and Billy take their part in God's mission through the church by their presence as link elements in the sometimes haphazard contacts and conversations which stem from keeping in touch with those employed to work with

them in the community. This is not to denigrate the gift of their presence: but to suggest that they play a significant part in drawing out the human face of what often seems an alien place to the outsider.

These two are men in their seventies. It was George who first came to our church, together with one of our church neighbours who happened to be working for Social Services at the time. The normal carrying-out of a visit to a new member of the congregation meant that I met him in the residential home which was closing down, and we were able to be interested and involved in his move to a bungalow in the community. He loves churches, and no holiday is complete without visits to churches and cathedrals. He had become half-known as one who had attended two other churches in the town over many years but he now has a sense of 'belonging'. One of our questions is how we can help to deepen that sense of belonging, rather than rest on our laurels as the church where he seems to feel at home.

In another bungalow managed by Social Services, Michelle and Myfanwy are learning to live with each other's likes and dislikes. Both young women are in their early twenties, one is rather placid and the other volatile. Michelle is not afraid of speaking her mind and behavioural difficulties are perhaps her biggest problem in relating to her family and people in the community. Her parents live in the town, and this is her first move away from home. It is proving good for them all, though not without its upsets. Michelle has not been to church for some weeks, since she and a carer arrived very early one Sunday and the time span from then to the end of the hour-long service was too much. She left church that day shouting that she couldn't stand "all that stuff" inside and greeted my last visit with a 'Hazel, what are we going to do with that bloody boring chapel?'. We will need to find ways to encourage her again, and to learn from her about our ways in worship and how they may be helpful or unhelpful. However, it is not simply a matter of us 'learning how to please'.

### **Embarrassed**

One day, I called when Michelle was in the middle of a furious phone call. Continuing in the same vein, she f...d and b...d at me before slamming into her room. The care assistant on duty said, "Don't talk like that to the Vicar!" which embarrassed me more than her! However, when a card with apology was received the following day, it became clearer that this incident and others like them in her contact with the church was part of her wider training in social skills. She needs these skills to help her live in a world where conventions of behaviour are vital for people to thrive. Sometimes in church we can be rather 'precious' in the way we pride ourselves on accepting those with obvious behavioural problems. We do not always realise that to give the signal that anti-social behaviour is acceptable is itself disabling. We think we are showing loving acceptance. The hard-edged kindness of those who work to equip Michelle with the life-skills she needs is not helped by a pseudo-Christian weakness in opting out of potential confrontation and growth.

2. Funerals and Bereavement Care: Before Michelle and Myfanwy moved into their bungalow; Margaret lived there. Margaret was in her fifties, a gentle woman with Downs Syndrome and a wicked sense of humour, who loved karaoke and Top of the Pops. Her father had been a local vicar, and she had lived a protected life for many years at home with them. For a while she lived with other members of the family until moving into residential care and then the bungalow in Brecon. She was perceptive and caring, and once remarked that I looked tired. I suggested that the



next Sunday I would say "I couldn't think of anything to say today, just talk among yourselves". "Don't do that, I'd be embarrassed", she replied. Although the banter was light-hearted, there was an edge of anxiety in her voice. On reflection, it underlined the inherent injustice in one of those crude generalisations which are found among church congregations as much as anywhere else: "Those people have a real gift of spontaneity. They don't suffer the same sort of embarrassment as we do. "Sometimes it is too easy to assume that people with learning difficulties are all in one category called "these people". It was something as small as that conversation which became a rebuke to the tendency to generalise.

### **Tortuous**

When Margaret died from lung cancer twelve months ago, the arrangements for the funeral were in the hands of her remaining family. The service was to be held in a church in an unfamiliar parish, arranged by people who had little knowledge of her friends and circle of acquaintances built up over her latter years in Brecon. Because of the person she was, there was real grief among a number of carers who had accompanied her during her last illness. Could we hold a thanksgiving service? Of course we could, and this was arranged for the day of the funeral: thanksgiving in the morning and funeral in the afternoon. Some time after, one of the learning-disabled tenants of another 'community care' house died suddenly. One of our congregation works there, and other tenants had been friends of Margaret's. He had no family, and it seemed natural to hold the funeral service in Kensington. One of its most moving moments came as we sang, "All things bright and beautiful" : *how great is God Almighty, who has made all things well*. For surely all is good in God's creating, and that includes Bill and Margaret and George and Billy and Michelle and Myfanwy. There have been so many others, it seems, in these few years.

In their college training, ministers have to some extent had the opportunity to face issues of bereavement and grief, and learnt something about the practical aspects of funerals and memorial services. In the trial and error world of ministry we learn more about how these issues are rarely straightforward. We become involved in the sometimes tortuous complex of relationships and missed understandings between 'professionals' and families. Where the person who has died has been living in a shared house, it is sometimes tempting to assume that the team or house leader will provide all the pastoral care needed. It is easy to find excuses not to call, especially when verbal communication is limited, but such visits become more important rather than less when a person cannot express their grief other than by continually turning a photograph of the dead person to face the wall.

### **Jigsaw**

This is perhaps one of the areas where it is most difficult to measure good use of the minister's time. By 'being around' at regular intervals, alongside those whose attention span is limited, the minister aims to forge some sort of relationship within the whole network which supports individuals whose internal support-system does not permit them to function well in independent living. It demands a letting-go of pride in being seen to be busy, which many aspire to but few attain.

3. Varieties of Community Support: So far the people I have mentioned have been living in dwellings managed by Social Services or by a Housing Association run specifically for the housing and care of people with learning disabilities. The l'Arche Community in Brecon also fits into the jigsaw. Two houses are home to a number of people of mixed ages and backgrounds, living in Christian Community. This

environment, perhaps surprisingly, does not always make it easy to relate to different 'churches', although there is much involvement of individuals. A church member chairs the local l'Arche Committee and her husband is involved with the candle-making workshop, which produces high quality goods for sale. If a small church did not see their involvement as an expression of its own mission and participation, it would be very easy to begrudge the considerable time and energy which is demanded and wish that more was available for 'us'. The church acts through its members when the 'whole church' as a body cannot be present. But in the everyday conversations and interest which fuel worship and prayer, we are all involved. Sometimes the whole church, including the minister, needs reminding of this, so that it is not just seen as so-and-so's hobby'.

### **Mundane**

To 'live l'Arche' is to take part in a bold sign of the kingdom of God, where people with (sometimes profound) learning difficulties and those who are not so designated live together in partnership. Precisely because any sign of the Kingdom lies in its connection of the human and the divine, there are many mundane aspects. For instance, in l'Arche Brecon, assistants are often young people from different cultural backgrounds, who have chosen to come to an attractive part of the world. They have their own needs and agendas, and it is a challenge to the churches to know how best to be available for them. Also, since l'Arche is not exempt from legislation which sets standards for provision of care for disabled people, idealism is not enough. Contacts have to be maintained between various officials, key-workers, and members of the community. It was at another funeral that I looked out at the congregation at the beginning of the address and saw a startling tapestry of connections embodied in the full pews. How do we understand ourselves as a thread in this picture?

4: Back to the local Church: We relish the particular presence of one child in our church family. Tomos was born last 'Leap Year' on 29th February. He is special on two counts, since he also has Downs Syndrome. Perhaps because we have known him since he was born, there is sometimes a difference of perception between how he is seen, and the congregation's attitude to those older people. To put it crudely, it is easier to see the one as 'family' and the others still as 'visitors'. Moreover, on a bad day, the presence of the older members of the congregation with learning difficulties poses a threat to the young single mother, who is adamant that her son will receive main-stream schooling and determined to fight for all the resources to help him live as 'normal' a life as possible. At this stage, supported living in the community-care bungalows is off her horizon of manageable prospects.

There is a sort of challenge which emerges for a small congregation with limited means, who would encourage people of all ages and abilities to come to worship and learn together. For example, the parents of a young family might believe whole-heartedly in the calling of the church to be a place of hospitality to 'all sorts' in the providence of God. They are glad to be part of that. But some weeks, when people are away, it is tempting to wish that there were more 'normal' people in the balance of things or that the fruit of the minister's time showed itself in bigger congregations. It's not sufficient simply to quote the love of Christ. We need the grace and the understanding to live what we believe.

# TO SIT BACK AND LISTEN

**DAVID BUTCHER, Minister of Loughborough Baptist Church, waxes lyrical about poetry in worship.**

Poetry is a hugely under-used resource of faith in our Churches. When did you last hear, or read, a poem in Church? Yes, of course, there's a lot of poetry in the Bible, but Bible readings come over as Bible readings not as poetry. There used to be a lot of poetry in our hymn books, but although we have more and more songs, we seem to have less and less poetry, and what is there is often overwhelmed by familiar tunes.

There's a lot of poetry about! Check the shelves in your local Library. There's a lot of faith in poetry, but there's no clear distinction between secular and religious poetry (as there is with music), so it's harder to find the specific poems you need. Busy ministers are going to rely on compilations.

There are two kinds of religious poetry I'm not particularly interested in. At one extreme there's "classical" Christian poetry by author's like John Milton: wonderful for personal study, but too full of difficult words and classical allusions for a congregation to hear and grasp. At the other extreme, the sentimental doggerel of religious greetings cards is not at all what I want.

I'm looking for Christian poetry which inspires and enriches faith and worship, which stirs the imagination and stimulates the thinking believer, but it also has to be "accessible", it has to come across to the wide variety of people in the congregation, it has to be both understandable and evocative so that even if, at one hearing, the whole meaning has not been grasped, at least something of the feeling and significance has.

There's some good material about, more than you may imagine. I have run two five week courses for the Loughborough Churches Together Lent Programme, reading poetry for an hour a week to surprisingly well-attended and interested groups. "It's so nice just to sit back and listen," said one member, who would normally be involved in study or discussion.

## **Ring the Bluebells**

So, what accessible and readily available Christian poetry is there for Ministers to dip into, bearing in mind that poetry goes out of print even quicker than most other books nowadays. The best thing immediately available is *The Lion Christian Poetry Collection* compiled by Mary Batchelor. A substantial hard cover book @ £20, but containing over 700 poems, none of them lengthy, some classical many modern, grouped under various sections and offering brief biographical notes of authors. In a second-hand shop you may come across *A Treasury of Christian Verse* published by SCM in 1959 for the Religious Book Club, so there are possibly still thousands about! From the 8th Century to the present day, it's a good selection of useable poems.

Let me give some examples of how poetry may be used in worship. First, there is the Poetry of Praise. We are all used to the poetry of certain Psalms, though many require editing for contemporary use. Joseph Bayly set out to write *Psalms of my Life* (Tyndale House publications, 1973) in present-day, albeit American, settings,

*"Praise Him in the Rockies, riding mountain trails...  
Praise Him in the snowfall, holding ski rope...  
Praise Him at the desk, phoning, writing, meeting, planning."*

Why not use Studdert Kennedy's "Sursum Corda" as a call to worship -

*"Sursum corda! Ring the bluebells,  
Lift ye up your hearts to God."*

Or if you have a worship time with a sequence of songs, why not use a poem or two to intersperse, as well as scriptures and prayers....

*"When was it that we first glimpsed God?.....(concluding)*

*Or was it yesterday,  
When in a moment of forgetfulness  
we lost ourselves  
And came across Him*

*unexpectedly everywhere?" (Lynette Bishop)*

Practise the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins,

*"Glory be to God for dappled things -  
For skies couple-coloure as a brinded cow"*

and your congregation will light up before you sing "For the beauty of the earth".

### **Scrubbers and Sweepers**

Use a little Laurie Lee to evoke a sense of being blessed -

*"If ever I saw blessing in the air,  
I see it now in this still early day....  
If ever world were blessed, now it is."*

Make a feature of James Weldon Johnson's poem *Creation* (Genesis as re-told by an American negro) with its childlike love of nature and a deep sense of faith, and your congregation will love you for it!

Or T.S. Eliot's *scrubbers and sweepers of Canterbury* who, even with "the hand to the broom"

*"Praise Thee, O God, for Thy glory displayed in all the  
creatures of the earth"*

Or Elizabeth Craven's beautiful but easily grasped

*"I thank Thee, Lord, that I have lived  
In this great world and known its many joys...."*

So much thought, care, experience and faith has been invested in poetry, its use in worship will undoubtedly enrich our praise.

Secondly, there is Poetry of Prayerfulness, which may simply mean that the words quieten us and prepare us for prayer. Joan Bidwell's *Supper Being Ended* takes its cue from the Footwashing story -

*"In the quiet place / at close of day /  
He washes the feet of my mind from the dust of its fret....  
The grace of His health restores my soul  
her place in the circling stars of perpetual praise."*

Angela Griffiths' *Echoes* reflects that we expect to hear God in natural settings...

*"But when I hear Him in the hubbub of the city...  
Then I can not help but thank Him for the unexpected word.  
And a prayer within me rises up  
Until it meets and mingles with my risen Lord."*

Or Evelyn Underhill's *Immanence* ...

*"I come in little things, saith the Lord...  
My starry wings I do forsake  
Love's highway of humility to take....  
Till by such art  
I shall achieve my Immemorial Plan  
Pass the low lintel of the human heart."*

### **Crimson Sandals**

Maybe something stronger to introduce our intercessions ...

*"only days ago in my city  
The night was aflame with burning cars,  
And hatred ran down our back  
Streets like a cold finger;  
Men shook their injustices like fists,  
And their voices were flying stones."* (Peter Firth)

Or to pierce our complacency -

*"You are my Body.  
Treat it gently, keep it warm,  
Make sure it gets enough to eat  
and lives respectably.  
Keep it out of politics, of course  
and the crush of common people.  
Avoid confrontation  
with the realities of evil.  
One crucifixion was enough."* (Muriel McNair)

Now that it's no longer in our hymn books, draw people to the Communion table with Christina Rossetti's

*"None other Lamb, None other Name,  
None other Hope in heaven, or earth, or sea,  
None other hiding place from guilt or shame,  
None beside Thee."*

Thirdly, there's Poetry to Make us Think, which may well illustrate services and sermons. If you ever come across a copy of *Let There be God*, compiled by Parker and Teskey, published by R.E.P. in 1968, you will find some real gems, but not always easy at first reading.

*"Oh Christianity, Christianity  
Why do you not answer our difficulties"?*

asks Stevie Smith.

Caryll Houselander provides some answers with

*"The Circle of a Girl's Arms / have changed the world  
The round and sorrowful world / to a cradle of God....."*

and in *God Abides in Men* which concludes

*"He has latched his feet in crimson sandals  
That they move not from the path of love."*

*Six Centuries of Women's Poetry* compiled by Veronica Zundel has some good things in it, too (and is still in print, published by Lion). "The Atheist and the Acorn", albeit written in the 17th Century, can still make a congregation laugh as well as establish the point that science can't give all the answers, and *Ain't I a*

Woman is truly remarkable, based on a speech by Isabella, a slave freed under the Emancipation Act of 1827, with this final stanza -

*"If the first woman God ever made  
was strong enough to turn the world  
upside down, all alone  
together women ought to be able to turn it  
rightside up again."*

The Daily Life section of *The Lion Christian Poetry Collection* has poems about Work, Life, Home and Social needs. There is a particularly telling poem by Andrew Lansdown called *Reaction to a Retard.*

*"...to limit the human, which is the image  
of God, to the beautiful and clever,  
and to forget that there is in every person  
a spark, a spirit, that abides for ever...  
There is a worse disorder than the damaged brain  
that disfigures the blameless face.  
It is the derangement of the cogent mind  
That deforms the heart by a denial of grace."*

## **Practising**

There are gems in the writings of people as politically diverse as Mary Wilson and Quintin Hogg, but, like the writer to the Hebrews, "time is too short for me to tell". If I can simply point you to the Treasure-Island Chest of Christian Poetry, where you may see a few pieces shining out from under its half-closed lid, then maybe I have done all I can. Except that I would be glad to receive as well as to give, copies and information which will extend my own limited knowledge and continue to enrich my faith and the worship I share in with others.

Finally, a few practical points. I try to remember always that people in the congregation are going to hear a poem perhaps only once and will not normally have the text before them. It has, therefore, got to be read as well as possible, with every effort to communicate its meaning. This requires practising and practising aloud, pencil-marking the text to assist and becoming so familiar with the page that eye-contact with the congregation is maintained as much as possible. It may mean exaggerating emphases and certainly reading fairly slowly. I am not averse to the amendment of difficult words or allusions if these are going to prevent most people from understanding what's being said. (For example "Saint Francis Preaches to the Computers" by John Heath-Stubbs is a brilliant application of that crucial but difficult text of Romans 8 21, but the poem is such a wonderful welter of Biblical and other allusions that the point could all too easily be missed).

Of course, it would be good to use other people from the congregation to read poems in services, but that would depend on their ability to do so, and, I would maintain, a willingness to be "produced" to achieve the best result. (At this point, and with next Sunday nearly upon you, it is usually easier to do it yourself!). Possibly one of our problems with poetry is that we are unfamiliar with it whereas hymns have grown on us with frequent use. So perhaps we have to use some poems more frequently, especially those evoking praise and prayer, and make copies available to people for their continued reflection after the service.

# SPOTLIGHT ON THE PULPIT

**ANNE PEAT, Primary School Teacher and a Lay Reader at St Mary's shared Anglican/Methodist Church, Rickmansworth recalls what it was like to be a *Times* Preacher of the Year Finalist.**

If you ask most people, and especially children, what is the least enjoyable part of a church service, they will probably say "the sermon". Yet, for many of us in Christian ministry, the sermon is the focal point, the place where people are helped to make the connection between the Word of God and their everyday lives.

In 1995, Ruth Gledhill, the Religion Correspondent of *The Times*, decided to do something to encourage good practice in preaching. At the same time, Bishop James Jones put a similar idea to the College of Preachers, an ecumenical organisation dedicated to improving preaching through putting on courses, the circulation of sermons, and the recommendation of books. The College, together with *The Times*, agreed to sponsor the first 'Preacher of the Year' Award.

On the Sunday after the Award had been announced in the Saturday edition of *The Times*, I was preaching at both the Anglican and Methodist services at our local Ecumenical Parish where Anglicans and Methodists share a building. Members of both congregations spoke to me after the service, and encouraged me to enter for the award. I spent a great deal of time looking through the scripts of sermons I had preached, and finally chose one on The Good Samaritan to send in. This, I felt, was theologically weighty, about the right length (fifteen minutes or 3,000 words) and had also received a good response from the congregation when I preached it. The sermons had to be submitted by the end of March, and the 30 preachers who had made the short-list were to be announced in June. I was not one of them! I read the list of names with interest, as I did that of the six finalists who were announced in September. My congregations were disappointed that I had not been chosen, but I concluded that my sermons were not to the taste of *The Times*.

In January, 1996, I received an entry form for the 1997 Award; I presume they were sent to everyone who entered the first year. I wasn't going to do anything about it, and left it on my desk, where it soon got lost under a pile of papers. I was clearing my desk just before the closing date for entries in March, and finding the entry form again, thought "Why not?". Picking up a script of a recently preached sermon that was waiting there ready to be filed away, I sent it in, so casually that I did not even keep a record of its subject.

## **Media Figures.**

I forgot about the Award, and had no thoughts of any connection when I opened a letter with a London postmark one Tuesday in June. I was amazed to find that I had made the short list of 30. The first thing the letter asked me to do was to sign away the copyright to the sermon, since they are all published in a book each year, edited by Ruth Gledhill, with profits going to help promote good preaching. Next, I was told to expect a communication from the College of Preachers, informing me of who would be coming to judge me in the next round. This filled me with terror, as I knew the judges of the first competition included senior churchmen, theological college lecturers and major media figures, such as Ludovic Kennedy and John Gummer. I could not imagine preaching well, with one of them sitting in the pew in front of me, taking notes.

In fact, this round was less terrifying than I had anticipated. My 'judge' was a fellow Reader from a neighbouring parish, whom I knew well, but who just happened to be a member of the College of Preachers. She came, by prior arrangement, to a small Methodist chapel where I was preaching, one Sunday morning in July. The congregation numbered only 18 in total, so I had a very clear view of what she was doing - and to this day I do not know how this round is judged, for she took no notes, made no recording, and didn't even ask for a copy of the sermon script or talk to those who attended the service.

A *Times* photographer had come to shoot off a roll of film of me standing robed in the pulpit and the churchyard, and one of his photos accompanied the list of those who made the short-list, but at this stage there was very little media interest. During August, an editor contacted me to discuss the form of the sermon that would be published in *The Times Best Sermons of 1996*. This was my first opportunity to find out which sermon I had sent in: when they asked me to tell them the biblical text on which it was based, I had to say "If you tell me the first line, I will be able to give you the texts!" Although we were urged to publicise the book in our local book shops and media, which I did, there was no response.

### **Strange Land**

I knew that the list of finalists would be published in *The Times* on a Saturday early in September, and when I had heard nothing by midday on Thursday 8th, I concluded I had not made the final, so I was astounded to receive a call from Ruth Gledhill in the afternoon to say I was in the final. I was so overcome that I failed to ask who the other finalists were, and only found the names out later from a local radio station who phoned for an interview. As I was the only woman in the final, media attention was quite intense, and my family got used to taking over my domestic duties when yet another radio station called wanting an immediate interview. The secular stations were much more interested than the Christian ones, and it was a splendid opportunity, I felt, to put the case for Christianity and for preaching, to people who might not otherwise think about these things. The local paper published a photo of me on their front page, under the awful headline "Anne's in the final. Alleluia!" and a Channel Four News crew followed me round the parish on the day before the final, and broadcast a long item on the Award in their evening bulletin. The final also featured in both the BBC and ITV news bulletins that evening - the church for once making news for doing what it is there for, rather than because of a scandal.

The final took the form of a service in Southwark Cathedral, in which each of the five finalists preached a ten minute sermon, with hymns, prayers and anthems in between each. My fellow finalists came from the Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Methodist Church (the only other lay preacher) and the Roman Catholic Church. Each of us had to preach on a verse from a psalm, allocated to us. I was allocated "How shall we sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?" from Psalm 137. When I thought about it before the final, I was aware I had a choice of whether to preach a sermon to win, or whether to preach a message which might not be popular with the judges, but which I felt needed saying. In the end, I chose to make a plea for using a variety of music, especially that which appeals to the young, in our worship, in order to have the Lord's song heard in the 'strange land' which is outside our church doors.

It was a nerve racking experience, since the Cathedral contained a much larger congregation than I had ever preached to before, most of them complete strangers. However, a coach load of over 50 friends, family and members of congregations came to hear and support me, and once I got into the pulpit, I simply relaxed and



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tried to do my best to preach the message I felt God had given me.

### **Front Pages**

I didn't win the award that year (much to my family's relief!), but the media attention continued with an interview on GMTV's Sunday Programme, and invitations to contribute sermons and book reviews to the College of Preachers' journal, and a regular religious article for a local paper. The award also got me involved in training other Readers in the art of preaching.

In 1997, the College of Preachers invited all the 1996 finalists, together with the winner of 1995, to be the panel of judges for the final of that year's award in Durham Cathedral. Unfortunately (so I thought) all the finalist that year were Anglicans, though there were two women, one of them a Reader like me. We were entertained in style at *The Times'* expense, to lunch at the Cathedral before the final, and to dinner at the Bishop of Durham's palace afterwards. Those of us who had gone through the ordeal of preaching at a final had forged strong bonds of friendship, and this continued with those who were finalists in 1997.

Before we heard the sermons, we were given a check list of things to look out for, such as 'Was there a clear message?'; 'Did the sermon engage both the mind and the emotions?'; 'Was the voice used effectively?'; 'Was there a sense of God speaking through the preacher?' and Joan Bakewell, who was chairing the judges' panel, asked us to come back to her at the end with a first, second and third in our minds. After the first four sermons had been preached, I was beginning to think that being a judge was as bad as being a finalist, since they were all equally good, but none was outstanding; but Paul Walker, who preached last, was so inspired that all of us were unanimous in giving him the title of 'Preacher of the Year, 1997'.

The format of the award has changed over the years. Each year the prize has been a specially commissioned statuette of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove; but in some years there has also been a cash prize for the winner, and the finalists. In 1997, tape recordings of sermons, as well as scripts were accepted, in an attempt to make things fairer for those who don't speak from a full text, although I understand from the College of Preachers that they found sermons very difficult to judge in this form. The greatest change has been in 1998, when entries from Jewish preachers were invited, as well as those from Christian denominations. This change has meant that the College of Preachers decided to withdraw its sponsorship from the award.

For some people, the whole idea of a preaching 'competition' is anathema, and of course, different sermons, and different styles will reach different people. However, the award has placed the preaching ministry of the church on the front pages of newspapers and on the TV news each year, and has been a stimulus to many people to take seriously the art of preaching, and to disseminate examples of good practice, which can only be good news for our congregations. After all, as someone once said, "No-one has ever been bored into faith".

---

*Ed. The Times, Best Sermons* edited and introduced by Ruth Gledhill (Cassell) has been published annually since 1995. Each collection (of around 30) is chosen from hundreds of entries. A Baptist has yet to make it to the semi-finals, though sermons by Baptists do feature in the collections.

# WHY Mr. SPURGEON HAD LESS TROUBLE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

**ROBERT GARDINER, Minister of Harrow Baptist Church reflects on the Church and the Child.**

Is it necessary to have been baptised to take communion? If faith is a prerequisite for baptism what constitutes faith?

As Baptists begin to recognise infant baptism - through co-operation in Local Ecumenical Projects, etc. are they implying that children who have been baptised as babies have a higher status than those that have not? If not does that baptism signify nothing? If we adopt the alternative of not recognising infant baptism are we going to insist on "believers' baptism" for mature adults who join our fellowships after lifetimes of dedicated Christian service, or offer only associate membership thereby implying that they are less members than others who perhaps have made less commitment in terms of Christian service but just happened to have been brought up in a Baptist church?

Baptism is entry into the church. Does this mean that unbaptised children are not members of the body? If not what are they? And if they are baptised very young are they to be full members and if not why not? Are they less able to help in the discovery of the mind of Christ despite what Jesus said about all members becoming like little children?

Is a child capable of faith or does faith come as a Piaget like stage of development along with a sense of time etc.?

Given our ecclesiology of the gathered people, how do we make whole families part of the fellowship where only one parent is a member, and even where both parents (or the single parent) are members what status do the children have? Is it different from that of those who attend from non-church families?

What is the purpose and status of infant presentation? Is it paedobaptism without water? If so does that mean that Baptists are saying that it is the use of water that is important?

How do we get young people involved in the church meeting? How old does one have to be to participate in the church meeting?

Is there any evidence from the history of the church or from its practices in other countries that can help us? Are there any trends towards younger baptisms?

Has our attitude to the child changed in our present age?

What practical steps can we take to bring our children to baptism and communion in that order?

Now that "family communion" is often the norm, what can we offer young children? In Anglicanism they are offered a blessing if they go to the rail, but in Baptist churches we have no mechanism for that. Some issue 'smarties' and pop - is that a solution we are happy with?

What practical steps can we take in our worship, church education and nurture structures, and pastoral care to ensure that children are valued not only as the "church of tomorrow" but as "people of today"?

## **Most Sacred**

It seems to me essential that any answers to these questions must take account

of the following principles:

- That we must take children seriously.
- That in this ecumenical age we must be sensitive to the traditions and practices of the church universal.
- That we remain faithful to our Baptist identity, affirming baptism as a sign of faith, and the church as the covenanting community of those committed to Christ in the world, though at the same time recognising that there are other images of the church in the New Testament, not least being that of a pilgrim people.
- That we do not set up barriers of hostility between church and world that make contact let alone evangelism all but impossible.

I see no grounds for giving communion to the unbaptised as a matter of routine practice. There will be those who are unbaptised to whom we give communion out of pastoral necessity or to avoid painful discrimination - but I do not believe that we can build a policy out of these cases and still expect to retain the respect of fellow Christians in the Episcopal traditions. To do so would be not only to stand outside the long tradition of the church, but to stand outside our own traditions as Baptists too. In so doing we either reduce baptism to being an optional extra, or give the impression that Communion is not an act of significant commitment. But it was precisely because the baptism of infants was seen as being an underselling of what baptism meant that our forbears were prepared to suffer persecution for practising believers' baptism. And though there has been, since the second half of the nineteenth century, a strand in our denomination that has "downgraded" communion (e.g. the position of John Clifford - described by J.H.Y. Briggs as "dangerously minimalist"<sup>1</sup> I would maintain that Baptist principles at their best and most enduring have never allowed communion to be taken lightly. Spurgeon said: 'Now we enter the holy of holies, and come to the most sacred meeting-place between our souls and God.'<sup>2</sup> If people are ready to take communion, to identify with the broken and risen body of Christ, then it is time they were baptised.

### **Special Occasion**

It follows, then, that if we are to give communion to children then we will have to baptise children. The research into Faith development is interesting but seems to tell us more about adults than it does children. It is at least clear that faith development is a lifelong process and choosing a moment for baptism along this Pilgrimage is going to be somewhat arbitrary. It is notoriously difficult to get responses from children to questions about faith simply because the answers given are more likely to indicate levels of articulation rather than depth or nature of faith. It is interesting that some of those who have spent lifetimes carrying out the research seem to suggest that faith is "natural" and lack of faith is learnt! 'We are reopotentiated .....we have as part of our creatively evolved biological heritage the generative deep-structural tendencies that make possible our development as partners with one another and with God'<sup>3</sup>. This hypothesis has been corroborated by research by Hardy, Kojetin and Jackson, all suggesting that the capacity to have spiritual experience is biologically rather than culturally conditioned. Dialogues conducted by Robert Coles show children to have "a dynamic spiritual life .... a living matter of personal experience"<sup>4</sup>. Work by Vygotsky unsurprisingly discovered that children have profound spiritual experiences but that they are not able to articulate them as such until later in life when they can then recognise them. Nye and Hay seeking to study the spirituality of six and ten year olds have revealed that although their work is at an early stage they have found "clear presence of what can be defined as spirituality in all the transcripts so far."<sup>5</sup> It is therefore

suggested that at least one element of a church child programme might be to make available to children the experiences and the interpretative language to understand and articulate what they have known but could not express.

Now whatever else it is, baptism is a powerful religious experience. However reluctant we might be to claim any special anointing of the spirit in baptism, I have yet to meet many people baptised as believers for whom it was not a special occasion accompanied by some kind of spiritual sign - tears, release, joy, peace, glow or excitement arising out of a sense of rightness with God. For many of us it is a day etched on our memory more clearly than most. And that memory can sometimes carry us through days when we feel distant from God. Somehow we can look back to that day and know that we are His. For some, of course, the day pales into insignificance when compared with the day of "conversion" But for others conversion did not happen on a single day let alone at a single moment. For many brought up in Christian families sudden conversions have to be invented. For them it will be baptism that is the turning point: rather as a wedding is for those who have already been long living together: it is the public demonstration of a total commitment that has been a long time in the making. I married such a couple recently: as the groom made his vows tears streamed down his face. the bride told me at the reception that she could not have believed that the day would be such an enriching spiritual experience: in one sense nothing had changed, but in another everything had. Living together had become marriage and they were not the same.

### **Milk and Honey**

The wrong of infant baptism is that it robs children of the memory, which can feed spiritual development. But the wrong of leaving baptism too late is that it can perpetuate an unstable "Living together" in which commitment is always avoided, and a public announcement of it is shunned. Being immersed in water and taking bread and wine are not so much about knowing in the Greek sense of the word - as about knowing in the Hebrew sense of deep relationship. David Tennant has soundly said, "the desire to have understanding before participation is such a big issue amongst many that it seems to smack of a kind of gnosticism."<sup>6</sup> Ambrose put it, "Understanding always follows faith." But perhaps Neville Clark put it best of all when he pointed out that it is not a question of now I understand, now I know; rather "this is where I belong and this being how things are, now I must choose."<sup>7</sup> We need to bring children to this state of readiness to make them ready for response. We often delay baptism until the mid-teen years when it can then appear to be a passing out parade - the rite of leaving the church rather than joining it! And even when this does not happen it often leaves insufficient time for nurture in the body of the church being available before the teenager goes off to the wilderness of college.

To help them move forwards in faith development we must make children feel part of the worshipping community: teach them liturgical language through participation and encourage them to make steps of commitment. I believe that baptism should come early in these steps. Children should be encouraged from an early age to be present at communion. Infant presentation could take place at communion so that there is less distinction between this and receiving in new members. This would be particularly appropriate when the baby is the child of church members. Then the presentation could be accompanied by anointing with oil, and blessing in this way could be repeated annually on the Sunday nearest to the birthday - or for all unbaptised children on Pentecost. Our current practice often seems to be little more than an apology for not baptising. Children should then grow up gradually appreciating what the breaking of bread means, the language of

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the service should become part of their ordinary experience. If the peace is shared then they should be part of that sharing: they might be able to take it in turns perhaps to bring to the table the bread and wine. Some churches offer milk and honey to children at communion. I am not altogether happy about this as I cannot really see what it is meant to signify; but sometimes they might bake the bread as part of their "Sunday School" activity.

### **Southern Baptists**

Too often these days we give the children an action song - push them off into Sunday School and that's it. Not surprisingly when they are too old for the action song they have no desire to stay in the church. When worship is too dull for children, if truth were told, it is probably too dull for adults too. Is it so extraordinary that adults constantly say at the church door that they liked the children's address best? The practice of running Sunday School concurrently with morning worship has obvious practical advantages but it has resulted in children being deprived of the opportunity to share fully in worship. Schemes like Partners in Learning, especially where the children re-enter the service before the end and share with the congregation their insights into the theme for the day, lead in prayer or perform a sketch or sing a song, help unify the two activities. But school is not worship. Education is not what the church is about. The Southern Baptists with their strict division between all-age Sunday School and morning worship seem to get nearer the ideal.

Where that is seen as too radical, the children should remain within the church on regular occasions for complete services. Quite clearly that puts a responsibility on the one conducting worship to make it involving to the children: but this should not mean that it all has to be "understood". Worship does not operate wholly at the conscious level. "When the life of the church is healthy and strong it is the place where the tradition of the people of God is effectively handed on in such manner as to illumine, disturb and transfigure developing experience and elicit appropriate responses and commitments."<sup>8</sup> But it must be authentic. Children are the lackest of all to appreciate the slick, meaningless show - the empty gesture, the lack of integrity that adults often put on for their benefit. Once again Neville Clark hits the right note: "our children will always know when we are involved with something of life and death significance to us. They might not understand it; it may seem largely a mystery to them. But it is a mystery shot through with its own strange meaning because it matters to us and it matters desperately"<sup>9</sup> How did Jesus put it? 'Worship in spirit and in truth,' or as we might like to put it these days - with life and integrity. The great evangelist Moody had a similar opinion: he was asked, "How shall we interest children in the regular church services?" He replied, "Let them feel they are part of the church" The questioner continued: 'Would you admit very young persons to church membership?' "Certainly if they have given good evidence of being converted. Mr Spurgeon has said that he has had less trouble with young people who have joined the church than anyone else; there is less backsliding among them. if they are looked after, they make the best Christian workers; but it is cruel to take them into membership of the church and then neglect them by preaching right over their heads. It is not fair to starve them out and then complain because they backslide."<sup>10</sup>

### **Pilot Parishes**

We will not therefore be imposing conversion on children: we will be offering them step by step opportunities of sharing in worship until such time that they want to be fully part of the life of the church. Then we baptise. That will not be the end: we would hope that our churches have nurture groups and provide opportunities to

serve. In the past Christian Endeavour did precisely that. Many of our current ministers and church leaders were trained in CE. But preparation must not end at baptism. Nurture will continue until full Christian maturity is achieved in heaven. Children who have been baptised will of course be sharing in communion. They will also be present at church meetings. These would no longer be in the evenings attended by small minorities of members but as a family occasion - perhaps over lunch or an agape meal after a morning service. The presence of children might do much to improve the atmosphere of some of these church meetings. Certainly if their presence did something to make us look at the church meeting again to make it more meaningful and inclusive that would be a most helpful consequence.

If we are looking for a lower age limit - then the historic one of seven would seem to be appropriate. That takes account of the importance of the development of memory. However, children should come to a desire for baptism in their own time: the age of seven is just for guidance. We should also make up our minds to accept those baptised as babies from other fellowships on affirmation of baptism. But some baptised as babies will prefer believers' baptism and for those I find the suggestions in the BU pamphlet quite sensible and sensitive."<sup>11</sup> The Anglican experiment of offering communion to those over the age of seven in pilot parishes has been an unqualified success. Here are just a few of the positive comments participating parishes reported: "They feel part of the church family sharing in a common meal"; "the children begin to feel valuable within the congregation"; "It seems to encourage their journey of faith"; "there is less of a tendency having come in during the service to fail to engage with it"; "The congregation is facing up to the implications of including children, seeing that they are truly part of the church"; "It says something to the congregation about 'coming as children' to Christ when they see committed children"; "Enthusiasm among younger children knowing that they soon will have the opportunity of joining in"; "There is more point to the church's policy of the children returning to the service if the service is more all-age than exclusive?"<sup>12</sup> The reported problems were very few. Many congregations experienced none. But the main two related to children of "free church backgrounds" who had not been baptised and those from non-church backgrounds who might receive insufficient parental support. If the conclusions stated here are put into practice then one of those problems might be solved!

When I embarked on this subject I was not expecting to end up with these conclusions. I always was and remain opposed to offering communion to the unbaptised as a deliberate policy and all I have encountered in my research has confirmed this view. But I had been routinely opposed to the baptism of children under the age of thirteen. This study, however, has resulted in a radical change of mind. I cannot expect to change the minds of others - but pray at least that they might be pushed a little ajar!

#### Footnotes:

1. Briggs p 68 *Baptists of the 19th Century?*
2. Spurgeon: *Till He Come*, quoted by Briggs, p68
3. Fowler, 1992, quoted in *Research in Religious Education*, Francis, Kay and Campbell, p61
4. Robert Coles, *Spiritual Life of Children*, 1983, quoted in *Research in Religious Education* p51
5. *Research in Religious Education*, p64
6. *Children and Communion* p10, available from BUGB.
7. Neville Clark, *Worship and the Child*, JLG, SPCK, 1975, p64
8. Neville Clark, op cit, p62
9. Neville Clark, op cit p67
10. *The Christian*, 17th August 1882
11. *Believing and Being Baptised*, BUGB
12. Pierce and Murrie, *Children and Holy Communion*, p18

# J-Mail

## EVIDENCE FROM THE PAST

*From John Morgan-Wynne,  
Minister Ilkley Baptist Church.*

Dear Journal, I was amazed at the Revd Mike Smith's strictures on OT teaching in general and in Oxford in the Sixties in particular.

1. He hides behind anonymous charges and mentions no specific names. Now I read Theology at Oxford through Regent's in 1958-60 (i.e. slightly before Mike Smith) and I do not recognise the grossly exaggerated picture which he draws (*Journal*, Volume 263 p16, specifically there on teaching about the Pentateuch.)

I heard three scholars lecture on the OT. Dr Henton Davies used to teach the idea of "streams" of tradition behind the Pentateuch, going back very early in Israel's history, some material to Mosaic Yahwism. He taught the northern provenance of much material in Deuteronomy (see his commentary in the New Peake). I also heard J.R. Porter lecturing on Judges, and he distinguished between the deuteronomic editing and much earlier material preserved originally within different tribes. Thus, both these scholars distinguished between a final composition and the material used within it which could be considerably older. Professor H.F.D. Sparkes' introductory course was 'middle of the road' critical approach. (Later in the sixties Eric Heaton returned to Oxford but he doesn't fit Mike Smith's strictures).

2. What of Mike Smith's alleged "critical consensus on the OT"? I find it distorted. Let us take just a few issues. First, the debate over the Conquest as depicted in Joshua. The student had the

work of Albright, Wright and Bright to balance more radical views. But, in any case, anyone has to deal with the evidence from Judges of a more gradual, piecemeal occupation, and also with evidence of a push from the south. Secondly, the patriarchal period and the Exodus: Rowley's treatment of both offered a fairly conservative approach to them. Thirdly, it was also common to date the Yahwist source (J) to David's reign and to accept the Succession Narrative as a nearly contemporary work. The assertion that it was critical orthodoxy to regard David as an invention is just laughable.

I am not an OT specialist, but I would like to make two observations on the main substance of Mike Smith's article, largely concerned with method.

1. The Ketef Hinnom Amulet, with the Aaronic blessing inscribed. This Blessing - the one priestly blessing actually given in the OT - would be in use long before it was written down and incorporated in P and the Pentateuch. One cannot leap to the conclusion that the Pentateuch must have existed in written form from the seventh century, simply because of this amulet, which seems to be what Mike Smith is hinting at (top of p18 - incidentally it is curious to find Martin Noth described as "ancient"!).
2. The Altar on Mount Ebal. The suggested date of this altar agrees with what J Maxwell Miller (hardly a conservative writer) suggested in 1977 was the period of the settlement, c1200-1000 and the area in the central mountainous region. What Mike Smith seems to be inferring is that the discovery of this altar proves "Joshua woz 'ere" (sic p15) and that therefore the account of the invasion of Canaan by Pan Israel as recounted in the Book of Joshua must be taken



at face value. This is, however, an exegetical sleight of hand. The existence of an altar at Ebal dating back to c1200 BC does not of itself prove what is being hinted at.

My task has been limited. In the main I am protesting against the denigration of individual scholars in Oxford and the caricature of OT scholarship available to a student in the sixties. Mike Smith was guilty of the old tactic of smearing one's 'opponents' and hoping that some of the smear sticks. A man of his unquestionable ability ought to know better. A combative style can be entertaining, but those inclined to abrasiveness must be careful lest truth is a casualty of their verbal dexterity.

## REQUESTS FOR PRAYER

*From David J Laskey, Chelmsford*

Dear Journal, In the April and July issues it has been good to see reference being made to Ministers under notice and Ministers out of Pastorate in the section 'Requests for Prayer' within the general section 'Of interest to you'.

However, this is still only a fleeting reference - we can only pray generally. Can there not be a more specific reference - i.e. by name? I am certain the Executive would have considered this possibility at some time or other. Please may we be informed of the outcome of its deliberations on this matter?

On page 31 of the last issue, mention is made that, 'The BMF seeks to encourage Ministers ... by trying to keep in touch with ... members at times of change'. Ministers under notice and/or out of Pastorate are at a time of change. How will the BMF Executive ensure that this aim is implemented?

## OF INTEREST TO YOU

*From Roger L Cuin, Watford*

Dear Journal, I received the latest issue and, as is my custom, I skimmed through the pages to get an overview of the contents and finally came to the pages *Of Interest to You*.

As is the case with each issue, it is interesting to see who has settled where and to see if any of my own colleagues have moved.

It was with great interest that I read the list of names of those who have retired. Allowing for the possibility that there might just be another Roger Cuin who I do not know, I was somewhat surprised to find that I had retired!

In some respects it would be nice to think that were a possibility, but I have a few years to go yet! I am, however, one of the many nation-wide who is under notice because of financial difficulties in the church, but too young to consider early retirement.

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*From Jack Ramsbottom,  
26 Chilton Road, Chesham, Bucks,  
HP5 2AT*

Dear Journal, The next BMF Preparation for Retirement Conference will take place at High Leigh from June 15th to 17th 1999, and is for those retiring in or before June 2001.

Those interested should write to me at the above address.

*Letters may be abbreviated*

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**HOLIDAYS 1999** The January issue of *The Journal* will feature the usual list of holiday accommodation. Notices for inclusion in this feature need to be in the Editor's hands by **24th October 1998**.

# Book Reviews

*edited by John Houseago*

***The Theology of Paul the Apostle, James D G Dunn :***

**T & T Clark: Edinburgh 1998 pp 809 : £29.95**

This is a book for all of us. At first sight there might appear to be a number of things against the purchase of this volume by very busy and not very well-off Baptist ministers. One is the price; the second is its length, the third is its sheer weight (nearly 3lbs or 1.35 kilos)! But don't be put off. To use the well worn cliché - the book is worth its weight in gold. Indeed it is a remarkable piece of work, comprehensive in virtually every sense of that word.

For those few of us who claim to be New Testament experts seeking always to keep abreast of scholarship - this is a book for us. Its introductory bibliography alone - some 200 titles is worth having on our shelves. Then there is a separate bibliography at the head of each of the nine sections into which the book is divided. Just as important is that this is a book for all of us who have the responsibility of preaching and teaching the Word of God. For it sets out the Gospel of Jesus Christ as Paul received it, proclaimed it, taught it and lived it. What is more Dunn sets it out in plain and readable English full of relevant detail. This is not surprising for the book is the outcome of a long process, beginning with the author's own studies, continuing through his many years of lecturing and writing and finally emerging from the sounding board of a seminar. The clarity and stimulation of the 'contents' list alone make this process quite evident.

Significantly he explains how he came to chose the title. He says that to call it 'The Theology of Paul' would seem to limit it to circles of biblical scholarship. So Dunn's solution is to use the title "which Paul prized above all others and which he insisted upon as his most regular self description and that was Apostle".

Paul was an Apostle called by God to the service of Jesus Christ and sent by God with the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel in word and action. The book describes how Paul did just that.

Dunn has a Prologue, an Epilogue and 7 chapters in between. The chapter headings speak for themselves and sum up the contents admirably: God and Humankind; Humankind under Indictment; The Gospel of Jesus Christ; The Beginning of Salvation; The Process of Salvation; The Church; How should Believers Live? Within each chapter there are subdivisions, 25 in all with subheadings under each, about 180 in all. The very valuable and properly provocative subdivision on Ethics in Practise in the final main chapter has subheadings which include: Living within a hostile world; Living with fundamental disagreements; Living between two worlds; Sexual conduct.

Such headings indicate the book's relevance to Christian life in today's world. But the book also has relevance to our current discussions within the Church itself with challenging sections in the chapter on the Beginning of Salvation entitled Justification by Faith, the Gift of the Spirit, Baptism. In the chapter on the Church there is a sub-division on Ministry and Authority and subheadings on Redefining Corporate Identity; Charismatic Community; An Unrealistic Vision.

My advice to all would be to go to the nearest book shop which is likely to have this book on its shelves, take it down (don't drop it!) and read the content list on pp VII - XIII at the front of the book. I shall be surprised if you do not then feel that the outlay of £29.99 is likely to be repaid many times over. After all it is just about the

price of a tankful of petrol for our 'Gospel Chariots', which take us several hundred miles, but the value of this book, a Gospel Treasury, is such that it has the mileage of a life-time (even of the youngest of us!).

**Morris West**

***The Lost Art of Forgiving*, J Christoph Arnold. Plough Books. 192 pp. £7.99**

The harrowing cover picture of Phan Thi Kim Phue, a naked girl, running burnt and crying from the napalmed village of Trang Bang, Vietnam, 1972, and the title *The lost Art of Forgiving* eloquently symbolise the gulf that Johann Christoph Arnold believes can be bridged by a readiness to receive the gift of forgiving. The inset picture, taken 24 years later, of Kim with John Palmer, the U S pilot who planned that attack, testified to the reality of Arnold's vision.

This is not a theological treatise on the importance of being forgiving people and the consequences of our ability to be so. In true post-modern style, that teaching is found in story-telling; real life stories from death row in the 1990's and Jewish experiences of Nazi Germany, from victims of child abuse, terrorism and violent crime and nearer home with stories from everyday life. This is not an overtly Christian book and as such has a universal appeal to a universal human experience. However, one catches the fragrances of deeply held Christian convictions permeating its pages.

Arnold's thesis, that true healing from the bitterness of such experiences can only come from the ability to forgive, is one which we should endorse, although we realise that it is not that simple. Arnold's stories illustrate well the struggle to find the ability to forgive and the surprising simplicity with which the gift of forgiving comes.

If you question whether forgiving can ever be a workable option in the darkness of life's bitter experience or that it could work in a particular situation, read this book, be convinced and encouraged to hold out for that healing. I was thrilled by this story book, and encouraged to believe that forgiving can provide the healing of individuals and, dare I say, of nations.

**Philip Mader-Grayson**

***Visions of Hope: An Anthology of Reflections* Compiled by William Sykes.  
The Bible Reading Fellowship £10.99**

A Friend, when things were failing apart, discovered quilting. Gathering scraps, merging designs, creating order from different things - this became an aspect of re-integrating a disordered life. The story behind this rich anthology is not dissimilar. A young priest finds his experience and the faith of the Church no longer connect. In his struggle to rediscover the truth and integrity of both, the God-given potential for life breathed through the Genesis stories and in the gospel of Christ strikes him with new hope. Seeking to grow in this 'vision of hope', he gathers together the recorded experience of saints and theologians, poets and novelists, philosophers and scientists and others too, with texts from Scripture.

Over a period of years, these gatherings have resourced small reflection groups, and this volume sets out sayings and passages in seventy-five topics - such as 'Acceptance', 'Character' 'Failure' 'Money', 'Work'. The group is invited to chose a topic, read the 'patchwork' of passages and enabled to reflect on them.

This sounded similar to the sort of things we find helpful in home groups, so I was keen to try out some of the themes. It was perplexing to find that the time went badly. This may have something to do with the length of some of the passages and that there were rather too many in each section for a group more 'mixed ability' in its reading skills than in the university environment in which it was

first used. However, the anthology does contain much that is helpful and thought provoking, garnered from it wide range of writers.

**Hazel Sherman.**

***Aid Matters*, by Alec Gilmore. SCM Press. 160 pp. £9.95.**

*Aid Matters* is one of those publications once picked up is easy to put down! Not because of failure of the compiler to gain attention, poor format, small print, poor content or confusing presentation, but because it hurts! There is no doubt that this compilation is at the hard core end of waking western Christians from comfort and indifference to aid issues. *Aid Matters* is a compilation of human story, personal testimony, cutting quotes, and reflective short articles with the addition of Bible study outlines, prayer prompters and suggestions for further action. The material is collated thematically and according to the Christian year. The framework is clearly evident throughout each section but does not inhibit users taking parts of any section and creating their own links and flows.

Although very particularly targeted for "all involved in aid and development" the material has immense potential for the influence of an audience far beyond. *Aid Matters* easily lends itself as a resource for generating challenging and informed intercession in acts of Christian worship, and to create times of reflection and self examination that challenge the many false presumptions and paternal attitudes that still permeates too much of our aid giving. As a small group work book its content is easily accessible and, with a little creative selection, could easily generate prolonged and profitable discussion over issues as everyday as where and how to take your holiday.

*Aid Matters* challenges those of us who have, with quality insight into the lives those who are the 'have nots'. It provides the recipient of Western aid the opportunity to speak directly to the givers of Western aid.

In my experience *Aid Matters* uniquely and courageously encourages the evaluation and assessment of those agencies who are the go-betweens, inviting the reader to critically assess and more wisely discern who they should trust to give their aid through. You may find that not every item included shares the same ability to stimulate or potential to impact, however, a significant proportion of its content is so concentrated with insight and challenge, *Aid Matters* is without doubt a sound investment.

**Keith Nichols**

***Gone but not Forgotten* by Philip Richter & Leslie Francis,  
Dartman, Longman & Todd. £10.95**

This book challenges us to face and understand a neglected pastoral issue by listening to those who have left the church. The statistics show a disturbing exodus of about 1,500 each week. Apparently that is as many out of the back door as are coming through the front door of our churches!

The book is well researched and clearly presented. Through a mixture of personal responses, statistical analysis and discerning comment the authors examine eight factors contributing to this exodus. It includes a helpful look at changing cultural values and a thoughtful analysis of the different stages through which people grow in faith. Overall three main reasons for leaving emerge - loss of faith, unfulfilled expectations about the church, and the chances and changes of life (moving, bereavement, illness etc.). The latter can also be a key factor in people returning.

Contrary to the title it appears that church leavers are often forgotten. Many

replied that if only churches had made contact during the first six to eight weeks of absence things might have been different. Encouragingly however, 45 per cent of respondents had not finally closed the door on returning. The last chapter, "Shaping the future" helpfully suggests how we might seize this mission opportunity. It spells out eleven points of good pastoral practice to help churches retain members and encourage leavers to return.

For all those involved in ministry this is an extremely useful book. It offers a stimulating basis for a much needed discussion in our churches.

**David Ronco**

***An Outline of Christian Worship* by Gordon S Wakefield.**

**T & T Clark 1998 x + 246pp (hardback) £23.95**

The author's purpose is to offer a guide to the journey through liturgical history and controversy and to inform understanding about the ever-developing ecumenical situation, in a way that offers some personal critique and assists right judgement.

The ground covered includes the origins of Christian worship, the development of church order, the division between East and West, the Reformed rites, the Church of England liturgy, the Puritans and their successors, Presbyterianism and Methodism, post-Reformation Catholic developments, the Liturgical Movement, new directions and non-eucharistic daily worship, personal and corporate.

Much of the book comprises detailed descriptions of particular liturgies, which is informative but does not make exciting reading. However, amidst the liturgical minutiae there are some thought-provoking comments; ethics was more important in the preparation of the catechumenate than theology (which do we emphasise more in our baptismal instruction?), the Puritan service with lack of colour and little participation by the people, depended on the minister being a person of charisma for dullness to be avoided (are things very different in Baptist worship today?), Jungman's words 'it is by studying the past that we can best learn how to shape the future' (one good reason for ministers to read the book), new liturgies have recovered the Word but may have become too verbal (is most Baptist worship open to this criticism?)

Unfortunately, there is no history of Baptist worship, perhaps because it has not been liturgical (in which case the book's title is a misnomer). There are four pages describing the participation of Baptists in the liturgical movement, 'Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship' and 'Baptist Praise and Worship', but no reference is made to its responsive readings and prayers (unlike the URC's 'Rejoice and Sing'), and its predecessor is mistakenly called 'The Baptist Hymnal'.

**John V Matthews**

***The Baptismal Service - A Guide* by David Stone.**

**Hodder & Stoughton 1998 142pp £5.99**

The Anglican emphasis in some places should not cause Baptist ministers to ignore this book, the bulk of which consists of eleven chapters expounding baptism and the Christian life, each with the word 'new' in the title ('a new birth', 'a new freedom', 'a new relationship with God' etc.) and based on a biblical passage. The material here is eminently suitable for enquirers or baptismal candidates and, as it is written in a chatty style, copies of the book could be given to them. The text of the proposed Anglican Baptism Service is included and explained. The questions asked of those able to answer for themselves are rather better than those in some Baptist services!

**John V Matthews**