

# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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*editor: GETHIN ABRAHAM-WILLIAMS*

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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

## How?

People are already bored to tears by the Millennium. There are signs though that the passing of time on this scale (let's not quibble here about precise dates!) is nevertheless making many think about ultimate reality in unexpected ways.

'Most people have lived with some narrative of eternity and an afterlife – and its abandonment in the developed west in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century does not seem to have made things much better,' wrote Sara Maitland recently. But times are changing, she noted. And the question now being asked is, 'Not is there an afterlife, but how can there be an afterlife? It has intellectual meat, but it presupposes a possibility.'

After quite a lengthy sterile period we are, therefore, beginning to move into an age in which religious issues and religious questions are again on ordinary people's agenda. The evangelistic opportunities of this changing climate are obvious. But they will only yield dividends if they are handled imaginatively and intelligently. *How* we answer the 'how?' is going to be critical.

During the summer I whiled away a long coach journey to and from Tuscany reading Humphrey Carpenter's hefty biography of the playwright, Dennis Potter. (I can still recall the impact of his TV play, 'Son of Man' in 1969.) By the time he was married with a family and a career, Potter had moved a long way from the certainties of the Gloucestershire nonconformity in which he grew up, veering between aggressive agnosticism and reluctant faith. Life had also become an immense struggle with the psoriatic arthropathy that afflicted most of his adulthood.

In an interview with Melvyn Bragg weeks before he died, Potter said, 'religion to me has always been the wound, not the bandage'. Then he gave this final testimony: 'I see God ... as some shreds and particles and rumours, some knowledge that we have, some feeling why we sing and dance and act, why we paint, why we love, why we make art. All the things that separate us from the purely animal in us are palpably there, and you can call them what you like, and you can theologize about them and you can build great structures of belief about them.'

There are a great many people like Potter on the fringes of our churches. Many of them struggling with the 'how?' questions. Recognising where they are and genuinely meeting them there, may not lead to instantaneous increases in attendance and membership, but it is what ministry is ultimately all about. **BMJ**

**G.A-W**

# A Gift

## **Richard Hayden, a novelist and playwright, suspects prophecy may be tougher than it looks**

He got onto the bus near the North Circular Road along with a straggle of other people; mothers and children, shoppers, commuters, schoolchildren. He was wearing a grey mackintosh stained with rain, carrying his shopping in a Safeway plastic bag. He flashed his bus pass but looked shifty and uncomfortable as he parked himself at the foot of the stairs, near the exit doors. He cleared his throat as the bus chugged up the hill and delivered his message. "The devil is among us, at work among us. The children who died, they were shot by the devil. More children will die. It is the devil's work. He is here. But the Lord will come. Judgement will come."

He was nervous, stood up on a crowded bus on a cold, Spring day. It was dropping cats and dogs outside and the windows of the bus were all steamed up. He was standing there, hanging on as the bus lurched and swayed, his shopping at his feet, an umbrella in his other hand, telling us the Word of the Lord.

"The name of the Lord is a strong and mighty tower."

## **Job Centre**

I remember learning the books of the bible for Scripture Union competitions. The gentle rhyming of names; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea: the prophets.

I won a fair few of those competitions, everyone thought I had an unfair advantage - the Preacher's son. Winning was not what it was cracked up to be. The prize was always a modern re-telling of a Biblical chestnut or a new edition of Mary Jones' Bible. But I remember the prophets, their names at least if not their prophecies. One question plagued me then as it does now : how does one become a prophet? In the days of myth it seems to have been a career choice. Any idiot could be a prophet. The trick was to be laughably abstruse, to link unconnected ideas into incoherent and implausible predictions. But perhaps prophecy is tougher than it looks.

These days you can't choose to be a prophet. Imagine the queues at the Job Centre, next to the boards teeming with offers in the catering trade, mechanics wanted, tele-sales, book-keeping and in the corner a tiny and perpetually blank board with the title 'Prophets wanted' across the top. Opposite: a wall the size of a barn 'Prophets offered.' No, nobody's actually looking for a prophet, it's only in retrospect that prophets are noticed, and as the quantity of printed matter gets bigger and bigger the number of potential prophets increases with it. But that doesn't discourage people from wanting to be one or looking for them.

The next best thing to being an actual prophet is discovering one before anybody else. To a certain extent this is sometimes more important than the prophet or the prophecies. To be able to say, I understood it first, I brought it to the attention of the world. I risked ridicule to proselytise this prophet's ideas. This is sweeter, more delicious, more delightful than being the prophet oneself, it adds zeros to the salaries of journalists, it adds kudos

and gravitas to their personalities, it puts notches in the bedpost. Jesus was the one who said it but Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were the ones who reported it; and Paul, he was the one who interpreted it.

## **My Way**

The truth is nobody gets to choose to be a prophet. Unless my understanding of the whole business is totally skew-iff. Prophets are chosen. The finger reaches from the sky and points at you. The dove descends and settles on your head. Tongues of fire lap around you. Angels wrestle with you. Whales swallow you.

To be a prophet is to embrace the irresponsibility of the mad. Your life, your mind, your thoughts, your every move, none of it is your own. You become God's tool, his messenger, his marionette. I don't like what I'm going to say but it has to be said, I am compelled to say it. The words pour from me like water down the Mountainside, with their own volition, and I am swept with them, without even the velleity of a pebble. The words sound like me, spoken with my accent (this after all is not *The Exorcist*), even the choice of expression is my own, but I have no control over the content. I am in the midst of a kind of spiritual Tourettes Syndrome. Pity me. Pity me. The voice of prophecy.

Let's move on. I'll put it simply. I'm talking about vocation. When I was about fourteen or so I had a profound sense of vocation in the Christian, Protestant, Baptist sense of the word. God was calling me to witness. Jesus wanted me for a preacher. I felt the tug. It was what I had always feared. As a teenager (spotty, horny, creaking voice, barely developed intellect) to be singled out, what a fate. The worst possible. How could it be? I not only resisted, I ignored. I turned my back. It was the only way to shut it out. In the space of a few months I shifted from a young boy struggling with the doctrines of Christianity, going to bible study, the good preacher's son, to something quite different, more belligerent, truculent and even more unhappy than I had previously thought possible. Oh for a whale to take me whole. Anything would have been better than *The Call*. It faded though. The trick worked. The voice receded into the middle distance. The noise and chaos of life drowned it out most of the time. I moved comfortably into late-teen agnosticism, flirted with atheism, settled for a muddled humanism. But when I sit very quiet and still, when I'm at my most confused and scared, underneath it all I can hear that voice calling. I'm doing it, I say. I'm doing it my own way. Give me a break. Still there though. Perhaps the pulpit is the only true home of prophecy. Or maybe the voice is trying to dictate to me. Maybe it's yelling out: "Take this down..." "

## **Eschatological errors**

Prophecy is scary stuff. To acknowledge its existence is to take on board a whole raft of ideas. The baggage that travels with the word would fill a juggernaut. Does any Preacher - up there in the pulpit, alone, confronting the upturned faces of the flock, a glass of stale water by the lectern, notes spread out, bible open - does anyone really consider themselves a prophet? Maybe I'm too rigid in my definition. Can you foretell the future? Do you know the will of God? There's not a writer worth reading who would accept the title and I doubt there's a preacher worth listening to who would either.

I heard some dodgy prophecies when I was a teenager. I got a lift home once from a

church youth leader. We stopped at a junction and he produced a shiny fifty pence piece from his pocket. He passed it to me in the seat next to him. "Look at the other side," he told me as he crossed the junction. I turned the coin over. "See the hands?" I did - seven or eight hands linked in a circle to commemorate the Common Market. "When the number of hands reaches eleven, it's a sign of the End Times. When the number of countries in the Common Market gets to eleven, it will be The Second Coming." I nodded, unable to respond. He held out his hand for his coin. I gave it back.

I don't remember if it was the same man, probably it was, who made a second prophecy. The night Russia invaded Afghanistan, New Year 1979, he said it was the beginning of the end. Communist Russia was the anti-christ. This would be the big one. The media event to end all media events. He was crafty though. He never attached a timescale to his prophecies. He never chose a date and said publicly, on this day the world ends. Unlike the Seventh Day Adventists, unfortunate victims of two eschatological errors: "The Great Disappointments". Unlike a college acquaintance who stripped naked in the town centre and proclaimed the coming dawn of a New Republic and was sectioned for his trouble. Unlike David Icke, driven and mocked into well-earned obscurity. Unlike David Koresh who was able to fulfil his own prophecies of destruction. Unlike Jimmy Jones who came to believe his own paranoid fantasies of civil war, imminent nuclear destruction, and political persecution.

Prophecy is a serious business. Literally life and death stuff. Take to your profession diligently, work hard. Listen carefully to that voice and ask yourself, how do I know it is the voice of God, or the voice of Reason, and not the chemical distractions of schizophrenia? Struggle to find the words, the unique words, to speak in that voice. Harden your heart to rejection and ridicule, turn your face from fame and understand, you are drinking from a bitter cup. Yes, prophecy is a serious business.

## **Mirror**

"The name of the Lord is a strong and mighty tower," he repeated the words over and over again as if they possessed a powerful magic that would somehow give him the power and courage he so sorely lacked.

He was full of hesitation, a bundle of nerves. He was trying to behave as though no one else was present, because that was the only way he could cope with the dread and the sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. He tried to deliver his message the same way he did in front of his bathroom mirror, when, in his imagination, he was able to stir the masses to a general repentance with a single, well chosen phrase; to open their eyes to the coming Judgement with an apt Biblical quotation.

"Believe in the Lord and He will comfort you. The name of the Lord is a strong and mighty tower."

But our indifference cowed him and he hurried off the bus at the next stop. Some kids on the back seats burst out laughing. The rest of us buried ourselves in our papers and our books. I watched him through the dirty windows, trudging through the rain. **EMM**

© the author

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Richard Hayden's novel, 'The Influencing Engine' is published by Black Swan

# Voices

**Ruth Gouldbourne, a tutor at Bristol Baptist College, challenges the notion that the only models of spirituality are those exploring silence and making space.**

It all started innocently enough. We were reviewing a quiet day which had been arranged for the Colleges in the Bristol Federation for Theological Education – a Baptist College, an Anglican College and a Methodist College. We had arranged a variety of venues and several different themes and patterns, and now we, a representative from each college, were going over the comments and questions that had come back. The vast majority were appreciative and people had clearly found the various days helpful and stimulating. But a couple, who obviously came from a tradition in which quiet days were precisely that – days of silence and reflection – appeared to have had some difficulty with the day we had organised at a local Baptist Church. This day had involved spending some time hearing about the setting of the church, and its particular form of ministry, and some time talking about the ways in which God's presence could be traced in this set of circumstances – a fair amount of speaking, in fact. A couple of those who had been part of that day found that there had been too much speaking, and they felt that this had made it impossible to listen to God. At the time, the group merely noted this for future reference.

When it came time to organise the following year's quiet day, we decided to approach the same church and ask for something similar. But my Anglican colleague said we had better point out in our guidelines to the students that this would not be a traditional quiet day. There would be a fair amount of speaking and sharing together. Then came the question "Don't Baptists use silence, then?"

My first reaction was to say that of course we did; then in honesty to admit that, on the whole, we didn't. In fact, one of the things which marks many of our services, especially morning ones, to say nothing of our other times together, is a lack of silence, and an emphasis on conversation. I started to admit this, shamefacedly to my colleagues, and then I stopped again. Those who had organised this quiet day for us, and whom we would be asking to do it again, are not those who make a noise for the sake of it, nor among those whose lives are so busy that there is no room for stillness and space. So perhaps this lack of silence which seems so instinctive is not something to "confess" as a lack in our tradition of spirituality. It could be that there is something more to be explored here.

## Discussion

And that's what this article is an attempt to do; to see if in fact as Baptists, we do have something specific to contribute in the contemporary explorations in models of spirituality, something which we take so much for granted that we don't see what value it has.

Before that, however, I want to make it clear that I am not suggesting that we should not be exploring silence and making space. I believe that it is vitally important that we do. We need to spend time alone with the Alone, being in adoration, listening for the still small voice and becoming aware of the Spirit at work in the depths of our beings. As a community, I believe, we have been the poorer for ignoring that strand of Christian spiritual tradition, and I am deeply grateful to those who have helped me to discover it,

and to struggle with it.

But we have a distinctive tradition of our own. It too is the expectation of hearing God speak, but not only in silence and not simply when we are alone. We expect God to speak to us and through us as a community. This is a pattern which has always marked us, and is something we can rediscover and re-treasure, as we spend time and energy reflecting on what it is to be a Baptist community. A significant part of our distinctiveness as a community is the way we do church, and a significant part of the way we do church has its roots in this form of spirituality. So, perhaps alongside the necessary discussions of structures and organisations, we could helpfully think about our spiritual heritage and life together.

The expectation that God will speak to and through the community as the community talked, prayed and listened together is part of our being from the very beginning. The first Baptists were among those Christians who separated themselves from the recognised church of the day in part at least because they did not believe that God spoke only through one person, priest or bishop, to an otherwise silent and acquiescent community. They believed that God could choose to speak through whomsoever God chose, irrespective of hierarchy and ecclesiastical recognition – and by the same token, ecclesiastical recognition did not guarantee the voice of God. As understandings of the nature of the church developed – from separatist into congregational – so there also came the expectation that in the ordering of the life of the church, the leading of God, what we have come to call “the mind of Christ”, was not something which was revealed to one person and passed on to the rest, but was found through prayerful, careful discussion by those who were the church. Here is a vision of church meeting as an exercise in spirituality!

## **Disciplines**

This applied not just to the organisational life of the church, but also to the spiritual - indeed, for a long period, such a distinction would not have been easily made. But the study of the Bible, the offering of prayers of praise and intercession, the seeking for guidance were exercises undertaken together. And this was not true just in our early history, but has remained part of our experience and expectation. To study the Bible together, to meet for prayer as a community are not new things we have recently discovered, but practices we have always undertaken. We have been deeply shaped by the understanding that one of the ways in which God speaks to us is as we speak to each other about the things of God. This is an important part of our spirituality.

But we don't only talk about spiritual traditions, but also of spiritual disciplines. Perhaps because we have not recognised this aspect of our life as the spirituality it is, we have not taken the discipline side seriously enough. I have suggested that this expectation of hearing God speak in each other's voices means that church meeting is an exercise in spirituality. But all too often it is an exercise in mortification and loyalty rather than an encounter with God. For many of us, there are vivid memories of meetings which appear to be devoted to the settling of old scores, or which seem to be irretrievably lost in the trivial. There are times when we wonder what such an exercise has to do with the Kingdom of God. In our meetings to study the Bible too, we can sometimes feel less than inspired. There are occasions when we could write the script – not only our own, but everybody else's – because we have got so closely fixed to the tramlines that we cannot break free

to say or hear anything fresh. Could it be that taking this as a spirituality, with its own disciplines would open a way out of this for us?

What might such disciplines look like? I can't even begin to give a definitive answer. We will surely only arrive at that together. But there are some important features we can already point to. The willingness to trust each other must come very high on the list. As the College Principals have pointed out in *On the Way of Trust*<sup>1</sup>, such an exercise in mutual trust and respect is at central to our life together. As we explore this way of encountering God, trust is necessary to hear each other, and to have the confidence to speak. We need to be willing to trust each other's integrity before God, so that even when we disagree, we can listen with respect. We need to know we will not be attacked or condemned especially if we speak with a lone voice, or raise a difficult question, if we are to have the confidence to speak. This is the kind of trust we can only develop as we spend time together, learning to appreciate the reality of each other's faith, and as we take the risk of being open. It does not come naturally – it is a discipline to be developed.

## Disturbance

This way of listening to God also involves the disciplines of time and space. We need to be able to spend time together, and to have space in our meetings simply to talk – without the pressure of necessarily making a decision “now”. This may mean things take a long time, but it can also mean the possibility truly to listen to each other, and to listen out for God in each other's words. In terms of Bible study, it may mean not having answers to the questions we started out with, and having to live with that for the meantime.

Another aspect is the discipline of keeping silence together. Here we have much to learn from the Quakers, who also expect to hear the voice of God in each other's speech. They practice not only talking to each other, but sitting in silence before God together. Anything that is said is not judged immediately, but is received and weighed by the community in silence. We might find practices here which will help to put our speaking into the context we are looking for, instead of drowning in our own words. It will also involve a self-denying ordinance on the part of those of us who can speak easily and powerfully. We need to make space for others to join in the conversation.

Such practice may also be important in building our communities. With the helpful and important emphasis on silence, we are perhaps in danger of ignoring the needs of those for whom this is not a preferred option, psychologically. Those of us who do respond well to invitations to be still may well find ourselves rattled and made uncomfortable by services – or meetings – which are busy, noisy and feel restless. Is it perhaps that this is because none of us have worked hard enough at a spirituality of speaking and listening together, and so we don't know how to do it? Because we have not learnt to listen to and for God in each other's speaking, nor learnt to speak with the possibility that we may hear the voice of God, we find the speaking a distraction and a disturbance, rather than a means of encounter. Taking seriously the expectation that it is when we gather in God's name, and speak and hear by the leading of the Spirit, we may not become much quieter, but we may become more focussed, less distracted, and better able to discern the mind of Christ.


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<sup>1</sup> Whitley Publications, 1997



## Decisions

I think we have something to offer to the wider church from this too. I have a clear memory of being part of the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland assembly three years ago, and getting involved in a discussion in the coffee queue with some delegates from one of the more centralised denominations. They were finding the whole experience of the Assembly deeply frustrating, because we did not seem to be making any decisions, or any headway. I realised as I heard them talk that I felt quite at home in the process we were going through – we were discussing, exploring, sharing and arguing. But no, we were not deciding. And yet, by the end of the time together, we had come to some conclusions, and certain plans were made, and certain schemes were adopted. Nobody quite knew how, but we had come to places of agreement and acceptance as we had talked and listened, and as God had moved among us. I felt at home, because it was the way, as a Baptist, I expected to work, although I had never really reflected on it, and therefore could not help others to identify it. But we do have this treasure – the knowledge that, if we are willing, humbly trusting of God and each other, and patient, in our talking together, the mind of Christ will be revealed among us.

I know that what I am groping for seems very idealistic and far removed from so much of our reality. But I suggest that is because we have lost touch with something important in our history and our distinctive spirituality. As I talked with my colleagues about why Baptists would not necessarily expect to spend a quiet day predominantly in silence, I began to think this was not something to apologise for, but something to celebrate and reclaim. So I want to ask that we do that. I know that this article is very preliminary, with more questions than answers, more suggestions than examples, but I would like to see if others have thought this through further and can help me to explore it more. Perhaps we can talk about it, discuss it together. And perhaps, just perhaps, we might hear the voice of God to and for us as we listen to each other. 

### If

If one does not forgive, one does not understand;  
and if one does not understand, one is afraid;  
and if one is afraid, one hates;  
and if one hates, one cannot love.

And no beginning on earth is possible without love, particularly in a world where men increasingly not only do not know how to love, but cannot even recognize it when it comes searching for them.

**Laurens van der Post**

# The Edge

**Judy Holyer presented these reflections at a Consultation to 'do theology in a Baptist way' at Regent's Park College, Oxford, last August.**

The Accredited List of Ministers produced by the Baptist Union includes my name. I am not in full-time (or even part-time) charge of a local church. I do not often take Sunday services. I only occasionally preside at communion. I am a minister of the gospel to those people I meet; wherever and whenever I meet them.

Like the rest of you I have read and studied the document "Five Core Values for a Gospel People" produced last year by the Baptist Union. I have read it and noticed that each core value is to be worked out first in the local church, then in the denomination and finally "in society and world". My first reaction to the document was surprise that the core values for a gospel people do not include being a believing community. I cannot read the document without feeling that Baptist churches and caring for those within them is what comes first. I have read without undue surprise (because I am a cynic) the self-interest in the document. It is the denomination that comes first. Under the concept of being a prophetic community it is stated that we should "deal radically with the unfairness of differentials in ministerial pay". Under the concept of being an inclusive community we need "to address the continued under-valuing of the ministry of women in Baptist life". I also see words about leadership used, when I would expect to see words about ministry and servanthood.

I belong to a denomination in which I perceive that "The Senior Management Team" takes the lead. The concept of "The Fellowship of Believers" no longer seems to be central to the denomination.

My own work is not primarily in the local church or even in the denomination, but in what the core values document calls "society and world". My church contacts are primarily with people from other denominations. Where do churches of other denominations fit in if the possibilities are local church, the denomination and "society and world"? Where does ecumenism fit into the Five Core Values document? I guess it might be covered in being an inclusive community where the obligation "to be open to those who are theologically different from us" is laid upon us. Alternatively it might be covered in being a missionary community where we are asked to commit ourselves "to share our Christian convictions humbly with people of other faiths." Working with other Christians is not prominent in the document. It seems to promote a strongly Baptist position and, although I think there is a distinctive Baptist way of doing theology, we need to be very wary of doing it in such a way that it excludes other Christian believers. Personally I find myself floundering in a denomination which has core values that can appear to be different from my own, especially given that I am in whole-hearted agreement with the Baptist Union Declaration of Principle, to which I have given assent as a Baptist minister, and which, according to its constitution, is the basis of the Baptist Union.

## **Computer Scientist**

In this article I intend to speak unashamedly from my own experience. I almost certainly

over-emphasise my point that ministry outside the church is important. If your calling is to work in a local church, preaching faithfully Sunday by Sunday and ministering to your flock, I ask your forgiveness. Your work is important. I do not wish to discourage you. I do, however, ask you to ponder for a moment on the lives of those called to other forms of ministry.

I am a full-time minister of the Christian gospel. I work half-time as a Computer Scientist. I work part-time as a University chaplain. I work as a volunteer at our local hospice. I pursue a number of leisure interests. This is not bi-vocational ministry. Wherever I am and whatever I do, I remain a minister. This is my calling.

Neville Clark wrote some years ago that "the ordained ministry is within and for the Church. It is to the Church in order that the Church may be to the World."<sup>1</sup> Some may agree with this principle. I do not. My objection to it is that it places an unnecessary onus on church members. It leaves ministers with the job of working with the small proportion of the population who now attend church, while the church members work in the World. There need to be ministers at work in the World as well as in the Church. Neville Clark's principle leaves those best able to give an account of their faith ministering to those already within the church. I am with Paul who wrote "I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news not where Christ has already been named."<sup>2</sup>

"Tomorrow's Pastors May Not Preach" was the title of an address given by John Drane to the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship at this year's Baptist Assembly. Reproduced in abbreviated form, it appeared in *The Baptist Times* under the title "It's time to bring the preaching to an end", which has a different emphasis to the original title. Drane's point was that if ministers merely service the faithful, then "we are like undertakers at a funeral, maintaining a sense of presence and dignity, while making sure that the decline is managed tidily."<sup>3</sup>

## Interaction

In the Weekend Pulpit section the following week the ministers polled seemed to think that there was little chance that the death of the sermon was imminent and correspondence has continued on the subject. What concerns me most is not that sermons are preached. For some people sermons form part of a culture which they understand and a service without a "traditional" twenty minute sermon would be incomplete. However, there are many others for whom this is not true. I have to admit at this point that, as someone who has attended church for many years and preached on many occasions, I do not find it helpful listening to sermons. I have found sermon preparation valuable, but largely because it enables me to address the issues that are affecting my spiritual life and the issues that I project onto the congregation. Sermons allow for the views of one person to be heard. They do not allow for interaction. Church services can easily become a performance, where a few do and the majority watch. It is then possible to use church to avoid God. It seems to me that within the Church, members of the congregation could learn a great deal from each other. I was recently at a communion service at a retreat house where, following a period of silence, the address consisted of an invitation to those present to share a thought on what the bible readings had meant

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<sup>1</sup> *The Pattern of the Church*, p108

<sup>2</sup> Romans 15:20

<sup>3</sup> *Baptist Times*, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1999, page 5

to them. This was an act of worship by a Christian community in which we were all involved and, to use an old phrase, it spoke to my condition. Sermons should be a tool used to help people grow in faith and to become true disciples. Sermons are not effective tools in all situations.

It is a common complaint of new ministers that they now find that they only ever meet church-going Christians. I find this sad - not that they meet church-going Christians - but that they do not meet other people. One of the activities in which I engage is voluntary work at our local hospice, where I work as a general volunteer doing whatever needs to be done that is within my capabilities. Great delight is usually taken in the fact that immediately after facilitating a short service I serve the drinks before lunch and usually have a gin myself. While I can tire at references to my resemblance to Dawn French - Vicar of Dibley - it seems important to me that faith is not divorced from the rest of life and that people can see that ministers are as human as anyone else. Most patients are not church-goers but they often wish to speak of their beliefs. Last week I was talking to a patient who has been coming to the hospice for several months and I discovered that the services she comes to at the hospice are the first that she has attended since Sunday School. Others do not wish to come to a service, but still wish to speak of the place of faith in their lives. I often feel that all I need to do is to allow God to work and that my task is "to light the touch-paper and retire". It is a privilege to work with these people who are facing important changes in their lives. Wherever I go God has been there first.

I am a Baptist Chaplain to the University of the West of England in Bristol. As far as the Baptist Union is concerned this is the only ministry in which I am involved. At church

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gatherings I am forever asked at which church I am a minister and worse still, whether my husband is a minister. It is my belief that I am a minister of the gospel, called to be a minister at all times and in all places. I do not cease to be a mathematician when I am a minister, nor vice versa. In working with patients and staff at the hospice, I am as much a minister as when working with students and staff at the university. Some might say that what I am speaking of is the priesthood of all believers. I would say that I am not. The call to ministry, my theological and ministerial training, the recognition by the Church and ordination distinguish me from the person I was before my ordination and mean that my actions now have a representative role that they did not previously have.

## Accredited

Perhaps the time has come to look at what Baptists mean by the term “minister.” It is clearly not synonymous with the term “priest”, where the priest has a particular sacramental role which can only be performed by the virtue of being a priest. Baptists have no theology of apostolic succession where the gifts of ministry are passed on by the laying on of hands. The call comes to each individual anew. Within the Baptist denomination there are no roles that are exclusively performed by ministers (although some roles are normally only performed by ministers.) The recognition of a call to ministry comes through the individual’s own discernment, their local church, the ministerial recognition committee, training at a Baptist college and a call to a local church. After this process the individual can be ordained. Throughout the process the notion of the call is vital.

Historically, Baptists have had a strong local notion of ministry. Thomas Helwys said “the officers of every church or congregation are tied by office only to that particular congregation whereof they are chosen.”<sup>4</sup> However, as Morris West writes “throughout Baptist history it can be shown there has been the recognition that a Baptist minister is the minister of a community far broader in definition than that of the local church.”<sup>5</sup> West asks if the logical thing is to ordain people “to the ministry of Jesus Christ through the Baptist Church.”<sup>6</sup> There is still no consensus on this question. At present, an ordination does not take place until a person is called to be minister of a local church, or occasionally, by special dispensation from the ministry department, to some other church work. If someone, recognised and trained by a Baptist college, fails to be called by a church within two years of leaving college, then their name is removed from the list and it is assumed that there was never any call to ministry. This occurs at great personal cost to potential ministers, who have often left all to follow their sense of call, which has, until this point been recognised by the denomination. Probationer ministers get into difficulty with the Union if all does not run smoothly with their church in the first years of their ministry, and they fail to move onto the Accredited List. Nevertheless, once on the Accredited List it is much easier to remain there. Certain jobs that do not include ministry within a local church are acceptable. Officers of the Baptist Union, Association Secretaries, Baptist college teaching staff, retired ministers and chaplains all remain on the list with relative ease. However, apart from the retired, everyone on the list is there by virtue of a particular function which they perform. Certain functions are acceptable and certain functions are not. Lecturing theology in a university would generally be acceptable while lecturing

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted on page 74, “English Baptist History and Heritage”, Roger Hayden, Baptist Union 1990

<sup>5</sup> “The Pattern of the Church”, page 51

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

mathematics would not. Once one allows anything beyond being full-time minister of a Baptist Union recognised church there is ambiguity as to what is acceptable.

This ambiguity is not in itself a problem. The problem lies in not having any means to discern what is acceptable and what is not. In considering what is meant by ministry it might be helpful to consider a number of different models of ministry. Some are more helpful than others and some will appeal more than others. Take your pick!

## Trapeze

1. The minister as factotum. A factotum is a person employed to do all kinds of work for another. For a minister this may mean doing all the jobs in a church. I have met many ministers who, in practice, work in this way, whether or not it is by their choice.
2. The minister as servant.
3. The minister as shepherd.
4. The minister as trapeze artist. I owe this to Henri Nouwen <sup>7</sup>. The minister is the flyer, who puts trust in God, the catcher.
5. The minister as professional.
6. The minister as mid-wife and mother of grace. I owe this one to a Southern Baptist minister, Jon Johnson, who visited Bristol Baptist College while I was training. The minister is there to assist at birth (a metaphor of a new stage of faith.) Many births take place with no assistance so the minister will only assist at some births. Often it is a question of waiting until the right time to assist at a birth - too early brings a premature birth - too late brings complications.
7. The minister as wounded healer. <sup>8</sup>
8. The minister as leader.
9. The minister as fire-fighter.
10. The minister as jester. <sup>9</sup> This is the eccentric courtier who by comment and story offers an insight which others have missed.

Do you identify with one of these models? Some will already be familiar. Some will be new. Perhaps you have other models to add. Which of these models do you find most helpful? Which model most liberates you to be free to act as the minister which God has called you to become?

The underlying question of this article is clear. Is ministry a function or a vocation? To make my own position plain I end with an exhortation.

Ministers are called to be ministers of the gospel. The call to ministry is not to be minister of a particular local church. It is a call to work in whatever way is necessary to bring the gospel to the world as it enters a new millennium. Let us not be culturally bound by the past. Let us not confine God to our structures, but let God define them. Let us be open, allowing God to lead us on new pathways, which we may not, as yet, even be able to see. **BMI**

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<sup>7</sup> "Wounded Prophet: A portrait of Henri J.M. Nouwen", Michael Ford, DLT, 1999

<sup>8</sup> "The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society", Henri J.M. Nouwen, Doubleday, 1972

<sup>9</sup> "Abnormal Ministry", Paul King, Unpublished paper, 1997

# A Journey

**In this edited version of another paper delivered at last summer's Oxford Consultation, Paul Allen of Trinity Church, Rawdon, Leeds, reflects on the consequences when ministers are willing to dismantle their defences.**

Members of a congregation will assume that the pastor is the one who is liberated. In this article a different assumption emerges – that the pastor is no different from the rest of the congregation, and that pastoral ministry is a journey: a journey of liberation, with the historical Jesus an integral part of that journey.

Liberation points to a future that is different, but which begins in the present or the past. There will be times when it feels as though life is denying our liberation, and times when we are on the mountain tops.

Paradoxically, the journey is itself one of self-discovery. Pastoral and counselling training ought to enable us to look within and discover something of our true selves. But this is a threatening experience, and we resist it. What is truly inside us is well guarded by defences that we have systematically erected from an early age. Those defences are there to protect us from experiences that we have found it hard to come to terms with. In reality, the defences are not protecting us, but have become a way of hiding from our own sense of inadequacy; from our fear of failing and of not living up to expectations that were probably set for us at an early age.

Pastoral ministry draws deeply on our emotional strength. We sit alongside the dying and the bereaved, the divorced and the victims of our harsh and stressful society. But our role is more than that of pastor counsellor. We must also lead these same people on in their journey of faith through the worship life of the Church; work with them in leadership teams; and counsel those who may have been critical of our ministry. The criticisms may have wounded us deeply, and our response may be to bury those wounds under all those defences and rise again to the task of pastoral care.

All of this is a crisis waiting to happen. The projected self of the pastor is one of the all-capable, all-caring person who loves unceasingly because it is Christlike to do so, even when experiencing feelings of hurt. But the inner self is anxious and filled with self doubt. The wider the gap between the projected self and the inner self the greater the growing crisis. The result is that all too often there is one crisis too many, and the defences can no longer cope. When colleagues share honestly with one another, what is often revealed is stress and depression, and nowhere to take these powerful emotions.

## **Therapeutic relationship**

It all feels a far cry from the *New Being* of which Tillich wrote. But this negative point may have to be reached before the pastor's true journey to liberation can begin. This may be the beginning of becoming – when the pastor can turn round and begin the walk to freedom that will enable others to be liberated too.

The Fraternal clearly has a role to play here, and accompanied self-appraisal would

be a huge step forward, enabling us to find support and future direction. But sometimes we need much more than this. We hear of people experiencing 'burn out', stress and depression, but these are problems that will not be solved simply by better stress and time management. What may well be needed is a therapeutic relationship, where unconditional love and acceptance can be experienced. Here the defences can be dismantled. There are times when this can be distressing, particularly when self-esteem has collapsed, and feelings of failure are explored. At times it will feel like the darkest winter's day. But signs of spring will come, and we will be able to look around and take the first steps to liberation.

Any journey needs a sense of direction, but we each need our own particular direction to travel. For Tillich salvation is found by participation in the *New Being*. 'Participation' is the key word, for someone else's portrait cannot simply be copied and placed in our personal album. It may meet someone else's needs and inspire them, but that is not the same as one's own reflections. The pastoral journey has to be our own journey, our own liberation and homecoming. Such was the beginning of my journey - starting with acceptance.

The people that Jesus finds acceptable are those who very often do not find social acceptance. We are on well trodden ground here when we remember that he accepted people like Matthew the tax gatherer, the prostitute who anoints him, and the poor masses to whom he speaks words of good news. The religious leaders do not know how to relate to these people because, by their very life style, they are ritually unclean and ignorant of the law they should keep. But Jesus could reach out to such people and make them feel accepted. The people who surrounded Jesus did not suddenly find abundant wealth or achievement, but they did find status, and that meant acceptance as a child of God with a place in his Kingdom.

## Wounds

In the story of the Labourers in the Vineyard, worldly justice and values of worth are turned upside down. Those who have worked only one hour are valued just as much as those who have worked all day. The point being made clearly is that God accepts into his Kingdom those who have *not earned* a place, but who, in the economy of the world, are *unworthy* and *unacceptable*. The parable speaks very clearly from a context of the unworthy and unacceptable finding the Kingdom through Jesus, while the great and the good look on stiff necked and critical!

In ministry we fill our time with making sure people find acceptance through pastoral care and by ensuring that people are drawn into the community of the church. But all too often we are also asking questions about our own acceptability, and striving to achieve our own acceptance. And each wound means we deny our acceptance. Each person whose attendance lapses confirms our shortcomings. We take into our being negative comments and do not believe the positive ones. Here are the seeds of depression and the collapse of self-worth, which will be accompanied by a lack of self-acceptance – never mind believing that we are accepted by others and by God!

It is no accident that acceptance is a key word in counselling. Without unconditional acceptance there can be no liberation from the feelings of negative self-worth. Without unconditional love there can be no self-esteem and belief in one's own worth. We



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## **To the readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal**

From time to time I come across a Church policy where correspondence with the church has remained "dormant" for several years and cannot help feeling that a review of cover and sums insured are well overdue. Although we now have index linking of sums insured it worries me that despite all our pleadings there are still a significant number of churches who do not undertake a proper review of their insurance on a regular basis.

As you may recall last year we linked Baptist Insurance with Ecclesiastical Insurance to enable us to widen the scope of services we provide. Some 135 churches have already taken us up on the offer of a free valuation and risk assessment of their property and it is evident that many were underinsured, a few seriously so. With an average level of underinsurance revealed of nearly 20% on these I feel it is important that other churches are not complacent with the adequacy of their current levels of sum insured.

I feel sure that many more churches can benefit from our free valuation service. This will ensure that your church obtains the peace of mind of knowing that the correct level of insurance protection is in place. I would appreciate your assistance in prompting the person specifically responsible for the insurance arrangements of your church to ask for the free valuation.

Finally I hope you will forgive me for a timely reminder to take precautions now for the winter. Most burst pipes can easily be avoided with a few simple precautions and action now can prevent damage later.

Yours sincerely

**A.J.GREEN ACIJ ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER**

measure our worth by the values of the individualism of our society: success, achievement, popularity and influence. We must have more people than last year, be better than the previous minister and more dynamic than other local churches. We cannot live up to these criteria. It is death by comparison. We accept others in their failings, but do not accept failings in ourselves. Self acceptance is, therefore, a key stage in our journey.

Potential follows on from acceptance. There are a variety of images in the gospels which are about the release of potential: to be different and new; to find the pathway that leads away from self-doubt and the voices that say we have failed and are of no worth; to move from estrangement to participation in the *New Being*.

Jesus, and the Kingdom he proclaims, releases the potential for self-love to grow, from which love for others can blossom. Then the creativity of love can flourish in our lives. That love may seem as small and fragile as a mustard seed, but it contains the potential to grow till our branches are big enough for us to love and support others.

### Price tag

The whole feel of the Kingdom of God that we grasp hold of in Jesus is that things can be different. Anxiety, stress and depression will not in the end have the last word. Within these experiences there is a mustard seed of hope, even when it is hard to locate. Someone will be offering us unconditional love and acceptance, and God will be working through that. We may feel unworthy of the love and back away from it, but God will not back away, continuing instead to come to us. We may not be able to find the seed of

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hope, but the other, through whom God is working, will hold the seed until we are able to hold it ourselves.

Jesus of Nazareth inspired hope in people who had no hope, and continues to do so. It would be grossly reductionist to speak of hope only in terms of a life beyond this life. The potential he stirs within us is for life *now*. When we feel crushed by life and then we share the experience of others that leaves them feeling crushed, we cry out for things to be different. We may feel we have little potential, but we always have more than we realise.

A consequence of acceptance and potential is solidarity. Jesus shows solidarity with the poor, the marginalised, the sick, the blind and the lame. He does not exclude others from his invitation to the Kingdom. Those who are excluded have excluded themselves by their pretentious righteousness.

The marks of his ministry amongst those who do receive him are compassion, love and justice. These bring liberation. But these are also the hallmarks of the God he calls 'Father', and he invites them to this God's banquet. His solidarity is amongst those who do not keep ritual cleansing and who are outside the Temple system.

Solidarity, though, comes with a price tag. Three times in the Gospel of Mark we read how Jesus predicts that he will meet a violent death (chapters 8, 9 and 10). Clearly there must be some reading back here by Mark and his Christian community. There is a rhythmic feel to the predictions that must have been composed after the event. There must, however, be some historical root. Jesus was clearly influenced by the prophet Isaiah in the way he shaped his ministry. The sermon at Nazareth, the life offered in service, the words at Caesarea Philippi that 'whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's', are all pregnant with the ideas of the servant figure. The early Church would have had to be remarkably inventive and visionary for this material not to have a historical root!

Jesus exemplifies the journey of liberation. His cause is the Kingdom of God, and the gift of that Kingdom to the insignificant. The price tag is his violent death in Jerusalem. The story is one of passion and cruelty. But the way the story is often interpreted does not sound like the God Jesus shows us. Classical interpretations tell us that God demands satisfaction for the sins of the world; sacrifice must be made that will appease him, and someone must stand in my place and face the consequences of my failures and sins. But this is a different picture of God to the one we see in the ministry of Jesus where God is 'Abba', Father. The Father God is a God of mercy, compassion, love and justice. He is a Father who forgives, not by sending the sinner to the Temple to be its sacrificial victim, but through the acceptance of Jesus.

## **Laughter**

Jesus shares this vision and experience with those who need mercy, compassion, love, and who are crying out for justice. The solidarity of Jesus with such people is the solidarity of God. The measure of the solidarity of Jesus is his suffering and death, when he suffers for mercy, compassion, love and justice. This is an honest look at the cross, which does not devalue what goes on there. From this point of view he suffers and dies not as a substitute to complete a contract with God, but because he does not deny his solidarity.

This is a powerful picture and a liberating one. The experience of solidarity is liberation. The belief that someone stands with you and does not desert you is strength for the journey.

Must solidarity with the undeserving, though, always end in death? The cynical answer would be yes. The pivotal doctrine of the New Testament, on the other hand, denies the cynical answer. The preaching of the early church is that God raised Jesus from death. And however we interpret the resurrection, the truth of the doctrine is that God confirms all that Jesus says and does. When he suffers for mercy, compassion, love and justice, he suffers for the things that belong to the very heart of God. He is raised because he is the true path to liberation. His solidarity with humanity is liberation from despair, sin and failure. It is liberation from the drive to prove one's worth through achievement, success, power and status. None of these things belong to the heart of God.

Acceptance, solidarity and potential are key words which describe something of the Kingdom, and are embodied in Jesus, who is the Christ. The words point to a gracious God whose grace in the end is beyond human understanding, and there is a mystery about resurrection and how God can change despair into laughter. The Kingdom is always more than we can understand. It is perhaps more like a finely cut diamond than a pearl, with many facets through which wonder can be seen.

In this article I have tried to hold together what feels knowable about the 'Figure' of Jesus and the Kingdom – picture or portrait sounds too definitive, and I am uncomfortable with definites here – with something of the otherness of God that he symbolises. It contains enough to take me forward while retaining an element of mystery. It is, of course, one thing to describe the 'Figure of the Kingdom', it is another to participate in the Kingdom he brings to us. It involves a profound spiritual leap which some make easily but which others find harder.

Here, I have drawn on the spirituality of liberation theology, which is a spirituality of following. It is like, 'Go to Galilee and there you will see him.' Following is the way of liberation. It means carrying the 'Figure' in our minds and in our spirit. It means letting the 'Figure' shape our living and our pastoral ministry.

The 'Figure' is in a way provisional, because we can never have a complete picture of the Historical Jesus. But on the journey our experience will add to the 'Figure' and enrich our vision.

Acceptance and solidarity go hand in hand, as gifts to be received. Potential adds something special – because it is the dynamic of the journey. **B.M.J.**

## Holidays 2000

The January edition of *The Journal* will carry the customary offers of holiday accommodation. Members wishing to use this free service for publicising such accommodation should let the editor have any changes to previous years' copy, or new copy, by 1<sup>st</sup> December, please.

# The Text

## **J. Martin C. Scott, Northern Baptist College, provides some bibliographical notes on the Gospel of Mark.**

The prominence of Mark as a controlling Gospel in the lectionaries for the coming year offers the opportunity to survey some recent offerings from the academic community. Like any article of this kind, it will reflect its author's interests more than most other considerations, but I hope that it gives some useful pointers to literature which is currently available. I hope too that it will encourage many readers to continue the task of studying the biblical text in detail - for whatever observations and inspiration the various authors may provide, there is no substitute for reading and taking the text seriously oneself.

It is not my intention to survey books which belong to either the more popular evangelical mould, or those which come from series where the reader is fairly aware in advance of the likely nature of the content. I will thus look at three major commentaries which have emerged in the last ten years and then at a number of other works which treat Mark from different angles.

### **Recent Commentaries**

The most recent major commentary on Mark is that by Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991). It follows the familiar 'Blacks' style of a running translation of the text and commentary. Hooker offers her own translation, and throughout punctuates the work with short notes on such themes as the messianic secret, the Son of Man, parables and the Kingdom of God. Hooker's approach is redactional, her main search being for the intention of the original author. Despite the subjectivity of this method, which scholars more pessimistic about historical-critical approaches would note, Hooker has many good theological insights to offer on Mark's programme. She views Mark as writing in a pastoral mode, concerned about the problems and trials of discipleship and this brings to the commentary a sense of purpose. Her historical interest does not prevent her from offering an analysis of the text which is both accessible and useful to preachers. This is not least because she is concerned with how Mark's Gospel may have been heard by its recipients and thus how it can be heard today. Her commentary is a work of real depth in its scholarship, but also real clarity in its presentation.

Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: a Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988) is another commentary well worth having on the preacher's bookshelf. It owes much in sympathy to the radical work of scholars like Walter Wink, whose advocacy of revolutionary non-violence is supported by Myers' reading of the Markan narrative. The book is not easy reading for two reasons: first, it uses a lot of sociological (very North American) jargon; second, it is immensely challenging to most of our bourgeois Christian comfortableness! For this second reason, however, it is also a very profitable read. Unlike Hooker, Myers places a lot of emphasis on the nature of the threats under which the community behind the Gospel is labouring. Although he sees Jesus (and so also God) as being on the side of the underdog - the Jewish resistance movements rather than the Roman authorities - he insists that the Gospel shows Jesus' message to be one of active, but non-violent revolution.

## Be warned!

Myers' exegesis of Mark challenges the reader to understand the message of 'taking up the cross' in such a way that it leads not merely to the transformation of the individual through some form of spiritual renewal, but much more to social, economic and political change as the community of God's people respond together. While you may not agree with all of Myers' approach, this is the kind of book which might just change your whole life if you take it seriously - so be warned!

Sadly Robert Guelich, *Mark 1: 1-8:26* (Waco: Word Books, 1989) died suddenly before his second volume on Mark was complete. Like many of the Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) series, this provides a very solid historical-critical commentary from an evangelical perspective and is a model of its type. It is particularly useful for its bibliographical material, which is comprehensive and listed for each individual pericope as well as for the Gospel as a whole. For those wishing to dig deeper, Guelich's book is a goldmine since it points clearly to the available resources. The format of the WBC is such that it can be used with profit by both those literate in Greek (there are textual notes on each passage), and those who access the text in English. There are comments on the structure, form and content of each passage, followed by careful verse by verse exegesis. Finally there is an 'explanation' of the theological significance of each passage within the Gospel narrative and Mark's theology as a whole. When the second volume is completed by Craig Evans, this will be a major resource for both Markan scholars and preachers.

For those who may have the facility of reading German, I would also thoroughly commend two major commentaries: Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zurich: Benzinger, 1978) 2 vols.; Rudolph Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg, Basel: Herder, 1983). Both of these are very full treatments which come at the text from a historical-critical perspective and each contains a wealth of further bibliographical material in languages other than English.

## Books on Particular Themes

One of the most useful additions to the biblical library over the past ten years has been the appearance of two new 'summary'-type series: the Cambridge *New Testament Theology* series, and its parallel competitor the Sheffield *New Testament Guides* series (similar series also cover the Old Testament). Both the volumes on Mark in these series have been written by Bill Telford, and each has its merits, but the Cambridge publication is in this instance much the more substantial of the two. W.R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge; CUP, 1999) offers a concise yet comprehensive summary of all the main issues related to the proposed historical setting of Mark, the theology of the Gospel, and its perhaps most interestingly its relationship to other major NT writings. In a final chapter, Telford also adds reflections on the role of Mark as the Church's book, and its contemporary relevance for ethics and discipleship. If you want a book which will bring you up to date with all the most significant opinions about Mark's Gospel, as well as offering good insights into its theology, you can do no better than this moderately priced volume. There is another short volume surveying major issues in Markan studies from a Roman Catholic, F. J. Matera, *What are they Saying about Mark?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). It inevitably looks a little dated when compared with Telford's work, but is nevertheless worth looking for some different insights and judgements.

Amongst the vast array of monographs on Mark, there are a few which may be of particular interest to preachers who want something other than the well-worn historical-critical conclusions. From a narrative perspective, Stephen Smith, *A Lion with Wings: a Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: SAP, 1996) offers a good insight both into how narrative criticism works, and into Markan theology through its lens. The sections on characterisation, plot and how irony functions are especially useful and help reveal the quality of Mark as skilfully constructed dramatic literature - a point vastly underdeveloped by historical critics, who have always tended to view Mark as rather inferior literature among the Gospels.

### **Non-violent resistance**

Also working from this narrative angle, Robert R. Beck, *Nonviolent Story: Narrative Conflict Resolution in the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996) picks up Myers' theme of active non-violence. Beck analyses the 'myth of redemptive violence' (cf. Wink) and systematically shows how the Markan narrative can be read as a challenge to this dominant mythology of our age by presenting Jesus as radically resistant to the evils of violence. Although Jesus clearly enters into *conflict* with his opponents he does so through non-violent active resistance, thus deconstructing the prevailing myth. This book is not an exciting read in terms of style, but does reward patient readers.

The theme of conflict is also taken up by one of the early pioneers of narrative criticism. Jack D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) seeks to show how the theme of conflict is the pivot around which the Gospel and its christology develops. Kingsbury is studiously uninterested in the speculative attempts of historical critics to reconstruct the history behind the Markan text. By contrast, his illumination of such matters as plot characterisation and setting offer the reader a fresh insight into the theological colour of Mark's portrayal of Jesus. The book is deliberately aimed at students and pastors, and as such avoids much of the technical language of some more esoteric approaches to literary criticism. Kingsbury's conclusions about the theology of Mark and Matthew (his other main focus in publications) are overly similar, but his work is nevertheless full of promise for sermon writers.

Much older, but still informative is D. Rhoads & D. Michie, *Mark as Story: an Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). This book is a lively cross-disciplinary discussion of the Gospel's literary technique by an English lecturer and a theologian. Rhoads and Michie offer insight into the way in which the narrative is constructed dealing with such issues as the 'point-of-view' of the narrator, characterisation, setting and plot. They cleverly uncover the way in which the so-called 'problems' of historical critics are transformed into 'opportunities' for the narrative critic through, for example, an understanding of the use of intertextual echo. The emphasis in this book on taking the narrative of Mark as a *whole* seriously remains as important a reminder to the reader today as it was an innovation in 1982.

### **Irony**

Other books which apply a narrative approach include Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989 - SNTS Monograph, 64). This is a doctoral dissertation focussing on a 'neglected factor in Markan theology' (faith!), and

may be a little hard-going for those who want wider discussion, but it does offer a thoroughgoing example of the rewards of reading the narrative as a 'wood', rather than allowing the 'trees' of lectionary gobbets to obscure our vision. Marshall uncovers a range of different usages of the theme of 'faith' in Mark, these being expressed through a variety of words, each of which he treats with exegetical skill. By examining the words in their context in Mark's narrative, Marshall avoids the tendency to colour our understanding of the language of 'faith' by reading it against particular views about the eschatological outlook of the Markan 'community', or speculation as to the crisis which it may (or may not!) have faced.

The more technical and esoteric approach of some forms of literary criticism is well demonstrated by Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). As is clear from the first part of the title (a quotation from Mk 13: 14), Fowler is interested primarily in the narrative techniques by which the Gospel is constructed, and in particular the difference between 'story' and 'discourse' (the way the story is told) in Mark. The work is run through with dense jargon, which hardly helps the injunction of Mk 13:14 become a reality for the reader! There is value, however, in ploughing through the unnecessary verbosity if only to discover something of the theme of 'irony', which Fowler rightly points to as an important feature of Mark's communicative method.

If you want to avoid being landed with one particular methodological approach to the Gospel then look no further than Janice C. Anderson / Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992). This book



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Why not join us and share this common interest in fellowship, friendship and stewardship amongst men? For literature and further details, please contact the National Secretary

**Clifford Challinor, Kingsley, Pontesbury, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY5 0QH**  
(Telephone or Fax: 01743 790377)



is essentially an introduction to modern critical approaches to reading the Bible, but it comes at the subject through worked examples based on the text of Mark. Chapters include a feminist reading of the story of Herodias, a narrative reading of the bread miracles, plus explorations into reader-response, sociological approaches and deconstruction. The book is worthwhile for the clarity of its introduction to methods other than the more familiar historical-critical patterns, but it also offers interesting insights into the text and theology of Mark.

## Challenging

Baptists ought to be aware of George Beasley-Murray's contribution to Markan scholarship over the years, particularly in relation to the apocalyptic discourse of Mark 13. Although his latest book on the subject, *Jesus and the Last Days: the Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), is essentially a compilation of his earliest work with the commentary on Mark 13 and his book on *Jesus and the Future*, there is much material to be gleaned from the end result. Beasley-Murray has updated the material and added comment on more recent scholarship, and while there is really little in the way of new theory which he puts forward, the quality of the original discussion and the juxtaposition of the different materials from his varied output on the Olivet discourse makes this a worthwhile addition to the library.

There are many other books to note, but a few which are worth at least brief mention include: Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll; Orbis, 1981) - an attempt by a European Catholic to write from the kind of perspective of Liberation theology usually associated with Latin America. Belo combines this approach with both structuralist and social-scientific techniques, so the result is very dense in jargon. Although the exegesis is quite erratic in places, it is nevertheless deeply challenging at points to Western values and assumptions. The publication of Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship. Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986) brings together a number of his articles on discipleship which reflect the contribution that Best has made to British NT scholarship and to this subject in particular. In the same subject area, though critical of Best's work, C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples According to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* (Sheffield: SAP, 1989) not only takes up the subject of the role, function and significance of the disciples, but also some of the methodological questions about the continued legitimacy of redaction criticism and historical-critical method in general already hinted at in this article.

Finally, an article well worth reading is John Drury's 'Mark' in R. Alter & F. Kermodé (eds) *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London: Fontana, 1987). Drury's introduction to Mark as literature is a superb contribution to this highly desirable book, the whole of which I commend to you as a very reasonably priced, valuable resource.

There are many other materials on Mark's Gospel which different readers will consider more important than those mentioned here. At least in these few you may find the pointers to others which will also enlighten the task of sermon preparation, or stimulate you to look more closely at the text. I wish you well in the task. **BMB**

# J-Mail

## The Country Parson

*From Stanley Mudd, Orpington.*

Dear Journal, As a former schoolmaster may I congratulate you on the skilful omission of lines 180-210 from your quotation from 'The Deserted Village' of the July issue. It is surely obvious that it was only Goldsmith's fear of offending the established church that made him describe the schoolmaster thus instead of the parson. Nowadays we are happily less inhibited.

'The Deserted Village' is a fruitful source of quotations for the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. What about lines 51-52?

## Journal

*From John West, St Joseph's College, Darjeeling*

Dear Journal,

I look forward to receiving each and every issue of The Journal. I share articles with the Jesuits. In the January 99 issue 'Gathered at the Table' and 'The real human Mary' were of special interest. 'Rocky saw him' from the April issue will be passed on to Fr Bowke, who is deeply involved in all kinds of translation work in Nepali. A few years ago he was awarded a Literature prize by the Nepal Government for a Nepali Thesaurus.

## Prague and Melbourne

*From Clive Doubleday, Orpington.  
Tel 01689-603680.*

*E-mail: CliveDoubleday@compuserve.com*

Dear Journal, I have recently returned from the International Baptist Theological Seminary (ITBS) Jubilee celebrations in Prague, Czech Republic, where I was able

to distribute a good number of Journals amongst the 70 delegates from around the world.

At the end of October IBTS will be hosting their annual Nordenhaug Lectures, which this year are being given by the eminent New Testament scholar, Dr Howard Marshall, with additional lectures on the Old Testament from Dr Martin Selman of Spurgeon's College. I would very much like to encourage UK Baptist ministers to use this opportunity as their annual study week and have, in conjunction with Keith Jones, the Rector of IBTS, put together the following trip: 25-31 October: return flight from London, plus six nights Full Board: £495. Free time to enjoy historic Czech castles, crystals and river cruises! Please contact me for further details.

I am also seeking to encourage Baptists to attend next year's (18<sup>th</sup>) Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Congress in Melbourne, Australia, when over 10,000 Baptists will be gathering for this five-yearly Congress. Details of the tour I am organising are as follows: 2-15 January 2000: two nights Sydney, six nights Melbourne, three nights Singapore: £1,995 (including Congress registration). Long stay option.

Please contact me for further details concerning either of these programmes. **B.M.J.**

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## BMF Preparation for Retirement

The next Conference will take place at High Leigh from June 20<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2000, and is for people retiring in or before June 2002. Those interested should write to:

Jack Ramsbottom, 26 Chilton Road, Chesham, Bucks, HP5 2AT.

Tel. 01494 774689.

E-mail: j.ramsbottom@talk21.com

# Book Reviews

*Edited by John Houseago*

***When I Needed a Neighbour - enabling pastoral care in the local church,*  
Penny Nairne, London, Harper Collins, 1998, 243pp, £8.99**

This book has achieved something that has been needed for a long time. Penny Nairne has put into a single volume a wealth of help for the practitioner in the area of pastoral care. The value of the book is in her thoughtful and yet very down to earth approach. The key to its liveliness and relevance is expressed in its sub-title; the concept of "enabling pastoral care" makes this book an ideal resource for the local church. The significant change which has taken place over the last 25 years, in fact since the production of R E O White's much used *A Guide to Pastoral Care*, is that the pastoral care of the local church is now no longer the private province of the "pastor" but the duty and privilege of the members, many of whom are specifically appointed for roles in the care of others. The recognition that this is how so many churches and pastors are now functioning gives the practical help offered here a vital edge over other books of this kind. Nairne affirms the value and importance of pastoral care, but does not assume that it is to be done by the professionals, nor even by people who have done it before. In this she encourages us to expand the boundaries of pastoral care in the church, to release those who feel fearful or unqualified and to enable them to function in new ways.

The book deals briefly with the concept of a caring church and uses examples to illustrate elements of this. Then in more detail the organisation and co-operation needed for pastoral care is examined, together with some of the practicalities of church visiting teams, including ministry to the sick and dying. Preparation and the ethical issues surrounding marriage and baptism are discussed and again illuminated with real life examples for consideration. The final section is a resource for training in aspects of pastoral care and includes what seem to be eminently transferable materials for training sessions in the local church. No church that is reviewing its pastoral organisation or seeking to improve its training should overlook this book.

We have here a book which emphasises community, continually holds open the mission dimension, approaches pastoral situations with a broad and open view, gives alternative approaches for sensitive areas and provides many real life examples for discussion and thought. Here is R E O White without the quaint language. Well done Penny Nairne.

**Chris Voke**

***Wounded Prophet: A Portrait of Henri J.M. Nouwen* by Michael Ford. Darton Longman & Todd. 1999, £9.95**

Who was Henri Nouwen? As an occasional rather than avid reader of Nouwen's writings, I came to this book with little knowledge of him but found here a fascinating, readable and often moving portrait of the Roman Catholic priest whose ministry of spiritual guidance arose from his own desperate sense of brokenness. I was hooked from beginning to end.

The first part of the book presents essential themes of Nouwen's life and ministry, from

his prayer-life, writing and preaching, to his passion for the flying trapeze! The author then traces his life from his childhood in Holland to his ordination there and his first studies in psychology. He follows him to the States where he became the internationally acclaimed writer and speaker with the frenzied schedule who left Harvard academia for the L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto, only in the last decade of his life coming to terms with his sexuality.

Relying heavily on Nouwen's own work and the personal observations and recollections of those who knew him, Ford compellingly uncovers the man behind the writing: the gifted priest deeply committed to Christ yet restless, profoundly insecure and unable to live what he wrote; the preacher who sparkled in public but wept in private; the pastor so overcome with loneliness he spent whole nights telephoning friends.

If this book avoids some of the critical questions - What was Nouwen's relationship with the Roman hierarchy given his ecumenical vision and practice of the Eucharist? How far did his spirituality arise out of his sexuality? How authentic was his commitment to issues of justice? - it provokes others. In revealing the inner demons with which Nouwen wrestled, Ford exposes the struggles of every minister. In his portrait of Nouwen, I found reflections of myself. And if when I began I was asking 'Who was Henri Nouwen?' by the end, I was asking 'Who am I?'

Mary Cotes

***From a Parish Base - essays in moral and pastoral theology* by Kevin T Kelly,  
Darton Longman & Todd, 1999, £11.95**

At first sight this seems a book that any working pastor would find a straightforward read. It is not so. The easy style belies the challenging content. Father Kelly writes as a Roman Catholic priest and largely addresses his own church from the perspective of local parish experience, making use of his previously published materials to explore some aspects of practical and moral theology. It is a book that combines insights from parish life today, faithfully reflecting where many churches find themselves, and awareness of current thinking in pastoral theology.

Kelly reflects on work in Liverpool and Skelmersdale, moves through a survey of more theoretical aspects of moral theology and finally considers some pastoral issues that engage his mind. There is insight here into the workings of the Roman Catholic Church and the fundamental criticisms by one (if not more) of her sons is illuminating. The challenges to the Roman Church that have emerged from Vatican II are exemplified and make most interesting reading. Of note for Baptists would be the call for collaborative ministry, teamwork and a congregational approach to decision making (there are paragraphs that read like a description of a Baptist church!) Kelly challenges strongly some moral positions taken by his Church and provides a good rationale for doing so, emphasising in particular the sinfulness of each person, including priests, and the Church in its very structures. You will disagree in some matters, but the discussion is valuable.

The book does not fully solve the problem of how Kelly's articles and discourses hang together, however, if you can ignore this (and the repeated irritating reference to his own writing), there is much to provoke and enable thinking in the difficult task of pastoring.

Chris Voke