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The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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The Baptist Ministers' Journal is the journal of
the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.

Details of the fellowship can be found
on the inside back cover.

'The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily
reflect those of the Editor or the Editorial Board'

'In His image'

Pat Took, London. Pat's address to members of the Baptist Ministers, Fellowship and other hearers at Baptist Assembly 2008 was not prepared as a publication for this Journal, but, with her permission, we publish an edited version here.

Earlier this year Baptist Union Council issued an apology concerning the complicity of our society in the Trans Atlantic slave trade, acknowledging its continuing legacy. It represented what has been at times a painful journey, both for those who have found the courage to speak publicly about experiences that have been humiliating and shaming to them, and for those who have listened, some of whom had been unconscious that they were in any way complicit in other people's oppression and who would have preferred to remain unconscious of such a disturbing reality.

But we have become increasingly aware that this terrible fracture of human society - victimization and dehumanising of human beings on the basis of difference - is blasphemous: refusing to see in another's face the one who is created by God in his image and redeemed by him at ultimate cost. It turns that difference which is given for enrichment into a cause for hatred and exclusion. As we have thought more deeply about these issues and have found the courage to face painful conversations we have set out on a joyful journey into God, a journey towards one another, that has taken us beyond the important ethical debates and the clashes of historical and social constructs, to a discovery of each other as gifts from God. As all humans are made in God's image; that there is both blackness and whiteness in God's heart and will; that in each other we find a completion of ourselves.

There is still a huge journey ahead: a love deficit to be made up, lifetimes of marginalisation and exclusion to be healed, before all are free to be what God created them to be. But something of the dream has been realised. We catch a glimpse of that Kingdom where we will delight in Paul's great Gospel truth that for those who have been baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ there is no such thing as Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female but that we are all one in Christ. The cross of Christ has demolished all barriers and a new, joyful and creative humanity is coming into view.

Against the background of this hope, that one of the desperate wounds in human experience, the ancient hatred

and combat between Cain and Abel, might begin to find healing, at least within the body of Christ, I wonder whether we are reaching a time when we might be able to consider that other, deeper, subtler and most enduring of all fractures: the breakdown in the relationship between Adam and Eve.

As the man and the woman turned from God they also turned from each other and the one intended as a gift became a burden and a grief, each becoming incomprehensible, threatening and dangerous in their difference.

Women

For women, the replacement of mutuality by domination and misogyny has led to a terrible history of oppression. Women have been

habitually enslaved, beaten, despised, raped, discarded and silenced. They have died from exhaustion, from premature pregnancy, have been refused education, have been legally disempowered, have been exploited as cheap labour and denied all rest.

While here in the West we do not allow child marriages, and allegedly do not permit sex-selecting abortion, we have a culture that systematically de-humanises women, not just in pornography but in all the imaging of women as those who do or don't conform to a type of male fantasy which is a contortion of the female body. This unnatural image is also one of perpetual youth: to age is to fail.

The negativity of many women's self image creates all kinds of emotional and psychological disorder. The desperate but vain search for Barbie-doll looks and perpetual youth drives billion dollar industries in fraudulent consumer goods.

At the heart of all of this is the refusal to accept as equal one who is made equal, one who is made, loved and redeemed by God. It is about hate, about fear of the different. And until we begin to address this fundamental alienation the efforts we make to end trafficking and prostitution and female mutilation and inequalities before the law cannot succeed.

Men

In this horrible fracture it is not only women who are losers. They have paid the bitterest penalty. But men too suffer deep emotional and psychological estrangement.

God created women to be the companions and colleagues of men. When he saw that it was not good for men to be alone he did not make

'the man down the pub' – he made a woman. Someone who was essentially the same but who was also interestingly different: bringing further resources, fresh intelligence, new ways of seeing things, a deeper companionship.

The destruction of this companionship leaves men in a place of great loneliness. Cities are awash with men living alone in disarray, because the relationships which should have created networks of support, the relationship between their mother and father, between themselves and their parents, between themselves and their wives or partners, between themselves and their children, have broken down. The tragedy is not just the poverty and overwork it brings for women, or the fatherlessness of children, but also the lostness of men.

And the knowledge of what happens to women, the knowledge of what men do to women, creates a sense of shared guilt even in those who have no cause for personal guilt. And guilt in turn fuels bitterness and resentment. Much misogyny is fuelled by this experience of gender guilt, and that in turn drives a further wedge between us.

With the loss of women to the task of government men are left to carry a weight of responsibility which they were never intended to carry alone and which they are unable to discharge intelligently by themselves. This inappropriate division of labour has lost them their rightful place at the heart of the family and impoverished their personal relationships.

We were made for each other, and without each other we are lost. We were made to govern the world together and when men attempt to govern the world alone the result is exploitation and destruction. We were

made to image together the God who created us, and without each other that image is lost.

The Church

So where is redemption and hope to be found? I believe it is to be found in the redemptive work of Christ and in the church when it is truly his body - when it is truly the redeemed community.

Much of the history of the church has held out little hope. It has been a sad story of ecclesiastical misogyny: the scapegoating of women as those responsible for the fall, the declaration that there is no wickedness in the world as great as the wickedness of women; proclamations of celibate clergy that women are in every sense inferior, that they are defective males. Such in fact as in found in the most revered of early Christian scholars and pastors.

For example:

As long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man (vir).

(Jerome: Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, III,5)

We should note Jerome's comparison of 'woman' with 'body'. He regarded his body as an enemy which had to be starved and brutally put to death, so that the spirit could be free. The body was responsible for the lust which bubbled forth and produced lewd hallucinations. If a woman could free herself from her sexuality, she became spiritual and masculine.

Ambrose is clear that salvation for a woman means shedding her femaleness and becoming fully human and fully adult:

she who does not believe is a woman and should be designated by the name of her sex, whereas she who believes progresses to perfect manhood, to the measure of the adulthood of Christ. She then dispenses with the name of her sex, the seductiveness of youth, the garrulousness of old age.

(Ambrose: Exposition of the Gospel of St Luke, lib.X, n.161)

These are just two early examples of the conviction of female inferiority which has persisted in different expressions throughout the Christian centuries. Harry Enfield's splendid sketch "Women, know your place" is not just comedy, but also tragedy.

At the same time the church has let itself be drawn into patterns of organisation based on domination, on structures of exclusion and of power that always work against wholesome community and always disadvantage women.

This is not the preserve of any one church or denomination. Our own community is constantly tempted towards a culture of common life that mirrors the business world and often reflects the habits of mind of the political arena: all about winning; all about status; all about success. Instead of that true mutuality, that serious collaboration in discovering and doing God's will, much church life, revolves around the search for Gung-ho leaders and the cult of celebrity. The exclusivity attached to 'ministerial status' is another expression of domination.

Why?

Why has this great grief gone unchecked for all these centuries?

Why has the church colluded with

attitudes and actions that are so profoundly inhumane and that lead to such catastrophic consequences?

Why have we never seriously considered that foundational call to live as those for whom Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female are now all one in Christ?

Why do we resist and marginalise and dislike this issue? Why have I resisted it for so long?

Why is it that good and loving Christian scholars can still think of this as *adiophora*, marginal, a matter of social custom, and insist that in the matter of freeing and celebrating women, unlike the matter of freeing and celebrating slaves, churches should be free to follow their conscience?

I think the heart of the issue is that this particular fracture lies so close to home that we are often unable to see it. And when we do we are paralysed to do anything about it. Our very identity, all that we know ourselves to be and all that we know ourselves not to be, is bound up in the matter of our gender. In this issue is tangled the relationships that obtained in the home we grew up in, the culture that we have breathed since infancy, the weight of the years and of received tradition.

For Christian people the opinions of those who taught us the faith and whom we honour are woven into our world view. Many have been taught that an unequal status for women in the church is Scriptural, and fear that to challenge this is to open the floodgates of liberalism and Gaia paganism. Women cling quite naturally to the roles in which we feel safe, the networks that support us fear change and the hostility that is always aroused when this matter is raised: the fear of being ostracised

and further marginalised as a trouble maker, an inappropriate woman - an unfeminine woman.

And for men I believe there is a great fear that if women are truly liberated they will use their freedom not to be homemakers and wives: a fear of loss, the loss of the most essential, the most foundational emotional security that is home. There is a fear that given the choice women would choose not to love them, not to care for them or keep them company: an inability to believe in genuinely free and faithful love.

I have no doubt that there are many other complex reasons for our avoiding of this issue. What is clear is that left to ourselves we are not going to be able to overcome the appalling power imbalance that underlies this catastrophic alienation at the heart of humanity.

We must face it, because it is not getting better. Global media has universalised the abusive and exploitative image of women and aggravated the tendency to objectify each other. Consumer society has encouraged us to use and discard each other. Globalisation of crime has made it increasingly easy for us to trade in each other. For the future of the planet, unless humanity is enabled to govern the world intelligently, which means with all the resources of a redeemed community in which men and women work together, we are heading for the last sunset.

It is time the church faced and addressed this disease. We do have the resources. We are equipped to do this. If we can begin to travel out of racist hatreds, exclusions and fears, and begin to realise that new creation in which there is neither slave nor

free, surely the Holy Spirit of God can also equip us to travel into a future in which male and female also find new oneness in the love of Christ.

These resources of hope are threefold, each of them central to the Christian revelation.

1. The nature of God

The first lies at the heart of our understanding of God. Christians know God as Trinity: God in mutuality, in love, in reciprocity. The richness of collaboration and creative partnership at the heart of God is beautifully expressed in the last discourse in John's Gospel, where the different expressions of God merge and separate in an elaborate dance of love.¹ Between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each does the will of the other, each indwells the other, each seeks the glory of the other, each separately plays a part in drawing humanity into the dance. Each is promised as an abiding presence and yet there is but one will and deity. It is the language of poetry: we see a flame of love now united, now separated, always life giving and illuminating. And it is in the image of this richness of personhood that humanity is created male and female. (Genesis 1.26-end)

Of course that does not mean that there is gender in God who is neither male nor female. But to speak about God intelligently we have to use some pronoun, and the nature of Anglo Saxon linguistics and the habits of the world have ensured that the pronoun will be masculine. That this fails to reflect the fullness of God is not disputed. That it serves to enshrine gender dominance in the world² is a rather drastic consequence of this linguistic dilemma. But we know God is Spirit, God is beyond all physicality,

with its sexual specifics, though God is the source and imaginer, the willer of all our physicality, all of which is declared good.³

What we learn about ourselves when scripture tells us that we are made male and female in his image is that we are created to work together for the population and governance of the world. There is an equality of dignity, an equality of divine origin, an equality of human giftedness, but also a richness of diversity.

So men are not the image of God alone and neither are women. Men are not called to govern the natural world alone, but only with women, women only with men. Only together does the full range of human capacity come into view – the resources to fulfil the divine mandate to be God's regents in the physical realm. If either man or woman were to try this alone they would be radically disabled by the loss of their proper colleague in the enterprise, and that is of course what we see has happened.

But for us who worship this God of mutual creativity and collaborative creation, there is in all our communication with such a God the potential for us to understand what we have been created to be and to find each other and ourselves again in the new creation of his redeeming love. Thus Jesus' prayer in John 17.20-23.

God's creative, redeeming purpose for us is that we should know each other, delight in each other, and live and work together in creative and collaborative harmony. Just as in the natural world we need both male and female to create life, so in all aspects of human endeavour, including the church, that original partnership is essential.

It is no accident that the dislocation of all relationship described in Genesis 3, which is understood to be the origin of domestic misery, dominance, blaming and lostness begins with a running away from God. This misery is known to have been a falling away from God's will. And any gospel of redemption that holds out a hope for a new humanity must be seen to overcome the wretchedness of loss and alienation that is experienced in misogyny and domination.

2. Jesus

If our first resource lies in the nature of the Godhead, the second great resource and revelation is Jesus Christ. As those who are disciples of Jesus we look to him to demonstrate and to teach us how we should function as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

For women, the gospels come as a joyful discovery of being loved and valued. This revolution, this emancipation is heralded by Mary in her great song in Luke 1.46ff.

Jesus takes up the theme, opening his ministry with the prophecy of the day of universal liberation and healing - the great Shalom. Good news to the poor, the freeing of the oppressed, and the releasing of captives" - for women this is wonderful good news. But Jesus is never just words, He is Word, and so we find this good news made real in all kinds of actions that were profoundly counter-cultural:

- the touching and healing of the woman who was haemorrhaging and who in that society and indeed most societies, would have been considered untouchable, was an amazing act of compassion and liberation;

- the healing of the bent old lady, whom we still always forget, contradicts that

way of speaking that describes some of our congregations as just a few little old ladies (people of no account);

- the challenging response over the woman caught in adultery overturns the double standards which have oppressed women in every society;

- the concern for the prostitute, for the Samaritan woman at the well, for the street woman who washed his feet with her tears, show his tenderness towards those who were victims of that habitual use and abuse of women that we all recognise.

In the gospel relationships between Jesus and the women who surrounded him, there is a mutuality, a willingness to be served and to serve, to listen and to speak, to welcome and to challenge, in which there is no breath of hostility or superiority.

Beyond this, Jesus is also recorded as giving to women roles that had a sacred dimension to them. So we learn of the woman at the well who evangelised the Samaritan town from which she came.⁴

We have in the great declaration of Martha a prophetic word which places her beside Peter as the fount of gospel proclamation.⁵

There is the remarkable incident of Mary's anointing of Jesus for His sacrifice and His burial. A High Priestly role, which she exercised as a gift of love to Jesus and which caused outrage among the watching men.⁶ And ultimately of course the message of resurrection is entrusted to the women as the first apostles to proclaim that Christ is risen from the dead.⁷

This honouring of women with sacred tasks and roles shows a Kingdom of God which is far different from that of our traditional way of thinking about

the sacred; away from all hierarchy – from all exclusions. Just as Jesus declared all food to be clean and the only uncleanness to be the wickedness that came from human hearts, so also He treated all human beings as clean and all fit to perform those functions of love and holiness which declare the presence of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus leads us out of all misogyny and all false limitation on access to the sacred:

- on Palm Sunday he filled the Temple with untouchables;
- at His death the veil of the Temple was torn in two;
- in His presence those previously excluded, those who were beyond the pale, those who were scape-goated and sidelined, are drawn into the full richness of their inheritance in the Kingdom.

In the same way Jesus challenges all notions of domination. Both in His teaching and in His example Jesus proclaims that in God's Kingdom the pattern of human relationships based on power dynamics will be overturned.⁸

The difficulty that the disciples had in understanding this is evident again and again. We read of them being quite unable to understand what Jesus is saying about the priority of children;⁹ and throughout His ministry the squabbling about who among them was going to be the most important in the Kingdom of God was a continuing frustration and demonstration of how impossible this idea is for human minds.¹⁰

But Jesus taught a Kingdom where each one will gladly and willingly serve the other, each will be happy to wash the feet of the other, the competitive, aggressive and hierarchical pattern of

human arrangements will give way to a pattern of mutuality and welcome.¹¹ And so at the end of His ministry when Jesus commissioned His people to go out and proclaim the gospel there are no distinctions among those so commissioned. All those who were present were given the same task.¹²

In this new community those relationships of mutual service, of delighting in and glorifying one another that we find at the very heart of God were to be expressed once more in the whole range of human relationships and especially in that relationship of mutual creativity between women and men. So Jesus proclaims the good news of the kingdom where the poor, the weak, the oppressed and the imprisoned, the slave, the leper, the gentile and the woman finally come to the banquet.

3. The gift of the Spirit

The transformation this brings to human community and specifically the community of the church, is the work of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit that enlivened Jesus and that he bequeaths to us; the Spirit that enables us to be in some sense indwelt by Christ, and that incorporates us into him.

As the death and resurrection of Christ leads us back to God, reconciliation breaks out and we find again the harmony which was part of our created gift. Delight in Him and delight in each other, male and female, made in His image, complementing one another.

The dividing wall is broken down, not just between God and humankind but also between Jew and Gentile, black and white, slave and free. And above all between man and woman.

That most intimate and most drastic

of all fractures is healed by the cross of Jesus Christ and we see the same honouring, the same welcoming and the same empowering of women that was characteristic of Jesus' own life.

All in the upper room at Pentecost are filled with the Holy Spirit. A tongue rested on each of them. And all began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance.

On this great day of the birth of the church the message is underlined

"I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy."

(Acts 1.17-18)

A wonderfully inclusive community emerges, in which it is quite definitely stated that all, young, old, slave, free, men and women, are included in the blessing and the responsibility of proclaiming the word of God. The inclusivity continues as the word is preached to that huge and motley crew, both Jews and proselytes, who all hear in their own languages.

We can hardly avoid the conclusion that God is breaking down all walls - that in this new Kingdom there is a true hospitality for all. If we were to continue the story we would come to the vision of Peter that clinched his acceptance that not only Jews but also Gentiles are acceptable to God.

For women too this is a great word of liberation "what God has called clean you must not call unclean".

It is this community that lies at the heart of the theology of Paul, for whom the very essence of the gospel is that in Christ all barriers have been

broken down, that in Christ, through the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit it has at last become possible to live together in love.

To do justice to this is too big a task here. Suffice to glimpse it taking form in Romans, commencing in the first chapter with the sorry tale of human alienation and the fracture of all natural relationships, all stemming from that initial alienation as men and women turned their backs on God and hid but moving on through the reconciliation brought by Christ, the righteousness which is gifted to us through his cross.

Paul speaks of our new birth in which we are liberated from the sin, the hard-heartedness which had found such destructive expression in all our relationships, and bound together by the Holy Spirit in a new community in which we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

In Chapter 12 we have a sketch of that redeemed community as the Spirit enables us to function in harmony, in mutual service and genuine love, and in Chapters 13 and 14 the emphasis on preferring the other - on self-forgetting for the sake of the other.

Finally, in Chapter 16, we have a beautiful view of a company on its way to the glory of Christian community; a joyful community drawn from all races, all social conditions, all ages, and both men and women. There are no distinctions here. At last love rules and there is genuine freedom.

These are the themes that inform all of the writings of Paul, who was above all the most passionate exponent of the community of love - for him the reality of the gospel was demonstrated by the possibility that people could indeed achieve this hitherto impossible

dream. For him the breaking down of the barrier between Jew and Gentile was a trumpet call to freedom and to a new community. For him the gospel means both emancipation and maturity.

It is time we trusted the gospel message, to let go of our fears, our defences and our anger, and to find each other again in this new creation, as those in whom the image of the God of mutual love is being restored.

Conclusion

It has taken me a long time to speak on this issue. This may be simply a matter of cowardice on my part. But at the same time I have not wanted to get involved in the trivial and nitpicking discussions that usually emerge when the church tries to debate these questions. It is much too big a matter to be dealt with in such a way. The grief that we face at the heart of the world, is much too profound. And the power of our gospel is much too revolutionary and wonderful to be so traduced.

I want to say to my brothers in Christ: you need us. You need us first of all simply on the human level, as those created to labour with you for the good of our world. In the body of Christ you urgently need us.

If the church is to present to the world the true image of God it will have to demonstrate in its gender relationships that self emptying mutuality which lies at the heart of the Trinity.

If the church is to speak the whole truth of the Gospel, it needs to hear the voices of the daughters and the maidservants on whom the Spirit was poured so that they might prophecy. If their voices are silenced God's whole truth cannot be heard.

If the church is to be true to Jesus in the way it lives there must space in it for women who are evangelists, who are priests, who are prophets and teachers and apostles.

If the church is to be good news in a world where the solution to every problem seems to be the application of force, it needs to function in the ways of Jesus, washing each others' feet, not lording it over each other, indifferent to status and title and thrones and crowns but caught up in a joyful mutuality of service.

We have begun to find freedom and true belonging across those barriers of race that have brutally divided and dehumanised us in the past. What of the long and laborious task of tearing down the centuries of misogyny and domination, of ignorance, fear and abuse that have driven a wedge right into the heart of our humanity? Can we begin to function as those who bear the image of God?

1 See Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God*

2 See the conversation between Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel & Jurgen Moltmann in *His God and Hers*

3 See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* - an interesting discussion of this imaging of God

4 John 4.24-30

5 John 11.21-27

6 John 12.1-8

7 John 20.1-2, 10-18

8 Luke 6 20-26

9 Mark 9 33-37, Mark 10 13-16

10 Luke 22.24-27

11 John 13.12-17

12 Luke 2.33, 46-53, Acts 1.6-8

13 Ephesians 2.11-22

14 Acts 10.15

15 As also at: Gal 3.26-29, 4.6-7, 4.31-5.1; 2 Cor 3.17-18; Eph 4;

Divine Untidiness

Bernard Monk, Worthing. A sermon.

I had an aunt who kept a tidy house. It was almost an obsession. Nothing was out of place.

Everything was exactly where it belonged. A flat surface, for example, was not there to put things on, but rather to be dusted and kept tidy.

My brother and I behaved rather differently and used to leave books or shopping or newspapers on these convenient surfaces. But hardly before you realised, it was all quietly tidied up behind us. It made the home almost into something of a museum. It became difficult to relax. You were never quite sure whether you were in the right place.

I remember mentioning this one Sunday morning in church before going on to talk about the value of untidiness - after which, so it was said, a certain lady in that congregation whose home was also neat and tidy, whenever she saw me walking up the path to visit, would casually throw a few magazines around in her lounge as I rang the front door bell. If only preaching always had such immediate effect.

Although we don't share my aunt's obsession, we probably do some tidying and sorting in our home before visitors arrive, maybe showing the Hoover places not previously visited in a regular manner.

Most of us like some kind of order where we can imagine that we are in control. Things seem easier that way. Perhaps it offers security.

One contemporary minister and theologian talks about the hymn we often sing which asks God to take from

our souls the strain and stress to
*"let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of his peace."*

But this she could not take.

She saw the strain and stress on the faces of many people in her congregation, and wondered what kind of ordered lives they could ever expect to live as they struggled to make ends meet apart from the order and neatness of a middle-class suburb. And, is it only order that can experience peace anyway?

She recalled one occasion when she was asked to sing this hymn at the end of worship - and sighing. Her body was tense and her nerves tingling; at home, a new-born baby was waiting to be fed and her nights were broken by his cries. Hers would be a chaotic night followed by another chaotic day because babies cause disruption.

Is peace impossible with babies around? Does the church demand ordered lives when order is impossible because of circumstances? And just at that time for good reason, her emotional life was not very ordered either.

She was living in chaos. And she resented that hymn partly because she could see and feel that there was a good side to her chaos! Her chaos brought forth new life and continued to feed and nurture it, to hold sustain and love.

And although she could not meet the church's demand, her chaos she came to accept. It was messy, painful and uncontrollable; it was also exhilarating and abounding in life and love.

But life is like that. And sometimes we are most alive when chaos threatens to overwhelm order and things refuse to be tidied away and neatly categorised.

Someone falls in love.

Life falls apart.

Little is sensible or straightforward.

Turbulence threatens everything.

And yet there is an experience never before imagined.

My study at home is reasonably tidy most of the time: but when I am working there, books and newspapers, cuttings and scribbled notes are to be found all over the floor. The best work is often done when the study is in chaos and the adrenalin is flowing.

Is there not some parallel from the world of science? A new theory brings revolution and causes disorder and chaos in the vanguard of creativity.

When a political upheaval takes place, old certainties are often swept away and the future opens up in new and exciting ways so that people, perhaps previously marginalised, are grateful for the chaos that heralds new life.

There is a tension between order and chaos. It is a complex situation. But we need to ask the question as to whether it is sometimes chaos rather than order that is the mark of the Spirit. Who can live when the new is emerging? Who indeed ... except those born of the Spirit!

The opening verses of the book of Genesis might suggest that the God who brings order out of chaos and light from darkness, is in fact on the side of things being neat and tidy. Everything seems in its proper place until that idyllic order is shattered by Adam taking things into his own hands: and now we begin to see that the situation

can never be neat and tidy again.

There will be all kinds of loose ends, unanswered questions, chance happenings, untimely interruptions broken pieces because order has broken down.

And the Pentecost experience in reversing Babel doesn't quite sort it out. In fact, as we read the story, it seems to be the reverse.

Lives were turned upside down by this esoteric experience of wind and fire. Born again? Yes, they were! And it was just as chaotic as their first birth. There were all kind of unexpected and unplanned events. They hardly seemed to know what was happening: people thought they might be drunk. They were no longer in control.

Whatever the hymn might suggest to us today, there was not too much that could be described as "ordered" in their lives just then.

And must this not be reflected somewhere in our experience as Christian people as well as in our church life? Will there not be a kind of charismatic, ecumenical and theological untidiness about the whole scene which is, in fact, a mark of the Spirit? Do we spend too much time and energy 'holding the line' and missing out on the exhilaration - however frightening that might be?

In the words we speak - both in and out of our pulpits - we need to take risks because all the time we are struggling to articulate a mystery. And if that mystery fits too neatly into our careful doctrinal formulations, the chances are that we have lost its cutting edge.

When I was still training for the Ministry, R. E. C. Browne wrote a book about preaching in which he suggested that "the tidy mind is not the truthful mind" and if in our speaking we leave

no room for doubts and questions, we have minds full of unwarranted conclusions.

He urged us quite deliberately to preserve what he described as an 'untidy mind'. It might drive us to distraction and we may fear for our own sanity, but there is no other way. "Untidiness is banished only at the expense of truth."

We live with loose ends and point to a mystery. The wine skins have burst and there is a mess. The wine will bubble.

Truth cannot be packaged like the latest brand of cereal and our language may sometimes be ambiguous because we are not the pious purveyors of neat conclusions. Therefore, in our struggle for words, what we try to say may often be untidy and broken.

I think, also, that our Church communities must also express something of the untidiness in their shape and life. Perhaps focussed at the centre, but ragged and unclear at the edges: open-ended and hospitable; inclusive rather than exclusive where the only lines that are drawn are those shaped by love.

A community where some will fit and perhaps toe the line, but where there is room for those who don't because they are still searching and asking questions. And this is where the untidiness must be preserved that allows them to be included.

I see a Church as an open community, with no neat and tidy lines, a door that is never shut and a welcome that is always waiting.

But these are big issues to wrestle with. Generally we like to play safe and keep people in the boxes where they belong and where they are under control. We are tidy people generally. It is easier that way. But is our tidiness a mark of the Spirit ?

There are those who will remind us that truth is always untidy, while lies come neatly wrapped. We must beware that we do not spend our time trying to explain and sort out what remains a mystery. There is a divine untidiness that will not answer to our theological demands and we do well to recognise that.

The words of the 3rd chapter of John's Gospel come to mind:

*"The wind blows where it chooses,
and you hear the sound of it,
but you do not know
where it comes from
or where it goes.
So it is with everyone
who is born of the Spirit."*

The disciples seem hardly to know what is happening with this wind storming the house and blowing through everything. It was unpredictable and turned everything upside down.

To be born of the Spirit is to experience something like the wind and like the fire - probing and exhilarating, unpredictable and mind-stretching, exciting and mysterious.

In fact, nothing you can tidy up.

On being different together

Gethin Abraham-Williams, Dinas Powys. Gethin, a former Editor of this Journal, was awarded the Cross of St Augustine in 2006 by the Archbishop of Canterbury for 'making an enormous contribution to ecumenical relations.' In this article he describes why he believes ecumenism matters.

Among those who take ecumenism for granted, and an obvious and incontrovertible consequence of a relatively recent exegesis of the Gospel, there is surprise that it has not been reciprocated to the same degree by many of our fellow Christians. Even among those of us who saw ecumenism as the one great insight at the close of a fractious second Millennium and had lived with the idea, and worked for its realisation throughout our lives, there sometimes crept in a certain weariness that it had not yielded the expected harvest, and even at times a degree of questioning whether we'd got it right in the first place!

Hence I would argue that there now needs to be a restating and a re-evaluating of the theological argument for ecumenism, and that it needs to take place at the level of the local-church as well as in the theology faculties of our universities. I leave it to others better qualified than I to produce the works of scholarship, which I feel to be currently lacking in this field. What I want to attempt here is to marshal some of the biblical texts that colour my own approach, and that confirm and challenge me on my ecumenical journey. They fall into three broad categories.

(I)

Maths and Physics

I have two texts for this first section. The first is: "The impious fool says in his heart, there is no God" (opening verse of Pss 14 and 53). The second is: "Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we ask no more' (John 14:8). I find it interesting that the certainty is in the Old Testament and the scepticism in the New.

While impious fool is an improvement on the AV fool, Mgr Knox renders it reckless hearts, which might be better at capturing the spirit of the Hebrew *nabha*. A person may be anything but a fool, in the accepted sense of the word, and yet be a 'reckless heart' in denying the being of God.

These verses capture the certainty, not only of that Old Testament world, but well beyond it, up to the Renaissance. However pluralistic or monotheistic, crude or refined, for the majority of the inhabitants of the globe, until very recent times God was a given.

Turn to John's Gospel and Professor Lightfoot's comment strikes a chord: namely, that it may 'be instructive to reflect whether' this question and others put to Jesus by his disciples, 'are not also the questions which every generation of believers desires to put'. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which for our generation this is an even more pressing question.

St. Augustine's classical proofs for the existence of God may still carry weight

for some, namely: the argument from contingency, from the order and beauty of the world, from the eternal principles of human reason and the moral argument from conscience. But they do not ring bells for those outside any of the great religious systems. Even among those who are religious, but approach their faith from a liberal rather than a fundamentalist stance, the concept of God becomes harder to explain. It is not just 'the reckless' who say there is no God. Many genuinely thoughtful and caring people remain to be convinced.

Since ecumenism is rooted in an understanding of God, it seems vital to me that we give more time and effort to addressing this basic tenet of faith, and in particular to exploring arguments for the existence of God that make sense to people with different terms of reference from those of the past. With a grown-up son more at home with maths and physics than theology, I am acutely aware of the gap between my assumptions and premises and his. Ethically and spiritually we may be able to make common cause, but theologically the gap is wide.

I had hoped that the Gospel and Culture movement that grew out of Lesslie Newbigin's remarkable, if now dated little book, *Beyond 1984* would be more of a bridge. Maybe it still is for some. For me, however, it was a missed opportunity, although some good came of it.

I am not au fait with contemporary philosophy but from time to time I pick up hints and whispers that some of today's systems of thinking can be seen as theological allies. By placing the problem of God in its historical

and philosophical context, essays edited by Philip Blond, entitled *Post-Secular Philosophy*, not only chart the origins of modernity by examining fifteen thinkers including Descartes and Wittgenstein, but show how other possibilities are now conceivable. I wait to hear more of this, and at a level of comprehension I can access. "Lord, show us the Father and we ask no more."

Icon

While I have a lot of sympathy, therefore, with Philip's question, God is nevertheless an every day reality for me. My starting point is Jesus. And in the words of the late, great Howard Williams, who occupied one of London's principal 20th century pulpits, Jesus 'is the human face of God'. It is more than a good sound bite because it summarises the Johannine argument. Jesus answered, "Have I been all this time with you, Philip. and you still do not know me? Anyone who has seen me had seen the Father. And how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9)

This way of coming at God, as it were, through Jesus, has been quite a strong strand in the life of the World Council of Churches, which this year celebrates its diamond jubilee. The captions for the seven yearly Assemblies show a strong Christocentric bias. The second assembly (Evanston 1954) was 'Christ - the Hope of the World', the third (New Delhi 1961) was 'Jesus Christ - the Light of the World', the fifth (Nairobi 1975) was 'Jesus Christ frees and unites', and the sixth (Vancouver 1983) was 'Jesus Christ - the Life of the World'.

Even so, one of the revelations of the ecumenical pilgrimage since Vancouver, largely I suspect because of the influence of the Orthodox Churches, has been the impetus to rediscover and explore the Trinitarian aspect of monotheism, which is such a cause of bafflement, not only to the Moslems! Andrej Rublev's icon of the Trinity has therefore become the image that even austere nonconformists are now prepared to acknowledge as an aid to contemplating the nature of God. And it shows up in the WCC's seventh and eighth assemblies. In Canberra 1991, we have 'Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation', in Harare 1998 it was, 'Turn to God - rejoice in hope', and in Porto Alegre in 2006, a prayer, 'God in your grace, transform the world'.

Imperceptibly but significantly, these themes from the periodic gathering of Christians from across the world, have helped to shape and enrich our understanding of God. From being thought of, in devotion and in life in general, as the omnipotent single and the ineffably self-contained with all its connotations, not least its reinforcement of individualism, we can now talk of God in some sense as community: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. This has tremendous ecumenical consequences on the human, let alone the ecclesial, plane in terms of interdependence and of how to be different together.

We can even conceive of 'communities of disagreement' being a positive ecumenical force, as Michael Taylor, onetime President of the Selly Oak Colleges, propounded. Over the last sixty years we have, therefore, moved away from seeing the goal of ecclesial

ecumenism as creating one monolithic, uniform Church. What we have yet to enjoy, however, is the ability to agree to disagree without disenfranchising each other or worse.

(II)

Cardinal

The texts which I want to draw upon in this second section are these: "Take one leaf of a wooden tablet and write on it then take another leaf and write on it. Now bring the two together to form one tablet." (Ezekiel 37:16-17) From Mark and the synoptic parallels: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand; if a household is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." (Matt 3:24, Matthew 12:25, Luke 11:17) And again from Mark: "He who is not against us is on our side." (Mark 9:40)

Ezekiel was the 6th century BC Father of Judaism, who almost single handedly rescued Israel from extinction after their catastrophic defeat by the Babylonians. In this text the prophet is commanded to take two leaves, inscribe them with the names of Judah and Joseph and join them into one, symbolic of the reunion of the two kingdoms. One King will rule over them.

With the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 (the same year as the WCC was formed) it looked to some as a fulfilment of that prophecy. But as we know from recent history, that achievement is far from the ideal of Ezekiel's vision, because the restoration has been at the expense of the Palestinians who also share that piece of land, and have shared it from time immemorial.

The image of restoration is however a powerful one, and it runs through the whole of Scripture. For us as Christians it contains both a promise and a warning. The promise is of the ultimate unity of the people of God, and the warning is about the consequences of forcing a solution that can defeat the object of that unity. Unity in the biblical sense is never for its own sake, but in order to bring humanity within the experience of God's reign of love.

The second millennium was one in which the Church as a single organism disintegrated. First the East divided from the West. Within the East there were numerous further divisions. Within the West, Protestant seceded from Catholic, and within the Protestant cause there was a multiplicity of continuing divisions of which we are the inheritors.

The twentieth century, however, saw a remarkable awareness of the need for restoration; for bringing separate leaves together to form a single tablet, again. It was a time when the major Christian traditions were changing more than they realised. The opening of the Baptist Union of Great Britain's Assembly in 1998 was not only attended by the late Cardinal Hume, but had him address one of the sessions. It was an historic moment.

My belief is that we will only move into a reconciled unity as lay people in all our Churches increasingly take the initiative to recognise each other. In the meantime the *missio Deo* is inevitably impeded by our continuing failure to recognise each other's ministries and members. We continue to be a divided kingdom, a divided house.

Jesus' Jewishness

There is, however, a wider ecumenism than the one between Christians. It is the ecumenism of Inter Faith Dialogues, and this is much more sensitive. I believe the argument for unity between Christians has been won. It now only waits for the will or the events to bring it about. On the other hand the jury is still out over the degree to which we accept other faiths as common allies in the struggle against secularism.

The so-called Abrahamic Faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, certainly share common roots and a belief in monotheism. Professor James Dunn of Durham University said at a British and Irish 'Churches Together' Assembly in 1996 that, in his opinion, "the greatest schism in the people of God and the greatest challenge to the ecumenical movement is division, not between Catholic and Protestant or between East and West, but between Jew and Christian. Only when that is healed will the purpose and promises of God be fulfilled."

And in his 1994 Risk Book *Common Roots, New Horizons* Hans Ucko; then Executive Secretary for Christian-Jewish relations at the WCC, reminded us that "It is only in recent times that Jesus has been allowed to recover his Jewishness."

Dialogue with the non-Abrahamic faiths raises different issues. Buddhism in particular has long had an appeal to western minds, with the current Dalai Lama being regarded as its most persuasive embodiment. Professor Keith Ward, one of Oxford's most respected Christian academics, writes in his *God, Faith and the*

New Millennium, that 'In the third millennium many possibilities exist for bringing the various religious traditions into a positive and mutually enriching relationship. For that to happen, the traditions must not be destroyed, but must remain as witnesses to the diversity of human understanding of God, a diversity which will remain within any wider convergence of traditions.'

White House Lawn

I have two texts to sum up the final part of my ecumenical *raison d'être*. First, from an unknown prophet in the tradition of Isaiah: "No child shall ever die again an infant, no old man fail to live out his life.... Men shall build houses and live to inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit" (Isaiah 65:20-21).

The second is from Revelation 21:1: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth."

The Isaiah passage is the radical religious agenda in a sound bite! No more exploitation. No more injustice. No more war. Thus Konrad Raiser, a former General Secretary of the WCC, could define ecumenism as a 'dynamic concept which extends beyond the fellowship of Christians and churches to the human community within the whole creation.' And Raymond Fung, onetime secretary for evangelism in the WCC's Commission on Mission and Evangelism, could claim that

God's plan and hope for the human community is summed up in these verses: "That children do not die, that old people live in dignity and that those who work enjoy the fruit of their labour." And that is the real work of ecumenism. Because, while ecumenism in popular parlance is seen as only Church Unity, the Greek from which it comes, *oikoumene*, just means the whole inhabited earth. It is easy therefore to see how a distinction has arisen even among Christians between 'Life and Work' and 'Faith and Order'.

Faith and Order is currently unpopular. It seems dull and far removed from the real world. I would argue however that, unless its importance is recognised, whatever progress we make in life and work will be impeded by failure to agree over faith and order. High profile declarations of accord by world statesmen on the doorstep of No 10 or the White House lawn become possible only because careful and protracted negotiations have first laboriously hammered out reasonable compromises. The same is true of the Churches. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth."

Gethin Abraham-Williams' new book *Spirituality or Religion?* is due to be published by O-Books in November [ISBN: 978-1-84694-149-8].

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The Work at Height Regulations 2005

Misleading press reports have suggested that the Work at Height Regulations forbid the use of ladders for changing light-bulbs in churches. Whilst ideally, alternative means of access such as tower scaffolds or mobile elevated work platforms should be used, the regulations do allow for the use of ladders under certain circumstances.

Application and definition

These regulations cover England, Wales and Scotland. The Regulations define work at height as work in any place (including a place at or below ground level) or obtaining access to or egress from such place while at work, except by a staircase in a permanent workplace where, if measures required by the Regulations were not taken, a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury.

Planning and supervision of work at height

Work must be properly planned and appropriately supervised. It must not be carried out at height where it is reasonably practicable to carry out the work in a safer way. (e.g. light fittings and items at high level could be taken down for cleaning, restoration and repair)

Where work is carried out at height, reasonable measures must be taken to prevent any person falling a distance liable to cause personal injury. Where access is routinely required at high level, eg for the clearance of leaves and debris from gutters, or the routine maintenance of parapets and roofs, the installation of fall arrest systems may be necessary.

Use of ladders

Ladders may only be used for work at height if a risk assessment has demonstrated that the use of more suitable work equipment is not justified because of the low risk and short duration of use, or existing features on site which cannot be altered.

Ladders must be placed on firm surfaces to provide support so that the rungs remain horizontal. They should be positioned to ensure stability during use. Portable ladders must be prevented from slipping by securing the stiles at upper or lower ends by using an effective anti-slip or other effective stability device. Ladders used for access must be long enough to protrude sufficiently above the place of landing to which they provide access, unless other measures have been taken to ensure a firm handhold.

Further Information

There is no Approved Code of Practice but the HSE have issued two Brief Guides, Ref: INDG401- The Work at Height Regulations 2005 and INDG402 Safe use of ladders and stepladders which can be downloaded free from www.hsebooks.com

Café church: story of an experiment

Cid Latty Welwyn Garden City

The network leader of cafechurch network shares his enthusiasm for one of the newer 'ways of being church'.

One day we could see a café church in every high street coffee shop across the UK. It is already beginning. Churches are taking faith to be about adventure and leadership to be about acting with humility and are therefore positioning themselves to connect with their community's right where communities meet. Many churches have taken up the challenge to step into a 'secular' space and re-imagine church in a culture that predominantly has few ties with the church.

How can the church connect with its community? This was the dilemma that Christchurch Baptist faced in Welwyn Garden City. A vibrant Baptist church situated on the edge of the town centre, we already had a number of community projects which fully utilised our own building but we wanted to do something that got us out of the walls of our church. We decided one day to ask the Manager of our high street Costa Coffee if they would mind if we used their building to host an event. We were surprised when we were given permission to use the shop 'after hours' for two hours on a Sunday evening. Costa would staff the evening so we set about thinking what kind of event we would do. We decided to book two events; one on the environment the other on the Da Vinci Code. In the lead up to these events we shared the vision widely and hoped and prayed someone – anyone! – would turn up. We were amazed to

find that events were packed drawing people from other churches too. So we booked monthly meetings from June 2006 and have consistently seen sixty to seventy people enjoy an evening to relax and engage in conversation.

Each evening covers a different issue and runs with a set 'menu'. Someone starts with a welcome and introduce the topic of the evening and encourages people to do a quiz that is on the tables. We find this is an easy way to begin conversations that help people make friends. We always give a prize for the winning table, which adds to the fun. Then there is a short talk and an interview which leads into discussion time around tables as the coffee flows. There is a round-up at the end of the evening, suggesting how people can get involved or get help with any issues raised.

We may offer opportunity to talk with someone, get some prayer or even link people with other church activities such as an Alpha course. This very simple 'menu' has worked well because it is completely flexible and adaptable.

It was while running one of these evenings that I got into a great conversation with a Regional Manager for Costa Coffee - Sandy Gourday. We had invited him to come and speak about the Costa Foundation which is the fair-trade arm of Costa Coffee. When Sandy saw what we were doing and

the way in which we were creating and engaging with the community he immediately invited us to talk further about doing the same in other Costa Coffee stores across the UK. As we talked we could immediately see the potential of such a partnership. The church knows much about building community but is often in the wrong context (the church building itself may be the biggest hurdle). Costa Coffee has a great context but needs community to survive. Together we see a win/win partnership. I have often called this a 'dream ticket' for Costa and the church. It goes beyond Costa coffee simply seeking to make money and the church trying to hoodwink people into a cold building.

There is a special something about this I've not entirely put my finger on. I guess it has something to do with God's timing to meet people in a way they can understand. The incarnational nature of café church requires the disciples of Jesus to go beyond simply asking people to sign up to a code of beliefs by asking us to discover what it means to live out those beliefs. Hence an emphasis on sharing values through conversation. It is true that 'people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care' and by listening to other peoples'

stories and sharing our own we find people see that we care. Something of the life of God seasons our words and it is this aroma of a very present God that I believe is the biggest draw for all types of people. The success of any café church is not the ability to encapsulate the latest gimmick or sales tactic but to make sure we are keeping as close to God as we can.

It is our hope that one day we will see a high street café church in every town, village and city. The Church will have not only sensed the opportunity but will have seized the moment to act. We have therefore set up the 'cafchurch network' to resource and help churches that have begun to ask us to help them set up a café church. Some will be in Costa Coffee stores – and any church wishing to start a café church in a Costa Coffee store should come through the cafchurch network - but it's not just about Costa Coffee. There are many other coffee shop venues where a church could set up a café church and we can still help churches set up in other venues too.

We encourage people to visit the website www.cafchurch.net or call 01707 390246 for more details.

At the point of need

Brian Tucker, Hitchin

It was a relief to be admitted to hospital. For some weeks I had been increasingly unwell, and now there was the prospect that a straightforward and common operation would quickly put me on the road to recovery.

But it didn't. Instead, pre-operative tests revealed that another process was at work, more threatening and more elusive, and after the operation I was kept in for an additional fortnight for interim treatment and a series of tests. It was more than thirty years since I had been a part-time hospital chaplain, more than forty years since my only other significant period as an in-patient, and more than fifty years since I had worked as a nursing orderly during national service with the RAMC. It was time to become acquainted with the contemporary hospital experience.

The experience did not feel therapeutic. For one thing, the environment was aggressively noisy. The noise began promptly at six, when the night staff began taking blood pressures, temperatures and pulses. Nowadays these are all measured by electronic machinery, which signals its procedures by a variety of bleeps. These increasingly irksome and intrusive sounds fill most of an hour, and invade another hour each evening. The day in between has its regular features, all of them accompanied by their characteristic sounds: the clatter of the meal trolley, the whine of electronic cleaning machines, the claims for attention of people changing water jugs, bringing drinks, selling newspapers, wanting blood samples, changing sheets, administering medicines. And in somebody's private room there is the background burble of TV.

Lights go down in the evening about 10.30 but often come up again for a late admission: the transfer from trolley to bed, and the long process of settling in someone who is agitated, in pain, or - in the case of one next

door neighbour of mine - in advanced dementia. The shortened night does bring some blessed silence, though intermittently broken by conversation and by trips to the toilet accompanied, as in my own case, by a drip stand with unco-ordinated wheels.

I had come prepared with my trusty copy of David Adams' *The Rhythm of Life*, patterns of prayer in the Celtic style with forms for four stages of each day following themes for each day of a week. It is a modest book, not fattened by too many words: the most important parts of it are the blank spaces between the blocks of text. Sometimes I woke in time to use it before 6 o'clock; otherwise that early morning stage was simply overrun by noise and activity. Usually, the same fate befell most of the other stages too. My other recourse was the Gideon New Testament and Psalms. Early on, looking for something more familiar in Psalm 119, I stumbled across verse 83 whose first line reads, "I shrivel like a wineskin in the smoke." I found this strangely comforting because, despite the formal constraints of the psalm's structure and governing

subject, it gave me voice, it said how I felt. Through it, Scripture offered me a home even though I was not full of faith and testimony. For several nights following, when I was awake in the near darkness, it lent me a focal image for what, in my case, passes for meditation. So those devilish bleeps were not wholly victorious.

Then there are the nurses. Like the o." Myther specialist staff who visit your bedside or to whose offices you are taken by a porter, they know their job and they do it. Bu they are sometimes overwhelmed by it. Each morning the sister in charge of the new day shift sets out to be on top of things by organising everying and swinging into ordered action. But usually the initial round of bedside visits isn't over befofr some emergency has arisen, the ranks are scattered, the plans are in disarray and we are back to the more customary mode of simply responding to Macmillan's "events, dear boy, events", often scurrying on to the next before the previous task has been completed. Manifestly, there are simply not enough nurses for the claims being made on them. So there is never time for that most therapeutic of encounters, the precious few moments when nurse seems to have nothing to do but attend, not to the patient's physical or physiological condition, but to the patient. In any case, the nursing cast changes from day to day, you keep seeing new faces, and there is little opportunity to develop any continuing relationship. There was a notice telling me I could ask to see the Chaplain. I would have been glad to see her, but that didn't seem sufficient justification for putting in a formal request. Evidently no one else did either, because we

never saw her on the ward. Perhaps she was overwhelmed too, like the local ministers who are always too busy with other more important stuff to make routing home visits, as I was myself at one stage.

Each morning consultants make their rounds, each accompanied by a few trainee acolytes. These are very brief encounters and, in my experience, also marked by rapid changes of personnel. Even so, these wise men and women come bearing gifts. The commonest gift is the gift of frankinsence of medication or treatment, but what we are all waiting for is the gift of gold. It takes the form of four words: "You can go home". My neighbour opposite had been through a very gruelling time involving catheters and frequent disappointments. He was no tough guy, but he had borne it all with fortitude. At last the morning cam when it was his turn to hear these golden words. Then, for the first and only time, he burst into tears. It was the good news which made him weep, the immincne of liberation. His was not the reaction foretold by Second Isaiah or some psalms. Nevertheless, we patients are all exiles - required to live where we must, while nursing the hope of freedom to live where we ought. Most no longer have access to the biblical model for this longing, but it evidently haunts the human psyche universally at some deep level, for Christopher Brooke identifies 'Voyage and Return' as one of *The Seven basic Plots* (2004) which recur in the stories of all cultures.

You may, however, receive the gift of myrhh. If so, handing it over may be delegated to the acolytes. I was told to go to the Sister's office, and

found a delegation of three waiting for me there, sitting in a row, they in their crisp uniforms, I shambling to the seat opposite them in the patient's penitential garb of pyjamas and slippers which proclaim, "There is no health in us". After a brief lead in, they told me that the test results did not yet permit an exact diagnosis, but did show that, whatever that turned out to be, it would be some form of cancer. partly because of the manner in which the information was conveyed, I heard it as a death sentence. It was solemn news, but not altogether surprising. I hadn't spent a lifetime in the profession without long since understanding and accepting that, soon or late, I shall die, as both my father and my son have died before me. So I accepted the information without demur. Like the man who comes forward at the evangelistic crusade but doesn't seem to know the standard conversion story, had evidently not made an adequate response. It had to be poked and prodded out of me, and one of them found just the sharp stick to do that with. "What about your wife?" These were the four words that got the tears out of me, and convinced them that my hands had closed round their gift. They started to talk about palliative care.

Meanwhile, Helen and I had Doctor B. He was another acolyte, a devout member of the Orthodox Church, and he took it upon himself to come and spend time with us almost every evening. How he carved that time out of his numbing schedule I cannot imagine, but he patiently answered our questions and explored our concerns, as well as telling us about the church he loved. So we found gold after all, and felt all the richer for

stumbling upon it all unsought.

Then we had Doctor H. We met her for the first time after I was discharged, and it was she who at last gave us a more precise diagnosis. I had Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system. The treatment was to be chemotherapy: eight sessions at three-weekly intervals, to be administered in the specialist suite which was her domain. Another doctor there told us, "We do terrible things to you, because the alternative would be even more terrible". It sounded like exorcism. His message was dramatically underlined by an accident which happened while I was having chemo 4. A nurse went to hang a drip bag on the adjacent patient's stand, but let go before it was secured. It fell to the floor, exploded, and sprayed its contents all over the room and its occupants. After a moment's pandemonium we were evacuated into the waiting area where one nurse supervised continuing treatment while all the rest completely washed and changed themselves, then washed the whole treatment room and all its furniture and equipment. All this was to remove every trace of the noxious solution which, at the very same time, was being dripped directly into our veins. It is a vicious treatment; it does not go with the flow of nature, butg locks horns with the enemy. No wonder it has undesirable side-effects.

Yet we have both experienced our time at the suite as therapeutic. Dr H sets the tone: highly skilled, acutely attentive to what the patient says, and with as much time as it takes to respond carefully to as many questions as patient and partner need to ask.

The nursing team is stable; there has not been a single change in the five months of our attendance. They also manage to combine technical competence (but for that one slip) with natural human warmth and interest and useful practical advice. Besides, they include one post allotted to a MacMillan trained nurse who does no actual nursing, but is simply available to patients as needed, both face to face and by telephone. In the early stages we found this invaluable. I am left, though not comparing like with like, facing the conundrum of how an ordinary ward in the same hospital can be brought closer to the model provided by this suite.

One piece of very firm advice was to avoid crowds and anybody with any infection. Chemotherapy undoes your immune system, so even the most inconsequent germs can bring you low. So I haven't been to The Millstream lately. I have, however, resumed going to church. We keep to the spirit of the advice by going home again as soon as the service is over, not lingering for the

customary coffee and chat. I have been quite surprised by how unsatisfactory this truncated experience is; worship which doesn't incorporate fellowship, however apparently superficial, is more impoverished than I would have guessed.

As I write, I await a post-chemotherapy scan and then a verdict which it will be Doctor H's job to deliver. She doesn't pronounce cures; the best she will allow is a blessed state identified as 'full remission', in which you live your life as if cured, but with the knowledge that the enemy may make a return visit at any time. Martin Luther would have understood this well enough, and on that basis it would certainly be good enough for me. Meanwhile, I am grateful for an experience which has not only made me feel much better but also taken me into the life of a contemporary NHS hospital and allowed me to see it at its best and at its average, and to appreciate some of the people whose working lives sustain both.

HOLIDAYS

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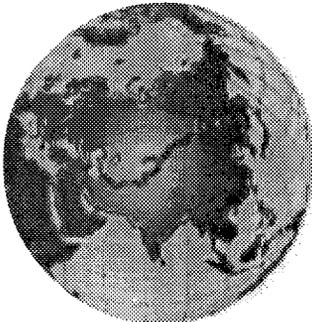
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Books

The Roots of Terrorism in Israel and Palestine – the uses and abuses of the Abrahamic covenant

Geoffrey Victor Whitfield

Lexington, KY; Emeth Press. 2007 pp 308. ISBN 978-0-9797935-1-6

Geoffrey Whitfield has had a long commitment to peace building across the Palestinian-Israeli divide. This has included working with multi-faith youth projects and working with people in the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities. This has been deservedly publically acknowledged by the award of an MBE in 2004, which is recorded in the appendix to this fascinating book.

What is told, however, are not stories of sowing seeds of reconciliation. The aim is to delve down into the roots of what appears an intractable conflict, which become ever more entrenched and pernicious. One of the key factors which has been too long neglected, Whitfield argues, is the Abrahamic covenant, found in Genesis 17. 5-8, where the land is promised to Abraham and his seed. This has influenced Christian, Jewish and Islamic understandings of rights and ownership in Palestine. It has fed Jewish and Christian Zionism over two hundred years. So the key theme is to trace the way this theme runs through the history of the middle-east and world opinion concerning the situation there.

The result is an extremely well researched history of the Israeli-Arab

struggle, its origins and prognosis. Inevitably, in such a fast moving situation, the most recent initiatives involving Tony Blair and George Bush came too late to be included. But if anyone wants to understand the tangled skein that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict this book offers a clear, fair and informed introduction. Whitfield does not pull punches. It will certainly not wholly please those fanatically committed to either side. It is also human, recognising the frailty of human nature and the depths of pain and brutality that is involved in what is effectively continuous war, with so few, but some real, signs of peace.

Perhaps two critical points are permitted. First, I missed any reference to the Palestinian argument that the land should be treated by Christians as part of the Law, like the ritualistic laws, that has been abrogated by the gospel, and so should not be part of the equation. Secondly, the style could have been somewhat tighter. This would have avoided repetition of the argument from time to time and obviated the occasional obscurity. Nevertheless this labour of love, from someone passionately committed to the 'gospel of reconciliation' over many years, deserves to be widely known. It is an invaluable contribution to bringing light to bear on an often obscure and obscured situation, clouded by prejudice and partisanship, and thereby enabling understanding and hope.

Paul Ballard, Cardiff

*Ten Commandments for Pastors
Leaving a Congregation*

Lawrence W. Farris

Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge
UK: Eerdmans, 2006; pp. 105, £12.00,
ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-2924-5

I have previously favourably reviewed Lawrence Farris' earlier book – offering ten commandments to pastors new to a congregation. Here we have a predictable, but equally valuable, companion volume which focuses on the other end of a ministry.

The format is identical: ten chapters, each offering a 'commandment' – and an afterword giving an eleventh. Again, the theological reflection is not always deep, but there is a wealth of wise counsel. The copious illustrations are undeniably American, but a minimum of translation is required to make this book work very well in our UK context. The author's Presbyterian churchmanship is close enough to our Baptist experience to be relevant, and sometimes the differences themselves stimulate valuable reflection on our own systems.

The first commandment, Thou shalt know when it is time to go, speaks for itself. There follow commands to explain the reason for going, and not to leave quietly but with proper goodbyes and closure. The fourth command is to affirm the congregation one is leaving, and the fifth to try and put right some of the relationships and processes that may have gone awry. Subsequent commandments focus on preparing for one's successor, being gentle with oneself, attending to one's

family, staying away once you've gone, and allowing oneself to grieve properly for the losses in leaving. The afterward speaks of the need to let go of the past in order to be able to lay hold of the future. As I have said, there is wisdom here by the bucket load.

Two chapters particularly engaged me. If there was cause for dispute, or at least discussion, it may have been in the command to help your successor have a good beginning. Farris suggests leaving two documents for the one who comes after: a map and a history. The map is hardly controversial, though I think I might prefer to get my own – ensuring it's up to date, and so on. The history is more problematic. Yes, it could be a valuable aid to continuity. But it could also skew the perceptions of your successor in ways that may not be helpful. Because you have found some person or some situation difficult does not guarantee that they will; identifying, as Farris suggests, future directions for development of the church's ministries, is not something for the one who is leaving but for the one who arrives – and for those who remain. To be available for consultation and conversation is one thing, but I am uneasy about the thoroughness suggested here.

The Methodists have a rule that a departing minister cannot go back to the church premises again for twelve months after their pastorate has finished. It's a sensible rule in many ways. The difficulties of being invited back, and by whom, are helpfully explored by Farris in his chapter

on staying away. Even when one imagines one's presence is benign and supportive, there's much pause for thought here. The BU's ministry department hopes in the next year or two to draw up good practice guidelines: here's an area where some careful thought could be most useful.

So once again Lawrence Farris has written simply but effectively. I ended my review of his first book by suggesting that if you know of someone starting in a church you should buy them a copy. Some diplomacy might be needed if giving a copy of this book to an acquaintance - however, I heartily recommend this small volume for all who are leaving and who one day might!

Rob Ellis, Oxford
(Prepared for Regent's Reviews)

Holy Spirit and Religious Experience in Christian Writings, c.AD 90-200

J E Morgan-Wynne Paternoster Press. 2006. Approx. 350pp. £24.99p ISBN 1-84227-319-1

This book addresses the important question, "If it be true that an intense awareness of the Spirit's presence and power was the hallmark of the earliest generation (as suggested by Acts and Paul), did that continue for much longer or did Christianity settle down to become something more 'domesticated' and 'bourgeois'?" (p2). This is not merely a historical question but is vital to us all who are interested in a vital living church in our day. What was the experience of the Holy Spirit

in those first days, and was it lost? It is impossible to do justice to such a wide ranging study, so this review is written from the perspective of the Pastoral Minister. I believe this book deserves a place on the shelves of the Pastor's study for it will be a source of teaching and inspiration.

John covers the period from AD90 – the culmination of most of the writings of the N.T. - to AD200, thus bridging the period of change from the early days to the more settled long term Church.

The experience of the Holy Spirit is considered under three headings:-

(1) Divine Presence – a vivid lived experience of God's presence through the Spirit. (2) Divine Illumination – the granting of deeper understanding, the awareness of the Spirit's guidance, and, especially, the growing awareness of divine truth through the Spirit. (3) Divine Empowerment – the consciousness of being helped by divine power in action, against temptation, and in the growth of Christlikeness. These three issues of spirituality, guidance and theological reflection, and spiritual growth, are vital to the modern Pastor.

The plan of the book is geographical. Writings are discussed region by region. Each author is explored under the three headings of Divine Presence, Divine Illumination, and Divine Power. The writing is refreshingly lucid and easy to read. All is drawn together in helpful conclusions. The range of reference is extensive. This

thoroughgoing method brings us into contact with a wide range of scripture and material from the early Church. For me it was a revelation of how much the Christian experience of the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit continued to be formative. There are many fresh insights into familiar scripture, and an introduction to later authors I did not know. I can give a few 'tasters' of the book. From John's gospel there is an exploration of the image of the new birth – birth 'from above' or 'a second time' (3:3). This is an experience that is "dramatic and startling, something which is sharply delineated in the memory" (p25). Clearly this is something more than a metaphor; it is a 'dramatic religious experience of memorable dimensions' (p27). Likewise the terms 'living water' and 'the comforter' refer to tangible experiences.

Likewise in the Johannine letters the Spirit's presence is a conscious experience. 'We know that we abide in Him and He in us by the fact that He has given us of His Spirit (1 John 4:13). The rest of the N.T. is explored giving many rich insights.

After this the next generations up to A.D.200 are explored. The Odes of Solomon radiate intense personal devotion. John writes, "No other extant work of the Second Century is so vibrant with the intensity of Christian experience (p59) "One might call the Odes.....'a charismatic song book' from the second century" (p307). Ignatius is described as "a charismatic institutionalist" (p53). For Justin conversion was "a felt experience"

(p165). For Irenaeus, remembered for Apostolic Succession, "The Spirit is.....the vital means of our experience of God. Knowing God is a matter of being indwelt by the Spirit.(p206)

The book is lucidly written and easy to read. 8 clear Conclusions draw together its findings. Conclusion I is important for Pastors. "The claim to have the Spirit of God on the part of Christians may be understood as part of their 'self-understanding'". In an age where 'Spirituality' is in vogue for many who do not adhere to the Gospel there is a clear need for Christians to distinguish between spirituality as a dimension of humanness, and an experience 'from another dimension' 'from above'. As John 14:17 has it, "The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him no knows him. You know him, *because he abides with you*". Conclusion VIII answers the book's opening question. "We may not live in the in the atmosphere of the Pauline letters, but equally, we do not descend to the impoverished level of some. The literature surveyed leaves us with a variegated picture, and in that, at least, it probably reflects faithfully second century Christianity". (p291). Pastors who read this will find their preaching enriched, their understanding widened, and their knowledge deepened.

Tony Turner, Bristol
(Prepared for Regent's Reviews)

Geoffrey R. Breed, *Calvinism and Communion in Victorian England. Studies in Nineteenth-Century Strict-Communion Baptist Ecclesiology*, Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press; pp. 646. £30 + free p & p for members of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship when ordered from the author, 14 Cleave Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 4AY 1-888514-29-9

In *Calvinism and Communion in Victorian England* Geoffrey Breed has made available previously unpublished documents relating to the debate amongst nineteenth-century Particular Baptists about the admission of believers to the Lord's Supper. As background to these documents the author helpfully reprints information about the London Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches (LASBMC) from his earlier book, *Particular Baptists in Victorian England and their Strict Communion Organizations* (2003). For the first time we have available the Minutes of the LASBMC for the period 1846-1855.

Geoffrey Breed reprints three Circular Letters issued by London Strict Baptists Associations as well as various documents setting out the case for close communion. The arguments for open communion are presented in a rare document 'Is the Practice of Open Communion Scriptural?' written by an anonymous author, who called himself 'A Lover of the Truth'.

Cavendish Baptist Chapel, Ramsgate, held a more moderate form of Calvinism than that held by the LASBMC. The church was a member of the East Kent and Sussex Baptist Association and the Baptist Union. Miss Mary Spencer had given £3,200 towards the erection

of the Chapel on the understanding that strict communion should be the practice of the congregation meeting in the chapel, which was put in trust for the use of 'Calvinistic or Particular Baptists'. The church adopted a clear closed- communion policy during the ministry of the Reverend Francis Wills but then in 1853 the church appointed the Reverend Benjamin Copeland Etheridge, who favoured open-communion. Miss Spencer took Etheridge to law, claiming that he had acted in violation of the 1841 Trust Deed. Geoffrey Breed reprints the documents relating the law suit 'The Attorney General v. Etheridge', which show how the legal profession debated what it meant to be a Baptist.

The appeal of this book is likely to be mainly to those who have an interest in Baptist history but the issues it raises are still important when discussing Baptist Identity. The LASBMC 1846 'Circular Letter on the Scriptural Constitution of the Churches of Jesus Christ' expressed the Strict Baptist conviction that a Scripturally Organized Church or Congregation of Christ was composed of baptized believers, 'voluntarily associated together, having their own elected pastor or deacons, being actuated by one spirit, having one Lord, one faith and one baptism'. Such churches existed 'for the manifestation of the divine glory in the world'. Although open communion is the normal practice for most Baptist Union churches, *Calvinism and Communion* raises the fundamental issue of what it means to a Baptist and it would surely be helpful for us to define what we now understand by the words 'a Baptist Church'.

Michael J. Collis