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the baptist ministers'  
**journal**

**October 2009, volume 304**

***The acceptable outsider***

John Rackley

***Honey pots: a response***

Paul Beasley-Murray

***Slavery, the Bible, and the apology***

Ted Hale

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**the baptist ministers'**  
**journal**

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# From the editor

## *Better together*

It has been exciting to begin the task of editing the *bmj*, to follow the good work of my predecessors, and to network with Baptist ministers all over the country. Baptists have a fine tradition of reflecting theologically *together* on the practice of ministry: it may often happen through colleagues; on occasion, it may happen at the church meeting(!); it might happen when away at a conference or on retreat; and sometimes it might happen here, in the pages of this journal.

Please make use of this opportunity. The *bmj* offers the chance for us to reach hundreds of others in the Baptist family who face similar contemporary pastoral and missiological dilemmas. We can share solutions, invite debate, and deepen our discipleship.

In this issue you will find articles by experienced colleagues relevant to ministry and mission, a selection of book reviews, and the popular *Of interest to you*. There is a new column, *A point of view*, where readers can offer a different 'take' on some topical issue or event—sometimes a controversial one. It can be helpful to hear another side of a debate and to be challenged to think clearly about why we hold our own views.

I am always happy to consider new submissions—please keep to a maximum of 2000 words for a theological article and 1500 for a more general article, and feel free to email me to discuss it first. Longer articles will sometimes be published, depending on the available space and content. You might want to write a response to something you have read—either a short piece (*ca* 250 words) or a longer discussion of your points.

Items for *Of interest to you* should be referred to Graham Warmington and those interested in reviewing books should contact John Houseago. Please note that the timing of publication will depend upon the length and composition of the whole journal, and the various section editors' decisions about inclusion are final. All contact details are printed on the inside front cover. I look forward to working with you to make the *bmj* a good and useful resource for contemporary ministry. *SN*.

# The acceptable outsider

John Rackley

*If you had wanted a minister simply to maintain what this church has done, then you should have called one of yourselves to be minister, because I am not one of you; nor ever can be.*

I said it before I thought about it. The words were out there in the church meeting. They could not be called back.

Much thinking about ministry emerges from experience, and what I offer here is a reflection on these words, which came out unguarded, without censorship or concern for the person who provoked them. Hearing myself say them affected me deeply at the time, and I am still seeking some sort of theological rationale.

I cannot remember what was being talked about in the meeting, which was early in my ministry at that church. The context would obviously make a difference, but essentially I believe that a minister's experience of isolation and marginalisation emerges in such moments and is inevitable and necessary for the wellbeing of a church.

I am not talking about the isolation that a minister may feel because s/he does not like some people in the church but is expected to deal with it (unlike other members); or which his/her family may experience because there is not enough money; or the deep loneliness that may

*I am  
not one  
of you,  
nor ever  
can be*

arise from a church's belief that the minister and spouse have some sort of immunity from the pressures on marriage today; or the isolation that grows when issues of retirement and housing become a serious consideration.

Nor am I thinking in terms of how I work, or how a congregation may understand the role of its minister. Rather, I believe that if a minister is not a 'resident alien', then he or she should certainly be the welcome stranger or, as in the title, an acceptable outsider.

### **Ordained to the margins?**

The isolation and marginalisation of which I speak is, I believe, necessary; and an inevitable result of ordination and obedience to the gospel. I believe that a minister is required to:

- \* give attention to the gospel call to the ministry of the outsider;
- \* resist the attractions of a 'duvet' ministry;
- \* practice the spiritual virtue of 'detachment';
- \* embrace the reality of our spiritually adventurous age.

At the Baptist Assembly each year, the President says at the Recognition of Ministers:

*All God's people are called to be disciples.*

*All are called to be servants of God in Christ Jesus  
through the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*Yet God calls some to servant leadership in the Church....*

*then let this Assembly affirm them*

*as servants of Christ and ministers of the gospel.*

I note in this quotation from *Gathering* that the church is given an upper case 'C', while the gospel receives a small 'g', which should not be explained away as a publishing convention. It is about a priority. The church is given primacy over the gospel, and so there are consequences—not least

in terms of the relationship between minister and members—for a ministry which is about being a servant of Christ and minister of the gospel. I am aware that there is a theological debate here—indeed, I believe putting church before gospel questions our Declaration of Principle.

Is it the church, or the gospel, calling the tune? Which has priority: ordination or induction? I suspect that the focus on the local church among Baptists has given an ascendancy to induction over ordination. Particular pressures today are making this more obvious, but I do not have time to consider them here.

Ask yourself which anniversary is ever mentioned in your church: ordination, induction, or neither? And as a minister, do you recall them and personally acknowledge the calling of God in your life? As a member of one my churches said to me, ‘your ordination was your business, John; your induction here is ours’. There’s a loaded statement!

Yet it does allow me to say, ‘I come to you as an acceptable outsider’. We should not forget that each minister is called to prepare for ordination *in anticipation of* a call to a church, not *because of* it. I am aware that this process does not always happen today. People anticipate the induction of one of their members by sending them to college, and then that person returns. I ask us here to consider the implications of this practice.

### **Jesus at the margins**

I assert that gospel freedom is given to the minister, which will and must keep him or her to the outskirts of a church’s story and not limited by it. Let us see this working in the ministry of Jesus to his disciples.

In Luke 17:11-17 we are told that on the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. Soon he will meet ten lepers. But what sort of place is a ‘region between’?

Jesus is travelling through border territory on his way to Jerusalem. He arrives at the outskirts of a village: a place on the edge of two regions. He and his disciples are on unfamiliar ground. They are no longer amid the

well known people and places of Galilee.

Jesus had done this before. It seems to have been a pattern. He walks with his disciples to the edge of their known world. Let us note the times Jesus made his disciples walk the margins.

\* *Caesarea Philippi*; the place of Pan worship and a question: who do you say I am?

\* *Tyre and Sidon*; a Canaanite woman who has a question of Jesus: who do you think you are?

\* *Across Galilee into Gedara*, to the edge of Roman civilisation and a man who lived among the dead, the last place for Jews to gather.

It seems to have been the policy of Jesus. He goes with his disciples to face experiences and questions that are new, different and challenging. He then expects them to see what he does, and watches their reaction.

Why does Jesus do this? Here are some suggestions.

\* Going to the edge gives us a glimpse of something different.

\* Walking on the borders allows us to see where we have come from and where we might go.

\* Going to the edge enables us to become a connection, a conductor for what is out of reach at the centre.

\* On the margins we are less in control, less certain of ourselves, more ready to learn and trust.

\* As on the margins of a page; we scribble notes, place our half-formed ideas, speculate, note mistakes and place what needs to be added, or we just doodle.

In the story, the healing of the ten lepers occurs, but only one of those cured and cleansed comes to Jesus: a Samaritan! Jesus does not refuse his advances. He stays where he is: in the space between two regions. The Samaritan comes to him. The leprosy that gave him a false identity has been stripped away. With his true identity he and Jesus create a prophetic

relationship, which challenges the conventions and traditions of both Jewish and Samaritan worlds. The Twelve have nothing to say. Perhaps they were troubled that someone so unlike them was acting so like a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus took his disciples to the borders and invited them to meet the people on their margins; to listen to their needs and to procure common ground. This is the work of the gospel, and the calling of the minister as a servant of Christ. Are the disciples the model for ordained ministry here? Or is Jesus a model for the challenging practice of ministry within the covenant community *which is never at the centre of that community?*<sup>1</sup>

The minister as a disciple of the gospel and a servant of Christ must expect the gospel to place him or her at the outskirts of a church, just as the same gospel will place the church on the margins of a society. Such ministry means resistance to the attractions of 'duvet' ministry. David Coffey used to warn against the 'domestication' of local ministers by their churches—the stroked dog who sleeps contentedly at its master's side and is deemed good when obedient to the master's whim. I want to use another image, from a scene of war: the image of the embedded journalist, who is not allowed out beyond the safety zone. S/he reports only on what s/he is told.

### **Embedded or detached?**

An embedded minister is subject to the preferences of the local church. He or she is not allowed to wander far from its priorities and prejudices. As one minister said to me, 'I always feel I am doing a trade-off. I can get involved in the community's youth volunteer bureau as long as I first visited three old ladies that everyone thinks need to be seen by the minister'.

Trivial—and potentially toxic. An embedded minister can become caught up in a swirl of compulsion, fear and routine that pleases others but does not fulfil his or her calling. The embedded minister will become the church secretary's errand boy, the elders' tool, the members' obedient slave.

How is a minister to overcome embeddedness? What can help him or her to maintain integrity as a servant of Christ in a context of potentially misplaced expectations? How does one live with this necessary and imposed marginalisation? What can help us to maintain the position of the ‘acceptable outsider’?

I want to consider the spiritual virtue of detachment, remembering the ancient words of confession: *we have done what we ought not to have done, and have not done what we should have done, and there is no health in us*. Detachment is an act of spiritual freedom. It is described in other ways: forgetfulness of self, humility, self-denial, and the discipline of keeping your distance, the sacrifice of being rewarded with approval. It is

*Detachment  
is an act of  
spiritual  
freedom*

an agreement that at the heart of Christian experience is the acceptance of the absolute character of God’s will and nothing can replace that in us or we will become unwell.

Perhaps strangely, the greatest challenge to a minister’s detachment may well be the very people that confirmed his or her calling: the local church. A 100% call co-opts and it co-

opts absolutely. Detachment is the Christian virtue that counteracts the power of the autonomous church. It is a Christian virtue that requires us to make our choices out of freedom in God, not snuggled into the duvet of compulsion, fear or routine.

In scripture Abraham exemplifies this spiritual freedom when, in obedience to the call of God, he leaves his homeland, travels as a stranger, and is ready to sacrifice his son, trusting in God’s faithfulness. He is at home with a God who has a deeper call on his life than the compulsion and routine of staying at home where it is safe—a God who frees us from the fear of fear, and its origins in others.

Jesus walked the same path of detachment when, for instance, he subordinated family ties to kingdom relationships, and in Gethsemane took his obedience into the dark fear of personal obliteration. The Philippian hymn (Philippians 2:1-11) is a meditation upon the fundamental detachment of the one who in all ways was as God but considered it all expendable for the freedom of laying down his life for us. Detachment is necessary to cope with the potential for the absolute co-option by the church.

### **Detachment and discipleship**

Detachment is in fact a prerequisite for any disciple. For a minister, it is the gift that s/he offers to the church *in spite of* the church. It is based on the constant discernment of calling. It is close to another Christian virtue called (rather alarmingly) ‘indifference’, a word used by Ignatius to describe what Paul calls the ‘renewing of the mind’ in Christ (*eg* Rom 12).

Now I am not suggesting that it is only ministers who need to practice this obedient humility to the will of God. There are people in our churches who put us to shame because we have become enmeshed in fulfilling the expectations of the church. These people have an internal discipline that nurtures an independence of mind that is not easily coerced.

I am not implying that ministers will inevitably clash with their churches over discerning the will of God. Neither am I talking primarily about the use of time, work patterns, and so on. What I am saying is that ministers and churches must beware a relationship that compromises the gospel calling for either the minister or the church.

Continuing ministerial formation and spiritual development requires a relationship with God that demands a detachment, an openness to God’s guidance, and a response that can be made before the God and Father of the Lord Jesus irrespective of human approval or disapproval. It is an obligation on the minister to keep this distance in heart and mind out of love for God’s people.

The practice of detachment is not an excuse for ministerial aloofness or

rudeness, or 'spiritual showboating' (see Matthew 6). It is not an invitation to condescending holiness. 'Detachment is not an end in itself. It is fully compatible with the enjoyment of creation and a warm human response to other people...The end of detachment is love but a love attuned to God's priorities'.<sup>2</sup>

Detachment is not simply a personal quality of Christian character. It is in fact a characteristic of the church, and was well known by our Baptist founders. Detachment can be a corporate freedom that seeks the will of God through fellowship, prayer, and discernment. It is the energy of humble waiting on God by which a gathering of Christians may determine the authentic call of God. Detachment created the first Baptists and can power the church meeting.

'Institutional detachment, like individual detachment, confronts vested interests and selfish securities. It summons churches to live beyond themselves for the sake of a world more just, more peaceful, more humane'.<sup>3</sup> This means a world shaped and redeemed by the humility of God in Christ. Ministers who practice detachment and accept any consequent isolation reveal the power of detachment to the people.

When I was minister in Leicester the deacons at an early meeting told me, 'John, go where you must and bring to us your insights and we will decide what to do with them'. This was one of the most liberating things they could have said to me. They trusted me to seek out what I believed they needed to encounter without fear or favour. It was also a tremendous responsibility. It gave me my place, but also put me in my place. I was free to go where I, hopefully in the purpose of the Lord, wished to go. But the discernment for the church lay with the church.

The isolation/solitude/loneliness and marginalisation of which I have been speaking is necessary and a consequence of ordination and obedience to the gospel. It will inevitably bring about a need to embrace the reality of living by faith in a spiritually adventurous age.

I believe something that was said in the early 1970s has the force of prophecy and is still waiting to be heard. It was a response to the question:

how shall we reach a generation that has turned away from the churches? It is recorded in the introduction to Vincent Donovan's seminal work, *Christianity rediscovered*.<sup>4</sup> They are not the words of that Roman Catholic missionary, but come from an unnamed American student speaking of his generation, who are now in their 40s. It was an invitation to Donovan and all Christian ministers as we serve the present age:

*...do not try to call them back to where they were,  
and do not try to call them to where you are,  
as beautiful as that place might seem to you.  
You must have the courage to go with them  
to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.*

I consider these to be words to be full of the gospel. They are challenging. They make me feel uncomfortable. They have a splendid hope. They are the call of the outsider to those who are prepared to travel from the centre to the margins of the church. Many are doing this already, and among them there must be ministers.

***John Rackley is the minister at Manvers Street Baptist Church, Bath. This article was originally given as his address to the BMF at the Baptist Assembly 2009 in Bournemouth. John can be contacted on jr\_msbc@btconnect.com.***

### **Notes to text**

1. W. C. Martin, *The art of pastoring: contemplative reflections*. Pittsburgh: Vital Faith Resources, 1994.
2. Howard Gray in Philip Sheldrake (ed), *The new SCM dictionary of spirituality*. London: SCM, 2005.
3. Howard Gray, *ibid*.
4. Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity rediscovered*. London: SCM, 2001, p xix..

# Honey pots: a response

Paul Beasley-Murray

In his article, *Minorities and honey pots*,<sup>1</sup> Roy Dorey's major contention is this: 'until we recognise that we are a small minority in our society, and we stop engaging with a false sense of success, then we will not take mission seriously'. Few people would take issue with this statement. Baptist churches—like all Christian churches—represent a small minority in British society. There has been a major decline in Christian allegiance in general, and in church-going in particular.

According to *The UK Christian handbook*, for the period 1989-2005 in my own town of Chelmsford, Sunday church attendance in the borough declined from 9.2 to 6.3% (interestingly Chelmsford is below the national average: in England as a whole, Sunday church attendance in that period fell from 9.9 to 6.3%). According to the 2005 English Church Census there were 10 100 people in church in the borough of Chelmsford on the day of the census.

However, we must not underestimate the size and influence of the churches. An increasing number of churchgoers are 'twicers', meaning that they attend church twice a month: indeed, in my experience, more and more people are attending church once every three weeks, if not less. If we are therefore speaking of 'churchgoers', rather than attenders on a particular Sunday, then clearly the percentage of churchgoers increases. According to Peter Brierley in 2005, 7.3% of the population attends church at least once a month; while 9.9% attends at least twice a year.

Indeed, the figures may look better than that. According to research released by Tearfund in January 2009, in September 2008, 26% of adults in the UK attended church at least once during the preceding year—figures that somewhat surprisingly revealed that churchgoing may be on the increase, for in the previous year there were only 21% of adults attending

church. Significantly the questionnaire was designed to exclude attendance for weddings, baptisms and funerals.

Still, whichever way we look at the statistics, Christians are very much a minority. We have an enormous task before us if we are to win our country for Christ. No church can afford *not* to make mission a priority.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, however, Roy Dorey goes on to imply that larger churches, which he equates with churches with a membership in excess of 200, do not ‘take mission seriously’—as if their size breeds complacency. Indeed, Roy Dorey states that ‘It feels good to be part of a crowd on a Sunday, as it reinforces our view that we are not such a minority’. He argues that ‘churches which receive the larger congregations tend to be cut off from their own community’, and have ‘no real links with the people who live around’. Furthermore, larger churches ‘encourage attendance on the “consumer pattern”...Those who attend such churches are in danger of being “takers” and not “givers”’. Larger churches are, he says, ‘honey pot’ churches, which draw people as a result of ‘good teaching, specialised teaching, particular forms of worship, feeling comfortable, culturally at home, a crowd attracting a crowd’.

As the pastor of a ‘larger’ Baptist church, which Roy Dorey would no doubt characterise as a ‘honey pot’ church, I would like to respond.

I am not seeking to say that larger churches are necessary ‘better’ than smaller churches: they are simply different. I believe that there is a place for both small and larger churches. Yes, some members of larger churches can be complacent and inward-looking—but on the other hand, some members of smaller churches can lack vision and can define success simply in terms of keeping the doors of the church open for another year. As one colleague said to me: ‘If we take the words of Jesus seriously when he said that he would build his church, we would never be satisfied with ‘small’ church’. But nor, for that matter, can larger churches ever be satisfied with their size—for by comparison with the thousands who not darken the door of any church, every church is ‘small’. All of us remain, as Roy Dorey rightly reminds us, a small minority.

Why do larger churches attract people? At a recent meeting of ministers of larger Baptist churches we identified the following factors distinguishing our churches from others.

***Larger churches give a warm welcome.*** Time and again people visiting larger churches comment on the warmth of the welcome they receive. At first sight this might seem strange. One might think that visitors in a larger church would get lost in the crowd and would perhaps not receive much of a welcome, whereas in a smaller church visitors would be immediately noticeable and would therefore be much more welcome. However, the reality is that most larger churches go to great efforts to ensure that visitors are made welcome. Larger churches tend to have welcome teams, who are keen to learn the names of newcomers, and ready to show people to their seats and in so doing perhaps introduce them to others in the church. Some larger churches even give gifts to newcomers. There is a professionalism behind the welcome that is not always found in a smaller church. Please note: I am not saying that small churches do not welcome others—but simply that larger churches tend to ensure there is always a welcome.

***Larger churches can provide anonymity for people seeking a haven.*** The experience of larger churches is that they often attract Christians who have been hurt or bruised as a result of church ‘fights’. Larger churches also tend to attract people who have been ‘burnt out’ and are exhausted as a result of having to take on too much responsibility in a smaller church. Larger churches provide space for people to recover from bad experiences in smaller churches. Being a ‘passenger’ can be part of a healing process. Please note: I am not saying that it is just smaller churches which wound people. Sadly church fights can also take place in larger churches.

***Larger churches are more seeker-friendly,*** in the sense that non-Christians do not feel as conspicuous. It is much more difficult for a non-Christian to try out a small church. Please note: I am not saying that large crowds are a necessity for effective evangelism. Many a larger church runs Alpha courses for less people than in the average sized ‘small’ church: however, what helps in that smaller context is that the majority of people is not comprised of church people.

***Larger churches tend to be positive places.*** People in larger churches often feel good about their church, their pastor, and their activities. As a result of their good experience of church, they are happy to tell their friends about their church. People look forward to coming to church—church is a great place to be. Not surprisingly, people are attracted to such churches. Please note: I am not saying that small churches by contrast are negative places. However, the fact is that sometimes smaller churches can be marked by a sense of tiredness, routine, and sometimes failure. It can be tough being a member of a smaller church.

***The worship and preaching of larger churches is attractive,*** not only because of the quality of the ‘performance’, but also by the vibrancy of spirit. In an age when people are media-savvy, this is important. It is so much easier for worship in the larger church to become a ‘celebration’. Please note: I am not saying that there are no vibrant small churches. Nor am I saying that the Spirit is only present when crowds of people flock to worship. Isaiah’s encounter with God in his Temple was probably a very personal and individual experience.

***Larger churches offer something for everybody.*** Small churches, for instance, are often unable to run a full programme for children and young people; and unlikely to have activities for young singles. Large churches may also offer a range of worship styles, which is attractive to many.

Not everybody, of course, is attracted to a larger church. There are many people who prefer the intimacy of a smaller church—they like the sense of ‘family’ that comes from everybody knowing everyone else. Difficulties, however, arise for the smaller church when it seeks to be a ‘large church writ small’. Instead of smaller churches seeking to be ‘all things to all men’, they probably need to do just one or two things well. To put it in ‘shopping’ terms, there is a place for the small ‘boutique’ as well as for the larger ‘supermarket’.

Roy Dorey seems to assume that it is wrong for Christians to pass other churches in order to worship at a larger church. But why is it wrong? The simple fact is that some people prefer life in a small church, and others prefer life in a larger church.

In terms of Christian mission, there is a lot to be said for the larger church. As Peter Brierley has shown, larger churches tend to be growing churches—the larger the church, the more likely it is to attract worshippers. Roy Dorey is wrong to suggest that it is more difficult to invite neighbours to church if a church is not local. The fact is that people are happy to travel to shop and to commute—so why should they not be happy to travel to church? During the week, for instance, people come from miles around to the centre of Chelmsford to catch the train, to work in the University or in the County Council offices, to shop, watch the cricket *etc*—so why not drive to church on a Sunday, or get the bus on a weekday? If you have something good to offer, people will make the effort to come. Indeed, we have to turn away people from our toddler group and from our seniors' lunches. It's not distance, but parking, which puts people off.

Roy Dorey is also wrong to suggest that people who travel to larger churches do not have a community to serve. The community is different. The 'parish' may no longer be a neighbourhood—instead the 'parish' may be the town as a whole. Indeed, one can argue that the larger church can be more effective as salt and light in the world than the smaller church. The leaders of the borough council or indeed the county council are more likely to take notice of the concerns of a larger church, than a smaller church.

Life in a smaller church can be demanding, but so too can life be demanding in a larger church. Roy Dorey speaks of the difficulties some smaller churches find in getting a competent treasurer—but it can be just as difficult finding somebody to act as treasurer in a larger church, and all the more so because the finances of a larger church are so much more complex and time-consuming. Yes, in a larger church there are many more volunteers—but many more volunteers are needed. The fact that people may choose to pass other churches to attend another church does not mean that they all simply become 'pew fodder'. True, in a larger church there is perhaps a greater proportion of 'passengers'—but sometimes this is not a bad thing. Sometimes people need to be 'passengers'. Furthermore, we need to remember that there is a wider world in which people can serve

God, not least the world of work—some of the apparent ‘passengers’ are in fact busily serving God in their workplaces.

So, in conclusion, there is a place for the larger church. The fact that people often come to a larger church as a result of surfing the web is not to be condemned as a feature of modern consumerism—very often they search the web because of a need. As larger churches we are glad to meet those needs. Our sadness is that smaller churches all too often fail to recognise the validity and worthwhile nature of our ministry.

***Paul Beasley-Murray is senior minister at Chelmsford Baptist Church.***

#### **Notes to text**

1. Roy Dorey, *Minorities and honey pots*, *bmj*, 2009, **301**, 8-10.
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# A point of view

## Slavery, the Bible, and the apology

The practice of slavery is contrary to the holistic freedom which God has shown in Jesus to be the way of life that is followed when God's spirit is honoured. Of that I have no doubt.

Quite clearly, however, physical slavery is not outlawed in the Bible, although its sense is that slaves are generally to be subjected to more or less humane treatment (*eg* Exodus 21:20-21). A nuanced reading of Paul's letter to Philemon might be thought to suggest that the idea of 'slave and master' within a Christian household is untenable. Such an assumption is by no means clear, and the overwhelming textual evidence is that slavery as an institution was not questioned by the Bible's authors or editors. Indeed, Colossians 3:22 says: 'Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord'.

The book of Acts gives further insights. In Acts 7:7 (*cf* Genesis 15:13-14), the Egyptians were punished for holding God's people in (physical) slavery. Two verses later (in Acts 7:9-10), Joseph's enslavement is regarded as part of God's overriding will and purpose. And in Acts 16:16 *ff*, Paul sets a slave girl free from an evil spirit, but not from her physical slavery.

### Jesus on slavery

Jesus apparently had nothing to say about slavery as an institution. The only two synoptic references to slavery (Matthew 20:27 and Mark 10:44) are invitations for the disciples to become slaves—or at least 'like' Jesus (*cf* Philippians 2:5-8), to emulate a slave's role of humble, obedient servant (see also Romans 6:18: 'You have been set free from sin and have become

slaves to righteousness'). In John's gospel, the discussion about slavery in John 8:33 *ff* records Jesus saying that it is sin that makes people slaves—and thus, by implication, they are not enslaved by physical restraints or conditions, or parentage!

Perhaps the crucial point of the John 8 discussion is made in v 35: 'Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever', which parallels Romans 8:15: 'For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship [or adoption]. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father"'.

### **A personal echo**

This verse of Romans echoes my own experience: when I was four years old, I was adopted by relatives. For a variety of reasons it did not work well during my teens and although I scraped through, they were not happy years and I developed an enormous chip on my shoulder (or, as Bunyan would say, a 'load on my back'). At 21 years of age I married and started my own family, which brought a new freedom, meaning that I had to work even harder; but this time it was a freedom based on positive, loving relationships which meant that the chains of the past fell off, and my heart was free. I needed no apologies. Had I needed them, it would have shown I was not really free at all, but still trapped by my past. I had my own dignity of being a husband, a father, and, yes, the dignity of a child of God who needs no one else's permission or apology to be such.

I believe that many today whose forebears were slaves have in fact failed to grasp their freedom in Christ. The Baptist Union, in pandering to the misplaced call for an apology/compensation (or in salving a collective Baptist conscience by offering one), does everyone a great disservice by implicitly condoning the imprisonment of people in the present by their past experiences. See Genesis 19:26, Luke 17:32, Luke 9:62, and particularly Philippians 3:13-14: 'Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for

which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus’.

I have seen the debilitating effects of the ‘I am a slave descendent’ mentality both in Jamaica, where an educated black Jamaican once told me, ‘What this island needs is a white Prime Minister’; and in England, for example, where the slavery-based ‘baby-mother’ syndrome,<sup>1</sup> which deprives young people of a legitimate father, is perpetuated, and an inferiority complex because of slave ancestry can lead to an overcompensation of affected appearance and macho bravado coupled with underachievement in all spheres of life.

### **Biblical analysis?**

I question how much the Bible was used as the basis for the apology given by our denomination. (The same would be true for all the ‘Baptist’ denomination’s recent history regarding leadership—but that’s another story!!) Too often in Baptist church life the Bible is read for opening devotions and then ignored for the business. I have a dream that one day all BU business will be conducted with a number of background papers of Biblical reasoning as a prerequisite. Had this business been subjected to Biblical analysis, the Council would have discovered that the word ‘apology’ is not available. The prodigal son’s attempt to make an apology the basis of the future relationship with his father is overruled by his father’s view of him as a family member! Similarly, in John 9, Jesus said of the man enslaved in his culture-defined disability (blindness): ‘What his fathers did is irrelevant. What he needs to do is get up and walk in the freedom of faith in God!’.

There is no doubt that the BU apology was not only approved in a Council meeting that sensed it was doing God’s will, but it was also warmly welcomed by many whose forebears were slaves: and it has been a good thing for healing some relationships. But at another level it has possibly done harm. Jonathan Sacks, in his latest book, *Future tense*,<sup>2</sup> observes that the Jewish people will never move forward positively because they insist on seeing themselves as ‘victims’. I was at a meeting of the BU Assembly

after the apology had been given, and a number of people of Afro-Caribbean origin were asking, 'So, we've had the apology, but what is the BU going to do for us next?' The apology has not taken away their sense of being victims, nor set them free to determine their own God-given futures. In fact it may well have helped reinforce a negative self-perception as being primarily children of slaves, rather than primarily children of God. It definitely has not enhanced their sense of freedom to be what God wants them to be here and now!

My final point is that an apology on behalf of the BU suggests that there is still a mind-set of 'them' and 'us'. The apology implies that 'we' (members of the BU) are the white Anglo-Saxons whose forebears did something to 'them/you' (the black Afro-Caribbeans). Fifty years ago, that might have had some justification: but it simply is not true any longer (in spite of the picture presented at the Annual Assembly). We are a rainbow people, each one a part of the diffused light of Christ, each a part of the one human race—and any actions which imply 'them and us' are likely to sustain the divisions which take away the very freedoms we wish to proclaim and promote.

*Ted Hale is chair of the BMF. The opinions in this article are his own; they do not necessarily reflect those of the BMF or the bmj.*

### **Notes to the text**

1. The 'baby-mother' syndrome is where children have only identifiable mothers, not identifiable fathers, because in many instances of slaver stable relationships were impossible. Indeed, loving committed relationships were often not desirable, in case one party were to be sold. John 8:35: 'Now a slave has no permanent place in the family' was sadly true.
2. Jonathan Sacks, *Future tense*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009, p 59.

# Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

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## ***European Baptists and the Third Reich***

by Bernard Green

Baptist Historical Society, 2009

*Reviewed by John E. Morgan-Wynne*

This work represents a follow-up to Bernard Green's previous volumes on Rushbrooke and the EBF History. Because of ill-health, Green only completed about two-thirds of what he intended, and together John Briggs and Faith Bowers finished the work.

Apart from secondary literature, Bernard Green has used source material available in Britain (the papers of Rushbrook, Payne, Aubrey and Champion; Baptist World Alliance files; and the *Baptist Times*), prompting the question of whether other material might exist

elsewhere in Europe and emerge in the future.

After briefly describing Hitler's rise against the background of German resentment at her humiliation post-1918, and how initially many wondered whether Hitler was 'a man sent from God', the heart of the book examines the reaction of European Baptists to Hitler before and during WWII, and then how Baptists were helped to cope with the horrendous post-war conditions. Of great interest is why German Baptist leaders supported Hitler, and refused to support the Confessing Church, and why after WWII they refused to acknowledge anything amiss in their approach. Bernard Green (and John Briggs in a helpful postscript) suggests several reasons, chief among which was their pietistic approach (Romans 13 had always exercised enormous influence on the German Protestant tradition), eschewing politics so long as they could live the Christian life and carry on evangelism.

Other European Baptists emerge 'with credit', especially the Scandinavians and the Dutch.

We are indebted to Bernard Green for attempting this story, which he has done with fairness and sensitivity. It makes sober reading. Here the reconstruction of the past has

its challenge for us in the present. It reveals the weakness of a theology that excludes politics from its remit (what would British Baptists do if today's 'nanny state' became more sinister and obtrusive in its control freakishness?). This story illustrates again the dictum: 'All that is required for evil to flourish in the world is for good men to do nothing'.

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***Approaching God: a guide for worship leaders and worshippers***

by Christopher J. Ellis

Canterbury Press, 2009, £14.99

ISBN 978-1-85311-886-9

*Reviewed by Steve Langford*

Sitting in the proverbial pew, leading worship looks easy. Surely it simply consists of choosing a reading and a few songs, and saying a prayer or two? However, when it comes to standing at the lectern, particularly for the first time, it suddenly seems far from easy. However, help is at hand!

Written in a lecture style Christopher Ellis explains why this work is seldom easy, as he unpacks that

multiplicity of tasks required of those who lead others in Christian worship.

By using the journey as a metaphor through which the corporate act of Sunday worship can be more fully understood, Ellis helps the reader to grasp something of the meaning that lies beneath the patterns and practices that, together, constitute corporate worship.

Before the journey begins, Ellis reminds readers that, in a free church tradition, the call to lead others in worship is initiated by God and confirmed through the issue of a personal invitation. Then, having spoken of call and unpacked the meaning of worship, he breaks the worship service into its constituent parts: prayer, singing, scripture, sermon, and the Lord's Table, and explores each individually.

As he invites readers to think about each area of worship, Ellis draws on the experience of others as well as his own. This approach was particularly evident in the short chapter on the sermon. In recognising that there is already a plethora of good books available on preparing and delivering a sermon, it was pleasing to see Ellis restrict his own comments and points to such experienced practitioners as Fred Craddock and Paul Scott-Wilson.

Towards the end of the book Ellis includes a section exploring some of the possible insights that other traditions might offer to free church worship, including responsive readings and visual images. He concludes by reflecting on how worship fulfils different functions within the life of the church. Ellis argues that spiritual formation, pastoral care and mission all form part of the corporate act of worship. Perhaps, then, we shouldn't be so surprised that leading worship isn't as simple as it might seem.

At 200 pages this book is an accessible read. For the experienced practitioner much of what Ellis has to say will be self-evident; but for the novice this book provides the sort of help I longed for when I prepared my first worship service.

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***Probing the past: a toolbox for Baptist historical research***

by Susan J. Mills

Baptist Historical Society, 2009,  
£9.50 plus package and posting

*Reviewed by Roger Hayden*

If you have ever thought of creating a version of a popular TV series,

*Who do you think Baptists are?*, and then realised that you do not have a large BBC research team to help you, don't despair: this book is for you. In this toolbox is a wide range of tools to provide you with the answers you are seeking. If you have a Baptist in your family tree, then this is the book for you. Writing a history of your local Baptist church? Let this book be your guide to a wide variety of relevant information.

For over 20 years Susan Mills was the librarian of the Angus Library, the largest UK national collection of Baptist historical materials. As a Methodist, she gradually came to terms with the Baptist collection in her care, and this book sums up her wisdom concerning our Baptist community. She has helped a multitude of research students from the worldwide Baptist family.

This update of her 1992 book, *Sources for the study of Baptist history*, tackles head on the burgeoning amount of new material on the internet, but also makes it clear what will NOT be found online. Despite assumptions by many modern students, by no means will all relevant information be found through the computer. As Mills writes, 'the moral is always "think outside the box"'. She will enable

every reader to do just that in his or her studies.

Search engines, gateways and general bibliographical resources are considered, and more importantly, methods of assessing what is on offer. Mills suggests the site called intute (<http://www.intute.ac.uk/>) provides a necessary scholarly overview and a review of potentially useful websites.

Mills reminds us that there are online and printed sources for dissenting history in general, and then lists secondary sources specific to Baptist history, which are divided into electronic/digital and printed media. Then follow primary resources, which are either digitised, facsimile, or reprinted collections, and a guide to manuscript collections.

In conclusion, Mills provides a helpful sample research strategy on the history and theology of the English Baptist Associations.

This lively text gets to grips with our personal, denominational, and worldwide Baptist story, by using a kaleidoscope of resources, ancient and modern. Everyone who reads the *bmj* should make it his or her personal mission to get a copy of this book into their local reference library and record office. Susan

Mills has done Baptists a great service through this book, and Baptists must make sure it finds a lodging place in the local community.

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***Israeli and Palestinian terrorism: the 'unintentional' agents***

by Geoffrey Whitfield

Emeth Press, 2009

ISBN 978-0-98195-823-1

*Reviewed by Colin Sedgwick*

The main thesis of this book is two-fold. First, the Palestinian people have had an extremely raw deal in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Second, the root cause of this is the work of religious extremists: the Israeli settler movement, Gush Emunim, and Christian conservatives such as the British CMJ (Church's Ministry among Jewish People). A literal understanding of God's covenant with Abraham—that the land should be Israel's in perpetuity—is the great bone of contention.

Geoffrey Whitfield is well qualified to write on this subject. He has a long experience of attempted peacemaking in the area, especially

among young people. He clearly knows what he is talking about, and while insisting that he has good friends on both sides of the divide, he makes no secret of his sympathies with the Palestinians. How fair his judgments are, especially to CMJ and other Christian evangelicals, I am not quite sure, but I find it hard to resist the main thrust of his argument.

A massive problem with the book, though, is that it has been edited extremely badly (or perhaps not edited at all!). Glaring errors of punctuation and grammar occur on every page, making reading laborious and understanding sometimes very difficult.

Nonetheless, as one who spent a couple of months in his student years harvesting bananas on a kibbutz by the Sea of Galilee, naively unaware that this undertaking was in effect a political act in support of Israel, I can only wish that I had read a book such as this, whatever its faults, before going.

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## **Book reviewers wanted**

It is some years since I last edited this section of the *bmj*. I have long since deleted the list of people who wrote reviews. Many new people have entered the ministry. So, I need a new list!

If you would be willing to write a review, please email or write to me. My contact details are on the inside front cover of the journal.

I'll try to get the book to you about 6 weeks before the review is due. Reviews are usually about 400 words in length, and you get to keep the book! Please let me know if there are particular subjects that interest you.

John Houseago