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# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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"The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily  
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# Editorial

Five years ago, in the light of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, we were talking in terms of the end of war as a means of settling international disputes. "War", we pronounced, "is an out-dated response, which we have now out-grown." Such talk hardly seems credible now. Bosnia alone, that greatest tragedy for many a long day, has effectively given the lie to such dew-eyed optimism: mass murders, ethnic cleansing and the full tide of human misery.

Significantly, the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the end of World War Two had raised again searching questions about causes, response and whether what happened could, in any way have been avoided or ameliorated. At the same time revisionist historians have been busy, telling it all another way. In particular, the morality of the Allies' decision to drop Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been agonised over afresh. Note how the bombs were domesticated by calling them "little boy" and "fat man" respectively. Ironically, about the same number of Japanese lives were lost as President Truman considered would be saved, in terms of GIs, if the war continued. At the time, to a war-weary world, the decision seemed justified on pragmatic grounds. Now the guilt we feel about it equals that for the holocaust. Unless, of course, we are partisans and not world citizens.

We would like to be able to say that, historically, Christian nations have taught the world a better way. Sadly, we cannot. Indeed, Constantine's Christ underwrote the war machine: "In this sign conquer". The cross in one hand and the sword in the other has not seemed at all incongruous these two thousand years. To that extent, in our compromised, fallen world, we have not sucked the very marrow of the Prince of Peace, and so the "peaceable kingdom" continues to tantalise from afar.

In this edition two articles reflect the "peace" issue. The first, from Nelson Kraybill, comes from a branch of the Christian family which has "peace-making" as a central tenet, not secondary. He urges us to face up to the full implications of the Incarnation in terms of reproducing a peace-making life-style. Then, Michael Goodman takes us back to the Baptist world of the 1930s, providing a fascinating read. Within this is the stance we adopted: pacifistic as opposed to pacifist, which probably reflects today's outlook too. In addition to these two articles, we have John Weaver pleading for a fully mobilised Church, highly motivated and well equipped. What are the psychological and ecclesiastical barriers preventing this? David Tennant's contribution puts the child at the centre, in a world in which children are so often patronised, used and abused. Who will speak for them? Lastly, John Rackley introduces the current investigation into spirituality in the context of ministry: *Travellers' Tales*. It indicates signs of famine and how, if we fail to feed each other, we shall never survive.

# The Incarnation as Peace-making Strategy

Four hundred and fifty years ago the Inca Monarch Atahualpa was held prisoner in South America by European conquerors. His captors wanted Atahualpa to accept the Christian faith. A priest carrying a cross in one hand and a Bible in the other approached the prisoner and said:

"I am a priest of God and I teach divine things to the Christians. I have come likewise to teach you. God who is one in essence and a Trinity of persons, created heaven and earth and all that they contain. He formed of clay Adam, the first man, and from one of his ribs Eve, from whom we all descend. Our first parents disobeyed their Creator, we have been born in sin, and no one would obtain divine grace nor go to heaven if Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, had not become incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and if He had not redeemed us by dying on a cross. Jesus Christ arose from the dead and ascended to heaven leaving the apostle St Peter as his vicar on earth, having put the whole world under his jurisdiction..."<sup>1</sup>

The speech went on for a while, and then the Inca Monarch had an opportunity to accept this doctrine about Jesus. He refused, but instead arranged to pay an enormous ransom in exchange for his life. The Europeans accepted this offer, received a room full of gold and two rooms full of silver - and then decided to execute Atahualpa anyway.

On the day of execution Atahualpa received one last chance to become a Christian, with the incentive that in so doing he would be strangled rather than burnt alive. The Inca consented. He was baptised, given the name John, and executed while the Europeans chanted their creed.

## **Peace-making at the Heart of Christ's Redemptive Work**

Our ears burn when we hear the name of Jesus associated with such a display of raw power, greed and sadism. Most Christians today recognise the Atahualpa incident as a blatant betrayal of the Prince of Peace. We are appalled to imagine a Christian leader holding a cross in one hand, a Bible in another, with an executioner waiting nearby in case the target of evangelism does not submit. Yet we ourselves, as Western Christians, are heirs to a heritage that sometimes has selectively appropriated the meaning of Jesus and allowed us to take part in activities that betray our Lord. We have not paid enough attention to the symbols, creeds and theology that made the Atahualpa tragedy possible.

Paul the Apostle summarised the work of Jesus and our own task as believers by saying "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.. and entrusting us with the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). Reconciliation and peace-making are not merely *aspects* of the redemptive work of Jesus; they are the very essence of what he brought and brings to broken humanity. Reconciliation and peace-making are the essence of what Christ calls us to do in his name.

## The Incarnation and Peace-making

Not long ago in London I had the opportunity to present the Christian side in a day of Christian - Muslim dialogue about peace-making. I learnt a great deal about Islam - including the insight that the word "Islam" is related to the Hebrew word "Shalom" (peace).

What I remember most about the day, however, is a breakthrough in my own understanding about Jesus. In the course of our dialogue it became evident that Christians have an extraordinary power to our peace witness because *God was in Christ*. That is a radical idea, and it is at the very centre of our faith. God was in Christ! If God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, and if we ourselves are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, then we might pay careful attention to exactly how Jesus went about being a peace-maker.

Most Christians are familiar with Jesus' teaching about loving our enemies, returning good for evil, and turning the other cheek. These explicit and difficult teachings, however, are only the tip of the iceberg of Jesus' way of living that brought alienated individuals and groups into redemptive contact with each other. Already at his birth, in the appearance of wise men, Jesus brought together Jew and Gentile, native and foreigner - and outfoxed the violent political despot Herod. Within his inner circle of twelve followers, Jesus had both a former tax collector and a former Zealot or armed revolutionary. The men came from opposite poles of the Jewish political spectrum. The tax collector had collaborated with the occupying power, Rome; the Zealot had been associated with a terrorist group ready to kill the oppressor. These two men should have hated each other to the death, but met Jesus and became knit together in a higher allegiance to the kingdom of God.

Jesus broke social barriers of gender by having women among his disciples, by even teaching them in public. Jesus allowed a woman despised as a harlot to anoint his feet, and appeared first to women after his resurrection. All of this was scandal in the first century. Our lord lived among the poorest of society, yet ate at the table of a wealthy Pharisee. He touched social outcasts such as lepers and those full of demons.

Jesus healed the servant of a centurion who was part of the occupying forces. Ironically, some Christians later used this incident to argue that Jesus thought it was fine to serve in the military. The point rather seems to be that Kingdom people are willing to extend love and healing even to the enemy. It was a centurion who, a short time later, organised the execution of Jesus!

On the night before he died, Jesus shared a meal with, and washed the feet of the disciple, who would betray him to death. He extended forgiveness to his executioners - who never even asked for it! Élitism in places of worship came to an end when Jesus was present; he physically turned a few wealthy entrepreneurs out of the temple, and announced that the temple henceforth would be a house of prayer for *all nations*.

The story of Jesus is a story of making peace - not the cheap peace of withdrawal from conflict, but the costly peace of engagement and suffering love. No part of the Jesus story more poignantly symbolises this than the cross. We have become anaesthetized to the power of the cross as the central symbol and strategy of our faith. We have washed off the blood and forgotten that the cross was the price Jesus paid for a life trajectory of peace-making. Because we have removed the cross from its political and social context, we remove ourselves from seeing

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political and social implications of discipleship today.

### **Creeds Don't Always Help**

When European priests held a cross in front of Atahualpa and tried to force him to convert, they did not understand that the cross *already belonged* to the Inca monarch. The cross belongs to people the world over who suffer unjustly at the hands of military, political and economic lords. Priests could chant the creed as Atahualpa was executed because the creed had gutted the gospel of its very core, removing any reference to the way Jesus actually lived.

Consider the Apostles' Creed, perhaps the most familiar of Christian confessions in the West:

I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,  
who was conceived by the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate  
was crucified, dead, and buried...

Do you see what's missing? The life, teaching and example of our Lord! If we reduce the incarnation of Jesus to his birth, death and resurrection, we miss the vital life narrative that puts his death into a peace-making context. No wonder sixteenth century priests could hold a cross while they engaged in brutality, no wonder they could chant the Creed while they executed an innocent man! If credal representations of Christian faith ignore the life of Jesus, how do we Christians remind ourselves that our Lord meant for us to live peace-making lives?

If we use creeds to summarise our faith in Jesus, then let us find or draft creeds that convey the radical peace-making character of Jesus. The Nicene Creed of AD 325, which Christians still repeat the world over, speaks of Jesus who was "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man...."

There is no need to jettison such historic creeds of the Church. But the Nicene Creed sounds like a legal document written by a lawyer! It is technical and preoccupied with metaphysical problems, such as defining what part of Jesus was man and what part was God. That issue was not the passionate concern of New Testament writers, and surely is not what grips the imagination of a broken world today.

A modern creed, written by a theologian from Zimbabwe named Revd Canaan Banana, captures something of the political and social agenda of the gospel:

I believe in a colour-blind God,  
Maker of technicolour people,  
Who created the universe  
And provided abundant resources  
For equitable distribution among all his people.  
I believe in Jesus Christ  
Born of a common woman  
Who was ridiculed, disfigures, and executed,  
Who on the third day rose and fought back;  
He storms the highest [of human] councils...

Where he overturns the iron rule of injustice.  
From henceforth he shall continue  
To judge the hatred and arrogance of [mortals.]  
I believe in the Spirit of Reconciliation,  
The United body of the dispossessed;  
The communion of the suffering masses,  
The power that overcomes the dehumanising forces of [mortals]  
[And] The resurrection of personhood, justice and equality...<sup>2</sup>

That sounds like a God I want to know; that sounds like a Jesus I want to follow. Even if this creed does not give details of Jesus' life, it embodies something of the radical, revolutionary values that made the gospel good news in human relationships.

### **Art and Liturgy Reflect Understandings of Jesus**

It is not only creeds that leave out justice and peacemaking in reference to Jesus. Western Christian art is bloated with images of Jesus in a manger and Jesus on the cross. Both are pictures which allow us to patronise Jesus - to coddle him as an infant or to mourn him as a corpse.

It is no accident that in Latin America, where professing Christians for centuries literally and figuratively raped native peoples, that the church fostered a lurid fascination with the dead Jesus. I've stepped inside a church building in Mexico where there actually is a coffin with an effigy of the dead Christ in it. That reflects Christology engineered by the power brokers of a culture, foisted upon people they exploited. Such a view of Jesus induces the powerless to grieve over the broken and lifeless body of Christ - rather than encouraging the poor to take hope from Jesus' promise that the meek and powerless "shall inherit the earth". Why do great cathedrals have so few images of Jesus throwing money changers out of the temple?

It is no accident that in Britain and America popular culture readily incorporates nativity scenes into our celebrations of winter solstice, and glibly ignores the ultimate meaning of a peasant woman giving birth in Bethlehem: Glory to God in the highest and on earth *peace among mortals*. A baby wrapped in swaddling clothes does not challenge us to change our behaviour (even if Herod was smart enough to recognise that baby Jesus could upset the political order).

It is no accident that millions of people in this culture know the Lord's Prayer, but never think through radical implications of praying "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is easier to make a mantra of the Lord's prayer than a manifesto for actually living the Kingdom as Jesus showed us how to live it.

It is no accident that many Christians would rather debate the authority of scripture than actually take what the gospel writers say about Jesus as a rule for our lives. We make a holy book out of the Bible rather than live holy, set-apart lives on the example of him we call "Lord".

### **Interpreting the Person of Jesus Today**

Let us come full circle now, back to the cross held by a priest in South America centuries ago. It is right for us to hold the cross as symbol, because it represents the extent to which God was willing to go to bridge the gap between himself and humankind. "When we were God's *enemies*, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son". (Rom 5:10)



Let us understand, though, that the cross has been co-opted for centuries by people who blasphemed the name of Jesus - from the "Christian" emperor Constantine in the fourth century, to the crusades, to the conquest of the Americas, to the blessing of the modern church upon warfare, to the current political campaigns of the "Christian right" in the United States. These are examples of people who have tried to distil the meaning of Jesus into abstract spiritual jargon, whilst ignoring the way Jesus lived and called his followers to live.

We need to spell out what we mean by saying there is salvation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is not adequate to limit our explanations of the cross to mere "substitutionary atonement". Ritual sacrifice and liberation from slavery are not familiar concepts in modern Western society. We may continue to use these biblical images that explain the meaning of Jesus' ministry, but our witness will be stronger if we draw from a range of metaphors, including:

- Jesus as mediator. Jesus stepped into the centre of conflict and in the end got "caught in the cross fire." He was not on a suicide mission, but was willing to pay the highest cost in an effort to bring alienated people together. Jesus was an is a mediator, both between human groups and between us and God.
- Jesus as one who breaks down walls. The crumbling wall is a familiar image in the modern world: The Berlin wall, Belfast, the Israeli/Palestinian accord. Paul the apostle said Christ "is our peace; in his flesh he has made Jew and Gentile one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between us" (Eph 2:14)
- Jesus who builds community and gives us new citizenship. We "are a chosen race, a holy nation, God's own people.." (1 Peter 2:9). The book of Revelation describes a Kingdom in which people from every tribe, nation and language share an allegiance to Jesus. Humanity so restored is not "pie in the sky for after we die"; John of Patmos saw the Holy City coming down out of heaven *to earth*.
- Jesus the Lamb: vulnerable, defenceless and paradoxically powerful. A hymn in Revelation 5:12 says the seemingly weak lamb is worthy to receive "*power and wealth... and honour and blessing*". Revelation notes that taking up the sword will only lead to death by the sword (Rev 13:10), and features those faithful believers who "follow the Lamb" (14:4) - presumably following not only in worship but in lamb-like living.

All these images fit appropriately within the shadow of the cross - that brutal symbol of the worst the world can do to those who are loyal to the Prince of Peace. Our walk of discipleship continues with a certainty that God brings resurrection power to those who know the suffering of the cross. In dying to ourselves, we rise to new life, "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy (!) that was set before him endured the cross..(Heb 12:2). The way of non-violent, suffering love may not appear practical in today's tumultuous world. But then the ministry and strategy of Jesus were not very practical by ordinary human standards. In Christ, God is doing something new and unexpected to break the cycle of violence that so torments the human family.

To take up the cross and follow Jesus means we are willing to make the same sacrifices for peace-making that thousands - even millions - manifestly are willing to make for the cause of war. Instead of taking up the cry for revenge or the flag for nationalism, we will build relationships with people (especially Christians) in nations

alienated from our own. We will house the political refugee and expose corporations that exploit developing countries. We will cry out for a halt to the arms industry that makes us rich even while it brings death in a hundred civil or international conflicts. At home, we will learn skills of conflict mediation so our own congregations and denominations can handle conflict in ways that build rather than destroy. Most of all, we will look to Jesus not only as the Saviour who brings us into fellowship with God, but as the Lord who shows us in practical ways how to incarnate God's ministry of reconciliation on earth.

**Nelson Kraybill**

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Anton Wessels, *Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Eerdmans, 1990), pp 63-64

<sup>2</sup> Wessels, op cit, pp92-93

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# Equipping the Whole Church

## Introduction

How do we go about mission in 1995, and how are we training people for ministry? Although God's will may be seen in the call to specific pastoral ministry, there is in another sense no such thing as part-time or full-time ministry. We are all engaged in full-time ministry and mission for Christ; this is the calling of our discipleship. While worship may be seen as central to our Christian existence, mission is the essence of the living out of our faith. In this we never stop learning from the Holy Spirit, from our reflection upon Scripture in the light of our experiences in the world, and from the experience of others.

Training is not something which takes place only within theological colleges and seminaries; it should figure on the agendas of elders', deacons', and church meetings, as together we seek to work out our God-given calling to be the church of Christ. Statistics produced by the Bible Society tell us that most Christians were brought within the sound of the Gospel by a relative or friend. This emphasises the need to help prepare all Christians to address the everyday issues of life, that they and their neighbours encounter.

We are seeing increasing numbers of people offering for ministry within our churches, but often the nature of their calling is unclear, and the nature of the ministry to which they feel called often does not fit with the "conventional ordained ministry". We will need to help these people to discover their potential through appropriate training and practical experience.

## Present day Realities

Opinion Polls tell us that 90 per cent of people in the U.K. have a vague belief in God; but 82.5 per cent will never go to church, except for weddings and funerals - mostly funerals these days. This is borne out by a number of years of running "Agnostics Anonymous" at *Spring Harvest*. I have discovered that while there is a sympathetic view towards Christians, who are mostly seen as sincere, there are real question marks over the relevance of the faith as it is presented by the Church. All sorts of questions arise, such as: why should I believe in anything at all?; it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere!; what about suffering and war?; hasn't science done away with the need for God? The answer to such questions must be a faith that is relevant. This was clearly demonstrated by a survey carried out by Altrincham Baptist Church. When they asked 500 people in their town why they did not attend church, they didn't get the answers they expected; 78 per cent of those questioned replied, "Why are you asking the question?", or words to that effect.

According to a recent survey, the top issues on people's agenda are: the environment, poverty, unemployment, parenthood, crime and war. These are issues that the media are constantly dealing with, so heightening the community's awareness of them. But how often does our preaching or Sunday worship address these issues? When did you last hear or give a sermon on one of these issues? The Bible has a great deal to say - but when did we allow the people to get out of God's word what God put into it?

We are also faced by a world in which there is a loss of meaning, and, in

consequence, a loss of hope. Lesslie Newbigin recently suggested that we are reduced to nothing but the development of self until "we are wheeled off to the crematorium" (Gospel as Public Truth Conference, 1992). To such a world as ours we have a Gospel of hope. A recent book (R. Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21st Century* O.U.P. New York, 1993) suggests that society has a quest for community at the top of its agenda. The author recognises that society is more fragmented, families are divided and broken, and there is an increase in division along racial and religious lines. The breakdown of families and of relationships within families means that the transmission of values through the generations is no longer happening. A survey of young people identified that they have two main needs: a need to express anger and a need to express relationship.

This broken society, with its lack of community, has resulted from a great number of factors, among which are; population mobility; pluralism, with racial and religious divisions; the development of a multitude of sub-cultures in a search for identity, epitomised among the young; economic inequalities and uncertainty, especially in employment; and the fast changing nature of life and society.

Passive participation in our culture is another problem that is raised by our ever growing attention to television. People are failing to engage with the real world, and there is the constant danger of being numbed in our response. (see Tom Davies, *The Man of Lawlessness*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1989) Modern art and the media present despair, fragmentation, hopelessness and violence. It is here that the world needs an expression of hope through despair and of the possibility of reconciliation. Such is the Cross and Resurrection. The problem is that often the Church is also full of passive participants, which is demonstrated in our failure to engage the world, and our failure to express community with integrity.

All of this raises questions about our presentation of the Gospel, our style, language and format. Perhaps we need to take another look at the way Jesus addressed people. He is not recorded as preaching very often, and certainly not to those outside his own close group. He used direct prophetic words, statements of truth, miracles accompanied by explanation, and parables - stories related to the actual life and happenings of the community - the issues of the day. We need to begin to preach the Gospel from the Gospels, instead of an over-exposure to Paul's theology, which was directed at churches who were, in large measure, getting it wrong.

Paul Mortimore, in his recent publication, *The Worldly Church* (B.U. internal paper, July 1993), draws attention to the insular nature of many Baptist churches today. He says that discipleship that is glorifying to God should bring Kingdom values and standards to bear upon every sphere of life and culture. He laments the fact that worship has too easily become a comforting escape from the complexity and challenge of contemporary secular life, with the result that God's people tend to evade their responsibility to be salt and light. There is a flight from reason, where worship becomes a welcome respite from a tough and demanding world. We need to develop a ministry that will enable people to make the connections between faith and life.

## **Equipping the Church**

We want our people to recognise that each church member, and indeed non-member, has a contribution to make; we all have our different experiences of life. We can consider a process of training under three headings: reflection, integration,

and formation, as I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> These will equally apply to the ways in which we engage with people outside the church. Paul Mortimore is right to assert:

The field of Christian education is another area where congregational life has not readily adapted to serve Christians dispersed for ministry in a post-Christian society. Whilst ideally within the gathered congregations Christians are affirmed, trained, supported and prayed for in preparation for their ministry, the testimony of many would be that they receive no such help. We can only grasp the seriousness of this situation if we clearly recognise the massive cultural boundaries which Christians cross each time they move either into or out of the gathered community of faith. Once that cultural divide is honestly faced, then it becomes painfully obvious that local churches are often woefully deficient in helping their members wrestle with the ever increasing complexities of living robustly as disciples of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

*i) Reflection:* the emphasis is not on telling people “how to do” but rather on getting them to draw on their own experience and ask questions about life and the place of God in the world. Reflection begins with experience, then moves on to consider the Bible - its application and interpretation of actions and events in the world outside the church - and asks, what is God saying in all of this? Examples of this, within my own studies, have been the issues of cohabitation and the new cosmology of Stephen Hawking, Paul Davies and others. Other current concerns that face the Church are AIDS, homosexuality, medical ethics in such areas as human embryology and euthanasia, and the place of Christianity in a multi-faith society. In considering an issue such as cohabitation and marriage, it is important to face up to the social patterns of our times, to face up to the Bible and the society of the New Testament period, to consider the approach of the Church through history, and then to develop a theological and pastoral approach for today. In the scientific arena, the discoveries of the new cosmology of the “Big Bang” origin of a universe with design and purpose, has opened up the possibility for a Christian apologetic. The questions now being asked by Stephen Hawking and others can only satisfactorily be answered by theology. We must be ready to take these questions seriously and address them out of a careful consideration of the biblical picture of creation.

*ii) Integration:* It is my belief that we should seek, wherever possible, to integrate the theory with the practical, as we do at College with our in-pastorate students. As well as reflection, we should encourage church folk to relate their biblical insights, back into the practical, pastoral and social issues of the church and world; and bring their experience of the world, as questions, to their Bible study. The success of this clearly depends on our ability to break down the compartmentalism that may exist in the individual church members’ mind. This will require careful and time-consuming teaching that first involves making the learner aware of their own understanding and confronting this by evidence that provokes further rethinking. The challenge arises as we expose our beliefs and our perception of “biblical truths” to the world which we experience in our daily living. Leaders should be encouraged to work at these issues with their churches. Prayer, Bible study and worship need to be integrated into the whole of life. For example, when the church considers its prayer life on behalf of the world, we should encourage our workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, local government officers, trades union officials, industrial managers, and so on, to share their feelings, needs, and work experiences with the whole

congregation. The same should apply to family life, the care of the elderly and the bringing up of children. These issues should also form part of the agenda of our house groups as we seek to see our faith worked out in our life in the world.

*iii) Formation:* the result of reflection and integration will hopefully be, what these days is referred to as “formation”, which, to put it another way, is not so much to teach folk *how to*, but to help them *to be*. To be open to the shaping of the Holy Spirit so as to be the person that God can use in the ministry of his Church.

Not how to counsel the bereaved, but learning to face our own death.

Not how to run an effective Sunday School, but to understand what children feel and how they think, learn and perceive the world.

Not how to lead worship, but what is worship.

It will mean taking the abilities and the experiences of all our church members seriously; and from these working out our theology of life as the people of God at the end of this century and into the next.

### **Mobilising the Church**

The temptation for churches to favour maintenance rather than mission is always a danger, especially when numbers are falling. We are faced with the problem of producing ministers for the existing system, while wanting to advocate a change to that system. There is tension here and this will be a hard question for the colleges, and indeed the Denomination, to face up to. It is possible that financial constraints may force the issue - a lack of money will mean investigation of training people part-time and within a church rather than college context. Paul Mortimore is right to maintain that we urgently need “to encourage a generation of theologians who in appropriate language and styles are able to resource the communities of faith with tools which all God’s people can use in the task of theological reflection.”<sup>3</sup> We can consider a form of “liberation theology” for the UK, where learning and equipping for mission and ministry takes place alongside daily work and family duties, and where theology is developed through reflection on experience and scripture. Within our local churches we will need to explore new styles of training that help our church members to relate their experience of the world to their experience of their faith, and *vice versa*.

There must be a cultural relevance; after all Jesus called us to be in the world but not of the world. Our problem seems to be that we are of the world in our materialism and self-centredness, but not in the world as a demonstration of Christ-like sacrificial love. To do this we will need to enable Christians to live out their faith in the world. By taking seriously the concerns of ventures like the Gospel and Culture Movement, and presenting them in ways accessible to the people, we will enable God’s people to cross back and forth across the cultural boundaries between “church” and “world”, and so produce new ways of living as the followers of Jesus. We will do this by helping believers understand and interpret the biblical text in ways which engage with their daily experience. We must help believers bring their successes and failures, doubts and insights into the life, worship, care and support of the gathered community. Congregations and Associations could establish communities of learning, providing appropriate contexts and means through which training, resourcing and support may be offered, both for leadership within the gathered communities of believers and for ministry in the world.

There is a clear need for the training and “equipping of the saints” in the outreach

of the church. This is particularly necessary if we are to meet the needs of the urban situation, the poor of society (especially in seeking justice for the powerless), the youth culture, and ethnic minorities/majorities.

I do believe that in our desire to mobilise and train the local church we will need to discover a "liberation theology" which is appropriate for the British scene. I believe that the way that this might be achieved would be through valuing the individual experiences of Christians and non-Christians. We would start by asking questions about their personal experience of life and God (however they might understand such a concept or person), and from there build an understanding of the ways in which God might act in the world.

We must keep the message and the training fresh and real; there must be relevance. Paul Mortimore quotes Michael Taylor<sup>4</sup> in believing that removing theological education from the realities of everyday life has meant that not infrequently "the wrong things easily become important". At Oxford, as a matter of policy, our ministerial students train with those who are studying other Arts subjects, who are looking toward employment in a variety of businesses and professions. They are asking questions and making observations about the Bible and about life that our ministerial students need to listen to. There is also a need to understand the world of science and engineering, and to listen to the questions being thrown up within these fields. The same is surely true within our church fellowships; church members should be encouraged to bring the questions that arise within their work or home situations and seek answers through the Scriptures and within the community of faith.

College style/academic training can often be inappropriate for our "lay" folk, but perhaps, more important to us, may not be the best type of training for those who we would encourage to work with such issues and situations. We must address the question of how the important theological and biblical foundation to ministry might be developed without blunting the cutting edge of a ministry that can encounter a non-book reading culture.

We want to encourage people to work out their faith within the world. This will mean facing up to the dualism which is a feature of some evangelicalism. It will mean using a different methodology that starts with experience rather than propositions. I should want to advocate apologetics, which arise out of experience, encounters the reality of life in the world, and takes seriously the Lordship of Christ in all of life. This is not an easy, nor a risk-free approach, and we will encounter questions, and indeed answers, that we may find surprising and unsettling.

**John Weaver**

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> John Weaver *Preparing the Church for Ministry in the 21st Century* (Mainstream Newsletter 49, 1994), pp11-14

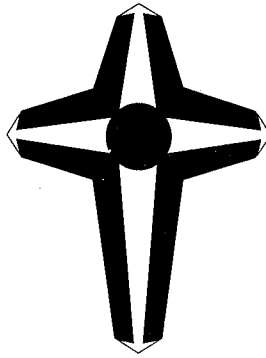
<sup>2</sup> Paul Mortimore, *The Worldly Church* (B.U. Didcot, 1993) p32

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* pp. 41-42

<sup>4</sup> Michael Taylor, *Ministerial Formation* (WCC, July 1978) p.7, quoted P. Mortimore, *op. cit.* p.47

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# Advocacy for Children: A Challenge to Faithfulness

What do we who confess Jesus as Lord and have been baptized into his Church believe about the nature and status of childhood? What significance does our Christian faith attach to children? And how are we to faithfully act in our relationships with children? Each of us approaches such questions with overt and covert assumptions.

We ought not to forget that for centuries childhood was unknown. Children were treated as miniature adults. During the Age of the Enlightenment children were "discovered". Ever since, children have been separated from adults and placed into a class of their own. Perhaps, more importantly, they have been excluded from the world of adults, and treated as inferior. We celebrate childhood and belittle it at the same time. We project onto childhood a false nostalgia of happiness and carefreeness, while believing children to be in need of becoming serious and responsible. Children are incomplete human beings in need of being shaped into adults.

It is as if when we became aware of children and ceased to treat them as little adults, we also stopped treating them as full human beings. Now they are only children. It was a questionable gain.

Of course, it is difficult for adults to feel free and think as children. We are taught to leave our childhood behind and more significantly, we tend to look upon childhood from a position of superiority. Adults are complete human beings; they have arrived. Anyone who has not reached this chronological stage is not yet considered a complete human being in the full sense of the word.

We typically say that children do not know enough, cannot think well enough, feel deeply enough, or act maturely enough to be treated equally. Children, it appears, have little to contribute until they reach adulthood. Through the magic of a birthday, persons become adults. Then, it seems, it no longer matter how much they know, how well they reason, how sensitively they feel or maturely they act. As adults they have rights and privileges in Church and world, rights and privileges denied children solely because of their age.

## The Vulnerable Child

**The century of the child has produced a serious problem. The discovery of childhood has produced seeds for the oppression of children.**

We talk more about the rights of adults not to bear children than the rights of children to be born and live in equality and justice.

Children have no political power. They cannot vote so, even though they form nearly half the human race, their opinions are often ignored, or not heard, by government. Very often children are not aware that they have rights and they are wholly dependent on their parents for protection.

But for many children in the UK and countless other countries, the protection of parents is not enough. Everyday the newspapers tell stories of children worldwide who are abused, physically or mentally, or refused the rights which many people believe should be automatic - such as the right to be fed, clothed and educated.

It is estimated, for example, that approximately 155 million children under five live in poverty and over 14 million die each year, mainly in Third World countries, from common illnesses combined with malnutrition. Some 100 million children live on the streets and up to 50 million children - the size of the UK's population - are working full-time under the age of 15. Some countries have child soldiers.

In the UK, almost one in three children is living below the poverty line, according to official figures, with persistent high unemployment dragging more and more children into penury.

In 1979 only 1.4 million children (10 per cent) were living below the official poverty line of half the average income, after allowing for housing costs. By 1991/1992 combined, 4.1 million (32 per cent) were doing so.

Overall, 13.9 million children and adults, 25 per cent of the population, were living below half-average income in 1991/1992, compared with 5 million (9 per cent) in 1979.

Until 1989 there was no national or international agreement on how the rights of all children and, most specifically, those who are deprived, could be protected. But in 1989, after 10 years of negotiations between countries with varied cultures, economies, systems and needs, the United Nations General Assembly approved a **Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

It was hailed as the "Magna Carta" or "Bill of Rights" for children. The Convention was designed to do for children what the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights had been designed to do for adults. On September 2 1990, the Convention was ratified by 20 countries, which meant it came into force as the first international legal code

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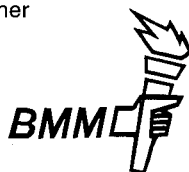
Nearly 80 years ago the Baptist Men's Movement was established to provide ways and means for men of this century to help change the world through Christian activities.

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on children's rights. The UK ratified the Convention in 1991.

**The Children's Act** which was originally enacted by Parliament in 1989, is the most important reform of the law affecting children to have been passed for many years. The whole statute applies in England and Wales and parts of it apply in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It brings together and simplifies child law and introduces many new ideas.

A new law was needed because the previous law had proved unsatisfactory. In particular, it had been ineffective in protecting children at risk.

Various committees including a law reform body, the Law Commission, put forward recommendations for altering the law.

In addition, the Report of the Cleveland Inquiry in 1987, which had examined the cases of over 100 children who had been taken into care after disputed allegations of sexual abuse, was very influential.

The new statute covers the care for, bringing up and protection of children. It deals with what may happen to children when parents separate or divorce, and with the intervention of a local authority if a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.

Central to the Act is the belief that children, classed as boys and girls under 18, are generally best looked after in their families. Parents have parental responsibility for their children and in the normal way legal proceedings should not be needed. Where necessary, local authorities must help families stay together and work with children, parents and relatives.

In court proceedings, the welfare of the child is the most important factor. The child's wishes must be given a high priority, but the court will decide what is in the child's best interests.

For Churches and voluntary organisations, the Act lays down strict guidelines for the supervision of children in Play Groups etc..., and requirements in terms of buildings, facilities, security etc..

### **Important in Their Own Right**

The status of children as being equal to adults is the significant affirmation of the Biblical tradition. A person's being, not their becoming, is at the heart of the Christian faith. Indeed, childhood is the norm for all faithful life.

The Biblical witness is not a romantic idealization of childhood. It is, however, an affirmation that children, like adults, are fundamentally children of God. Children cry "Abba" naturally; adults must learn to say it.

The normative issue is the crucial one. If the norm for life is adulthood, understood as high cognitive functioning, emotional maturity, moral decision-making and ethical behaviour, then childhood is suspect. If, however, childhood and its characteristics are considered normative, then children are not only of worth in and of themselves; they have something to contribute to the life of adults.

This does imply, of course, that children should not strive toward adulthood or endeavour to reach their potential. Each person bears that responsibility. But what it does mean is that our status and value before God is not determined by having achieved these ends. We do not earn God's grace. It is a gift given to children as well as adults. Our position before God is not to be determined by our potential becoming, but only by our being.

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## **Arson and Vandalism - A Serious Threat**

Arson and other malicious damage has become common in today's society and the culprits are all too often children. It is a sad fact that many people no longer regard Churches with the same respect or reverence which was once the case.

As Managers of other types of arson-prone buildings such as factories, shops, schools and hospitals have tightened their security arrangements, petty criminals look elsewhere for "easier pickings"; the thieves start fires to cover their tracks.

In recognition of these rather sombre facts, I have been working with the Arson Prevention bureau to produce a booklet which offers practical suggestions on how to minimise the dangers. The leaflet entitled *Arson - The Major Threat to Places of Worship* is being sent **free of charge** to every Church insured with Baptist Insurance Company.

There are positive steps you can take to prevent arson and malicious damage, the first being for you to take responsibility for security. This can then be delegated if required to a suitably qualified person within the Church. The next step would be to use the risk assessment within the leaflet to determine key action points required and how they can be achieved.

If your Church has not received a copy of the leaflet, please write to me and I will arrange for one to be sent to you by return of post.

**REMEMBER THE BEST DEFENCE AGAINST ARSON AS WELL AS AGAINST THEFT IS TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE SECURITY PROGRAMME. IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE AN EXPENSIVE PROCESS, AND ACTION NOW COULD PREVENT YOUR CHURCH BECOMING YET ANOTHER STATISTIC.**

Yours in His Service

T.E. Mattholie

Childhood is real life, not merely preparation for real life; the child will unfold, change, develop, and become - all of life does, for eternity. But we ought never to treat a child on the basis of future worth. We must learn to look at children and see full human beings. Children are not born to become what we are not. We need to stop using children as vehicles for the projection of limited or defeated adult ambitions, nor to satisfy adult needs.

Of course, creatures born of human beings do not become human in isolation from other human beings. It is, therefore, the responsibility of adults to be with and act with children but not to do things to them or for them. Like adults, children are human beings carrying on their own struggle to make sense of life, to meet their needs, and to master the challenges presented by life. Like adults, children need others. Children need adults and adults need children. All need opportunities to act and react with others in a community of love and respect. The Church needs to model a way of life which demonstrates that children, like adults, have equal rights before God and all humanity.

It is well known that basic attitudes and prejudices are formed in childhood. Mass media and schools, community and family life can have a manipulative impact on children. Our Christian commitment to combat racism, sexism, nationalism, classism and militarism must be focused on the transformation of adults and the social systems they create and maintain. Only then will children have a full opportunity to experience and witness God's will and way.

It is our adult responsibility to ensure that each child has the right to a healthy physical environment, as well as an environment of love. Children's human rights must be protected, ensuring each child security and opportunity regardless of potential or socio-economic status, race, sex or abode. Children have a right to grow up in a society which respects the dignity of life and is free of poverty, discrimination or other forms of degradation; the right to have meaningful choices in the process of development and to have a meaningful voice in the community; the right to be educated to the limits of their capabilities; and the right to live in a social system which enforces these rights.

At the turn of the century, the Church discovered children. The challenge which faces us in the last quarter of this century is to make good the Christian conviction that it is the being of all persons - children and adults - that must be honoured. Only then will the child-likeness, to which the Gospel calls us all, be celebrated and the reign of God realized.

**David Tennant**

# As We Were: Baptists in the 1930's: Part One

This article is something of an indulgence! Having spent several years completing a PhD thesis on Baptist life in the 1930's, I was rather touched when our editor asked me to produce something for the *Journal* based on my research. In this brief article I wish to share a resumé of my findings, with the hope that we will recognise in English and Welsh (or more precisely, South Walian) Baptist life 60 years ago many of the issues still crucial for the Church today.

## No Escape from the Past!

For our forebears - as for ourselves - there could be no escape from history. It is a truism to say that the Church today will always be a product of the Church yesterday. The context for our Baptist churches in the 1930's can actually be found as early as the closing years of the nineteenth century. These had been magnificent years, popularly perceived as years of growth and spiritual vitality; a period of apparent health paralleling the highpoint of political and social influence of Nonconformity in general, and indeed, of the 'idealised friend' of Nonconformity, the parliamentary Liberal party. Baptist numbers had seemed to increase for much of this period; a new headquarters had been opened and a thriving and expanding bureaucracy controlled central Baptist affairs. Baptists were also leaders in dissent, most notably over such issues as the Boer War and the later Passive Resistance Movement. Some Baptist leaders at this time felt that soon there would be one Christian church in the United Kingdom, and it would be predominantly Nonconformist! Yet by 1907, at the very height of their perceived power, many of their key opinion-formers were shocked to discover a fall in membership of the churches. This decline had, in fact, been gathering pace for more than a decade, masked by the use of limited statistical techniques which had failed to detect the numerical decline of the denomination *as a proportion* of the British population.

The reasons for decline were many and varied, and as distinct entities do not provide an adequate explanation for the phenomenon. Yet taken together they provided a powerful corrosive to the amalgam of Baptist life. The increasing social standing of Baptists tended to separate them still further than was already the case from the working classes. Indeed, my researches confirm the widely-held view in scholarly circles that Baptists in the late-Victorian period had never really been the church for the working classes. This general evidence becomes even more overwhelming when one considers the sparsity of working class members of diaconates. Paralleling the decline in the already meagre working-class involvement in Baptist church life was the rise of the Labour party, providing as it did an ideological and 'spiritual' home for those members of the working classes overlooked by the Church. Social dependence upon the churches was also weakening as many of the social evils of the day were ameliorated through parliamentary legislation. Indeed, Baptist thinkers already saw the danger to their vested interests in the State taking over social care functions from the churches. Baptist links with the young were also weakening as the Sunday School system to which they were so committed and into which they had poured vast resources of time, manpower and money, itself entered into a time of uncertainty, change and decline. Baptists also became more inward-looking, delving again into the pool of theological debate,

yet, paradoxically, living in constant fear of a new Downgrade controversy. Additionally, the Great War was also to leave its dark cloud over the entire era, and a further fundamental change occurred with the collapse of the great Nonconformist link with Christian pacifism, giving way to a war in defence of Christendom.

Although Baptist numbers showed a slight resurgence in the early 1920's they soon dropped dramatically. The denomination was in a state of deep confusion, indeed, crisis, as to its identity within the wider world of both Nonconformity and of British social life in general. Yet the evidence indicates that the denomination's leaders were not fully aware of the depth of confusion that had already begun to take hold among their wider constituency.

Thus it was that during the 1930's the Baptist denomination went through a period of reassessment and realignment in most spheres of its life. Yet such change tended to remain both superficial and inadequate. This should perhaps come as no great surprise. In the 1930's English and Welsh Baptists, like other Christians, were confronted with a decade of profound, if regionally-varied, social crisis, poverty and deprivation which was compounded by international upheaval that the 'war to end all wars' had psychologically declared to be impossible. Not only had the old verities slipped away, but new crises befell the churches even before a new perspective had been attained.

### **A Lost Political Voice**

My thesis first considered this crisis as it affected the thinking and policies of the national leadership of the Baptist Union. On matters political, the leadership of the Baptist Union had become very cautious. This conservatism in political viewpoint was the result of the interaction of several factors. Some of the newer church leaders had less faith in the ability of politicians to deliver their promises to pressure groups such as the Free Churches. In part this realism had been forced upon the churches by the disappointing behaviour of Lloyd George. Not only had the Liberal party been unable or unwilling to offer to Nonconformity the advantages promised for their support in the 1906 General Election and subsequently, but Lloyd George had also disappointed Baptists on a personal level. Thus, if a politician so closely linked with the Nonconformist Conscience could let down the cause so dramatically, how could Nonconformists ever again fully trust another political leader?

On the other hand, the Baptist presence of Ernest Brown within the cabinet, Geoffrey Shakespeare (son of the former Baptist Union secretary, J.H.) on its fringes, and the 'Christian' presence of Baldwin, McDonald and others in the leadership of the nation served to convince many Baptist opinion-formers - most notably, M.E. Aubrey, the General Secretary of the Union - that support for the national government was the safest policy. Indeed, in addition to its positive support for the national government and its expressed concern at the state of Liberalism, the Baptist Union leadership presented a specifically negative view of the Labour party. The debates surrounding the launch of the Council of Action for Peace and Reconciliation in 1935, under Lloyd George's leadership, provide confirmation of this assertion. Aubrey and, later, J C Carlile (editor of the *Baptist Times*) saw the Council of Action as an opportunist move by Lloyd George to create a multi-party grouping, centring on his personality, which would fill the void left by the effective parliamentary demise of the Liberal party. They felt, however, that support for the existing government, doing a comparatively good job in a difficult situation, was greatly to be preferred to a romantic return to an uncertain Liberal past or a rash

move to an uncertain Socialist future.

## **Responding to a Changing Society**

Turning to the question of social involvement, in general terms, Baptists in the 1930's did their best to respond to local needs, although for most churches this response was very limited. The financial pressures facing the churches, coupled with their loss of direction, meant that issues of internal organisation, not to say survival, predominated. Issues perceived to be important did come under debate both nationally and locally, but these were generally topics associated with old dissent - alcohol abuse, Sunday opening of cinemas - and they were now increasingly irrelevant to the rapidly-changing society of the 1930s. More complex social issues such as unemployment received, in comparison, much less attention. It is most unlikely that this was due to cold-heartedness. Rather, it should be seen as a reflection of confusion and uncertainty about the changed Baptist role in society. Old certainties are always easier to live with than the new ethical dilemmas. What is quite clear is that the denominational opinion-formers saw no easy answers to these complex changes and were adamant that no one political party had those answers either. There was also a naïve tendency among many Baptist leaders to view all classes in Britain as enjoying unprecedented prosperity which would have to be foregone for a while, even if the comparative level of prosperity left much to be desired. At the same time, it is equally important to note the frustration felt by many Free Church people that they were no longer strong enough to impose their social viewpoint on wider British society, only to result in a great deal of ill-will, together with psychological separation between their approved social world and that of the national consensus.

## **War, Peace or...?**

The Baptist leadership was by no means united in its views on the crucial fundamental issues of war and peace. As the Thirties began, there remained a fond attachment to the ideals of pacifism. Yet those ideals were no longer easy to maintain. Free Church support for the Great War had undermined much pacifist confidence. Indeed, one may wonder how solidly pacifist the broad body of Free Church people had ever been. What is clear, however, is that as early as 1932 the Baptist leadership - and substantial numbers of 'ordinary' church members - were moving to a solidly pacificistic position. War remained an evil to their minds, yet it might sometimes be a necessary evil. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, with all its attendant implications for Western missionary involvement in the country, was a seminal event in Baptist thinking on international affairs at both local and central levels. From this point on the leadership of the Baptist Union became more and more aware of sinister changes in the accepted world order. Through the medium of the denominational journal they also tried to spread that awareness without actually creating what they considered to be the equally sinister horror of war-mindedness. The rise to power of Hitler, the militaristic growth of Germany, the oppression of some elements of the German Church, and the rise of other dictatorships served to break even further the will of pure pacifism within the denomination. The field was then clear for pacificism to become the normative moral stance on issues of war and peace. This move had a profound effect on the presentation of news and views within the denominational journal. Without the premise that war was always and ever wrong the various writers could range widely in their critique of German affairs and in presenting suggested responses for the



British government.

## **A Baptist World-View**

Baptist interest in international affairs must be viewed squarely within the context of the move towards overt pacificism. For the leaders of English and Welsh Baptist thinking, mid-decade proved to be the second crucial turning point in their thinking on international issues. Indeed, 1935 marked the precise point at which they were forced to accept that international affairs were bad and getting rapidly worse. In the German context, although they had earlier argued for the repealing of the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty, when Hitler actually did this in March 1935 they were largely horrified. Their sense of fair play was tested to the extreme by this development.

Additionally, and crucially, the public concern of English and Welsh Baptists for their co-religionists in Germany dated back to 1933. Once again, an increase in interest can be discerned in the spring of 1935. Events in the German churches found their focus in the arrest, trial and imprisonment of Pastor Niemöller. The comparative lack of coverage of Karl Barth's position may indicate that, with the assertiveness of a strongly conservative evangelicalism in Britain, Barth was considered too radical for many Baptist minds at this point in time. The development in the German Church Struggle in general, however, confirmed the already-prevailing concerns of many Baptists about Hitler's long-term intentions.

Additionally, the concern expressed by the Baptist leadership at the rise of the German dictatorship was extended to the other fascist dictatorships of the time. In the case of Italy this concern was expressed as early as 1935. As the situation in Abyssinia worsened, the *Baptist Times* moved to an overtly anti-Italian position. This was linked to a latent and long-standing mistrust of the Vatican and Roman Catholicism in general. Significantly, it was in the light of the Abyssinian crisis that the *Baptist Times* began actively to support and even promote British re-armament. Again, the ideological move from pacifism to pacificism had paved the way for such a marked change of stance. Similarly, concern expressed by Baptists over the war in Spain was again expressed against the more worrying backdrop of developments in Germany. Perceived Vatican complicity again led Baptists to attack the Pope for his weakness in international affairs.

In this increasingly volatile climate the League of Nations was seen as an abject failure. The one great international force for peace - as many Baptists saw it - had been shown to be finally and irretrievably impotent when it was most needed.

Although Baptists had had a long-standing concern for their co-religionists in Eastern Europe, it is clear also that by the mid-Thirties concerns about these religious and political problems were rapidly being eclipsed by those in the west. Possibly, the increasing rapport between Hitler and Stalin served to destroy much innate sympathy felt for Russia by Free Churchmen in general. The most notable exception to this general rule was J.H. Rushbrooke, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, who worked, travelled and wrote tirelessly for the cause of religious freedom in Eastern Europe.

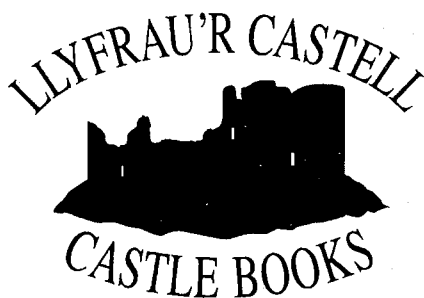
Finally, Baptists had a continuing interest in Indian affairs at this time; but thinking on Indian issues in general, and Gandhi in particular, was mixed, even muddled. What is clear, though, is that English Baptists, at least, were in favour of Dominion Status being granted to the sub-continent. As in so many other international

issues, the religious dimension obtruded, with considerable debate ensuing about the religious presuppositions of such Indian leaders as Gandhi. Again, also as in the cases of Eastern Europe and China, by the late 1930s national concern over events in Western Europe had eclipsed wider, traditional international concerns. Local church studies have shown no evidence of expressed concern on the issue of Indian independence at any time in the Thirties.

It may be argued, then, that during the 1930s it was seemingly quite impossible for Baptists to view any particular issue, whether national or international, as merely political in nature. The religious dimension was never far away. In international affairs in particular, it is clear that for many key Baptist thinkers, and also for many 'ordinary' Baptists of the time, positions were generally taken on the basis of 'What would be best for Protestant Christianity in that country?' To that extent, at least, Baptist thinking and speaking on these issues may be said to have exhibited a certain underlying, if self-interested, consistency.

In the second part of this article, we shall consider the phenomenon of numerical decline, and the response of local churches to the social milieu of 1930s Britain.

**Michael Goodman**



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# Travellers' Tales: Spirituality in the Ministry

The Travellers' Tales Project began with a set of questions. They were addressed to people in pastoral ministry. They included:

Are we overlooking basic spiritual simplicities by which Christian faith and ministry need to be maintained?

What is spirituality? Is there a specific Baptist spirituality?

What are appropriate patterns and rhythms of prayer today?

How far does vocation in ministry carry with it the belief that with God's call come also the resources to fulfil it?

How far is the nurture of our relationship with God, and of life in him, as essential part of ministerial formation and development?

Four of us, Margaret Jarman, Bernard Green, Barry Vendy and myself, approached a cross-section of Baptist ministers with these questions. A high percentage of our questionnaires was returned and the response was fascinating.<sup>1</sup>

Travellers' Tales contains the opinions, stories, reactions and practices of ministers, when asked to consider their relationship with God and the spiritual resources of our Faith. It begins with this arresting, heartfelt statement:

*"There is a big gap in the church between what should be and the reality of experience, so ministers become insecure about whether Christianity works and engage in frenetic activism. We talk of peace in Jesus but the reality is that we are largely anxiety-ridden and oppressed. We talk about forgiveness and reconciliation, but watch the congregation shunning each other. So ministers are particularly insecure about their own position...which becomes "If I work really hard, maybe others will forgive my shortcomings and lack of results." This breeds a guilt about time taken for reading, reflection, silence and creativity."*

That sets the tone of the whole publication. It is honest and to the point. The demands of living with people as their minister has spiritual consequences.

In summary, Travellers' Tales portrays the feelings of insecurity, lack of reality and marginalisation that ministers experience. The need for honest communication between ministers and their churches is desired, but only occasionally achieved. The pressure to be successful in each other's eyes between ministers is acknowledged, with the hurt and the blight to our trust in God it brings to those of us who feel unaccepted and less successful. With the inability to acknowledge to others the lack of depth in our relationship with God comes a certain loneliness.

Travellers' Tales also details what Ministers believe spirituality to be about and what we do when we try to pray. Here's a sample of what was reported:

*"Spirituality is not what we do, it's who we are. It's the style of our individual response in Jesus Christ before the challenge of everyday life in a given historical and cultural setting".*

*"It is our experience of living and how our relationship with God is developing through our beliefs, worship, discipline and lifestyle".*

*"I've used the Joint Liturgical Group Daily Office for many years. I have written my own rule of life, which is a guide; something to be glad about, not something to make me feel a failure".*

*"Once a month I have a **REVIEW DAY** when I look back over the past month and forward to the next, to keep the church element of life on track and check out my own spiritual well-being".*

Never far away is honesty about the struggles:

*"Traditional Quiet Time seemed like trying to start up a car with a flat battery on a winter's morning".*

One of the most heart-warming features of the survey is to read how ministers seek to overcome isolation from God and each other. Friends, prayer support groups, retreats, covenant groups and spiritual directors are looked for and employed.

It was obvious some ministers could turn to their local church.

*"I have the experience of being ministered to by the people I work with locally...in my case, though, I was only open to accept this help when it became public knowledge that I was in personal crisis".*

And yet through this sometimes troubled commitment the resources of the Spirit are enjoyed and explored.

*"The nearer we get to God, the more realise that the future is truly open, that God is a God of Surprises. This means we have to take risks and exercise faith and that can be frightening. The reality is that the openness which we are so often afraid of is really a space where the Spirit is free to work".*

This is only a sample of what Travellers' Tales records. It is good that the BMF Journal asked for this article, and also to report a very positive response to the aspirations of the Project from Area Superintendents and Baptist College Principals and staffs.

I wish to continue with a series of personal reactions to the Project and raise some issues it leaves for me.

1. It was refreshing and humbling to have such candour from fellow ministers. It made me question my own insularity and reticence to share my own struggles and discoveries with my fellow ministers and local church. It made me question my own journey with God. Fittingly, then, whilst editing the text, I was unwell for a few weeks and unable to preach. I found it incredibly hard not to be in the pulpit for a couple of Sundays. I felt empty and unfulfilled. I had become unhealthy attached to a particular activity of the ministry and time of the week. I realise I have let my spiritual journey become fixed in one experience of ministry. My prayer life appears to depend on it. Of course, preaching without prayer is like sounding gong and clanging cymbal. But our life of prayer is about more than what we do for the church. It is so easy to relegate our own need for a healthy relationship with God through Jesus Christ to a facet of our ministry. If our prayers, times of reflection, reading and ministerial conferences constantly serve the needs of the mission and life of the local church, there may be two results. Our life becomes restricted. The Church becomes the be-all and end-all. But more importantly, a relationship with the church becomes a substitute for one with God. "He saved others, himself he could not save" becomes the

sad epitaph for the minister who showed others where to drink but did not drink himself. We can lead others in prayer but when it is just "The Lord and me", that is quite another matter.

2. The spiritual well-being of the ministry is partly to do with our structures. It is necessary that we have new forms and patterns. But it is potentially intimidating for the minister. The role and function of the minister are under close scrutiny at present. And thus a questioning of vocation can begin. *Forms of Ministry among Baptists. Towards an Understanding of Spiritual Leadership*<sup>2</sup> addresses this. But it is of necessity a dry, cool document. Reference to experience is limited. I looked but could not find an exploration of what "Spiritual Leadership" means. It is more than an analysis of terms and theological insight. It is an experience of being human before God. It is struggle. It is moments of clarity amidst confusion. As one of the Travellers says:

*"My strongest feeling is that anyone who sets out on a life of faith and anyone who attempts to minister in the name of Christ will undoubtedly experience all kinds of stresses and disappointments...I do not think there is any technique or study course that can take the cross out of Christianity. But...whatever the price we pay for our vocation, it is far outweighed by the joy of living in companionship with God..."*

So Malcolm Goodspeed was right to challenge the whingers<sup>3</sup> in a recent *Journal*. But it is not just about pay, conditions and family life that we experience anguish. There is a soul hunger which needs to be openly acknowledged within our structures. So I, for one, hope that in the current Superintendency Review, the question will be raised: Is not the Superintendent the one to ask of "their" ministers: "And how is your journey with God at present?" And if not, who should ask?

At Ordination we give our assent to large-minded, profoundly deep questions about the priorities of our vocation. In the light of my experience since, I wonder that I had the temerity to agree to such a life. For so often the experience is that it is left to you to monitor your own journey. Most of us can, as Travellers' Tales shows, if we wish, find a person to enquire after our spiritual state and give us support. But I do feel the way we organise ourselves denominationally needs to allow the question to be heard more readily and answered. And, incidentally, who would ask it of the Superintendents?

3. It was exciting to discover the many ways, new and old, in which we encounter the spiritual resources of God. We need to learn more and more how to offer our resourcefulness and discoveries to each other. I recall the image Michael Griffiths employed to describe the loneliness of many Christians. It is like flying solo with only occasionally being asked to fly in formation. The bane of our individualistic ministry is that we can find it so hard to share with each other and with the people of the church who have invited us to minister to them. Some of the most telling statements in Travellers' Tales emerge from just such an experience. The time is here to stand back and consider what the present high tide of spiritual writing and exploration has brought on to the beach. Not all of it is worthwhile. But much is important. The ministers in Travellers' Tales emphasised that spirituality is about finding companions, going wider than Baptist identity questions, and keeping the matter simple. God. Bible. Questions. Liturgy. Prayer. Life.

4. Not that it is that simple. One of the surprising omissions for me in our collection of ministerial experience was an acknowledgement of the intrinsic untidiness of the task. Maybe I speak only for myself. But I do find it very difficult to organise God, other people or myself. Unexpected surprises of all shades constantly come along. I find that the models of ministry that arise from sociological analysis with their delight in pattern, order and system do not serve this experience. I do not believe I am opting out of the need for discipline in my ministry if I learn to live with its untidiness. People are not mechanical objects. God would appear to be far more flexible than the Laws we attribute to him.

Eugene H. Petersen in *The Contemplative Pastor*<sup>4</sup> explains the ministry that emerges for such a recognition:

*"The pastor's question is "Who are these particular people, and how can I be with them in such a way that they can become what God is making them?" My job is simply to be there, teaching, preaching Scripture as well as I can and being honest with them, not doing anything to interfere with what the Spirit is shaping in them. Could God be doing something that I have never ever thought of?"*

We may want to do more or act differently but surely he has it the right way round. It is God's Ministry before it is ours.

5. I was also surprised at three other omissions. Except for one person there was no explicit reference to the study of Theology as a source of spiritual refreshment. I found this disturbing. Is the love of God with the mind so rare among us? There was no one who mentioned the Arts as a similar resource. I find that distressing, perhaps it was the way the questions were couched for I hope Baptist ministers are not blind or deaf to the resources of the Creator Spirit as we receive them in the world of the Fine and Performing Arts. Again, no one mentioned the spiritual regeneration of the river bank, moorland track, forest trail or sun-kissed cove. Could the disciples of one who was constantly using images from the natural world, which he obviously enjoyed, be denying themselves one of God's most accessible spiritual resources?
6. Overall, the tone of Travellers' Tales is summed up by the word "sacrifice". For some ministers this is at present an awful experience which cannot be accepted with the delight and trust experienced by others. But the experience of Christ within will always be the experience of the Cross. In *Creative Ministry*<sup>5</sup> Henri Nouwen describes ministry as the laying down of one's life for one's friends. He continues:

*"Ministry means the ongoing attempt to put one's own search for God with all the moments of pain and joy, despair and hope, at the disposal of those who want to joint this search but do not know how".*

And why? So that people experience the new life of Christ.

The journey with God does not end. it is incomplete in this life. There is always more to discover. There is a pleasant humility among ministers, (well, I assume it is humility) that does not see themselves as images of discipleship for others to look at and in whom to find inspiration. Our experience of life in God's world, it is thought, is at worst distorted and at best limited. We are shielded from many of the pressures, demand and constraints which our fellow members experience. However, what we do have in common is the belief that all Christian discipleship follows the pattern of Jesus' death and resurrection. We walk his way in trust, the Lord being

our helper. So the most important aspect of our image of discipleship will be our attitude. Do we embrace the way of Christ or simply resign ourselves to it? In all honesty, we probably find that we move between the two! However, it is a source of deep regret when a Christian, whether minister or not, gives in to the struggle because he or she considers they are no longer worth it. All too often we proclaim justification through grace and live out justification by works. So the final word is from one of the Travellers:

*"Previously I worked for God asking his help when my resources did not seem to be sufficient. I came to see it was better to ask God to do all the work, with me as his servant".*

**John Rackley**

Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> The full text of Travellers' Tales can be obtained for £1.25 from John Rackley, Church Office, Manvers Street Baptist Church, Manvers Street, Bath BA1 1JW
- <sup>2</sup> A discussion document by the Doctrine and Worship Committee of the BU, 1994.
- <sup>3</sup> *The Baptist Ministers' Journal*, April 1995
- <sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Petersen: *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Eerdmans 1989
- <sup>5</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, Image, 1991.

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# Book Reviews

## ***Crisis Counselling: Caring for People in Emotional Shock* by Howard Stone (SPCK, 1995, 108pp, £8.99)**

Most readers will need no introduction to the well established New Library of Pastoral Care and its important range of titles. The present book is a revision of Howard Stone's work which first emerged in the seventies. This new edition aims to explain the principles of crisis counselling by way of an A-B-C method and to show how the method works in practice by reference to a number of case studies.

Stone distinguishes crisis counselling from normal pastoral care, and in Chapter Two defines and describes what he understands by "crisis". It is important to be clear that this is Stone's purpose, since (as he himself acknowledges) much of his advice is highly directive in a way which is inappropriate for most caring practice.

Stone's A-B-C method is to Achieve contact, to Boil down the problem to its most pressing need, and to Cope actively. He spells this out in Chapter Three and offers examples and case studies in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Six speaks of the Church as a caring community.

The strength of this book is its roots in Stone's own pastoral experience, and its confidence in offering the reader a method that works. Its weaknesses derive from the same considerations. Its cultural and ecclesiastical context is alien to ours. Stone suggests that when the pastoral carer is uncertain where to refer (s)he should call a mental health professional in the congregation (page 56). This is a world away from the experience of most British churches. In a suicide case study he talks of phoning 911 or, if that fails, the fire brigade (page 77).

It is not Stone's fault that these American pieces of advice have emerged unedited in the British book. Nor is he to blame for the spelling differences which any decent word processor could have corrected in minutes. Such blemishes may or may not irritate you. They did me, but not fatally.

What I found more serious was the lack of theological insight. *Crisis* is the NT word for judgement, pointing to the presence of God in human experience. Stone has scratched together a few verses to illustrate his conclusions, but he has not struggled with the question of God.

In his Introduction, Wesley Carr, the new Series Editor, says that the minister will have to work at providing what Stone has failed to offer in this area. No doubt Stone would argue that he is simply offering a how-to book, and that theodicy is not his purpose (cf page 16). If that is the case, then those who are eager to have Stone as their guide need to read Carr's Introduction carefully and to dust off those Philosophy of Religion text books.

**Paul Sheppy**

## ***An Ecumenical Pilgrimage* by Paul R. Clifford (West Ham Central Mission, 1994, 184pp, £9.95)**

This book is a reflection on his life by a man with remarkably wide interests and experiences, from early years, through West Ham Central Mission, McMaster University, Selly Oak Colleges and on into 'retirement'. Life in the three institutions make up the major part of the book, but there are other ventures and activities of an innovative kind. It all adds up to a most varied and interesting pilgrimage not into ecumenism, but within it, revealing a deepening commitment, not to a single unified



Church, but to a free and open sharing of communion with all who confess Jesus as Lord. Moreover, ecumenism comes to be seen in its more literal meaning as a world-wide and inter-disciplinary enterprise, and not just as cooperation and sharing between denominations. The chapters on McMaster and Selly Oak will be of special interest to those concerned with theological education and ministerial preparation, while the earlier chapters on West Ham provide a glimpse into the way in which the Gospel was made relevant to the needs of people around.

In a book of this size it is easy to point to what is missing. In particular, I miss any reflection on the wider social and international context in which Paul was working, especially after leaving West Ham. I also miss some engagement with those who might be called customers - ordinary church members and students. The Index of people mentioned shows the degree of concern with people of the upper social and intellectual classes.

Still, it would be too much to ask for everything in a book of 180 pages, and this story of a remarkable life, lived by the grace of God, will greatly stimulate and encourage readers.

**Harry Mowley**

***Life in the Lordship of Christ* by Raniero Cantalamessa  
(DLT, 1992, 304pp, £11.95)**

Open this book at random and you may think it is by John Wesley, Martin Lloyd-Jones or some contemporary evangelical theologian. It is, in fact, by a Catholic professor and preacher to the Papal Household. So here and there you may come across something which you find unacceptable, especially his assumption that all spiritual graces are automatically given in infant baptism. And if your theology tends to be in the liberal direction you will find the book somewhat conservative.

But, whatever your theological viewpoint, this is a quite exceptional, richly rewarding book, to read and re-read and meditate on. It is sub-titled, 'A Spiritual Commentary on the Letter to the Romans', but it is not a commentary in any normal sense of the word, rather a meditation on the great themes arising in the epistle, taking no account of the re-thinking in recent years regarding the purpose for which Paul wrote the letter. But Cantalamessa has a wide and deep knowledge of Scripture, of human nature, and of the contemporary world, and he is obviously a man who walks in close fellowship with God in Christ, so that reading him brings to light deep and challenging truths.

One word of warning. Beware of your occupational hazard! This book offers spiritual nourishment and challenge to **you** personally. Don't switch off your personal receptivity and turn each page into a three-point sermon for **them**. Instead, put a copy in the church library and let **them** read it for themselves.

**Gladys M. Smith**

***What Do You Think of Christ?* by W. Scott  
(Emmaus Books, 1994, 159pp, £5.99)**

Bill Scott is a Baptist minister who has pastored churches in Yorkshire, Durham, Gwent and Sussex. Ever the student, he has now found time to share some of his learning in this book. It centres round the person and work of Christ "with special reference to the formation, growth and significance of early Christian belief in Jesus".

It is aimed at the reader who is unfamiliar with the technical terms of theology. There are no footnotes and a glossary of basic terms forms an appendix. Each

chapter includes a gentle but logical application of the subject under discussion.

The book begins with a brief review of the Old Testament ideas that act as a backcloth for the foundation of Christian belief. Next, the Gospels are seen as a major source for our knowledge of Jesus and his teaching. Then two chapters are devoted to the Resurrection, one to the Virgin Birth (well worth reading) and three to different aspects of the Second Coming. In discussing the latter some of the problem verses from Matthew's and Mark's Gospels are examined in a very helpful way. It is a pity that the Death of Christ, despite the disciples' lack of understanding, does not receive the same amount of space as the Resurrection and the Second Coming.

Although to my mind the book lacks illustrations and would benefit from the 'cut and thrust' with other scholars, a serious student seeking a basic understanding of Christian belief would greatly benefit from it. To quote the author, "We cannot avoid using our heads as well as our hearts in the endeavour to apprehend and understand the implications and significance of the special revelation through Christ".

**Jack Ramsbottom**

### ***Bringing Your Church Back to Life: Beyond Survival Mentality***

**by Daniel Buttry (Judson Press, 1990, 160pp, \$12 (£8))**

When I saw the cover of this book I have to admit that I made the snap decision that this was yet another book peddling yet another technique for growth. Having agreed to review it, however, I resisted the impulse to put it on the shelf, and sat down to read. I was pleasantly surprised.

The purpose of the book is to help ministers who lead struggling churches to make the right diagnosis of their church's problem. If survival mentality is found to be present, this book sets out to show the minister how to bring the church back to health. Buttry's style is that of the old-fashioned doctor; he is friendly, sure of himself, and confident that any patient who follows his prescription will make a full recovery. The book is easy to read and has something to say to anybody who longs to see spiritual vitality and corporate responsibility in the life of a local church.

Buttry makes some sweeping statements about the Church, though, of course, he is referring to the situation in America. He sees the 1990s as 'lacking vitality, (with) dwindling congregations, (and) dwindling budgets (which) forecast the slow death of once vital and growing congregations' (p8).

The first symptoms of survival mentality are: the goal of keeping the doors open and mortal fear of change. But just recognising the disease is not enough. The root cause must be found. In all cases Buttry believes the root cause is the lack of vision. '...The dynamic reality of Christ present has been lost...in a sea of despair' (p.28).

So a vision bearer is needed one who, like Ezekiel, will prophesy to the dry bones (Ezekiel 37: 1-4). This vision bearer, says Buttry, is called to proclaim God's word to a dying church; by loving the people and preaching, teaching and demonstrating God's love, and dealing with barriers to life: barriers such as traditions which have lost relevance, and attitudes like racism and divisiveness.

Buttry's ideas of health and renewal may not match everybody's, but he does have some penetrating insights, and offers suggestions which are simple but apparently effective. Of course, with books like this the proof of the pudding is always in the eating.

**Vivienne Lassiter**