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The Baptist Ministers' Journal

April 1996

ISSN 0968 - 2406

Vol 254

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"The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board"

Editorial

We are not seeing the doomwatch excesses of millenarianism evident a thousand years ago, but the imminence of the third great epoch is certainly concentrating minds. In the secular sphere, "the biggest ever party" and prestige building projects are the favoured responses. In the churches, an unprecedented degree of spiritual agitation has been precipitated. Some get in shape for the Lord's coming and others try to re-invent themselves in readiness for Century 21.

On the whole, U.K. Baptists appear to be in the second category. And, clearly, anything that causes us to look critically at our life together, asking the Bonhoeffer question "Are we still serviceable?", must be welcomed. Enter the significant autumn Denominational Consultation, heavy with possibility.

But we are a small denomination, with limited resources, and we live with the delicate dynamic between Union and churches. We exist only on the basis of gospel trust and this is our glory. Given this situation, we need, at some point, to rationalise the great debate, identifying what new initiatives are within our grasp and what, ruefully, we must leave. The alternative is the equivalent of drinking sea water - more is never enough - so that we create the madness of perpetual frustration. Churches might ask, "What is reasonable to demand of our Union?" and the Union might ask, "how many initiatives can the churches reasonably assimilate?" And, whatever happens, millenarianism must not obscure the fact that the local pastor will continue to preach the gospel, baptize the convert, visit the sick, feed the hungry, and shepherd the people of Christ. It is God in ordinary; but no less important for that.

In a similar time of turmoil, the potent mix of Renaissance and Reformation, Erasmus of Rotterdam was one of the giants. Scholar, humanist, reformer, John Nicholson reminds us of the many facets of this outstanding figure. Many colleagues now work in Christian broadcasting, but Jim Pollard was among the earliest. He shares some reflections and offers tips to would-be broadcasters. The issue of human sexuality and its expressions is currently exercising the Church no less than other institutions. Keith Riglin argues for a fresh appraisal of the biblical, moral and cultural arguments.

Fourthly, at a time when mission agencies at home and overseas are severely strapped for cash, Fred Stainthorpe questions the philosophy of much Christian giving, pleading for an overall strategy, rather than dependence on the response of the enthusiasts. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 7, Mike Smith builds an approach to pastoral counselling over against the prevailing Rogerian (non-directive) view. This brings us to two of the early Fathers: Benedict and Ignatius. After introducing them, Brian Howden shows how they can relate to the contemporary search for a satisfying spirituality.

As from the July edition, John Houseago will be responsible for book reviews. If you would like to undertake a review from time to time, please contact him.

In Praise of Erasmus

During a recent visit to Canons Ashby, a National Trust property in Northamptonshire, I discovered that both the owners of the property in the late 16th century, Sir John Cope and his son-in-law John Dryden, named their eldest son Erasmus and that this practice continued into the next century with the result that the father, brother and son of the poet John Dryden were all called Erasmus. This illustrates the influence of Erasmus of Rotterdam in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

My interest in this Europhile was rekindled a year ago when I discovered the latest book on him written by A.G. Dickens (the doyen of British Reformation scholars of this generation) and Whitney Jones¹. They adopt a rather unusual approach, dividing the book into three parts, which they term the biographical, thematic and regional. I want in this article to make six points in praise of Erasmus, arising from this book:

1. Erasmus the Reformer. This is the title of the book and they sum up his significance in his phrase “The philosophy of Christ”. They write “Erasmus sought to rediscover the Christ of the Gospels, to clarify and then expound the written record of Christ’s message”. They find his basic purpose illustrated above all in the *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, which has had various translations into English, *Handbook of the Christian Knight* or *Dagger of the Christian Soldier*, because the word means ‘in the hand’ and can refer both to a small weapon and to a small book. It was originally written in the hope of persuading an adulterous manufacturer of armaments to mend his ways. Erasmus presented the book to him; he reciprocated by presenting Erasmus with his own dagger. Roland Bainton, in his biography of Erasmus,² comments: “Neither made any use of the weapon of the other”! The book is a straightforward manual for living the Christian life. Believe in God and his Word. Express your conviction in your morals. Make use of the Cross, remembering what God has done for you. Compare God with the devil and then compare the rewards they offer.

The *Enchiridion* was first published in 1503, but was not translated into English until the 1520’s and that translation was not published until 1533, but between that date and 1549 seven further editions appeared. Sir Thomas More, a close friend of Erasmus, highly praised the translation until he discovered who had done it - William Tyndale! This shows the remarkable breadth of the fans of Erasmus. It was a recent biographer of Sir Thomas More, Richard Marius,³ who makes the interesting claim that “the *Enchiridion* probably contributed more to the origins of English puritanism than any other book except the Bible itself. Within a hundred years after Erasmus died, Protestant pilgrims had landed in the New World, dedicated to the rigorous simplicity and the union of the Christian and secular life that he had espoused in the *Enchiridion*.”

Dickens and Jones have a most interesting chapter on “The Radical Reformation”. They point to relationships between Erasmus and the Anabaptists both in the realm of ideas and in the shape of personal contact. They claim that the basic principle of both was “a strict and essentially Christocentric biblicism”, both emphasised discipleship in life and a concept of the Church as a brotherhood united in love, but they rightly point out that Erasmus never thought of that as a group separated from the world, and they conclude this chapter with the statement, “it was the Radical reformation which best reflected his insistence that Christ’s teaching must find conscious and committed actuality in the conduct of the professed believer”.

2. Erasmus the Satirist comes next in chronological order, because *Moriae Encomium (In Praise of folly)* was written in 1509 whilst staying in the house of Sir Thomas More and dedicated to him because, to quote from the preface, “Your name

is More, which is as close to the world of folly as you are far from the thing itself". This is probably the most entertaining of all his works. He starts by describing all life as a play, he then satirises each profession in turn, and finally he turns to the foolishness of the cross.

The satire of Erasmus, however, is found also in his *Adages* and in his *Colloquies*. Let me give one example from this last work: an urgent Gospeller encountered a Franciscan critic of Erasmus and gave him absolution by banging him on the head three times with Erasmus's New Testament, thus raising three lumps in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!

3. Erasmus the Biblical scholar In 1516 the *Novum Instrumentum* was published, dedicated by Erasmus to Pope Leo X, in subsequent editions entitled *Novum Testamentum*. It comprised four parts: a Greek text of the New testament, a new translation into Latin revising the Vulgate, Annotations commenting upon the text, and a striking introduction called the Paraclesis. In this he pleads that the scriptures may be translated into the vernacular in all countries "would that as a result the farmer should sing some portion of them at his plough, the weaver should hum some parts of them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveller lighten the weariness of his journey with stories of this kind. Let all the conversation of every Christian be drawn from this source." Dickens and Jones quote P.N. Brooke who points out that this rather than any Lutheran output would have engaged attention at the White Horse Inn in the Cambridge of 1516, and they go on to show that Catherine Parr, the sixth and last wife of Henry VIII arranged for an English translation of the *Paraphrases*, part of it being done by the 'Lady Mary' herself. In 1547 the Royal Injunctions decreed that alongside an English Bible in the churches there must be placed within 12 months the paraphrases of Erasmus also in English upon the Gospels "whereas their parishioners may most commodiously resort unto the same and read the same". They comment "the emergent Church of England became permeated through and through with Erasmian values and attitudes".

4. Erasmus the ecumenist The last chapter of the book is entitled "the legacy of Erasmus". The authors point out that Erasmus "attacked in scathing terms the doctrinal and sectarian wrangling of his own time...Yet for him the promise of salvation through Christ remained definitive. He held fast to the Christ of the Gospels, not only as man's hope of redemption in the next life but also as teacher of righteousness in this... Erasmus did not write for the 'free-thinkers' of the 18th century; but perhaps he came nearer to writing for the ecumenical Christian movement of the 20th". They show that this was because of his concept of 'adiaphora' - 'things indifferent', beliefs or articles of faith which are not a necessary condition of salvation. this concept enabled him to maintain an irenic attitude for as long as possible both towards the Catholic Church and towards the various streams of reform. However much he might pour scorn on monks, friars, theologians and popes, he never attacked the Catholic Church as such, and remained a member of it to his death. Let me give four examples of 'adiaphora':

(a) Dickens and Jones show that the last attempt at reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants took place at the Colloquy of Regensburg or Ratisbon in 1541. The proposed agreed formula on 'double justification' closely resembled Erasmus's position in his *De Sarcienda* of 1533, which combined total dependence on grace with an equal emphasis on its fruit in works of charity. The Catholics, however, refused to budge on transubstantiation.

(b) The book states "his emphasis upon the spiritual significance of the eucharist was seized on by a wide range of Protestants, whose opponents, of course, lumped

them all together as 'sacramentaries'", and in another chapter, dealing with the influence of Erasmus on England, we read, "the decision on the crucial wording in the Communion Service - to include phraseology from both the 1549 and the 1552 Prayer Books may be taken to signify a studied ambiguity, hesitancy, recognition of the principle of adiaphora, or merely a hedging of one's bets. Was it not a device worthy of Erasmus himself?"

(c) We cannot avoid in this section mentioning the historic clash between Erasmus and Luther on free will. He tried to avoid attacking Luther, but the latter criticised him for Pelagian tendencies and for abandoning the knowledge of grace for the sake of peace. Erasmus says he would rather play the debater than the judge and warns that we should not "through irreverent inquisitiveness rush to those things which are hidden, not to say superfluous; whether God foreknows anything contingently; whether our will accomplishes anything in things pertaining to eternal salvation; whether it simply suffers the act of grace.." So he arrives at the concept of 'synergism', our will works together with God's grace.

(d) For Baptists there is another very interesting example of 'adiaphora' - in relationship to baptism. Dickens and Jones describe how Erasmus was accused of being an Anabaptist, not that he ever rejected infant baptism, but because in his *Paraphrases* on Matthew he quite explicitly proposed a re-enactment of the ceremony of baptism when the age of puberty was reached, after prior instruction of voluntary participants as to the real meaning of the sacrament. What is known in LEPs in this country as the New Zealand rite for the renewal of baptismal vows through immersion, and what I thought has first been proposed in my College Principal's little book "A Conversation about Baptism" published 30 years ago⁴, I now find was suggested by Erasmus!

5. Erasmus the pacifist M.M. Phillips in her book on Erasmus⁵ says; "It is when he writes on war and peace that Erasmus seems nearest to our time". As early as 1504 he writes, "If people would remember that the Christian world is one country, the Christian Church is one family..all members of the same body...redeemed at the same price, called on an equal footing to the same inheritance, and that we receive sacraments which are common to all, they will surely judge that there can be no war which is not a civil war..if it is taken up by Christians against Christians". He frequently derides the concept of a just war, and his only slight qualification of a position we would call today absolute pacifism is when he concedes that the princes of Christendom might feel driven to war against the Turks as an inevitable necessity, but he immediately goes on to add that Christians must beware of becoming like their adversaries. Dickens and Jones conclude that "in his attitudes on this subject Erasmus was centuries ahead of his times", not least in his most explicit and celebrated plea for peace *A Complaint of Peace Spurned and Rejected by the Whole World*. This point leads naturally to our last section:

6. Erasmus the European, or to use a modern phrase, the Europhile. This was the feature about him which most struck me in reading this latest book on him. Although he was known as Erasmus Roterdamus, he was in fact a citizen of not one country but of many. He had, of course, the advantage of being able to write all his books in the European language of the day - Latin. He was critical of all countries. In *In Praise of Folly* he uses national characteristics as an example of self-love. Dickens and Jones point out that "pride of place in terms of number of visits - and probably in total length of residence - must be accorded to England", but he was very critical of our beer, of our weather, of our language and of our predatory customs officers. They conclude their

chapter on "The Christian Commonwealth" with these words: "But it is in the realm of international relations, as a propagandist for peace and for the method of negotiation by which it might be pursued, that he really stands out. It is particularly interesting that late twentieth century commentators have moved away from long-held opinion about unfavourable contrasts with the allegedly much more realistic analysis and precepts of Machiavelli, to a gradual realisation that the way ahead if mankind is to avoid a final nuclear holocaust lies in and through Erasmian prescriptions". Erasmus was naturally a man of his age and not of ours, but perhaps some of the practical advice he gave to the English rules of his time, Henry VIII, in *Education of a Christian Prince*, could profitably be read by our present leaders!

Most historians of the Reformation have tended to put Erasmus in a separate category of Christian humanists in contrast to the Reformers.⁶ The significance of this book by Dickens and Jones is that they claim that Erasmus was the Reformer who profoundly influenced later Reformers.

John Nicholson

Footnotes:

- ¹ *Erasmus the Reformer*. A.G. Dickens and Whitney R.D. Jones. Methuen, London, 1994
- ² *Erasmus of Christendom*. Roland H. Bainton, Collins Fontana, London, 1969
- ³ *Thomas More*, Richard Marius, Weidenfield, London, 1993.
- ⁴ *A Conversation about Baptism*, R.L Child, SCM Press, London 1963
- ⁵ *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance*, Margaret Mann Phillips, 1959
- ⁶ e.g. *The Reformation* ed Pierre Chaunu, Guild Publishing, 1989

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Wired for Sound: 26 Years in Local Broadcasting

When the Editor asked me for this article, I began to think he was flattering me. On reflection, though, I think he was telling me in the nicest possible way that with “three score years and ten” accomplished, I might find it easier to remember the past rather than the present!

I would not dare to pontificate about broadcasting: other BMF members working with Network (BBC Radio and TV Channels) are much more qualified than me to give answers to the many and pressing questions concerning religious broadcasting. I do claim, however, that with no ‘Induction Courses’ when I started 26 years ago, I have learned the hard way and, along that hard way, I hope I have learned something of worth: enough to write about now.

In the Beginning

It all started when “All in Good Faith”, the religious magazine programme of BBC Radio Merseyside, was rested for six weeks in 1969 to enable Bob Azurdia (its Producer and Presenter) to have some holiday. My interest in, and knowledge of hymns had become known and I was invited to present a programme for those six weeks which would be called ‘Voices Raised in Praise’. After Bob Azurdia’s return, I was invited to present another six weeks alongside ‘All in Good Faith’; and that second series has stretched into over 26 years!

One advantage of Local Broadcasting, I believe, is the building of lasting relationships with listeners. I set out to build just such a relationship. Many have listened throughout the years and have written in regularly to express their views! A disadvantage has been that older listeners say, bluntly, that the programme should cater exclusively for their age group, and not for younger listeners. I reply that I hope the programme will continue long after they and I grow daisies. Therefore, younger listeners must be encouraged and have their type of music included in programmes. For three or four years, Alan Ward, the Youth Officer for the Diocese of Chester, and himself quite an authority on ‘Hot Gospel’ music, presented regular programmes aimed at younger listeners who prefer such music. I could be certain, whenever his programmes were transmitted, that there would be a rush of letters and ‘phone calls: all from older listeners vehemently protesting!

I must now write about the evolution of ‘Voices Raised in Praise’. For the first thirteen months I presented it myself with a diet of hymns, anthems, organ music and, usually, a song by Cliff Richard. Rather surprisingly, apart from the odd mild complaint about him, I have never encountered nasty criticism about his style! I realised that if ‘Voices Raised in Praise’ continued with the same format each week, always presented by myself, it would write itself out of the schedules. As a result, ‘United in Song’ from churches, chapels, schools and halls, went out on alternate weeks. Those early days were rather rough and ready productions. I still blush at daring to record the choir of Chester Cathedral with just a microphone and portable tape-recorder!

Here, There and Everywhere

We have come a long way since those early days and ‘United in Song’ is now recorded professionally as, of course, is ‘Voices Raised in Praise’. Getting used to new engineers or PAs has been rewarding although, on occasion, rather fraught. I remember one Harvest Service being recorded at a Salvation Army Citadel and the

duty engineer coming to me and saying, "I am not recording this. It sounds more like 'Come ye mournful people, come'. Act!" I recorded in a tiny village church and the same engineer came in and told me that unless I spoke to an elderly lady in the front row and persuaded her to moderate her voice, he would not record. With real trepidation I asked all three ladies in the front rows to 'moderate your voice as one of you is singing too loudly'. To her credit the lady obliged but afterwards told me in no uncertain terms that she had 'led the singing in this church for 61 years and am resigning as from tonight'. The Rector heard her and, well out of earshot, said to me, 'You're a Baptist and can make up prayers better than I can and maybe the Almighty may listen to you more than to me. Please ask Him to make sure she keeps her promise'. I have never had enough courage to return to that village! Over the years it became evident that a competent Conductor was needed otherwise needless time would be spent trying to get good results from the congregation. A team of Conductors has been built up and, coming from outside, the guest Conductor has accomplished speedily what no 'home' Conductor could have hoped to do.

Venues for 'United in Song' have ranged from our three Cathedrals to small village chapels. HM Prison, Walton: HM Prison, Risley: Thorn Cross Young Offenders Institution near Warrington: all have been good venues for Prisoners' Sunday. Choral Societies; Festival Choirs; Independent Schools; Comprehensive Schools, County Primary Schools; Christian Brethren Assemblies (one allowing us to record a Breaking of Bread Service); Boys and/or Girls High Schools; Baptist Churches (Maghull allowing us to record a service of Believers' Baptism with the veteran John Hamilton preaching); Salvation Army Bands and Songsters: a Harvest Thanksgiving in a farmer's field (with Warrington Salvation Army Band and Songsters' help); hospitals; hospices; HMS Plymouth (with Rock Ferry Salvation Army Band and Songsters): all have found their place in 'United in Song' schedules. An Easter Day Service of Holy Communion with the Bishop of Chester was specially memorable. It ended a Lent series under the general title 'At Home with God'. The Bishop and I took the Bread and Wine to the patients and, after serving one man, the Bishop turned to me and said, "He will really be 'At Home with God' long before this recording is transmitted": he was, five minutes later. Subsequently, for several years, 'At Home with God' was recorded in private homes. On one occasion, the magnificent staircase and hall at Bishop's Lodge, Liverpool, was brought into use with members of a large choir standing on each stair. We have had two services from the lounge at Bishop's House, Chester: one for New Year's Day 1995, and the other to celebrate Terry Waite's release. That service was arranged, rigged, recorded and de-rigged in less than 24 hours!

At an inner city church, St Francis Xavier, which is about half a mile from Liverpool city centre, drug pushers sat on the church wall less than 50 yards from us. At St Hilary's Wallasey, we had boys shouting some very naughty things as we tried to record the bells with one microphone outside. It was a hectic five minutes as we chased them away. Later, they water-bombed us: as revenge? The Duke of Westminster allowed us to use his private chapel at Eaton Hall for one Christmas Day Service and then provided us with splendid refreshments! The National Trust has just celebrated its centenary and our 1995 Christmas Day Service came from the historic Speke Hall, owned by the Trust. At a Methodist Church in Widnes, the Engineer had to ask for protection from local villains pelting us with large and hard snowballs and then vigorously shaking the van. The most moving testimony I have heard for many years came from a prisoner at HM Prison Risley. Four years ago he was thoroughly converted and now is training as an Anglican Lay Reader. Halfway through a recording at the original Wycliffe URC, Warrington, the main fuse blew: half the programme had

a magnificent Harrison organ and the other half a piano! The organist for one Choral Society (I won't tell you which one) fell off the organ stool - hopelessly drunk! St Bartholomew's Church, Barrow, out in the country near Chester, has recorded two Harvest Praise Programmes and then followed it with sandwiches, cream cakes, fresh strawberries and cream: is that why we've been to Barrow twice?

Occasionally we do a 'specialist' programme. Last summer we did a 'Sankey' programme and, just as we expected, we had a bumper mail. Bishops, Archbishops, MPs, the Archbishop of Dublin (Church of Ireland), URC Moderators, Methodist Presidents, Baptist Moderators and Presidents (the latest being Peter Tongeman) have recorded programmes. The Heswall Inter-Church Drama Group gave a first-rate two part play for two consecutive Sundays to celebrate the William Carey 200th Anniversary. Few of us involved will ever forget a Blessing of Animals service at St Peter's Church, Hargrave, near Chester. It was hilarious! Dogs, cats, stick-insects, mice, rabbits, all kinds of animals, even two donkeys turned up. One enjoyed it so much it sang lustily during the hymns!

One major development has been the appointment of a Co-Producer. Age and health problems have made it imperative that 'Voices Raised in Praise' and 'United in Song' are not 'one-man bands'. Hazel Bradley is well known for her conducting of the morning service on Radio 4LW, for her Pause for Thought series from time to time on Radio 2 and as an authority on hymns and their stories (she has published two books). Older listeners will remember her as 'Hazel' of 'Chapel in the Valley'. I am more fortunate in having her as Co-Producer than I can put into words. She is a very special colleague. If you don't possess her books, 'Hazel's Hymns' and 'More Hazel's Hymns', go out and buy them.

An Approach to Broadcasting

To start summarising; religious broadcasting is a privilege and **not** (as some have told me) a right. Nor is it intended as a medium for 'hot Gospel' evangelising, although I hope that, indirectly, people are helped to Christ by what we broadcast. It is a great responsibility which we believe God has given us and since, according to Audience Research, more people listen to us at 8.30am each Sunday morning than to any other station in the country, we ask your prayers for us. If you are invited to contribute, please do co-operate. It has been a big disappointment that we have not been able to record a service of Infant Dedication and Thanksgiving since no Baptist Church would co-operate.

Please watch your use of English and grammar e.g. 'I am sat here' instead of 'I am sitting here'; 'myself and my brother went to the same college' instead of 'my brother and I went to the same college'; 'It looks like rain is coming' instead of 'it looks as if rain is coming'; 'different to' instead of 'different from'; 'at this moment in time' - what is a moment if not in time? Beware of 'yeah' instead of 'yes'; using the daft interjection 'if you like'; 'if you like - what?'; 'at the end of the day' and judging by its use, there must be a huge amount of things to decide 'at the end of the day'. Beware of overuse of 'basically'; 'hopefully'; 'All of our members': why not 'all our members'? Split infinitives; e.g. 'John Redwood will, unlike other backbenchers, have the use of..' (The Times): why not good English 'Unlike other backbenchers, John Redwood will have..' The Revd ABC was, until his retirement..': why not good English: 'until his retirement the Revd ABC was..'

Please, please, make sure your scripts give evidence of careful thought and time. Please make sure your choirs, your congregations rehearse adequately, and this applies especially to guitar groups; none of this 'we are doing our best, it's for the

Lord'. If it is, then nothing less than the best will do and this silly trying to cover up bad playing is out. Spend time on what you say. In our catchment area alone we have at least 100,000 listeners each week. You must justify your invitation to broadcast. We are not short of requests for a broadcast! Bad singing, a poor speaker whose voice lacks enthusiasm and conviction is not a good advert for religion or for our Lord: so -

(i) Be eager and enthusiastic. If you are not, the microphone will convey this and the congregation will react in a similar way.

(ii) Be selective in your choice of items: neither all traditional hymns nor all modern songs. If you must use Graham Kendrick, please shy away from 'Shine, Jesus, shine'. Overuse has made it threadbare and a bore both for us 'on the job' and to listeners.

(iii) Take time with scripts. Broadcasting means much more than projecting yourself or your church.

(iv) Please do not confront us with a poor quality music and then try to excuse it with religious jargon. If you have a person whose voice shrills above the others, please don't leave it to us to deal with your problem.

(v) Watch your English: good grammar, please.

One of the very best Radio 4 Sunday morning services I have ever heard came from Slough Baptist Church. David Coffey's sermon outclassed most sermons I have heard on radio for a long time. Keith Moyes's script and splendid delivery caught and held attention. Try to get a recording of that service; it sums up perfectly what I have written.

Jim Pollard

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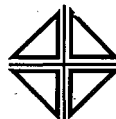
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Homosexuality: A Christian View

"Our Lord Jesus Christ...is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the holy scriptures,..and...each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer his laws".¹ These words remind Baptists that their professed authority is not the Bible itself but Christ, revealed in scripture, discerned through the Spirit's help - a view shared with the other churches of English Nonconformity.² It follows that when debating any matter of creed or conduct, not least human sexuality, Baptists are required not only to read the text but to interpret. St Paul forbids women to preach,³ Jesus forbids the remarriage of divorcees,⁴ the Council of Jerusalem regarded as an "essential" abstinence from food containing blood⁵ - Christians disagree as to whether these restrictions apply today. But such disagreement illustrates how the Church has never simply made up its mind on matters of faith and conduct by quoting biblical texts.

What is the Purpose of Sex?

Christians wishing seriously to debate human sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, need to begin with their understanding of the purpose of sex. One biblical tradition suggests sex exists solely for the propagation of humanity - "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth".⁶ The science of procreation (sperm from a male fertilizing an egg from a female) seems not to have been understood by the writers of the Hebrew scriptures, for the language - one reads of the *seed* of both plants and humans,⁷ and of a woman without child as *barren*⁸ - is that of agriculture rather than human biology. This gives meaning to the only biblical text explicitly to condemn human homosexuality - "if a man lies with a man as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination".⁹ With this view of reproduction such activity clearly is "an abomination", for the male is perceived as putting human seed where it is incapable of growing. This also explains the condemnation on Onan's *coitus interruptus*,¹⁰ and the absence of any reference to lesbianism - on this view, the latter being two empty vessels whose mutual activity involves no seed. Noting the probable Exilic origin of Leviticus, Spong comments, "the passion to reproduce, to guarantee the future of the exiled nation, was a very high priority and would have mitigated against any practices wherein the potential source of life was wasted."¹¹

Whilst not necessarily accepting this primitive understanding of reproduction, the view that sex exists solely for the propagation of humanity remains the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Such a view, held also by some conservative evangelicals, holds that any sexual activity which cannot lead to conception must be wrong because, by definition, it is against the purpose of sex. Homosexual activity is therefore condemned as "intrinsically disordered",¹² as is contraception ("Every action which..proposes..to render procreation impossible is intrinsically evil")¹³, masturbation ("an intrinsically and gravely disordered action")¹⁴, together with any other non-procreative sexual activity. As the *Leviticus* command is alongside other purity laws concerned with such diverse matters as the wearing of clothes made out of differing fabrics,¹⁵ and the eating of meat with blood,¹⁶ the question arises, "Does the fact that the law against homosexuality is found with such a series of timebound localized regulations limit its application?"¹⁷ The question for those who use *Leviticus* for condemning homosexual activity is surely: To be consistent, should these other activities not be similarly condemned? And if so condemned, why not answered with the prescribed punishment - "They shall be put to death"¹⁸

Another biblical tradition is, however, evident - one which views sexual activity as

part of a relationship between two people, as in the first creation story - "it is not good that man should be alone"¹⁹ This view is held by the majority of Protestant theologians, portraying sex as being not only "for the birth and nurture of children" but also that people "may know each other with tenderness and joy".²⁰ Thus, Protestants have tended not to object to contraception and have shown less hostility to, for example, masturbation. It follows that, if sex is not only for reproductive but also for relational and recreational purposes - the expressing and making of love and affection - Christians need to ask why some of their number are so absolute in their condemnation of two men or two women doing together what those of the opposite gender do?²¹ Any discussion on human sexuality must address the question of the purpose of sex.

What is Normal and Natural?

Another question to be addressed is an understanding of what is meant by "normal". Contemporary scientific evidence suggests 5 -10 per cent of the total population will be gay,²² by which is meant those persons whose predominant, though not always exclusive, sexual orientation will be toward those of their own gender.²³ Even amongst conservative evangelicals it is now generally accepted that for such persons, their sexuality is as normal as that for any other, though their orientation may not be the norm - "abnormal" in the purely statistical sense. Thus, the *Ministerial Recognition Rules* of the Baptist Union contain the guideline - "Homosexual orientation...is not of itself a reason for exclusion from the ministry". Most, however, still draw a distinction between orientation and practice - the guideline therefore continues, "Homosexual genital practice is to be regarded as unacceptable in the pastoral office".

The problem with such a view is that it draws a false distinction between Being and Doing - claiming to affirm as normal the way an individual is created, whilst condemning any expression of what has just been affirmed. Often behind such objections to homosexual activity is the objector's personal abhorrence of what they imagine such activity involves. The answer to the question what is natural and normal becomes reduced to what the objectors favour, and what is unnatural and not normal that which is perceived as revolting. Such homophobia²⁴ is as non-sensical as affirming the abnormality of left-handedness (not the norm yet not unnatural) whilst condemning use of the left hand because the right-handed object, and is hardly a reasonable basis for Christian morality.²⁵

What about the Bible?

Those Christians who do draw a distinction between homosexual orientation and practice usually do so on the basis of what they regard as clear biblical teaching. As well as *Leviticus*, other texts are quoted.

The story of the destruction of Sodom²⁶ undoubtedly condemns the desire of the male population to have sex with Lot's male guests. What is sometimes overlooked is that the narrative also approves of Lot's offer of his virgin daughters to satisfy the sexual demands of the mob, and suggests incest as a legitimate way of impregnating women when no man is available except the women's father.²⁷ "What society would today be willing to incorporate either of these practices into its moral code?"²⁸ Indeed, "It is difficult to see how this passage is capable of becoming 'God's word for today'. One wonders how it was ever God's word for yesterday."²⁹ The wickedness of Sodom ("sodomy") would appear, in fact, to be inhospitality to, and self-alienation from, God.³⁰ This is certainly the interpretation placed on the story by Jesus³¹, who "said

nothing about birth control, large or small families, childlessness, homosexuality, masturbation, fornication or pre-marital intercourse, sterilization, artificial insemination, abortion, sexplay, petting and courtship".³² It remains strange how many Christians appear to know quite clearly what Jesus would have said on all these matters.

The only other unambiguous biblical reference to homosexuality, and the only one to lesbianism, is in Romans.³³ However, it is clear from the apostle's argument that he regarded homosexuality as God's punishment for the sin of idolatry - "for this reason God gave them up to degrading passions" - rather than the sin itself, and although one would not wish to suggest that St Paul approved of homosexual practices, his argument here can hardly be the basis for condemnation. Indeed, in his extensive list of "things that should not be done", given after the reference to the "degrading passions", no reference is made to homosexuality.³⁴

The biblical position is well summarized: "Even if one is a biblical literalist, the biblical references do not build an iron clad case for condemnation. If one is not a biblical literalist there is no case at all, nothing but the ever present prejudice born out of a pervasive ignorance that attacks people whose only crime is to be born with an unchangeable sexual disposition toward those of their own sex."³⁵

What about Celibacy?

When clear biblical teaching cannot be found, those condemning practising lesbian and gay Christians often resort to the call to chastity - to be "pure, virtuous, decent".³⁶ Yet the question has to be asked; Why cannot an active homosexual person be all these things? The difficulty is, as temperance is too often confused for abstinence, so chastity is confused for celibacy. Celibacy itself is as much a calling as marriage, and there are many Christians, heterosexual and homosexual, who would profess such a vocation, some of them making public profession as part of a religious community.³⁷ However, to suggest, as some Christians do, that, whereas heterosexual people *can* be called to celibacy, homosexual people *must* be celibate, not only appears to be unfair,³⁸ it also denies the true nature of a vocation - which is calling not compulsion.

The question of human sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, is being addressed by most denominations today. The 1995 General Assembly of the United Reformed Church has asked "the Church in all its councils to discuss the matter of human sexuality and its implications for ministry within the Church",³⁹ with a similar debate taking place in the Methodist Church,⁴⁰ and in the established Church of England.⁴¹ It is unfortunate, therefore, that the Baptist community seems unwilling to hold such a debate. Indeed, any open discussion involving ministers may already be precluded by the restrictive "guideline" (sic) stating, "Ministers are expected not to advocate homosexual or lesbian genital relationships as acceptable alternatives to male / female partnership in marriage"⁴² - of all the matters which could fall under the general heading of "conduct unbecoming to the Baptist Ministry" how strange that "serious sexual behaviour" alone is specified and only "homosexual..genital practice" (sic) is made explicit.⁴³

Nonetheless, so long as there exist not only homophobic attitudes but such restrictive rules - "guidelines" which permit a Baptist chaplain in the armed forces to bless weapons of mass destruction but do not permit a Baptist pastor to bless a loving and stable relationship⁴⁴ - those who believe sex is given not just for procreation but for the making and expressing of relationships; who affirm the substantial minority of people both in the church and in society created lesbian or gay; who see no clear biblical teaching condemning any relationship that is not, by

intention, stable and faithful;⁴⁵ and who affirm God's call to chastity as being for all Christians, regardless of their sexuality; then such believers will continue to press for a debate.

Not all will agree, but it is the view of an increasing number of Baptists that "human sexuality in all its richness is a gift of God gladly to be accepted, enjoyed and honoured, as a way of both expressing and growing in love, in accordance with the life and teaching of Jesus Christ", and who therefore share the conviction "that it is entirely compatible with the Christian faith not only to love another of the same sex, but also to express that love fully in a personal, sexual relationship."⁴⁶

Within the Baptist community, deeply held and strongly different views are evident on this matter. One can only pray that the "liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit", declared as a Baptist principle, will include in future a respect for the liberty of others amongst their number who hold differing views.

Keith G. Rigin

Footnotes:

- ¹ *Declaration of Principles*, Baptist Union. *The Baptist Confession of 1646* speaks of God's word "contained in" the scriptures, not equated with. Such statements are difficult to reconcile with those giving to the Bible alone "supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct" (*Basis of Faith*, Evangelical Alliance)
- ² "The word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people". *Basis of Faith*, United Reformed Church. cf *Doctrinal Statement*, Free Church Federal Council.
- ³ 1 Corinthians 14:33-36. The Ministerial Recognition Committee of the BU disagrees.
- ⁴ Matthew 5:32
- ⁵ Acts 15:28ff: cf S.B. Dawes, *Why Bible-Believing Methodists Shouldn't Eat Black Pudding* (Truro, 1993)
- ⁶ Genesis 1:28
- ⁷ Genesis 1:11 and Leviticus 15:16. In the latter "seed" (as in AV) is sometimes translated "semen" (NRSV), though the implication remains that the female contribution to reproduction is simply the environment for the seed's growth.
- ⁸ Genesis 11:30; 25:21; 29:31.
- ⁹ Leviticus 20:13 also 18:22
- ¹⁰ Genesis 38:9. Incorrectly interpreted as a reference to masturbation, hence "onanism".
- ¹¹ J.S. Spong, *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (New York, 1988) p 145.
- ¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) para 2357
- ¹³ *Ibid*, para 2370
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, para 2352
- ¹⁵ Leviticus 19:19
- ¹⁶ Leviticus 17: 10-13
- ¹⁷ *Report of the Commission on Human Sexuality*, Methodist Church (1990) para 106
- ¹⁸ Leviticus 20:13
- ¹⁹ Genesis 2:18
- ²⁰ "The Purpose of Marriage" *Service Book URC* (Oxford, 1982) p52
- ²¹ Most sexual practices are the same, involving sensual touch, excitement and affection, irrespective of sexuality.
- ²² See "What is Homosexuality?", R.A. Isay, *Being Homosexual: Gay Men and Their Development* (London, 1989) pp11-22
- ²³ See "The Situation Today", N Pittenger, *Time for Consent: A Christian's Approach to Homosexuality* (London, 1976) pp 14-25
- ²⁴ "The fear or hatred of homosexuals, and...beliefs which ...denigrate lesbians and gay men". W. Stewart, *Cassell's Queer Companion: A Dictionary of Lesbian and Gay Life and Culture* (London, 1995)
- ²⁵ See "An Analogy between Left-Handedness and Homosexuality" L Scanzoni and VR Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual my Neighbour? Another Christian View* (London, 1978.) pp77f
- ²⁶ Genesis 19

- 27 Genesis 19:30-38
 28 Spong, op cit, p141
 29 A. Thatcher, *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology* (London, 1993) p23
 30 Isaiah 1:9f; Jeremiah 23:13ff; Ezekiel 16:46-51. "Sodom represents in an archetypal way the alienation from Yahweh that provokes his destructive wrath". P Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality* (London, 1980) p32.
 31 Matthew 10:14f
 32 J. Fletcher: *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (London, 1966) p139
 33 Romans 1: 18 - end
 34 Romans 1: 28-31
 35 Spong, op cit, p154. "Christian sexual theology can and must be biblical. But if biblical theology is about discerning a single 'mind of scripture', or wrenching from their contexts surface meanings of texts in order to apply them to contemporary social situations, it does a disservice to Christian faith." Thatcher, op cit, p28
 36 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1990)
 37 See M T Kelsey and B Kelsey, *Sacrament of Sexuality* (New York, 1986) p35ff. for a discussion on celibacy and sexuality.
 38 "The gay rights movement wants a society where the individual growing up can choose between two equally valid alternatives...a primary relationship with one of the opposite sex or a primary relationship with one of the same sex". *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation* edited by M Macourt (London, 1977) p3
 39 *Record of the General Assembly of the URC, 1995* (london) p21
 40 Methodist Church, op cit.
 41 *Issues in Human Sexuality*, House of Bishops of the Church of England (1991)
 42 "Guidelines" *Ministerial Recognition Rules*, BU (1991-)
 43 St Paul offers more holistic guidelines in Galatians 5: 16-21
 44 See *Exploring Lifestyles: An Introduction to Services of Blessing for Gay Couples* GCM (London, 1980) and *Daring to Speak Love's Name: A Gay and Lesbian Prayer Book*, edited by E Stuart (London, 1992) for examples of such services.
 45 It has been argued, "there is a sense in which gay people were the first to introduce romantic love into the Christian system of thought, and following this, marriage as a result of romantic love rather than biological necessity." J Boswell, (*Rediscovering Gay History*) GCM(London, 1982) p21. See also E. Stuart, *Just Good Friends: Towards a Lesbian and Gay Theology of Relationships* (London, 1995)
 46 *Statement of Conviction*, Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. Offering Gay liberation to the churches and Christ to the gay community. LGCM, Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2 6HG (0171 - 739 - 1249)

HOLIDAYS 1996

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Patterns of Christian Giving: Tree-trunk or Rabbit's Ears?

"The stewards will now wait upon us for our morning offering".

"Will missionary box-holders please bring them in before the end of the month?"

"There will be a jumble sale / sale of work next Saturday in aid of Home Mission and of BMS".

We often hear sentences like these in our churches. They illustrate two patterns of Christian giving. In the first the whole congregation is involved. Every (including non-believers who may be present) puts something into the plate. To pass it along without contributing would be embarrassing.

The second is voluntary. People choose to take missionary boxes and put money in them. Woe betide any missionary secretary who insisted that every church member should have one! Others may donate unwanted objects or make others to be sold. Those who are interested attend the sales.

These patterns illustrate two "theologies" of giving. The first says that the affairs of the local church, including the support of its pastor, are the responsibility of the whole congregation. The second implies that "extra-local" mission is to be supported only by those who are interested in "that sort of thing". The first is obligatory and communal. The second is voluntary and individual. Many churches will budget for local mission and peg it to the cost of living (although they do not always follow 1 Timothy 5:17 literally!). They regard anything else as variable and leave it to the enthusiasm of each member.

It is difficult to square this attitude with the New Testament doctrine of mission. Jesus did not tell His Church "Your overriding, if not only, responsibility is to the needs of your locality". Rather, it is to "go and preach the Gospel to every creature". Each of the Gospels, in its own way, and Acts also, contains this imperative; and as Jesus was addressing the whole Church in embryo, it still applies today and it extends to every disciple.

We could, therefore, picture Christian giving as a cross-section of a tree trunk. Concentric circles extend outwards. everyone would be involved in all aspects of mission as part of the church's policy. In practice it often resembles a rabbit's head. The two ears represent giving to Home and Overseas mission. Some members contribute to one and / or the other, but their efforts are separate and occasional, pinned on to the head. Therefore many members, through not giving to these causes, do not take part in the world-wide extension of the Kingdom which Jesus commanded.

Minority Interest or Owned by All?

The root of this anomaly lies in the fact that, in the main, missionary societies have rarely been originated by churches or "churchly bodies". It has been left to concerned individuals who have formed voluntary societies to initiate mission elsewhere. These societies have drawn support from some members of local churches, but have not always gained the backing of all members. In this way, in times of decline, as in the 18th century, the Spirit of God compensated for the churches' lethargy by stirring up individuals, such as Carey and Fuller, in Baptist circles, and others elsewhere. The ideal would have been for churches to have initiated world mission as churches, but this has not been so. It has resulted in the present situation in which some members

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To Readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who responded to my reminder regarding the adequacy of insurance cover. I am sure that it has been quite a revelation to many when they have realised the limited scope of the existing arrangements for their Church. Given the heavy snowfalls and freezing conditions recently experienced, in some cases, the additional cover has been arranged just in time.

In our continuing efforts to keep insurance costs as low as possible, we have traditionally allowed a substantial discount off the insurance costs for the Fire section of the policy in return for the Church entering into a Long Term Agreement. This is an undertaking to offer the insurance to the Company throughout the duration of the Agreement, which normally runs for five years. It is a contract and the Church is therefore contractually required to renew the insurance for the five year period.

If your Church does not already benefit from this facility but would like to, please write to me and I will make the necessary arrangements.

Yours in His Service

T E Mattholie

are "interested in world missions" while others are indifferent or lukewarm. It has also been responsible for the "rabbit's ears" type of giving.

The New Testament sees world mission not as an interest but as an obligation and a privilege. We all have varied interests. Often we take them up for pleasure or to further our education or meet friends. They are entirely voluntary. No one will necessarily praise us for taking them up or blame us for laying them down. To think of overseas missions in these terms is to caricature them and to both misunderstand and avoid the plain teaching of the New Testament. Jesus did not say "Support world missions if you are interested in them" but "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel". He gave us a command and the correct response to this can only be obedience. Once we obey, interest will ensue. This applies as much to churches as to individuals.

Therefore we should budget as much for "extra-local" mission as for our work in our own locality. If we are to be true to the Gospel, we should both teach this principle to our members and discuss the required level of giving in the church meeting. Home Mission's practice of recommending a figure for each member to attain and the BMS's new PIPS (Partners in Projects Scheme) should help us in fixing approximate figures. In this way every member of the church would be both expected to support "all-round" mission and stimulated to look outwards more. The weekly offering would become truly a missionary offering.

No one would wish to deny or hinder extra efforts which some members might make. God will always give special concerns to particular people and we rejoice in this. "Tree Trunk" giving, however, would do away with the situation whereby large amounts (the greater part?) of such support comes from the sale of unwanted goods which non-Christians buy, or from children of non-Christians, or by the section of the church which is keen on missions. It would enable us to give regularly to outside causes and thus avoid the end-of-year financial crises which give rise to appeals for last minute effort.

We would never finance our local church by ad hoc giving. No more should we support Christian work anywhere else in this way. Let consistency reign.

Fred Stainthorpe

HOLIDAYS 1996

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1 Corinthians 7: A Paradigm for Pastoral Counselling

The late 20th century is not the first era where there are intractable pastoral problems which need Christian advice. For Paul's converts at Corinth there must have been many tensions. They had all come from a background of gross promiscuity (1 Cor 6:9-11), and were now following Christ, who allowed no sexual misbehaving. Their prime teacher, Paul, was not married, and as far as we can ascertain had no desire to do so (1 Cor:7;8). The stresses and strains to which they were subject must have been as great as anything we experience today. Especially in a city where the main temple (that of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinthus) was a public and social-acceptable brothel! Paul's handling of this situation gives us four very basic rules for counselling.

Ability to Listen

First, he listens to what his hearers actually say. "It is well for a man not to touch a woman" is almost certainly a quotation of what some said. Paul knows the strong pull to cut all links with sexual activity (1 Cor 7:5), and is also aware of the dangers that this can bring (1 Cor 7:2,9,36). He is not rushing in to pontificate without first hearing what people are saying. While he can and does give definite advice, it is in the full knowledge of the situations that actually occur (eg 1 Cor 7:12-16). Believers were torn between loyalty to God and loyalty to an unbelieving (and perhaps awkward and violent) partner. Here we have case study based on finding out what was actually going on.

Being Directive

Secondly, Paul is not afraid to give definite advice. Today, non-directive counselling is fashionable. In part, it is a reaction against insensitive counselling of the past. But the trend has gone too far. Where Paul has a definite command from God, he is not afraid to state it (1 Cor 7:10). This is not to say that he then enforces it with all the savage sanctions of mediaeval canon law. But he does make it clear when God has spoken on a matter.

This, of course, flies in the face of much accepted theory and practice today. But surely, part of the task of a Christian pastor is to spell out what is God's way, even if people choose then not to follow it. It is a surrender to post-modernist relativism for a Christian counsellor to keep silent about what God says. And this applies not only to sex, but to other things as well (e.g. personal honesty). The prophet could not command obedience, but he was under an obligation to pass on God's message.

In the past, I fear, Christian counsel has been emasculated by the terror that counsellors might be "directing" those they are counselling. This danger has also appeared in some types of work with young people, where almost no parameters of acceptable behaviour have been set. When God has spoken, we do no-one any service by keeping silent about it.

God's Word and Ours

Thirdly, Paul makes a clear distinction between what is God's word and what is Paul's opinion. He spells this out most plainly in 1 Cor 7:25. He offers his opinion, but makes it clear that this is on a lesser level than an actual word of Christ. He has also drawn the contrast earlier (1 Cor 7:10 and 12). And although he has a high opinion of his power (1 Cor 7:40), he maintains this important distinction.

In view of the widespread use of "words of knowledge", this distinction needs to

be heeded. It is one thing to have a clear command from Scripture. It is quite another to have a vague spiritual "feeling" that something is so. Protestants rightly reject Papal claims for infallibility. There should also be an equally forthright rejection of charismatic "infallibility". Roman Catholics do, as a matter of fact, officially limit papal infallibility to pronouncements made "ex cathedra". But in practice, any papal encyclical is invested with an aura of infallibility which few would dare to question. Similarly, in many charismatic circles, claims to "a word of knowledge" are uncritically accepted. For my own part, I very much doubt whether 1 Cor 12:8 actually bears any relevance to what goes on in some charismatic circles. I would think that "word of wisdom" refers to practical application of Scripture, and "word of knowledge" to the ability to find the relevant Scripture. But even if I am wrong, we are told to test everything (1 Thess 5:21). Scripture is the standard by which evangelicals must do the testing. Anything else must be viewed with caution.

So, in counselling, we must clearly say when something is just our opinion. In non-charismatic circles, "I feel led" has been used to preface some authoritative but often highly dubious opinion. The most Paul will say, when giving his opinion (as an apostle!), is that "*I think* I have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 7:40). If the apostle, with an authority which none of us now possesses, could be as cautious as that, we need to walk very carefully, and to avoid anything which might seem to put our fallible words on a level with Scripture.

Readiness to Advise

Fourthly, having said all this, Paul is ready to give all kinds of practical advice. Some would say, "Well, as an Apostle he had a right to do this, but we don't". However, such folk would still be able to accept the giving of advice based firmly on Scripture. But even though apostleship is the one charismatic gift no longer available to us, Christian pastors should be able to give advice. Here again, I am aware that I am flying in the face of much modern counselling practice. But I would question the widely-held view that we are just to be passive listeners and sounding boards.

After all, anyone coming to a Christian minister declares by that very act that they think they might have something worthwhile to say. The Christian minister is not any Tom, Dick or Harry (or their female equivalent)> He or she is at least a trained person, and someone with some knowledge and understanding. While we are not in the position of the Roman Catholic priest, who in theory at least can give commands, there is surely no good reason why we should not offer advice in our position as a minister of the Gospel. People are free to take our advice, reject it, or take some intermediate path. But, if we allow for Paul's safeguard, and clearly declare when it is our opinion and not God's word, then advice of a specific nature can be given.

Such advice should be reasoned. Paul could speak of motives (1 Cor 7: 36-7), consequences (7:32-5), possibilities (7: 14-16) and circumstances (7:26-31). All these need to be considered and spelled out. Different views should be discussed. Paul could outline different choices which might both be good (7:36-8). Ultimately, the choice is left with the person who has come for counselling. They have to decide how to act, when the guidelines from Scripture and the spiritual wisdom of the counsellor have been offered.

Too many people think that 1 Corinthians 7 is just Paul's view on sex. Actually, the specific case provides us with definite guidelines for counselling in any pastoral situation.

Mike Smith

Roots that Go Deep: Benedict and Ignatius

In 1994, we moved from the pastorate at Lymm, in Cheshire, and were somewhat taken aback by the sense of loss and pain we experienced. It was as if we had been uprooted, pulled out of the ground in which we had become established.

Roots are important for they tell us something of our journey so far, the history of our own lives, and at the same time provide connections with previous generations that have influenced and shaped us in one way or another. It is vital, both in our own lives and the life of the church, that in looking to the future, we do not turn away from insights gained in the past that can breathe life into the contemporary world.

As we move towards the year 2000, two people drawn from each of the two previous millenniums have a contribution to make to the spiritual life and call to Christian discipleship of the 1990's. Both are people to whose writings I was introduced through involvement in the present day Retreat Movement, writings that have not only nourished an evangelical spirituality, but also many other strands of Christian spirituality. Benedict of Nursia lived in Italy (480-547) and Ignatius of Loyola in Spain (1491-1556)

Historical Roots Explored

There is little known concerning the life of Benedict, other than the writings of Pope St Gregory (Book 2 of the Dialogues, written 593-594), in which he recalls the virtues and miracles exhibited by holy men and women in Italy within living memory. Gregory clearly saw Benedict as a man of God, attributing to him a number of miraculous incidents. Benedict lived in 6th century Italy at a time when the Roman Empire was disintegrating. "The changes that were occurring were not dissimilar to what has been observed in recent years following the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹ Born at Nursia, a little town some 70 miles north east of Rome, at the age of twenty he was sent to Rome to study. Appalled by the moral corruption of the city, he later withdrew to live as a hermit for three years in a cave at Subiaco, a thirty mile journey away. His new life style drew others alongside and during this phase of his life a number of monasteries were formed, each with an abbot. Benedict acted as an overseer to these fledgling communities for a period of about thirty years. His later move to Monte Cassino arose from a major breakdown in relationships which forced him, together with a small group of loyal supporters, to leave Subiaco and establish a new monastery at Monte Cassino, from which a formerly pagan region was converted to Christianity. This was to be his home for the final seventeen years of his life and from where he was to write the "Rule" that was to establish a way of life for those who followed in his footsteps. Although written with a Benedictine community in mind, the "Rule" has much wider use, for it speaks to many of the issues that confront all communities who are seeking to follow in the steps of Christ. In that, it speaks to our present day Church context.

Ignatius Loyola was born almost a thousand years later than Benedict - the world and the Church inevitably a different place. His family tree charts a long line of nobility and his early life reflected the society in which he moved, "He participated in all the revelry of royalty - gambling, duelling, romance - and worldly attraction".² A military career followed, during which he sustained a serious injury that was to change the

future course of his life. Brought home from the 'front' to recuperate, he immersed himself in spiritual reading including *The Life of Christ*, the lives of the saints and stories of St Francis. A spiritual conversion took place and, with his health restored, Ignatius chose to live as a beggar, presumably inspired by his reading of the saints. During this time he underwent a number of profound mystical experiences. Michael Ivens comments on this phase of his life, "he grew into a confirmed mystic of action".³ An exploratory visit to the Holy Land in 1523, with the thought of becoming a perpetual pilgrim, gave way to a period of further study, both in his home country, Spain, and then later in Paris. It was whilst in Paris (1528-1535) that Ignatius, along with six friends, formed the Society of Jesus and took private vows of poverty and chastity, together with a commitment to either return to Jerusalem, or if this were not possible, to place themselves at the service of the Pope. The door to Jerusalem was closed, due to the outbreak of a Mediterranean war, and so Ignatius and his companions pledged themselves to "undertake any apostolic work anywhere in the world at the behest of the Pope".⁴

The writing of the Spiritual Exercises, which arose out of his own mystical experiences, were completed during his time in Paris and provided a thirty day 'retreat', initially for those joining the Jesuit order, but now available to a much wider audience.

Benedict and Ignatius - Common Ground and Differences

Benedict's and Ignatius' **early life** stand in stark contrast to one another. Benedict, at the age of twenty rejecting the decadence of Rome to pursue an alternative Christian lifestyle through the establishment of small communities of like minded people. Not with a view to escape from the world, but the creating of a window on the world, always open to those coming to the monastery. Esther de Waal writes, "he holds together the emphasis on the solitary, on withdrawal and disengagement that Cassian taught, with the emphasis from Basil on the communal or shared life".⁵

Ignatius, by background and personality, was quite different. From an early age he was introduced to the 'glamour' of society life and foundations put in place for the military career he was to follow, up until, that is, his argument with a cannon ball! The qualities of romanticism, audacity and leadership present in his earlier days were now to be qualities that would mark him out in his new calling.

Both Benedict and Ignatius lived at times of enormous change and turmoil. Benedict, as the Roman empire was collapsing, the last Western emperor being deposed in 476. The world of the sixteenth century was also caught up in change, both political and ecclesiastical, and the formation of the Jesuits was to play a significant role in the Catholic Reformation movement of that time.

Out of the cauldron of both these cultures, at different times in history, Benedict and Ignatius have taken their place. Their lives and writings have greatly influenced both individuals and communities in discerning Christ's way - both in their time and subsequent generations.

The Rule and the Spiritual Exercises

The "Rule" of St Benedict consists of 73 chapters, in total length a little over 9,000 words. Written in the context of a Benedictine community, one is immediately struck by the opening words of the Prologue, "Listen carefully, my child, to my instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from one who loves you; welcome it and faithfully put it into practice." The theme of listening permeates the whole text, by which is understood a deep listening of the heart. A listening to God's

word that is to bring life to the inner being and the community. The "Rule" addresses the question of authority, both how we live under authority and exercise it. "Benedict's words contrast with our modern suspicion of authority in general, and our tendency to view obedience at best as repressive, and at worst as spiritual tyranny in disguise. For Benedict, however, the root of obedience lay in listening."⁶ The "Rule" very skilfully addresses a wide number of issues of community life. Attention is given to working out the role of humility as it is experienced in day-to-day life. Esther de Waal's comment is illuminating in relation to today's world as she seeks to respond to Benedict's teaching on humility. "Ever since I can remember I have lived in a world which is highly competitive, which likes success, which encourages me to play roles. I like to be busy, appreciated, applauded. Yet now Benedict is asking of me the honesty to cease to play games, with myself, with others, with God. Our rebirth in integrity takes time and many repentances."⁷ The subject of possessions is addressed and the role they play in life, either leading to greater trust in the giver, or to greater acquisitiveness and therefore greed, envy, resentment. Themes of work and hospitality are also covered as is the worship life of the community - in fact 13 chapters of the "Rule" are given over to the conduct of worship. Monastic spirituality is orientated to the "Office", as opposed to the Eucharist, and the rhythm of monastic life includes seven offices during the day and vigils at night. The Office is praise centred "and consisted in the recitation of all one hundred and fifty Psalms on a seven-day cycle and readings from Scripture and recognised orthodox commentaries prayers".⁸ Running like an unbroken thread through the "Rule" are the three Benedictine vows of obedience, stability and fidelity to monastic life, which Esther de Waal sees worked out as "the need to listen", "the need not to run away" and "the need to be open to change" - appropriate advice for all Christian communities.

Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, unlike Benedict's *Rule*, are written with the guide or spiritual director in mind, ie the person who is to accompany the one following the Exercises, rather than the retreatant themselves. The Exercises are for a thirty day period, divided into four "weeks" - each "week" representing a different stage of the Exercises, which may vary in length for each individual, according to God's activity in their lives at that moment. The Exercises are not about working one's way through all the material, but allowing the Holy Spirit to be one's guide and following his leading. The four "weeks" of the Exercises enable time to be spent in the first "week", on the love of God and sin; the second "week", on the life of Christ from the Incarnation, through to the call of the disciples, and up to Palm Sunday; the third "week", in the events of Holy Week and up to Easter Saturday; and the final "week", on the resurrection appearances of Christ.

The Exercises were born out of Ignatius' own experiences during his time of convalescence, which he sought to write down in such a way as to make them available to others. The language of the Exercises is cast in the thought forms of that period and therefore need to be understood in that light, but the overall thrust of the Exercises in enabling a person to encounter the Christ of the Scriptures, and deepen a sense of call and purpose is a thread that connects the sixteenth century to the latter years of the twentieth century.

Connecting Threads to the 1990's and Ministry Today

The voices of Benedict and Ignatius, heard originally in their own culture and context, are voices that also speak to the world of the 1990's - a very different culture and context. I want to highlight three themes:

Rhythm of life:

The Benedictine way of life is one of rhythm, "that concern with doing ordinary things quietly and perfectly for the glory of God which is the beauty of the pure Benedictine life".⁹ As such, it speaks to what must seem at times a frenetic pace of life where the important and necessary is always in danger of being sidelines to that which demands immediate attention. This was underlined for me earlier in the year when I spent two days in a Benedictine community. The rhythm of the Benedictine "Office", providing space for reflection between the readings and prayers, was initially hard to embrace, for I brought with me the hustle and bustle of my agendas and struggled to enter into a deeper listening. The rhythm built into creation which the writer of Genesis 1 presents through the creation narratives, offers an on-going challenge if our lives are to be in harmony with the rhythm of God and His agenda. The importance of a rhythm to our lives is a Benedictine virtue that speaks to the contemporary world.

Community

While the Benedictine "Rule" is written in the context of a "closed" community, it has much to offer in relation to other communities where there are committed relationships. The three vows of obedience, stability and fidelity to monastic life have meaning beyond the Benedictine community. Esther de Waal expresses them as "the need to listen", "the need not to run away" and "the need to be open to change", all of which are interconnected, providing a balance between steadfastness, on the one hand, and an openness to change on the other. As the Benedictine community is called to embrace these themes, so the local church, as it practices community, wrestles with similar issues in seeking to listen, face up to, and work through difficult decisions, and, at the same time, be open to change.

Prayer

For Benedict, prayer was part and parcel of life. "Lectio divina, the prayerful reading of scripture, complemented communal prayer, and also occupied a significant amount of a monk's time. It enabled a monk to internalise the Scriptures, so that they began to form a reservoir of spiritual wisdom from which to sustain prayer at all times and occasions".¹⁰ This involved the receiving of a word or short phrase by continual repetition, as it found deeper root. Bishop Graham Chadwick speaks about letting the word get from your 'nut' to your 'gut', the rooting of God's word deep within our beings, allowing it to bring life to dark places. A process is involved and it takes time to happen, in reality a lifetime, and within that process there need to be times when we can simply be still and receive.

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen a growth in Ignatian prayer, offered through retreats, Weeks of Guided Prayer and various prayer evenings/ days. Ignatian prayer has as its focus the offering of one's life to the praise and service of God. It encourages a person to enter into a Bible passage, often a Gospel passage, either as one of the participants in the story or as an observer. One is encouraged to become aware of the five senses, looking, listening, smelling, touching and tasting, by way of entering into the scene for oneself - to encounter the Christ of the Gospels, the same Christ who meets with us today.

Conclusion

For anyone embarking on an individually guided retreat, whether for three days or

thirty days, the insights of Benedict and Ignatius contribute not only to ways of praying, but encouraging a desire to be radically open to Christ. The emphasis of Benedict in listening to God, not simply with the ear, but with one's whole being, stands in contrast to the need for things immediate, that possibly avoid the more painful paths of growth.

If one of the Benedictine gifts to others is "the need to listen", then Ignatius has helped many to encounter the Christ of the Gospels through the use of the imagination in entering the Gospel scene. Both would speak of letting Christ make himself known, sometimes confronting us with a re-think of our previous images of him and always reaffirming his call to follow him.

Brian A. Howden

Source Books

The Rule of St Benedict:

Atwell R

Spiritual Classics from
the Early Church
Living with Contradictions
A Life Giving Way
Seeking God
Devotional Classics
Searching for God
The Rule of St Benedict

NS/CHP, 1995
Fount, 1989
Geoffrey Chapman, 1995
Fount, 1984
Hodder & Stoughton, 1990
Hodder & Stoughton, 1977
Gracewing, 1990

de Waal Esther
de Waal Esther
de Waal Esther
ed Foster & Smith
Hume G B
Parry

Ignatius of Loyola:

Flemming D

Contemporary Reading of
Ignatian Exercises
Finding God in all Things:
The Ways of St Ignatius
God of Surprises

Saint Louis, 1978

Hebblethwaite M

Fount

Hughes G W
ed Jones Wainwright
& Yarnold

The Study of Spirituality
Ignatian Prayer,

DLT, 1985

SPCK, 1986
Spring 1995.

The Way Supplement 82:

Footnotes:

- ¹ *Spiritual Classics from the Early Church*, p157, Robert Atwell, NS/CHP, 1995
- ² *Devotional Classics* p329 ed Richard Foster and James Smith, Hodder & Stoughton, 1993
- ³ *The Study of Spirituality*, p358, ed Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, SPCK, 1986
- ⁴ *ibid*, p359
- ⁵ *A life-Giving Way* p xviii, Esther de Waal, Geoffrey Chapman, 1995
- ⁶ Atwell, *op cit*, p159
- ⁷ Esther de Waal, *op cit*, p51
- ⁸ Atwell, *op cit*, p159
- ⁹ Thomas Merton, from *Seeking God*, p30, Esther de Waal, Fount, 1984
- ¹⁰ Atwell, *op cit*, p159

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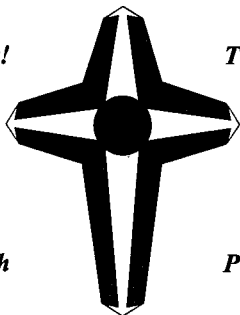
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Book Reviews

***Authentic Christianity* ed Timothy Dudley-Smith (IVP, 1995, 424pp, £9.99)**

The challenging and enriching quotations from the writings of John Stott were selected because they are, in Timothy Dudley-Smith's own words, "telling or instructive or (above all) thought-provoking." John Stott has been writing for fifty years and in this book we have 970 extracts from his work. The book begins with **The Living God** and ends with **The Hope of Glory**, and, in between, covers a wide range of Christian theology and its relevance to life today. John Stott's experience of God, his conviction of the authority of Scripture, and longing that all should share in the salvation of God in Christ - all this breathes through these pages. He expounds a Biblical Christianity that claims heart, mind and will. He writes, "Love becomes sentimental if it is not strengthened by truth, and truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love" (p618). Elsewhere he writes, "This utter disregard of self in the service of God and man is what the Bible calls love". (p644)

From his extracts that deal with baptism I felt, most of the time, that he must hold to the fact that baptism in the New Testament is the baptism of believers, but then it appeared that he holds also to infant baptism.

Having got that off my chest, I commend this book as being spiritually and intellectually challenging. It does not shrink from seeking to declare a Biblical perspective on many vital issues that face us as Christians today.

Keith Dixon

***Making New Disciples* by Steve Croft:**

(Marshall Pickering, 1994, 224pp, £7.99)

Steve Croft writes from the background of a large, growing church and his writing reflects this. The book is earthed in reality and is a flexible, user-friendly resource in the task of making disciples.

As the title suggests, this book is an attempt to bring new Christians to maturity. Steve Croft takes seriously the command to make disciples and not simply converts. One quote from the introduction gives a sense of his aim in the book..."If our evangelism is to have a lasting effect on church and nation then our aim has to be much more than increasing church attendance or numbers of conversions. We must become proficient at making disciples".

To this end the first part of the book deals very honestly with what is meant by "Christian maturity"; the facing of potential difficulties and stress points again reflects the "earthed" nature of the book. The second part of the book is a manual for helping Christians develop to maturity in eight different areas of the Christian life.

An excellent feature of the book is the study guide provided for each chapter of the book. The study guide itself is again sub-divided into four "tracks" for different readers. This means that the book is equally useful for pastoral leaders; or small group leaders; or for one-to-one work with a new Christian; or for an individual to work through on their own. (In addition, copies of various handouts based on these chapters are also available.)

With his conviction that "the whole process of initiation needs to be deeper and last longer", this book would be a very useful basis for an initial discipling process within our congregations.

Peter Swaffield

***Christian Choices in Healthcare* ed Dominic Beer (IVP, 1995, 320pp, £8.99)**

This book is written by doctors for doctors. The first third concerns guidance for young doctors and the rest covers the ever widening field of Medical Ethics. There are thirty contributors and, not unexpectedly, there is some variation in value and some repetition, especially in the use of scriptural references. Many of the contributors are members of the Christian Medical Fellowship, and write from an avowedly conservative evangelical standpoint.

Ministers will find much in part 1 of the book of value in helping members of their fellowships who are working in the caring professions, and the sections on communication and confidentiality will be of help in ministry. Part II, on Medical Ethics, though written primarily with young doctors in mind, is nevertheless of value to all carers and those involved in counselling carers, patients and relatives.

To understand several articles, a knowledge of medical, genetic and scientific terminology is required (two chapters have useful glossaries). The layout, with frequent sub-headings, is helpful for reference, and the style of most contributors is easy to follow.

The chapter on medical missions is written largely from an Anglican standpoint (The BMS is not mentioned). No account is given of the high quality research being done by medical missionaries.

The chapters on *The Meaning of Care, Making Decisions in Medicine* "Why Does God Allow Suffering", and, are of particular value. The chapter on, is hard going, but well worth the effort.

It is, perhaps, surprising that little is said about the present debate on the pressure of market forces on medical practice: the purchaser/provider dichotomy within the health service. This threatens to become ever more pervasive in decision-making.

This is a useful, handy reference book of modest price, which many ministers will find of repeated help if it is on their shelves.

David Charley

***The Post-Evangelical* by Dave Tomlinson (Triangle, 1995, 160pp, £5.99)**

Tomlinson's definition of a post-evangelical as someone who has "difficulty...in reconciling what they see and experience in evangelicalism with their personal values, instinctive reactions and theological reflections" (p2) means that his definition of "evangelical" is likely to be interesting! And it is. However, it is at this point that his whole thesis is in danger of failing, because his experience of evangelicalism, variously described as "dogmatic", "rigid" and "absolutist", and as a sub-culture where "dissent becomes difficult", where there is much "platform rhetoric" and "public vilification of alternative points of view" is clearly limited. Consequently, much of what follows in describing a **post**-evangelical can be found in many who are avowedly evangelical. However, if you allow for Tomlinson's theological slip to show, the rest of the book is well written and thought-provoking.

He charts the rise of evangelicalism as a necessary counter-response to modernism with its demythologising, but laments the present hide-bound nature of the beast. Post-evangelicalism, however, is a positive response to the remythologising of post-modernism, and so is more likely to resonate within our new-age culture. Post-evangelicals are not ex-evangelicals, but grateful for their foundation in faith, want to grow up in it. It is the thinking persons' evangelicalism, which welcomes doubt as a friend, not an enemy (ch 1); which encourages honesty, openness and a search for truth, (Ch 5) but which denies that absolute truth can exist (ch 7); which wants to

get out from the “rigidness of legalism” to find freedom in Christ (ch 6); which wants to engage in “positive worldliness”, seeing the imprint of God in all creation, but recognising the corruption of humans and of sinfulness too, (ch 9); and which respects Scripture as the Word of God, and as a vehicle for divine revelation, (ch 8).

Once I’d got over the shock of being labelled “unthinking”, I found this a challenging read, and a timely challenge to evangelicalism.

Ian Furlong

***Prayer in the New Testament* by Oscar Cullmann (SCM, 1995, £9.95, 208pp)**

From the distinguished French biblical scholar, now in his nineties, comes a study which has been many years in the writing. As a New Testament specialist, one might have expected an objective, dispassionate, technical work. But while the scholarship shines through - and there are 36 pages of footnotes - there is a strong, hermeneutical desire to inform Christian life and experience. Today, this appears to be rather rare at such a level of biblical competence: the growing chasm between the Church and academic theology.

The reader will not find here a philosophy of prayer, rather an examination strictly within the limits imposed by the New Testament itself. And so the main witnesses - the Synoptics, John and Paul - are examined at some length, with a brief survey of the other writings.

In the synoptic study much space is devoted to the model prayer of the Kingdom, each petition individually examined. The Gethsemane prayer is also prominent, focussing as it does the element of “submission”. The author highlights the contrast with Paul in that the stress in the synoptics is on intercession, rather than praise and thanksgiving, while Paul and John, though employing different language, harmonize in the priority they give to the activity of the Spirit in prayer. On Rom 8:22 Cullmann says: “By sighing together the creation shares in the embrace of the Spirit which is already ours”.

The exegesis forms the heart of the book which opens by recounting some of the common objections to prayer *per se*, and concludes with an attempt to meet them from the New Testament itself. Particularly helpful was his discussion of the apparent conflict between the immutability of God and intercession: “God writes straight but in crooked lines”. Less convincing was the section on prayer and evil, with the binding of Satan in Rev 20:2 intended as illumination. The conclusion of just two pages, is a gem. Indeed, in this area, if you possessed *Prayer in the New Testament*, you would need no other.

This is a fine example of an author being able to say much within a short compass. The fluid translation is by John Bowden, to whom we are indebted for rendering so many important books into the vernacular over the years.

Michael V Jackson