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# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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

Details of the Fellowship can be found on the inside back cover

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

# Editorial

## Re-imagining ministry

I was recently invited to be a consultant observer at a Church in Wales meeting reviewing the future pattern of its ministry. The participants had been encouraged to think the unthinkable, but most played relatively safe, proposing interesting but modest changes to parish, diocesan or provincial structures. One lay member, however, flew a much more radical kite: '*I envisage a model for Church in which clergy are as a rule unpaid, and where the community (rather than the church hierarchy) may decide to employ people (but not necessarily as priests).*' It was a suggestion that was neither shouted down nor adopted on the spot. Its significance lay in that it had been aired at all, and at that level, and would from now on be part of that Church's thinking.

In this issue of the *Journal* Stuart Jenkins and Malcolm Halliday both raise questions concerning present and future patterns of ministry that are not dissimilar. Across the spectrum of the denominations, therefore, I detect a willingness (perhaps even a necessity) to re-visit traditional models of ministry, and to be prepared to consider fresh ways of serving the body of Christ.

In his book, *Transforming Priesthood: a New Theology of Mission and Ministry* (SPCK 1994), Canon Robin Greenwood, now on the Church in Wales' central staff,

put the question in this form: How can the Church family through all its institutions, '*clergy and people together, with overlapping and conflicting theologies and personalities, carry out their responsibilities in such a way as to be a sign and a foretaste of God's hope?*'

Churches and Denominations that are willing to ask questions like that are in themselves signs of hope – for the Gospel and for the People of God in their mission today. **bmj**

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- At the Fellowship's Annual Meeting in Blackpool in May the Revd Dr Hazel Sherman was elected to Chair the *Journal's* Editorial Board. A former tutor at Bristol Baptist College and with the University of Birmingham, Hazel is currently minister of Kensington Baptist Church, Brecon. In warmly welcoming Hazel to the editorial chair, we look forward to the fresh insights she brings to the board.
  - Some readers may have noticed a lighter, thinner feel to the *Journal* this year. This was the result of a salutary lesson last December when the magazine in its envelope was a single gram over weight to qualify for second class postage. The post office branch from which they were dispatched was unwilling to waive the difference resulting in a surcharge of £140! Hence the decision to print on slightly lower gram paper in future.
  - BMJ publishes articles which will be of interest to its readers: ministers and missionaries. The *Journal* invites original contributions of no more than 2,500 words, which are accessible to a broad section of readers. MSS for consideration will be read by members of the Editorial Board, and should be submitted in hard copy and electronically.

# What's the point ?

**Stuart Jenkins, the new chair of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship (BMF) reflects on its purpose.**

I remember the first ministers' conference I ever went to, a nearly totally male gathering. I remember the heartiness of it all, the matey greetings, the back-slapping humour, and the astonishingly loud singing. I remember my creeping sense of horror, not that this was how it was, but that I was part of it. I belonged to these people with their seamless self-confidence and their beefy laughs. I was undeniably one of them. It was something of a shock.

Years pass and now I sign up eagerly for each year's conference. Perhaps I've grown heartier over the years and become more of a clubbable bloke myself, but the conferences have changed too. The ministers are women as well as men. The atmosphere is less competitive, less assertive, less assured, and more accepting of uncertainty, disappointment, and distress. Where the gung-ho personality once fattened itself on affirmation, now the flawed or fragile psyche may be restored by a little friendship. There is a gentler and more spacious atmosphere. After all, ministers today are such varied people.

I'm writing this article to express my thoughts on the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship and its purpose. I start, remembering that long ago conference, with a great suspicion of any claim to understand what ministry is all about. Models such as pastor, teacher, minister of Word and sacrament, enabler, community theologian, preacher, scholar, counsellor, or leader can be helpful to some of us, some of the time, but I don't believe any of them offers a complete understanding of ministry or of how ministers and churches should relate.

## Quick learners

Ministry cannot be reduced to an easily expressed, easily understood formula. Ministry is unavoidably interlocked with the Church, and our understanding of ministry is largely dependent on our *Baptist Ministers' Journal July 2001*

understanding of the Church. If we say the Church is the Body of Christ and claim it makes real to members and neighbours our encounter with God in Christ, then the Church and its ministry are clearly going to be larger and untidier than any definition, because they share in the life of God. And if we don't know quite what ministry is all about, we are certainly going to be unclear about what the BMF is for. [I should perhaps state that when I refer to 'ministry' I am mainly thinking about the role that designated ministers fulfil, but I am aware that this is only a part of the ministry of God's people.]

Having started with the first conference and the unwelcome self-confidence of its ministers, I move on with much more enthusiasm to the diversity and openness of ministers today. I believe the variety of ministers and ministries, and our uncertainties about ministry today, reflect the creative time we live in. The Church in our society is facing enormous pressure for change. Deep unanswered questions have loosened our thinking right the way down to the basics. We are persistently reminded that we do not know how to be the Church and do not know how to follow our calling.

These are times for learning, and uncertainty is a welcome friend. In some areas, the life of the Church will develop in ways that lead to changes in ministry, but in others it may well be that change

enters the Church through the ministry. Either way, we need to have the humility of those who do not know, and the faith of those who are willing to learn. These are good qualities in any age, because in truth, all ages are times of change, but I think that our time is one that requires us to be especially quick learners.

### **Less protection**

Consider some of the more practical changes that are impacting on Church and ministry. Ministers would once have been considered one of the professions. Baptists have long been unsure whether we like or agree with this designation, but in any case the world has moved on and professions are under assault. In medicine and education, for example, there have been changes imposed that represent a significant withdrawal of trust – or perhaps it's a widening of responsibility?

Education is no longer a matter of receiving what schools provide: parental involvement, more powerful governing bodies, and home/school contracts are the order of the day. In medicine, statistics on clinical outcomes are made more widely available, and procedures once restricted to doctors may now be performed by nurses. Similar changes in attitude affect ministry. There is less protection and privilege, perhaps rightly, and good reason to move towards openness and accountability, but until these changes are in place there is an increasing sense of vulnerability and stress.

Some traditional patterns of ministry probably require a minister to work at least a sixty hour week; morning in the study, afternoons visiting, evenings at meetings. This may once have been a reasonable expectation, but new patterns of work and family life operate against it. Couples who both have paid employment and who expect a more equal sharing of parenting and household tasks will not be as tolerant

of such demands as earlier generations were. Some ministers job-share. How is this to be done if the work of a minister is infinite, as it has often seemed? The existence of job-shares compels us to define the task of minister in a way that has probably never been attempted before.

### **Cultural literacy**

The growth of home ownership as the normal means of housing has a further impact. It is still the case that most ministers live in tied accommodation when others (police, service personnel, caretakers, agricultural workers, etc.) have largely followed the trend for owner-occupation. The real problems with tied accommodation come when there is a change of career or a career break. With more women in ministry and with more equally shared parenting, ministerial career breaks for young children are going to be an increasingly common requirement, and the housing problem will be felt acutely.

In a technologically advancing age, the skills needed for ministry move on rapidly. Can you use a video projector, give a 'PowerPoint' presentation, set up a website, use e-mail efficiently? In a culturally diverse society, the requirements for relevant communication change. Can you relate to younger teens, older teens, thirty-somethings, Asian British people, Radio 2 listeners, FHM readers? Where will the retraining be found? Where will the necessary cultural literacy be acquired? Ministers have a growing need for continuing education and there are increasing opportunities to get it, but this again is something that raises more questions than we yet have answers.


### **An evolving ministry**

The BMF, then, creates the opportunity for the viewpoint of ministers to be visited regularly and thoughtfully. It discovers a particular agenda, a set of concerns, slowly developing, which are seen in a particular

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way from the places where ministers stand. Things such as settlement, housing, pensions, retirement, appraisal, accountability, and accreditation raise themselves as issues of concern. Conversations take place within the BMF and between BMF and Union, and in other directions too. Questions are analysed and relevant theological insights are brought to bear. Unsatisfactory solutions are identified as such, more promising directions are followed. We are mainly talking about things that are also proper concerns of others, but this mix, this agenda, and this perspective is uniquely ours, and we therefore have a unique and important contribution to make.

So I don't really know what the BMF is for. I know it's not a trade union and that it does not exist to champion the interests of ministers as against those of churches. I know that it's not a professional association

setting the standards and patterns within which ministry should be carried out; that is a responsibility of the wider Church. I don't think the function of the BMF can be neatly defined in terms that set out which subjects are and which are not within its competence, and that determine how it is to relate to other structures within the Baptist churches and Union. What can be said is that the BMF is a forum within which the current concerns of those in Baptist ministry will be explored, and that in a time of change, when the very nature of ministry is evolving, the existence of such an ill-defined forum is invaluable. The BMF is the organ through which the Baptist ministry achieves self-consciousness! That self-awareness offers the best chance of the discernment we need as we learn what we are to become, and on the way, we will also discover what the point of the BMF is. 

# BT 2001

BAPTIST TIMES

## The year 2001 is many things. It is:

- the 150th anniversary of the Great Exhibition.
- the first year of the new millennium (not 2000!).
- the 100th anniversary of the birth of Walt Disney.
- the year Arthur C. Clarke chose for his popular space odyssey.
- the 100th anniversary of Queen Victoria's death.
- the probable year of a General Election.
- the 100th anniversary of the patenting of the Gillette safety razor.
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# The death of a baby

## **Carol Nolan, Chaplain at Homerton Hospital, asks whether there can be hope in despair?**

As a hospital chaplain, a significant part of my time is spent with parents who are experiencing the traumatic death of their baby. Working with those families in their grief and reflecting theologically on the issues that arise has left me with a greater understanding of the pain of this kind of bereavement, and made me more aware that Christian ministers are often in a unique position to offer support to grieving parents. Much of what I write is born out of the experience of struggling to care pastorally for those whose grief is beyond my own personal experience. I offer this article in the hope that others who face a similar struggle may find some help.

### **Josie and John**

Peter and Claire had recently become committed members of their local church. Claire was pregnant and anxious about the baby because she had miscarried twice before, but their new faith gave them confidence that things would be different this time. However, it was not to be. At 26 weeks gestation, Claire went into labour and was rushed to hospital. She gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Josie survived just a few hours, and Claire was devastated. She looked weak and empty, her hopes and dreams smashed.

Desperate to fill the aching gap which Josie's death had left, Claire quickly became pregnant again. Tragically, Claire miscarried after five months. Less than a year after the death of Josie, baby John was buried in the same garden of remembrance as his sister.

### **Jessica**

I sat at Sonia's bedside holding her hand, and inside I wept. The doctors had told Sonia there was no hope. Her waters had broken four months prematurely and now she should get up and let nature take its course. But Sonia, too, had been this way before. She could not, and would not, let this baby go. Lying as still as her aching body would allow in a desperate attempt to hold on to the struggling life within her,

she looked at me, drained, and helpless. 'Will you pray for me?'

I was faced with a dilemma: Do I pray that God will look after her baby and that all will be well? Or do I help Sonia to let go, to prepare herself for the fate her doctors have told her is inevitable? I chose the former, and she continued to rest, to trust and to hold on in faith. For another five weeks in fact, until, against all expectations, Jessica was born.

For a further six months Jessica remained in hospital, often close to death, then fighting back again. Sonia and Stephen, her husband, never gave up, but continued to do all that they could, in order that Jessica might come home to live with them.

She did come home, for a short while, and it seemed that perhaps she had won the battle for her life. But complications set in again, and Jessica was rushed off to hospital. This time she did not recover. It had been nine months from the beginning of the crisis until the death of their baby.

For Claire and Peter, Sonia and Stephen, the on-going pastoral task remains to help the families to work through their painful experiences. The question frequently asked following such tragic events is 'Why did God allow this to happen?'

## Necessary conditions for successful mourning

20 – 30 years ago many grieving mothers found that the death of their baby was trivialized and they were expected to get on with life with the minimum of fuss. Today however, largely as a result of pressure from mothers themselves and from the subsequent formation of support groups like Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society, attitudes in hospitals have changed considerably.

Lin, Lin and Fabricant have found that:

*Parents who have just lost a baby show emotional and physical grief reactions similar to those seen following the death of any loved person. Furthermore, there is no significant difference in intensity of grief for a miscarriage, stillbirth or death of a new-born (Lin, Lin & Fabricant, At Peace with the Unborn: A Book for Healing: 12).*

As with any bereavement, there is no set pattern, but research suggests that intense mourning following the death of a baby usually lasts for six months or more, and for some a lot longer, particularly if there is insufficient support or recognition of the loss involved. Like any other grieving person, bereaved parents have to go through the pain before they can come to terms with their bereavement.

In order, then, for the bereaved parent to successfully move through the process of grieving, certain conditions are needed.

Firstly, parents need permission to grieve. If the death is belittled, then the mother may feel she has to 'snap out of it' and suppress her pain, resulting in a prolonged period of mourning. If all memory of the baby is regarded as insignificant, it becomes far more difficult for the parents to work through their pain.

However, encouraging the parents to express sadness and to name the pain they feel may help them to acknowledge the loss for themselves. A service of blessing or dedication of the baby may help some parents, offering a way to begin to accept that their baby was a person of real value and that it is okay to feel deep loss.

### Personal and appropriate

Secondly, parents need something with which to remember their baby. One reason why grief becomes so intense and prolonged for some mothers is that they lack a concrete image of the child to say goodbye to. Therefore encouraging the development of memories is important. Photographs, a lock of hair or keeping a journal can be helpful ways of preserving memories. Parents should be allowed to spend time with their baby, to hold, to bath and dress the baby in his or her own clothes if they wish to do so.

Thirdly, parents need encouragement to make their own decisions. It is all too easy for those caring for the parents to take over. However, many parents later regret decisions that were made for them in the early days of their grief. Many hospitals will arrange for an individual funeral at no cost to the parents, but their wishes should always be sought and every effort made to ensure that the service is personal and appropriate to their needs.

Fourthly, parents need sufficient time to grieve. It should not be presumed that they would quickly bounce back to normal. Losing a baby is not something that parents will ever 'get over' in the sense of forgetting or leaving it behind. With proper support and encouragement, parents can learn to live with the experience of having lost a baby, but it will always be a part of them.

Support also needs to be given to other family members. The father may feel quite isolated, carrying the load at home and



having to explain to family and friends. Similarly, siblings may be feeling confused, frightened, or even responsible for the death of their baby brother or sister.

### Hope out of Despair

This subject raises some tough theological questions to which there are not any easy answers. However, the church does have a specific role to play in ministering to bereaved parents - particularly to those of the Christian faith - not only in offering love and support, but also in pointing to hope in Christ that can arise out of despair.

One of the most profound emotions following any death is anger, and for believers that anger is often directed towards God who is seen as the giver of life. Sarah Murphy explains:

*Those with a religious faith often suffer added strain when their baby dies.... Marilyn, expressed the dilemma well: 'In many ways grief is harder to cope with as a Christian.... I imagined that my grief would pass quickly and easily. I was not prepared for the length and severity of the normal grief process. I often felt that I was failing God when I wasn't behaving the way I "ought" to. I was angry and didn't understand why God had taken Luke' (Murphy, S., 1990, Coping with Cot Death, SPCK, London: 99. Italics mine).*

Marilyn is expressing understandable anger at an image of God who is the giver - and destroyer - of all life. Her God is all-powerful and chooses to take away the life he had just given. It is not surprising that such an image of God raises huge difficulties for Marilyn. Why indeed would he do such a cruel and terrible thing?

For others, the dilemma is, 'Why has God *allowed* this to happen?' Here, God is not seen to cause the evil, but chooses to sit back and watch it happen.

### Storms just happen

As I have struggled with these questions I have been drawn to Mark 4:35-41, the account of Jesus stilling the storm on the lake. Here we find the disciples in a boat on the lake, when a fierce storm arises. The disciples are afraid. Meanwhile, Jesus is asleep in the stern on a cushion! The disciples wake Jesus, saying, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' Jesus gets up and calmly rebukes the storm, saying 'Peace! Be still!'

This story seems to reflect the experience of Peter and Claire. All had been well, when suddenly, disaster had struck. Their whole world was turned upside down. God, who had previously been very real and close to them, now seemed to be a very long way away. We might wonder, Why did God do this to them? or Why did God allow it to happen?

It seems to me that one of the crucial points about this story is that Jesus did not cause the storm, neither did he prevent the storm. Storms just happen. But he was there with the disciples in the boat from the beginning of their journey. He did not climb in - or out - at the time of crisis, but remained with them throughout. Similarly, God does not always miraculously calm the storms in our lives. He does not always take away the physical and emotional pains that we bear. But we can be assured that he is always with us. He has promised to be with us *in* the storm - even when it seems as though he is asleep in the stern on a cushion.

### The dilemma

We see this understanding of Christ coming alongside the sufferer and remaining there in the suffering again in Jesus' care for the Samaritan woman in her emotional turmoil (John 4:4ff), his socialising with outsiders (Luke 5:27-32), and his journeying - unrecognised at first - with the disciples on the Road to Emmaus

(Luke 24:13-16). Furthermore, the Psalmist declares:

*Even though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and staff, they comfort me  
(Ps 23:4).*

As I sat at Sonia's bedside when she asked: 'Will you pray for me?' I was faced with a dilemma: 'Should I pray for a miracle or should I help Sonia to prepare to let her baby go?' This is a dilemma which all in the caring professions face. When to offer hope, and when to help to let go.

Sonia believed that God would hear and answer her prayers if she only believed hard enough. She held on, willing Jessica to live. And at times it looked as though she would make it.

But does God offer hope only to take it away again? Why did Jessica die after such a struggle for her life? Did Sonia stop believing? I think not.

### **Able to hear**

Murphy tells her own story in which Elizabeth, one of her new born twins dies.

*I was ... willing [the twins] to live. I felt that if I let go at all, they would die, so I virtually did not sleep, spending as much time with them as I was allowed and spending the remainder of my time lying in the ward trying to send telepathic messages to them that they must hold on and pull through (Murphy: 102).*

Elizabeth died aged 3 months. She, like Jessica, had been willed to live by her mother, and had held on for some time, until circumstances had taken over and the fight for survival was lost.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross offers some helpful insights from her work with terminally ill adults and children. She tells the story of Jeff, a young boy who was dying with leukaemia. After counselling his parents for about a year, Kübler-Ross recalls:

*Jeff developed pneumonia and started to talk about his impending death again. He suddenly said to his mother, 'You know, Mommy, I feel so sick now that I think this time I'm going to die.' A year ago his mother would most likely have said to him, 'shut up, don't talk like this, you are going to get well.' This time she was able to hear him. She was able to sit down and say to him, 'What do you think this is going to be like?' (Kübler-Ross, E., 1982, Living with Death and Dying (Human Horizons Series), Souvenir Press (E & A) Ltd, London: 59).*

For Jeff's mother, being able to talk openly about impending death with her son was an important step towards facing the reality of it herself and preparing to let her son go.

### **Coming alongside**

The question remains. Was I right to offer hope to Sonia when the outlook was so bleak? There is no easy answer, and each situation must be considered by itself. The emotional strain on Sonia was intensified because of the length of time that Jessica was ill. However, if Sonia had 'let go' sooner, perhaps she would have had the added pain of feeling that they had caused the death(s). Maybe it was necessary for Sonia to keep on hanging on as long as there was any chance at all of her baby surviving, otherwise she may have had to live with the agony of thinking, 'If only... (I had believed more, rested more, loved more etc)'.

There still remains the dilemma of how to help Jessica's parents to come to terms with seemingly unanswered prayer. To suggest that we have any clear answers is not helpful, but the image of Christ travelling with us in the storm still applies. The picture of Christ remaining with Sonia and Stephen day by day, throughout the months of uncertainty and grieving, offers a model of Christian hope in times of deep despair.

By being with bereaved parents in their grief ministers can offer Christian hope in coming alongside, in offering support to deconstruct unhelpful images of God, and to create more helpful ones. In so doing, they become representatives of Christ who comes alongside us and remains with us throughout the storm - even though it may at times feel as though he is asleep in the stern on a cushion! **dmj**

## The Amen of those with learning disabilities

*BUild - the Baptist Union Initiative with people with Learning Disabilities - is publishing a series of occasional papers of which Everyone for Jesus is the first. It covers the preparation for worship, its content, including story, music and prayer, and other practical points distilled from our corporate experience of leading worship with such people over the years. The note that follows is the Introduction to the Booklet.*

Worship at its best is that worship in which all the people are included. All the people: the hale and the hearty and the quick in the uptake can say "Amen!"; the deaf who cannot hear properly can say "Amen!"; the blind who cannot see the overhead projector can say "Amen!"; and those who find things hard to grasp because they are slow of thought, however deep their feelings, they too can say "Amen!". Everyone can say with understanding and from their hearts "Amen!" because they have each met with Jesus.

"Meeting Jesus Christ is an incarnational experience ..... we are first and foremost about people and when we plan [worship] .....contacts are more important than content. We are working with a particular group of people, we seek to be incarnational in entering in to their culture [and their experience]." (Robin Gamble. *Transmission*, Autumn 1997) Worship must be inclusive and not exclusive: it

must 'flesh out' the Gospel for us all and nowhere is this more true than when the congregation includes people with Learning Disabilities.

It also follows that if, as we say, "Nothing but the best is good enough for God" that "best" must speak to the heart of every individual present whether they have a learning disability or not. What is said and done may look very simple on the face of it yet the golden moments come when the whole Congregation worships in Spirit and in truth.

### The heart should be ready

Simplicity must be the keynote, but in doing simple things well, it is not necessary to talk down, as anyone who has ever experienced the deep simplicity of a Taizé chant well knows. It is necessary to accept limitations and to use imagination and skill in evoking the presence of the Holy in the midst, but at the same time it is necessary to remember that the Holy One is the God

who turns human logic upside down. Every person, disabled or not, has a gift to offer in worship and the worship must be planned to make the most of those gifts. Think positively. Think expectantly. Be ready for the surprises of God whose power is made perfect in weakness. After all the Cross of Christ is the only adequate measure for our love in these matters.

Just caring is not enough. Self-giving is the name of the game, leaving behind all our very human tendencies to want to "do good". As ever the task is that of "One starving beggar helping another to see where bread is to be found."

"Who is sufficient for these things?" There is one essential ingredient and only one really; it is that the heart should be ready. One has to grow into it. Just as the Pastor of a Church spends himself in love getting to know and understand his members and so brings God's word to them out of his deep compassion and knowledge of their souls' needs, so the would-be leader of worship with people with Learning Disabilities must be willing first to embrace that potential congregation.

### **The rewards are glorious**

So get to know and learn to love your people first. Visit them. Learn to listen to them. And do remember that if it is true that, as scientists tell us, 70% of all

communication is non-verbal, the proportion of non-verbal communication when meeting people with Learning Disabilities is much higher. Learn to understand them. Learn by speaking of everyday things with them. Befriend them. Do things for them maybe, but better, find something you can ask them to do for you - make a cup of tea perhaps. Discover the limitations of their attention span and be there long enough to find out if there are any behavioural quirks that might startle or distract if you are not ready for them. Discover the real person with whom you are making friends.

Don't expect everything to happen at once, all learning is a slow grind. It takes time to learn to communicate especially where there are speech impediments. But the rewards are glorious. They are nothing less than the discovery of the Lord himself sharing the conversation, sharing the friendship and speaking through it to you both.

Remember, patience is a gift of the Spirit and alongside that gift will come all the others, Love, Joy, Peace and the rest. When these Gifts possess your soul in the presence of your new friends then you will be confident to lead them into the joys of worship and you will know the blessing of the Lord both as you prepare meticulously and prayerfully and in the event itself. **bmj**

### **More on Divorce**

David Instone-Brewer, Baptist minister and Research Fellow at Tyndale House, Cambridge, is the latest contributor to the Grove Books biblical studies series.

In *Divorce and Remarriage in the 1st and 21st Century* (£2.50), Instone-Brewer argues that new insights into the world of the first century suggest that both Jesus and Paul affirmed four Old Testament grounds for divorce and allowed remarriage, though they rejected no-fault divorce and emphasised that divorce should be avoided if at all possible.

(Post free from Grove Books Ltd, Ridley Hall Rd, Cambridge, CB3 9HU.)



# Who are we?

## Malc' Halliday of Queen's Road Baptist Church, Coventry, ponders issues of Baptist identity.

In his incisive analysis of the state of Britain at the end of the twentieth century broadcaster John Humphreys concludes thus:

*'.....are we happy with the direction we have taken as a society in the past forty years? .....I am not, and I believe many people share my misgivings .....society is changing. Consumer populism cheapens, coarsens, makes false promises and offers phoney solutions and I think we should make a fuss about it. We should make dissent a habit ..... We cannot - nor should we - rely on the old elites, nor seek a rigid new moral framework. We should certainly kick the backsides of the new elite, who cynically go along with consumer populism because they see it in their own interests to do so .....For all the dissidents who have succeeded there have been plenty who have failed. The only thing we can choose is the route we take. I can see no alternative to the dissident route and sooner or later we will find out whether it gets us where we might prefer to be'.<sup>1</sup>*

For everyone who claims the title Baptist with any serious intent the call to dissent will find an echoing response in their own hearts for, of course, the origin of the Baptist denomination finds its roots in this very dissenting principle. Committed as we are to the truth revealed in the person of Jesus Christ we find that truth is embodied in the life of one who gave flesh to the principle of dissent.

Whether chasing moneychangers from the temple, challenging the repressive teachings of the religious leaders or – perhaps most shockingly – proclaiming in his own person that God was revealed,

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Jesus stands as a fascinating figure, in my view undoubtedly the most fascinating figure, in history. Of course the immediate result of such dissent was torture and execution. Nonetheless there is a choice for all to make when confronted with the person of Jesus Christ: will we make his cause and values our own or will we shout "crucify" with the rest of the crowd and go back to our inadequate and imperfect lives.

The decision Jesus calls us to make was expressed like this by Julia in T S Eliot's post-war play "The Cocktail Party":

*'And now, when they are stripped naked to their souls  
And can choose, whether to put on proper costumes  
Or huddle quickly into new disguises,  
They have, for the first time,  
somewhere to start from.  
Oh, of course, they might just murder each other!  
But I don't think they will do that.'<sup>2</sup>*

## Crisis of major proportions

Sadly although the origins of the Baptist denomination might be found in the lives of those who dared to respond to the structures and institutions of society by crying "No more" it is difficult to find that same spirit alive in Baptist life in 2001. Only one hundred years ago Baptist Christians in Coventry were prepared to go to prison rather than pay taxes which they believed to be incompatible with their Christian principles. Where is the willingness to nail our colours to the mast

these days? In the year 2000 a group of Christians from the Kaleidoscope project marched to a Cambridgeshire police station in support of a couple entitled in the media "The Cambridge Two".

These two, responsible for the management of a hostel for the homeless, had been found guilty of allowing drugs to be used on their premises. The Baptist Christians who came to the police station in their support were asking to be arrested arguing that they too were guilty of the same crime. Their protest made the headlines of the *Baptist Times*. Proof, it could be argued, that the principle of dissent is alive and well. However it is possible to argue that it was only because the response of the Kaleidoscope Project was so unusual that the story made news.

If neither the example of Jesus Christ, nor our understanding of Baptist origins, is enough to inspire us then surely the state of the church should drive us into the arms of the dissenters. Michael Riddell sums it up thus:

*"53,000 attenders are leaving the church in Europe and North America every week, and they are not coming back. This exodus of believers is in itself a crisis of major proportions. Any business which was losing clients at this rate would be doing some serious reconsideration of its methods and objectives. Because of the denominational fragmentation bequeathed by the Reformation, however, it is possible for the church to ignore the consequences"<sup>3</sup>*

### **Does it work?**

Post-modern society has looked at the promises of the enlightenment and found them wanting. The notion that morally, socially and educationally we would get better and better has been exposed as a lie

and so the lie, and those that sold the lie, have been rejected. The church has been too closely identified with the system to be completely blame free and so suffers the same fate as other institutions and systems.

It was right and proper that when society modelled itself along modernist lines we should have represented the claims of the faith in modern ways. The alarming possibility is that we allowed ourselves to be so wedded to the rock of modernism that extricating ourselves from it and finding new and relevant ways of communicating the faith will be extremely painful. Some will, no doubt, find it too painful and cling to the rock while the tide of post-modernity washes over it and moves on.

We have grown accustomed to arguing in rational and logical ways for the truths of the faith and have forgotten to live it. We have presumed that the question people are asking is "Is it true?" and responded accordingly. However what people are apparently asking is, "Does it work?" They want to see that Christian faith is an option worth pursuing. There may well come a point when we can argue that it does work precisely because it is true but first people need to see the evidence of it working in our lives and relationships with one another and with the wider community. As Brian Haymes has expressed it: "all that a Baptist church ever wants to do is the will of God"<sup>4</sup>

### **Wanting to be authentic**

If this is true can we look at our structures, organisations and practices and honestly say that this is what God had in mind? Surely, at heart, God's will is to build relationships with all who will respond to his demonstration of love in Jesus. It appears that too often we have focussed on the building of that relationship with those who have already responded and

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To the readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal

## SUMMER HAS ARRIVED

Now that we have our first opportunity to enjoy the warm weather my thoughts turn to the outdoors and the activities that church members love to join in with.

I am grateful to one of my colleagues for the following personal experience that I feel sure is mirrored at many Baptist Churches.

"At a recent Church meeting, the question of the annual Church Barbecue in aid of Tear Fund came up, and (as usual) I was asked to act as chief "chef" for the event.

It is normally held in a large garden of one of our Church members, using a "home made" barbecue. That is ½ an oil drum on its side, welded to an iron stand, and covered with removable iron grilles.

It works well for a large amount of cooking, but is a big beast to set up safely. Lots of potential for painful accidents!

Friends and families are all invited and fairly active games organised for the children.

One (very hot) year, these games ended up with everyone chasing each other with water pistols, or even the garden hose! Lots of rushing around ensued.

Fortunately, I had arrived early to set up (on level ground), and barricade myself in to the "cooking area". Trestle tables form not only a serving area, but also a barrier to prevent our younger, more boisterous children from getting anywhere near where the danger of fire/splatters of fat etc. could cause harm.

I now also ensure I have several buckets of water and wet swabs handy – not just for ammunition!

Afterwards, I never leave the barbecue area, until the ashes have been properly dealt with and I am certain they pose no hazard.

Oh, by the way, at this Church meeting I voiced my strong dislike of **ever** hiring a bouncy castle as an attraction. The potential for injury to children (and adults!) is too great"

I know that a number of the points made may be stating the obvious, but this personal experience demonstrates a series of hazards that have been minimised with a little common sense. Please try to ensure that all your church activities are safely organised by thinking through the potential hazards and taking simple precautions to prevent accidents.

A.J.GREEN ACII ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER



forgotten that there remain countless millions who, as yet, do not know that there is a demonstration of love to respond to.<sup>5</sup>

Is this a uniquely Baptist perspective? I don't believe so although I would argue that it is authentically Christian. Whatever else motivated the early dissenters to baptise one another in Zurich in 1525 it is clear that they were not seeking to establish a "Baptist" church. Rather, as dissenters have sought to do before and since they were responding with the best of their knowledge and to the limits of their ability to a sense of wanting to be authentic Christians and obey the will of God.

I believe that anybody truly committed to the way of Jesus Christ would want to do no less. From childhood my experience of denominationalism has been somewhat eclectic. I was brought up with the Congregationalists, discovered faith with the Methodists. I was baptised by a Pentecostal church (because I knew of no other church in the area that would do it) and at University worshipped with the Anglicans. I began my working life in fellowship with a Brethren meeting and flirted with Anglicanism once again before arriving in Coventry.

### **To forego the title**

However the motivation for these various links was never the pursuit of novelty but rather identification with whichever Christian body was most appropriate at the point of the journey I was on. I have always claimed that I am a Baptist by conviction rather than upbringing. By this I mean that in general I find the principles that for me reflect authentic Christian living (eg: Personal faith in Christ - the authority of Scripture, taking seriously the need to be salt and light in the world, church structures and practices that can be shaped by the membership) - most clearly reflected in a Baptist Church. However I

have met them, and continue to meet them, in other denominations, while at the same time noticing their absence in some Baptist fellowships.

It may well be that, in the light of this, one of the radical stands we have to take is to be prepared to forego the title "Baptist" in our structures. I suspect it means little to the majority of people in our congregations: increasingly people will join a church where they feel welcomed, affirmed and encouraged to grow in faith regardless of the name outside the door. In fact it might even be argued that the very wonder is a hindrance to our pursuit of the will of God. This, either because it is meaningless to the majority of people, or it is a reminder of bad experiences in the past which have proved a barrier to faith ever since. However if simply changing a name were to be the means by which the world would become Christian we would all be outside our church buildings now with a pot of paint and a stepladder!

### **Abandoning our buildings**

No! I believe the radical call of Christ needs to be responded to in a much deeper way. In a society suspicious of structures, institutions and authority and in which the church is seen to be a part of that system then we need to be prepared to present such a different picture of the people of God that old prejudices and misapprehensions are challenged. If post-modern society says that it knows little of community and sustained relationships; if we increasingly live in streets where neighbours remain nameless figures and being part of a Christian community involves a lengthy car journey; if the cry of the human heart is for identity and purpose then God's call to us in Christ is surely to be with these people – respond to their confusions and reclaim the lost neighbourhood values for the Kingdom of God.

Of course this will mean abandoning our large Victorian buildings. It will mean pooling resources so that it is possible to release fellow Christians to be a regular presence in the community. It means being prepared to live in poorer housing, change our working patterns and allow what is important to us to be reshaped. If the church building is not a place where people want to go then let us be prepared to abandon it. What matters most – the support of a structure or visible expressions of faith? After all if a small group of believers meeting in a home amidst other homes is the best way to provide a visible Christian presence it would hardly be original would it?

### **Like everybody else?**

Of course such challenges bring a response of fear. We like the familiar, we want to be secure. Sometimes the challenges will come from those who are protecting their interests. If Christians began to organise themselves in ways appropriate to local need where would be the need for paid ministry or larger structures such as Associations and national offices? It is when we think like this that we realise that we have moved from our radical roots to attempt to reproduce what all the other denominations have. “We want to be like everybody else” appears to be the motivation – the antithesis of radical living. It may well be that we do want to pay people to do certain tasks but it might be more useful to employ a community worker than a preacher, a child-minder than a theologian.

As for national bodies it would, no doubt, be salutary to seriously ask ourselves what precisely would be the impact if the offices of the Union were to close at midnight tonight? What precisely would be the reduction in activity for the Kingdom of God? I am not arguing that all these changes must take place but that if we are to be faithful to our radical roots the

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question must constantly be being asked.

However even if we can claim to be secure enough to handle radical change and with our hand on our heart say we have no vested interest in the system as it stands there will be others who will point to other radical ventures that have ended in disaster. In recent history the names “Heaven’s Gate”, “Waco” and “Jonestown” are a salutary reminder that it can all go horribly wrong. Others might look to our own Baptist origins and recall the attempt to build the Kingdom of God on earth that took place in Munster in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Jan Matthys, a baker, announced in 1530 that God’s Kingdom had come and that in this Kingdom there would be no “magistracy, no law, no marriage and no private property”<sup>6</sup>.

With the hope that these pronouncements brought, persecuted Anabaptists flocked to the city of Munster seeking refuge while Catholics and Lutherans fled fearing for their lives. The city was held under siege, a siege which came to an end in 1535 with the survivors being cruelly tortured prior to execution.

It is not surprising therefore that many continue to be suspicious of fanatical zeal. However the corrective to bad experience is not to avoid the issues altogether but to encourage right and positive practice. It is clear then that my desire is not to be a good Baptist but to seek authentic Christian spirituality for my own life and in the fellowship of other like-minded believers whether or not they are found within the doors of a Baptist fellowship.

It may mean losing that which has long been familiar, being misunderstood, parting company with friends who cannot walk the same path. It may mean failure and confusion and a regular beginning again, learning from the mistakes we have made. But just as the first disciples could

conceive of no other path to follow than that of following Jesus for he had "the words of eternal life"<sup>7</sup> so we must remind ourselves that we are not called to be successful but faithful and allow God to take care of the rest.

To return, as we began, with John Humphreys. I am not Welsh but, in the words which close his book, I find a rallying cry that excites my whole being:

"As a Welshman I am naturally pessimistic about outcomes, though not about people. So when it comes to hoping I am with the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci: pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. Or to put it in Welsh terms: just because the odds are against us it doesn't mean we shouldn't bloody well try."<sup>8</sup> **bmj**

## Note: The Cambridge Two

On December 17th 1999 Ruth Wyner, the Director of Wintercomfort for the homeless in Cambridge England, and John Brock, the charity's Day Centre Manager, were sent to prison for five and four years respectively because some of the people they were helping were secretly exchanging drugs on the premises.

The two were released on bail in June 2000 pending the outcome of their appeal to the High Court.

On 21st December 2000 the Royal Court of Appeal delivered its verdict. It substantially reduced the sentences passed on the two workers and ruled that they would not have to return to prison. However the court did not declare their convictions unlawful.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Devils Advocate – John Humphreys: Hutchinson 1999 pp 270-271

<sup>2</sup> The Cocktail Party – T S Eliot: Faber and Faber 1950 p.145

<sup>3</sup> Threshold of the Future – Michael Riddell: SPCK 1998 P.3

<sup>4</sup> Why be a Baptist? Baptist Basics series. Brian Haymes – Baptist Union of Great Britain

<sup>5</sup> This concept is pithily expressed in the "Story of the lifesavers hut". See Appendix B

<sup>6</sup> A History of the English Baptists – A C Underwood: London 1947 p.24

<sup>7</sup> John 6.68 – New International Version

<sup>8</sup> John Humphreys op.cit p.271

## To Captain Rider and Co.

The latest title in the ONE Version of the New Testament, co-ordinated by Baptist minister John Henson, is 'Letters from Paul's Team' (£2.00 from 029 2040 9102). It covers the two Letters to Tessatown (*Thessalonians*), the Letter to some Celtic Christians (*Galatians*), the Letter to Philiptown (*Philippians*), the Letter to Quaketown (*Colossians*), the Letter to Phil, Ava and Captain Rider (*Philemon*), and a Circular Letter to the Churches (*Ephesians*).

The ONE version is a rolling translation, subject to continual review and amendment on the basis of suggestions from anyone interested in the work.

*'Jesus is like a portrait of God come to life, showing us God's character for the first time. Jesus is the model of what we shall all become. What we see in Jesus is the life-force which brought everything into being, both in our world and in worlds unknown to us. Jesus is the clue to what its all about.'* (Col 1: 15 & 16, ONE version)

# Six days in Kosova

For Phil Jump, Minister of New Addington Baptist Church, Surrey, a trip to Kosovo was a shattering experience that he'll never forget.

(Phil's visit was organised by *'Smile International'*, a registered charity founded by Baptist Minister Clive Doubleday and his wife Ruth.

If I'm honest, it wasn't my idea to go. The first I knew about it was when a group of Kosova Albanian refugees accosted Jan, my wife, in the school playground. "Phil is going to Kosova?" they enquired excitedly.

My last expedition with Clive Doubleday had been a college roadshow to Torquay, but I figured that if I was going to go to Kosova with anyone it would be *Smile International*. I am grateful to the London Baptist Association and BMS World Mission for providing the funds to make it possible.

No matter how you try, it's impossible to pack up the experiences of those six days into any sort of article. We'd all heard the stories of atrocity and war, but now we were coming face to face with the people to whom it had happened. How can I describe the feeling of watching a man struggling to untie my laces because his thumbs had been cut off by Serbian soldiers? Yet I had to let him express his hospitality and gratitude that we cared enough to call by. I have prayed out loud in churches and concert halls, to congregations of thousands and nothing but a handful, but how can I convey the overwhelming but privileged struggle of leading the prayers at the newly-made graves of the men who had been massacred in a tiny, unprotected hamlet near the Kosovan border?

## To rebuild

No prose can capture the miles upon miles of destruction that lines every road in this

war-ravaged land. No words can adequately describe the sense of anguish, despair, disbelief and downright anger which at times we all shared. You have to go there yourself, if you are ever to fully appreciate the extent to which fallen humanity can descend in destroying our fellow human beings, or the joy and privilege of helping those who have survived to rebuild their shattered lives.

For amidst this systematic and brutal destruction there are embers of hope.

The smiling faces of children now able to sleep in their home again because *Smile* have provided them with a roof. The warm embrace of a farmer now able to re-start the cycle of seedtime and harvest, thanks to a simple supply of seeds. The quiet gratitude of a head teacher who tells us that it would have taken 10 years to repaint his school without *Smile's* help. The thoughtful smile of a widow and bereaved mother, whose dignity is restored by the provision of a cow, which can restore a basic livelihood to her family. This is God's love in action, a powerful and indisputable expression of "Good News to the poor and release to the oppressed."

## Repairing broken lives

I sometimes think of *Smile* as the charity that reaches parts which others don't. Sure there are multi-million pound, United Nation relief operations going on in Kosova, but there are many families who slip through the net. Even in a country that is almost entirely dependent upon the UN

for every aspect of its national life, there are still the haves and the have-nots, and *Smile* is seeking to reach out to those who have least. That's why they need our ongoing support.

So what difference can ten people make in just six days in a country like Kosova? Apart from being able to come home and share first hand the needs of this tiny struggling country, our trip was worth while for many reasons. An impromptu concert on the steps of a school, returning fun and laughter into the lives of children whose eyes have witnessed unthinkable cruelty. The willingness to be the guest of a family who feared that their very race might be wiped out and forgotten. The privilege of praying for and ministering to fellow Christians, who have been called to live and work permanently in this hurting and shattered land. The chance to share laughter, food and news from home with

those whose ministry in Kosova will continue long after our departure.

When I got home someone asked me if I had enjoyed my trip to Kosova – I didn't know how to answer. You cannot enjoy picking your way through the rubble of someone's destroyed home, or photographing the grave of their murdered husbands and brothers.

But ask me if it was fulfilling and enriching; ask me if I grew spiritually; ask me was it a privilege to play a tiny part in the work that *Smile* is doing to repair broken lives; ask me if I would go again; ask me if you should go too and the answer is an overwhelming - YES! **bmj**

Footnote: This article originally appeared in the first issue of the magazine *Smile International* (Spring 2001), and has been reproduced at the request of Clive Doubleday, BMF's International Correspondent.

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## j – mail

### **Black Baptist Christians**

*from Fabian Best, former President, London Baptist Preachers' Association, 1999/2001*

Dear Journal, I was very pleased to read three items in the October 2000 *Journal* that helped me to focus on some of the issues of the day.

First, I read Michael Bochenski's review of *Dread and Pentecostal* by Robert Beckford, which he found so painful after his Presidential travels. It is good that he was able to share something of his growing pains with us and acknowledged that he learnt something from it. Perhaps this would stir others of his colleagues to do something similar to make the Black

Christians within the Baptist Churches feel more at home.

Second, I read Albert Richards's interview with the BMF group, *Are Preachers born or made?* I found the answers interesting and fascinating, but was disappointed because it seems there was a lack of black perspective.

Third, I read Sean Winter's article, *Preaching from Luke*. I found this to be quite informative, opening up the gospel in a new way. I have also come to the conclusion that Luke is the gospel of Social Inclusion (Luke 15:2), and a gospel we should focus our attention on now and in the coming years. **bmj**

# Book Reviews

*Edited by John Houseago*

***Jesus after 2000 years: What he really said and did.* Gerd Lüdemann. SCM Press. 695 pages. £30.00.**

In this mammoth book, Lüdemann covers the Synoptics and Thomas, two collaborators look at John and the Apocryphal Traditions, to pronounce on the authenticity of sayings and incidents.

The book is a classic illustration of how presuppositions determine conclusions. Lüdemann starts from radical premises concerning the Jesus-traditions. Not surprisingly, therefore, he lets few verses through his critical net (set out on pages 694-95), and these are mainly sayings rather than episodes. Few Baptist ministers will enjoy such a dose of scepticism.

The publisher's claim "that even those without technical training can follow" the investigation seems to me to be absurd. One needs an acquaintance with Germanic scholarship to appreciate where Lüdemann is coming from.

No one would wish to deny that considerable shaping of sayings and episodes has gone in the Synoptics, the process reaching its climax in John. An honest use of a Synopsis reveals that. The issue is whether the wholesale invention Lüdemann assumes has occurred, whether we assume inauthenticity unless authenticity can be proved or assume authenticity unless inauthenticity imposes itself.

The final chapter (pp686-93) offers a short life of Jesus, including half a page on Lüdemann's own reaction to Jesus. He says he cannot take seriously Jesus' enthusiasm and believes Jesus to be almost ridiculous in his confident dialogue with God and how he saw himself at the centre *Baptist Ministers' Journal* July 2001

of the world. This verdict greatly saddened me. The critical method is here joined to extreme scepticism. That this is not the only possible combination is proved by those who handle scripture with scholarly precision and with reverence springing from a faith perspective.

Most Baptist ministers would see this book offering stones, not bread. If one has £30 to spend on a book on Jesus, Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God* would be a far better buy.

**John E Morgan-Wynne,  
Ilkley Baptist Church.**

***Doing Theology in a Baptist Way.* Paul S. Fiddes (editor), Brian Haymes, Richard L. Kidd & Michael Quicke. Whitley Publications, 2000. ISBN 09528150 9 5 £3.00**

The five essays in this collection are based on papers given at a consultation on 'Doing Theology in a Baptist Way' held in August, 1999. The consultation grew out of the authors' experience as members of a wider group that met over twenty years, seeking to do theology in a Baptist way. The group's story is Chapter Two in this book. In Chapter One Brian Haymes argues that doing theology in a collegiate way is one of four 'Baptist distinctives'. The others are: having a theology that is always being renewed, that is a reflection on practice and that has a provisionality about it.

In chapter three Paul Fiddes argues for a theology related to a community's experience of God, its confession of its faith and its own story. But how does one identify a 'Baptist community'? I feel uneasy with his solution of spelling 'baptist' with a small 'b' and emphasising the

individual's decision to 'identify' with others. It opens the way to the 'consumerist' approach typified in W.C. Roof's book 'A Generation of Seekers' by the man who described himself as 'primarily' Roman Catholic, but who also attended an ecumenical prayer group and frequently went to an evangelical protestant church because he enjoyed its 'good preaching'. Perhaps the balance to this 'shopping around' is to be found in the central role Paul Fiddes gives to 'covenanting' together.

Richard Kidd's essay describes something of his own spiritual journey and concludes with a 'manifesto' of key themes which he sees raised by liberation theologies and as crucially significant for Baptists: scripture, community, mission, discipleship and conversion. Finally, Michael Quicke argues that preaching still has a vital role to play today, provided the sermon is a 'corporate preaching event' involving the congregation. Drawing on his own experience in the pastorate he gives some indications of what this might mean.

This is a very readable, thought-provoking set of essays which will encourage others to 'do theology in a Baptist way'.

**Ernest Lucas.**

**Vice-Principal and Tutor in Biblical Studies, Bristol Baptist College.**

**1 & 2 Kings (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary) Walter Brueggemann. Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2000 xx11 + 645pp. £40.**

Walter Brueggemann is a noted OT scholar who has spent many years engaging with the composition and imagination of the OT, with a particular interest in issues of power and the manner in which it is exercised in societies, both ancient and modern. 1 and 2 Kings, with its focus on the fortunes of the Israelite monarchy from the death of David to the Babylonian exile,

provides an ideal arena, therefore, for him to exercise his considerable talent at helping the reader enter into the biblical drama. Devoting little attention to questions of sources and the history of the traditions, Brueggemann chooses instead to focus on the complexities of character, events and settings portrayed in the text and to explore the theological issues presented. His style is expansive (he does have more than 600 pages to fill) and at times a little repetitious (with some annoying typos), but the vocabulary is delightfully non-technical and down-to-earth. Solomon's journey to his coronation is regarded as equivalent to travelling "in the king's limo", the Temple is described as "posh", Elijah challenges the prophets of Ba'al to "rumble" and Jezebel's threat is "the crown playing hardball".

Weightier discussions of detail and the treatment of other related topics are presented in distinctive *Sidebar*s, or special interest boxes, which are clearly linked to the main text, but avoid interrupting the flow of the basic interpretation.

For contemporary preachers the most useful material may prove to be the section entitled *Connections*, in which Brueggemann shows the contemporary relevance of the ancient text using illustrations drawn from art, current events and popular culture. The "down" side for the British reader however is that most of the focus is on the American scene. It would be easy therefore to attempt to duck the force of his heavy critique of the more exploitative aspects of US government policy and the easy popular consumerism of the affluent American citizen. On the other hand there are probably sufficient parallels in attitudes and lifestyles in this country to make his statements challenging and his penetrating observations distinctly disturbing. They may even serve as a catalyst for those wishing to sharpen the cutting edge of their

own prophetic calling. Brueggemann may approach the text of 1 & 2 Kings with a particular agenda, (don't we all?) but he does have the knack of showing how uncomfortably relevant the word of God continues to be.

**Joy Osgood.**  
**Spurgeon's College**

***A Baptist's Theology.* Edited by R Wayne Stacey. Published by Smith & Helwys, Macon, Georgia: 1999. £14.95. ISBN 1-573132-265-3**

This collection of essays is written by a dozen or so American scholars, and builds up into a sort of systematic theology covering all the usual issues and topics that would be dealt with in a single author book of that nature. It is written, we are told, in response to requests from those outside the Baptist community who want to 'get a handle' on the way Baptists come at these issues. But they also reflect a welcome broader approach to theological issues than has sometimes been evident from the more conservative Baptist voices in the States. The essays on Revelation and Scripture, for instance, become more significant when read against the background of the theological ferment of recent years. The essay on God begins encouragingly with a few disclaimers and a section on 'mystery'.

The essays are generally well written, with a popular touch that makes them quite accessible. A number of the contributors develop their themes with conscious reflection on Baptist historical perspectives, and as a general introduction to their subjects many of the essays work quite well, assuming little prior knowledge of their areas and with a minimum of unexplained jargon.

All this said, I have two disappointments about the book – the first in regard to content. The essays are pretty 'safe' and  
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traditional, and lack a certain spark at times. True, the essay on 'Revelation' has some interesting and even brave things to say about religious pluralism, but the overall treatment is largely bible-oriented in a narrow way. The discussion of 'Communion' stays with historic issues and we never get to things like children and communion which have come to exercise us. Maybe this question of content is a cultural matter, an indication of another Baptist world quite different to our own?

More serious is my disappointment about the book's method. This is a 'Baptist Theology' – but we are told that what that means is simply one individual after another stating their own view – it is a delighting in independence with no corresponding valuing of interdependence. This is a book "in which individual Baptists, rather than just one Baptist, express their own diverse views, not attempting to speak for all .... – which no Baptist can" (p vii). Well, of course not, but is Baptist theology really just everyone holding forth and having their say? One contributor hints at another way: "My theology ... varies from that of many other Baptists. But that is the Baptist way. We are free to develop our own theological understanding in dialogue with other Baptists" (p 189). If only we had some indication of that dialogue in the compilation of this otherwise worthy and helpful book.

**Robert Ellis,**  
**Tyndale Baptist Church, Bristol**

***The Promised End; Eschatology in Theology and Literature.* Paul S Fiddes. Blackwell, Oxford. 2000. £15.99.**

The question of our end, both in the sense of our ultimate purpose and in the sense of our final condition, is one of the great issues in theology. It raises many intriguing questions; apocalypse, judgement, life after death, resurrection, the nature of eternity and the nature of time. Related



issues have also been addressed by novelists and literary critics. What is a good ending to a story? What is human destiny, if any? And to what extent are our attitudes towards these questions related?


Fiddes allows theology and literature, and occasionally science, to inform one another as he reflects on what God has in store for us. For example, Doris Lessing's work helps to develop ideas about the survival of identity after death, and a helpful reappraisal of Martin Amis's *Time's arrow* leads to some interesting thoughts about repentance, atonement and judgement.

Fiddes builds helpfully on some of the ideas about the Trinity explored in *Participating in God*, including the image of the divine dance in which we share, to offer a vision of eternal life which satisfies

both the key philosophical questions and our cry for a truly fulfilled human life. His final reflections on the New Jerusalem draw on Blake, Augustine and G.B. Caird to present a vision of our destiny as "a closure with openness at its heart. City and dance, dwelling and movement are complementary images for the promised end which is nothing less than to move and dwell in God."

This book succeeds in finding fresh insights into eschatology at the interface of religion and literature and is a fine achievement. It is not always an easy book to read but is always a worthwhile one. It will send you back to the Scriptures and to the books Fiddes discusses in order to engage in reflections of your own.

**Steve Finamore,**  
**Westbury-on-Trym Baptist Church.**



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