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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

"There is nothing practical that may not also be theological." Tempting though it is to make the one a direct equation with the other, I still hesitate to state that every practical matter is of itself theological. The notion of 'spirituality' has gone that way in recent years, to the point of becoming a buzz-word which is on the verge of burning out. It is up to us to discern and spell out good and bad theological implications, not to collapse distinctions between words and concepts.

However there is nothing theological that is not also practical. The affirmation in the Fourth Gospel that "the Word became flesh" is prelude to a whole tapestry of belief-faith-practice-doing whose richness is drawn out with the help of vocabulary which shades from one to the other and back again.

It has become clearer to evangelical Christians that the "praxis" beloved of Liberation Theologians is not a special interest sphere but has to do with the heart of the Gospel.

Three articles from urban contexts in this issue of the Journal draw this out in different ways, with David Shosanya's piece reflecting on Gun Crime and the response of Baptist Christians in particular drawing specific attention to Liberation Theology's methodology.

That the context of mission is practical and mundane is self-evident – we act and live within the parameters of this world, even though its boundaries are broken by the scope of God's Kingdom drawn near in Christ. Practical and mundane matters of ministerial employment have been prominent in discussions recently, and were a significant matter on the agenda of the last Baptist Ministers' Fellowship

Committee. Implications of changes in the law concerning flexible working hours are just one area that potentially affects ministers in their working relationship with their churches. Behind this, however, lies the larger question of whether our status is that of employee or office holder, and which is likely to be the case in the foreseeable future. Stephen Holmes has brought a theological perspective to this debate, and we hope to follow this up later in the year with further news of how the Ministry Department of BUGB is following through the discussions with Government on our behalf.

I am particularly grateful for the range of ideas and material which is forthcoming from readers of the Journal, and would simply note that constraints of space and quarterly publication sometimes makes it impossible to use absolutely everything that comes our way. Members of the Editorial Board are committed to commissioning articles on matters that are (or should be) important to Baptist Ministers, but are conscious that the Journal is neither an extended commentary on BMF committee meetings nor a publication akin to a Trades' Union newsletter. If you feel otherwise, J-mail would be glad to hear from you!" **bmj**

"I always knew...that freedom gives birth to suffering, while the refusal to be free diminishes suffering... freedom is hard; it is a heavy burden."

(Nicolas Berdyaev)

# Urban Expressions: Christians in the inner city in search of an alternative language

**Andy Bruce, Mansfield Road Baptist Church, Nottingham, investigates church-planting and missionary-being through 'Urban Expression'.**

Urban is a word to which I have always responded warmly. To me it suggests not blight or decay, but life, potential and variety. As a minister in an urban church, the prospect of a sabbatical in the autumn of 2002 took me in search of an urban experience that would give me a different perspective. I found it among a network of church planters in East London, gathered under the banner of "Urban Expression". Our way of speaking about what we were engaged in became one of the main areas of reflection during my stay.

## **Origins**

Urban Expression began in 1997 as a counter-cultural church planting initiative, focusing specifically on the inner city. Traditional church planting was often unsuccessful in the inner city, if it was attempted at all. The reason seemed to be that suburban models of mission and of church were not appropriate vehicles for the gospel in that context, but these models were constantly being reinforced in evangelical Christian circles. Alternatives had to be discovered if the Christian decline in the inner cities was to be reversed, and this became Urban Expression's purpose. The mission statement, written before any work on the ground actually began, set the tone: "Urban Expression recruits, equips, deploys and supports self-financing teams to pioneer innovative and relevant expressions of the Christian church in under-churched areas of the inner city."

Five years on there are six centres, three in Tower Hamlets at Shadwell, Stepney and Wapping, and three more to the east of the River Lea at Forest Gate, Leyton and Plaistow. As might be expected from something avowedly experimental, there is no blueprint. The teams come in different

shapes but one size – small! Experience has taken these examples of urban church far from the management jargon of that early mission statement. One of my sabbatical tasks was to facilitate discussions about Urban Expression's 'Values' document. Did it still describe the vision? Did it reflect what had actually developed, or were some new words required to convey a true picture?

## **Which words to use?**

Words paint pictures: they also reveal our own heart. They often communicate not just by their technical definitions but by the emotional resonance they create. Word association exercises can be very telling because they reveal the images and impressions conveyed by a word. Exclusive language excludes because certain words and phrases provoke a negative gut response that means nothing else can be heard. If what we say is taken wrongly, we may indignantly claim that our vocabulary is innocent, but we must be careful - it's not all in the mind of the listener. What prejudices and assumptions are we signalling if we refer to all people as "he" or to anything bad as "black"? Theological language also works in two ways: the intended meaning and the

images that attend the words themselves.

As enthusiastic and committed young Christians, the pioneers of Urban Expression naturally brought with them traditional evangelical language. Words like 'Christian', 'evangelism', 'conversion', 'salvation', and 'commitment' were deeply embedded their vocabulary. But the desire to find "innovative and relevant" church in the inner city had taken them into uncharted waters. Models of church, patterns of mission and ministry and indeed theological words and phrases inculcated in a suburban environment were of little use. People began to respond and forms of church started to emerge in ways that did not always conform to expectations.

Supporters from the suburbs often unwittingly illustrated the problem by asking inappropriate questions. "How many people do you have?" It would have been better to ask about local people's willingness to build relationships or about new discoveries of God revealed in the city, but these were questions that did not come easily in their native tongue. The inner city quickly disposed of the language of goals, targets and measurable results. Warm open relationships characterised by friendliness, patience and acceptance became far more important and so different patterns of intention and expectation took root. Experience was starting to shape theology, but often without a language to give it voice.

I found all this exciting and attractive. It was highly relational. People mattered, friendships mattered, and the God of surprises was to be found at work in even the most unpromising situations. The theological motif of incarnation was the one that seemed most helpful, but the language used was not always in harmony with it. At one time a group of us were

talking about engaging with the local community. One of the team members tried to summarise. "What we're trying to do," she declared, "is win people for Christ." The associations of this phrase struck me as being a million miles from what the group was actually committed to. *Winning* people, prising them out of one reality and into another suggested that they became God's only when they assented to what Christians proclaimed to them. It cast those who were in reality friends and neighbours in the role of targets, whose real value lay in the possibility that they might be "won". Besides that, the whole notion of "winning" contradicted the one value that everyone agreed was the most important in Urban Expression, that of humility, of not having all the answers. Sure enough, when I raised some of these doubts in the ensuing conversation it became clear that what was commonly understood by the traditional phrase was not what was meant. Its crusading language came out of a theology and practice that had been superseded. In discussion "winning people for Christ" became "helping everyone to take a step nearer Jesus, whatever their starting point." I sensed that a faltering new language was starting to emerge.

All of this is very easy for an observer to report. Within Urban Expression there is plenty of evangelistic passion and most of the team members still instinctively reach for that familiar language. What the values discussions revealed, however, is that most of them are aware that they have moved on in practice and have left some of the old certainties behind. This is illustrated by the three following scenarios, each coming from a different Urban Expression church.

### **The language of salvation**

Steve, an habitual drug user, was one of Urban Expression's first local contacts.

After about a year of intensive support, friendship and prayer, he became a Christian. Everyone was thrilled: here was a real success – and after all, William Carey had had to wait much longer for his first convert! Steve's new found faith made a profound difference in his life and he became a key member of the church. Then things went horribly wrong. Steve was back on drugs, and had evidently been using them again for some time. As a result Steve, who had gone away to work on a Christian project, returned home with his tail between his legs. His friends at church were devastated. They were upset for Steve and shared his pain and guilt, but they also felt let down and angry. Their faith in "anyone who is in Christ is a new creation" was shaken. Was Steve's conversion genuine? Had it really been salvation that he had experienced? Perhaps he had been living a lie all along, just pushing the right buttons to get a good response. Was his Christian experience invalidated by his fall from grace?

In the way we normally use it, "new creation" implies an instantaneous act with no human element: God simply acts miraculously. New Creationists rarely have time for evolution. In fact, the entire language of salvation and conversion implies fixed categories: a sinful former state, a defining experience of transformation, the gift of new life and the assurance of future hope. Steve's experience blurred these boundaries. It was not possible to be certain in the way that the language seemed to require. There was obviously a human element in Steve's "salvation", but did acknowledging this human dimension mean that God was no longer involved? Was it just that the reality was more complex and perhaps less individualistic?

Because in church-speak Steve was described, and described himself, as

"saved", it was a shock when he fell short. If the language had avoided the implication of certainty and permanence and had instead used more provisional terms such as those of discovery and journey – turning, responding, following – perhaps both the highs and the lows of Steve's adventure with Christ would have been viewed more realistically. Which of us is ever truly "saved"? With us humans, sinfulness is always going to be part of the equation. But even when we stumble, we can aspire to be disciples and it is then that the grace of God becomes most apparent.

### **The language of church**

"Church" is a term that is often laid embarrassingly bare by word association. Most of us carry so much baggage, so many impressions of church, both good and bad, that theological considerations barely get a look-in! When Urban Expression conceived of itself as *church* planting, it took on assumptions that were always going to be problematic.

One day the leader of the Urban Expression church in Wapping shared a vision with the group. Given their strong links with the local psychiatric hospital, the constant stream of patients being discharged into the immediate neighbourhood and the leader's own sense of calling to work in the field of mental health, was God prompting the church to focus specifically on this area of ministry? Perhaps the church could begin a support group, welcoming people who might otherwise be very isolated because of their illness? They could offer friendship and hospitality, building supportive relationships where healing might take place.

Immediately the discussion centred on whether such a small church could take on such a big work. On one level this reflected a practical concern about the level of need that they might find

themselves dealing with, but there was also an underlying anxiety about what might happen to the church itself.

"Church" was a very intimate experience. The group was small. They knew each other extremely well and enjoyed a high degree of confidence when they came together. They all "sang from the same hymn sheet", so that prayer, bible study and the sharing of spiritual insights could all happen without much need to explain or interpret what was being said. Instinctively they realised that the kind of relational ministry that was being envisaged could not leave the nature of "being church" unchanged. They could not build separate relationships with Christians and non-Christians, or with those who were mental health patients and those who were not. It would be unthinkable to ask those who had not made a commitment to leave the room when they shared bread and wine. The friendship and acceptance that was at the heart of their own experience of church was precisely what was likely to prove life-giving to someone who was struggling with illness. The church itself would have to *become* the support group. It would no longer be possible to rely on everyone having the same framework of understanding and experience.

The list of implications was daunting! What would this mean for membership and commitment? Could they cope with a church with unclear boundaries, where you were never really sure who was out and who was in? How would worship, prayer and bible study need to change? Might the whole exercise of church simply subside into chaos under the weight of such needy individuals? Archbishop William Temple reportedly said that church is a society "that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members", but the challenge they would face was that these needy people from the community

would *be* the church! Could they even call it "church" any more? Clearly it is a dangerous thing to pray for God to open a door: you never know who he will bring through it!

### **The language of mission**

Mission is not a very biblical word. Its root is from the Latin *missio* - **to send**. The associations surrounding its use today are those of the strong and the weak, the saved and the unsaved, the enlightened and those in darkness. It conjures up an impression of certain attitudes and activities, some of which have been tried at different times by Urban Expression, along with more unconventional enterprises, such as free neighbourhood window cleaning! Many within Urban Expression have become increasingly sceptical about the value of organised "mission".

Members of Stepney Open Door were thinking through the idea that every Christian group should expect to divide if it is to grow. One very sociable individual, who cultivates an ever-expanding circle of friends, suggested she herself could plant another church - yes, they were still using the language of church! Her friends all know she is a Christian and often there are intense theological discussions late into the night. Some have visited the church in Stepney but whether they have or not, she sees all these relationships as being God-given. To be a disciple of Jesus means showing Jesus to her friends, it's as simple as that. Many Christians try to juggle their commitment to church with having sufficient time for other friendships. For her there was no conflict, as mission, church and social life all happened at the same time!

It is often difficult to bring the working life of Christians or even their voluntary commitments in the community into the


orbit of spirituality and discipleship when the traditional language of mission is used. However, at Stepney those members who were in paid or voluntary work spoke freely about the issues they faced and the personalities they were dealing with. These concerns lay at the heart of the prayer-life of the church and other members frequently offered practical support and looked for ways of getting involved themselves. The normal lines of demarcation didn't apply because the idea of commitment to other people and situations as a natural way of life was replacing the need to label certain activities as "mission". The distinction strikes me as similar to that made by the prophet Micah when he speaks against religious offerings and instead commands the people "to do what is right, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." (6:8)

**bmj**

## To be continued...

The process of reinventing language is never complete. As I wrote up the Values discussions I came up with what strikes me as a more helpful Mission Statement, suggesting images and impressions true to what I saw of Urban Expression. *"Small local communities of Christians, serious about seeking and sharing God in the inner city, embracing humility not arrogance, relationships not institutions, kingdom not church."* This at least conveys something of the flavour of Urban Expression that I tasted, but I realise that the language makes a lot of assumptions!

To discover more about Urban Expression, visit their website at [www.urbanexpression.org.uk](http://www.urbanexpression.org.uk) or contact Juliette & Jim Kilpin on 020 7790 8716



**BMM**

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# A theological response to the death of Damilola Taylor and the events following

**Roy Dorey, North Peckham Baptist Church reflects on temporary political and media profile and the continuing presence of the church.**

The Baptist Union Estates Group met in June 2002 to consider ministry in housing estates and the impact of the Good News of Jesus upon them. This paper was written following that discussion.

## **A tragic death**

The death of Damilola Taylor in November 2000, on an estate in North Peckham in South London, was a tragedy at a number of levels. It was, of course a great tragedy for Damilola and his family. No child should die in such circumstances. No parent expects to have their child die before they do, and if that death is a violent one it is especially tragic. Furthermore the depth of the tragedy for the family has been increased by the failure of the justice system to find and effectively prosecute and convict anyone of his death.

Without minimising the tragedy for Damilola and his parents in any way, it has been a tragedy for the estate and the people of the estate where he was living, and where he died. It has had ramifications for his school, and for the community in which he was so recent an arrival.

The North Peckham estate at the time of the death of Damilola was 16 months away from the end of a Single Regeneration Budget scheme, to replace much of the housing, to alter some of the layout and street patterns, and to generally make it a better place to live in. Millions of pounds had been spent on this, following consultation with a wide range of people, not least those who lived on the estate and the faith community there.

Prior to the SRB scheme the aerial walkways had been removed, and some street patterns changed to make it a safer place to be. During the five years prior to the death of Damilola blocks of flats had been vacated and boarded up, and then pulled down. New, lower rise buildings had been erected. It was an area facing great changes.

The estate houses about 8,500 people. As result of the redevelopment that is about 15 – 20% less than before, although the housing waiting list for the London Borough of Southwark runs into thousands. On the edges of the estate property has been built for owner occupation, and housing associations have increased their presence. Overall the residents are those housed from local authority lists. There is a substantial African and Afro-Caribbean presence, with others from Turkey and Vietnam. Many languages are spoken domestically. Comparatively few people from the 60 plus age group live there, with a larger proportion of under 25 year olds and those of school age particularly represented. Unemployment levels are high particularly amongst the decade following leaving school. There is a strong Christian presence with 'more evangelical car stickers than you will find at the Keswick convention' (to quote a church member). Many choose to meet with and worship with people of their own ethnic group, some in halls and rooms on the estate, but many off it.

It was in this situation that Damilola met his death. He was a victim. In specific personal terms we are not sure now of whom he was a victim, and leaving aside the 'nudges and wink-winks' of many people we have to say that there was not enough evidence to convict anyone, and it is still an open case.

### **Many victims**

What has happened since his death has demonstrated that he has also been the victim of the media and of local and national politics. So has the estate and the people who live on the estate. The press has vilified Peckham in general and the North Peckham Estate in particular. Photographs and camera shots have shown the stair-well where Damilola was found, and this is accurate reporting. The impression the general public has is that this is what the whole estate is like, although it was in a building which had been emptied so that it could be pulled down and new housing go up. A 180 degree change of viewpoint would have shown some of the new development. This media impact has not been helped by self-appointed 'local community leaders' expressing views which owe more to self-advertisement than to the opinions I have heard from many living on the estate. The overall impression given in the media, both press and television, is that it is a dangerous place to be, that gangs roam the streets, and that people live in terror behind closed doors.

That is not the case. I have spoken to people living there. North Peckham Baptist Church is at the heart of the estate. I walk across the estate frequently and do not feel intimidated. The place where Damilola was found mortally wounded is two turnings away from the church. People who had to move out for the regeneration to take place are wanting to move back in. Some who have lived there

for over twenty years are not wanting to move out.

My argument is that the estate and the people of the estate have been made a scapegoat for what are essentially national issues, and provoked by the powerlessness of the political will to do anything about it. Rene Girard has developed the concept of the scapegoat theologically in terms of communities, and I consider his insights to be directly relevant to this situation.

The political use, and I would say abuse, of the sad death of Damilola demonstrates this. Under the umbrella of marking the seriousness of his death both local and national politicians have sought to make capital out of it. They have continued and strengthened the whole concept of nominating the estate as a 'bad place to be' and by doing this have made it a victim and a scapegoat.

The sports centre which is next to the Baptist Church, known as the Warwick Centre because it is linked to the local Warwick Park Secondary School, has been renamed 'The Damilola Centre.' This was the action of local government. The person who came down to mark the re-naming was Tony Blair, the prime minister. It is good that Damilola was remembered. It is bad that it has been used to make political capital for local and national government. Such an action may or may not have brought comfort to the family of Damilola. What it has done is to perpetuate the estate as 'the place where Damilola died.' Further, it implicates the people of the estate as the 'people who are so disregarding of human values that they are responsible for Damilola's death.' The estate is the guilty one in the eyes of the media, and for many it feels like that. If the media express any view that the estate is a victim itself then they take opportunity to make a very loud political

noise about it. Many of those who live there feel they are the victims of those in authority and of the media.

On the first anniversary of the death of Damilola a service of remembrance was held in St Luke's parish church. That church is also at the heart of the estate. The church was packed. The preacher was the Most Reverend George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury. As one local person said to me 'Over the top or what!' Many local councillors and council officials were present, struggling to keep up the pretence of Christian faith, but not wanting to be left out. Whatever the comfort the service was to Damilola's family, it was another engineered political and media event. Again it was rubbing the estate's nose in what was seen as its own dirt, as a violent place to live.

The police have increased their presence on the estate since the death of Damilola. A police sergeant is accountable to a more senior officer for the beat patrols and overall police presence. If you walk across the estate at any time you are more likely to see a police man or woman than before. For those who see such sporadic presence as reassuring this is a good thing. The evidence from other locations is not clear that it does make the streets safer places to be.

I consider that the police are also victims in this situation. The self-righteous newspapers which put great pressure on them to bring to justice the perpetrators of this crime did not make their job any easier. They also were caught up in the strange collaboration of media and politics, and the eyes of the nation were upon them. Like many victims they were party to their downfall, they and the director of public prosecutions. It must be remembered that this is 'Lawrence Country.' Stephen Lawrence, his death

and the way the police handled it, are live issues. The enquiry took place at the Elephant and Castle, which is about two miles away. Despite this, and the criticisms levelled at the police by that enquiry and the report, they did not deliver a credible case as far as the judge and jury were concerned. More than that, despite guidelines about the need for special training for interviewers of children the person most involved in interviewing the key witness for the prosecution had not had that training. Whether or not that training would have made her a better interviewer is beside the point. They were seen to be cutting corners in something as high profile and of public note as this case.

The police were victims, but they also made victims of the young people who were prosecuted and of the witnesses called. The general opinion I have heard is that this has set back local confidence in the police yet again. For the parents and family of Damilola the way the evidence was gathered, the arrest and bringing to trial of the four young people, can only be seen as bringing them even further pain and grief.

### **An incomplete scapegoating**

The idea of victim and scapegoat is to be found in Scripture and in the way in which the Church has over the years understood Scriptural teaching. The idea that the sins of many can be placed on the head of one animal or person has fed much theology over the centuries. A key idea that is present is that once the scapegoating has been completed then the rest of the community is cleansed, or healed, or reconciled.

It is my considered view that the reason why the media has made so much of this situation relates to what is seen as a pervasive problem in our community, that of violence and street crime. It is found

all over the country. The politicians and police may be holding it at bay, but in view of more recent events this seems unlikely. They have taken a near universal of a problem and particularised it in this case. By pointing up how bad the North Peckham estate is they have implied that they are good. If we can all focus on North Peckham then perhaps nowhere else will seem so bad. I am not suggesting that any of this is theologically worked out by the media or the politicians, or even exposed to 'Blue Penguin' psychology. I am saying that this is what is happening.

The fact that politicians have gone along with this, and even colluded with it expresses their sense of powerlessness. If you can show moral indignation on a national platform about something that essentially is morally culpable, then you are seen to be on the side of the angels (even if you do not believe in angels). Perhaps there is the hope that by such public demonstrations they can be seen to be doing something, when in my estimation they are making things worse.

With much doubt being cast on what actually happened on the day Damilola died, and with no-one convicted of the crime, the scapegoating is incomplete. The goat has not run off into the wilderness. The cross is not empty. There is no resurrection. The estate is 'still harbouring the guilty ones.' The fact that people have not come forward to put the finger on those who are guilty and to provide the evidence for it demonstrates again the wickedness of the local community and also the terror in which people live. The media want it both ways. The police cry out for co-operation, and the implication of some of their statements is that the estate is as guilty as the perpetrators. As in all scapegoating situations there is a complexity of messages and half-messages being given.

Non-one would say that Peckham or North Peckham are Utopias. It has its tear-aways. It has its bullies. It has its groups of young people who are seen as a threat to others. It has its unemployment and low school achievement. It has a history of having been let down by the authorities over many years. After all, every SRB project in an area like Peckham is an indication of the failure of national and local government to get it right in the first place. The Baptist church in North Peckham was put up in 1870 in the middle of market gardens. The estate they demolished to make way for this new development was only 30 or so years old. The schools of the London Borough of Southwark have had a chequered career in the past, although many are doing very good work now. North Peckham is an area in transition seeking to settle down to be home to many people who enrich the whole of our society. It can do without being vilified, or to use a theological word 'demonised.' That is what it feels like to many people.

### **The church's testimony**

In the face of three institutional giants like the media, national and local government the church takes its place in a number of ways. It will continue to be a presence when all three in their fickleness have moved on to new issues, ones which sell more newspapers, attract more viewers, and make political capital afresh. When the bandwagon has passed on the church will be there, as it has been for 130 years. It will continue to be a pastoral support to those who live under the shadow of the false judgements made by others. The process has been to under-value the people of North Peckham, and the church will continue with its quiet way of letting people know that the value God puts on them is sacrificial, and not the outcome of other ego inflating institutions. On the right occasions and in the right forums it

will continue to testify to the God of Good News, who can speak of justice and forgiveness, of being present in suffering and pain, and of bringing reconciliation. It will not hit the headlines, but it will be

with integrity – a missing factor in all of this. **bmj**

## More Holidays 2003

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# London has gun mad: is there a challenge for Baptist Ministers?

**David Shosanya, Chalk Farm Baptist Church, London**

Obsessions with our own insularity will not meet the challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. People will not hear us better because we shout the same things louder, but because we say them more clearly.  
(Joel Edwards, General Director, Evangelical Alliance)

The murder of Birmingham teenagers Charlene Ellis and Letisha Shakespear in the early hours of January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2003 brought to the attention of the whole nation what we in the black community already knew: guns are readily available, gunmen are reaping havoc, and no-one is immune from gun crime<sup>1</sup>.

## **The facts**

Gun crime figures for London tripled in 2002, making them the highest incidents of gun crime since 1993. Between January-August 2002, gun related murder had increased by 87% in comparison to the same period in 2001. Gang related shootings increased by 133%, murders involving black drug gangs increased by 77% from January 2001 to January 2002, and armed muggings increased by 53% - from 435 to 667 incidents. During the 10 months to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2002 there were 939 firearms incidents - an increase of 617 incidents in the same period the previous year. There is no doubt that gun crime is on the increase<sup>2</sup> and that it represents a serious threat to society.

## **The availability of guns**

Guns are easily available in London through illegal dealers. After a shooting incident at Nando's chicken restaurant in Shepherd's Bush a reporter for ES Magazine (The Evening Standard) interviewed a witness who commented that guns were as easy to purchase as 'a bag of chips'. The reporter decided to test

this claim. He made contact with a recently retired armed robber named Chris who took him to a Catford pub where firearms are easily available. After making a few calls Chris returns to their table 'with a cheeky grin on his face' and simply says, "it'll take 20 minutes ... less time than it takes to deliver a pizza and plenty of time for another drink. Same again?' A man arrives in just over 30 minutes and nods his head at Chris. The three men retreat into a cubicle in the pub toilets where a Browning high power 9mm hand gun is produced.

Guns are also very affordable. A .32 automatic weapon can easily be purchased for around £100, a .9mm for £250, a Glock machine gun for £900 or a Mach 10 for around £1, 200. A new Brocock<sup>3</sup> MO38 Magnum air pistol can be purchased without any license requirements for £150. A second-hand Brocock air pistol can be purchased for as little as £30.

## **Institutional Responses Operation Trident**

The Metropolitan Police are so concerned with the increasing use of guns that in 2000 the commissioner established the Trident squad with specific responsibility for investigating black-on-black<sup>4</sup> gang and drug—related shootings and murders. While Trident has had some success in combating gun crime, shooting incidents and gang-related murders have continued

to rise in the black community. Conviction rates are low due to fear of reprisals and direct witness intimidation. I was recently a guest panellist on a radio debate with the sister of a young man who was shot dead in Soho. Despite over one hundred people being present in the immediate vicinity of the shooting (in effect witnesses) no one person, except a young lady, appears to have seen the incident. Having had the courage to come forward as a witness to make a statement to the police she refused to sign it after her life was threatened. The killer cannot be prosecuted due to a lack of witnesses.

### **A Gun Amnesty**

Can a guns amnesty reduce gun crime? I do not think so. This is not a new idea. It has been suggested in the recent past and rejected. An amnesty is more of a knee jerk reaction to the escalating incidents of gun crime than a strategic strike. It smacks more of the need for government to be seen to be doing something about the situation than anything else. The last occasion a government announced an amnesty was after the Dunblane disaster when school children were killed by a deranged gunman. A few thousand guns were recovered and taken out of circulation. The situation however has not improved but worsened! The statistics confirm that fact. Besides, it is naïve optimism in the extreme to expect hardened criminals, whose guns are 'tools of the trade', to surrender their weapons to the police and (literally) leave themselves defenceless in the face of a potential attack from a rival gang-member or drug dealer.<sup>5</sup>

### **Stiffer Sentences**

Hackney MP Dianne Abbott has championed the call for a mandatory five-year jail sentence for individuals caught in possession of a firearm. Stiffer sentences were mooted by the Home Secretary after the murder of Charlene Ellis and Letisha Shakespear. However, the government

had to do a U-turn after judges objected to the government's encroachment on their legal right to discretionary and autonomous sentencing procedures. As with the amnesty proposal, I am not convinced that stiffer jail sentences will either reduce or deter criminals from using guns. Simplistic approaches to reducing gun crime such as these demonstrate a profound lack of insight into the complex socio-psychological and socio-economic factors that influence and motivate the behaviour of many gunmen. Take the Soho incident for example, where the killer was heard speaking to a friend on a mobile phone as he sped away from the crime scene, saying that he 'did not mean to hurt' his victim and that, 'he would be alright'.

### **Is there any hope?**

While there are no simple or single answers that can be proposed as the definitive remedy for the reduction in gun crime, research is beginning to provide insights into models that work, as well as why they are working.

### **The role of the church**

Two locations, Trench town<sup>6</sup> in Kingston Jamaica and Boston in the United States, have seen significant reductions in gun crime. Empirical social science research has demonstrated that where inroads are being made the church has and continues to play a crucial role.

### **The Boston Miracle<sup>7</sup>**

Between 1990 and 1996 the Boston homicide rate fell by 61.2%, from 152 to 59 homicides. The rate continued to fall to 43 homicides in 1997 and 35 in 1998 - a drop of 77% since 1990. Perhaps more significantly, for the 29 month period ending January 1998 not a single Boston teenager was killed, although in 1999 four teenagers were lost to gun crime.

As a result of the phenomenal decline in youth homicides, academics began to

ask how such change come about. Three schools of thought emerged: The first, championed by Harvard academics Jenny Berrien and Christopher Winship<sup>8</sup> and John J. Dilulio Jr, a leading policy and 'faith factor' research scientist and founding director of CRUCCS (Centre for Research on Religion and urban Civil Society) attributes the significant reduction in youth homicide to 'the preacher end of Boston's public/private justice systems partnerships'.<sup>9</sup> Others have argued that the role of the preachers was minimal and that the reduction in youth homicide resulted from new policing techniques and inter-agency collaboration. The third view held is that specific anti-gun initiatives – The Boston Gun Project<sup>10</sup> for example – and neither the applied use of academic theories, nor the ministers, were the essential factors that facilitated a reduction in gun crime<sup>11</sup>.

### **Social capital: the church's underutilised commodity**

While commentators on the Boston Miracle do not explicitly use the phrase social capital, it is nevertheless evident in their writing and underpins much of what they have to say about the influence of the Boston Ten-point Coalition. Mutuality, trust and reciprocity have been identified as some of the classic characteristics of social capital. These characteristics are perceived by social scientists and political strategists to be evident where churches develop co-operative relationships with their host communities.

By drawing upon its social capital The Ten Point Coalition was able to play a significant and strategic role. It was able to broker a working relationship between communities that were deeply distrustful of the police and other criminal justice agencies<sup>12</sup> and consequently assist to reduce gun crime and prevent unnecessary deaths. Thus, Berrien & Winship point out that the Ten-Point Coalition became

'... an intermediary institution through which decisions are made that are perceived as fair. Through their involvement with at risk youth and their interventions in situations where youth are in trouble, they have gained the legitimacy to inject a sense of justice into the situation. They have created what we call an 'umbrella of legitimacy' for the police to work under. The police are sheltered from broad public criticism while engaged in certain activities that are deemed by the ministers of the Ten Point Coalition to be in the interest of the community and its youth'.<sup>13</sup>

Is it unreasonable to suggest, given the current state of relations between the police and black communities in Britain, that Baptist ministers in fellowship with other churches/ denominations can play a similar role in our context? I think not!

I want to suggest that two cutting-edge initiatives, Guns Off Our Streets and The Street Pastors' Initiative, each adaptable to specific contexts, provide models, and present unique opportunities, for Baptist Ministers to take seriously the challenge of playing a redemptive role in transforming London's culture and seeing the kingdom of God established in this city.

### **Guns off our streets**

The Guns Off Our Streets initiative was launched in March 2002. Its purpose was 'to empower the church to be a vehicle, joining with agencies in the community to stem the tide of violence'. The church is able to do this through constructive use of its accumulated and substantial social capital. We also hoped to achieve the following objectives:

1. To raise awareness in the churches and wider community of the issues of gun crime, its increasing incidence and consequences for all sections of the community.



2. To encourage community and church leader alliances, to address the issues in their areas.
3. To encourage the church to engage the young men involved in these criminal activities, and to promote changed behaviours.

The launch was followed by a national tour covering a two-week period from the 22nd-30th May. The team visited three cities and made presentations/held discussions in five locations in London, one in Birmingham<sup>14</sup>, and one in Manchester. Each venue hosted an afternoon meeting for church and community leaders and an evening meeting open to the general public. Meetings followed a similar format - welcome/introduction, Operation Trident power-point presentation and an explanation of the 5 core values that drove the initiative. Pastors Bobby Willmott and Bruce Fletcher shared insights and strategies from their experience in Jamaica. Time was set aside in each meeting for questions and answers/discussion.

### Findings

Much reference was made to the demise of the black family especially in meetings held at the Brixton and Stonebridge venues. Many older African and Caribbean mothers and fathers felt that legislation passed over the last 30 years in respect of the rights of children, had served to undermine traditional modes of discipline, and that the crisis in the black community was a direct result of such legislation. The need for responsible black role models able to engage with young black men who were being enticed by the gangster lifestyle was stressed.

Both Pastor Willmott and Fletcher were keen to stress the urgency of the situation facing England. They repeatedly asserted that,

'The church must not wait for gun crime

to become of epidemic proportions before they arrest it (which was the mistake of the Jamaican church). It must be a concerted effort of church, community agencies, and all institutions.'

The church is currently left with no viable alternative but to break out of its four walls and to engage – what Pastor Willmott termed '*eye-balling*' (lovingly confronting) – young men in the community on their own turf.

### Street Pastors<sup>15</sup>

This initiative is a direct response to concerns raised about the need for responsible role models to engage with disaffected young men in the black community. It was recently launched at a Pastors' reception hosted at Kenyon Baptist Church in Brixton, South London.

Street Pastors will receive 12 weeks (days) of training before being commissioned to go out into their local communities and make contact with young men and women between 10:00pm and 4:00am. The Street Pastors will be encouraged to build relationships with local club/pub owners, the business community, families and individuals on the street. Each team will be co-ordinated by a designated person within the host community. The initiative starts in March 2003 in the following boroughs: Lambeth, Southwark, Hackney, Haringey and Brent.

### Towards a liberating theology

Liberation theology's<sup>16</sup> hermeneutical circle - a three-step approach to doing theology captured in the notion of seeing, acting and reflecting - represents a fundamental aspect of its exegetical methodology. It challenges the premise that one can do authentic theology without being practically involved in mission.

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In a recent article published by National Churchwatch I came across a few telling and, perhaps for some, fairly obvious characteristics relevant to Churches that make them vulnerable to these types of loss.

- Contents of churches are relatively easy to steal.
- The regular flow of people to and from the church means that not all are known to each other.
- Access to the church is encouraged.
- Activities in the church can make it easy for certain crimes, such as sneak thefts, to be committed.
- Certain church events can make it widely known that money is on the premises.
- There can be a misperception that the appearance of the Church is a sign of affluence.
- Low surveillance levels can persuade a potential offender that the risk of being caught is minimal.

Against this background I would suggest, if you have not already done so, that you consider the following as points for action where relevant.

- Look at your church as a criminal would. What could you easily steal? Is it easy to get it out of the church? Can you drive a vehicle right up to the church?
- Are there obvious points of entry? Could you funnel any intruders towards an alarmed area?
- Would your neighbours ring the police if anything suspicious happens? Reassure them that you will not mind if it is a false alarm.
- Is there anything in your church which would be a significant loss if it was stolen? If so, how are you protecting it?
- Have you carried out a general risk assessment in relation to building security?
- Put security as a fixed item in your church's budget. Every church needs extra security and to increase it over the years will ensure that if and when you do suffer from crime you will have done everything practical to limit the offence.

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Authentic theology springs from mission - from getting one's hands dirty, from being in the midst of suffering, poverty and pain, from weeping with the relatives of murder victims and taking the risk to be with them in their most vulnerable time of need. Theology is therefore an essential component of mission which should, but often does not, emerge out of having reflected on one's critical engagement with real life contexts and situations and not only from grappling with concepts presented in academic texts.

Our theology will not be relevant if it is carried out in isolation and outside the realm of reality. It must be incarnationally rooted: evolving not from a 'safe' and disconnected 'space', or from an arms-length social analysis but from the midst of the life. To be able to articulate in a meaningful manner and expect to be listened to, we need to be organically linked to real people.

This way of doing theology may not be easy to receive. However, we have to accept that we do not theologise from a position of neutrality or objectivity but from perceived and subjective reality. We ultimately decide from which point or perspective we will interpret reality and search for evidence that will assist us to build a cumulative case that demonstrates the cogency of our argument and reinforces our position. Meanwhile, the effects and implications of our choices are serious: our theologising either sustains the status-quo or liberates and radically transforms it; it either uncovers reality or obscures it; it makes Christian truth attractive or repulsive, it attracts sinners to Christ or leads them away from him. Peter Cotterell has rightly pointed out that

'The Christian mission is charged with the task of giving meaning to life, of giving hope in a world of suffering and disorder. But more than that, Christian

mission involves *acting* to oppose oppression, to bring wholeness and life, to announce Good News; reconciliation with God, and the creation of a new community, the Church, a community of love and compassion ... and of power'.<sup>17</sup>

The challenge we face as Baptist Ministers is to develop or engage with theological models and methodologies that are sensitive to and embrace the political realities, provide a framework and point of reference that allows us to making penetrating insightful analyses of social situations – and human responses to them - in order that we might make contributions to contemporary societal debates. **bmj**

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<sup>1</sup> Trident statistics indicate that shootings occur at a variety of venues including homes, pubs/clubs, between motor vehicles etc.

<sup>2</sup> During a recent BBC2 documentary (Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2002), Gunpoint London, a senior officer from Operation Trident spoke of there being between 1 and 4 million guns in London- approximately 1 gun for every 20 Londoners.

<sup>3</sup> The Brocock air pistol was the weapon used to murder taxi driver Mohammed Bashrael in Oldham. For as little as £10-£15 the Brocock is easily converted to fire live .22 bullets. 70% of London gun crime involves converted Brocock air pistols.

<sup>4</sup> There is huge debate around the issue of the term 'black-on-black' violence within the black community. The term has been challenged by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (in *The Rainbow People of God*) who argues that the phrase 'black-on-black' communicated a 'qualitative difference' in respect of the crime as well as the victim. Recently a number of high profile shootings have involved Greek and Turkish families. It will be interesting to see whether they are referred to as 'Greek-on-Greek' violence or 'Turkish-on-Turkish' violence. Part of the objection lies in the racialisation of certain types of crimes.

<sup>5</sup> During their visit to London, Pastors Willmott and Fletcher spoke of gunmen calling a cease-fire after Church leaders in Kingston were able to broker a peace deal after negotiations

between rival gangs. However, rival gang members were not willing to hand over their weapons in the event of being over-run by other gangs. Instead they would 'bury the gun' – literally – as long as the cease-fire was held by each gang. I think we can expect a similar situation in Britain.

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller insight into the Trench town story see the Guns Off Our Street Report

<sup>7</sup> For a full account of the Boston story see The Boston Strategy: A Story of Unlikely Alliances by Bettye H. Pruitt at <http://www.BostonStrategy.com>

<sup>8</sup> For a full account see Berrien. J & Winship. C, Should We have faith In The Churches? The Ten-Point Coalition's Effect On Youth Violence. A Harvard research study evaluating the contribution of the Ten Point Coalition in the reduction of youth crime and gang activity in Dorchester, one of Boston's worst neighbourhoods.

<sup>9</sup> John, J, Dulilio, Jnr, The Faith Factor: Does Religion Reduce Deviance and Cut Crime?

<sup>10</sup> See The Boston Gun project: Impact Evaluation Findings, Anthony. A. Braga et al, Harvard

<sup>11</sup> This latter views differ from those of The President of the United States, the chief of police and Mayor of Boston who all attribute a large part of the success in reducing gun

crime to the work of the Ten-Point Coalition - a groups of ministers/churches that began to patrol the streets to meet with young men and women on their own turf, and develop relationships with them.

<sup>12</sup> To understand how African-Americans perceive the criminal justice system see Randall Kennedy's Race, Crime and the Law, New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Berrien. J & Winship. C, Should We Have faith In The Churches? The Ten Point Coalition's Effect On Youth Violence, p.24.

<sup>14</sup> The Birmingham leg of the tour was hosted by Aston Christian Centre. We were not to know that less than a year later Aston Christian Centre would be mourning the death of Charlene Ellis and Letisha Shakespear - two teenagers that attended their youth group.

<sup>15</sup> For more details contact The Ascension Trust Office.

<sup>16</sup> I am not advocating adopting Liberation Theology wholesale but making use of one of the insights I think it offers to Western theology.

<sup>17</sup> Cotterrel. P. Mission & Meaninglessness, p.2, SPCK, 1990

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# On Not Muzzling Oxen: A Brief Theological Account of Ministerial Employment

Stephen R. Holmes, Ashford (Middlesex) Baptist Church & King's College, London.

**This paper was originally written at the request of the BMF Committee to feed into the debate on stipends. It is published here at their request and has been edited by the author to reflect recent discussions concerning employment rights for the clergy.**

St Paul's interpretation of the levitical ordinance prohibiting the muzzling of oxen who are treading out grain (1 Cor. 9:9) may not offer a particularly flattering metaphor for Christian ministers, but it is one of only a few texts in the New Testament that hint at the relationships that might be expected to obtain between a minister and the church s/he serves in the narrow area that we might call 'employment rights'. There is not room here to consider the hermeneutical question of the extent to which (Baptist) ministry today can be modelled on New Testament practices; nonetheless, we may observe that the central puzzle in both the New Testament and today is the same, and so perhaps look there for theological resources which will illuminate our own questions.

## Service and leadership

Ministers within BUGB (& other congregationalist contexts) apparently relate to their churches both as employees<sup>1</sup> and as leaders: they are appointed by a ballot of the church meeting, and may be dismissed similarly; equally they are expected to teach, lead and shape the church, to be the primary conduit of church discipline to church members, and so on. A pastor is etymologically a 'shepherd', whose relationship to the sheep is best described using language of 'rule', or 'control'; financially, however, ministers are paid out of the pockets of those church members whom it is their job to lead, challenge, comfort or rebuke. There is yet a third aspect to the relationship: the minister is expected to bring a perspective from without which will challenge and question the life of the church and its members. We might here compare the role to industrial (or other forms of) chaplaincy: there it is generally regarded as good

practice for the chaplain to be paid from outside the company s/he is serving, to prevent conflicts of loyalty when s/he seeks to offer a prophetic critique on individual or corporate behaviours or similar. The minister of a church is equally called to offer such challenges, but without the protection and distance created by an outside income. S/he is at once employee, leader and prophet. The tension between these three poles in this central relationship is, I think, the key issue facing us in considering ministerial employment. I believe that the same dynamic is visible in the NT, particularly in Paul's several relationships with the churches he founded. One might notice particularly aspects of the Corinthian correspondence, where Paul's refusal to have followers of his own (1 Cor. 1-3), or to be classed with the 'super-apostles' (II Cor. 10-12) point to a refusal to resolve this tension in his own favour, to be 'enthroned' as a prince ('prelate') over the church; rather he will take the Christ-like option of becoming first

by becoming the servant of all. However, this life of service does not preclude the apostolic duty of leadership, instruction, rebuke, and even the harshest and most autocratic exercises in church discipline ('...whom I have handed over to Satan.' I Tim.1:20; compare I Cor. 5 for a similar, but undisputedly Pauline, text). How can the duty of service be held together with the duty of leadership, and both with the duty to stand against, in the name of the Lord? I suggest that many of the questions concerning ministerial employment gain their peculiarly intractable nature from this conundrum.

### **Stipend**

Take, for instance, the question of appropriate levels of stipend: if we think of the minister solely as an employee, then we could probably solve this question by asking what duties are being performed and generating a 'going rate' for those duties. A particularly expert practitioner might be able to command higher rates, as would one with extra duties. So, our churches might (as indeed some do) recognise that the Home Mission figure is a 'minimum', and think that it should be increased for ministers of large or active churches, and for senior ministers who include running a team in their responsibilities. If we thought of the minister solely as a leader, many similar issues would arise: the role now is of managing a voluntary sector organisation (the local church), and we can find an indication of the proper salary levels, and performance indicators, for such a role without difficulty. The minister considered as a prophet simply should not receive a stipend from the church s/he serves: to do so would be to compromise his/her ministry, and so either the complaint, occasionally heard, that a paid ministry is a betrayal of the gospel would become decisive, or we would press for a centrally paid ministry, freed from questions of loyalty.

### **Employment**

A second current question concerns employment rights. At present, ministers of churches<sup>2</sup> are, in law, classed not as 'employees' but as 'office holders'. We are not unique in this: trustees, police officers, magistrates, company directors and Government ministers are all classed the same way. To quote the Department of Trade and Industry website, 'The defining characteristic of an office-holder is that the rights and duties of the holder are defined by the office, which exists independently of the person who fills it. This contrasts with the rights and duties of a "worker", which are defined in a ... contract between an individual and an employer.' The result of this, established by a series of court cases (beginning in 1911), is that the relationship between a minister and the church s/he serves is not a matter of contract; ministers do not 'work for' the church that pays their stipend.<sup>3</sup> The famous media line that ministers 'work for God' stems from one of the most recent of these cases, in the Court of Appeal on 11 July 1997, where the court judged that ministers have 'no terrestrial employer'. This has two serious legal effects, which lie behind the current review: ministers lack any of the normal legal rights given to contracted employees (maternity/paternity leave; minimum wage; notice of dismissal; ...); and churches are not straightforwardly legally responsible for their ministers' actions (i.e. I cannot sue a church for its minister's actions in the same way that I can sue a hospital for its doctor's actions<sup>4</sup>). Looking at this in terms of my three 'poles', the same tensions emerge: a servant of the church would seem to be straightforwardly an employee, with all the rights and responsibilities that implies; a leader is clearly an 'office-holder' in the same way that a company director is; a prophet clearly can and should have no contractual relationship with the people s/he

addresses. I suspect that many or most of these tensions about stipends, conditions, and so on can be shown similarly to result from different, and proper, aspects of the ministerial task pulling in different directions. There is a need for a picture, or model, of ministry that enables us to hold the diversity of the role together. One proposed model today is that of 'servant leadership'. I have to confess that the phrase seems merely oxymoronic to me, but in any case the leadership that Paul exercises is not especially marked by the attitudes that are said to be characteristic of this model: he is hardly self-effacing, and he certainly appealed to authority that had been given to him ('Am I not an apostle?'), rather than trusting in his own inner resources to inspire others. Even if such a model could be made to work, it would straightforwardly exclude the third component of the conundrum I have outlined, the ability to stand over against the community as a prophet or critic from without.

### **Baptist tradition: the priority of 'membership'**

If I were to suggest a way forward, it would be by drawing on resources from within our Baptist tradition: the emphasis on the gathered church; the concept of a ministry 'of word and sacrament'; and the traditional resistance to calling a minister an employee. The first of these would teach us, I think, that a minister is first a covenanted member of the local congregation s/he serves, not someone imposed from without. The process of settlement should then be understood as a moment when, having made our gifts available to God, we seek his will as to the fellowship in which he wants us to use them. We do not go first as 'the minister'; we go first as 'a member', covenanted together with others to serve the Lord and preach his gospel in a particular context. Second, however, the minister is someone

who brings particular gifts, and a particular calling, to the fellowship to which s/he is called. Traditionally, those gifts and that calling have been understood under the rubric of 'Word and sacrament', applying the gifts of God ('means of grace', or whatever term is found preferable) to comfort, edify and rebuke God's people.<sup>5</sup> The role of a pastor in a church is a recognition that such gifts and ministry are necessary to the life of the church, and so that one or more from each gathered congregation, whom God has called to this task, should be entrusted with it. Finally, a traditional way of enabling this ministry is the payment of a 'stipend', not a payment for the work done, but a gift to ministers (and their families) that enables their ministry, by freeing them from the need to earn money. This gift parallels the gifts given to other members of the church in financial need; it is best understood as an outworking of the community principles of Acts 2:44-5, and reflects the fact that, if the church should ask one of their number to devote herself so fully to the church's work that she is unable to earn a living, then it has a particular responsibility to ensure that she is not in material need.

### **A framework for debate**

Under such an understanding, we might begin to make sense of the various roles outlined above: a minister is not 'employed' by the church meeting: s/he is called of God—whose mind is known in church meeting. Equally, the ability of church members to 'dismiss' a minister must be understood theologically: the church meeting has no right to do anything but discern the mind of God (this is not to say, of course, that in every case God's mind has been correctly discerned; if it was not in a particular case, the church meeting had no right to do what it in fact did). The servant, leadership and prophetic roles of the minister are each aspects of the central role of speaking forth



God's word. The proper level of stipend is that level that frees the minister from financial concerns, and enables him to serve, lead and speak. This does not remove the need for hard questions and debate (particularly about ministerial families), but perhaps offers something of a framework within which such a debate can be conducted. With employment rights in view, it seems to me that one half of the issue is simple, theologically: if a minister is to be able to speak and act prophetically, her church cannot be held responsible for her words and deeds—if it were to be, an intolerable situation where she was asked to clear all that she sought to say and do with the church before speaking or acting would result. To be a prophet is a lonely calling, and we must simply accept that. The other side of the issue is equally clear in principle: if we ask whether ministers should be given the respect and safeguards that 'normal' workers are, we will surely want to answer 'yes!' (As Lord Sainsbury put it in the House of Lords on 4 December 2001, 'While technically the clergy are employed by God, I believe that ... God would want to be a good employer...'). Whether employment legislation is the right way to protect this is more difficult, I think, for at least three reasons. First, as Baptists we have good historical and theological reasons to be unsure about government legislation instructing us on what we may and may not do in ordering our churches, and even if the effect of this legislation is only beneficial, we might still be in danger of selling our birthright for a bowl of soup. Second, and more specifically, employment legislation will change, and that in ways we are uncomfortable with; whilst religious organisations<sup>6</sup> were granted certain exemptions under the Sex Discrimination Act (and however wrongheaded—and indeed repugnant—many of us find the refusal of certain churches to embrace the ministry of

women, we would want to permit them their integrity), we cannot presume that such exemptions will continue to be provided, and the spectre of churches finding it difficult to exclude people on grounds of, say, sexual immorality (of whatever sort), or even religious belief is not one we would wish to summon. Third, and more theologically, many of us might feel that the discourse of 'human rights' is just foreign to what we are talking about when we discuss the relationship of minister and church, and so whilst it might happen to provide certain protections that we would want to see provided, it would also introduce inevitable confusions and distortions. There was a day when European universities were home only to theologians and lawyers; how such theological reflections might best be translated into legal statutes is one I leave to the other half of the ancient academy, out of both necessity and inclination!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Not as 'employees' in the legal sense, of course – that is the whole issue in recent discussions!

<sup>2</sup> A minister who is a hospital chaplain, say, typically is an employee of the NHS Trust.

<sup>3</sup> To the best of my knowledge, this issue is live under Scottish law also. Interestingly, there are recent cases in both Australia and New Zealand where the same issues were aired, with the same result.

<sup>4</sup> I do not pretend to understand the legal niceties, but an organisation called 'Catalyst' which supports 'victims of religious abuse' offers details of at least a couple of cases where this distinction has led to the collapse of court proceedings.

<sup>5</sup> Even the narrowly pastoral role was once largely understood in these terms, as Richard Baxter's Reformed Pastor makes clear.

<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that many of these issues are faced indifferently by churches, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras, and so on. Inasmuch as my suggested answers are theological, they are rather more specific, of course.

<sup>7</sup> On which note, I should record my gratitude to the Revd John Houseago for providing me with some insight into what the legal term 'office-holder' implied.

# J-Mail

Dear Journal,

We would like to draw the attention of BMJ readers to funds for local evangelism available through the Union's Green Shoots Fund. Many of us in ministry know the annual budget process well. Getting the right balance between mission and maintenance is rarely easy! Sometimes it is the funding for evangelism that loses out and, as a result, potentially effective local outreach is neglected. Home Mission's Green Shoots fund was set up to remedy such situations and to enable people to find Christ through the evangelism of our Baptist churches in this new century.

There are, of course, some qualifying conditions. We are looking for creative initiatives in contemporary evangelism – not, for example, simply throwing new technology at a problem! Such evangelism will be part of a holistic mission strategy and will enable people, of all ages, to respond to the claims of Jesus Christ upon their lives. Some evidence of research into the local context for mission and of consultation with those who have relevant expertise also helps. Contact with the Association Green Shoots representative is

also strongly advised.

Indeed we are pleased to note that most Associations now have a first point of contact for those considering Green Shoots applications. If in doubt, contact a Regional Minister. We will also expect a report back to our Green Shoots committee within six months of the project concerned. For those meeting these conditions, **grants for evangelism worth up to £3000** can be made available for Baptist Churches in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

The Green Shoot Committee meets three times a year to allocate grants. We meet next on June 26th and December 4<sup>th</sup>. Applications need to be with Fiona Pollock at Baptist House at least three weeks before these dates in order to be properly processed. Forms can be obtained from Fiona or on line at [www.baptist.org.uk](http://www.baptist.org.uk)

Green Shoots is another example of the many ways in which Home Mission serves the causes of the gospel each year. Good news indeed! **bmj**

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“Where we are encouraged by the gospel to challenge our habit of believing only what is humanly possible, we can find new grounds for hope. The biblical traditions are constantly engaged with situations of hopelessness. Israel’s story is one which again and again leads into situations where all hope seems to founder, and Jesus’ story directly engages the ultimate enemy of all hope, death. The message of the gospel discloses a God who does not side-step situations of hopelessness, but who transforms those situations from within. It is in situations where all human possibilities seem to be exhausted that God opens up new possibilities.

.... the restoration of hope begins where the grip of despair about exhausted human possibilities is loosened by directing our hearts to God who is not bound by what is humanly possible. This hope is not an empty hope, because it has Christ as its content.”

Colin Gunton, *Theology through Preaching*, T & T Clark 2001 p.13

# Book Reviews

*Edited by John Houseago*

*Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature.*  
**Lee H. McDonald and Stanley E. Porter**

Hardback £26.99, xxvii + 708pp,  
Hendrickson, 2000. ISBN 1-56563-266-4.  
\$39.95

For over thirty years, students of the New Testament have been well served by the New Testament introductions by W.G. Kümmel and Donald Guthrie, and, more recently, by Don Carson, Douglas Moo and Leon Morris. These and other introductions have generally followed the same basic pattern of a discussion of each NT book, with several additional chapters or appendixes.

Like its predecessors, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature* provides detailed studies of each NT literary corpus (Gospels and Acts; the Pauline letters; Hebrews, the General Epistles and Revelation), but these take up less than a third of the book (some 210 pages). Where this introduction differs from earlier ones is in the remaining eleven chapters. Some of these lead into the study of the chapters already mentioned (two chapters on the story of Jesus, one on the Pauline tradition), but we have two further chapters exploring the historical context and the emergence of early Christianity, and another on the quests for the historical Jesus. Others explore the language, text and transmission of the NT; the origins of the Christian Bible; the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha and Agrapha; and there are two detailed appendixes on the chronology of events and persons from 200 BC to AD 200 and, what all really good introductions should have, a glossary of critical and historical terms.

But the book opens with a helpful chapter on history and faith (the issues and assumptions encountered in NT studies) and on examining the Bible critically. This chapter guides the student through the many critical disciplines—from textual criticism to canonical and linguistic criticism.

This is an excellent book; in fact, in many ways it is two books in one. Set in two columns per page and attractively produced, each chapter includes up-to-date bibliographies, notes (not too many and not too few), tables, maps and many well-chosen photographs (colour and black and white). My one criticism was that many of the photographs in the first printing are dark, though I understand that the publishers will rectify this, if they haven't already.

The scholarship is evangelical but never narrowly so, well written, critical but not obscure, and highly informative. What's more, it is written by two North American Baptists: Lee H. McDonald, Principal and Professor of NT at Acadia Divinity College, Nova Scotia, and Stanley E. Porter, President, Dean and Professor of NT at McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario.

At over 700 pages this book is excellent value. It will be of great interest and help to newcomers to the study of the NT, the increasing number of church members taking correspondence courses, pastors and all those interested in the NT. It is highly recommended and will be a valuable resource for many years to come.

**Rev. Dr Anthony R. Cross, a Consultant  
Editor for Paternoster Press.**

*A Cry in the Darkness.* **Anthony Clarke.** Smyth and Helwys/Regent's Study Guides 10. . £14.99.

An enormous yes to this book – not because it is the last word on that most difficult of theological circles to square – the suffering of God – but for its being such a rich contribution to Christian pastoral theology.

Pastoral theology it certainly is. The Forsakenness of Jesus in Scripture, Theology and Experience is Anthony Clarke's subtitle. Few will have spent long in ministry before encountering someone with an experience of forsakenness. This is the background of Clarke's book, in which Auschwitz, the great 'experience of forsakenness', rightly, is allowed to stand for all.

The authors with whom Clarke engages – Moltmann, Urs von Balthazar, Solle and Jungel, all relate their work to the post-Holocaust context. Clarke's book is a discussion of the differing ways that Mark 15:34 has influenced the development of their theology in that context. It includes some useful New Testament study as well.

He is fair to each author, robust in his criticisms, and judicious in pointing to ways in which Christian theodicy might move forward. Clarke's introduction of the idea of God 'remembering' toward the end I found most helpful.

This is, of course, not a book to leave on the coffee table to comfort the newly bereaved. Its style - something more than a 'reader', though very readable – and its content mean that anyone who is prepared to let the experience of suffering in their own, another's, or indeed the world's life affect what they are prepared to say about God over coffee or in a pulpit will want to return frequently to the issues raised here.

In a Christian world still dominated by the 'last remaining superpower' model of the Church and its God, surely that means anyone involved in the ministry.

**Michael Docker,**  
**Tyndale Baptist Church, Bristol**

*Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: an historical and practical theology.* **John W. Riggs.** Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, Louisville, Kentucky, 187pp. £20.

The first and second generation European Reformers pioneered new ways of thinking as they rejected the institution of the Roman Catholic Church and countered the radical challenge from the Anabaptists. The conflict focused baptismal theology, practice and liturgy in the concept of covenant. John Riggs follows the development of tradition through the seminal figures of Zwingli, Luther, Bucer, Bullinger and Calvin, and then the Confessions of Reformed European churches, before briefly visiting Schleiermacher, Barth and Marcel. Doctrine and liturgy express covenant theology and the rite of baptism the appropriation of the promise of God's gracious activity.

The latter part of the book looks at current Reformed baptismal liturgy, as seen in The Book of Common Worship of the Presbyterian Church (US). Riggs critiques this as a departure from traditional Reformed liturgy, reflecting the influence of the modern ecumenical movement and the post-Vatican II Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. In his view the book grafts a foreign element on to previous tradition to its detriment. He ends by making some suggestions about a way forward in re-shaping the liturgy.

From a sound Reformed stable, this book will probably appeal in the main to those with ecumenical liturgical interests. The battle lines will seem rather remote for

most English Baptist ministers. However it is good to be reminded that Baptists are not the only ones for whom "baptism" and "covenant" are rallying cries, and to be challenged to explore the richness of our own inherited vocabulary. And Luther lived in Mansfeld not Mansfield.

**Stephen Copson**  
**Central Area Association Minister**

*The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies*, Edited, **Professor David Bebbington**, Stirling, Scotland. Volume 1 Studies in Baptist History and Thought, Paternoster Press, 2002. £24.99.

These essays are a posthumous tribute to Canadian Baptist Historian, George Rawlyk, a Rhodes Scholar, who from 1966 was Chair of History at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Given at an international study conference at Oxford they consider international links between Britain and America; provide some British Baptist case studies; review Baptist development within continental Europe over two centuries; Baptist global expansion, particularly the effects of mission, and consider future Baptist developments.

In part one, John Coffey, Reader in History at Leicester University, reviews Baptists and religious tolerance in England and America from 1612-1791, and in doing so, recognises the persistent strain of intolerance among Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic, challenging 'the traditional picture of the Baptists as unflinching champions of religious liberty for all', while urging Baptists to 'identify the alternative visions on offer for the Baptist future'. [p.37] Professor Timothy George, William Brackney and Ian Randall offer further stimulating reading on the theme.

Among the case studies, Donald Meek, Professor of Scottish and Gaelic Studies at Edinburgh, considers 'The glory of the

Lamb': in the Gaelic Hymns of Peter Grant'. He shows the heart of 'celtic spirituality' as he demonstrates how Peter Grant's hymns celebrated the 'assured triumph of the Lamb' as the mission of Christ extended across the Highlands and across the globe' [p.131]. Meek speaks out of his own childhood on Tiree, where Grant's hymns still inspired worship, and a life-time of Gaelic studies at Edinburgh.

In part 3 Paulo Spanu writes on Italian Baptists since 1945, Maurice Dowling reflects on Baptists in Soviet Union, and Richard Pierard recounts Baptist expansion in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. In part 4 'the paradigm of missionary experience' offered by Andrew Walls using the 'multiple conversions of Timothy Richard', Baptist missionary to China, and Brian Stanley on T R Glover in India should not be missed.

All the contributors have something worth saying, but for this reviewer, Donald Meek's essay alone, is worth the price of them all!

**Roger Hayden**  
**President, Baptist Historical Society.**

*The Canvas Chapel*. **E. Bryn Little**: (published by Bob Little Press & PR, 23 Sherwood Avenue, St. Albans. Herts AL4 9QJ). pp.158, £14.99 ISBN 0-9543113-0-2

This is the story of one man's journey with the Royal Army Service Corps through the Second World War. Bryn Little was called up in February 1940 and after initial training was posted to Tunisia, then Egypt before battling up the spine of Italy with the Allies forces, where he was awarded the Military Medal. He draws on journals and letters to re-tell his story of those years separated from friends, family and church. It evokes that sense of ordinary people in extraordinary times, of the humdrum of military life and the horror of war. There is

humour and drama. Lifelong friends are made and comrades are killed. The common soldier learns how to cope with the daily chores. In the midst of this there is God. Bryn Little demonstrated his Christian faith in his military service, as opportunity permitted. Overseas, he organised services in a temporary shelter, the canvas chapel of the title. For here we also have the story of one man's journey towards ordained ministry, a calling tested among soldiers in the Army camp and on the battlefield. The final pages leave us in 1945 on the eve of training at Rawdon, which led to pastorates in Halesowen, Kings Langley and London Colney.

The author died in 1997 before the book was completed and it has been edited for publication by his son, Robert, a Baptist lay preacher in Hertfordshire.

**Stephen Copson, Regional Minister,  
Central Baptist Association.**

(Readers may obtain copies of this direct from Bob Little at the above address (cheque with order or invoice) or via Amazon.)

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*Fit to Lead - Sustaining Effective Ministry in a Changing World.* **Chris Edmondson.** London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002, ISBN 0-232-52431-9, pp142, £9.95

If you are looking for an immensely practical book, well aware of the current context of ministry and touching on all the major issues that affect the leader of the local church, this modest book is a worthy contender. The stated aim is to "bring together under the covers of one book a cluster of issues, challenges, concerns and

opportunities that especially face clergy in their leadership roles in a fast changing world." The fast changing world is wisely analysed with some background, along with the sombre note of church decline. The issues are the questions such observation raises for the changing role and inner confidence of clergy. The challenges and opportunities noted include the need to take care of ourselves and those near to us. The concerns are how we ourselves are cared for and the opportunities include personal and spiritual development and new skills that can be learned. All these are briefly, but deftly, expanded with some most telling ideas, such as simple but penetrating questions on personal discipline; and excellent advice for supervising our church volunteers.

The whole book, though claiming to be for both the ordained and those working with them, is almost entirely illustrated from and applied to the Anglican clergy scene. This is an omission rather than a weakness and the material is easily transferable for Baptist ministers and other leaders. For those more long standing in the ministry, the information, advice and insights may be either too late or already well noted, but for students, those setting out in ministry, or recently appointed to a church leadership role, there is a wealth of valuable and material here.

**Chris Voke. Spurgeon's College,  
London.**

Go, songs, and come not back from your far way;  
And if men ask you why ye smile and sorrow,  
Tell them ye grieve, for your hearts know To-day,  
Tell them ye smile, for your eyes know To-morrow

Francis Thompson, *Envoy*